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# Happy Holidays Happy Trails

From Tim Hayes

**I**t's hard to believe we are at the end of the year and beginning the holidays. It's always nice to buy gifts for loved ones but perhaps this year in particular we might also consider some of the gifts we have already been given. 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 the wonderful gifts I receive not only from my horse Austin but from every horse I meet.

I believe happiness is a feeling that spontaneously originates inside me when I feel good about myself. When, however, I depend on things outside myself to make me happy, my happiness eventually disappears. 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 good about myself and happy inside. It's the ideal win-win situation.

The greatest teacher of The Golden Rule I have ever known is the horse. Horses not only treat each other with this rule, they treat humans the same way. Values that are natural for horses are often forgotten by humans: acceptance, 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. His natural world is living outside with his herd-mates. He has survived by learning how to get along with others. When I show up he accepts me as I am. He 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 human vulnerability and not to treat me like another horse.

If I am clear, consistent and patient in my requests he understands me. He's a generous soul who doesn't complain if I ask him to let a little kid pet his nose or sit on his back. He's totally 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 tell me something and I don't listen or acknowledge him, he let's me know I'm being disrespectful by resisting or ignoring me.

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.

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To set up a Clinic, Class or Private session contact Tim at:  
631-329-5840; or at [tim@hayesisforhorses.com](mailto:tim@hayesisforhorses.com)

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