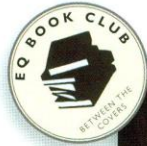


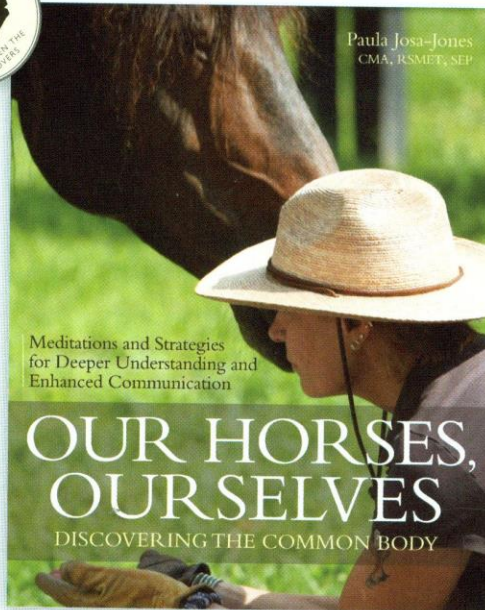
OUR HORSES, OURSELVES

A dancer, choreographer, writer, visual artist, and movement educator, **PAULA JOSAJONES** is known for her visually rich, emotionally charged dance theater.



For years horse trainers and equine experts have sought new ways to tap into that which for many remains elusive: the ability to use the human body and our often neglected power of intent to explain to the horse what we want, as well as receive and understand his answer. We have used various areas of study—from yoga to the martial arts—that are seemingly unrelated to horses and riding to gain new insight as to how to achieve a soft, fluid connection with our equine partners.

Now in this fascinating book, dancer and choreographer Paula Josa-Jones examines this age-old conundrum from a whole new angle, combining her two greatest passions: movement and horses. Through stories, strategies, and over 65 meditations and gentle exercises, Josa-Jones shows us how we can develop greater somatic awareness away from the horse, as well as how being with the horse can help this consciousness continue to evolve. The result is we not only have a closer, more intuitive connection with our horses, but we are more trustworthy, more comfortable in our own skin, and better prepared to act with balance, sensitivity, and kindness in all our relationships.



the confines of stalls, paddocks, and work. They inhabit the spaces we permit, their freedom cut to fit our needs and demands, completely dependent upon our care and feeding.

Like our horses, our bodies express our limits: habitual postures, aches and pains, and a lack of feeling, expression, and imagination are all part of the boundaries that we expect and endure. Habits of mind become engraved in our tissue, cells lose elasticity and fluidity, and our bodies become little stalls instead of open pastures. These physical, mental, and emotional contractions can be reflected



In 1998, Paula Josa-Jones created an inter-species dance company with horses, dancers, and riders. She is an avid student of dressage and a guild-certified Tellington TTEAM Practitioner. She has been called “one of the country’s leading choreographic conceptualists” by the *Boston Globe*.

in our work, relationships, and health, impeding our ability to live joyfully.

The good news is that our bodies can also help us feel and release these limiting beliefs, tensions, and anxieties, and horses can play a crucial role in this process of moving toward greater freedom of body and mind.

According to anthropologist David M. Guss, in tribal societies, “A system of reciprocity existed in which all living things took part.” In other words, what many think of as more “primitive” cultures were not limited by dualism—the “them and us” worldview that is deeply rooted in many aspects of contemporary thinking, particularly in relation to other species. Guss observes that in tribal societies, connections with other humans, the natural world, and all nonhuman forms of life, were continually reaffirmed by song, dance, dress, and other cultural forms. “This ceremonial life of the tribal person was a constant dialogue, with interspecies communication both ordering and transforming it. This was the magical ingredient that seasoned every action, dissolving the individual into

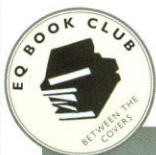
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What constitutes a limit? Is it the body, the mind, the stall, the bridle and reins? Is it our belief that we are separate entities; living lives essentially independent of each other, unable to feel ourselves part of a larger whole? How can we listen more deeply and hear what is being communicated by the natural world—an oak tree, a horse, a singing wren, a friend? How do we negotiate these limits of body, mind, heart, and spirit? Except for wild herds in places like the American West or Chincoteague, the Camargue in France or Mongolia, horses live within



