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CHAPTER 4

# The Bladder Meridian Technique

## Before You Begin

**GOAL:** To bypass the horse's survival-defense response and connect directly with the part of the horse's nervous system that holds and releases tension.



4.1 A & B The bladder meridian.

**RESULT:** This simple yet powerful Technique establishes the basis of communication between you and the horse through touch and response (*Search, Response, Stay, Release*, p. 11). It allows you to learn to “read” a particular horse and the horse to learn to “read” a particular human—you. It puts you both on the same page, so to speak, sets the tone for the interaction, and relaxes the horse and you.

As your first fact-finding tool, this Technique also shows you where the horse may be storing tension, and helps him to begin releasing it.

## WHERE YOU WORK—ANATOMY

The *Bladder Meridian Technique* as we use it addresses the body and mind of the entire horse.

In Chinese medicine there are 12 primary acupuncture meridians in the body. The bladder meridian is one of the major acupuncture meridians in that it has a unique affect on balancing all of the others.

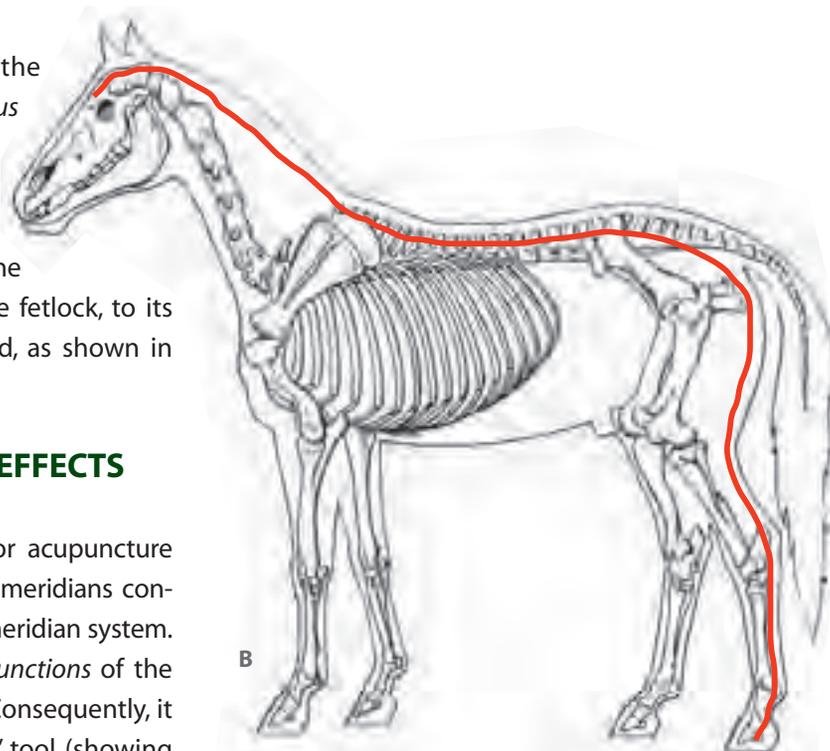
The bladder meridian runs along each side of the body parallel and just below the topline of the horse (figs. 4.1 A & B). It begins just behind the eye and runs over the poll between the poll and the ear, and from there continues down the neck about 2 to 3 inches below the crest, alongside the withers 2 to 3 inches beneath the topline, until it reaches the croup. From there it “leaves” the topline, going over the rump toward the “poverty

groove”—the crease between the *biceps femoris* and *semitendinosus* muscles. Follow this groove down the hind leg, over the side of the hock just off the hind centerline of the leg, down the groove on the side of the cannon bone, over the fetlock, to its termination on the coronary band, as shown in the diagram (right).

### RELEASING TENSION: THE EFFECTS

- The bladder meridian is a major acupuncture meridian to which all the other meridians connect, and it balances the entire meridian system.
- It runs over or near the main *junctions* of the horse on which you will work. Consequently, it serves as an initial “fact-finding” tool (showing horse sensitivity, for example) as well as getting first releases.
- It is easy to reach while allowing you to watch the horse’s responses.
- It has a calming effect.
- However, the most important reason you begin the Masterson Method working on the bladder meridian is because it establishes the interaction of *touch and response* between you and the horse, at the same time as calming the horse and preparing him for the Techniques (body-work) that follow.

You get a sense of how a particular horse is going to respond to your touch, and the horse gets an immediate sense of what he can expect from this interaction with you. The horse’s nervous system learns to react to your touch in a way that



bypasses his *survival or defense response*. This will establish the basis of your communication with the particular horse you are working on. Along the way, the horse will let you know where he is “guarding” (i.e. blocking out) or bracing against the tension, and will begin to release that tension. The most valuable aspect of this Technique is the trust that develops between you and the horse as a result of this interaction.

