



Longeing Is More than Trotting in a Circle

Recently the Shepherd purchased a young Haflinger gelding in order to provide the long-desired riding horse for his two daughters. Our newly purchased horse, Alfred, was “broken” to ride, but was only partially trained in the niceties of a horse and rider relationship. One of the first riding episodes resulted in Alfred managing to buck and unseat his rider. In response the Shepherd got on Alfred’s back to “persuade him” to get the bucking nonsense out of his head. The subsequent rider was encouraged to “keep Alfred’s head up” when riding to prevent another bucking episode. However, as we worked further with Alfred, it became apparent that his prior training was scanty; although he was tame, his manners left something to be desired.

Our response was to initiate a resistance free training regime for Alfred, which is popularized by the books and videos of Richard Shrake. This method includes longeing as one way to encourage the development of good horse manners (obedience), good attitude, and good body movements. In longeing the horse is typically connected to the trainer via a long longe line. Then as the trainer provides verbal commands, changing whip positions, and distinctive body movements, the horse learns to appropriately respond by stopping, walking, trotting, or cantering in a circle around the trainer. As in most training enterprises, success comes only by spending time with the horse, maintaining consistency in handling, and sharing an attitude that promotes harmony. When onlookers watch a trainer longe a horse, it often appears like a meaningless repetitive exercise where the horse simply trots in a circle around the trainer.

However, longeing is a methodological tool that enables training and promotes harmonious responsiveness of the horse to signals of the trainer.

Harmonious relationships emerge when individuals experience mutual respect, communicate clearly, and work toward a common goal. This principle is true in horse training, in an academic institution, in the Christian church, and in one’s relationship to God. Relationships are fostered when we “longe with each other” (work together). Sometimes profitable longeing is hindered by stress or tension. Yet persistence, mutual respect, and love by the parties involved restore a harmonious relationship.

As I work with Alfred, I am reminded how Jesus Christ my Lord works with me and lovingly draws me back to him when I stray from his plan. The key to a harmonious relationship with Christ is to love and submit to his directions, his words, and his examples. Although we may not understand the discipline of the Lord, yet our submission to his will makes our way more clear and enhances our life. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, “Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!” (Heb. 12:9 NIV). When I am given a longeing lesson by God, I want to understand that it is more than a trotting episode. It is an opportunity to learn to know my Trainer and develop a more harmonious relationship with him.

Shalom,
Roman J. Miller, Editor

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