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Author says  
meditating with  
your dog good  
way to relax,  
reinforce  
bond with  
loyal pet



MARSHA MATTA  
The Columbian

# Find inner peace with your pooch



"I wasn't sure what the reception would be to the whole concept. Luckily, people who get drawn in by the goofiness of the name get that it really works."  
**James Jacobson**  
AUTHOR OF "HOW TO MEDITATE WITH YOUR DOG"

By TRICIA JONES  
Columbian staff writer

**D**og lovers ready to advance beyond "sit," "stay," "shake" and "heel" can add a new word to their pets' vocabulary. Try "Ommmmmm." The mantra could signal a new form of pooch-bonding for readers of "How to Meditate With Your Dog" (Maui Media, \$16.95).

What sounds like a thin novelty book is an earnest, but playful, manual on achieving serenity with Spot or Spike. Author James Jacobson insists that darn near any breed of dog is a superb guide for humans seeking the road to bliss. Dogs, he says, have mastered the goals of meditation: living in the present, following life's natural rhythms and accepting the gifts each day brings. Credit for the idea goes to the author's Maltese, Maui.

The purposeful pup leapt into his lap 13 years ago as he sat in quiet concentration. They continued the ritual together, and Jacobson eventually decided to follow up on friends' advice to write a guidebook. It's co-written by meditation teacher/novelist Kristine Chandler Madera. "I wasn't sure what the reception would be to the whole concept," said Jacobson, a Washington, D.C., native who moved to Hawaii about two and a half years ago. "Luckily, people who get drawn in by the goofiness of the name get that it really works."

One reason Jacobson says it works is because our canine-centered culture is ever on the hunt for ways to connect with our terriers, hounds, spaniels and retrievers. "And secondly, I think there is a growing recognition of the benefits of living

more mindful lives, of which meditation is a part," Jacobson said.

Brain scans of Buddhist monks have yielded evidence that meditation can be medicinal, according to Dr. Michael Bernstein, medical director of Southwest Washington Medical Center's department of behavioral medicine.

"Endorphin levels go up, blood pressure goes down; regular meditation gives you a better cholesterol profile," Bernstein said. "It's like taking up a sport."

Meditation can also relieve stress for people whose lifestyles cause them to "always have a commotion going on" in their heads, said instructor Melonie Nielsen, owner of the Vancouver Yoga Center. Jacobson says he has no proof that meditation is also healthy for dogs. But

## Did you know?

■ "Dogs" fetched the ninth spot on the 10 most popular Internet search terms of 2005, according to Dogpile.com, a self-described "metasearch" engine that claims to return the top results from all the leading search engines. Dogpile.com's name is coincidental to the findings.

■ About 5 percent of Americans practice meditation, according to the Meditation Society of America, which is based in Wagontown, Pa.

## Meditate:

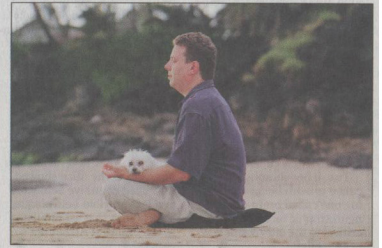
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when Maui got into a box of Christmas chocolates and ate about an eighth of her weight in candy, he rushed her to a veterinarian. He and Maui then meditated together.

"It helped her a lot, and it certainly helped me," Jacobson said.

Clark County veterinarians shied away from commenting on whether meditation could be good for dogs. Three sent word through their receptionists that they weren't interested in discussing it.

However healthy the practice may or may not be, it's hard to imagine certain dogs taking to focused inactivity. Jacobson is convinced they can and will. After all, he says, dogs already spend much of their time in a state between wakefulness and a doze that he refers to as "hound-lounge." And dogs innately seek to please the



Courtesy of James Jacobson

**Author James Jacobson says he's meditated with as many as 25 dogs (and their owners). Here, he seeks bliss with his Maltese, Maui.**

humans they regard as their pack leaders.

A good pack leader therefore will bring her dog to a meditation site, get comfortable with him and synchronize her breathing with his.

Jacobson's book provides not only more details on the how-to of meditating with

canine partners, but also what to do when our dogs resist.

Vancouver meditation instructor Nielsen said she supports the idea that animals can teach people by example. Still, "It's the kind of thing I would pick up out of curiosity and read for the novelty, but not make into a long-term

practice," she said.

At the home of Vancouver nurse anesthetist Maureen Jamieson, dog-human meditation is not just practiced. It's expected.

She and Holt, her spirited, 65-pound standard poodle, rest comfortably when she returns from a graveyard shift. They listen to music and breathe in sync until peace prevails.

"If I'm exhausted and fall into bed and don't put on music, he'll pull the covers off," she said.

Jamieson says novices probably should learn to meditate alone before trying to partner with a dog, especially if the dog is less than mellow. But Jacobson disagrees.

"I see this as a way to nudge people into meditation. People are more willing to do things for their dogs than themselves," he said.

Jacobson urges readers not to be discouraged if meditation doesn't come easily. Vancouver psychiatrist Bernstein confirms that meditation can be tricky for most North Americans, who view it as wasting time or doing nothing.

That's when it's helpful to call in an expert at lounging. Enter Jacobson's next book, due out in May: "How to Meditate With Cats."

Bernstein said the sequel makes sense, given cats' ability to take in stimuli and withhold reactions.

"The problem is, they usually fall asleep pretty quickly under those circumstances," Bernstein said.