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HOW TO'S of IRON FREE Riding

Part 3 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 bit no spurs.

As I discussed in Part 2 HOW TO'S of IRON FREE Riding, there are Four Core Emotional Concerns that humans and horses share. To recap they are *Appreciation, Status, Autonomy* and *Role*. Being aware of these Core Concerns helps you balance your nature with your horse's nature creating a deeper companionship and superior communication.

I left off at number two of the Five Fundamentals so let's begin with the third Fundamental which is desensitizing. You simply cannot desensitize your horse enough..... In part 2 you used your training stick to encourage your horse to lunge by tapping on his shoulder to move away from the pressure. Now I want you to desensitize your horse to the training stick by making it a “feel good” extension of your hand. I never want my horse to be afraid of the stick just as I would not want my horse to be afraid of my hand – the two are synonymous, one in the same.

DESENSITIZING

Begin by standing at your horse's left shoulder with the lead rope in your left hand and your stick resting in your right hand pointed down to the ground. Shorten the lead rope to 18-24” gripping it overhand which is little finger towards the horse and thumb towards you with the end of the lead rope draped over your thumb. Reach up with your left hand and stroke your horse's neck telling him “good boy” keeping his nose tipped slightly in your direction. This position allows you to desensitize your horse more safely since at any time you can pull your horse's nose towards you sending his hind end away and keeping him from running off. Stroking the neck is a good way to get your horse to calm down and relax while having the lead rope in your hand to react quickly if necessary. Standing at the shoulder stepping a few feet away is a safer position when

desensitizing so you can pull the nose towards you if the horse tries to kick out and/or run away, or block your horse with your hand lifted up at his eye if he tries to run you over and so on while keeping the lead rope 18-24”.

Now take a few steps to the right away from your horse, but keep his nose tipped slightly towards you and begin introducing the stick by gently rubbing on his foreleg working your way up to his shoulder and back. You want to keep his nose tipped towards you so if at any time he tries to kick out or take off you can pull his nose towards you which sends his hind end away from you. Stroke his neck if he gets a little worried, but keep loving him up with the stick. It's very important to stand at your horse's shoulder when desensitizing as a matter of safety for you. If at any time your horse gets scared, simply put your left hand on his neck and stroke him telling him he's ok; ask him to drop his head if he's starts to get really upset. Never push him to a melt-down, simply go back to a starting point and take baby steps rubbing him with the stick.

YIELDING HIND & FOREQUARTERS

The purpose of yielding hind and forequarters is first to help your horse connect his brain to his feet. When your horse is aware of where his feet are he is much more sure footed on the trail and in the ring. I want my horse to move his hind end away from me with just a point of the finger. Also, refining the hind quarter yield will translate under saddle when I'm teaching my horse the emergency handbrake, the one rein stop, by pointing at his hip when he isn't responding to my heel pressure. When I touch his girth I want his inside foreleg to cross in front of his outside foreleg which will translate under saddle when I ask for a side pass, half pass and turn on the haunch. A purposeful look at the hip is true refinement in communication and you will soon develop that with your horse once he responds to the point of your finger. Everything I teach on the ground will translate under saddle so I want to get it good on the ground first.

To begin yielding the hind quarters stand at your horse's left shoulder, tip his nose towards you slightly with your left hand and raise your training stick just above and behind his hip (above the left side of his rump) and start tapping the air while counting 1-2-3, 1-2-3, then gently tap your horse's bottom with the end of the stick counting 1-2-3. As soon as your horse takes a step with his hind feet away from you instantly rub his bottom with the tip of the stick (extension of your hand) telling him “good boy or good girl” and stroke his neck with your left hand. Remember stroking the neck releases a chemical response that accelerates learning and supports your horse to be calm. Pause while your horse licks and chews thinking of what just happened. Invoke the thinking if he's tight mouthed by feathering his tongue with your finger as described in Part 2 of 3 How To's.

If your horse isn't moving his feet away from the tapping on his bottom, AMP (applied measure of pressure - increase) your tapping while maintaining your count and as soon as your horse moves his feet rub him and praise while stroking his neck. The release of pressure is everything so be instant with your release and profuse with your praise. What you do on one side of your horse repeat on the other side starting from the beginning using the stick as an extension of your hand. As your horse's response gets to the point of just raising the stick and he's yielding, drop the stick and point at his bottom with your finger with intensity in your body language and cluck if you need to. Watch how he will move his bottom away from the pressure with just a pointed finger.

HINT: your horse doesn't have to "get it" the first session. Just have him yield his hindquarters a couple times on both sides and then stop and go for a walk with him. The fastest way a horse learns is short periods of training and lots of support with praise and touch. Also, when on a walk with your horse it's a good time to practice the Three Foundations. I often stop, back up my horse, ask for head down and then resume walking. My horse must pay attention to me as the herd leader even when the neighbor horses are showing off.

