



Sally Swift Notes (3)

Lengthening Like an Elastic Band

If you pull an elastic band from both ends it gets longer.

If you put two spots on the band, and pull both ends, the spots move further apart.

If you anchor or ground one end of the elastic band and pull the other end in, a upward direction, the two spots follow upwards with the top one going farthest. These spots represent our upper body and pelvis.

This is a great image for the buttress or any lengthening of the body on or off the horse. This is especially good image for half halts. In the buttress and the half halt, you simply allow the loin (the lower back) to expand, which it will do if you choose to allow it. Consciously trying to expand the loin produces back bracing. The elastic-band image produces no muscle tension, even in the buttress, just as there is no muscle tension in the unbendable arm.

A problem of semantics arises when using the "elastic band" in teaching Centered Riding. If you urge riders to lengthen their bodies, they sometimes tend to hear it as "lengthen the stride of the horse". You can ask people to lengthen when they are on their feet and it works. But once the rider is on a horse, use the term "center and grow". If you teach the elastic band lengthening with the buttress when the students are on their feet, they will be able to "center and grow" when mounted. Then only an occasional reminder to "pull the elastic band" is needed.

If you transpose the shoulder-pushing of the buttress to pulling with the hands, as if holding the reins, the elastic band image works wonderfully. The "horse" person must cross her arms at the wrist so the "rider's" person may hold the "horse's" hands, thumbs on top. The "rider's" closed fingers remain soft as if holding the reins. The "horse's" fingers do the gripping. The "horse" gradually increases the pull as the "rider" grounds herself and pulls her elastic band. Make sure "rider's" joints are free. Just like the release of the neck under the skull to "go on the bit" and the half halt are instantly used and gone, so is the pull of the elastic band. The lengthening doesn't stay. But each thought of lengthening, of pulling the elastic band, on the part of the rider is distinctly felt as a pulsation of power for the "horse". This is also true in the "push" of the normal buttress. This is why "center and grow" is such an excellent form of half halt or re-balance on the real horse who does not question that form of power.