



The Nature Of Horses; The Nature of Humans By Tim Hayes

By far the single most important factor for us to be aware of when interacting with the horse is the dramatic difference in our natures. The horse is a prey animal. He is a source of food for predator animals including the cat family (mountain lions, bobcats etc.), the dog family (wild dogs, wolves etc.) and the human family (you, me etc.). The human is a predator animal. He seeks out prey animals, kills and eats them. Cows, deer and yes horse. Horsemeat, although "officially" outlawed as a food source in the US. (horses don't know this), is readily eaten and served today in both France and Australia.

Humans have survived by using a combination of force and superior intelligence (we created the gun). This has enabled us to not only kill and eat prey animals but all our enemies (other predators) as well.

Horses have survived by using their ability to out run all their enemies (unless surprised and then caught) They're not spooky (afraid of being surprised by something they don't recognize) because they're stupid; they're spooky because it's their genetically built-in survival nature.

Horses have powerfully acute senses. They can see the flutter of a bird's wing across a river that's 300 feet wide. They possess the fastest reaction time of any animal: the time it takes between the horse deciding to kick and the instant the hoof hits its mark. And finally their cunning intelligence to out smart predators is demonstrated daily by their resistance to go into horse trailers (a predators cave on wheels) and their lightning fast evasive maneuvers when they decide they don't want to be caught.

Once we recognize that our horse might be reacting to a situation motivated by self-preservation (he must take control to save his life) and not because he's "being difficult," our response can be useful, supportive and non-confrontational. This will in turn create a positive change in his attitude and response to us at that moment and in the future. We must be able to distinguish the subtle differences in his resistant response to know whether it is based on fear, disrespect, misunderstanding or pain. They may appear the same but they are not and they require a different response from us for each one.

The qualities it requires to have a relationship with our horse that creates harmony both on his back and on the ground is not unlike the qualities it requires to be a good parent. We must understand how the child sees the world. When he tells us he's afraid of going into a dark room, instead of telling him he's being silly, we must acknowledge his fear, re-

assure him by picking him up, holding him, and walking into the room together to turn on the lights. Not only does this positively resolve the immediate issue of going to bed, but it is how we create a relationship that has our child look to us as a source of comfort, safety, understanding, trustworthiness and leadership. Are not these the qualities what we also want from our horse?

The most important needs for a horse, those that motivate all of his behavior are the same today as they were 6,000 years ago; SURVIVAL, FOOD, COMFORT (emotional as well as physical), and LEADERSHIP. As an animal whose nature is to live outside in a herd with an alpha leader, horses, having worked out their pecking order with dominance games (horseplay), are quite content to follow one who is wise, fair, trustworthy, and commands respect. When it is just you and your horse, you must play and win these games (ground work) to become the alpha in your herd of two. Humans who are good with horses know this and become the alpha leader on the ground before they get on their horses back. This creates resistance free riding.

The important needs for most humans in today's modern world are PRAISE, ("you're a terrific rider, you made no mistakes") RECOGNITION, (from others - "I won the blue ribbon" and from our horse "I allow my horse to nibble on my shirt because he's showing how much he loves me".) and MATERIALISM ("I prefer to keep my horse alone and in a stall because he costs a lot of money and I'm afraid he could get hurt or scarred playing outside with other horses".).

TRUST IN NATURE

When we look at the true nature of horses and humans who have these radically different needs but lack a common language to communicate their differences; is it any wonder that the single largest problem people have with horses is not the horses' physical ability but his mental and emotional attitude, which then impacts on his physical behavior. Without a language that the horse understands (English is not one) achieving leadership through force with the threat of pain ("getting after him") will never create the type of partnership that we all so desperately desire with our horses.

We can't change our horse's nature but we can change our understanding and the way we respond to him. We can help him work through his survival fears instead of reprimanding him, which usually turns into an unpleasant and often dangerous situation. We can acquire new knowledge and new tools that will help our horse become more confident and trusting in the human world we have asked him to live in. If we give of ourselves and of our time, if we truly communicate with our horse in his language, then we will ride with the resistance free harmony we have all yearned for.

The method of communicating with a horse in his natural language (body language) has been in existence for thousands of years. Today we are indeed fortunate to have an abundance of Natural Horsemanship clinicians, clinics, books and tapes to help us learn these remarkable methods of natural communication and partnership.

Riding a horse is the simple act of not falling off. Natural Horsemanship is the ability to communicate your wishes in a language your horse understands. It is being able to positively control every muscle, thought and emotion of you and your horse at every moment. It is then that we ride and guide. It is the then that we achieve harmony. It is then that we understand and combine our different and unique natures so that becoming one with our horse is truly something magnificent and natural.