

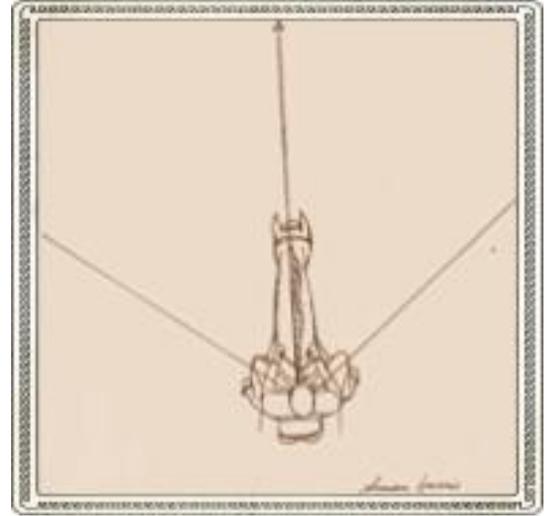
Using 'Soft Eyes'

Thursday, May 01, 2008

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What are “Soft Eyes”? Soft Eyes are you looking with wide open eyes and peripheral awareness, being aware of your entire field of vision and allowing yourself to feel sensations from within. Soft Eyes are much more than just a way of “looking.” It is a method of becoming distinctly aware of what is happening around you, beneath you and inside of you. This awareness includes feeling and hearing, as well as seeing. Using soft eyes, you become aware of “the whole” – yourself, your body, your horse’s body beneath you and behind you, as well as all that is in front of you and around you.

Here is an experiment that will help you practice using Soft Eyes. You can first try this experiment off your horse and then again while sitting on your horse. While sitting quietly, chose an object in front of you and focus very intently on that object. Keep looking intently at the object and concentrate on its outline, shape, density and color, very acutely taking in everything about the object. This is what I call the use of “hard eyes.” Now look at that object and without glazing or making your eyes fuzzy, R..E..L..A..X your eyes. Allow your eyes to take in the largest possible expanse above and below as well as to the right and to the left of the object. Sitting comfortably with your eyes wide open, work on having the feeling of going within yourself as your eyes encompass everything that comes into your field of vision, all the while still aiming at the central object. Practice switching back and forth between hard eyes and Soft Eyes.



When you try this experiment on your horse, try using “hard eyes” and focusing first on your horse’s ears. Then with Soft Eyes, look above your horse’s ears and with your vision very wide and open, encompass everything that comes into your vision, all the while going into yourself and increasing your awareness of yourself and your horse. You will see that using Soft Eyes encompasses a method of becoming distinctly aware of what is going on around you, beneath you and inside of you. Through the use of Soft Eyes, it will be easier to feel what your horse’s back is doing to your seat. You will experience a greater field of vision, increased awareness of your own body and your horse’s body. You will experience less tension and feel easier and freer movement.

Drawing by Susan Harris, Senior Level IV Clinician from Cortland, NY.