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**Note:** *If you practiced nothing else but the Bladder Meridian Technique on your horse—on a regular basis—it would make a noticeable difference in your horse’s performance and behavior as a result. The Technique may seem “low energy” but, even alone, is effective in releasing tension in the horse’s key junctions.*

THE BLADDER MERIDIAN TECHNIQUE



# QUICK OVERVIEW: Step-by-Step

## THE BLADDER MERIDIAN TECHNIQUE



### REMINDER

#### Release of tension is indicated by:

*Subtle responses:* eye blinking, lip twitching, and a change in breathing.

*Larger responses:* licking, repeated yawning, shaking the head, and repeated snorting or sneezing (see p. 8 for more).

### ONE: SEARCH

**Step 1.** Stand at the horse's head on the left side (A).

**Step 2.** Place the flat part of your fingertips, or cup the palm of your hand above the eye or on the poll just behind the left ear.

**Step 3.** Barely touching the surface of the skin, slowly (it should take about a minute to run your hand from the poll to the withers) run your hand down the bladder meridian (B).

### TWO: RESPONSE

**Step 4.** As you move your hand and fingers down the meridian, watch closely for subtle signs or responses from the horse (C).

### THREE: STAY

**Step 5.** Rest your hand and fingers over that spot, keeping your hand soft and the pressure light, waiting for a release. This may take one second, or one minute. Be patient. Breathe and relax...

### FOUR: RELEASE

**Step 6.** ... until you get a larger response of *Release*, in this case, licking and chewing (D).

**Step 7.** Then continue down the meridian, repeating these steps, along the back (E)...

**Step 8.** ... over the rump (F)...

**Step 9.** ...down the poverty groove (G)...

**Step 10.** ...over the hock (H)...

**Step 11.** ...over the pastern (I)...

**Step 12.** ... and to the Ting Point—see sidebar, p. 29 (J).

**Step 13.** When you are finished, go to the right side and repeat.



4.3 A Using your fingertip.



4.3 B Using your palm.



4.3 C Using “air gap” pressure.

## Tips

**Rule 1:** Go softly: Use *air gap* pressure (non-pressure) barely touching the horse’s hair or skin with your palm or the flats of your fingertips. Run them slowly along the meridian, watching the horse’s responses to your touch—especially in the eye and lips (figs. 4.3 A–C).

**Rule 2:** Go slowly: Forget about the clock when doing this exercise. If you are anticipating or anxious, the horse will sense it. That doesn’t mean he won’t respond—he has to if you are going slowly enough and softly enough—but it will make your job easier if you are relaxed. Take a deep breath and move your hand very slowly along the meridian and watch for responses in his eyes and lips.

To give you an idea of how fast or slow you should be running your hand down the meridian, let’s use the back of your hand, and the “one alfalfa, two alfalfa, three alfalfa” technique:

1. Hold your left hand in front of you with the back of your hand (knuckle side) facing you.
2. Place two fingertips of your right hand on your wrist.
3. Move your fingertips lightly (*air gap* pressure) from your wrist to the fingertips of your left hand.
4. Counting “one alfalfa, two alfalfa, three alfalfa...” it should take six to eight flakes of alfalfa to get from your wrist to your fingertips. This is about the speed you should move your hand along the bladder meridian.

## Ting Points

The termination of the meridians are called *Ting Points* in Chinese medicine. There are six Ting Points on each hoof and each is the termination point of a different meridian. Five of the six points are located around the coronary band, and one is located between the bulbs of the heel.

*The Bladder Meridian Ting Point* is on the outside where a “ridge” that runs down from the back quarter of the fetlock meets the coronary band.

**Note:** *The locations of acupressure points and meridians on the horse’s body are not exact and differ with each body. This is only a general guide.*

*As you aren’t giving an actual acupressure treatment, don’t worry that you may not be precisely on the bladder meridian. Follow the described path and let your intuition, and the horse guide you.*

*There are many books available on equine acupressure and Ting Points for those interested in learning more.*

When you get to the Ting Point that is the termination of the bladder meridian, stay there for a few sec-

### Ting Point Locations



Lateral (bladder)



Medial (spleen)



Front (stomach)



Quarter, lateral (gall bladder)



Quarter, medial (liver)



Behind (kidney)

onds to see what kind of response the horse gives you. Sometimes you will get surprising releases from this—and the other Ting Points. A

release doesn’t necessarily mean that there is “tension” on that point, but rather it may be related to activity on the corresponding meridian.

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**Note:** *If you finish one side of the Bladder Meridian Technique in less than five minutes, you may need to get the clock back out and slow down a bit.*

You will start to notice, as you watch the horse's eyes, that there is a certain speed at which the horse stays connected to your fingers. Too fast, and you leave the horse behind; too slow, and the horse gets bored and stops "listening."

**Rule 3:** *Search, Response, Stay, Release.* When you get a response such as a blink or twitch of the lips, stop moving your hand and rest it there (still air gap pressure!) and wait for a larger, release response from the horse. The most common release will be licking and chewing, however, the horse may let out a sigh, or start to shift weight from leg to leg when he lets go. Once the horse shows this larger release response, move on.

