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HORSES AND SPIRITUALITY

By Tim Hayes

“Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insects as well as for the stars, human beings, vegetables or cosmic dust – we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper.”

Years ago I came across this quote on a visit to Great Barrington, Massachusetts. I believe it is the best definition of spirituality that I have ever read. What it says with such simple elegance is what I believe about our world: we, and everything in the universe, are all connected.

I believe that this “mysterious tune” is a shared consciousness that is always present in all things: in particular animals and in specific, humans and horses. Anyone who has ever had a close relationship with an animal whether it be a cat, a dog or a horse will tell you there is an invisible yet palpable feeling of consciousness between them e.g. “sometimes my dog actually knows what I’m thinking”

Many years ago I had the privilege of participating in a Clinic with the late Tom Dorrance; considered by most to be the grandfather of today’s Natural Horsemanship. When the clinic ended I asked Tom what books he would suggest I read. He said there were two: *Dressage* by Henry Wynmalen, and *Kinship With All Life* by J. Allen Boone. I remember thinking that these were the last two books I would have ever imagined an old

California cowboy would recommend. Today, having had the opportunity to read them both I now understand why he chose them.

The principals of Natural Horsemanship are based on not only creating a physical relationship with your horse but one that is also mental and emotional. Horses like humans think and have feelings.

Without communicating with a horse on all three levels you can never truly establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect much less a willing partnership with you as the senior partner or leader. This is also a prerequisite for Classical Dressage.

There are in fact many great books in many different languages on riding and horsemanship. However all of them emphasize the same primary principal: *To control the movement of the horse one must control his feet. To control his feet one must first control his mind.*

Whether it’s English Dressage or Western Reining all great riding is based on being able to communicate and influence each of your horses’ four feet at any given moment.

Unless you can influence your horse mentally and emotionally (his mind) you will not be able to influence him physically (his feet).

When I asked Tom for help, since no one had yet written any books on “Natural Horsemanship” he simply recommended an excellent book on Classical Dressage. He knew it was based on the same principals and methods of horsemanship that he believed

in and taught.

When I finished reading *A Kinship With All Life*, at first it seemed almost child-like. I now understand why this was Tom’s second recommendation. It’s a collection of stories about some amazing relationships humans have had with a number of different species of animals. I believe this was Tom’s way of helping me to recognize that in addition to the mental, emotional and physical there was also a spiritual connection that was possible and could exist in the horse/human relationship. He knew and believed this and with this book hoped to pass on this knowledge to anyone who had an open mind. His attitude and spiritual connectedness toward horses is what made Tom Dorrance so special.

Whether one chooses to believe in a spiritual connection between man and horse is an individual preference. Certainly it’s possible to achieve a high level of horsemanship and riding ability without it. I have found that once I allowed myself to accept the possibility that the invisible connected consciousness I felt between me and my horse Austin was real, our relationship improved, it went to a deeper

level, I became more humble and more teachable.

As I have gotten older I have come to see spiritual connections turning up everywhere in my life. This was not always the case. Years ago I would have not even entertained the idea that such a concept was possible without some scholarly scientific validation. I guess I still have some of that in me because the thing I like the most about the quote that began this article was that it was written by Albert Einstein. ©Tim Hayes 2015

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