

# Week 4 Summary – Relationship

**What's Relationship?** *The shared, fluid, ever changing, energy space between horse and human.*

**How important is relationship to a horse?** *It is everything – it drives survival, both physically and emotionally. Horses live for harmony and resolve conflict as swiftly as possible.*

**Where does the social intelligence that enable us to relate, reside?** *Social intelligence comes from our limbic brain which all mammals have. This drives them to nurture their young and live in groups, therefore relationships are a natural survival mechanism. The logic and reason part of our brain, which we have often spent so many years developing in education and work, can't make sense of relationships.*

**What is the nature of a healthy horse/human relationship?** *From the human point of view this is best described as a combination of friendship and caretaking. To our horses we fall into the 'socialising' part of their day (10% of each 24 hours).*

**What nurtures a healthy horse/human relationship?** *Simply put, mutual trust. The ingredients of mutual trust include:*

- **A genuine interest** in the well-being of your horse. Not a self-serving interest where you are focused on what you can get, but a genuine interest where you focus on what you can give. We are a herd animal, just like the horse, but in western society we are living increasingly isolated lives and nurturing relationship is practiced less as a result.
- **Commitment to two-way communication.** In a sense we need to practice becoming more horse like and listening with our whole bodies to our horse's body language thus ensuring we do things 'with' rather than 'to' our horse. Often our horses are sending us 'calming signals' that say 'you are agitated or aggressive, I want peace – will you please calm down' eg. turning or moving away or actively ignoring us so we can rebalance ourselves. These are often ignored or misread as 'disrespect' and punished which is like saying 'stuff peace – I want a fight'. They are continuously communicating a full range of emotions from fear to pleasure to curiosity to grief and many more in between. It is up to us to learn this language and validate what is being shared. We will never be able to fully comprehend the horses world so who are we to invalidate their responses and reactions when we invite them into our world.
- **Clear, consistent and fair boundaries** so you have the physical and emotional safety to be your 'true-self' with your horse. We need to educate our horses how we wish to be treated – they cannot guess. To not communication boundaries, and then get angry and resentful when they are disregarded, is entrapment. Generosity of spirit and being in the Now cannot exist without boundaries. Essentially boundaries are our personal Ok/No Ok lists and they will evolve over time as experience and familiarity grows.
- **Taking responsibility** for what we bring to the relationship space between us – bravely asking ourselves 'am I fit for equine consumption at this moment?'. If the answer is no, then we take appropriate action to bring ourselves back to our 'true-selves'. We must be vigilant to ensure

we are not transferring our emotions from an unrelated situation onto our horses eg. angry at your boss but take it out on your horse. We also need to keep an eye on our projections where we accuse our horse of having certain unpleasant impulses that we are denying in ourselves eg. my horse is aggressive or anxious, when in actual fact we are, but don't want to 'own' that.

- Living in the **Now**. We know our horses are acutely sensitive, social, nomadic prey animals. We also know that we are both a predator and a prey animal who has a tendency to become 'lost in thought' rather than fully immersed in the Now moment. Becoming lost in thought is a luxury only afforded to a predator – prey animals must be alert to threat at all times. When we do this we become 'energetically absent'. I have known horses to run over the top of people because they are so in their heads that the horse no longer senses them. The Now is the only place where connection, growth and beauty exist.
- Trust our **inklings** and intuitive knowing. Our sub-conscious is collecting, sorting, storing and retrieving millions of pieces of information per second about us, our horse, our environment and our companions. When we are absorbed in conscious thought we are not open to receiving the wisdom from this vast wealth of information that is being delivered to us as inklings and intuitive knowing. We not only put ourselves at risk we put our horses and everyone around us at risk too.
- Respect that horses **mirror and amplify** conflict energies and that emotions are contagious. Sometimes we need to pause and ask 'Is this mine?' to find out if we are mirroring our horse, if they are mirroring us or if one of us is mirroring someone else entirely. Our gut knows the truth. The first stage of emotional agility is awareness and the second is independence. When we are emotionally independent we can be the energy leader when our horses need us in challenging situations that arise in this strange human world.

