



## Somatic Horsemanship

v6.4

*Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God?*

*New Testament  
1 Corinthians 6:19*

Somatic horsemanship is the practice of exploring the physical relationship between humans and horses both on the ground and on the horse in order to promote physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health in both species. While all these aspects of the horse-human relationship are closely

interrelated, for most people and most horses, the most tangible means of interacting is through the five senses and the body as a whole.

### Background

The word *somatic* means *of the body*. Somatics as a mind-body conditioning and healing practice began with the work of the late Thomas Hanna, a student of Moshe Feldenkrais. As with Feldenkrais techniques, Hanna Somatics emphasizes small, slow, isolated movements to heal injuries, correct anatomical problems, and promote healthy aging processes in muscles and joints through re-patterning neurological connections. Somatic horsemanship uses breathing and slow, mindful activities with horses to tap into bodily states of health, peace, and strength.

Somatic horsemanship combines the principles of safe, traditional horse handling<sup>1</sup> with techniques from yoga, t'ai ji, chi gung, aikido, dance, and other martial, somatic, and healing arts. It includes practices from equine-assisted learning and psychotherapy, equine-guided psychospiritual development, natural horsemanship, and sports medicine.

My relationship with horses began in middle age as I felt my physical capacities diminishing. Once a marathon runner, mile-a-day swimmer, and solo wilderness backpacker, I began to notice a decline in energy, strength, flexibility, balance and stamina. Always an animal and nature lover, I was attracted to horses as magnificent beings and as extensions of my body. I perceived a way to regain physical potency in intimate, whole-body contact with this large, beautiful animal. In my Arabian

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<sup>1</sup> As specified by the Certified Horsemanship Association, United States Pony Clubs, and the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship

mare, Dream, now gone over the Rainbow Bridge, I found the renewal of my physical abilities. We were each other's centaur-like appendages, joined at the body and at the heart.

When I became an equine-assisted learning and psychospiritual counseling practitioner, my work emphasized the psychological aspects of the horse-human relationship in communication, leadership, and teamwork. The somatic aspects played a lesser role. Then, in the spring of 2011, in a non-horse-related accident, I sustained a fractured foot, a dislocated right elbow, and a sprained left wrist. If I were a horse, I'd have been called three-legged lame! My healing process included becoming a patient at the National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy, a premier hippotherapy and therapeutic riding facility. Riding, which I had always done on my own and usually in a saddle, was now done bareback with someone leading the horse, a sidewalker, and an inspirational therapeutic riding instructor. The sessions brought back home the message that for me, the entry point to mind-body-spirit wholeness is the physical body, and the physical and metaphysical embodiment of physical wellness is the horse.

I continue to experience body and mind revitalization best when riding, but also when grooming or massaging horses or just watching them in pasture. Watching, touching, and riding evoke feelings of strength, speed, grace, balance, and peace. In wishing to make these wonderful sensations accessible to others through contact with horses, I offer sessions in somatic horsemanship to promote healing, enhance athletic ability, and support healthy aging.

### **Somatic Horsemanship Program**

Somatic horsemanship is for both those who have, or have had, horses and those who have never related to a horse. It is intended for normally-abled or minimally disabled adults<sup>2</sup>, especially those in middle age and older, who wish to become re-energized by association with the power, grace, and majesty of the horse.

The program consists of a 4-phase plan, starting with somatic and mindfulness exercises on the ground and optionally proceeding to bareback or saddled mounted work, sitting still and at a walk.

*Your body is your temple and horses lead the way to the altar.*

*For more information or to schedule an appointment contact:*

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<sup>2</sup> Significantly disabled persons can more appropriately benefit from therapeutic riding or hippotherapy programs.

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