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Article

Different Kinds of Giving

By Me, Tracy Porter

Here goes I'd like to explain giving and how we apply it to the horse. First we'll look at giving from a general perspective, then a more specific perspective and then how to put the two together.

First you should understand the snaffle bit, it's designed to work off one side of the horse or the other. This means the snaffle is a directional control bit. If we pull back on both reins at the same time, we negate any usefulness the snaffle bit has and turn the safest, most effective tool into a worthless piece of metal that will make an out of control situation...into one where we are asking for forgiveness and confessing our last sins before we meet our maker.

A teaching progression for a snaffle bit goes as follows, left rein, right rein, both reins. If we don't have a good response with each rein independently, it certainly won't improve when we use both together.

Put a finger on each side of your face. Pretend pulling back on both reins at the same time squeezing your fingers against your face. Here are a couple of ways the horse can respond to this they can push their nose out and lean down into the bit, balancing themselves much like a race horse. Others simply bend their necks and tuck their chin against their neck. In both cases we're on a horse that's running away, whether it's at a slow walk or a dead run.

So how can we effectively use the snaffle to make it the safest bit we can ride with? We are going to simulate using your left rein. So put only your right finger along your right cheek. This represents what the bit feels like to the horse. From this position we can talk to parts of the horse's body and get them to move. In the case of the run away the hip is what is driving the horse. If we connect the rein, to the horse hip, we can stop it from driving the horse forward. Well, enough of that for now.

Let's look at what GIVING means. Giving is simply, something moving toward what we want versus against what we want. In simple terms, we ask the horse to give itself to us if he is loose in the round pen, pasture or stall and we want him to turn and face us. When leading him in a halter, we ask him to move away from us and not step on us. When riding, we can use our reins and attach them directly to our horse's body parts to get them to move.

We do this by following this formula: (This works in the round pen as well, but we are not focusing there now.)

- Pick the body part
- Pick the direction
-Pick a motivator
- Pick a reward

Keep in mind that the motivator and the reward have to make sense to the horse. The motivator has to be something specific it can't be that he just wants to please us. Using the rein we can take out the slack this is our motivator. It stands to reason that if taking out the slack will motivate the horse to change by moving the body part in the direction we want that to reward him, we need to release and let the slack out immediately when he answers our request!

So now try it. Take the slack out. Focus on the hip moving to the side. Hip moves to the side. IMMEDIATELY RELEASE the rein COMPLETELY.

Circle walk. And we can do this with every part of the body. The further advanced our horse is the more we can ask. At first we may ask the shoulders to move to the right then we can picture ourselves walking with a clock around us we can ask the horse to move toward a number on the clock such as 12, 1, 2, 3, 4.

When we start horses, it is easiest to teach the horse to respond his hips and shoulders to the rein in this order from easiest to a little more difficult: the (left) hip away from the rein. Then the (left then right) shoulder away from the rein. Next, the (left, then right) shoulder into the rein, and lastly the (left, then right) hip into the rein.

We can use the same formula and talk to the ear. We can say ear, I want you to lower and then give the reward. After we get the ear to lower, we can use the same formula for raising it. We can use this to teach our horse to lower his head for many reasons, from bridling to calming down, and achieving the desired head height without using artificial means (tie downs, martingales, draw reins etc.).

Before we discuss where to begin, there is another important part of giving and it begins in the jaw.

We have all heard the phrase Giving to the Bit but do we really, REALLY know what it is referring to?

The body part we want to give is the Jaw.

The direction is not to be pushing or leaning on the bit.

The motivator is the rein.

The reward is THE RELEASE.

In the beginning, it is important that when I take the slack out of the rein, I lock my hand on the saddle and do not allow it to move if the horse resists against it. Later I will not have my hand on the saddle. When the horse gives I immediately drop the rein and then immediately restart and repeat the past request. It is important to keep a good rhythm, but not to rush. The lighter you want your horse, means that the slower you need to take the slack out of the rein. But keep in mind that you still need to immediately release the rein when he responds correctly. The body is beginning to give, we see it evolve and change as the horse begins to first soften his muscles toward our slack being taken out of the rein.

In the beginning the jaw softens and moves to the side, next the spot behind the ear comes along with the jaw, first it springs back forward, then stays to the side for a few seconds.

If we look at this short line of muscles in the horse's neck, we see them first becoming parallel to the ground, next they will begin to ripple or bounce indicating they are softening further; then the muscles will begin to bend.

The fourth spot is the poll, we will see it progress and change as the horse develops a softer response to the bit. We can classify it into 3 zones A, B & C- A is optimum, don't be disappointed if your horse is not working there he will in his own time. The zones are as follows. The A- zone is the area from the withers and up 4 inches. The B-zone is straight out (level) from the withers. The C- zone is the area from the withers and down 4 inches. Anywhere above the A-zone and below the C-zone is at this point undesirable.

Depending upon your breed or discipline you can later teach your horse to carry his head in one of those areas BUT it will be done WITH what we are teaching NOT without it! Why do we need it? Let's look at gaited horses. When we artificially raise the head we create a brace in the horse's neck and back, the horse stiffens and hollows out, creating future strain, back and leg problems. And from a purely aesthetic stand point, we can eliminate that ugly bulging neck and have a pretty one and a nice rounded frame.

Continuing on our quest for softness. Spot 5 is the 3 spot getting softer and bending more. Now it runs from forelock to withers.

Once we can see our horse softening in these 5 areas we change our request slightly. Up until this point everything the horse has given us has been as a result of his own softening. We could not make him soften up until this point. IT JUST HAPPENS. But our next spot we call it 6. Is the only spot we make happen. After this we are back to letting it happen. Another important thing to note is that we have now shifted from MUSCLE RELAXING to MUSCLE BUILDING. We need to realize this so that we give our horse an opportunity to stretch out his neck after our request. Later, when our horse has built muscle and understands what we want we can ask for more. But beware asking too much too soon will make him sore.

Spot 7 shows us a lot of changes, I think they are the most visual of all the spots. The area that the neck and the shoulders meet begin to ripple, next they form a hinge you can almost sink your fingers in on some horses. A hole or dimple develops in this area and then the neck changes or inverts. It goes from thick on the bottom to thick on top thin on top to thick on top.

Spot 8 are the shoulders. We see the muscles in the shoulders begin to ripple or bounce. When muscles are soft they are not rock hard, that is why we see them look like jelly. The horse then begins to drift his shoulders away from the rein.

Spot 9 is the withers they go thru 3 phases much like the shoulders but instead of drifting forward and to the side they drift straight sideways. First with a drop down, then a level drop and last with a raise.

When we have all these spots. We can put it all together. IT really is important to note that from now on, when our horse is soft and giving us 1-5 that we begin to ask him to give into 6. When we do this we need a major body part to move either the hips or the shoulders. Otherwise, we risk disconnecting the front of the horse from the back of the horse.

Why is it important to ask for spot 6 when the time is right? If we don't our horse will get comfortable there, we will develop a rubber neck and the horse will get heavier on his front legs. Unfortunately a little of something here and there ends up biting us later!

So If we take the giving of the hips and shoulders we spoke of in the beginning and add in this giving of the jaw and beyond We create a masterpiece and we can place the horse where we want for what we want to accomplish.



**See the Articles: Giving To The Bit parts 1,2, & 3
For more information on Sir Thomas's spots...**

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