



The Relationship Between Horses and Humans in Today's World
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Although the title of this talk is "equine Human relations in today's world," I hope you will forgive me if I begin with some reflections upon the wider relations between humans and animals in Yesterday's world, by way of "setting the scene", and trying to see not only where we are now but how (how on EARTH!) we got to this...

The relationship between animals and humans in the times of our ancestors was much clearer I think. Hunting was for most a necessity yet performed with appreciation of and respect for the hunted creatures-it was not purely massacre, and it was set within a real framework as was most interaction between our predecessors and the natural world. There were cultural and religious procedures that were STRICTLY OBSERVED, unlike today, where most guidelines are often purely mechanical, performed (if at all correctly) in a perfunctory manner and with no real empathy.

Buddhism not only respects- but avoids in any way jeopardizing the lives of -even the tiniest insects. In Shamanism, creatures are often regarded by individuals as their spiritual guides, or "totems". Nearer at hand, and more familiar to most of us, the three monotheistic religions all have strong guidelines for interacting with the natural world: guidelines based upon mercy and respect. We are told that King Solomon altered the course of his entire army to avoid trampling a colony of ants: Islam and Islamic history, from the Prophet to his Companions and on, has directives and requirements for the treatment of animals and even plants which are stricter than many welfare organizations would dream of, surprising though this may seem. One of the most telling examples is the event where the prophet Muhammad, also at the head of a huge army, posted a soldier to stand guard over a dog with new born puppies by the path. The sentry was to stay with her until all the troops had passed by, in order to ensure that nobody would bother them. Islam also, while fully acknowledging Christ's ability to heal the sick and raise the dead, cites an earlier of his miracles : his modeling of a dove from clay and then breathing life into it...his ability of ,with God's Guidance, giving life- the "greatest gift of all!" - was not restricted to human beings...

The fact is that our predecessors-and not so long ago either- only a generation or two in some parts of the world- were ALL aware of the sacredness of life whatever the species and - especially in the near and far east-they were also fully aware of animals as sentient beings. Yet In spite of St Francis of Assisi and many others who famously interacted with all creatures and had firsthand knowledge not only of the sentiency but sophisticated thought processes of all



creatures , it took until 1999 for the modern European Community to officially recognized the sentience of animals!

So there has clearly been a degeneration in the attitude of humans towards the rest of Creation... and this has accelerated along with every other aspect of worldly life, during the past century. Huge numbers of humans with their associated needs- magnified into DEMANDS thanks to both public and social media- call for equally huge resources to be put at their disposal. Logistics do not necessarily encourage humane attitudes-pressures prevent us from thinking about the essentials, often, and the one thing that most of us are encouraged to do is to "Get ahead", -make more money- bigger names for ourselves- provide for our loved ones- often by giving them more and more intrinsically superficial values and gadgets which take away from our interaction with the natural world; from what is REAL, GROUNDING-and terrifyingly- ENDANGERED!

Horses. We are all here at this WAHO conference because of some form of interest, love-commitment, not only to horses but particularly to the Arabian horse-the "versatile", horse- the Improver-whose genes have contributed to all warmblood breeds and several others as well.

We felt, I believe, fairly safe and cocooned in our "Arabian horse world", as recently as twenty years ago. Yes, there were muffled outcries at the surfacing abusive trends in the training of show horses across the ocean, but while we abhorred it we also felt slightly complacent that THIS would never catch on anywhere else. I, for one, WAS alarmed at how soon that complacency was cracked when the European and Australasian show scene began to follow suit, but I was still naive and SURE that "Once ALL the Arab countries get really involved in the Arabian Show scene this will change-they will NEVER accept these excesses. We will be horrified and vocal and help to wake everyone up, and put our resources behind stopping the abuse. I believed it fully- but sadly, whether through our blind belief in the word of trainers and dealers, or through willfully blinding ourselves to the reality behind reactions of horses in the ring, or ANYWHERE when "Stood up", by most handlers, -WHATEVER the reason, we have not done and are not DOING right by our horses. I -regretfully but openly-include Jordan in this, because while do truly try our best to ensure that our SHOWS do not feature abuse, and make our owners aware of the issues, there are still many owners who do not "GET IT", and while loving their horses still either do not recognize OR turn a blind eye to bad handling and scared horses.

