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Article

A Dance of Softening and Yielding!

Part 4 of The Basic Foundations Series

By Me, Tracy Porter

This is my favorite lesson. This lesson is a continuation of the previous lessons. Our goal is to get the horse to work around us in a circle. We will be asking the hips, shoulders and jaw to soften and yield to us. As you'll recall, we have a lead hand and a drive hand. The lead hand simply tells the energy where to go. It does not start the horse, that is the drive hand's job. The lead hand is the hand closest to the nose and the drive hand is closest to the tail.

First send the horse out to the left. Allow him to circle. You will then ask the horse to yield the hip by slightly lifting the lead rope. Do this three times, do not take much slack out. At this point you are asking the horse to yield. If the horse does not yield the hip take all the slack out of the line, requesting the hip to yield to the bridle, (halter etc.). If the hip still fails to yield, use the tail of the lead rope as you did in moving the hip from the pressure lesson.

Repeat on this side until the horse yields the hip so he becomes square to you. In the beginning you'll restart each time, sending him back out. He may get stuck, almost squaring up. It may be because he is losing momentum, anticipating or the hip is still heavy, resistant and unresponsive. He also may just not be aware that you want a little more from him. Depending on which scenario, you may have to ask him to get the lead out and move that hip or simply ask him to take another step and he will have accomplished the task. It's very important to pay close attention to how your horse tries so you can accurately assess his performance!

After he squares up you can ask him to go the other direction. If you do not have him square, he probably has not yielded his hip. If you change directions, you will find that he can't yield his shoulders. Instead what you will get is forward movement from him and it will be infringing on your space. **IMPORTANT NOTE! Make sure you do not allow horse to step into you when you are driving him out in the circle. It is best that his shoulders take a step away from you as you send him out and away.**

Be careful as this can be or become an aggressive move on your horse's part. If you already have control issues with your horse i.e. he is pushy, pins his ears, etc. You will want to get hands on help.

Let's say the world is a perfect place and he squares up. We will ask him to yield his shoulders as he begins the direction change. Then we'll let him alone and after a trip or two around us, and ask him to yield his hip again. Of course you want to repeat this until he squares up again. Changing direction is the same as before getting those shoulders to yield!

After we and our horse have a rhythm, we can play with it in a variety of ways. We can use different gaits improving suppleness, balance and response to our cues. We can also add in a variety of objects to move around and eventually over. Tarps, jumps, bags and bottles. I also use this as part of my advanced sack out lesson!

Have fun with this lesson, it will become one of the most important you will ever teach your horse.



1. Lead hand says where to go. Drive hand says to move.

2. Ask by slightly take slack out ask, ask, ask. Here Caz is responding on the ask.



3. If the horse does not respond after 3 times request by taking the slack out.

4. Make sure the shoulders move out and away from you.



5. Take this exercise into a variety of areas.

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