

Ulrike Dietmann

ON THE WINGS OF HORSES

**A Hero's Journey into the Heart
of the Creature**

A Book for You

Foreword by Linda Kohanov

Cover Art © Kim McElroy

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Original title: "Auf den Flügeln der Pferde – eine Heldinnenreise ins Herz der Kreatur" © 2010, Wu Wei Verlag, Isabella Sonntag, www.wu-wei-verlag.com

Translated by: Andrea Zwingelberg-Woods and Roy Woods

Publisher: [spiritbooks](http://spiritbooks.com), Kirchheim/Teck, www.spiritbooks.de

ISBN: 978-3-9815421-4-1

Cover image: Cover Art "King Midas" © Kim McElroy, spiritofhorse.com

Cover design: Antje Stephan www.epona-spirit.de

Publishing services: www.tredition.de

Printed in Germany

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For the shining stars in my life

Martin, Lea, Joel

*Some things, we know deep in our soul,
are true, no matter what anybody may say about them.*

Shelley Rosenberg, horse trainer

Important tip: The methods introduced here are no substitute for an education in riding or handling horses. Neither the author nor the publishing company will take any responsibility for results which originate directly or indirectly from reading this book.

Foreword by Linda Kohanov

How often do we read about the mythic or historical adventures of heroes, barely noticing the silent heroes they ride? What is a hero, after all? Someone who transcends survival instincts to face the unknown, sometimes enduring terrifying ordeals for a greater cause? Someone who remains poised in the midst of turmoil, who prevails despite the odds to capture a treasure from the gods, an uplifting innovation, enduring significant hardships to bring some glistening piece of magic back to the tribe?

By this definition, horses are every bit as heroic as their riders, perhaps even more so. For thousands of years, pioneers faced considerable hardships as they explored the world on horseback, charting territory they would have struggled to traverse on foot, reveling in a primal experience of freedom, strength, and speed so exhilarating that we still measure our most sophisticated engines in units of horse power.

Warriors, carried by their loyal mounts, fought with swords, spears, and arrows, later enduring musket and cannon fire. That men could be persuaded to stare death in the face like this is one thing. But riding a *prey* animal, a vegetarian, a species that much prefers flight over fight, anywhere near the scent of blood---let alone the din of absolute chaos and unmitigated agony---goes against every hard-wired impulse the horse possesses. If, as scientists once insisted, animals are machines programmed for survival, ruled exclusively by instinct, such an act would be impossible.

In the twenty-first century, of course, increasing research supports our experience that animals are sentient beings with an incredible capacity to feel, learn, love, and even perform altruistic acts. Those of us who work with horses in the fields of equine-

facilitated learning and therapy, however, see something even more miraculous happening. Horses are teaching people how to be better leaders, parents, spouses, companions, and innovators. Whether or not we literally climb on the backs of these powerful, soulful beings, horses uplift us, filling us with courage, awe, wonder, and delight, sometimes awakening gifts we didn't know we had.

For many equestrians, this happens accidentally as they prepare for a show or take a trail ride. But what if we purposefully tap the horse's ability to make us better humans?

Ulrike Dietmann offers a heartwarming, empowering program for doing just that. In this book, she uses the model of the hero's journey, developed by the late author and mythologist Joseph Campbell, helping us consciously, and thereby much more efficiently, access what horses have been silently teaching riders, heroes, pioneers, leaders, and artists for millennia. Her graceful, intelligent writing is also clear and easy to understand as she makes some normally complex personal development principles surprisingly accessible.

Horses are incredible teachers, but they need good translators to bring their wisdom to a wider human audience. Ulrike is a great translator of horse wisdom. Read this book, follow the activities, and answer the poignant, perceptive questions she asks, and I promise you, your life will change. You will become the hero of your own unique story, and you will realize once and for all, that, even when you wander off the main trail and get lost in the woods, you're never alone in this world. Every heroic journey is a partnership between the rider and her horse.

Linda Kohanov, Author of *The Tao of Equus*, *Riding between the Worlds*, *Way of the Horse*, and *The Power of the Herd*

The preface is important

If you want to profit personally from this book, I suggest you read the preface first, because here you will discover how best to work with the book.

This is a very personal journey into areas of your feelings and your consciousness which you may not have entered before. I will guide you on this journey, but you must take the individual steps yourself.

There is only ever *one* first reading of a book and that first reading will have the strongest effect. Therefore, I advise you to read the chapters one after another and to carry out the tasks as you read each respective chapter. The book takes the form of a journey in which each step is based on the previous ones.

