

Integrity and Horsemanship

BY JOANNE MACBRIDE

Blessed is the horse who is fortunate enough to have an owner who has an understanding of what integrity is and means; and one who strives to live within that integrity.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary refers to integrity as "wholeness; soundness; uprightness; honesty" How does one behave when acting within ones own integrity? How does integrity apply to horsepeople and their relationships with their horses?

Integrity is when what we think, what we say, what we do and what we are is in agreement, harmony and balance. It is about becoming aware of what is in you...of announcing it, pronouncing it and birthing it. Having integrity puts one in the position of striving to preserve it. Struggling to maintain integrity is a lifelong challenge. Chogyam Trungpa said: "To be a warrior is to learn to be genuine in every moment of your life."

Integrity is about doing the right thing.

- 1) For horse people this means being impeccable with your word. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself and others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and well-being.
- 2) Try not to take things personally. What others do and say is a reflection of their own reality. If you are able to become immune to the opinions and perceptions of others you will not suffer needlessly.
- 3) Don't make assumptions. Find the courage to express yourself freely and to ask questions. Communicate as clearly as you are able to. This will help you to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and anger.
- 4) Do your best always; knowing that your best will change from time to time and from moment to moment. Simply do your best under any circumstance. This will help you to avoid self-judgement and regret.
- 5) Protect the integrity of your horse. Seek knowledge about your horse's care and maintenance. Samuel Johnson said that "Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful."

Find the best feed and feeding program for your horse. Have your hay tested for nutritional value. Feed the best hay Provide fresh water. Have ample turnout. Turn out daily. Provide fresh, clean bedding daily; ensure that your horse's barn has adequate ventilation. Provide adequate medical care. Have a vaccination and deworming program and stick to it! Have your horse checked yearly

by a competent and knowledgeable veterinarian. Find a competent farrier. Check on his/her qualifications. Have your horse's feet done regularly. If your horse is sick, call the vet. When in doubt, err on the side of caution...call the vet. Learn veterinarian first aid. Familiarise yourself with horse-related illnesses. Know the signs of distress. Learn your horse's vital signs and how to read them. And, finally, if you do not have the resources to meet a horse's basic needs...do not own one. This is integrity.

Protecting your horse's integrity means not pushing her beyond her limits. It means listening to her as she communicates to you through her behaviour (always look at what is just beneath the behaviour). Is she telling you that she is sore or tired? Is she telling you that she is a western horse and not a saddleseat horse; or that she is a saddleseat horse and not a dressage horse?

Do not compromise your horse's integrity by putting excessive weight on her feet, which will shorten her soundness and her usefulness. Make allowances when she is having a bad day.

Establish a relationship. Have a structure. Build on basics. Begin at the beginning. Warm her up slowly. Cool her out sufficiently. Build you horse's integrity. Start from the ground. Ask, don't demand. Give.

Take. Let go. Breathe. Reward often. Nurture. Breathe. Encourage, encourage, and encourage some more. Be gentle. Be kind. Be honest. The gift that we receive from building our horse's integrity is the creation of our own.

"Animals hold us to what is present, to who we are at the time. What is obvious to an animal is not the embellishment that fattens our emotional resumes but what's bedrock and current in us: aggression, fear, insecurity happiness or equanimity. Because they have the ability to read our involuntary tics and scents, we're transparent to them and thus exposed we are finally ourselves."

~ Gretel Ehrlich

Good fortune to all of you who continue to strive for your own integrity as well as that of your horses.

Authors referenced:

Mahatma Ghandi, Chogyam Trungpa, Meister Eckhart, Don Miguel, Ruiz, Barbara Paley, Samuel Johnson, May Midkiff, Gayle Lampe. ♦