Yielding with just a point of your finger will translate under saddle when you ask your horse for a one rein stop and for whatever reason he is not moving off the pressure of your heel you can add the point of the finger which will instantly remind him to move away from the pressure.

Now you've got your horse yielding hindquarters let's move onto forequarters. It's very important to be aware of the placement of pressure so it will translate under saddle. When asking a horse to yield forequarters the placement of your foot under saddle is on the girth or slightly in front of the girth. I use my toe and upper side of my foot right behind the shoulder which depending on the horse I'm riding can be slightly in front of the girth or on the girth. Short backed (short coupled) horses tend to have less space between the girth and their arm pit compared to longer back horses; horse training is not an exact science since each horse is unique in shape and temperament.

To begin training a horse to yield his forequarters I start with my horse facing the arena wall, or a fence. This allows me to ask the horse to move sideways without stepping forward to get out of the pressure. I'm going to teach my horse to follow his nose as my starting point while I apply pressure at the girth with my thumb. Eventually I'll only apply pressure with my thumb and my horse will yield his forequarters which will translate under saddle with my foot.

To yield the forequarters is to have the horse cross the inside foreleg in front of the outside foreleg. So with my horse facing the fence and me standing on the his left side with the lead rope

in my left hand (over hand), I'm going to apply pressure with my right thumb at the girth where my foot would be in the saddle and raise my left hand palm open at his eye level. I'm going to press with my thumb which probably isn't going to mean anything to my horse at that moment so I'm going to then pat the air with my left hand towards his eye which will invoke my horse to move his head away from hand making him move his feet to follow his nose. As soon as my horse takes a step away from me I will stroke his neck with my left hand while rubbing his girth with my right hand praising him verbally. By the way this is all done at first without a saddle on my horse so he can feel the pressure at the girth

If my horse is simply not moving away from my patting the air towards his eye I will bump his cheek with the heel of my hand so he'll move off the pressure. I may have to AMP my bumping until he moves away, but I will not take it to the point of hitting, just bumping. For the horse that just simply doesn't understand I will grasp the shank directly under the horse's chin with my left hand and turn his nose away from me while I press with my right thumb pushing him to follow his nose and step over. As soon as he takes a step I rub and praise. This can take a while so have patience. Remember you are teaching your horse a new language and he's struggling to understand what you are asking. It's ok if your horse doesn't cross his feet right away, just stepping away is the beginning. Once your horse does cross his feet praise profusely and let him soak on it working his mouth.

Depending on the horse I will quit after only a couple successes especially if the horse has had a real tough time figuring out what I'm asking. Come back the next day or two and try it again asking this time with just your thumb pressure. If your horse doesn't understand go back to the beginning with your hand raised at his eye level and repeat until just the thumb pressure is sufficient and he's crossing the inside foot over the outside foot. Eventually you will want your horse to yield his forequarters without using the arena wall or fence. Getting this good on the ground will make laterals, side and half passes that much easier for your horse as it directly translates under saddle.

The last of the Five Fundamentals is *Changing Direction*. This means changing direction while lunging and the reason it is a fundamental is because it creates agility, suppleness and above all brain development. Changing Direction is the start to dancing with your horse on the ground. It's rhythmic and fun and is a playful time that builds confidence between you and your horse.

Changing Direction starts with the WHolistic Lunging. By now your horse should be able to lunge without the stick, but it's ok if you need it from time to time; you can use the stick while changing direction it just takes a little extra coordination. But before you start with your horse I recommend

doing the dance steps without your horse so you've created new pathways in your brain first. I like to tie a halter to a gate or fence post so I can practice with it in hand first so go ahead and get started using your rope halter. I want you to stand as if you are in front of your horse and get your horse lunging to the left (I'm trying to be consistent with you starting everything from the left, but you don't have to start on the left every time with your horse). Now I want you to step your left foot to the side about 18-24", but don't move your right foot. Your feet are spread apart giving you stability. Notice how you can shift your weight between each foot from side to side with stability. Be loose and comfortable with slightly bent knees. Next reach overhand across your body with your right hand and grasp the lead rope about 18" in front of the left hand and then lift the lead rope to the right asking your imaginary horse to now go to the right. Your imaginary horse is now lunging to the right; pretend your horse has gone one full circle around you, now step with your right foot to the side 18-24", reach over with your left hand about 18" in front of your right hand lifting the lead rope up and across now asking your horse to go to the left. Practice a few times both directions until you feel comfortable with the moves. When you are ready try it with your horse. There will come a time with you and your horse that all you have to do is step to the side and give your horse "a look" and he'll rock back on his haunches, pick up his front feet and hop over changing direction – that's when it's dancing.....

