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# On Top of the Mountain

## *Achieving a Magical Connection with Your Horse*

by

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(All references are to the books listed in the bibliography at the end of this article.)

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If you achieve this, if you recognise the horse and you have the chance to connect immediately, then something very important, very nice is occurring, because it is absolutely not important that the horse will gallop, that the horse will carry you, that the horse will one day do a shoulder-in or whatever kind of nice dressage figure, such as a piaffe or whatever is there, because you are realising there is no difference in perception. There is simply no difference in happiness. You are on top of the mountain.

From now on you can go from one top to another top to another top but it will not become better. The horse will not become happier. It's there from the first moment.

**Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling**

Video: *Immediate Connecting with Horses, Part 2*

In the absence of a magical connection with a horse all that a human has to communicate with that horse is a technique, a method or a combination of techniques and methods. This may be enough to achieve some type of connection with that horse but that connection will not extend further than the technique employed and the horse will not give the human more than that technique elicits from it. This implies the existence of a major difference between a connection between horse and human that is merely based on a technique or method and one which is “magical”. So what is that difference? To find out the answer to this question we need to learn what such a magical connection is, and to do this we may start by referring to those humans who have shown themselves to be capable of achieving such a connection with horses.

### **THE MAGICAL CONNECTION**

There are three humans whom I currently turn to for guidance on what constitutes a magical connection with a horse and how to achieve it. They are Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling, Michael Bevilacqua and Imke Spilker. The reason I do so is because they are first of all committed to relating to horses without force or violence. Secondly, they put the horse first in the sense that the well-being of the horse represents the primary purpose of interaction between horses and humans. Thirdly, they rightly note that the key to doing anything meaningful with horses lies in developing a relationship with them and that any techniques and methods can only be secondary to this. And finally, their approach implies that if a human is to develop a relationship with a horse, that human will need to develop an authentic approach and presence.

So what, according to these people, is a magical connection between a horse and a human? Hempfling refers to the presence of “magic” (KFH 167) which leads to what has become known as the “first parallel” (bizarrely translated as the “first parallelism” in his book – KFH 79-80). He describes the first parallel as follows:

Basic trust is created after just a few moments. From there, horses follow me very precisely with a natural consistency and at a slight distance. They stand when I stand, and walk when I walk.  
(KFH 79)

Referring to the first parallel as the “main focus of meditating with horse” (KFH 80), Hempfling goes on to describe the experience as follows:

Metaphorically speaking, it is as if there is a kind of “dip” in the ground beneath me and everything – including the horse – aspires to this “natural deepening”. Scents, sounds, wind, sensations on the skin, cold, heat, the heaviness of my weight on the ground, all of my limbs, my heartbeat, there is space for all of that in my perception and also for the whole appearance of the horse. There is nothing else. It is crucial that everything is very light, especially for the horse. (KFH 81)

So important is the experience of the first parallel to Hempfling as the manifestation of the magical connection between horse and human, that he devotes several pages to various occasions on which he has experienced it. The first parallel is informed by authenticity – the human’s ability to be genuine – and congruence – the human’s ability to bring his external presence in line with his inner self – in every meeting with our horse. As Hempfling puts it:

Everything that I describe in this book concerning inner and outer presence and authenticity serves the first parallel. That is where everything comes together. Even if it happens when I first meet a horse, it is always a kind of recurring highlight for me. Each meeting with a horse should always be like a completely new one, and that is why the first parallel can happen again and again. (KFH 83)

Imke Spilker also mentions something similar to the concept of parallel movement. She finds the magical connection with her horses through harmony and synchronicity at play. Horses and humans at play come to match each other intuitively while interacting with each other and this is exhibited in the course of the game:

It is reflected by all the participants – in their body carriage, in the rhythm of movement, in their identical reciprocal actions, and in a mutually agreed upon level of excitement, even including muscle tension, a total physical harmony. Play partners match one another. They find a common rhythm. They follow, respond to, and accompany one another. Instinctively, involuntarily, their rhythm, tempo, pace and momentum are synchronised and their movements are adapted to one another. (IS 74)

Although Michael Bevilacqua does not go into as much detail, he is conscious of a “connection stronger than any rope or bridle” (MB 104).