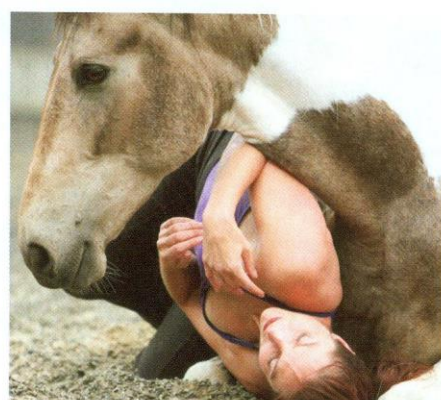
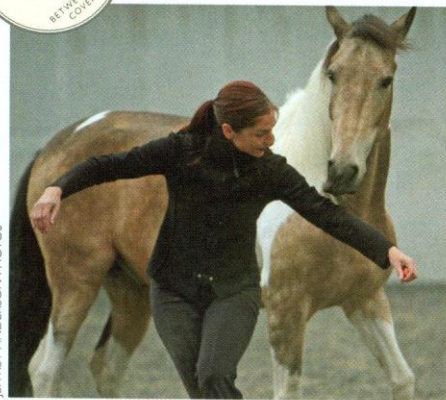
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One winter she decided that living inside was preferable to the cold, and she hid in our living room.

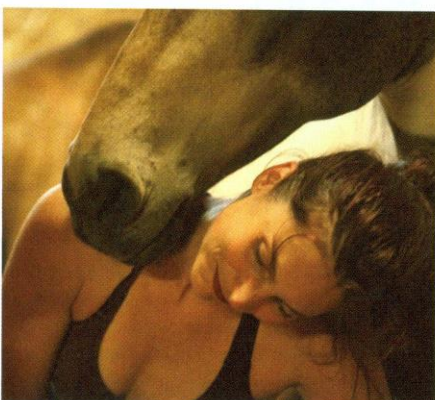
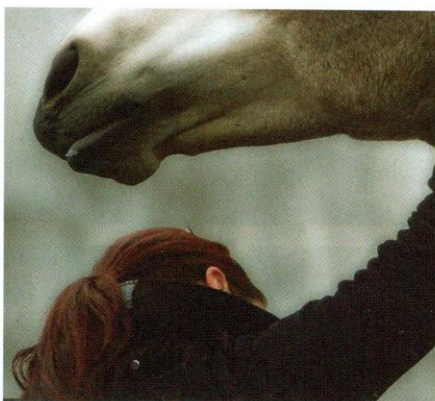
JEFFREY ANDERSON PHOTOS



the greater reality while at the same time defining his relationship and responsibility to it.” Perhaps this is the most devastating limit we experience: the loss of an embodied, numinous relationship with nature in all its forms.

Is there a reliable, readily available way to dissolve our limits, to deepen connection to the larger whole? In an article in *The New York Times*, David DeSteno, a professor of psychology at Northeastern University, states, “Meditation fosters a view that all beings are interconnected.” In his work with psychologist Piercarlo Valdesolo he has found that “any marker of affiliation between two people, even something as subtle as tapping their hands together in synchrony, causes them to feel more compassion for each other when distressed. The increased compassion in meditators, then, might stem directly from meditation’s ability to dissolve the artificial social distinctions—ethnicity, religion, ideology, and the like—that divide us.”

For a time, we lived across from a farm. People would drop off cats, and several of them made their way into our yard, which is how we expanded our population of cat companions. One day a young mother cat appeared in our garden



with three kittens. While we kept the kittens, the mother was very feral, so we spayed her and then released her. I named her Mamacita. We built a little shelter outside our door with a heated pad where we would feed her daily. It seemed that she wanted to stay, but we could not

touch her, and she would flee if she saw us.

I spent many hours, and soon many years, sitting quietly, waiting, allowing Mamacita to sniff my fingers, then eventually she let me touch her head. One winter she decided that living inside was preferable to the cold, and she hid in our living room, declining to leave when we offered her the outdoors. Again, I would enter, lie down nearby or sit quietly and wait. After perhaps six years, I was able to hold her. It is now 10 years since Mamacita first appeared. She lives in a small room off my studio with a cat door. When I come in to feed her, she calls plaintively to me, and does not eat until we have had a luxurious long snuggle. She still has her spooky, fearful, hiding moments, but for the most part she has overcome the limits of her wildness.

I tell this story to demonstrate that meditation is not only sitting on a cushion. It includes moments that invite awareness and a quiet, receptive mind. Touching and being touched, dancing, singing, and writing can all be forms of meditation when we bring intention and conscious focus into the heart of each moment.

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