### More Suggestions

- Stop and hold your hand on a spot at any time if you sense that staying there may get a release.
- You can start over, or in a different place. You may switch hands, use both hands, stop and begin again, or retrace and go back over an area or spot. Don't worry: If you do this wrong your horse won't self-destruct or start to smoke.
- You may adjust the pressure or manipulate your fingertips or hand, or slow your hand down as you get responses.
- Make a mental note of all spots where your horse showed responses or releases. You will find that often, when touching on these partic-

ular areas or junctions again in the Techniques that follow, your horse will respond again in the same area and you might even find restrictions in movement that point to these areas.

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**Note:** *This exercise with its almost meditative qualities can become a regular part of your weekly routines. Soon your horse will start feeling "at home" so use it in various situations to "ground" him, such as when you have a quiet moment between showing, on the campground before or after a group trail ride, before a vet visit, or when trailering.*

## What Ifs?

- ***What if I get a response and stop, and then get no release?***

First of all, be patient and allow the horse time to feel what is going on and time to be comfortable releasing. You are on the horse's agenda, not yours.

Secondly, keep your hand soft. If you feel nothing is happening, try softening your hand even more, or even taking your hand or fingertips off the hair. Watch the horse's eyes as you do this. You will see them soften. No matter how light you think your pressure is, lighten it even more.

The horse's first response when you find something will often be to try to block out what you are doing. But, if you stay long enough and lightly enough, the horse's nervous system will *have* to release tension.

If, after holding your hand over a spot for 30 or 40 seconds or so the horse doesn't respond, then move on. It doesn't mean you are doing it wrong, or that the horse is not cooperating. Be

patient and move on slowly, possibly returning to the spot later.

■ ***Sometimes I can't tell if the horse is blinking at something else, or at me.***

If you're not sure that the horse has blinked at a spot in response to your touch, move your finger back a few inches before that spot and slowly go over it again. If he blinks on the same spot, there is a correlation between what you're doing and what the horse is doing: It's a response. If not, move on.

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**Note:** *Horses lick, chew, yawn, blink, and twitch all the time. With this exercise you are looking for the correlation between your touch and the horse's behavior or response to it.*

■ ***What if my horse starts to fuss or walk away?***

Fidgeting is a sign that something is about to release. If your horse is standing quietly and you are waiting on a spot for a release and then he starts to fidget or take a step away, stay with him and continue what you were doing, but soften your hand just a little. Some horses will fidget more than others when they are about to release.

■ ***What if he is "mouthy" or is constantly messing with the lead rope?***

Continue what you are doing and watch to see what happens. Often the horse will stop fussing after he releases a little bit, but some horses are just mouthy and fidgety. With a little practice,

you will get good at reading the releases and responses through the fussing. Sometimes the response you're looking for is when the horse stops fidgeting: Often, this is when he will release.

If you have a horse handler on the other end of the lead rope, the horse will often fuss with the handler. It's important that the handler does not interact with the horse while you're doing this Technique because it makes it difficult for you to "read" the horse.

■ ***Can I tie the horse while doing this?***

Yes, especially if the horse is mouthy and won't leave you or the handler alone. I like to leave enough slack so that the horse can bend his neck or reach around a little bit. For safety, if you're in a stall, it's a good idea to tie the lead rope to a piece of baling twine or something that will break if the horse pulls back and starts to panic. The twine will break, the horse will calm down, and you'll all still be together in the stall—in one piece.

■ ***What if my horse pulls his head away?***

First, give the horse a little room to pull away so that he doesn't feel trapped, but don't pull back on his head. If you soften the hand you're placing on the poll it will also help him to relax a little. If he still doesn't want your hand on his poll then start down the neck a little way until he is comfortable—and go from there. You can come back up to the poll after he has relaxed a little bit.

Take your time with head-shy horses. This is what they need the most. Most head-shy horses are this way because of pain or tension in the poll.

■ ***How often should I do the Bladder Meridian Technique?***

Do a little bit of this every day if your horse continues to respond. You don't need to do the whole meridian every time. If you do it too frequently and the horse stops responding, take a few days off and start up again later.

■ ***If I'm not right on the meridian will it still work?***

Don't worry about being exactly on the meridian. The horse will tell you where to work. You are learning to follow the horse's responses. The bladder meridian is an energy pathway and doesn't run in precisely the same place on every horse. You may, in fact, use this Technique anywhere on the horse's body, not just on the meridians.

■ ***Will all horses respond and release the same?***

After doing only a couple of horses you will notice that all horses are different. Depending on the horse and your individual sensitivity, the length of time you spend on the entire Bladder Meridian Technique will vary. Some horses are very stoic and take longer to respond and release. On these horses you have to go slower and pay very close attention to see the *subtlest responses*. Some show responses but won't release until you move past a spot, or step back away from them. Others start responding immediately (fig. 4.5).



**4.5** Not all horses respond the same. Some are stoic at first; others respond immediately.