## **PREREQUISITES FOR ACHIEVING A MAGICAL CONNECTION**

Obviously a magical connection between horse and human cannot occur in a vacuum. Their interaction occurs within a specific framework and not just any horse and human are capable of achieving a magical connection with each other. Certain prerequisites need to be met by both horse and human as well as in relation to the framework within which their interaction occurs. These prerequisites are summarised below.

### **Horse**

In the case of the horse these prerequisites are minimal and self-evident. The horse must be capable of:

- communicating with the human (see KFH on body language; IS 52);
- placing its trust in the human (KFH 61; MB 128; IS 82).

### **Human**

All of our guides are clear that, if a human wishes to establish a magical connection with a horse, he will need to work on himself to satisfy an extensive array of requirements in terms of his self-development. Such a human must be capable of:

- experiencing spiritual and physical wellbeing (KFH 35);

- being relaxed, peaceful, positive and hopeful (KFH 39);
- being physically and spiritually self-aware, self-controlled, self-confident and simultaneously at ease (KFH 39, 61, 121; MB 77);
- being authentic and congruent (KFH 8; MB 42; IS 138);
- showing leadership (what KFH refers to as “dominance”) and guidance in the interests of the horse (KFH 61, 121; MB video; IS 81, 84);
- showing love, empathy, compassion and concern for the wellbeing of the horse and of reassuring it (KFH 61, 63, 121; MB 49, 99, 124, 129; IS 24, 50);
- being intuitive, sensitive, responsive and joyful, like a child (KFH 30, 46, 79, 80, 225; MB 42, 110, 151, 175; IS 24, 32, 6, 52);
- not expecting anything of the horse and of accepting that it may respond as it wants (KFH 121, 217; MB 49, 84, 124; IS 40, 53);
- intent or commitment in relation to all of the above (IS 45);
- communicating through body language and visualisation (KFH 61; MB 82; IS 28, 40);
- being fully present (KFH 166);
- being trustworthy (KFH 39).

This list is daunting in that it seems to suggest that the human will almost need to attain a state of perfection before he will be able to achieve a magical connection with a horse. While it is true that developing such a state of being would most certainly help a human to do so, it should be borne in mind that this list of qualities only applies in relation to horses and not fellow humans, as Hempfling himself has graphically demonstrated.

In addition, it should also be borne in mind that developing such a state of being is a process which occurs over a period of time. As this process unfolds, a human will be able to achieve a magical connection with horses with growing frequency and to maintain it for increasingly longer periods of time. Interaction with horses will also help a human develop this state of being.

### **Interaction framework**

The prerequisites applicable in relation to the framework for a genuine connection between horse and human are also fairly straightforward and self-evident:

- time must be made available for such interaction (KFH 86);
- such interaction must:
  - start on the ground (Hempfling’s entire approach is premised on this; see also IS 41);
  - preferably occur in an enclosure which is safe and offers room for a horse to escape (hence, not in a round yard);
  - preferably occur in an enclosure which is not too big to render the initial meeting of human and horse impossible.

It should be noted that in Hempfling’s case a magical connection is usually achieved in a highly controlled environment in the form of a small picadero (a square yard of about 11m by 11m).

### **TIPS FOR ACHIEVING A MAGICAL CONNECTION**

Naturally, the most important step you can take to ensure that you can consistently achieve and maintain a magical relationship with your horse is to embark on your own personal development to become the kind of human described above. Obviously, this represents a long-term solution which will not materialise overnight.

In the meantime though, there are many things that you can do immediately which will not only help you to achieve a magical connection with your horse with growing frequency but also to maintain it for increasingly longer stretches of time. When encountering a horse for the first time

Hempfling generally recommends the following steps in the order in which they are mentioned (KFH 74):

1. try and recognise the kind of horse in front of you;
2. try to gauge your horse's mood or frame of mind;
3. try to determine your next step on the path that you wish to take (this is done intuitively);
4. continue on this path with clarity and consistency while constantly communicating with the horse in a quiet and relaxed manner, understanding what is required.

