The Equine Mandala

A 4-sided holistic approach to understanding horses, their behavor, their language, how they learn and their World-View.

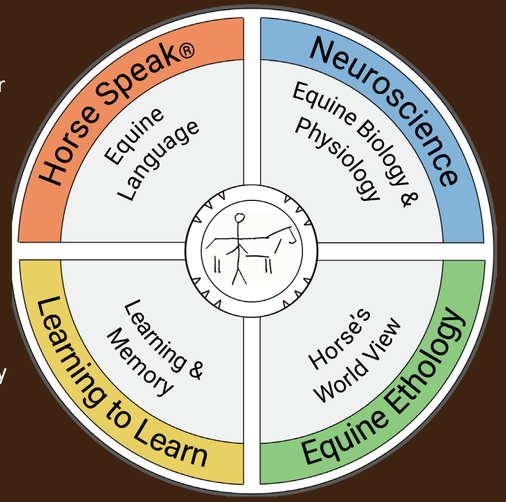
This is the basis of Lucinda B's Moving as One teaching program for both horse and human.

Learn WHY horses behave as they do under various circumstances based on the way heir brains and central nervous system functions AND how they see the world using Ethology. This is crucial to your success in effectively working with them.

The synergy of this research represents a fundamentally new approach to working with your horse and works well with any training technique. It enhances, but does not replace, what you currently do.

Experience a new richeness of communication with your horse through science and knowledge.

Do it for your horse. *Do it for yourself.*



Learn more at:

www.LucindaB.com

Being Herd

Building a Bridge between the amazing ethereal sensation of "Sharing Space" to the down-to-earth practicality of "Getting Things Done"

Second Edition

Diego

Lucinda B.

Acknowledgments-

Thank you to all my students and teachers, both human and equine, and to my friends and family for putting up with my zeal in putting together my teaching program.

A big shout out to Dr. Stephen Peters for his patience with my thousands of questions, and Sharon & Laura Wilsie.

Thanks also to my forever partner, Chris for his support all these years, and thanks to you too Rachel, for your support.

I'm grateful for this amazing journey- and its just getting started.

Building a bridge between that amazing ethereal experience of ***"Sharing Space"*** to the down-to-earth practicality of ***"Getting Things Done"***

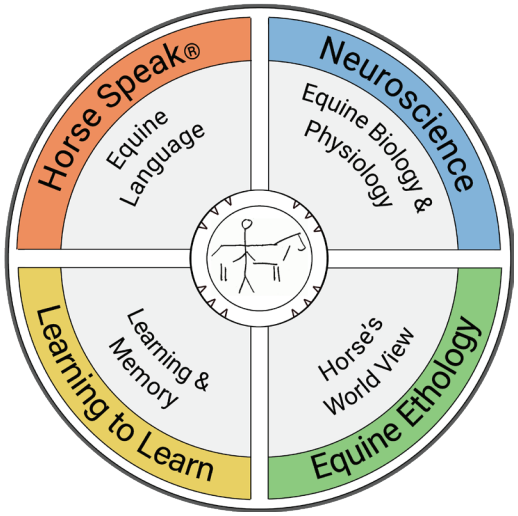
Being Herd

2nd Edition-
March 2023

Lucinda B.
Aligned Horsewomen

Moving|as One
Programs

Introduction- Where do I begin?



First and foremost, this wee book is about how to get a thing accomplished with the horse, whether it's jumping a fence, moving cattle, or going on a trail ride with your friends.

Throughout the book, I will refer to the Equine Mandala. This graphic serves to remind us of the interrelatedness of the four disciplines depicted in the Equine Mandala- Neuroscience, Learning Memory, Equine Ethology and Horse Speak. Together they represent the most advanced information that horsewomen have to help get things accomplished with the horse.

I've spent the past 5 years researching and organizing all this information into as compact a form as possible. Sure, becoming a Master at this stuff takes a lifetime, but you will see and feel real results after a short period of practice.

You can do this. You can learn this. Yes you. You with all your history, all your messy life experiences and, most important, all the joys you have experienced. All these things make up the total of who you are today and has brought you to the point where you are reading this story right now. Nothing here is "easy". It takes practice and time, but I'll do my best to keep you energized as you push through your feelings of defeat, discouragement, unworthiness, and that mischievous ego we are all forced to dance with. The beauty of this work/information is you will start to unpack and figure out for yourself many issues you maybe having, and see results in both your horse and yourself quickly.

Along this journey I hope this book will continue to be of ongoing use to you. The stories, information and exercises herein should allow you to have many "ah-ha" moments. There is no way to count the ones I've had putting this together for you.

As I did my research, the information I collected seemed overwhelming to me. ***"How the heck am I going to be able to teach this?"*** was my main thought. Then one afternoon, out in a paddock using Horse Speak® with one of my horses, I had an epiphany. All this information seemed to turn back on itself- each bit helping to explain everything else. In that second, I saw the beautiful circular structure to it. The only image that seemed to be able to contain it was the Equine Mandala.

Something that's really important to remember is summarized in this quote,
"Beneath every behavior there is a feeling, and beneath every feeling there is a need. When we meet that need rather than focus on the behavior, we begin to deal with the cause not the symptom". -Reimaging Recovery

WHY is the horse bucking, biting, spooking, refusing to leave their friend, not walking over the tarp, won't pick up a certain lead, etc. Don't focus on the Symptoms. Focus instead on what your horse's needs are by learning what drives his behavior based on his World View through his mind and body. Every time your horse does something that baffles you, get curious, observe it and say to yourself "How interesting".

The best thing is that this work is completely technique neutral. It enhances all training methods. Going into the show ring with a quiet, attentive horse is much better when competing, doing cow work, or just moseying down the trail.

The Importance of Evidence-Based Knowledge

First, there is **Scientific Knowledge**. This is a type of knowledge based on rigorous testing.

- You start by asking a question like, *"Would digging a 4-foot hole in the ground be faster with a shovel or a fork?"*
- Then you formulate a hypothesis like, *"It should be faster to dig a 4-foot hole with a fork than a shovel."*
- Next, you conduct an experiment to test the hypothesis, like actually digging two holes, one with each implement, and keeping track of the time.
- Analyzing the data tests the hypothesis.
- If the hypothesis is found to be true, the experiment is given to another researcher who follows the same experimental procedure.
- If the second researcher finds the same result, this tends to confirm the hypothesis.
- Only when many researchers find the hypothesis to be true, is it generally considered to be scientifically true.
- If the hypothesis is found to be false, or unrepeatable, then the hypothesis cannot be considered scientifically true.
- Failed hypotheses encourage the investigator to reformulate the hypothesis until one can be found that satisfies scientific truth.

