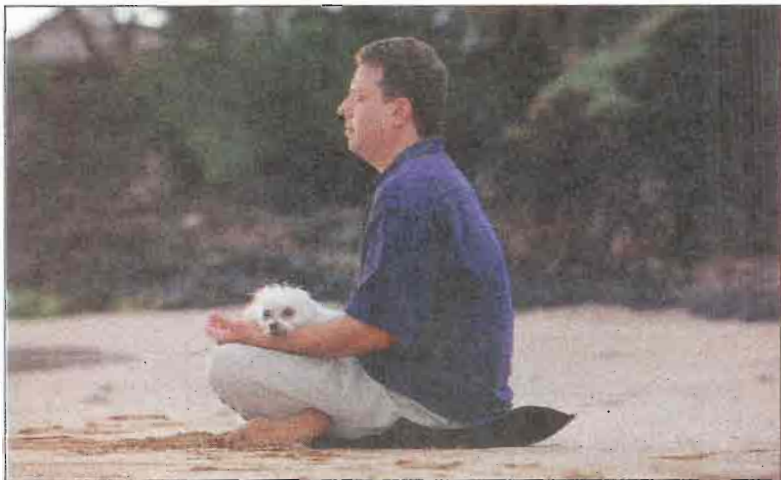


CHUCK ISAACS / Inquirer Staff Photographer
Pausing on their march the night after John Lennon was shot were Richard Sales, 28, and Joan Evancic, 18. They were on the trek between the Art Museum and City Hall.

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Seeking a Zen calm — doggie at your side



James Jacobson, author of "How to Meditate With Your Dog," in a placid pose with his Maltese, Maui, on the beach. It only looks easy.

By **Tanya Barrientos**
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Here comes headache, here comes neck pain, right down Santa Claus Lane!

Go ahead, sing along, because there's no getting around the fact that anxiety gets to us this time of year.

According to the American Psychological Association, one in five of us reports that tension associated

with the holiday season affects us physically.

That cramp in your neck? A little gift to you, compliments of nervous driving on icy roads and shopping in overcrowded malls. That rum-pum-pum-pum of pain behind your eyes? A little stocking stuffer of stress from you and yours.

As a result, we eat too much, we drink too much, we yell and worry. See **MEDITATE** on E7

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Achieving a new Zen, with doggie at your side

MEDITATE from E1 and stew.

What we should be doing instead, the shrinks say, is finding a way to cope, a way to appreciate our loved ones. We need a way to relax.

Which is where *How to Meditate With Your Dog* comes in.

Written by James Jacobson, a meditation teacher from Hawaii, the new book promises daily transcendent bliss for you and your poodle, your pointer or your beagle.

"Excitable dogs become calmer," and "aggressive dogs become more loving," Jacobson writes. And their humans, he says, become more relaxed, content and compassionate.

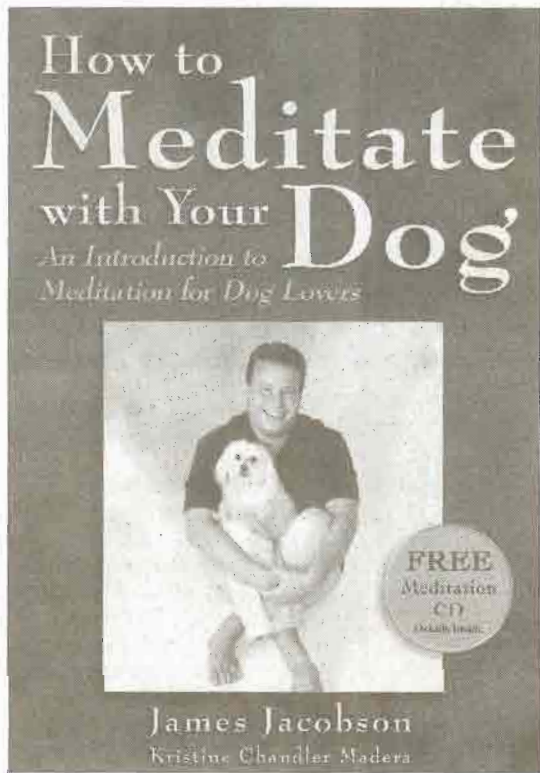
He and his Maltese, Maui, have been meditating together for 13 years, and he swears by it.

Jacobson admits it sounds a little wacky. But the book is getting its fair share of serious attention.

"As much as any book about meditating with your dog can be legit, this one is," said a Washington Post review. And Publishers Weekly listed it in its latest roundup of new and interesting self-help titles.

If nothing else, the 174-page how-to is a brilliant combination of two of our society's current obsessions — pets and the mind-body connection — as its sales figures indicate. *How to Meditate With Your Dog*, which Jacobson's company, Maui Media, published, is now at a respectable No. 5,129 on Amazon.com, ranking only about 1,500 notches below Dr. Phil's diet book.

It's no secret that science has solidly determined that pets can help people lower their blood pressure and, in general, increase happiness. Dogs and cats are routinely used in therapy in nursing homes and hospitals.



From the book jacket
"Dogs naturally know how to meditate," says James Jacobson, whose book is rooted in 13 years spent meditating with his pooch.

And there's a growing body of medical study showing that transcendental meditation can, essentially, do the same.

So when your spaniel decides to play tug-of-war with the tinsel on the tree, or your corgi sinks its teeth into a box of Christmas candy, Jacobson says meditation will calm down both of you.

First, he writes, find a spot to sit quietly with your pooch. Place your hands on his back. Feel the heartbeat. Then synchronize your breathing with his. For 10 to 20 minutes.

Dog owners know that's easier said than done.

Milo, my 2-year-old miniature schnauzer, is about as calm as an exposed nerve. When he's not leaping up and down like a car piston, he's sniffing around

for something to eat, or seriously punishing a squeaky toy.

On a recent morning, before work, I called him over to his bed, where I was sitting in the lotus position. I sat him on my lap, just as Jacobson recommends, set one hand on his haunches and the other over his furry little heart.

Ready to find calm, ready to find bliss, I slowly murmured my mantra. ("This will work. This will work.")

Milo leaped up and his head smacked me in the eye.

Jacobson says that when this sort of thing happens one must refocus.

"Dogs naturally know how to meditate," he said in an interview from his island home. "And that's where our deep connection with our pets comes into play. You clear your mind of thoughts, and it's good for you and the dog."

I refocused. Hand. Haunches. Heart. *This will work. This will work.* This time Milo scratched his ear, nibbled my fingers and ended up, well, licking himself.

He seemed happy, but I felt like a failure.

Which could explain Chapter 5 in Jacobson's book: "When Your Dog Won't Meditate With You."

It'll work, Jacobson says. Just keep trying.

Well, maybe after the holidays. Who's got time for inner peace at this time of year?

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