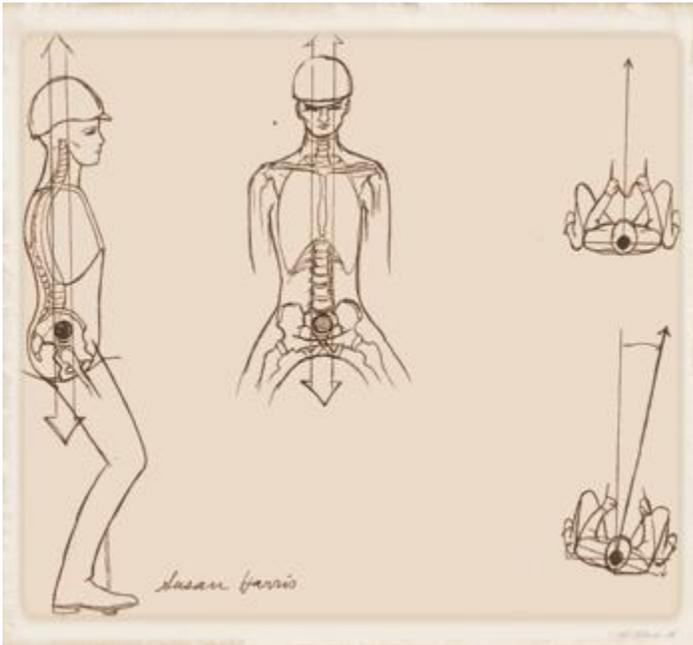


Centering - The Third of Four Basics

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In order to effectively control both your own body and your horse's body, you must be able to find your center. If you watch someone riding and he or she looks off-balance, jerky or stiff, it is almost always because the center is wrong. If we get our centering correct, the rest will usually fall into place.

To find your center, point a finger at your belly between your navel and your pubic arch, the front of your pelvis. Deep behind that point against the front of your spine, lays your center of balance. It is also the center of your energy and your center of control. Large muscles stretch to your lower spine from the bottom of your diaphragm and rib cage. Other muscles connect from the lower spine into your pelvis and down into your thighs. These are some of the deepest and strongest muscles in your body. Down here, deep and close to the lumbar spine, you also have the largest bundle of muscle-

controlling nerves. At the site of this large nerve center and the heavy, controlling muscles, is your center.

To achieve centered control, use your soft eyes to become aware of your body and organize your breathing. With your diaphragm, let your breathing slide down through your body. Allow your awareness to drop to your center. By doing this, you will find yourself breathing to and through your center. Using imagery may help you be aware of your center. For example, you might want to imagine a great hand at your center or perhaps an internal electric generator sparking energy. If you find a particular image or thought that works for you, hold on to it, because every time you return to that image, you will automatically feel that centered control.

In my book, "Centered Riding", I have readers imagine that they are a rocking doll weighted at the bottom. You can push the top of this doll over as far as you want, but it will always bounce upright again. This is the way your body should feel – so stable and deep at the bottom that the top can do nothing but remain balanced and upright. If you have difficulty learning how to center yourself, take your time, give your body a chance and don't force it. Keep using your imagery or the thoughts that work for you. Retire to your center and be quiet. Breathe to your center.

By being centered while riding, you will establish balance, control and energy. Your center of gravity is lower, and your upper body will seem lighter, more stable and easier to handle. Your seat and lower body will seem heavier and more secure. You will eliminate or release any tension that blocks the flow of energy through your body. You will be relaxed and ready to ride, and your horse will notice the difference!

Drawing by Susan Harris, Senior Level IV Centered Riding Clinician from Cortland, New York