

## Finding Feel

- Stefanie Travers, Lodestar Horsemanship

In our journey of horsemanship and pursuit of becoming a more aware and accomplished equestrian, there are few words that hold such strong implications, yet are shrouded in such mystery as 'Feel'.

A short little word, with such tremendous depth and daunting meaning, feel is an often elusive quality that can be hard to teach, at least in the normal context. Indeed, by its very definition, it defies being taught. It must be FELT. And therein lies our challenge. WE need to feel. My own journey of exploration of feel began with some distinctly non-equine related practices, and inevitably, began with the Self. If we even begin to explore the words feel and feelings, our brains begin to 'seize' up and not unexpectedly, as feelings are not a thinking thing. They are a heart thing. And so now we are beginning to see the challenge and slipperiness of this whole subject.

Feelings - we as humans really struggle with this word. We want them. We don't want them. Especially not the bad ones, though often not the good ones either. They are messy, they make us feel too darn much. Many of us don't want to feel - so much is in there and we keep these feelings in/down/hidden/denied/numbed. Or maybe we feel too much (or so we are told). We feel we may lose control of our feelings (THAT'S a great line). Of course there is always the keeping our feelings all inside and then finding sanctuary with our horses, our safe place. We don't trust our feelings, and as they are not the domain of the brain we 'think' they just need to be controlled or tamed. Well, good luck with that. Perhaps we don't want our feelings hurt, we are not the "feeling type", or maybe we just don't know what or how to feel.

Unfortunately, but also extremely fortunately, our horses DO feel. Everything. Intensely, Acutely. Accurately. Instantly. They are designed as high flight prey animals to do exactly that. And this ability is what is allowing horses to become integral to so many therapy programs, from physical, to emotional, mental and spiritual applications. They are also magically gifted healers and self reflectors for their human companions. But that is another story! We were discussing feel as it relates to horsemanship and raising our skills as equestrians and communicating our desires to our mounts, and refining our aids and elevating our sense of timing and, softening our horses in the body, mind and frame, and, and.....hmmmmmm. Well, guess what folks. This is truly where it all begins. If we cannot feel for ourselves, then how on earth do we expect to feel for our horses? When we do not feel, we come to our horses this way. We find ways of managing them, usually with a heavy dependence upon tack, tools, methodology, techniques, games, or psychological means. And I don't care if you are 'normal', 'traditional', or 'natural'. All are substitutes for feeling, actually slowing down, becoming finely aware, conscious and present, opening all our senses and truly engaging, embracing and being fascinated.

a few questions in this moment might be.....

- What do you feel?
- What don't you feel?
- What does your horse feel like?
- What doesn't your horse feel like?
- How do you feel?
- Where do you feel/ not feel.

Feel has been defined as...

- 'undergoing an emotional sensation or be in a particular state of mind'
- 'coming to believe on the basis of emotion, intuitions, or indefinite grounds'
- 'being conscious of a physical, mental, or emotional state'
- 'groping in search of something'
- 'an intuitive awareness'
- 'find by testing or cautious exploration'

I love all these definitions.....truly not the domain of the brain! 'Find by testing or cautious exploration'. Wow, that really starts us heading in the right direction, as it implies that there is no 'wrong' method of searching for feel and also encourages experimentation. And how about 'be conscious'? Only one of the most insistent messages on our Earth today.

Once we begin to look at our feelings and what we are feeling, a beautiful thing begins to happen. We begin to see how our horses are feeling and how what we do affects them, how much we do affects them, what we don't do affects them, and the entire system works as it should. A constant feedback loop; adjusting, softening as need be, firming a little here, slowing now, ready to hold a moment, now allowing freedom, going with, now supporting, oops, too much there, so re-adjust...and feel.

I Believe that Feel is a gorgeously complicated word, wonderfully simple and infinitely fascinating. I for one, hope it takes an entire lifetime of exploration.....both for my horses and my self.

Copyright 2009. Lodestar Horsemanship. [www.lodestarthorsemanship.ca](http://www.lodestarthorsemanship.ca)