Scientific knowledge is very important, but much of what we know has come from our life experiences. Dr. Marthe Kiley-Worthington calls this **Folk Knowledge**. This is the kind of knowledge that has proven itself repeatedly through time. It has been passed down through the generations. This is stuff that you have learned or figured out, that just works, time and time again. You don't need the formality of the scientific method to know what works- it just works. If it didn't, you wouldn't waste your time on it.

Throughout my life I have felt the need to rigorously authenticate information, both for myself and before I share it with others. What I offer in this book is backed by evidence based information from experts in their fields.
To appear here, it must be backed up. I've put a fairly comprehensive list of my sources at the end of this book and on my website, www.lucindab.com/resources

As a horsewoman with 45+ years hanging out with horses I have experienced working with Mustangs, breeding and foaling out, caring for elderly and sick ones, and working with young horses. I have done a lot of stuff right, but I've also have done things wrong. In some cases, I thought I knew just what the horse needed only to find out I was mistaken. In other cases, I just didn't pay enough attention to the situation, because I was so busy in my head, and things got out of control. I have had to learn the hard way too many times but learn I did and I continue to learn.

Just like you, I have a history too-

I now live very far from any city in the John Day-Ochoco Highlands with my forever partner Chris and our many horses, chickens, goats, cats, and dogs, not to mention the bunnies, coyotes, wild turkeys, cougars, elk, badgers, raccoon, and deer that share this beautiful part of the world with us. It has been a curiosity to me why I have had chosen to live with so many animals around me. You might be wondering the same thing about yourself, or you might be feeling there is something missing if you don't have an animal in your life.

Science now knows why we are drawn to animals. When we are near them, looking at pictures of them, or just thinking about them our brains produce the "feel good" neurochemicals. Whether it's a baby, a dog, a cat, or a horse these chemicals enter the bloodstream and produce pleasurable feelings throughout the body. Playing with a puppy is a highly pleasurable experience for most people. Hugging, watching a sunset, eating ice cream, and looking at photos of your family are other examples of neurochemical-induced pleasurable experiences.

When these pleasure producing chemicals are in our bloodstream in lower concentrations, we miss them, and this affects our behavior. The longing for those good feelings, and the actions we take to get them, is an important part of the glue that keeps humanity together- keeps us caring about something other than ourselves for just a bit.

This is exactly what happens in the equine brain and is the glue that holds herds together. If you understand this, it can become the glue that holds you and your horse together.

Bit by a pony named Ginger-

My earliest memory of a horse happened when I was 4 years old. My dad was an avid hunter/jumper, and he took me with him to the barn one day. Years later he told me that since the horses were in their stalls, he wasn't overly concerned for my safety. While he and the barn manager were talking about his horse, I gravitated over to a black pony named Ginger. She seemed huge, but in a photo I've seen since, she appears to have been maybe 10 hands tall. I was fascinated.

I don't remember exactly how she did it, but she stuck her head out and, ever to gently, took my little arm in her teeth. She didn't bite, she just held it and I wasn't afraid at all. At some point my dad noticed and hurried over to move me away. I was completely uninjured, but the damage was done. My young brain had been flooded with those "feel good" neurochemicals and I had a powerful positive experience. From then on I was helplessly in love with anything equine. Ponies, horses, donkeys, mules, it didn't matter.

At that same age, the family dog was a silver standard poodle named Saucy. That dog followed me everywhere and wouldn't let me leave our property. My mother became so convinced that Saucy was taking care of me that she let me be outside in the yard by myself for long periods of time without an adult. My brother and sister were 10 and 12 years older than I and they had little time or patience to play with me, so the dog became my best friend.

From then on, my connection, I call it a "soul connection", to all living creatures became my hope and my sanity. It didn't matter if was an animal, insect, or amoeba- I started relating to all life on earth.

Animals seemed the most natural thing to me to have around. They offered their senses for protection, reliability, and consistent information through any experience. They offered themselves as nothing more and nothing less- just themselves as they are.

Ebony Joseph-

Joey and I had been jumping together for 2 years, since I was 11. This big black warm-blood had been my partner in crime many times. He was stabled at a posh riding academy in La Canada, CA called Flintridge. Their focus was developing young people to be on the show-jumping circuit, and I had been training under Jimmy Williams since I was seven.

Joey knew I was a kid, and he took it upon himself to look after me. I was an explorer, nonconformist, and a tomboy. Unfortunately for my parents, who had dreams of me going to the Olympics, none of these traits were aligned with their ambitions for me.

My goals were much simpler. Get Joey tacked up and go for an adventure. We had a routine. I would get dropped off at the barn with a days-worth of lessons. I'd do the first couple of lessons in the morning and then we'd sneak out through the back gate and go trail riding in the surrounding area around Jet Propulsion Laboratory and Berkshire Park.

Joey and I had formed a herd of two. We trusted each other and had each other's back.

I had not considered that our outings might be dangerous. I just knew how thrilling it felt to know we were a team and to feel we could do anything. On one of our outings we encountered a couple of young men that were hanging out on the trail. As we came upon them, they approached us. Joey, with his massive chest, brought his head up and took several intimidating steps towards the closest young man. The guys weren't used to horses but, after the initial shock of how big he was, one of them reached for the reins. Joey moved his head just enough so he couldn't grab them. Seeing our peril, I pulled us together enough to turn and gallop back to Flintridge. It was the first time I realized the world might not always be a safe place. To this day I am extremely grateful for Joey's protection and partnership.

Before my 14th birthday my folks stopped taking me to the barn. Many years later I learned that my they had been forced to put Joey down. They said he'd been "put out to pasture" to protect me from the truth. I wasn't mad- I was just sad.

Over the next 20 years I attended college, had children, traveled, and lived in Australia and New Zealand and worked in the film industry. Through the years I found I was happiest when I was a student and researcher. I still fondly recall the childhood hours I had spent listening to my older sister's Cal Tech boyfriends discuss some mathematical proof or talking about astrophysics and many other science topics.

This was all very natural to me as I had always been exposed to adult discussions at many meals with my father's friends and colleagues who were doctors, engineers, lawyers etc. Literally on the other side of the table was my mother, who was a seeker of beauty, the natural world, and the spiritual side of the coin. She exposed me to art, and she was a big believer in the Golden Rule.

All my early experiences gave me an insatiable longing for more information- a thread in my life- that I am grateful for to this day.