The show scene has become actually a TRIAL for many spectators to attend. Those that do not have horses entered don't come because it is not a pleasure to see a vast majority of frightened animals. Those that care too much to subject their horses TO abuse often feel that they can't compete with the "professional" scene- and so give up-many are giving up their whole LIVES with horses when not being able to compete against the wind. Yet attempts at strict rule enforcement are often countered by pleas for leniency towards the "professionals, "with



comments like "they are only doing their JOB- it's their livelihood." In truth, it is ACTUALLY those relative few who are ruining the livelihoods of many, along with the sanity and wellbeing of their possibly beautiful but internally damaged charges. Exaggerating? When you walk through a barn full of fabulous deep straw bedding and big looseboxes, wonderful ventilation and (no doubt) the BEST food and medical care-ALL the "pluses", cited commonly by the professional trainers and handlers- you may be impressed... until you see a large strong beautiful mare prick her ears at the sound of one famous handler WAY down the corridor and collapse on the ground in a heap, scrabbling in the lovely deep bedding to get OUT-to go ANYWHERE away from that voice, even out through the back wall of her cement loosebox. Then you are not only unimpressed- if you are like me, you are feeling physically nauseous. Especially when the overseer entrusted by the owner with this huge project shrugs sheepishly and says, " Russian bloodlines", or some equally ridiculous excuse.

So the Show scene is not in great shape-and from the little I have seen, this is true of several other Breed shows to greater or lesser degrees. Much stress, much travel, little consideration for the horses. The more dangerous aspect for the future-aside from the breeders and owners leaving the scene (and who are the ones who ensure continuation of any breed) -is the negative transformation of the Versatile improver, the tough prepotent intelligent BRAVE (and yes, beautiful) Arabian into a cowering or aggressive neurotic flimsy travesty; not only off-putting to non-Arabian horse people, but with questionable potential for any life outside the show ring and a very poor prospect for the long-term viability of the breed.

Some of us decide to give other Horse sports a try-because we love horses and everything about them-the smell of their breath, their feed, their leather tack- just being in some way a part of their world. So we try endurance- polo- dressage- racing. Endurance and polo, though much derided and often cited as abusive by "show people", wanting to accuse other equine sports of abuse (as if two wrongs ever made one right)...both of these sports-and i do mean when performed PROPERLY -are often loved by the horses. Endurance involves exercise, and when training and feeding are performed realistically and there is not the typical modern stress of ego to WIN AT ALL costs (too often the horse's cost) then it can be a great sport. A real partnership and mutual understanding between equine and human; reciprocal respect and affection; sustained physical effort culminating in a wonderful bond- and often deeply fulfilling performances resulting from really knowing each other . Sometimes spectacular unexpected wins, but in their absence STILL enormous satisfaction and contentment after a long days' effort spent in amicable competition with other like- minded friends both human and equine, concluded safely. In such cases, it is a Great sport.

Polo also, for the horses with an aptitude for the game and trained and ridden by good sensitive riders, can be highly enjoyable. Many polo ponies appear to truly LOVE the game. I know of several "old hands", well trained ponies who actually do a little shift of weight or skip to correct



the seat of an inexperienced rider, and are themselves great teachers. As with any other horse sport, if the human part of the equation has too little consideration or too much ego, then of course it can be disastrous. Too little SKILL on the rider's part is often less of an issue, because horses, like other speechless creatures, understand our hearts and are willing to put up with much physical discomfort quite contentedly as long as there is love and consideration. As long as the rules are clear. As long as things make sense. It is when things become bizarre- when punishments given for standing in a natural way- or REWARDS are given for achieving a required pose which is UNCOMFORTABLE- praise for something painful- punishment for not doing ANYTHING WRONG. That is when horses can start to lose their minds.

