



Flourish, a flurry of flow

Flourish Sanctuary, an abode for spiritual seekers and those on a quest for personal growth, has been running transformative events and activities that have been drawing people from all walks of life.

Nestled in the serene outskirts of Nimbin, Flourish has been making waves with its unique offerings that cater to the mind, body, and soul.

From retreats to meditations to men's groups, Flourish Sanctuary is a home for those seeking inner peace and self-discovery.

The Grail: A rite of initiation retreat

One of the most anticipated events at Flourish is The Grail, an extraordinary 3-day journey presented by SheMatrix. This life-changing retreat is specifically designed for men, offering them a chance to delve into the feminine mystery and embrace their wild selves. Participants embark on a Rite of Initiation, where they are encouraged to honour their authentic selves.

Social Dhamma Circles: Delving deep into integrity

Integrity is the cornerstone of personal growth, and Flourish has begun investigating its significance in leading a fulfilling life. In Julian Robinson's Social Dhamma Circles, attendees participated in closed discussions and reflections on integrity and what it means to live with it.

Jagad: Guided meditations and more

Jagad, a custodian and meditation guide at Flourish, has continued to run meditations. These meditations provide an opportunity to reconnect with the inner self, fostering a sense of peace and clarity amidst the chaos of daily life.

In other news, Jagad's ankle is on the mend. After an injury that led to a month of difficult mobility, Jagad is off his crutches and walking again.

Upcoming events: Connecting and growing together

Flourish Sanctuary's dedication to fostering spiritual growth and a sense of community is evident in the exciting Lineup of events planned for August:

1. Free dance: An opportunity to express

oneself through movement and rhythm, promoting a sense of joy and release.

2. Guided meditations: Jagad continues to lead participants through transformative meditative experiences, allowing individuals to contribute as per their ability.

3. Introduction of spiritual friends: In a style like a satsang, this event features Jagad leading a meditation followed by an open discussion about spirituality. Attendees can share their questions, insights and reflections.

4. Men's group: Flourish Sanctuary invites men seeking a supportive space to express interest in joining a Men's Group proposed to be held at Flourish. This regular gathering will provide a judgment-free environment where men can confidentially share their thoughts and emotions, helping each other to grow and become the best version of themselves.

5. Wwoofers wanted: Flourish Sanctuary is seeking volunteers interested in becoming Wwoofers. Those who are passionate about contributing to the Sanctuary's mission are invited to participate and support the land and the various events.

Flourish Sanctuary's website: www.flourishsanctuary.com.au/whats-on.html provides a detailed schedule and a means to RSVP for participation.

Flourish Sanctuary continues to be a beacon of spiritual growth and connection for seekers in Nimbin. Through transformative events like The Grail, insightful Social Dhamma Circles, and soul-stirring guided meditations, individuals find a sanctuary for inner exploration and self-discovery.

As Jagad re-joins the Sanctuary's activities, the community eagerly looks forward to the up-coming events that promise to foster even deeper connections and personal growth.

For those seeking spiritual growth, solace, and a small supportive community, Flourish Sanctuary remains an oasis of tranquillity.

For more information about Flourish Sanctuary and upcoming events, please go to: www.flourishsanctuary.com.au or talk to Jagad.

Shifting chaos with better communication

by Gail Wallace

Challenges in life can often highlight where we need to learn about ourselves and others. Understanding the impact of our feelings and needs opens the door to a world of insight into how we and others respond to events in our lives.

Having these insights replaces confusion and emotional turmoil with emotional clarity, compassion and intelligence. This can then lead to resolving many of life's problems.

It is quite magically inspiring for the person (and those around them) when the perspective on the 'apparent' problems shift to show new ways of dealing with them.

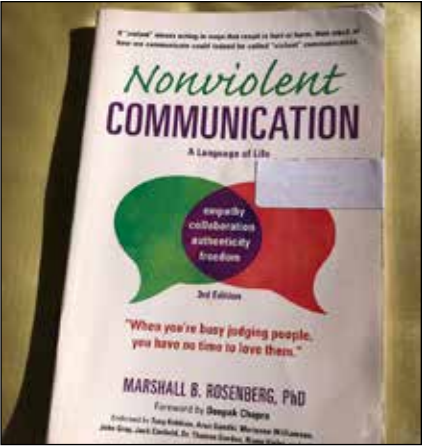
These concepts formed the foundations of the work of Dr Marshall Rosenberg (1934-2015) that we know as non-violent communication.

