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## **HOW TO'S of IRON FREE Riding**

### **Part 2 of 3**

“Iron Free Riding is the next step for the Natural Horsemanship (NH) enthusiast as the “ultimate” in riding” Missy Wryn founder of WHolistic Horsemanship explains. Iron Free simply means no bits no spurs.

As I discussed in Part 1 HOW TO'S of IRON FREE Riding, it's a myth to think you have control of your horse with a bit. I have been on enough runaways with a bit in their mouth to realize that I could not stop a 1000 pound animal no matter how much pain I inflicted in the mouth by pulling on the bit, and using pain is not the way I want to ride my horses.

To ride IRON FREE you start teaching your horse on the ground first. But before I go on to the Five Fundamentals that Translate Under Saddle for a Safer Ride I want to introduce you to Four Core Emotional Concerns humans and horses share. I touched on the first Core Concern in Part 1 which is *Appreciation*. These Four Core Emotional Concerns are helpful to keep in mind when working with our horses supporting us in balancing our nature with our horse's natures. The Four Core Emotional Concerns we share are: Appreciation - Status - Autonomy - Role.

Appreciation; consider, how well you perform when your boss is putting you down for every little mistake and never appreciating you for what you do right and how you contribute to the company and team? Don't even consider asking me to work late or weekends for a boss who is a jerk and doesn't appreciate me. I'm sure you feel the same - so does your horse..... I have found when I use Appreciation both verbally and with physical touch, learning accelerates along and trust grows. One way I accelerate the horse's learning is by stroking the neck when they get the right answer. Research has found there is a chemical response relating to birth when you stroke a horse's neck. When baby hit the ground mamma starting cleaning baby by licking and when baby got scared mamma came and licked baby's neck to soothe and calm. So when I'm teaching my horse something new, as soon as they “get it” I'm in there stroking the neck and cooing good

girl/good boy. Appreciation is number one on the list because it's very important to training your horse quicker and safer.

The second Core Concern is *Status*. Status means position in the herd. Every horse is genetically wired to require a herd leader at all times even in your herd of two, you and your horse. Your horse sees you as another herd member so you must be the leader at all times which is easily accomplished by *He who moves the other's feet first is in control*. Remember backing up your horse? It's just that easy! And don't forget to do a WHolistic Joining from time to time especially if it's been a while since you've worked with your horse in order to re-establish your leadership (see article Wholistic Joining vs. Round Penning). As humans we require Status at our jobs, our homes and in any group of people, your horse does too. Your Status is always the herd leader and your horse is ALWAYS second in Status when you are together in your herd of two – your horse genetically requires to know the Status within the herd at all times.

The third Core Concern is *Autonomy*. I never force a horse for the right answer respecting their Autonomy to come up with the right answer, an AH HA moment, on their own. For instance I will never hit a horse to force the correct answer when I'm teaching how to lunge. I see some trainers that raise the lead rope, then raise the stick, then hit the horse until it lunges – I never do that! In lunging I will tap the shoulder gently and increase the tapping until the horse takes one step, therefore guiding the horse to make the right answer. Typically, tapping gently will get the horse to move his feet since the shoulder is one of four reprimands spots for a horse.

HINT: There are four reprimands spots ("move or else" communication spots) on horses that they use on each other in the herd. The first two are each shoulder and the other two are each hip. I use the horse's natural reprimand spots when I want a horse to move thereby using a horse's physical instinct.

As soon as the horse moves even a foot in the direction I am asking I immediately drop all my pressure by lowering my eyes, bowing at the waist, lowering the exclaiming good girl/good boy (bowing is a dramatic release of pressure that I use at first when teaching and refine my body movements as the horse learns - *Be dramatic to teach and refine as you go*). Allowing your horse to find the correct answer while you guide your horse honors their Autonomy thereby creating a trusting relationship without using force or pain.