Deep, resilient, mutual trust is built on unconditional love ie. the love you have for your horse is not earned or lost by what they do or don't do. At all times you know in your heart that they are doing the best they can – this frees you from judgement, resentment and victimisation.

**How do we relate to horse in ways that nurtures mutual trust?** There are many ways we can be with our horses – the variables include:

- Contact eg. riding, grooming, lunging, vs  
Non-contact eg. sharing space, liberty ground work
- Leading (we meet new situations first) eg. leading & close contact ground work vs  
Following (our horses are at the front) eg. riding, in-hand ground work
- Directing (we set the direction & pace) eg. riding, all ground work vs  
Allowing (neither is asking anything of the other) eg. sharing space
- Physical restraint eg. using halters, leads, lunge lines, bridles vs  
Non-restraint eg. sharing space, liberty groundwork, bridleless riding
- The energy of Work/Schooling ie. a heavy, sometimes pressured onerous energy vs  
Play ie. an energy filled with unlimited possibilities, curiosity and fun

All this being said, relationship begin in our hearts and minds – thoughts and feelings are real forces. We must always remember that being with a horse is a privilege, not a right.

**Is conflict bad for relationships?** Conflict is neutral and unavoidable – how we deal with it either builds or breaks down mutual trust. There are 5 main conflict resolution approaches that meet your needs, the needs of your horse and those of your relationship in varying degrees:

1. **Disconnect** – sometimes the best thing to do is walk away for a minute or for the day. If you can't be your true-self in that moment then you need to get to a safe place where you can. If the relationship will suffer as a result of staying, then it's time to disconnect. Disconnecting doesn't build better relationship but it can stop them being damaged.
2. **Impose** – sometimes you need to act quickly and decisively with more force than is ideal in dangerous situations eg. pulling a horse's head around and kicking it up a bank in the face of a speeding logging truck or jabbing your thumb into your horse's side if they mistakenly stand on you. If you have built a reservoir of trust then infrequent impositions won't break down a relationship but again it won't build it.
3. **Accommodate** – sometimes our horse's needs must take priority over yours eg. you want to go for a long ride but your horse is taking a long time to find their courage to cross a stream so you patiently wait for as long as it takes and shorten your ride as you know 'imposing' a solution will could damage your relationship.
4. **Compromise** – sometimes you need to find a middle ground eg. you want to ride through a stream but your horse is scared so you hop off and lead through. You get wet feet but your relationship remains intact even though it's not ideal. As long as your requests are reasonable then compromise is necessary in the learning process before you can move onto #5.
5. **Collaboration that builds a mutually enriching relationship** – you are like a pair of adventurers who trusts the other completely. You both trust that each will always try their utmost to protect the other and only make reasonable requests. This is when magic can really happen between you. This puts your relationship above everything else and is natural territory for our horses. Mutual trust becomes a self-perpetuating virtuous circle of closeness.

**What gets in the way?** Essentially when we come to our horses as a version of our **false-self**. This can take many forms so the easiest way to check in quickly is to ask yourself 'Are I being loving in this moment to myself and my horse?'. Our false self operates from fear and the opposite of fear is love. There is no room for feeling threatened/not enough/isolated OR superior/universally adored/untouchable when we are embodying love. The energy of love builds a bridge between you and your horse and it begins with self-love – we cannot give what we haven't experienced. Our cells simply don't have a reference for it so they can't vibrate it. Our relationship with your horses, is only ever as good as your relationship with ourselves.

**The past...** We can severely limit the development of our relationships with our horse by imprisoning it in limitations eg. we will never be able to confidently ride down the beach together. You know how much we live to be right and the power words have over us... Allow you and your horse to be 'new' in the moment – not limited by the past.

**The future...** Disappointment and frustrating result from unmet expectations. Avoid the self-torture of 'I will be happy when...' goals. Be loving now and have intentions to be your true-self but don't give your happiness away to rigid goals.