Racing, show jumping, dressage-again, in the modern world, these have problems. We all know about the huge number of non-starters, young horses not up to the promise of their pedigrees or who broke down too early- sent to meat factories. Horses who may need a few months of rest to be great competitors NEXT year, but are put down because it is quicker to claim insurance on them and buy a new one to compete on- and if successful sell on-FAST before it fails and the price goes down. On and on selling and ridiculously huge prices until the creature fails. Then, unless it is a great breeding prospect -off to the meat factory.

For dressage, the old time consuming basic training, of the Classical schools such as the Spanish riding School of Vienna and the Cadre Noir of France, are largely ignored in modern dressage. These techniques and training plans took into consideration the essentials such as the maturity (both physical and MENTAL) of the horses for each stage: the necessity for protecting developing joints and tendons and for preserving sensitive mouths. Riders were not allowed to TOUCH the reins of a horse until they had completed I believe it was two years of training and would not compromise the horses by heavy handedness. No bleeding mouths, no over-flexion, no "blue tongues", to sicken spectators. Those classically trained horses last, they perform their exercises for many years before retiring. The average age of competition horses in Europe a couple of years ago- i am not aware of the more recent statistics-was EIGHT years old. Disposable beings.

And yet, though there are so very many horses that don't make the grade and are sent off to slaughter or are just neglected- do we stop breeding so many ? Do we attempt to only produce realistic numbers for which we can do our best to guarantee a reasonable future? Oh no, instead we breed by ever more artificial means- extracting the last possible penny from the parents with no consideration for THEIR part in the lives they beget: stallions are harvested often much too young , totally ignoring the truths behind the Chinese philosophy which equates male energy with the "Life force", itself... MARES are also often harvested mercilessly for embryo transfer- not just in rare cases where a rare strain or bloodline is attempting to be preserved-which COULD perhaps justify embryo transfer on a small scale- but for other reasons- selfish reasons. How often have we heard, "This is NOT a brood mare-she is a SHOW MARE that



produces babies ". She needs to keep her figure to attend shows- or alternatively, it may be pure greed in wanting to have as MANY eggs as possible to sell from a famous expensive mare. So she is pumped with hormones again and again. I think not only the ladies among you, but any gentleman who has a wife daughter or sister will understand how such things affect our well-being... and these poor mares rarely if ever are allowed the fulfilling conclusion of it all- a warm live foal to love, teach, and nurture.

I frankly find equally offensive the fact that the carrier mares-often large gentle souls but not esteemed enough to be bred themselves-are regarded with amusement and derision when they produce the "Jewel", they have been carrying on behalf of the more aristocratic genetic dam. I have seen them laughed at and called ugly while they are still serving their required purpose, nurturing or even still carrying the other's foal- no respect at all. And it is worth remembering that surrogate dams DO contribute to the physical as well as temperamental make-up of the creature they carry. Humans cannot attempt to "Play God", without serious repercussions ... I apologize for depressing you, but if we just close our eyes and ears to the truth, then we really cannot help to make the future brighter for anyone. There IS however good news. There is at last a large, loud, and I think serious outcry about show abuse. (I know because having the questionable benefit of being on the ECAHO Show Commission I am quite regularly being upbraided for being ineffectual and useless) - and I don't blame those who say that -any committee is often a good way of delaying action, and with the best will in the world, action is often HORRIBLY slow. But I DO believe that the present outcry, if sustained, may help us to bring about change-by waking up the owners to reality- to the suffering of their horses- by empowering officials, from judges to DC s to ring stewards to being far more effective-and helping push us into far more practical action and decisions.

As for the trainers, I also believe that many are as desensitized to what they are doing, as are children playing violent video games to real war footage. I know from myself that the more I think about and really become acquainted with the feelings and senses of others, the more I become aware of HOW desensitized I WAS, often not perceiving things which are in fact truly distressing. So instead of just criticizing the trainers I DO think that we need to actually TRY (at least) to get them to understand what the effects are of what they do.