So Much Information-

There are so many ideas about ways to "be" with your horse. We are lucky to live in a time when so much information is available. I have listed my most influential sources at the back of this book and on my web site. The nice thing is that I've already done the research so you shouldn't need to do it all again.

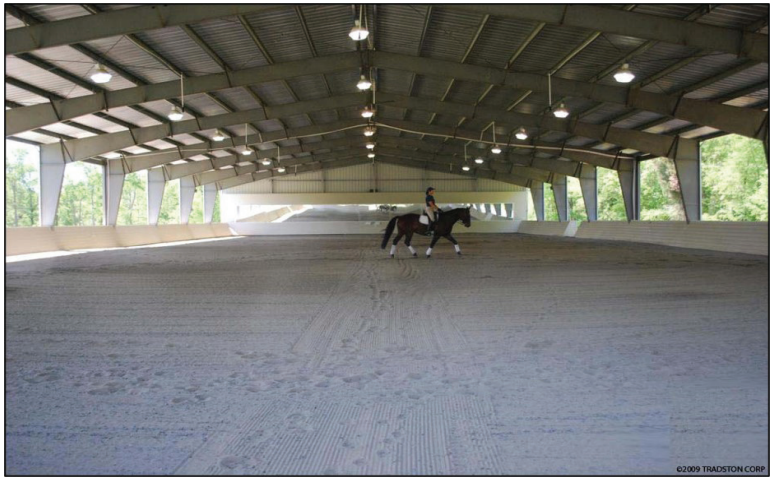
As I studied these works, I started to see a pattern. There is a common thread to their teachings. I remember the day when I had this "ahh-ha" moment of incredible insight. My first thought was that I couldn't wait to share it with my kindred horsewomen.

A good way to start is to tell you the story of "Unlocking Nemo's Head"-

There are moments in one's life that change the direction of your path. This is the story of one such moment for me.

In the late 1990's, our businesses were going well, and my kids were pretty grown up, so I started fantasizing about owning another horse. I was looking to relive some of those wonderful days with Joey.

My search led me to Nemo. He was a 6-year-old black Arabian, 14.2 hands and very athletic with an active mind. My heart leapt when I saw him cantering around the arena. It looked like he was flying, mane and tail blowing in the breeze. I longed to be on his back and ride like the wind.



After the vet checked Nemo, the main comment I remember was, *"He is going to be an exciting ride"*.

Naively I thought, *"Sounds good to me."* So, I bought him. We were together for 18 years until his death in 2016.

When I first brought him home, all I really knew was that a horse was a horse. I assumed that all horses were attuned to the natural world and therefore should be comfortable being ridden on trails. It didn't even OCCUR to me to ask the sellers if he had ever been trail ridden before loading him on my trailer.

Despite how great he looked in the arena, on the trail it appeared that he was SCARED of EVERYTHING.

It quickly became obvious that I was in serious danger riding him anywhere but the arena. Nemo was a very quick and athletic little Arab, but he just couldn't pull it together to walk down a trail. After several scary trail rides of tripping over his own feet, spooking, running though my hands, refusing to go near water and managing to dump me at nearly every turn, I finally called the previous owners.

Apparently, he had been a show horse and had only been ridden in the arena. It took me years, but I would eventually find out what this really meant.

Some Necessary Science Stuff-

When I started researching the brain, I found the term "Neuroscience" to be intimidating but soon realized that many of the general concepts are quite easy to understand and applied directly to my situation with Nemo.

One of the most interesting things I learned was about the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) which includes the Para-Sympathetic/Sympathetic Nervous System spectrum. The terminology is sounds complicated, but the concept is quite simple:

*The **Parasympathetic Nervous System** (PNS) is a low energy state of the (ANS) commonly referred to as "rest and digest", on the low end of the excitement scale. The whole body is close to the state of homeostasis.*

*The **Sympathetic Nervous System** (SNS) is a high energy state commonly referred to as "fight or flight" on the high end of the excitement scale. Animals cannot "think" when they are highly stressed. You can't "reason" with them. They simply "react".*

***Homeostasis** is a natural regulating mechanism that continually works to balance the (ANS) at optimum levels between the Sympathetic and Parasympathetic.*

I like to refer to the situation like a thermostat where the heat gets turned up and down depending on the information coming in from the outside world. Sleep and blind panic are the two endpoints of this spectrum with many states in between (curiosity, active attention, concern, alert, etc.). Mammals (horses) typically move up and down this emotional spectrum throughout their day.

Back to Nemo-

When I purchased him, Nemo had spent NO time on the trail. Because of this, his brain completely lacked the motor skills he needed to navigate the natural world. (Motor skills control coordinated movement appropriate for the situation the horse finds itself in. Learning Motor Skills requires doing small things well, then building on that.) Being on the trail, out in nature, was as foreign to him, and as stressful, as being in the middle of the ocean.

I came to understand that just because he was a horse did not mean his brain had the necessary experience to handle the information (sensory input) that was coming in from the outside world. EVERYTHING he saw was a new, potentially threatening thing. In addition, he was literally figuring out where to put his feet with each step- like a human ice skating for the first time.

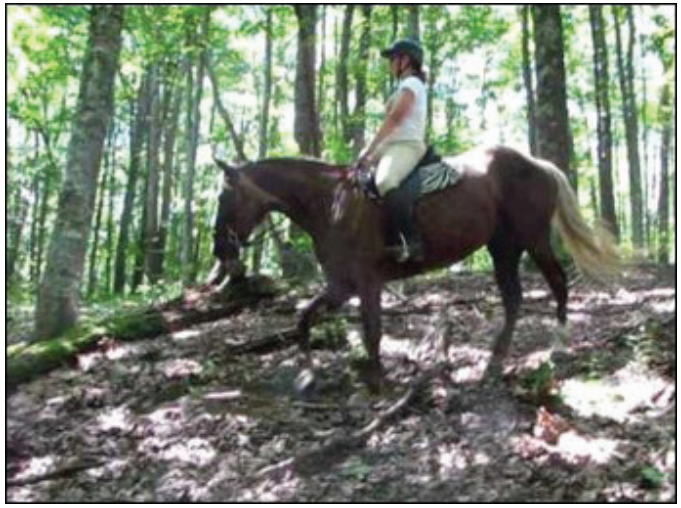
Because his brain was coping with so many new experiences at once, he quickly became overwhelmed and over-reacted to everything- shying, stumbling, and tripping all the way. Nemo's brain was so stressed with the new environment that he was up in his Sympathetic Nervous System (thermostat turned up) most of the time we were out. This was bad for both of us.