Obviously, you will not need to perform Step 1 with your own horse, as you already know it. However, you may want to carry out Steps 2 to 4, although you may doubt whether you have attained the level of perfection achieved by the master who dances with horses. His advice is that no one – not even your horse – is expecting perfection from you: “You just need to be heading in the general direction” (KFH 74).

So how do you head in the general direction of perfection? Ultimately, only you and your horse can work this out together with the aid of the advice provided by our guides. Here are some of the tips which they provide to help us achieve the state of being required in a human who wishes to establish a magical connection with a horse, and which are working for me:

- make time available (KFH 86);
- go into the moment, be entirely present and focus solely on the here and now (KFH 46, 80, 166, 218; MB 42);
- create distance and space between yourself and the horse until the latter relaxes and accepts your leadership (KFH 222, 224, 226; IS 4, 36, 39, 49);
- try and sense the mood and personality of the horse (KFH 79, 226);
- if you do not know what to do, do nothing until you intuitively do (KFH 225, 226);
- ask instead of telling and avoid the boss mentality (KFH 30, 39, 168; MB 83, 161; IS 53);
- do not use any force or violence (KFH 61, MB 98, 142);
- be friendly, calm, patient, sensitive and responsive (KFH 79, 227; MB 16, 80, 93);
- do not try to establish a magical connection in the same way that you should not expect anything (the absence of expectation is central to KFH's teachings; see also MB 49);
- accept what the horse does or refuses to do, as there is always a reason for it (MB 84, 124; IS 40);
- deal with a refusal by either asking again creatively or accepting it for the moment (MB 129);
- find joy in what you are doing and be ready to smile and laugh, even at yourself (KFH 226; MB 53).

Of the above tips avoiding the boss mentality has really been a challenge to me. When I get an idea and am ready to implement it, I tend to want to act on it straightaway. It has to happen and it has to happen now. The fact that there is a live animal objecting to this, is not an issue to which I am really keen on devoting a lot of time and energy. This used to be my approach and it is something that Hempfling also recognised in me. How I have tried to deal with it is described below.

### **MY EXPERIENCE OF A MAGICAL CONNECTION**

The first real difficulty I experienced when trying to answer the question as to how I was ever going to learn how to achieve a magical connection with horses, was one that I myself created, inadvertently perhaps but no less effectively because of that. What I did was study all that Hempfling has written, watch all his videos, and speak at length with many who had attended his courses either as students or unpaid assistants. What I did not do was actually weigh up what it would really mean if I were to indeed do what he taught as conveyed through those channels, and then actually start acting on his teachings.

Ultimately, the guidance provided by other humans as to how to achieve a magical connection with a horse is merely that: guidance, and no more. It can help establish the framework, point you in the right direction and even dip your nose in it. At the end of it all, though, such guidance can do no more for you than you can do to get the proverbial horse to drink the water to which you have led it. In the same way that you cannot make the horse drink, so too such guidance is unable to get you to do anything. You have to do it yourself and you have to start now. The beginning of September, the time when I was supposed to be starting a year-long course of training with the master who dances with horses, seemed to be an appropriate time to start doing just that. So I did and in the beginning there was nothing.

The decision that Vicki and I had made to go on sabbatical for a year, meant that I had made the time available. This was an excellent start. My ability to go into the moment, which I have been working on with growing frequency every day since discovering body awareness exercises and Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*, has also been indispensable. Having the time and being able to live it in the present have made it possible for me to surface from the almost suffocating hurt and anger that our experience with KFH produced and to discover a calm joy which I refuse to allow anyone to ever take from me again. This has created a context which is a *sine qua non* ("without which nothing") for achieving a magical connection with a horse: you are at peace, you have time, and you are *living now*.

