



Lara and Captain - when we work with their nature true unity is possible.

EXCERPT

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1.1 As things were

Like most people, I started out with a riding lesson many years ago as a seven year-old child. I did not have to learn anything about the horse. My job was to get to the stables / yard, mount an already saddled horse and carry out the instructions given by whoever gave the lesson. Anyone who's been there will have heard "show the horse who is boss"; "don't let him know you're afraid"; "leave your emotions at the gate"; "don't let him get away with it".

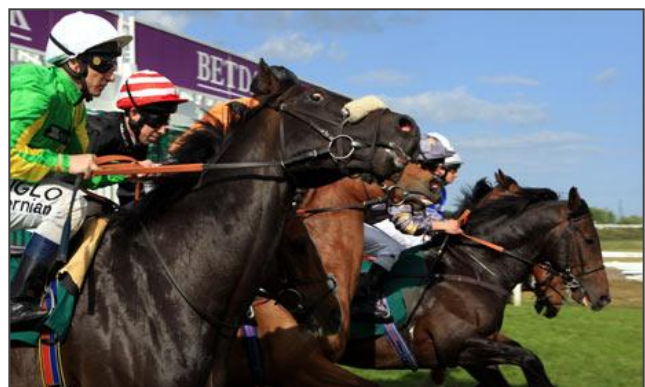
You will have been admonished for wanting to get off if things didn't feel right. And of course after you've taken a tumble and felt shaken and terrified, came the standard "get back on right away, don't let him win, don't give in to your fear."



As my riding progressed this translated into *ignoring my feelings* and *making* the horse do what I wanted him to do. That meant whacking him if he didn't want to go/jump/run; it meant catching him with food or herding him into a corner and grabbing him with the halter if he didn't want to be caught; it meant tying him to a pole, twitching him, or getting as many people as necessary holding onto your fighting and straining horse, if he needed to be treated; it meant using bribery (food) and force (ropes, whips) and plenty of hands pulling and pushing

to get him trailer loaded, if he did not want to be boxed. This list could go on forever.

I am not a cruel person. I have loved animals all my life and I've never whacked a horse for the sake of it. I thought my horses knew I loved them; I brushed them, fed them treats (and then held the ropes tightly for the farrier or vet or trailer). I just had no idea that there could be a different way with horses. This was the standard practice – *make* your horse do what you want him to do; and *make* your horse accept whatever you need doing with him (veterinary care, hoof trimming, etc.).



There are essentially two key elements underpinning this kind of interaction with a horse – *force and physical dominance* – which ultimately translates into various stages of aggression, at times even cruelty, when you have to increase pressure to achieve a result. At the same time, this way left *no room* for intuition or any feelings one might have about what is going down.

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As I've said, the short answer is that this 'new way' is not an exercise, rather it's a philosophy and attitude that forms the basis of everything you do with your horse.

Leaving ancient times behind, somehow as time progressed things got more and more boxed, territorial and separated. Nomadic lifestyles became all but extinct; societal structures became fundamentally patriarchal and unbalanced; religion – as horsemanship – became a thing of fear and punishment for the most part, having very little to do with spiritual expression.

 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j0Z19lhgPA>

1.3 A New Beginning

But all is not lost. Towards the end of the 20th century we saw the breaking down of the Berlin Wall, we saw the demise of Communist Russia without a single shot being fired; and closer to home we saw the end of Apartheid in South Africa. We saw significant changes in terms of human rights, race and gender equality, gay rights and animal protection rights. The role of women changed, the role of men changed. How we raise our children changed. And while for the most part not changed yet, we are at last questioning how we educate our children – education which is supposed to prepare these kids for a future no-one can fathom.

And then the idea of a new way with horses started taking shape and came to the fore. I would venture to say the first printed work touching on this came from English horse trainer Henry Blake in his book *Talking with Horses* (1975). His subsequent books such as *Horse Sense* were disappointing, reverting to (external) method and behaviourist training – almost as if he needed to write something to be taken seriously again, after having devoted several chapters in *Talking with Horses* to unscientific, intangible concepts such as telepathic and empathic interaction between horse and human. Maybe the world was not ready yet.