At the time I had no idea what he was going through. I just thought he was high spirited, or he'd had a bad experience with his previous owners, or maybe he was in pain.

Learning takes place best when an animal is calm and alert, but Nemo was spending most of his time on the trail scared. Not only was it a terrible experience for both of us, but he wasn't learning how to navigate the outside as fast as I wanted him to.

He acted scared going up and down hills, passing a tree or a rock, being near water or seeing a big shadow. I found that once he was spooked up into his Sympathetic Nervous System, it was nearly impossible to get him to calm down. He was just "checked out".

Even though I didn't understand all this at the time, I did understand how dangerously unprepared he was for trail riding. This, of course, put ME on edge and sent me up to ***MY*** Sympathetic Nervous System. I didn't know a lot, but I knew enough to understand that ***WE*** had a big problem. I had no idea how to solve it, but I was determined to try.



What we were doing.

So, our true journey began-

Nemo inspired me to begin a journey of discovery which continues to this day. It has been thrilling. Nemo has been gone now for ten years yet the drive to learn and share this knowledge is as strong as ever.

Nemo and I started with simple obstacles in the arena, graduating to more and more complex ones. We rode 4-5 days a week on trails, up and down mountains, though water, traversing dense forests and over and around thousands of obstacles.

We had many harrowing experiences on the trail, but over the next several years he slowly developed the motor skills he needed and became more confident. He and I began to feel much safer on the trail.

What Nemo felt like he was doing.

But something still wasn't right-

Try as I might, I just couldn't figure out how to fix his most annoying habit. While on the trail, he would swing his head back and forth almost continuously. He would swing it left and right, right and left for the whole trail ride. He was ***not*** noticeably anxious or nervous. He just swung his head back and forth "with intent".

It felt unbalanced and uncomfortable to ride like this. I began to wonder if there was something mentally or physically wrong with him, but I was pretty sure there was something going on that I just couldn't see... ***yet***.

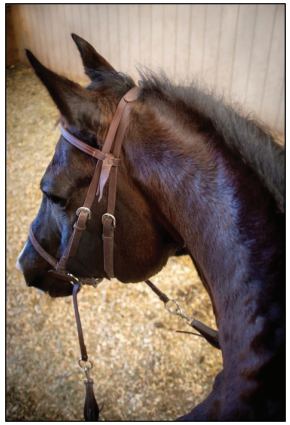
Through those years I attended dozens of clinics with and studied the work of Tom Dorrance. I rode with many clinicians- Ray Hunt, Dennis Reese, Buck Brannaman, and many others. Nemo and I became experts on attending clinics.

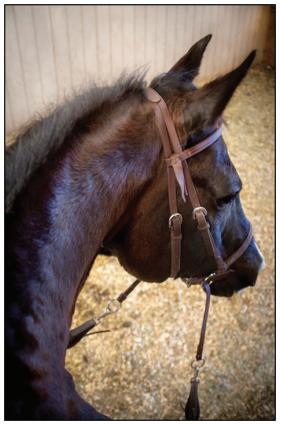
I learned a lot about "**feel**", "**timing**" and "**release of pressure**". It was worth every penny I spent, and every minute I spent in the saddle. I was confident these clinicians could help me figure out how to stop his head from moving back and forth if I just worked hard enough at it.

I did my best to "**get to his feet**". I went around thousands of bushes and trees on the trail. I got good at: "**making the wrong thing hard and the right thing easy**". I worked at everything I had learned. But there was still no answer to Nemo's head situation.

None of the work we did slowed his head movement on the trail- even a little bit. My frustration was epic. What was I missing?

Compounding my confusion was the fact that in a clinic setting, in an arena with many things going on around us, he never moved his head back and forth. He was the best little clinic horse ever. I couldn't even show the clinicians what he was doing.





One beautiful spring day, we were going down the trail and, once again, his head was swinging side to side. Once again, I was frustrated and I said to him firmly, “What are you looking at?”

In that moment it suddenly occurred to me to look EXACTLY where he was looking. I didn’t just glance with my eyes, I turned my head and REALLY looked. Within seconds, his head centered and came quiet.

I could tell that something very big had just happened. It was one of those real “AHAH” moments that you remember forever. Every time he would look off into the forest, I turned my head to follow his gaze and his head stopped swinging. One tends to forget that, because of the nature of their visual field, your horse is watching you just as much as they are watching the trail ahead. Because of his reaction, I knew he could see and feel where I was really looking.

I was dumbfounded- such a simple fix.
Could it really be that easy?

From then on, whether I was on the ground or in the saddle, whenever he began looking around, I would follow his gaze to where he was looking. It ALWAYS worked. His head came quiet. I tried this with my other horses, and they all responded exactly the same.

I knew I was on to something profound that I hadn’t heard anyone talking about…yet.

Since I’d never found a clinician who taught this, I realized that I probably had to do my own research. This research led me to Equine Ethology (the study of horse behavior based on how THEY experience the world around them) and Dr Marthe Kiley-Worthington.

I began to understand that horses are communicating with each other in the herd all the time. Whether in the saddle or on the ground, the horse is actively communicating (or attempting to communicate) with their person about things (potential threats). I now understood that I had not been able to See/Hear/Feel them because I didn't know what to See/Hear/Feel for. Up til then, I must have seemed like Helen Keller to him.

Nemo was teaching me that horses are NEVER autonomous (comfortable being alone). They are always in a herd mentality, communicating with each other and us. Horses never daydream like humans. Being prey animals, they are always on alert- even when resting. Their brain and senses are fine tuned to pick up the first indications of a threat- much more so than humans.

Horses live 100% in the present as their lives literally depended on it in the wild.

It turned out that all this little horse wanted me to do was to BE part of his herd and pay attention. All this time he had been looking out for both of us as we went down the trail. Since I wasn't looking, he felt alone- and alone is the scariest thing there is for a horse. All I had to do to make him comfortable was stay engaged and present as an active member of his herd.

Over time he became very quiet on the trail and anywhere else I took him. If he did become concerned, I simply stopped and acknowledged his concern. This would immediately bring him back to a quiet place. We saw squirrels, deer, elk and a bear or two but since I was WITH him, together we made good decisions about what to do next. Thus, he never got overwhelmed.

Nemo and I did this for the rest of his life and our bond and rapport was strengthened 10-fold because of what he taught me.

I called this story *"Unlocking Nemo's Head"*, but the truth is Nemo unlocked MY head on so many levels.

My research, observations and hands-on teaching have shown me that when a horse really feels you are with them as a herd-mate they are willing to follow you. A true equine partner/leader must include ALL herd-mates (the horse and yourself). This means all the participants of the herd need to be engaged and present while at the same time respecting each other's participation and space.