With your horse I want you first to teach him to stop in front of you before he changes direction and I've a got a couple tips that you are going to need to help your horse understand what you are asking. As your horse is lunging left take a step with your left foot, reach over with your right hand about 18" in front of your left hand and pull the lead rope across in front of you and bump, bump bump the lead rope under your horse's chin asking him to stop and face you. As soon as he stops facing you put your feet together, drop your countenance, lowering your eyes and bend slightly at the waist bowing while you praise profusely. Then walk up to your horse and stroke his neck with a smile on your face and delight in your voice.

When your horse stops in front of you make sure his rump is out of your eye line meaning you can look straight down his body and his rump is not hanging to the right or left. If his rump is hanging out to the side yield his hindquarters by pointing and clucking with a purposeful look in your eye directly at his rump. You want your horse's body to be in a straight line with eyes forward paying attention to you. A hanging rump sticking out is an attitude of disrespect and since you've taught your horse to yield his hindquarters with just a point of your finger he will line up his body respectfully. Maintain your horse's respect by controlling his feet and watch his body language for disrespectful behavior. Your horse is going to be relaxed and trustful of you so long as you are the herd leader he genetically requires.

Once you've got your horse stopping in front of you respectfully with attention, the next step is to ask him to change direction. So ask your horse to lunge to the left, then step and reach stopping him for a moment then lift your right hand with the lead rope as I described when you were practicing by yourself and ask your horse to go the right. He may stand there for a moment and then realize you are asking him to lunge, but if your horse is resistant to lunge here's where you can incorporate your training stick. The trick to the stick is to pass it under the lead rope as you switch hands. So your horse is lunging to the left and the stick is in your right hand. Step to the left, pass the stick under the lead rope to your right hand then reach out with your right hand and grasp the lead rope as you did above, then lift the stick for added pressure as your horse changes direction. He'll respond quickly and respectfully so long as you have followed through using the stick in the beginning.

I actually have to use the stick with Benny, my Autistic horse, when changing direction by simply lifting the stick straight up to keep him from coming into me. Benny has a lot of draw which means he likes to be close to me, too close, so when I ask to change direction he wants to come towards me, but simply lifting the stick straight up, not even pointing it at him, he respects the stick and rocks back on his haunches as he darts in the direction I've asked. Don't hesitate to use the training stick as an extension of your hand to guide your horse and to keep you safer.

You've completed the Five Fundamentals on the ground and by now you can see how they will translate under saddle. The first application is a one rein stop under saddle which is your horse's emergency handbrake. Upon mounting I flex my horse's head to one side, reach down and stroke his head reminding him this is the safe and loving place we go when we're in trouble. As soon as my horse dips his nose toward his girth or there is slack in the rein I instantly release the rein instantly releasing pressure. The way I flex a horse is I slide my hand down the rein and gently pull the horse's nose to my foot, but not all the way since I want the horse to flex on his own the last 1/3 of the way or so. When pulling the nose to the girth I bring my hand to my hip as my point of reference so as not to pull the horse's nose up, but to the side. Pulling a horse's nose up like to your knee level can tip a horse over like the stunt horses in the movies. Just pull to your foot gently since your horse should be good at flexing all ready as you taught on the ground. I flex each side before we start moving forward loving the horse up. Next I want my horse to understand the one rein stop in a walk, trot and canter so I'll ask to move out a few steps at a walk and then reach down sliding my hand down the rein and flex the nose towards the girth while pressing my heel behind the girth asking the horse to disengage his hindquarters. Remember to put your heel where your thumb was when you taught this on the ground (translating under saddle). If your horse does not disengage, then reach over with your other hand and point to the rump and cluck asking for the yield. Once your horse disengages release

your foot pressure, but do not release the rein until your horse's feet stop moving and the horse has "given" to the pressure of the flex just like you taught on the ground. Repeat this in the trot and canter getting your horse's emergency handbrake good under saddle. Stopping your horse in a crisis is not about pulling back, it's about shutting him down with a safe, responsible one rein stop controlling his feet. If you had a bit in your horse's mouth when performing a one rein stop the bit can slide through the mouth popping the entire bridle off the horse's head (I've had it happen), not to mention the tearing of sensitive membrane and tissue in the horse's mouth from the bit. Bitless riding is a safer, painless way to ride your horse and when the Five Fundamentals are good on the ground first you can ride your horse IRON FREE which enriches your companionship with your horse. Your horse will love you more for taking the time to teach him/her how to ride IRON FREE.

Missy Wryn is the founder of WHolistic Horsemanship *Training the Whole Horse*[®], 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*[®] 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 bit – no spurs). Check Missy's schedule for appearances and lectures in your area at 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-insect control and skin care products for dogs, horses, livestock and people too. Visit www.NaturesBalanceCare.com.

For high resolution pictures of the Three Foundations and Five Fundamentals contact Info@WHolisticHorsemanship.com or call 866-821-0374.