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THE GIFTS OF THE HORSE

By Tim Hayes

It's the holiday season: families, friends, eating, travel, reflection, spirituality and gifts. Before running out to buy the new iPhone or that GAP gift certificate, I'd like to share some thoughts with all of us lucky enough to have a horse in our life. As the years go by I become more aware of and grateful for the amazing gifts I receive not only from my horse Austin but from every horse I try and help.

I believe happiness is a feeling that spontaneously originates inside me. No matter what things or situations I have on the outside, if I look to them to keep me happy, my happiness eventually disappears. If I'm feeling good about myself, if my relationships are working positively, most of the time I feel happy. So the question becomes; if my happiness begins to fade as I start to get scratches on my new car, what can I do to help me feel good about myself and stay happy on the inside.

For me the answer is the same advice I got when I was a little kid: It's called "The Golden Rule:" Treat others the way I want them to treat me and treat myself the same way. If I have a happy relationship with myself, I have a very good chance of having a happy relationship with others; spouse, partner, father, mother, son, daughter, friends, boss, etc. When my relationships bring me happiness, I feel even happier. It's the ideal win-win situation.

The greatest teacher of The Golden Rule and all its ingredients I have ever known is the horse. From years of studying how horses treat each other in their relationships I now understand that they are treating me the same as they would another horse. I have discovered they possess the same 12 "Golden Rule" qualities that I want to be treated with from others as surely as they want me to use to treat them: accep-

tance, kindness, understanding, patience, generosity, trust, consistency, honesty, justice, respect, compassion and forgiveness. Another way to say it is, "Love."

My horse is a prey animal whose survival depends on getting along with others. His natural world is living outside with his herd-mates. When I show up he accepts me as I am, never questions my race, my gender or my age. He's kind and doesn't seek to hurt me. If I get bit, kicked or dumped it's because I haven't taught him to respect my vulnerability and not to treat me like another horse with his play or communication. If I am clear, consistent and patient in my requests he always understands me.

He's a generous soul who never complains if I ask him to let a little kid pet his nose or sit on his back. He's always honest with me and consistently tells me the truth about what he thinks and feels whether he's scared, angry or happy. He's fair and just with me. If he tries to ask or tell me something and I don't listen and acknowledge him, he let's me know I'm being disrespectful by resisting my requests of him.

Finally with great compassion and forgiveness he continually tolerates all my mistakes and inadequacies. If I allow my horse to help me become a better person then all my relationships with both horses and humans will improve. This will bring me the kind of happiness I could never find in a store. My horse, love in its finest form. What a gift. © Tim Hayes 2013

Natural Horsemanship articles by Tim Hayes are at:
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