When he began this work in 1960s, he scarcely expected that its teachings, principles and practices would spread like wildfire across 60 countries around the globe!

Influenced by the paths of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, he was also fortunate to study with Carl Rogers, the 20th century humanist psychologist, when the latter was researching components of improving relationships. It was the results of this research which played a key role in the evolution of this radically powerful form of communication we now know as NVC or compassionate communication.

So what was so different about NVC from the multitude of other communication forms doing the circuits within popular psychology and well-intentioned courses in relationship building conflict resolution, counselling, mediation and the like? Libraries of self-help literature attested to a great need, but was all that somewhat missing the mark?

Well, firstly NVC highlighted what seemed to be missing in some of the



above. They tended to focus more on the 'intellectual' side of relationship issues and behavioural advice. Indeed, the heart, the very hub and nub of how we fundamentally connect as humans, seemed to be playing a more minor, less important role.

Marshall's work turned this whole paradigm around on its head and tail as he noted some critically missing elements.

So why the term 'non-violent'? Are we essentially that violent as humans? Isn't that a strong assessment for most of us peace-loving, conflict-averse, caring, loving occupants of planet Earth?

Well, another major difference Marshall identified related to one's definition of 'violence' itself.

He maintained that, if 'violent' means acting in ways that result in hurt or harm, then much of how we communicate can be regarded as 'violent communication'.

Judging others, bullying, having racial/gender bias, blaming, finger-pointing, discriminating, speaking without listening, criticising others (or ourselves), name-calling, reacting when angry, using political rhetoric, being defensive or judging who's good/bad, what's right/wrong with people, can all play a part in hurtful, unhelpful behaviour.

He also analysed the many ways in which we can be internally violent

to ourselves and, when doing so, it is difficult to be compassionate to others.

So where does all this lead us? Well, Nimbin's great fortune on the weekend of 12-13th August is to have Australia's top NVC trainer, Cate Crombie come to our village to deliver a two-day workshop. It will be held in the Aquarius Church and the cost is only \$195 pp (some discounts may apply), including a comprehensive workbook, handouts and on-going references.

Bookings are essential, phone 0402-347-399. Places are quite limited, so please, book yourself in asap.

If you are interested in improving relationships with friends, family, partners, work colleagues... this is for YOU. You will learn strategies that offer invaluable tools as you develop and practise this process experientially within the 'safe environment' of the workshop.

Having trouble deciding? Not enough information? Finding the cost a challenge? Then please jump on-line to read about Marshall Rosenberg and NVC.

Absorb the myriad of testimonials and endorsements from everyday folk, as well as the esteemed likes of Deepak Chopra, Marianne Williamson and Arun Gandhi. All doubts may dissolve.

I can't emphasise enough the value of this transformational, life-changing learning. I have seen this, time and time again, and it excites me to be part of that process of helping others to make big changes in their lives. To re-connect with those they dearly love. To have better connections they 'know' in their hearts is possible. To handle conflict in a way that doesn't create ongoing damage. To know what is happening and how to respond when there is upset. To make a difference in their own lives and those of others.

Don't miss this chance to re-think yourself and how you want to present yourself to the world. Isn't that what we all really want?

Reefer madness in a galaxy far far out

by Paul Pot

Return of the Jedi turned 40 on 24th May. The Star Wars films were a hash of movie genres – war, westerns, gangsters, pirates, Arabian knights, samurai and more.

I'll never forget the shock of seeing Jabba the Hutt smoking a bong, and long did I think it was a nod to the heads who turned out to see the movie stoned.

The truth is more sinister. Smoking, it turns out, is a cue to let you know who the bad guys are, like in old gangster movies.

Obi Wan says of Mos Eisley spaceport, "You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy." In the cantina we see humans and aliens indulging their appetites, most drinking, some sipping portable nargils or hookahs used like today's vape pen.

