

SPEAKING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

(Extract from the U.S.A. version of Perry's book SECRETS OF THE PEOPLE WHISPERER, published by Ulysses Press, CA)

For about ten years I had a horse riding centre in South West England where I started (broke-in) many young horses. One horse in particular taught me a great deal about communicating in ways that the listener can understand: a beautiful Spanish Andalusian mare, which at four years of age came to me with no name. Because of her over-reactive and extremely neurotic behaviour, we called her 'Bananas.' I had never seen a horse with her stunning markings: she had an abundant long mane and her body was very dark grey with bright, white star-bursts. I bought her because I felt sorry for her; she was shut up alone in a stable on a yard where she appeared to have little or no contact with other horses. I have no idea what kind of handling or treatment she had received before she came to me, but suffice to say she was pretty terrified around people and even afraid around other horses.

Over a period of months I tried every method I knew in order to start this youngster and turn her into a riding horse, but whatever I tried she resisted and was determined to teach me something about how I communicated. As time went on I realized her heightened sensitivity meant I had to 'speak' to her incredibly quietly, which - since horses read body language - meant the directions I gave her with my body had to be almost invisible. What Bananas gradually forced me to do was look closely at everything I communicated: my tone of voice; the speed and expression of my movements; the way my internal feelings were expressed; my energy level. I needed to be specific in every communication, so all of my messages were crystal clear. If I gave vague or mixed messages her body would tremble and she would attempt to run

away in panic. If there was nowhere else to run, Bananas would run straight into the nearest person and knock them down as her means of escape.

This horse was so reactive and afraid, that unless I was very understanding, clear, steady and quiet in my communication, she was unable to listen. She demanded that I speak her language or not be heard at all. When I was finally able to connect with her by communicating her way, she opened herself to me and became so trusting, loving and willing that it would bring a lump to my throat and tears to my eyes. What I had done was learned to speak her language: not just the language of horses, but the language of that particular horse, honouring her as a unique individual and in return being honoured by being trusted, respected and heard.