

# Every Coin Has Two Sides

*When it comes to learning, seeing both sides will double your wealth.*

**W**hen we are made aware of a new or different idea or philosophy, we should always ask, “What is the other side of that coin?” Two sides are necessary for enough balance to stand on its edge. If all our coins are lying down, we can only see one side. That means that we are probably functioning in half truth. If that particular half truth has no consequence, it doesn’t matter very much. When it comes to the horse-human combination, one side of a coin can be monumental. Half truth from us will be confusing for our horses simply because we deprive them of ever being able to get the big picture.

It is probably safe to say that most horse owners really want to get it right. That desire puts them on a quest for knowledge, which is as it should be. They want to give their horses the best care possible and enjoy them in whatever way they get that enjoyment. For that to happen in the fullest way possible, we must become aware that every coin has two sides. When we discover a coin of new information, it is probably lying on its side. After we get a good look at the exposed side, we must pick it up and look at the other side — that is, if we want to have a balanced point of view.

What makes the whole coin thing difficult is the problem of definition of terms and concepts. Do we define ideas in terms of feelings or real knowledge? If we are motivated by our feelings, there is going to be a problem because a horse does not live in a world of the same kind of feelings that we are capable of. I didn’t say the horse has no feelings or emotions. To believe that would be to grind off one side of a very essential coin and destroy the value of that coin. In the horse’s world there is not much of what we would call pity or mercy. Horses are animals and are subject to animal instincts and their own animal world view. They can and will manifest some slight shades of pity and mercy, but without the benefit of abstract reasoning.

Some people say, “When there is trouble in the horse-human relationship, it is always the human’s fault.” This is almost true. The implication in this idea is that the human taught the horse to be bad or

made him bad. Let’s turn that coin over. The first side of the coin is true. People are at fault. The second side is also true. Horses are at fault. Horses do not become bad just because they want to be bad. They are doing what seems best or right to them at the time under the given circumstances. The problem is, what is right for them is not right for us.

The youngster that nips and bites sees no harm at all in his behavior. He is doing natural horse behavior. He may be playful at the moment or he may actually be trying to intimidate somebody. So now there is a dilemma. He’s just being a horse, but it’s not fitting well in our world. In that light, his action is bad. He now has to be informed of the status of his action. For that to happen, we have to do something to him that is clearly punitive — and with enough force for him to take us seriously. If the behavior continues, we didn’t hurt him badly enough and he probably thinks it’s a game. Anyone who cannot differentiate between injuring a horse and simply hurting him in a constructive manner is going to have ongoing and unnecessary struggles with some horses.

A horse bites out of his own free will. That implies that the horse is guilty entirely on his own. There are some in our horse world who refuse to say that the horse has any guilt or responsibility. That view is demeaning to the horse. It assumes that the horse has no will or opinion or, to put it simply, that it is stupid, mechanical and incapable of considering. The horse is at fault for biting but the human is at fault if nothing is done about it. The human didn’t teach the horse to bite, but if nothing is done, the person is teaching the horse that it is OK to bite.

One night we were watching a National Geographic Channel documentary on Yellowstone National Park. They went to great lengths to show the benefits of the return of the timber wolf. They told of a balance that was restored by bringing back the wolf. They said if a wolf pack can kill a bison in 15 minutes or less, they know the bison is sick or weak. Normally it takes a wolf pack two hours to kill a bison. The wolves cull the herd of the weak, the sick and the old, thus maintaining the physical integ-

rity of that herd. That's one side of the coin, and a painfully legitimate one, I might add. For the other side of the coin, you might want to talk to the bison about the benefits of a slow and miserable way to die.

Natural selection is rampant with pain and torture. I know of a horse that was tied inside the barnyard. When the herd boss discovered him, he beat him up so badly that he had permanent nerve damage and an altered way of moving. One side of the coin says the horse was beat up because he couldn't get away. The other side says the horse was beat up because the dominant horse had the chance to do what he really wanted to do — that is, unless he is mechanical and simply genetically programmed. If you object to my position on this and say it was merely instinct at work, then the word *natural* has sinister implications.

I recently saw a sign outside a grocery store that said, "Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative." That really got me thinking. One side of that coin was, "Mindless repetition will get old quickly" or "Doing things the exact same way all the time reveals the shallowness of one's thinking or the limitations of one's knowledge." That's what the message of the sign seemed to be. However, inconsistency in the regarding of basic principles is the refuge of the confused. How basic principles are applied can and should be varied in our relationship with our horses. It will keep them honest and fresh. That is not the same as mechanical repetition that truly is the last refuge of the unimaginative.

The last coin to be considered here is anatomical in nature. The part of us that makes us conscious, rational and human is the combination of our heart and head. The term *heart* is generally viewed as the seat of emotions, feelings and conscience. Of course, if a human heart is dissected, those characteristics will be nowhere to be found. It is simply a manner of speaking. The heart-head combination is a perfect set of checks and balances. If a child is chasing a ball that rolled across the street, you have the choice of grabbing his arm and probably wrenching it and hurting it, or allowing the car to hit the boy. You are willing to risk hurting the child a little to save him from hurting a lot or dying. As it turns out, you pulled that little arm out of its socket. The doctor, of course, immediately suspects child abuse and you are

investigated. Word gets around that you are abusive and charges are brought against you. You and the child are the only ones who know what happened. The child recovers and after a few years go by and the understanding part of his mind wakes up, he sees the incident in a new light. A growing sense of gratefulness characterizes his view of the incident. His personal testimony is, "You guys got it all wrong, my mom saved my life!"

Do you see how crazy this heart-head combination has become in some sections of the horse world? I'll let you sort out the heart-head activity in the example above. Just remember, your horse is a lot more concerned about *why* you do something than about *what* you do. You can't simply flip that coin. What needs why and why needs what. It is both possible and necessary that our hearts and heads function simultaneously.

One day, while visiting with a vet and his student, I mentioned Cesar Milan and his wisdom and skill in handling very difficult dogs. The student said that the university she was attending did not like Milan. I was appalled. I asked what could possibly be the problem. She said it is because he has hurt a couple of dogs. But the man has saved thousands of dogs from being euthanized! Through his TV show and his personal work, his love for dogs and his understanding of how to really help them have given them a new lease on life and given owners a new and wonderful relationship with their dogs. So that apparently counts for nothing because he hurt a couple of aggressive, dangerous dogs? Absolutely unbelievable! Hurting a dog is a calculated risk when somebody deals with very, very troubled dogs (a perfect example of feelings vs. knowledge). One side of that coin is an unfortunate and harsh reality, but is worth the support it gives to the other side, which is wonderful beyond measure.

In your quest for knowledge, examine your coins. Seeing both sides will double your wealth. Grinding off one side is like fixing something until it's broke. The horse-human relationship can be healthy, wealthy and wise or it can be impoverished by frustration, needless struggle and unnecessary danger. Considering both sides of a coin is never the same as a tolerance that compromises truth.

Just my opinion,

— Warren Bengtson