Wookieepedia, the on-line Star Wars encyclopedia, tells us that everyone smoking at the bar, ladies included, are mercenaries and bounty hunters, all looking for Han Solo, the smuggler guy. That



cargo of Jabba's he ditched was Glitterstim, a drug that makes the galaxy look groovy, like ecstasy.

When we finally meet Jabba, the biggest bad guy in the galaxy smokes the biggest bong, the room is filled with smoke and his slit eyes glow orange red. A Jawa fans him with what looks like a giant cannabis fan leaf, and according to Wookieepedia, that's Marcan he's firing up.

Yes, the first three letters of the words marijuana and cannabis combined. All the while surrounded by slaves, henchmen and hired killers.

This scene alludes to a bygone era of gangsters and reefer madness, but the cliché

goes much deeper. Jabba's inspiration comes from the "old man of the mountain", the leader of the Hashashins, a cult of devoted assassins who would blindly perform any cruelty commanded of them in a hash-induced haze, and were infamous across Christendom for killing thousands of Christian Crusaders. It's this cult that, allegedly but not actually, gave rise to the word 'hashish'.

In 1809, Antoine Silvestre de Sacy, a French nobleman and linguist, wrongly associated hashish and the cult of the assassins, reinforcing existing prejudices against both

hashish and the Muslim people who made their home in France after Napoleon's failed invasion of Egypt. Ironically, it was the returning soldiers who brought hash back to France.

The arrival in the west of both hashish, and the prejudice against it, would set the scene for the marijuana hysteria that would cast a long shadow across the world to the present day.

Both of these stories are inventions, however only one is seen for the fable it is; that the other has remained unquestioned for the last two centuries may be attributed to the 'illusory truth effect' – a lie often repeated can be believed because it's familiar and confirms our beliefs.

An exceedingly dangerous phenomenon, as we know, a myth can end up influencing the formation of law, disrupting countless lives for generations.

The story of prohibition serves to remind us how important it is to sort out fact from fiction in matters of law and order.

Question everything. Why? Why not?

In praise of NIMBYs

by Nan Nicholson

I have often wondered why the acronym NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) is used as a term of abuse.

Humans have evolved for the last two million years deeply embedded in their natural surroundings. We must have known from the start that we were a part of nature and couldn't be separated from it.

We haven't changed. That is why someone living in a high-rise apartment in a big city has a pot of parsley on the balcony, a picture of a flower, and a budgie. When we ask people when they are happiest, they nearly always say, "When I am in a natural place that I love".

Caring about our surroundings is built into us. We have always worked together to protect whatever landscape we inhabit because it sustains us and our group (call it community). We have always been required to look after our backyard. Those who were disconnected from land and nature perished.

We are all NIMBYs – there is no shame in that, just pride.

For this reason I am grateful for living in the Northern Rivers. This community seems to understand, largely, that natural places don't stay safe – they need to be fought for. And, as Red Gum said, "If you don't fight you lose".

We battled to save our backyards from fire in 2019/2020, working together to protect people and forests. Most fire-affected folks helped other people in neighbouring communities to save their fire-threatened backyards.

In March 2022 we leapt into dealing with major flooding and landscape collapse in all of our backyards, quickly organising community rescue, emergency accommodation, food relief, transport, repairs, emotional care and support of every kind.

Everyone I have spoken to since these two disasters has been involved in some way in helping people with rescue and recovery, and restoring farms, forests and waterways.

Back in 1974, the Northern Rivers was in the lead in the defence of nature, teaming up with First Nations people to save local forests, starting with the rainforest at Terania Creek, in the Nightcap Range.

This resulted in the declaration of the Nightcap National Park in 1983, and finally in the protection of 120,000 ha of our most important rainforests and old growth forests across NSW in 1982.

In 2012, the Northern Rivers initiated the Gasfield-free Communities movement that succeeded in booting the destructive gas industry out of our region in 2014.

We organised, educated ourselves, and trained in non-violent resistance against an industry that threatened everyone. We then shared our method with other



Victory at Bentley, May 2014. Photo: RJ Poole



Local community members outside Rous County Council, February 2022.

communities across Australia to help them defy the gas industry.

Now the Northern Rivers is resisting the proposed Dunoon Dam, a disastrous, uneconomic project which cannot protect us against droughts or floods and which would cause the destruction of Widjabul Wia-bal heritage, a rainforest Endangered Ecological Community and critical koala and platypus habitat.

