

## The Masks We Wear by Lynda Watson

In this present time, we are being asked to don masks for everyone's physical health. Yet at the same time we are being challenged to doff our internal masks for our mental health both individually and as a collective. The horses can support us to remove that inner façade and emerge into a more peaceful and positive future.

When I began to pen this article humanity was still in the midst of what will forever be known as the event that defined the current generation - the COVID-19 global pandemic. Every human has at least one event that shifts their current paradigm. Examples of such past events include: 911/ JFK's assassination/the moon landing, etc. The future is still uncertain as to whether the pandemic will remain on humanity's shore for a while longer or finally head out to sea. Interestingly, someone asked me the other day, 'how do horses deal in times such as these?'. They don't. This crisis means nothing to them in terms of their daily life. They adapt and adjust to their environment every moment of every day. How are they so adaptable? What makes them able to flow from calm to stress and back again so fluently? Three basic characteristics of living make the horses the ideal model for us to learn from at this and any time in our lives: Foundation, Flexibility and Fellowship.

Before we go any further may I invite you to take a moment, breath deeply and enter the paddock in the imagination of your heart. A small herd of gentle horses grazing peacefully in the warm summer sun. You are supported by an equine professional as needed. Together you make your way to a small grove of trees and sit down in the cool shade on nature's carpet of green. You settle in to watch the quiet herd do what they do best. Live in the moment, in tune with nature, their own energy and each other.

This is their foundation. It is made up of five elements; that quiet strength on which they can live in peace while monitoring for safety, somatic knowing and listening, presence and awareness: all are important when living as part of nature. Horses are nature. They are not separate from it. In spending time with them we are brought back to nature ourselves. A place we tend to forget in our super busy monkey mind lives. They bring us back to the cycles of nature and of life; back to that which is real and 'down to earth'. In that groundedness we come back to our bodies. Horses live fully in their bodies. This enables them to be aware of their environment and sense impending threats. If they are busy in the past or the future, then they miss those cues. Only with pure presence and awareness

in their bodies can they live a peaceful and aware life. You feel that peace and lack of stress as a calm sensation when you are in the field with them. In fact, many folks say horses are boring to watch. They eat, drink, sleep, eat more, play once in a while, etc. That's about it. If you stick with it a bit and you will feel and welcome the peace within the herd. To be able to run if needed they must conserve their energy therefore their calm daily lifestyle is a necessity. Their days are spent gently and quietly doing what they need to do; embracing being who they truly are, horses.

Moving our attention back to the herd let us take another deep breath. Are you feeling that calm and groundedness they live in? It is right and good for us humans to try to do this as much as we can. It makes for healthy humans; stress free and able to release the monkey mind. As you are sitting in the field with the herd you notice in an instant that things change. It all happens at once; the barking of a dog, the flight of the herd, and your heart rate elevates. But as quickly as it happens it is over and the herd resumes its peaceful grazing in another part of the field. You, however, are still recovering from that sudden change in your world.

This is flexibility. It is so relevant to what we have all been through over the last year. A good foundation enables the horses to be flexible without causing undue stress. Horses engage that flexibility for them to move to safety while not overtaxing their systems. Stress in the human world could overtax our bodies. Horses are different from humans in how they deal with disruption and we can learn much from them for future challenges we may face. One strong aspect of their flexibility is their emotional agility. Their ability to feel an emotion, learn from it in the moment, deal with it as needed (i.e. running from the barking dog) and then let it all go (back to grazing). If they had been holding onto past emotions, they would have not been able to quickly sense and move away from the barking dog. We humans know this all too well. We are not the best at letting our emotions pass in a healthy amount of time. We hold onto anger, sadness, etc. But we are learning, especially when we learn from the horses. Horses can face change and disruption on a daily basis. In the wild, the land changes, weather prevents movement in a familiar direction or resources dry up. If they are domesticated, humans cause disruptions to them daily. Most disruptions are not substantial but all create the need to be adaptable. The horses' adaptability is the key to flexibility. Conserving energy, releasing emotions once they are dealt with and living in a peaceful environment of authentic fellowship is the basis of this adaptability.

Bringing our awareness back to the herd, take another calm, slow and deep breath. Take your time. You find yourself in a different state of mind and body now. Watching and witnessing the herd, as a collective and individuals, has created unexpected sensations within. What is that feeling welling up inside of you? Is it connection? To the land? To nature? To the horses? Perhaps even to your true and real self? Don't run from it, sit with it and the herd. As you are feeling this you notice one of the herd members looks up and slowly makes its way over to you. The others follow, but at a distance. You are overcome with a sense of peace and profound compassion. The horse seems to be looking directly into your heart. As quiet as can be you stand and allow the space for the horse to approach you on its own terms, at its own pace. In what seems like no time, as it feels like time has stood still, the horse comes forward and places its muzzle on your heart. What is that beautiful feeling that gently bursts within

you?

This is fellowship. Horses live in herds when they live in the wild or as close to nature as possible. Just like us humans they live in social structures. What is the difference? They don't have wars. Their conflicts are settled quickly and they get on with life, quickly and amicably. They don't hold grudges. They don't label or judge and are 100% honest all of the time. What a model for us humans. The horses live in a peaceful and positive society, an authentic society. Horses are who they are. They don't pretend to be something else. They don't wear masks. The connections they make through their heart and their gut are genuine. They don't use words. That doesn't mean they all get along. Some just don't. But they are real about it. Horses set appropriate and clear boundaries in their communications. Their living arrangements are not fear based. They feel fear but don't live in it. When living in nature horses are free to move and free to be with their mates. This is fellowship in perfect form. And when we spend time in nature with them, they invite us into that fellowship and we feel it in our bodies, minds and souls. When we feel that, we cannot unfeel it. We can then carry it back to our daily lives and integrate it into our daily actions.

One more long deep breath. Your time with the herd has come to an end for now. Your hearts are forever connected in fellowship. You leave feeling calm, prepared to better handle change and full of gratitude. You can express that joy through a heart filled thank you to your equine fellow sentient beings. They will feel your vibration of appreciation.

So, what have the horses been doing during this extraordinary time in our history? Nothing, they have just been horses. And when we step into the field and look closely, that is so very much. In that consistency and calmness, they are able to comfort, guide and direct humanity, gently, into a future we never expected. A future we can look forward to. With horses modeling the concepts of; Foundation, Flexibility and Fellowship we are able to doff that inner disguise. We see that the world is perhaps not as polarized as imagined. We see how horses are showing humanity a better way to live by removing our inner masks one human at a time.

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How can you expand perspectives about who animals are and who you are in relation to them? To explore this question more deeply with like-hearted others, join the upcoming Animal Connection Pod. More details [here](#).