

Finding Harmony

It's the overwhelming feeling of freedom. It's the emotional comfort of having a partner. It's the excitement of achievement. It's having harmony with a wild, powerful animal.

Finding harmony with a horse is the most amazing feeling that any rider could experience. It takes trust and an open mind to hear the voice of a horse, because if we listen we will hear the horse's emotions asking for help and partnership. Horses want partnership, they want to feel secure and safe, but it is how we accept them that determines if true harmony is achieved. A horse will reach out to his rider for help, or in an attempt to communicate, but the horse can only be heard if the rider has a relaxed, open mind to hear him.

It is hard to let go of our fears and trust a thousand pound animal underneath us to not run away, or buck when all aids of control are taken away. But if we don't trust him, he won't trust us. It does not matter if I am riding a colt for the first time or if I am riding my retired show horse, if I want to succeed in developing a horse that *wants* to perform I have to trust him. It's just like a marriage; the trust from both parties can overcome the most difficult obstacles, but if there is a lack of trust, the relationship crumbles in the face of the slightest complication. Horses are not on earth to be used and abused, but instead to help people to find peace in the midst of stress, to help the traumatized and injured to feel valued, and to show people their connection to the animal kingdom.

How do we achieve such harmony with a horse? As in all training, the work progresses in stages. Most horses are trained to move off of leg, so if pressure is applied by the right leg, the horse moves left and vice versa. I use this as secondary communication with my horse to help him know where I want his feet to go. My primary communication comes from my mental focus. I have to be able to let go of everything and open my mind to the horse beneath me.

The best way to learn how to find harmony is to release all types of communication with the horse. I drop the reins and anchor my hands to the saddle, so that I do not feel tempted to reach for the

reins as direct communication. I relax my mind to release all of the stresses of life, so that I am able to only focus on communicating with the horse.

I have to feel as if I am part of the horse and think about seeing the path of travel as the horse does. My communication needs to be clear and smooth. I have to want to connect with my horse on a deeper level than just giving him cues with the expectation that he will listen. Harmony comes from the hearts of both rider and horse to communicate as one.

For fluidity, I have to let the horse know where I want to go ahead of time. The horse can't just lift his shoulders and place them ninety degrees to the right. He has to make a series of steps with forward motion in order to make the turn. In my mind, I have to draw the path in which the horse will have to travel and envision it on the ground ahead of me. It is important to remember that to go anywhere, forward motion is necessary, so when envisioning where to travel, I look out over the horse's head and around a turn. I have to think about two beams of communication pointing from my mind and the horse's mind, and merge them into one. If I were to look ninety degrees to my right, I would lose the connection.



The most important aspect is to not panic. If I become nervous and panic because my horse starts to speed up or go in the wrong direction, I would be dropping my trust in the horse and I would lose my connection. Even if a horse takes the wrong step, I have to keep my trust in the horse and work to find the connection again. I look out straight over the horse's head, try to reconnect with the path of travel and then ask him again to turn. When I ask for a horse to turn, I ask first through my mental focus and then add the correct leg pressure as needed. In most cases, leg pressure is always needed, but it's the degree of leg pressure that varies as I become stronger with mentally communicating with my

horse. As I become more confident in communicating with my horse, I'll pick up the trot and then the canter. Sometimes making the transition requires me to occasionally pick up one rein lightly to help the horse stay focused with me, but if I have the horse working consistently enough at the walk, the transition to the trot or canter will come smoothly.

Riding with no direct aids and finding harmony with a horse is something that not only the rider has to learn, but the horse does too. For a long time, the horse has been ridden with primarily direct aids and he is not used to looking for a telepathic communication, but it develops quickly with trust. As the communication becomes stronger, I can begin to take away pieces of tack until I am riding with no tack at all. This is when I have found true peace and harmony.

Finding harmony with a horse, better allows me to help the horse to perform at his highest potential. I have developed a better understanding for the way that the horse moves, thinks, and reacts to various aids and situations, so when the time comes, I know how to help him. A smoother communication can only lead to improvement and greater success. Listen to your horse and he will listen in return.