Cion Story-

Here is a true story of Atencion (Cion), my Warlander, who was in my life for 20 years. We were on a trail ride up in the mountains by Green Lakes (near Bend, OR) with a group of friends.

At one point, we had stopped to drink from a stream, so my friends had gotten ahead of me on the curvy trail. I could see them across this small meadow, so I decided to ride across to catch up.

As I began, I saw a small log and thought it would be fun to get Cion to step over it. Not a big ask because it wasn't a big log. As we approached, he slowed, stopped and backed up a step. I tried again, but he showed reluctance.

Up to this point, I had the agency to determine our path. I had made the decisions. My partner had been content for me to make the decisions. In the new science of ***Emergence***, when another member of the herd (flock, school, pack, etc.) is in a better position to lead, then the leadership quickly and seamlessly shifts to that individual. The key to its effectiveness is the speed with which it happens. There is no ego involved. Whoever is most able to lead, leads- no meetings, arguments or votes. This is a difficult concept for humans because our egos are so strong. In that moment, Cion felt that he was in a better position to lead, to have the agency to pick our path.

I thought, “Hmmm”. I’ve got two choices, I could force him to step over the log, thus showing my friends how skilled we were (ego), or I could treat him like a true partner and acknowledge his concerns. I knew his senses were much more acute than mine. I knew he was smart and capable. I also knew that if I really insisted, he would hop over the log like it was nothing.

In the end, I choose to listen, and gave him free rein for the moment. As we went around the log I looked down to the other side and noticed a group of hornets coming and going from under the log, I was very glad I had decided to listen to my friend.

This being said, there ARE times when the human must take at least 51% of the control to get something done. When its time to load up, or stand for the farrier, or get their teeth floated, the horse would much rather be doing something else.

These wonderful animals we call horses are sentient beings that have emotions and are cognitive of their world. They have a World View built on what they need in the world to survive and thrive.

Just about this time a book came out called ***Horse Speak®***, by Sharon Wilsie, and a movie came out called ***Taming Wild*** by Elsa Sinclair. I realized other horsewomen were experiencing the same thing. We were opening up to the possibility that horses are talking to us and that true conversation is possible. I became obsessed with wanting to find others and to see what more there was to know.

After a lesson one day, a client handed me a copy of the Horse Speak book. My first reaction was fascination. I soon found that Horse Speak® was about the actual language of the horse. Sharon had spent years observing and decoding their Postures, Gestures and Signals to allow us to not only understand what they’re saying but communicate back with them.

I ended up taking the 2-year Horse Speak® program and it has changed everything for me when handling horses. Being introduced to Sharon’s work wildly expanded my vocabulary and made it repeatable (scientifically true). It isn’t hyperbole to say that Horse Speak has opened up a whole new world for me and many others. ***It Changes Everything.***

Now I can offer an idea to a horse, and they can offer a response back to me- one that I will understand. Neuroscience says when you learn a different language you start thinking in that language. I see that this is true as I now SEE the horses' action in a whole new light.

It's been interesting looking around at experienced horse handlers and noticing that they do some Horse Speak without even know they are doing it. Of course they do. Humans have been working with horses for thousands of years and have picked up a lot of Folk Knowledge about equine postures gestures and signals.

Early on, I found myself working with many different horses. One horse, barn-named Yoyo, was blind in one eye. I had the idea (my hypothesis was) that it would to be best if I stood on his blind side to "become" his blind eye. He wasn't the least bit interested in my idea. Yoyo very quietly kept putting me on his sighted side. It now seems obvious but, of course, he would want to see my reactions to the world by being on his sighted side. This was a big learning moment for me. At this point, I realized my horse language skills were very rudimentary- Kindertalk.

Have you had a situation with your horse that you just couldn't figure out? You might think she/he might need more training, body work, a different bit, or adjustment to their food. While all these things might be true, no matter what, YOU must take the information you have and make a decision. I've been down this road many times and it has led me to the work I do now.

Aligned Horsewomen?

I've chosen the term Aligned Horsewomen to give agency to women (77% of horse owners) to be able to diagnose and solve many of their own horse issues. Alignment means balance and there are so many things that can throw a woman out of balance. Horses are gigantic bio-feedback machines who respond to you and your emotional state. My goal is to teach women to fish- not give them fish. I offer tools and information that give agency to women to regain balance with their horse when they've lost it.

Central Principle-

If I had to boil down everything I teach to a single phrase, it would be, ***"Don't ever leave your horse behind".***
Sounds great, but what does that mean and how do we do it?

An individual horse, all by themselves, is a vulnerable prey animal- and their central nervous system is hard wired to know it. For them, a feeling of safety comes in numbers- more eyes, ears and noses scanning for danger- means less chance of being caught by surprise by a cougar or other predator.

Whenever you're with, or even near, your horse, they automatically look to you to be "together" with them for protection, part of their herd. If you are "there" with them, have a connection with them, they feel safer and are less stressed. When they are less stressed, they are more able to listen, think and learn. If you want to get a thing done whether it be crossing a tarp, running barrels or just go for a trail ride remember your horse does not become an autonomous being when they leave their paddock, they need to know you will be with them every step of the way.

Connection

You let them know you are with them by being in a Low, Medium or a High Connection.

A **Low Connection** is like you would be with a small child, maybe talking with a friend but always aware of the environment, keeping and eye out on what they are doing in case you need to step in.

This is what NO Connection looks like:

This is what Low Connection looks like:

A **Medium Connection** is when you are actively asking for and individual task to be performed slowly and deliberately- like doing a Horse Speak “Greeting”, picking up a foot, standing still when brushing or doing “matching steps” in the round pen.

A **High Connection** is for when you are doing an extended intense task- working cattle or barrel racing, show-jumping, dressage or endurance riding. In a high connection, you are hyper aware of the connection between you and your horse to get the most out of the experience.

If you lose your connection, the horse feels they are on their own and their sense of vulnerability increases. They begin to understand that they will need to make their own decisions without you- because you’re not “there”. When this happens, things can go south very quickly and, of course, it won’t be their fault.

It wasn’t their idea to leave the paddock- it was yours. That means you must maintain at least a Low Connection- an active awareness of the environment and the direction you are taking them to make them feel safe.

Looking vs. “I See You”

In order for the human to “see” the horse, they must understand the Horse’s World View. A good way to do this is through Equine Neuroethology.

World View

Horses and people have different views of the world, or “World-Views” based on their needs and their senses.