It is within this context that I focused my conscious attempt to act on the above-mentioned tips in the course of September. As mentioned, in the beginning there was nothing. Anaïs would still insist on setting a blistering pace during our walks through the forest, break into a brief anxious trot now and then, and refuse to raise her head from grazing during our short breaks. The breakthrough came the day before we had a practice run to load Anaïs on to a trailer in preparation for her trip to the vet for her alternative treatment. Instead of halting or half-halting Anaïs when she threatened to get ahead of me, I consciously resolved to focus on leading through my presence. First, I started walking slightly faster than her until I was a little bit ahead of her. Then I focused my attention on my body, what I was feeling and where. Beyond that I became aware of the cool autumn air on my cheeks, a bird calling up to the right, the dank scent of the wet undergrowth, and then this massive warmblood striding hugely towards my left. There was just the two of us moving down the path in a cocoon of nature oblivious to everything else. Suddenly I sensed a slight hesitation in her stride and felt my body automatically respond to match her. She recovered and I joined her. That was when feeling turned to knowledge. I dropped my energy slightly and sensed her respond to match me. Then I raised my energy again and so did she. We went back and forth like this for several minutes before the contact slipped away as I caught my mind wandering again. What was left though, was the sensation of what had been: shared energy with 575kg of vibrant warmblood mare. Awesome, truly!

The next day we managed to establish this close contact again. Ineke, who owns the stables together with her husband, Kees, and who had made arrangements together with Jolanda for us to use a trailer for our trial loading run, came up to me in the morning and asked me how I planned to load Anaïs. I recall being rather nonplussed and slipping out an off-hand remark to the effect that it was simply a case of the mare following the leader whom she trusts. A few hours later I was called upon to be that leader. A small crowd of curious onlookers had gathered round, partly I suspect because we are those weird people who do not want to ride their horse before it can self-collect and who had intended to attend a year-long course with that Hempfling fellow in Denmark, and they wanted to see what it was that we would do differently when it came to loading a horse onto a trailer. I remember first showing Anaïs the trailer and treating it as though it was just another of the objects to be found in the courtyard in front of the stables. Then I walked her around the trailer and the courtyard in general while focusing on my body, Anaïs and the cocoon of our surroundings which we shared as we moved around. Everything else became a blur until Anaïs was on the trailer. Later Vicki mentioned that while I had been leading Anaïs towards

the trailer, Daan, the teenage son of Ineke and Kees, had called out some advice to me, to which his mother had responded that I could not hear him even though I was only metres away from him. Indeed, I did not, because I was so present with Anaïs that nothing else mattered.

Interestingly enough, I could not load Anaïs onto the trailer a second time, because I was unable to achieve that connection again. Since then I have found that I am able to establish a connection with Anaïs with growing frequency and that I am managing to maintain it for longer stretches at a time. The secret is not in knowing how to do it, because that is an activity of the mind. Rather, it is in feeling how to do it and knowing where to find that feeling. And the knowing refers to a knowledge of the tips provided by my guides, Hempfling, in particular. As he puts it:

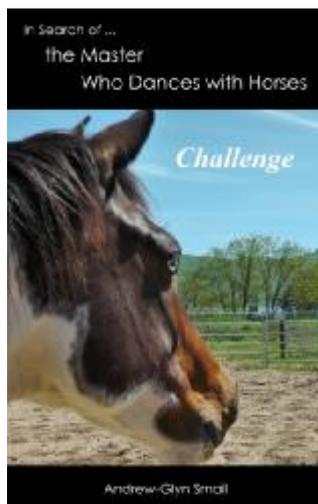
There is one thing I would like to mention, which is if somebody really wants to experience being in complete harmony with a horse, then I believe that in the end, they really have to feel. Until then, they will definitely keep on getting closer to this experience but they will not actually achieve it. (KFH 79)

I do not fool myself that I am capable of replicating Hempfling and achieving complete harmony with a horse every time or that I can maintain it consistently while I am with a horse. That degree of presence and control I am still developing and will continue to do so with the help of Anaïs and any other horse with which I may interact.

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