If you first leaf through the book to see what to expect, you will approach it later with a more guarded attitude and forfeit some of the opportunities the journey offers. Clearly it is your decision, I just want you to be forewarned.

The book adopts the formula of a hero's journey.

What is the hero's journey?

The hero's journey is a mythological model developed by the world-renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell. He discovered this structure by questioning what all stories, in all cultures and at all times have in common. The hero's journey is a venture into the unconscious to attain insight and personal growth.

It is a valuable model to describe the special experiences people can have if they connect with horses in an authentic way.

The heroic journey applies both to ancient and archaic myths as well as to Hollywood movies. Hollywood often uses the heroic journey model in developing screenplays. The first blockbuster film developed in this way was *Starwars* by George Lucas. A film like *Pretty Woman* also embodies the structure of the heroic journey.

But this is not our concern here, I merely wanted to give you some information on the background. It was through my work as a scriptwriter that I became acquainted with the hero's journey and since then have applied it to everything I write. For many years I have also been teaching the hero's journey.

I have tested the journey in all its conceivable variations and have continuously had excellent results with it. It is a key not only to story narrative, but also a key to being.

After I learnt to communicate with horses, and to work with them in a completely new way, I wondered whether the heroic journey could also provide a model for capturing these elusive experiences. My answer was to write this book.

My work with horses was inspired by Linda Kohanov's books and the Epona Approach which she developed in cooperation with other innovative horse people. I have learnt the Epona Approach and I work as an Eponaquest Advanced Instructor in Germany and worldwide. I teach the Hero's Journey based on the Epona Approach and offer my own Apprenticeship as a Hero's Journey Instructor.

The basic idea of this approach is that it is not in fact the horse that must change, but the human being. Only then is true communication with a horse possible, only when the person becomes what he or she really is: a creature of nature, a creature which strives for love, for connection and for development like all living beings.

Horses can be our guides on this path. The hero's journey connects the ancient myths of the gods and goddesses, priests and priestesses, male and female shamans with the modern stories of our civilization which are based on our individual psychology. The hero's journey incorporates both contemporary people and primeval initiates. One thing above all else happens on this journey: we draw closer to what horses really have to tell us and teach us. And through contact with horses our perception of all creation and of ourselves changes. We become what we have always been: natural human beings.

Different models of the hero's journey exist, all of which, however, follow the same basic principle: the growth of personality by confronting our shadow. This can be painful, but ultimately brings forth healing.

This book, then, will contribute to your personal growth and to your better understanding of horses, and to a harmonious relationship with these remarkable creatures. Whether you are a horse owner or leisure rider, whether you work professionally with horses or simply feel drawn to these beautiful creatures, you will profit in your own personal way from this book.

Each chapter deals with one step of the journey. Each step has its own content and tasks. You will find a summary of the tasks at the end of the book.

With every step there are several tasks to work on. Your answers and discoveries will coalesce to form a larger picture and a wider perspective.

The tasks are marked in bold type. You can work on them while reading the individual chapters, wait till the end of the chapter, or if you prefer: wait till you have finished reading the book as a whole.

The essence of a journey is progression. It is not so much a question of reaching a goal but of taking the individual steps. And yet there is a broader framework within which everything finds its place. Behind each step there is an order which relates all the parts to each other and imbues them with meaning.

You can trust the dynamics of the hero's journey to carry you forwards. Therefore it is important that you take each step at a time and in the right sequence. If you change the order, you will reach a different result.

In each chapter you will discover the significance of the individual steps. I will recount events which I myself have experienced as well as stories I have been told by others whose credibility I have verified. In some stories I have combined different incidents to form a single story in order to clarify the meaning. In many cases I have changed the names of the persons involved to protect their identity. Furthermore you will learn about the background of intuitive communication with horses, about how to find true relationship and gain access to the wisdom and healing power of nature.

I recommend that you write a journal while you are working on the tasks, so as to put your thoughts in order and to gain an overview of your development. You can also draw or paint or choose any other form of expression you feel comfortable with. You do not have to fulfill all the tasks meticulously. Select what appeals to you. Feel quite free to follow your own intuition and inspiration.

Don't try to be perfect, just be honest with yourself. This is quite enough.

I wish you a wonderful journey

Ulrike



Step One Who Are You?

None of this means anything. This is not reality, I think as I sit with my eyes closed, being carried along by a horse. What I consider to be my world, the perceptible world, is just a segment of a larger whole. My familiar world drops off me like an old skin and underneath it something new, something tempting opens up. Temptation and raging fear alternate. What is happening to me? My whole body is trembling, while the horse beneath me rocks like a boat on the high seas.