Horses experience their environment using all their senses all the time. Their sensory receptors, part of their central nervous system, are hundreds to thousands of times more sensitive than ours. Their eyes see in 340 of the 360 degrees around their heads. Their ears can be pointed toward a sound or independently toward two sounds. Their noses are huge and contain thousands of times as many receptor cells as ours. Their feet and legs have highly sensitive vibration receptors and can sense movement far beyond their other senses.

Because we are a predator species, humans have relied on our sense of sight, language and our reasoning skills for so long that our other senses are not as sensitive as they once were. Our frontal cortex (our thinking/planning brain) is so busy at any one time that we are distracted from “truly seeing”. We see what we feel we need in the moment and ignore the rest.

Nonetheless, when you are with a horse, they are counting on you being a full member of the herd. That means bringing the full range of our sensory apparatus to augment the herd. Only then are you bringing value to the herd- even to a herd consisting solely of you and your horse.

Of course, matching a horse’s senses is impossible. The human needs to keep the low connection with the horse. Be aware that it’s important to the horse to feel like you’re paying attention to, and acknowledging, their concerns. This takes practice. Horses are perceptive, as we’ve seen, and they will gladly accept the human’s efforts as genuine. The effect is a calmer horse open to learning and a more authentic experience for the human.

LOOKING means using your visual sensory receptors (eyes) to be aware of your environment. It's like a floodlight spread over a wide area.

SEEING ("I see you") is truly looking into someone's true essence, to understand their concerns and desires with empathy.

Seeing is noticing or becoming aware of an object using your eyes to detect it and your brain to analyze what you see. Once the object is seen, the brain decides how best to move forward. Seeing is not only noticing something but understanding it and attending to it. Attending to it can be engaging with it, watching it, or choosing to ignore it. Seeing is looking past the obvious to perceive a thing's meaning and nuances.

"Seeing" a horse is looking past the obvious surface details into their motivations and concerns. Its being a friend and understanding what is important to them.

It doesn't matter what you do with your horse eventually, if you don't "see" them and stay in an appropriate mind/body connection, there will be an accident or an injury.

The tendency, then, is to look for something that happened just before the bad incident. In most cases this is the wrong place to look, as you and your horse were probably on your way to having issues when you put on the halter.

For many years, I thought that horses' faces, bodies and legs where just reacting to their current immediate environment, like being hungry or cold or frightened, etc. But as I have studied Equine Ethology, Horse Speak, and how horses learn, I can now ***SEE*** that animals are sentient beings with languages and emotions. I have acquired a new lens through which I can experience this. You too can develop the ability to SEE them more clearly. Mastery of this takes a lifetime but small, significant, and life-changing steps can be taken almost immediately.

A Story about a Mustang from Stinking Water named Diego... and the wee hill that saved him

Diego once had his own herd. This is an important because he would have strong emotional memory of this time with his herd. Even to this day.

He was out of Stinking Water, a remote area in Eastern Oregon. He was 4 -5 years old when they brought him into the BLM pens in Burns, Oregon.

One of the first things they do when they bring new stallions into the holding pens is geld them. Diego was there for about a year before he was presented at an adoption event. This is where we first met. He had a regal air about him, and was vibrantly healthy with a clear eye. To me he immediately stood out from the crowd.

At that point I was not yet certified to bring him on as a TIP horse. (The goal of the TIP program is to get a wild horse “adoptable”. This means getting the horse to the point where he could be led, loaded in a trailer and allow someone to pick up all 4 feet.)

A couple of months later, after I was accepted into the TIP program, I drove back out to the Burns holding pens. I saw him immediately and arranged to take him home. Once I had taught him the necessary tasks, he was ready for adoption.

A young inexperienced woman adopted him. She was a wonderful person and her heart was in the right place. She just did not understand what owning a wild horse really meant. Not many people would. She spent many hours with him at our ranch, and they formed a bond.

I worked with Diego and this young woman for over a year on groundwork and partnership. She was able to walk with him out on BLM, groom and handle him safely. After that year, we determined that he was ready to be started under saddle.
Since I no longer did colt starting, I advised her to find a trainer who would start him

under saddle using the work of Tom Dorrance. I explained to her that since he had been a stallion with his own herd, and very proud, he would likely become resentful and dangerous if someone tried to “break him” using dominance-based training, instead of “starting him” using Tom’s work.

Its an old story but, if a trainer is unaware of the subtle feedback the horse is giving, they are unlikely to respond correctly. When this happens, the horse’s confusion and frustration push them up into the Sympathetic Nervous System. A trainer unaware of this sees this “over-reaction” as “bad behavior”.

She had a difficult time finding a trainer that would start Diego because he had once been wild. Unfortunately, she did not heed my warning and took him to be “broke” by heavy handed trainer. For 18 months the trainer handled Diego with dominance training. I feared this would not end well.

Diego’s behavior continued to deteriorate. After a while he just started bucking the trainer off. Whenever he fell off, Diego’s brain got a dopamine hit (behavior reinforcement). This trainer was actually teaching Diego that bucking was an easy way to stop the pressure and thereby get rewarded. Classic “operant conditioning”, but in the wrong direction.

When he failed to get the results he was looking for, the trainer stepped up the pressure by employing more and more aggressive dominance-based methods to stop the bucking. This included tying one front foot up off the ground, running him until he thought Diego was exhausted and other methods I prefer not to think about.

Instead of taking responsibility the trainer finally announced that Diego was simply un-trainable and directed the young woman to take him off his property.

She had spent a lot of money with this trainer and Diego had gotten

more and more unmanageable. She was heartbroken over the treatment her beautiful horse had received. She was also now faced with finding him a new home. Where she had started out taking him for walks on BLM and enjoying him, she was now scared to get near him.

She called me and confessed she had made a terrible mistake with the trainer and begged me to take him back to our ranch. After dropping him off, she promised she'd come to visit from time to time. I'll never know if she was embarrassed or grief stricken, but she never came to see him again.

Diego was sullen and looked like a broken spirit after his arrival. He stood all day alone facing East- toward Stinking Water. He was very lethargic and in a state of "Learned Helplessness". He was completely shut down.

When I had first met Diego, I thought to myself what a proud horse he was. To live in the world for the first 4-5 years as a stallion with his own herd was perfect for him. In the wild, a stallion has the specific job of always looking out for danger, ready at a moment's notice to defend the herd. Because of this, stallions spend a great deal of time up on the nearest hill scanning the surrounding area.

