**YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A MULE**

**A rancher suggests humans would do well to follow the equine example**

**Mules do not see things the same way humans do. This is not only true in the physical sense, but psychologically as well. The mules' eyes are much farther apart than ours, so it has a wider angle of vision. Because of the distance between the eyes, objects directly in front and close to the mule are in its peripheral vision and are not seen clearly. There are other physiological differences as well. For example, mules have much better night vision than we do, and it is very likely that their color vision is different from ours as well.**

**Psychologically, the mule sees the world from the perspective of an animal whose ancestors have been chased or bushwhacked, attacked, and eaten for thousands of years. In short, they are naturally cautious and see their environment as being filled with things that might bring them harm. On the other hand, humans have done much more attacking than being attacked. We are naturally aggressive and see the world as full of things to be dominated and eaten.**

**Humans could learn a lot by seeing the world from the mule's perspective. An example of an object that the mule and its rider will often see from different points of views is a blacktop highway. When approaching the road and preparing to cross, the rider sees a flat, solid, smooth black surface that will be easy and safe to cross as long as there is no traffic. The mule may see a long, narrow, unending, bottomless black pit that may be impossible to cross without the ability to fly. The rider who does not appreciate the other point of view will often try to prove to the mule that it is wrong; the rider will urge the mule to cross before it has figured things out through careful study. This natural reticence and caution has historically been seen as stubbornness. As people who know mules will tell you, that is a gross and unfair misunderstanding of the animal's deliberate thought process. Attempting to force the matter will only demonstrate to the mule that the rider's judgment cannot be trusted.**

**Two other senses that create differences in viewpoints are smell and hearing. Those big, beautiful ears aren't just for decoration. I know for a fact that my mules can hear much better than I can. Quite often my favorite molly, Honeybee, will obviously hear a truck or car approaching from the far side of a hill long before I do. I haven't been able to find scientific information about the mule's sense of smell, but it is almost certainly much more highly developed than ours as well.**

**Now apply the senses of hearing and smell to the problem of getting your mule to cross that long, narrow, unending, bottomless black pit that you know as a highway. The mule may refuse to cross because it can hear a truck coming that you will be unable to hear or see for a minute or more. It may also perceive that the stench coming from the asphalt is caused by the rotting carcasses of all the mules that were foolish enough to have attempted to cross this mule-eating pit in the past.**

**A similar difference that I have noticed between what I see and what my mule sees is our reaction to shadows. I ride in an area where there are rocks of all sizes. It is not unusual for Honeybee to suddenly show concern about a rock she has walked by dozens of times in the past without concern. Before I learned to appreciate the mule's point of view, I thought she was being silly or stupid by shying away from a rock that hadn't worried her the day before. After studying the situation, I realized that because the time of day was different, the rock was casting a shadow not there the day before. Like the highway, the shadow may have appeared to be a black hole that could house a wolf, a lion, or other creature hazardous to the health of a molly.**

**In addition to their keen senses of hearing and sight, mules have an uncanny knack for avoiding injury. An example is an incident involving a rider, a wooden bridge crossing a small stream, a mule, and a horse. The rider frequently crossed the bridge when riding his mule and his horse. On one occasion, his mule absolutely refused to walk across the bridge, and the rider allowed it to pick a different place to cross the stream. A few days later the rider's horse willing started across the bridge only to have a front leg injured when a rotten board gave way. By being considerate of his mule's point of view, the rider avoided a confrontation and probably earned the respect of his mule.**

**Perhaps there is a message here for humans regarding interpersonal relationships. If we were all more tolerant and understanding of the other person's point of view, we might not have to worry about terrorism, war, or simple assault.**

**It might also be a good idea for anyone choosing a mate to give each prospect a mule and watch how he or she handles the relationship with the mule before taking a walk down the aisle.**

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***(Written by John Hauer, as it appeared in November/December, 2015 issue of The Saturday Evening Post, beginning on page 12)***

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