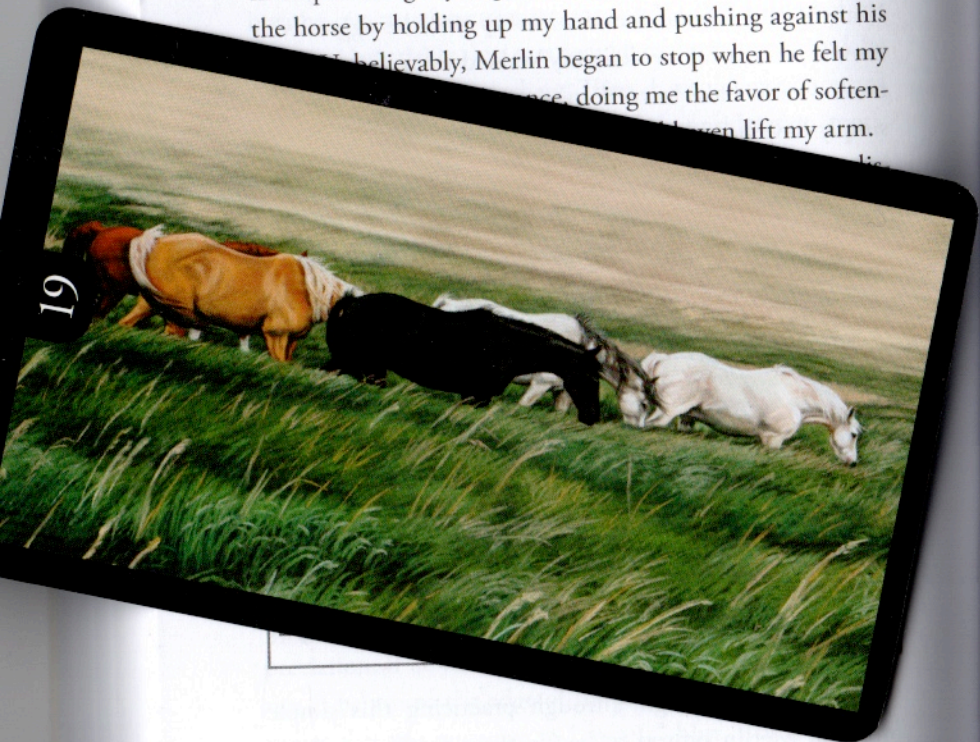


At first I carried it as reinforcement, realizing that I would want Merlin to stop a good ten feet away if he was acting aggressively. Yet because it was a neutral device—it had no blood pressure or heart rate—it proved more effective in emphasizing my request for space than if I had stopped the horse by holding up my hand and pushing against his chest. Surprisingly, Merlin began to stop when he felt my hand on his chest, doing me the favor of softening his stance. He even lift my arm.



## 19. Back to Grazing

Emotional Agility  
Trust in the Universe  
Letting the Story Go

*With the sun massaging their backs and warm winds blowing through their manes, horses of different colors and temperaments graze together in quiet ecstasy.*

## THE GIFT

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When you move through emotions like horses do, when you get the message behind a troubling feeling and change something in response, you experience greater periods of authentic peace and fulfillment.

## THE CHALLENGE

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To truly enjoy life, to see yourself and others in fresh ways, you must be willing to let go of the stories that keep you tied to the past.

## THE JOURNEY

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Horses are models of emotional agility. When something scares them, they startle and bolt. When the danger passes, they relax and go back to grazing. They don't spend the afternoon ruminating over the fact that they had to run from a predator, and they don't stay up all night worrying about future encounters with lions and tigers and bears. Trust in the universe flows through their veins. The world, after all, is a salad to them.

Whether the tone is peaceful or playful, angry or fearful, horses are effusive yet efficient creatures. When trouble arises in the herd, they deal with it and move on. After a few hours of wandering through fields of flowing grass, a stallion may get

a little feisty and push his mares around. If they're not in the mood for his shenanigans, they'll pin their ears and warn him to back off. If he doesn't listen, they'll become more emphatic, kicking out, squealing, and lunging at him if necessary. Yet when he finally gives them space, they'll relax and go back to grazing, joining him later for a nap under a favorite tree. These horses don't need hours of counseling to work out their resentment and disappointment. Both offender and offended get the message behind the anger, change something in response, let the emotion go, and resume their enjoyment of life.

Horses spend so much time milling around, dozing, and reflecting, in fact, that documentaries about them are innately misleading. If films on equine behavior showed fight-or-flight responses in proportion to the hours the average horse spends peacefully nibbling grass and grooming his buddies, these programs would be downright boring to watch. And so we get to see stallion fights, flamboyant posturing, close calls with lions, numerous mating episodes edited together, and beautiful horses rearing and racing across the plains with voluminous crescendos of orchestral sound. We wouldn't have it any other way, of course, because compared with horses, human beings are drama junkies. We love stories filled with excitement and intrigue, and we're very good at telling them. Yet that same gift for storytelling is another one of those double-edged swords.

When we keep telling the same sordid tales over and over again—about how our parents neglected us, how our

best friend betrayed us, how our husbands or wives don't understand us—we can't relax.

The very act of trying to suppress emotion and avoid conflict at all costs makes it worse. It's impossible to experience authentic joy when you've been seething with unresolved anger for years. Yet when you learn to use emotion as information, and have the courage to act on that information, you too can develop the emotional agility to move through troubling feelings, accessing a deeper sense of trust and tranquility underneath.

Of course, we all make mistakes at times, and others make mistakes with us. But when we're willing to learn from these mishaps and move on, relationships become so much gentler and more fulfilling. If only our human herds could learn to move through the inevitable skirmishes and go back to grazing, we'd have more time and energy to kick up our heels and relish life.

#### RELATED WISDOM

- 14. **Eye of the Storm** Handling Troubling Emotions
- 18. **Boundary Dance** The Wisdom of Anger
- 21. **Moonlight's Embrace** Keeping the Heart Open
- 23. **The Herd** Authentic Community



## 20. Close to Shore

Crossroads

Detachment and Surrender

The Pain and Wisdom of Old Age

*An old chestnut mare stands at the edge of a vast ocean that the rest of her herd cannot see. From this height, so close to shore, the grass begins to thin. The mare's bones ache, and her coat is losing its shine, but the view is worth the climb. She can see both worlds now: the herd grazing below and that strange and powerful force surging on the other side. This horse has reached the final crossroads of her life, the place where she will share her hard-won wisdom and surrender to a higher will.*