I asked myself, *"What job could I give him that would make him feel needed and useful?"*

The most natural thing for him to do would be to look far out to the horizon and over his herd. I guessed that this would make him feel useful again. We fired up the tractor and put several buckets of dirt in a pile, making a wee hill for him. It was about 8 feet tall and 25 feet wide.

It worked after only a few minutes. Diego looked at the mound and walked right over to it. He climbed up and stood there for hours in the rain. In the days that followed, even when it snowed, he stood dutifully at his post.

Everything changed after that. He became a different horse. Bright eyes, curious and back with his new domestic herd. He had found calm once again.

Sometimes the thing we need most is a job to do, even if it's a wee job that keeps us in the game of life.

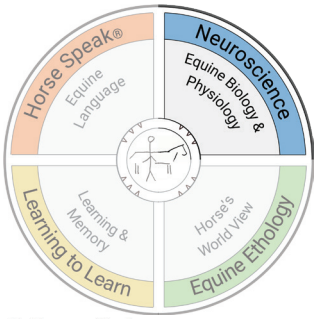
Diego's part of the story was just the beginning of "The Hill":

Since we made Diego's Hill, I've been carefully observing how the other horses in our herd interact with it.

Our other horses use it to play "King of the Hill". Over time we noticed that the horses were standing in all different orientations, uphill, downhill and side-hill. You could tell that they were stretching their legs, back and pelvis using the leverage offered by the uneven ground- releasing built up tension in core muscles. Instead of taking them to the gym, we gave them a hill.

Overall, we noticed a distinct reduction in tension in the herd. Since they did this so often on Diego's Hill, we decided to put hills in all our paddocks and they are used on a daily basis by everyone.

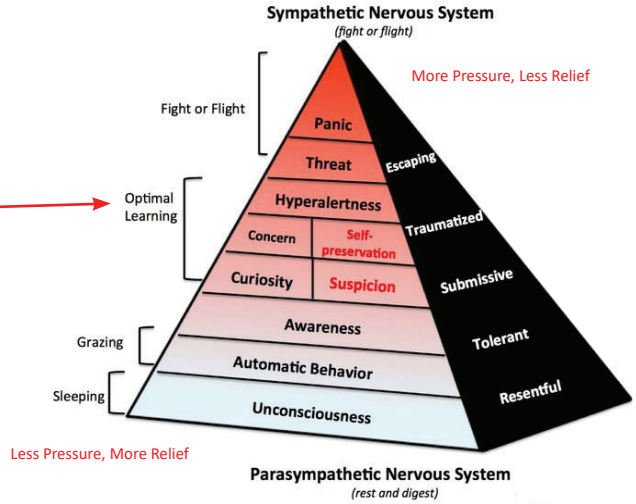
The Equine Mandala Explained. NeuroScience



NeuroScience is a very deep and complex subject. For our purposes, we only need to scrape the surface to get a general understanding of the Central Nervous System and the Brain. One of the most important concepts is that of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) and how it affects Learning.

The ANS controls the emotional state of all mammals, including horses. Their emotional state varies moment to moment, based on their perception of danger or safety, through the production of neurochemicals which have powerful effects on the body. The emotional spectrum of the ANS ranges from ***sleep***- on one end of the scale, to ***blind panic***- on the other end.

A horse learns most efficiently in a certain emotional range somewhere in the middle. It is known as the Optimal Learning range shown in the diagram at the right from Dr. Stephen Peters work. I call it the Calm and Alert range. Obviously they won't learn anything when asleep or when running for their lives. Understanding the conditions that promote this emotional state enhances your success when asking them learn something new, like a new dressage move or accomplishing a task, like trailer loading.

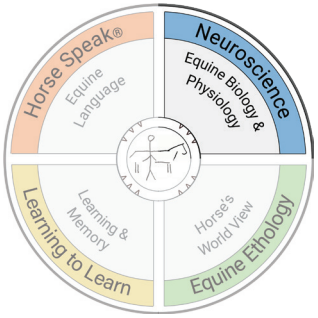


Parasympathetic- Rest & Digest

Homeostasis

Sympathic-Fight or Flight

NeuroScience-



Dr. Stephen Peters (Evidence Based Horsemanship) says,
"The horse's brain is more of a motor and sensory organ than it is a planning brain".

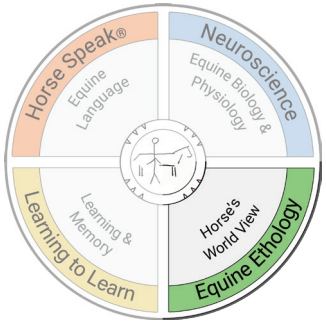
The frontal lobe of the brain is responsible for making up stories about the world. Humans have a very large frontal lobe in their brains, whereas a horse's is very small. This largely differentiates how we think from the way they think.

Humans make up stories to explain their experiences, and this has often proven to be very useful for us. It allows us to plan for the future. This just doesn't happen in a horse brain. They live almost exclusively in the present and, in their environment, this has proven very useful.

"The function of the frontal lobe involves the ability to project future consequences resulting from current actions. This choice between good and bad actions or 'better and best' is also known as conscience, the override and suppression of socially unacceptable responses, and the determination of similarities and differences between things or events."
-from Evidence Based Horsemanship.

The frontal lobe also plays an important part in integrating longer non-task based memories stored across the brain. These are often memories associated with emotions derived from input from the brain's limbic system.

The Equine Mandala Explained. Equine Ethology



Ethology is the scientific study of non-human animal behavior, usually with a focus on behavior under natural conditions, and viewing behavior as an evolutionarily adaptive trait**.**
Equine Ethology is the study of horse behavior.

Horse behavior is determined largely by their physiology, World View, and the needs of the herd.

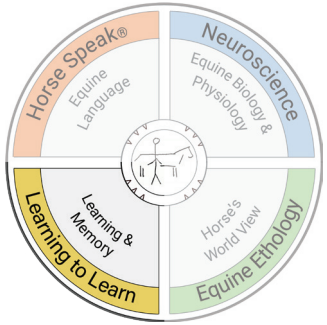
Horses have a high level of cognition. Cognition refers to "the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses". It encompasses all aspects of intellectual functions and processes such as: perception, attention, thought, intelligence, the formation of knowledge, memory and working memory, judgment and evaluation, reasoning and computation, problem solving and decision making, comprehension and production of language.