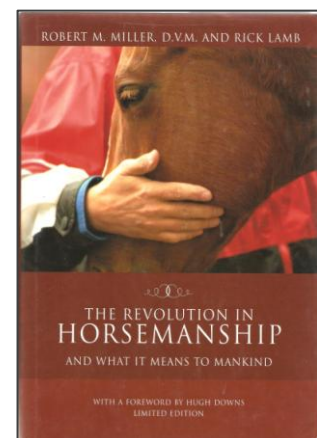
And so it was during the 1990's that in the end, the good old cowboys of the USA pushed the 'movement' through the cracks, that it may become visible to all – though its practice was by no means exclusive to these men as good horsemanship was practiced in many parts of the world.

In their book *The Revolution in Horsemanship* authors Robert M. Miller and Rick Lamb described the unfolding of the movement as follows:

"Through the twentieth century, even as technology exploded around him, the California stockman continued to work cattle from a horse's back as his forbearers did.

"He considered the horse a partner, a thinking and feeling creature that was as psychologically delicate as it was physically strong. The challenge and joy he found in riding came not from dominating a larger species but from building a relationship and taking it to the highest levels of finesse. Whether he realized it or not, he was an important link to the great horsemen of the past.

"These men had no intention of starting a revolution, of changing the world, or even of changing anyone else's mind. The stockmen had work to do, and being good horsemen made it easier. They loved their horses and, for the sake of the horse, were willing to share what they had learned with those who showed real interest.

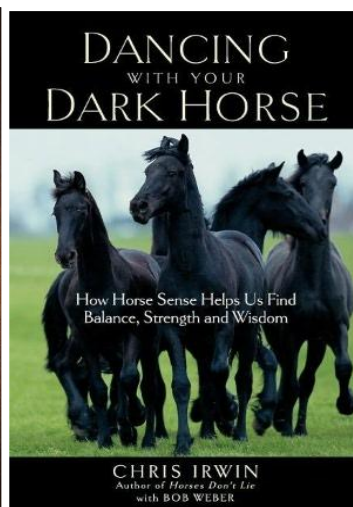
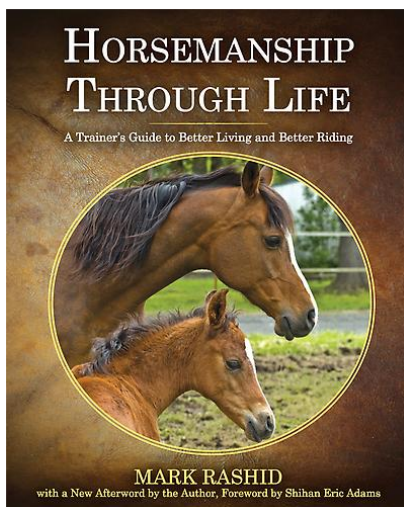


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As the movement grew, as we learnt more about the way of the horse, we became better people for it due to the fact that the process inevitably lead one to look within. And then, to make progress, one had no choice but to grow. In *Horses and the Mystical Path*, Drs. McCormick explain:

“Indo-European history and traditions make clear that the relationship between humans and horses was once honoured in ways that have become clouded by contemporary life. These traditions demonstrate that working and living with horses, within a spiritual framework, puts one in touch with inner truths and balance that contribute to the evolution of the human psyche. Still today, the special spiritual and emotional bonds between horses and humans are cultivated in Iberian horse communities, which contain wisdom traditions tens of thousands of years old. Whether horses are a part of our everyday lives or not, there is much to be learned about ourselves and our relationship to the Cosmos by exploring the timeless lesson they still offer us.”

It is not possible to be unaffected by these noble creatures. Over the years I noticed how titles of books changed. Some of the men, who had started out writing about a new, gentler/natural way with horses, ended up writing about the profound effect their work with horses had on themselves and their lives. About how what is required of one to be a good leader for your horse, is relevant to other relationships (personal and professional). One after the other, they too became different people, incorporating what they learnt from horses through the years in all areas of their lives.



How could we possibly go back to a riding lesson being the beginning and the end? How did we ever not know there is much to learn from these magnificent creatures?

1.4 Context & Perspective

When a new idea or movement emerges and develops and takes hold, it often explodes into all manners of extreme at first and it's only after the dust settles that we can begin to make sense of it. At the same time, there's usually much resistance initially to most new ideas, which often translates into criticism and dismissal.

I will try to give some perspective on some of what transpired.