One example- A horse who was having serious episodes of bizarre stress-sudden, hysterical behaviour- apparently flashbacks. With the help of a horse whisperer a story unfolded-and I do realize that many of you will dismiss this as fantasy, but bear with me- I ghoulishly -and in view of the almost self-damaging violence of the episodes expected a tale of beatings, the infamous cattle-prods, etc etc. But instead there was a show arena- identifiable from the description - then some "shaking", (flapping of a bag or plastic thing to just wake up the young creature in the ring-nothing violent nor mean- but disturbing to the youngster. Then a lovely box, security- a solid box not a temporary show one (this fitted with the identification of the Show arena and



fitted with the horse's history, as did the whole story, but the "whisperer"-or "listener" if you like- knew none of this). Wonderful sense of peace and security in this box, but then the door opened and someone came in and began shaking and jazzing the horse up-AGAIN-and though it was not cruelly meant nor threatening, there was a sickening sense of "EVEN here there is no PEACE",... the security shattered... Now how many of us would think that this would be THAT upsetting? A young horse at a show, people interested to see him after classes- visit his box, ' come on, wake up now, look good"... but to HIM it affected his whole sense of order and there was no security anywhere- for years. Now this story may be sheer imagination on the part of the Whisperer, merely coinciding with the known facts horse's real history It may be that this horse WAS horribly abused, but the apparently banal and understated events described made it so much more plausible to me...it is NOT, as the trainers may think-just serious beatings and real pain that does the damage-it can be FAR FAR smaller seemingly harmless patterns. AND IT IS UNNECESSARY. THAT is what we ALL need to underline.

We know that horses are great strong creatures-even a foal can be hugely difficult to manage if it decides to be obstreperous- but this merely underlines the obvious fact: If horses did NOT have a basic willingness to work with humans, if they were INTRINSICALLY vicious uncooperative creatures just waiting for a chance to "Be the boss", "Take control", or harm us, they would not throughout history have been such wonderful companions, so patient and tolerant of our mistakes and harshness (whether intended or otherwise) or so willing to be our workmates and our friends. Horses have individual characters which in a herd will form parts of an intricate whole, each with a role according to his or her natural abilities and each complementing the roles of the others. There are outstandingly sensitive ones- perceived as "flighty"; their natural ability to sense danger, find food and water, and to take fast decisions allows the herd to rely on them as Scouts. These will probably not be best suited to certain pursuits in which loud noise and total obedience-lack of individual initiative-are main components. There are the natural "defenders", often strong males who are commonly perceived as DRIVING the herd, but in fact are "guarding the rear", protecting the rear or any vulnerable spot while THE SCOUT -often a strong minded and quick-witted MARE- leads them out of danger. Such a defender would not be idea for a job where he has to be mindlessly obeying orders however alien to his understanding.

The key is not to assume that horses are lying in wait waiting to "take over"...it is in making things as clear as possible, gaining their trust and in return respecting and trusting THEM. Thus, when we require something which does NOT make sense or is alarming to them, like crossing a busy street. They will accept that we know THIS urban and man-made environment, and trust us not to put them in danger- especially if we in return trust THEM in THEIR natural environment, don't force them to walk past a grove of trees where they may have sensed a predator hiding, or to take a path which they sense is unsafe footing... In any partnership, trusting each other to do what is best for both and to take the lead in their own field of "expertise" is the best way. By the same logic, forcing an unsuitable job on a creature whose individual talents and NATURE are in



opposition to it, is a recipe for problems. We should understand that and not set ourselves AND the horse up for failure by insisting what a specific creature must do if it is intrinsically unsuited to it. Otherwise yes there MAY be huge battles, and because we have more technical and physical ways of controlling the horses we may force them into our mould- but at great loss to both sides-including physical danger and worse-loss of HUMANITY.

We need to comprehend that when horses refuse a request or directive it is usually because they physically cannot do it- or find it hard-like obeying a particular order while on the wrong LEG. Or because it is painful-they may have a physical issue of which we are not yet aware- or again they may be just asking us to confirm what it is we want. If they have performed a new task well several times and suddenly seem reluctant to keep doing so, it is probably not stubbornness or stupidity- it is most likely, " Are you SURE you want this AGAIN? We already DID that over and over"... Sometimes they are "testing", us, asking us who WE really are-horses are amazing teachers and- when permitted- healers....