It would inflict further damage on a river system which is already at risk and which cannot afford further degradation.

Local citizens have been able to demonstrate that they won't let up in the defence of nature and of First Nations rights.

All of these battles started small and then enlarged their scope. The backyard grew. The people ignored political boundaries and worked hard to protect each other and the land. These were great NIMBY efforts all round.

In the end, the whole planet is our backyard, and it is in more trouble than ever before. We need more NIMBYs,



Logging protestors at Terania Creek, August 1979. Photo: David Kemp

not less, especially those who realise that they are fighting for everyone's backyard. I guess we could call them NIABYs: Not In Anyone's Back Yard.

As a proud NIMBY/NIABY, I intend to keep working with others to get us onto the war footing required to tackle the really big issues threatening us all: global heating and climate chaos, both driven by a perverse, self-destructive fantasy of growth without limit.

Welcome to any new NIMBY/NIABY who wants to help. There is no time to lose and no shortage of issues that you can get stuck into.

When anyone accuses you of being "just a NIMBY", you can simply respond: "What?! You mean you don't look after your backyard?!"



Aquarius 50 - thank you Paul and Jeni

by Lewis Templar

I've taken some time recently to reflect upon my experiences at Aquarius50, and I thought I'd take the time to express my gratitude and love to the festival and its organisers.

When you both invited me to the festival, I thought it was going to be like Woodford: big stages, big speakers, and lots of people rushing around keen to enjoy as much as they can.

I was delighted to find that the festival was so much more than an external sensory experience. There were plenty of lights, sounds, colours and shapes that inspired a playful mode of being, but the highlight for me was the focus on the metaphysical world of ideas.

So much knowledge in one small place is something of a dream for a truth seeker, and Aquarius50 took me to a really lovely place, not only in my mind but in my heart.

At first I was learning about astrology, and the ancient history of psychedelics, and not long after I heard stories of trauma, heartbreak, and loss. After being invited to think playfully, the way I used to as a child, I became deeply and truly moved by speakers in circles, performances, and even the occasional naked dancing hippy.

Pretty soon we were all learning how to re-parent our inner child, and how to have fun doing it.

As the event went on, the momentum picked up. Being there from the start I could see others being drawn into the womb of Nimbin town, charmed by its aesthetic,

and mesmerised by the astonishing performances of Benny Zable, Phillipe Petit.

I saw audiences build, and connect truly and deeply after a six-hour talk on soil and health from Graeme Sait. Who could have known that an agricultural expert could have filled the Nimbin Town Hall, gripping the people of Nimbin with his intense and mind-bending knowledge of soil.

Watching people buzz around sharing contact information after being inspired by a talk, performance, or even Peter Derrett's photos on the wall from the original 1973 Aquarius Festival, was surprising at first. After I left Nimbin, however, I understood what the festival meant to everyone.

Driving away from Aquarius50, I had a lot of time to think on the quiet country roads. As a country boy myself, I remember how much it meant to us to have a trip into town for an event at the Hall.

When I was young I loved running around in my gumboots in the dirt, with brightly coloured clothes. I loved being hypnotised by street performers, and running around with the other kids, learning new secrets to life, and how other people live, laugh, and love.

Reconnecting with that experience brought a tear to my eye as I made my way back to the city that night. Aquarius50 helped me re-connect with that inner child, which so often gets neglected, and it showed me that we always have the power to let go, be free, and play.



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Nimbin Garden Club notes

by Peter Brooker

Last month we journeyed to a place of food that grew low to the ground. This month, well, it was a little different.

In Australia there are 134 million hectares of forest covering 17% of our land mass and representing 3% of the world's forested area. We are the seventh largest reported forest area in the world. This, as 26 club members have witnessed, may well change now that Anna and Olof have moved across the world and settled in Terania Creek.

They set off on their travels intending to find a 'magical place', off-grid, where they could grow their own food.

Eventually they wandered into Nimbin, spent a little time on Black Sheep Farm, then, like the rest of us, found it difficult if not impossible to leave this town.