"Horses have shown they make an effort to stick together and to be nice to each other. They are 'Stickers', not 'Splitters'. They work at cementing bonds and deflating potential splitting of the group." - Kiley-Worthington, 1998

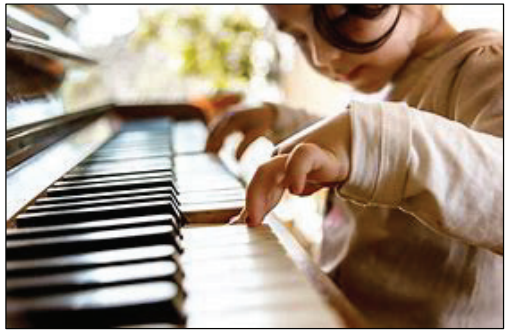
"There are major reasons for trying to get a little nearer to understanding what it may be like to be an equine. If we were to have a better understanding of equine behavior and their mental abilities, then we would be able to structure their husbandry and education better, avoid problems, save money and have a better time together."
-Dr. Kiley-Worthington, *Horse Watch*

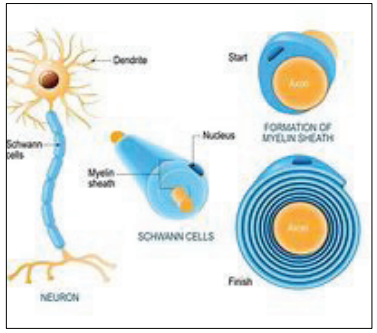
The horse's World-View is very different than a human's based on their superior sensory abilities. These are just some of their sensory apparatus.

The Equine Mandala Explained. Learning to Learn



Learning is the process of acquiring new understanding, knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, attitudes, and preferences. The ability to learn is possessed by humans and animals. Some learning is immediate, induced by a single event, but much skill and knowledge accumulate from repeated experiences. The changes induced by learning often last a lifetime.





Additional layers of myelin on the axon of neurons are responsible for mastery of a practiced motor skill. When learning to play *Shubert's Fantasie in C major* on the piano it will, at first, take a great deal of conscious processing, focused effort and painstaking repetition.

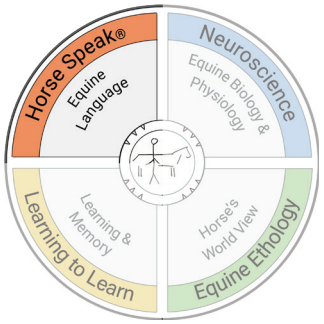
This repetition is exactly what causes Myelin to form on the neurons in your brain responsible for this specific activity. Once you have practiced enough, you will have integrated the procedural information, the movements of the fingers and the timing, into your memory. You will remember the sequence of notes, and this will become relegated to unconscious memory. For each individual song you learn your brain must create a neural pathway and each neuron must be myelinated individually to commit the song to unconscious memory.

This is exactly what is happening in the equine brain. Mastering a new task takes time for the neural pathways to develop and strengthen. Over time, new myelinated neural pathways will be formed in the brain, so it is easy to see the importance of correct practice. Poor practice will reinforce poor results.

It takes a horse between one and three minutes to process a thought. This seems like an eternity to a human and we tend to lose patience when they respond slowly. We also tend to move too fast for them. Working with a horse successfully is a slow, methodical process that takes patience and attention.

Repetition is the key. Take a deep breath, pause, and start again.

The Equine Mandala Explained. Horse Speak®- Equine Language



What is Horse Speak®?

Horse Speak is literally the language system of the horse based on their own set of gestures, signals and postures. Horse Speak teaches people how to “listen” and “talk” to horses using our body language. Instead of trying to teach horses how to speak and understand “People”, we can now use “Horse”. The best part is that horses don’t need to learn Horse Speak®- they already know it.

Horse Speak® vs. Training

In the past we have used training as a way to communicate, and it has never worked as well as we’d hoped. The”talking back and forth” through Horse Speak® is the missing piece of the puzzle. Horse Speak® uses the horse’s native language to speak to them instead of expecting, or demanding, that they understand ours. Horse Speak® enables us to support the horse through any task in any discipline. Training is teaching a specific cue to the horse and, through repeated patterns, expecting the horse to remember the answer to that cue and deliver the desired behavior. When training a horse, you are shaping and molding the behaviors that you want.

Horse Speak® Decoded

It took time after Sharon had learned the postures, gestures and signals of the horse to figure out how the human could communicate back. “As humans we make so many random movements around horses that they can be at a loss trying to understand us.”- Sharon Wilsie- Horse Speak®

15 Buttons of Horse Speak®

The 15 Buttons of Horse Speak® are interactive areas on the body that horses use for communication. They have specific emotional and physical meanings. They combine with gestures, postures and signals for communication. They help horses express precise intentions, emotions, wants, needs, fears, protection, support and nurturing. They also play a role in conflict resolution in the herd.

If you would like to explore the possibility of taking a new journey with your horse, I offer a one-hour ***Personal Consult*** as part of my Moving as One Program at **www.lucindab.com**.

Stay true to your heart. Love of your guy or gal. Look deep into their eyes and know they are talking to you. Calm your busy mind and listen. They will tell you what you need to know.

...and remember to breathe, smile, and be grateful...
Lucinda B.

Clare Parsons- Cover Photo
Chris Baker- Editor & Design
Rachel Nordenhok- Logo Design & Branding

www.lucindab.com
copyright March 2023, Lucinda B.

Resources-

Horse Speak® -Sharon Wilsie

Horses in Translation -Sharon Wilsie

Essential Horse Speak® -Sharon Wilsie

Evidence Based Horsemanship -Dr Steven Peters & Martin Black

The Art of Changing the Brain -James E. Zull

Presence -Amy Cuddy

Equine Neurology -Martin Furr & Stephen Reed

The Brain that Changes Itself -Norman Doidge

The Female Brain -Louann Brizendine MD

The Male Brain -Louann Brizendine MD

Are we Smart Enough to Know how Smart Animals Are? -Frans De Waal

Affective Neuroscience -Jaan Panksepp

For the Love of Horses -Mark Rashid

Animals in Translation -Temple Grandin

Essential Hoof - Susan Kauffman & Christina Cline

Equine Science (4th edition) -Rick Parker

The Wisdom of the Enneagram -Don Ruso & Russ Hudson

The Matter With Things -Iain Mcgilchrist

Through a Window -Jane Goodall

Difference -Frans de Waal

True Unity -Tom Dorrance

The Brain- the story of you -David Eagleman

Dr Andrew Hubberman Podcasts

The Whole Brain Child -Daniel J Siegl MD

The Power of the Herd -Linda Kohanov

Horse Watch- What it is to be Equine -Dr Marthe Kiley-Worthington

The Elephant Whisperer -Lawrence Anthony