

## **Finding Zero**

by Gretchen Vogel

We now know a quiet mind, present and calm emotional attitude is the real secret of the great horse whisperers such as Monty Roberts and Ray Hunt. It is not some unachievable state of being for us all. In *Horse Speak*, by Sharon Wilsie and Gretchen Vogel, this mental and emotional calm is called zero.

We can reach zero by setting our agenda aside as we walk into the barn, pause and breathe with the horses for a few moments. Simply breathe long enough to want to take a full deep breath. By the time you feel like yawning you've probably reached zero.

If you're really having a bad day zero may take a bit more effort to find. We may have to imagine our happy place, a memory of the time we were on a beach at sunrise or sunset, fully present and happy. We may have a song which triggers calm in our body, even a rap song if it helps us reach that place. Pause on entering the barn and sing that song for a moment. You can't sing without breathing.

Now as horse owners, we all know the horses want to be fed or are looking forward to getting out into their turn out or to join us and go somewhere. They might get impatient first thing in the morning, but we approach our horses all day at different times. You might pause and find your zero as you approach your horse before you bring him in to groom and ride. Anytime you approach your horse, if you pause and breathe, perhaps nod slightly for a second, it will help to reset your agenda to one of presence and not tasks or work.

Achieving zero state of calm and emotional quiet around horses will take some practice, but it will become a habit. The real reason we need to find our zero is because so many of our horses cannot find theirs.

Yes, you read correctly--horses have lost their zero. A horse's natural state is one of calm. A herd of even two horses strives for calm with each other even if they may play up or argue over a hay pile, as soon as they can they return to a steady state of calm presence. This state is why we love to be with them so much.

Let's think now of the individual horses we have known who have lost that state of calm within themselves. Often horses are shuffled around a lot and insecure in terms of their basic needs for water and nutrition, let alone taken from horse family or friends, moved from a place they magnetically grounded which felt like home. Of course I'm only guessing here on what knocks them out of their own zero, but I'm pretty sure handling from emotionally inconsistent and unstable or even cruel humans for a period of time might make it impossible for them to be at their own zero when they are around us...even if we are not the person who mis-communicated with them.

Any competent horse lover KNOWS whatever vice or emotion is shown by a horse is the fault of a human somewhere along the line. Caring horse people consider our own responsibility for our horses' state of being. And we try to "fix" them.

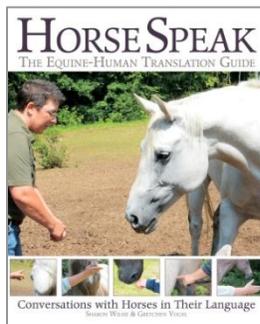
However, they can and will fix themselves. Let me repeat that, a horse at zero knows how to fix himself. That is, of course, if we are at zero and help them achieve their very own zero.

We can help a horse achieve their own zero by modeling ours. I've found matching steps deliberately and consistently every time I lead, even making a special time to simply lead a horse, match steps grounding each of my footsteps as mindfully as I can helps ground an emotional horse. Also deep breathing near a horse ill at ease, (no closer than the distance when they react to my approach) is a generous activity. As I breathe I image energy going into the ground through my feet, I imagine energy flowing through their four legs down into the ground. Simply breathing on purpose near an emotional

horse, and then leaving them in a quiet state helps them. Rinse and repeat this as many times as is necessary. When a horse can achieve their own zero, they will "fix" themselves.

In a herd, barn, stable there is often one or two "rescues". These are horses no one wants to work with and are often agitators to the other horses. This is the horse who has lost their own zero; this is the one to model grounded calm and presence to. Without even touching them or being in their personal space we can help them tremendously and in turn help the rest of the horses in the herd. Other horses' "problems" melt away when this horse is calm.

We brought a young paint draft cross to our farm recently. The cover girl on our book, *Horse Speak*, is a white mare rescued from a kill pen. She lived here along with the steadiest of Quarter Horse geldings I've ever known. The white mare ran the new gelding too much when out with the boys, so is now in her own turn out. She had depended on the steady gelding for her zero and now was not with him. I am modeling zero to her as she adjusts to these different arrangements. She continues to teach me all about finding my zero and helping her find hers. Do yourself a favor, find your zero and share it with your whole family, no matter what species.



Click [here](#) for more information and to order the book.

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