Their time at Black Sheep convinced them they wanted a place nestled in the forest with Bangalow palms where

they could practise Permaculture. In 2019 they found that place in Terania Creek, a 15-acre plot carved out of 250 acres. They rolled in with nothing but their backpacks and days later rolled out again as the fires swept through the valley. On their return they became a local hub as they had solar and internet.

The origins of the house sprung out of the Nightcap logging protest when a journalist from Sydney began the project in the 1980's using mud from the property to make bricks, and trees from the property were used for structural poles.

Later it was bought by Greek musicians who doubled its size and added a sound studio, it then passed to more musicians, whose melodic sounds could still be heard thundering down the valley on Sundays, before Anna and Olof, the permaculturists, moved in.

Painstaking renovations are now all-but complete, and Anna and Olof can return to the garden. Those of us who

attended the visit a few years back remembered the flourishing vegetable gardens just below the house. These gardens have fallen temporary victims to the heavy rain, but will return along with more extensive areas later.

On this occasion we saw the beginning of the major project, the clearing of privet, camphor, and other weed trees and shrubs, the regeneration project and the granting of land for wildlife registration, which brings us back to the figures at the beginning.

There is a Welsh proverb that says the seed hidden in the heart of an apple is an orchard invisible. Anna and Olof have noticed the hidden seeds and are in the process of planting a 'food forest' of tropical and sub tropical trees.

I have counted, from the list Anna provided, 64 different trees and shrubs, so I can neither list nor spell them all, but as a result we shall surely improve our position from seventh largest forested area in the world to sixth



largest.

And to assist in this task we should all remember the words of Aldo Leopold when he writes: "Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for gods and poets, but humbler folk may circumvent this restriction if they know how. To plant a pine, for example, one need be neither god nor poet, one need only own a shovel."

Next meeting

Our next meeting is the AGM on 19th August so you have a few weeks to campaign for a position on the committee. Also fees are due, so bring \$15 and a plate to share and we'll meet at Lae and Gerard's home at Lot 13 Blue Springs on Symonds Road. We have been asked to park on Symonds Road and walk to the property.

Loopost

We all have to face it eventually. Even as children we play with it, eat it even, driven by a curiosity that seems to stay with us for most of our lives. How many are honest enough to admit that they take a long look after a visit to the loo? How many are more than mildly curious as to what they ate to eventuate in that thing in the loo?

I have vague memories of floating turds in bathwater... perhaps some of my earliest. I am sure I wasn't grossed out by it though. Somewhere along the line we are taught that faeces are dangerous and germ-ridden and are to be avoided at all cost. Yet we still need to wipe our asses. Existential threat number one for most of us.

Then, just when we are coming to terms with it, along comes a bout of diarrhea with uncontrollable squirts that seem to permeate everything, cloth and skin alike. Yikes! I remember waddling down a tourist thoroughfare in southern Turkey turning green and brown all over before my friends found me and prepped me up with some western wonder drug.

In all seriousness though, there is a lot of nasty stuff in poo, especially an unhealthy person's poo. We are right to be fearful but respectful of the power of poo for good and evil. Composted poo is good. Loopost!

Many of my customers are surprised to learn that I charge so much for servicing and emptying loopost from their toilets, but they are always willing to pay. These customers are the phobic amongst us that have not been able to learn the distinction between poo and loopost. They pay the price for being slow learners. Fair enough some are uninitiated



View from the loo

by Stuart McConville

tenants that have not actively chosen to use a compost loo. I deal with their loopost and their landlords are paying a premium.

As I don't really want to spend the rest of my career dealing with other people's phobias (and it is increasing as tree changers buy up hippyville) I want to encourage everyone to help out their neighbours with a friendly conversation about how wonderfully easy it is to empty a loo and how loopost is an excellent additive to their fruit trees or landscaping (NOT veggie patch for fresh out of the loopost, wait a year first).

Try to dispel the myth that it will be smelly and goopy. It's not. Good loopost is mostly carbon from the bulking agent with broken-down black humus distributed throughout. Millions of micro-organisms have eaten and re-pooed it out again and again. Long strands of mycelium have woven their way through it, feeding and breaking down into food for more micro-organisms. It is unrecognisable as poo.

But if you can't achieve this, then please reassure them that I will be happy to come and service their loo for a princely sum so that they don't have to get their hands dirty.

