

Spiders in the Brain

They can make your horse see double.

“**M**y horse seems to be two horses. He responds well when I work him in the round pen or any other type of ground work. When I get on his back he is a different horse. He is willful and unresponsive and doesn't cooperate like he does when I'm on the ground. Why is that?”

It is because your horse has two handlers. The one on the ground is confident and clear, which results in the horse having a clear understanding of your expectations and requirements. The handler on his back is tentative, uncertain and too slow with responses and requests. A horse reflects the certainty or uncertainty of the handler. All horses act according to the conclusion they arrive at based on the information they receive from us.

At first, a horse plays defense. He is suspicious, fearful and curious all at the same time. As he sorts out those issues he makes decisions on how to regard us and our antics. If he finds us to be confident and clear, he starts relaxing and makes an effort to get on the same page, looking for ways to participate with us.

He realizes he can't get away, which would've been his first choice. He realizes the human he is stuck with is not dangerous. He then decides to make sense out of the dilemma he finds himself in. He proceeds on the basis of what he observes and experiences in this horse-human experience.

When confusing situations don't get cleared up, his first reaction is to be defensive. When those situations continue, he goes on the offensive because in his world somebody is always driving the bus. At the moment he knows he isn't in the driver's seat, he begins to realize that the driver's seat is empty. To regain some sense of security, he fills that vacancy.

At first he did it just to keep the bus on the road. However, he starts to realize that whoever is in the driver's seat gets to set the route for everyone on the bus. If allowed to remain there, he will be able to implement his own agenda. Obviously, if we occupy that seat and stay there, we can keep the bus on the road even though it

gets bumpy and slippery at times. If we allow the horse to assume that position for very long the eviction could get messy.

When the handler is on the ground the horse is always at some distance. In the handlers mind that removes him/her from immediate danger. They feel more at ease and are able to confidently direct the horse. The horse, feeding off that confidence behaves and obeys.

When the handler is on the horse's back, the whole story changes. Now there is the distinct possibility of falling off and getting hurt. Moms with kids are very much affected by the thought not being able to direct their family. That all adds up to fear and intimidations regarding a horse's obedience and behavior. The horse picks up on the handler's tentativeness immediately.

He quickly realized that he is dealing with two handlers. He is confused a little at first but soon gets accustomed to seeing double. When that condition becomes normal it is because the handler was unable to kill the spider in the horses mind. Every time the horse disobeyed or ignored the handler, the spider spun a strand of web. Eventually the horses mind is filled with cobwebs, and the spider works unhindered. Does a spider spin a web by instinct, decision or instinctive decision? Is that a question you consider when you swipe a cobweb out of the corner of a room? Why not? Because it doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is the cobweb has to go.

Admittedly, it is not that simple with a horse. To effectively clear the cobwebs out of a horse's mind, we do need to consider how they got there (if possible). However, in today's world more and time and effort are often dedicated to psychoanalyzing than to getting a broom and sweeping them out. The spider gets more consideration than the horse does. It is possible to be afraid that hurting the spider will hurt the horse.

If we catch the spider at work in the very beginning, the horse will never miss him. If we allow cobwebs to fill a horse's mind, he will fight to protect his very own personal spider. If you

love your horse, you will hate the spider. If you are afraid to hurt the spider's feelings, you don't think much of your horse.

A common theory today is to remove the mass of web just one strand at a time. The idea probably is to reduce trauma to the horse. For the novice or intermediate horse owner, this is the best way. However, there are some very good and effective ways to take a broom and quickly remove all the cobwebs at once.

The problem is, the spider did his dastardly deeds on the owner's watch. It will be nearly impossible for that horse owner to keep more spiders from getting in.

Until the owner learns to recognize spiders and hate them enough to kill them, the webbing will start showing up almost immediately. Because of the owners confusion the spider is safe and able to keep working. A horse doesn't know that spider free thinking is the best way to live. He needs our intervention, help and direction to get the spiders out of his head.

If he senses that we are more concerned about the spider than we are about him he will neither respect or trust us. The leadership he needs isn't there, so we have a bus driver with spiders in his head. That will never make for a pleasant trip.

Horses are all different. Humans are all different. The combinations of the two are different. So now what? The main aspect of spider removal is that it has to happen. Just exactly how the principles of spider removal are applied will have infinite variables. The need is simple; the solution is not so simple.

So how do we kill the spiders in the horse's mind without damaging his mind? First we have to find them. Everybody wants their horse to behave and cooperate. When that is not the case it is because they don't know where spiders hide. These spiders don't hide in a physical place. They hide in the spirit of the horse. More specifically, their favorite places are the fear, defiance and confusion the horse experiences and acts out.

The horse's three questions show up again.

1. What do I need to be afraid of?
2. What can I get away with?
3. What do you want?

When a horse's fears are resolved, the big

spiders of fear have no place to hide and can be disposed of. When a horse discovers that obedience is the best life, the spider of defiance has no place to hide. When we are incrementally appropriate and clear in our human-to-horse communication, the spider of confusion has no place to hide. If they have no place to hide, they might just leave on their own. If they don't, we have to kill them.

When the handler on the ground and the handler on the horse's back can identify and quickly kill spiders, the horse will no longer see double. There will only be one handler to deal with, simplifying everything for both horse and human.

When it is the human that is seeing double, it is for the same reason. However, the spiders in the mind of the human are more complicated and diverse. The most common spider is the lack of knowledge. Next in line is the lack of understanding. There is also a strange spider that changes color and form so frequently that most people that have it don't know they do. Its name is twisted love. These folks believe (and say) that they love their horse. However they refuse to hold a horse accountable for bad behaviors. They "love" him so much they could never "hurt" him. Firm and effective leadership evades them because they don't want to cause their horse any stress. Their horse desperately needs leadership and authority in his life but they love him so much they refuse to give it to them. So they leave him in limbo until in desperation he decides to take the leadership role. Then the human assumes the role of spider protector. They are afraid that if any spiders are disturbed it will be traumatic for the horse. As it turns out they love their twisted understanding of love. The love they say they have for the horse is not really love at all. If they truly loved him they would put their feelings aside, clear out their own spiders and start killing the spiders in their horses head. Stomp on them, starve them or take away their hiding places, but for goodness sake get rid of them. That is the only way your horse will believe that you love him.

Neither horse nor human will see double anymore and the relationship will blossom.

Give it some thought,

— Warren Bengtson