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## *Horses & the Power of Now*

By **TIM HAYES**

**T**here are many ways to say the same thing: live in the moment. Be here now. Look at your feet; that's where your life is – The past has been spent; the future is an unwritten check but the present is a gift. We need these reminders because we are human and, as far as we know, the only species capable of using its brain to think about the past and fantasize about the future. Horses to the best of our knowledge are only mentally alive in the moment. Knowing the way back to the barn and reminiscing about the past are not the same brain event.

There's nothing wrong with thinking about the past or the future. However doing so prevents us from being 100% present to reality: what is actually happening at this very moment in time. If I'm not totally present to my immediate reality i.e.: driving a car, hitting a ball or riding a horse, I will not be able to perform at my best. Two primary ingredients of high performance are reaction time and quality of response.

As a human, if I swing at the ball and miss because I'm thinking about what's on TV tonight, the worst that can happen is I strike out. If I'm a horse and I don't run away when I first hear a strange noise on the trail, the worst that can happen is a predator eats me – *Big mistake* – Reaction time isn't always crucial with humans but it always means life or death to a horse.

Horses are prey animals and possess the fastest reaction time of any animal on the planet (the time elapsed between a stimulus to one of their senses and their physical response). This is why if you are anywhere within a horse's kicking zone and he decides to kick you, you never see it coming. It is physically impossible to get out of the way before he makes contact.

Living in the moment, being aware and only thinking about what's immediately occurring is natural for horses. It's how their brains work. Along with enormous strength and speed, it is an evolutionary characteristic that has allowed them to survive for millions of years.

They are literally aware of everything that's going on in their environment every second of their lives. They not only use their super human senses to eternally monitor their surroundings, they use them to detect the slightest change that occurs in their world. They're like a walking mental, emotional and physical alarm system.

The benefit of "being in the now," being focused on and connected to our horse is always a mutually improved experience. Our trail ride is safer and therefore more fun. If we're showing, we have a better chance at winning. Staying mentally connected to our horse helps prevent him from misinterpreting our physical energy and body communication if we're thinking about something else. It also helps prevent him from tuning out his riding partner who is not paying attention.

If I'm riding and talking on my cell phone before a show my horse immediately knows his "leader" has "left" him. He must now fend for himself and become his own leader. If my horse is the leader he may decide to do the opposite of what I want (i.e. refuse the jump).

Not being in the moment when we're with our horse may not always be a life-threatening situation, but it definitely works against us performing at our best. If we want our horse to respect us, we need to show him the same respect. Not being consciously connected to our horse 100% of the time that we are together is disrespectful and our horse knows it.

The power of being in the now is natural for our horse. If we want that power, it needs to become natural for us as well.

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