Stuart McConville runs Pooh Solutions, compost toilets and waste water services:
www.poohsolutions.com.au
phone 0427-897-496

Mt Matheson and Pholis Gap walk



by Peter Moyle
Nimbin Bushwalkers Club

What a gorgeous time of year for walking, the ground drying out, cool mornings and sunny mild days, perfect for the Nimbin Bushwalkers to get out and about.

We came back to town for our last walk and headed up to Mt Nardi for the Mt Matheson loop and Pholis Gap track. 16 walkers set out for this shortish trek, but with plenty of time to take in the views north and the abundant flora and fauna. We spent 3½ hours on track.

This is a beautiful area and well worth the visit coming up the hill back towards the cars we came across more examples of last year's storms with trees down and some serious landslips.

All up a great day out before a visit to the Nimbin Bush Theatre Café for some of their excellent Coffee and cake.

Walks programme

11th to 13th August – Forest Tops in the Border Ranges NP via Kyogle

Leader: Peter Moyle 0412-656-498
Grade: 3-4. There are lots of great walks and most have now reopened.
Meet: at the Campground, contact Peter to register your interest. You can come for a day walk or you can camp for a night or two. In-car camping and



Warming up

tent spots available to share. We have the three sites booked so just us. NSW Parks vehicle daily access fee applies, or yearly is better value.

Walks: There will be a walk on the Saturday from 9am and the Sunday from 8am.

Camping: Peter Moyle has booked all the sites, ring to reserve your stay.

Sunday 27th August – Brunswick Heads Management Trail and Simpsons Creek

Leader: Peter Spearritt 0421-055-292
Grade: 2-3. A walk south on the coastal trail that runs parallel to the beach with lovely heathland and coastal vegetation. A keen eye will pick up some early spring wildflowers. A couple of stops to take in Simpsons Creek along the way. Visits to the beach also and maybe a return as Peter has arranged a low tide to suit his visit.
Meet: 9am at Brunswick Heads Surf



Ron and fern

Club. There is parking but make sure you read the restrictions.
Bring: Water, hat, sunscreen, and lunch or very tasty fish and chips etc nearby.

8th to 10th September – Lake Arragan in Yuraygir NP near Brooms Head

Leader: Peter Moyle 0412-656-498
Grade: 3-4. There are lots of great walks and most have now reopened.
Meet: at the Campground, contact Peter to register your interest. You can come for a day walk or you can camp for a night or two. In car camping and tent spots available to share. We have the three sites booked so just us. NSW Parks vehicle daily access fee applies, or yearly is better value.
Walks: There will be a walk on the Saturday from 9am and the Sunday from 8am.
Camping: Peter Moyle is taking bookings; ring to reserve your stay.

Demystifying reinforcement with horses

by Suzy Maloney, BEqSc

When we handle horses and especially when training, we are often using some form of reinforcement.

There are two main types of reinforcement training done with horses, negative reinforcement and positive reinforcement. Sometimes we don't fully understand the principles behind these, so I'm hoping this article can fill the gaps.

Firstly, let's start with some definitions. In this context, the term 'reinforcement' refers to something the horse likes, it results in an increase in a behaviour. 'Punishment' refers to something the horse doesn't like; it results in a decrease of a behaviour. 'Positive' means adding something and 'negative' means to remove something. The words punishment and negative have very different meanings here than in their common usage.

So, putting these together in relation to horses.

- 'Positive punishment' means adding something that reduces a behaviour.
- 'Positive reinforcement' means adding something that increases a behaviour.
- 'Negative punishment' means removing/withholding something resulting in a reduction in a behaviour.
- 'Negative reinforcement' means removing something resulting in an increase in a behaviour.

These forms of reinforcement always come in pairs; they can't be solo, and punishment always comes first.

Let's look at how the training method of negative reinforcement works. An example would be applying pressure to the lead rope to ask a horse to walk

forward. This is firstly adding something, so it's a positive and it's a punisher because the pressure is something the horse doesn't like, and it decreases the behaviour of standing still.

Therefore, this first part is positive punishment. The horse walks forward, so we remove the pressure, making it a negative, which increases the likelihood of the behaviour increasing in the future, so it's a reinforcer. This part is negative reinforcement.