In the sky the seagulls from the sea nearby are shrieking, they tear open the air, a noise which echoes in my legs, arms and above all my chest where the battle takes place between remaining in control and letting go. Between clinging to the familiar world and letting go. Am I losing my mind?

The images come, they come more and more frequently and faster. I am wrapped in the warm fur of tiredness, and the rocking

of the horse's body calms me. But suddenly not even the horse gives me any security any more. At the same time as a new wave of fear floods over me, my grip on the horse falters.

The 'Journey Ride', a guided ride on a horse's back, requires that I keep my eyes closed. My thighs tense up as if I was sitting on a horse for the first time.

What I once knew, what I was able to do, who I was, all this has dissolved. In my inner eye the image of an Arabian horse appears, its eyes wide with fear—and I feel very vulnerable.

I have always been like that: defenseless. I was just not aware of it.

Only now do I know that not a breath, not a blink of the eyes, not a swish of my horse's tail occurs without it finding a place in some inexplicable order. I hear the horse sigh. It is his way of telling me that he shares my opinion.

It is the moment when everything begins, when I begin to perceive my world not just with my mind, but with my heart, my body, my whole being. The moment when the horses takes me with them on a journey, an adventure starts which is as old as mankind, and which threatens to be forgotten in our contemporary civilization. A journey into the heart of creation, into the heart of everything living, into the heart of the creature. A million-year-old journey which begins anew again and again, with every living creature that is born.

The sun must have pushed through the bunched clouds. Its warmth strokes my face, warms my shoulders and something in me shifts. I have accepted my fear, the gelding's sighs have calmed me down, he is here, I feel it and through him I am also here. My

thighs relax, I have arrived here on the horse's back.

I ask my horse partner: Am I destined to be a spiritual author—whatever that may mean? The term *spiritual* has not been part of my vocabulary up to now. And neither do I know where the question suddenly comes from. And even less: where it will lead me. Up to now I have been an author of horse fiction, of romantic novels and commercial texts.

His name is Ambrose. He sends me the picture of a universe sprinkled with countless stars. I nod. This is your source, Ambrose adds. The source of all creativity. I think writing is spiritual by nature because it is creative and because all creativity arises from a world beyond what is conceivable. And not only all creativity but everything living is fed by two worlds, from this world and that, the known and the hidden worlds which I am just getting to know.

You will find many sources of inspiration, says Ambrose. It is strange that a horse is talking to me. Or maybe not. It is only strange from my old, limited viewpoint. Ambrose does not seem to find it in the least strange. For him it seems to be the most natural thing in the world. I like this new perspective.

The image of the star-spangled universe changes into the steppes. That I see these images seems to me to be completely normal, and at the same time I know that Ambrose is sending them to me. I see a valley with gently rising hills which fades into eternity, a basin curving gently inwards with the wind blowing through it. The grass sways as if stroked by a hand. It is yellow and dried up and the hooves sink silently into it.

Now my fear has completely disappeared. That is how we go through life, says Ambrose, you and I, free and yet connected. Not only now but always. Our soul is always here, in the place where

freedom dwells, the place where we are at one.

What else have you got for me? The universe, the steppes ... Is it presumptuous to ask for even more? Come on, Ambrose replies, where did you get that from? Who says that wisdom, love, communication only come in small doses?—I think only humans can come up with something like that.

The journey continues. Ambrose shows me a golden chalice. The sun is rising over the edge of it. I stand with the chalice in my hand before the spreading flood of light and I grin about something incomprehensible which rises in me like the glowing sun. I am completely filled by this light which floods my body and releases a barely describable feeling of well-being.

The horse continues to rock beneath me, but I now feel I am in complete communion with him. The border between Ambrose's body and mine dissolves. I feel his muscles, I feel how he lifts his legs, I feel how relaxed he is as he walks. I should always ride like this. This is the way to sit: the true rider's seat.

The golden chalice.

What does it mean, I ask Ambrose. The very moment I ask the question, I have the answer.

The chalice is the universal vessel, it stands for everything. For the soul, for creation, for the world we live in. The chalice stands for the light which becomes form. It is the original form from which all else arises. It can become everything, god, goddess, art, knowledge. I think of the cornucopias on the illustrations of the old goddesses, think of the Holy Grail sought by knights, of the Chalice from the Last Supper of Christianity.

I want to journey on, to know more, because I have gained