The fourth Core Concern is *Role*. We all have many Roles and so do our horses. For instance, when you see a herd of horses sleeping there is always a horse standing being the Sentry, the guard. There are the disciplinarians, the mothers, and the teachers within the herd just as within

our human herd. I have many Roles in my family, and with my horse. My Role is always teacher and my horse's role is student when we are together. I am the herd leader and my horse is the follower. Recognizing our specific Roles in our herd of two can help you maintain your leadership by identifying the Role your horse is playing. If your horse is not behaving as a student then you need to re-establish your Role as teacher and your horse will fall into the Role of student.

With the Four Core Emotional Concerns in mind you can balance your nature as a human with your horse's nature recognizing the similar needs and applying herd leadership that your horse is genetically wired to require. Now let's begin the Five Fundamentals that Translate Under Saddle for a Safer Ride. These techniques are started on the ground and then applied under saddle so you can ride safer with just a rope halter and lead rope – IRON FREE. I do the Five Fundamentals every time before I go riding which only takes me about 5 minutes. It re-establishes my leadership and provides consistency that I'm the same predictable leader today as I was yesterday. Consistency and predictability builds trust and confidence in your horse with your leadership and companionship. BE CONSISTENT....

The Five Fundamentals start with WHolistic Lunging. I call it WHolistic because I am working with the WHOLE horse. I lunge by having the whole horse's attention on me which consists of eyes, ears and mind. Since horses are prey animals they are designed to see independently with each eye receiving input separately into their brain allowing them to be alert of predators from either direction. Therefore I stand in front of the horse to begin lunging so I have both eyes on me with ears forward at full attention. Standing in front of the horse about 8 to 10 feet away (out of their blind spot) with the lead rope in my left hand I will lift the lead rope to the left, cock my head to the left, look directly in the horse's eyes asking the horse with my body language to move left (his right). As the horse looks at me trying to figure out what I'm asking I will lift my training stick with my right hand and ask again with a cluck or kiss maintaining my "move left" body language. If the horse does not respond by moving I will tap the horse's left shoulder with the end of the training stick once while making the cluck sound and then tap again continuing to tap until the horse takes a step in the direction I'm asking. As soon as the horse takes even one step I instantly drop all pressure, (stop asking) by dropping both hands down and bowing at the waist dropping my eye contact and saying good boy/good girl. Then I will drop the training stick and come up to the horse's shoulder and stroke the neck. If the horse licks and chews all the better, but if not I will stick my fingers in the corner of the horse's mouth where there are not teeth and feather the tongue to get a lick and chew, and then continue stroking the neck and expressing appreciation.

HINT: Licking and chewing means “ah ha, I’m thinking on that” and is a relaxation response. I want my horse to be relaxed and not frightened by my asking to lunge. Remember the stick is simply an extension of your hand which is for loving and applying measured pressure (AMP). If you have a horse that is afraid of the stick, please read the section about desensitizing before attempting to use the stick.

I will ask again and maybe this time I won’t have to tap the horse to move, but I will not hesitate to tap on the shoulder to get the horse moving. If you raise your training stick you must be prepared to follow through and use it. It’s like another horse nipping asking “move”. Don’t hit the horse, just tap and increase the tapping (AMP) until the horse moves his feet. Once you’ve got your horse stepping in the direction you are asking keep the horse moving by swinging the training stick behind the horse to add pressure asking “keep moving please”. Remember to praise verbally as the horse responds to what you are asking. I always drop the hand that is holding the lead rope down to my side relaxed in the neutral position once the horse is moving/lunging. The horse will learn that he needs to keep going and that you have simply stopped asking to begin lunging. Once your horse starts to lunge stop asking so go into the neutral position. If your horse stops moving his feet simply raise the lead rope and ask again. Keep the energy flowing and don’t be hard on yourself – your body is learning new techniques so it will take some time to get a rhythm between you and your horse. Praise yourself for trying.....