Now let's look at positive reinforcement training. Using the same example, we use a cue then withhold the treat, so that's a negative. The horse doesn't like not getting the treat, resulting in decreasing the behaviour of standing still, so that's a punisher. Making this first part negative punishment.

When the horse moves forward we give the treat, so that's a positive, and it's a reinforcer because by giving the treat the behaviour is more likely to be repeated in the future. This part is positive reinforcement.

I hope I've managed to explain this clearly enough, it's a tricky concept to wrap the brain around. One of the great benefits of understanding this, is a reduction in judgement. At present there are people in the 'positive reinforcement' world who judge people using 'negative reinforcement' as being mean to their horses.

And there are people in the 'negative reinforcement' camp judging those using 'positive reinforcement' saying they're spoiling their horses giving lots of treats.

I want to debunk both these views. Both camps are using a form of punishment, and both are using a form of reinforcement. In this world there is an infinite variety of horses and people,



so having multiple styles of training horses is desirable.

What suits one horse may be totally different to the next. And with one single horse some things might work better using 'positive reinforcement' and some with 'negative reinforcement'. I've combined the two up with the same horse many times.

Ultimately, it's not what we do but how. People can use 'positive reinforcement' to turn horses into robotic slaves who'll do anything for the treat and 'negative reinforcement' can be applied painfully to horses.

It's up to us to use any training method with compassion, respect, and lashings of patience, that's the important part.

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Tensegrity therapy for horses

by Les Rees

Recently my research has led me towards the use of Tensegrity therapy for horses.

The term is better known in the world of architecture and civil engineering as a descriptive device to define three dimensional structures that allow for the tension of movement whilst still maintaining safe structural integrity. It's used in towers, roofs, bridges and temporary structures.

In horses, it is used as a means to understand how posture and conformation are maintained by the balance of tension throughout the musculoskeletal system, an idea that certainly appeals to me because that is exactly how the internal body works. Movement is based on a chain of moveable parts consisting of bone, muscle, tendons, ligaments and fascia that coordinate together to create motion whilst maintaining balance within the body.

This works in tandem with the horse's proprioception, the sense that enables it to perceive the location, movement and actions of body parts by using a complexity of sensations emanating from joint position, movement and muscle force. All this information is relayed via sensory receptors throughout the body, most of which are found in the nervous system, muscles, joints tendons and fascia.

Some problems with proprioception can include tripping and bumping into things and a general lack of awareness of personal space; uncoordinated movement; poor postural control;



avoidance of trotting or cantering or bending laterally; and sensitivity to touch causing anxiety and aggression.

Therapy involves an approach that helps to rebalance and regulate the nervous system using gentle movement and touch which I've found to be a profound tool amongst other therapies I use for Equine Sports Massage. This reactivates the input of sensory information to the brain, the result of which enables up to date outgoing information to the body initiating easier movement.

As I understand it, the body's response to injury or impairment is to transmit signals to the brain resulting in outgoing response signals to the site involved. Because horses are stoic by nature, injury or impairment can be difficult to identify when they first occur so is often missed.

As a result, the brain to body information has sent out messages to enable the adaptation of movement in order to avoid further injury. Unfortunately, the downside of this can cause damage to those areas that take

up the slack and the extra workload can set up further problems. This is often referred to as a compensation injury.

Tensegrity therapy also involves the use of miofascial release techniques targeting tight fascia. This wraps around everything inside of the body including the organs, muscles, tendons and ligaments forming a web of supporting tissues and contains a massive number of sensory receptors to enable it to relay information about the functioning of the whole body.

Its primary function is to allow the sliding between the muscles by lubricating the tissues to allow for movement. This is because the layers of fascia have hyaluronic acid in between them allowing for easy gliding movement between the layers. However, fascia can also transmit force and strain to the muscles in order to aid their stabilisation.

Problems can arise when the fascia becomes sticky, restricting movement throughout the fascia lines and this is when miofascial release and massage techniques can help, by warming the tissues aiding the melting of the hyaluronic acid layers to enable unrestricted gliding and subsequent movement.

I'm a great believer in the value of improving my knowledge in the hope that it extends my ability to deliver better outcomes for my horses to live comfortably, particularly as they age. Tensegrity therapy is certainly going to become part of my toolset!

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