Back to the good news- there is a HUGE trend towards people wanting to use non damaging and kinder methods in their interaction with horses. However - and I do feel this is important to understand- some of the "Natural Horsemanship" methods- most notably those involving chasing away the horse in a round pen-can be quite as damaging as physical abuse-perhaps more-as they strip the creature of its will - FAST and what is left is an apathetic shell. True there was no outward cruelty and CERTAINLY the intention is good, but it is based upon incomplete or partial truths. True, wild horses keep newcomers outside the group until they have assessed how (if at all) they will fit into the complex herd system. If accepted-both newcomer and herd having had up to three days sometimes, in which to observe and figure things out-then there is usually a smooth blending- no fighting and injury-risking, nor damage to the valuable grass around by churning it up in the process. If NOT accepted, the newcomer has the option of finding other company-it is not hemmed in, being chased away but with nowhere to GO, and only total submission and loss of identity as the alternative. That way is a form of domination- and we all know that broken minds and wills can be far harder to heal than broken bodies. So if you want to try natural methods, do read up on them from several angles, and use your own sense and observation as well. You are probably more in tune and have HEARD more from your own horse than any expert can teach you...trust your hearts.

We all know that horses are not just enchanting, a healthy pastime for teenagers, ego-boosters, work companions or facilitators, entertainers - but as I mentioned earlier, they are ALSO healers. Arab tradition tells us that they bear good fortune, that they ensure Divine assistance to their owners in caring for them, that they are comets combatting negative forces. I believe that they really do filter away negative energies, but they do more than that. I would like to end this talk with a few happy stories-stories of our horses at the Growing Together project run in Jordan for



children on the autistic spectrum and others with emotional disorders and some physical special needs.

This project was started only a year ago, using mainly retired horses, some are rescue cases- none had any specific training. The children meet the horses, and within minutes each child has been "chosen", by one of the horses -the bond between them acknowledged by some physical indication on the part of the horse. The program develops at the individual speed required by each child- some are extremely anxious by just being outdoors- some want to sit on the horse from day one-others take weeks to get CLOSE enough to touch one. But there have been some seeming miracles and almost if not all have shown truly amazing progress. From non-speaking at ALL, to calling out to the horse-from agoraphobia to roaming around the hillside confidently- from lack of coordination to playing football with friends, from lack of self-expression to joining in discussions and making choices.

One little boy of seven had poor physical coordination, and had never spoken at all. He was walking down the hill with "his" horse, past an enclosure of wildlife rescued from local zoos. Suddenly Suyen, who runs the program, heard what sounded like, "WOLF". She turned to the child's carer in surprise at hearing the English word. Again they heard, "WOLF", and now the child was pointing at the wolves watching through the fence. The carer was almost in tears; yes the little boy heard English spoken at home, but never had he spoken in ANY language before. Several months later, his physical development continues to grow along with his verbal vocabulary- but he is probably the first child ever to be PRAISED for "Crying "Wolf"!

Another small boy who did speak occasional words (but never linked two to make a phrase) attends with his mother, their school not being able to afford extra carers to accompany the children on these visits. (The sessions are all a free service, but carers attend with the children.) This mother was thrilled when, on days that she would tell her child, "No school today", he would respond with, "Husan (horse)". The fact that he was clearly drawing conclusions-linking lack of school with a reason- a visit to the stables-was a huge step in what she saw as his development. After a few weeks of walking near a mare, he progressed to leading her himself and then came the best moment of all for his mother: he had never expressed emotions before, but suddenly he said in Arabic, "I love horse", and went up the mare and kissed her. He has continued progressing so fast from then that he not only chats away to his family-he is about to join mainstream school this year, God Willing.

On that note, I will conclude this talk with a short film of how the relationship between horses and humans CAN be..... I hope the talk has not been too exhausting or boring, and thank you for your patience.