Now you’ve got your horse lunging so the second Fundamental of the Five Fundamentals is a One Rein Stop on the ground which is the start of your horse’s emergency handbrake which will translate under saddle. As your horse is lunging around you drop your training stick, take your right hand and grab the lead rope behind your left hand (not in front of your left hand) and start pulling the lead rope through your left hand, gathering it in long loops in your right hand as you walk towards your horse’s girth area. Your horse will most likely continue walking as you work your way towards him. As you get closer you will draw your horse’s head towards to their side and girth area. Flex your horse’s head towards his girth leaving at least 18” of lead rope from under your horse’s chin to your hand and rest your hand on his back as your point of reference. Move with your horse if he is still moving his feet, but do not release his nose until his feet stop moving. Exhale releasing your energy and talk softly to your horse “ho ho” or “whoa whoa” while stroking his neck with your right hand. Stroking your horse’s neck will calm and soothe and promote relaxation and a stop. Once your horse’s feet stop moving do not release his nose until he “gives” which is either slack in the lead rope or his nose bobs towards his girth. As soon as you get a “give” open your left hand and drop the lead rope like a hot potato. You are still holding the lead rope with your right hand, but you have instantly released the pressure with your left hand giving your horse his head. Praise and stroke his neck allowing him “soaking time” while he

thinks on what he did. Feather his tongue with your fingers to get him to lick and chew if he doesn't fully relax. I will even ask for the head down with slight pressure on the lead rope as I taught in the Three Foundations to get my horse to drop his head, relax and think – *Where the mind is the body follows*.

The secret to training is instant release and allow for soaking time. I often will only work with my horse 10-20 minutes and put him away for the day to soak on the lesson. There are dendrites in the brain that make electrical connections when learning and research has found that during rest the dendrites continue making connections. That's why you'll notice sometimes your horse is farther in his/her training if you've returned after a day or two. I remember a time in 4<sup>th</sup> grade during math I was struggling to understand the concept of fractions. I was worried about falling behind my classmates, but returning to school on Monday I had an "ah ha" moment that happened when we opened our textbooks and resumed our lesson – it all made sense because my dendrites were able to continue working on the math subject while I rested over the weekend.

In the final Part 3 of HOW TO'S of IRON FREE Riding I'll wrap up the last three of the Five Fundamentals and get you in the saddle riding with just the rope halter and lead rope. Practice the Three Foundations, Wholistic Lunging and the One Rein Stop on the ground along with the pressure and release of your body language like bowing, dropping your eyes and countenance. Follow up with the relaxation techniques of lowering your horse's head and feathering his tongue to get him to lick and chew (chew on his thoughts, licking his brain), but be careful to get your fingers in the area of the mouth that does not have any teeth about midway in the lower jaw.

Missy Wryn is the founder of WHolistic Horsemanship *Training the Whole Horse*<sup>®</sup>, IRON FREE Riding, plus inventor of the ALL-IN-ONE Training Halter Bitless Bridle. Specializing in problem and dangerous horses Missy has developed a unique, fear free, and pain free approach to training horses and riding Iron Free. *Training the Whole Horse*<sup>®</sup> is the foundation to Missy's innovative and simpler approach to training your horse using effective communication that your horse will understand, honor and respect while having fun and being safer riding Iron Free (no bits – no spurs). Check Missy's schedule for appearances and lectures in your area at [www.WHolisticHorsemanship.com](http://www.WHolisticHorsemanship.com). Missy's training DVD's are now available to download and watch for only \$1.99 at [www.WHolisticHorsemanship.com](http://www.WHolisticHorsemanship.com).

Missy Wryn is also CEO and founder of *Natures Balance Care, LLC*. *Natures Balance Care* is the manufacturer of organic approved (OMRI) fly control products for horses and organic livestock plus organic approved remedies for Dogs suffering from skin conditions related to allergies, bacteria and fungus. Visit [www.NaturesBalanceCare.com](http://www.NaturesBalanceCare.com).

For high resolution pictures of the Three Foundations and Five Fundamentals contact [Info@WHolisticHorsemanship.com](mailto:Info@WHolisticHorsemanship.com) or call 866-821-0374.