

## Giving our Animals some Breathing Room for Happiness and Health

by Alexa Linton, CBP, Equine Sport Therapist

Published in Synergy Magazine

Recently it has come to my attention, not for the first time, that there is large part of me that feels the need to exert control over everything. This part of me has been conditioned since childhood to believe that if things are not under her control then they could go badly. When I follow it back to its source, there is always the same feeling, fear. What awful things could happen if I actually let go of this vice grip on my life and the lives of those around me? The fear can be completely overwhelming for many of us at the best of times and at this particular point in history, is at quite a high. So we stress and micromanage our way through life, breaking only to take the edge off the tension. All I can say is, our poor animals!

Recently, a friend gave me a rather simple sounding challenge. She dared me to stop micromanaging my horse! Until that moment, I didn't comprehend quite how annoying I must be to my mare. When I ride, I am constantly giving instructions. It seems that I can't quite let her make her own mistakes, or to put it more succinctly, I can't quite let go of control so that she might learn to find her own rhythm and balance. Nonetheless, I am stepping up to the challenge.

They say that often all that is needed for the perfect thing to take place is the space for it to happen. So often with our animals, we smother them and any space needed for them to reach their potential. My challenge is just one example of stepping back, holding space and allowing my horse to start thinking for herself rather than controlling every move. It is very common to react to any small change in our animals. So often, we restrict our animal's activity because something bad might happen. Fear rears its head, and all the worst case scenarios play before our eyes like a video tape. This is the moment to change the pattern. Ask yourself, how can I hold space for my animal, without trying to control the situation? If the fear is founded in an intuitive sense, then it is important to honour it. But if it is only your conditioning, take a deep breath, relax and switch your mind to the positive. Obviously, there is the possibility that the worst could happen. No matter how much you prepare, this could be the case. But what happens when you allow yourself to let go of your need to control the outcome? There is just as much opportunity for something wonderful and unexpected to occur.

In my experience, an animal will live up to the belief we have about him. So, if we believe him incapable of healing his own body, running safely with a herd or pack, or finding his own balance and confidence, then this will probably be the case. On the other hand, if you can hold space for the possibility of an unlimited potential, there is every possibility that you will be pleasantly surprised by how capable your animal is. Way less stressful than trying to constantly control everything, don't you think? This is the case for your animal as well, who will often respond negatively to your physical and emotional tension. In fact, you will be saving your animals a great amount of discomfort that they so often feel in their body when surrounded by stress, control and reactivity.

Remember, life is supposed to be about thriving, not surviving. If you are often stressed out, it means that your body and mind are regularly in a flight/fight survival state. Now is a great time to start relaxing and having some fun. Start breathing deeply on a regular basis into your belly (not your shoulders) and use the out breath to let go of any tension. Your animals will love you for it!

