

Puppy Love

One of the most frequent topics I am asked about is the socialization and training of young pets. There are many books available on the subject, however, while many have good points, many often include advice that is outdated and incorrect. Based on improved scientific understanding of animal learning and behavior there are several resources that I would like to review and recommend.

One of the more common problems in books on puppy training is the overemphasis on domination. Think about any relationship that starts with the premise of "who's boss". This attitude creates an environment based on fear. It would be similar to sending a 3 year old child to "boot camp" for an exercise in tough love. Instead, when we remind ourselves that we are seeking that special gift of unconditional love from our pets, does it not make sense to achieve this goal with gentle loving kindness?

There are some excellent resources available on the subject of puppy behavior, socialization and training. My current favorite is a book written by the faculty at Tuft's Veterinary College. It is edited by Dr Nick Dodman, a colleague of mine who I had the pleasure of co-authoring a research article on anesthesia practice in a neighboring New England state. I have come to respect him as a leader in research and teaching about animal behavior.

The title of this book is Puppy's First Steps: The Whole Dog Approach to Raising a Happy, Healthy, Well Behaved Puppy (Houghton, Mifflin, 2007). The first chapter focuses on issues that should be considered before selecting a particular

breed of dog or a mixed breed dog. I am occasionally disappointed when I see a family make a choice that is inappropriate and then have to live for many years in disharmony instead of the joyfulness the correct decision would have brought. The next chapter, "Getting Puppy Settled In", addresses topics to be considered before bringing a puppy into a household. Another very important chapter is an honest appraisal of the responsibilities that parents need to address when dogs and young children live in the same environment. It is entitled "Young Dogs and Children Under the Same Roof". The section titled "Sit! And Other Tricks" covers the identification of potential behavior problems, housetraining and ways of resolving behavior issues. This book offers sound advice based on scientific evidence and explains why devices such as choke collars and punishment are contrary to the goal pet owners seek to achieve.

Another very interesting resource is the book Dogs, by Raymond Coppinger. He disputes the theory that dogs evolved as part of a wolf pack and instead developed along with man as camp followers, developing a mutual relationship based on companionship and service.

If you like to approach subjects from the philosophical as well as the spiritual and scientific, I recommend Tao of Puppies: How to Raise a Good Dog Without Really Trying by Krista Cantrell. This book attempts to have owners contemplate their behavior as it relates to a puppy. Asking questions that rely on mindfulness such as the logic of certain expectations. It emphasizes normal puppy behavior and development. If you believe there is a spiritual connection between pets and people, try a mantra inspired by the author Jack Kornfield as you walk the beach with your puppy: "May my heart be filled

with loving kindness, may we be peaceful and at ease, may we be happy, may we be healthy”.

The subject of animal behavior is important because behavior problems are a significant cause of death in companion animals by euthanasia. By bringing behavior awareness to the pet owning public, veterinarians try to prevent the mistakes that will interfere with a successful relationship between pets and people.