

Comparing Appys and Urchins

From time to time a clinic participant will ask me about a book or a video they've seen—case in point the dvd set put out by Philippe Karl, formerly of the Cadre Noir of Saumur. This is not to denigrate the work of Monsieur Karl, but merely to point out that all learning materials are not created equal, and before you naively ingest something whole, it would be wise to understand the viewpoint from which it arose.

I sat one evening with a student in Costa Rica watching the Karl videos. His system is self contained and carries its own logic, but it's not what we in the mainstream of FEI/USEF sanctioned dressage would call "normal." If you understand that the goals and, therefore, the methods, are different, then you can simply decide if it's your cup of tea or what ideas within it are worth incorporating in your own riding.

But my student did not have this awareness, so she took it all in at face value. As the video proceeded, she would ask, "Is that the seat bone I should sit on?"

"Well, no."

"Is that what the contact should look like?"

"Uh, no."

"Is that enough energy?"

"Not for the show ring."

"Connection?"

"No."

And so on.

I'm not saying it's harmful. In fact, it's pretty interesting. With his upper level horse, the ease of movement and relaxation is admirable. It's worth watching. But you have to know what it does and does not purport to be. And if you want to play the "show game," you have to play by the show rules and standards.

Alternatives to "our" way abound, especially on the internet. Here's another lifted from a website. Make of it as you will:

The Turns of the Rider's Hand

I. The horse's posture and the rider's hands interact

- 1. While the horse is long and low the rider's palms are turned down*
- 2. When the horse begins to elevate the rider's palms face each other. Hands are upright*
- 3. After the horse has mobilized the rider's palms can turn up*

Note: In the following lessons the rider's calm body control, direction of eyes and intent play the leading part.

II. In a balanced horse a turn of the rider's two hands produces side stepping. It is the same movement as a leg yield. The rider may also turn hands individually.

- 1. When one palm turns up and the other palm turns down both thumbs point into one direction. The rider looks into their direction and softly closes both legs. The balanced horse follows the direction of thumbs and eyes, and steps sideways.*
- 2. The rider's outside hand, turned palm down, effects the croup fore. The inner hand remains upright.*
- 3. The rider's inside hand, turned palm down, effects the shoulder fore (=croup out). The outer hand remains upright.*

Note: The most logical introduction to the turns of the rider's hand is done with both hands, palm down. Raising one hand into upright position impacts the same-sided shoulder and passes on to the diagonal hind leg.

III. When the horse elevates much has changed. The rider's hands now work differently

1. A movement that at once turns the palm up, turns in the wrist (and with it, shortens the rein) bends the horse and brings the croup in. The outside hand remains upright.

2. Turning the outside hand, palm up, brings the rein closer to the horse's neck, distributes the horse's weight toward the diagonal inner hind leg and by the same token effects the three track shoulder in. The inside hand remains upright.

3. Interestingly enough the effect of the turned up outside palm continues, even when the hand moves away from the neck and becomes a directional rein. The inside hand works propulsively as it moves towards the horse's neck.

Note: Shoulder in and croup in displace fore and hindquarters individually. The following lesson displaces the forehand into one direction while displacing the hindquarters into the opposite direction. The horse thus turns around the center directly under the rider's upright vertebra.

IV. The turn around the center prepares the swivel, which in turn prepares for free transitions between all lateral movements. The effects of the turning hand follow the same logic.

1. To initiate the turn around the center the rider leads the horse on a volte and turns both thumbs towards the outside. The horse's shoulders come in and the diameter of the volte diminishes until, finally, the horse turns around its center, which is located right under the rider's upright vertebra. The inside hand, palm down, leads.

2. If in the turn around the center the horse is kept straight (that is, the vertebra is lined up in a straight line) the horse tends to elevate. The rider's hands remain the same. The outside hand, palm up, now leads.

3. Coming to a gentle halt and then turning the thumbs into the opposite direction prepare for the counter turn around the center. To initiate it the rider curls the inner hand in/palm up. The horse reverses the direction of movement from head to tail and eases into the counter turn around the center. In the process it poises.

Note: The counter turn around the center prepares for fluid counter croup in movements on straight and curved lines and helps to initiate the back up.

Got that?

Now just be careful of what you do with it!