

What Our Dogs Can Teach Us

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About Living a Better Life

I believe that every animal species has something to teach us if we would pay closer attention to them and understand some of their core qualities. For example, let us look at dogs. I frequently take a walk in a nearby dog park early in the morning and watch the dogs. I enjoy the beauty of the dog park and the views of the distant mountains, but most of all, I enjoy watching the dogs and their boundless energy when they are off leash. They are always excited to be able to move about freely. Some walk, some run and some even leap in the air. Some dogs stay close to their persons and some run off and then work their way back. Their joy of movement is infectious.

Many of us have busy lives with numerous responsibilities to our families, our jobs, our community and so much more. We work hard to be responsible and caring. Sometimes we lose our sense of joy and in particular, our sense of joy of physical movement. Some of us even feel guilty if we take time to be outdoors engaging in a physical activity that gives us pleasure. And yet, it is precious time to do something outdoors to refresh and energize both emotionally and physically. We can inhale the freshness of the outdoor air; we will see the sky, the trees, the mountains and meadows and know we are part of all that is on planet earth. The movement of our physical body will release naturally some of our daily tensions and worries.

Another quality I observe among the dogs in the dog park is the “acceptance” of other dogs who may be smaller, bigger, a different color, a different breed, etc. Many dogs will seek another dog to play and run with in the park. We have much to learn about acceptance from dogs in this regard.

There is considerable diversity among people in our society, and we often are too quick to reject the “other” because the person is a different color, a different religion, a different culture, even a different political party! As a result, we lose out on the possibility of coming to know the talents and gifts of the “other” who in some way is different. Ironically one of the few ways we seem to accept the “other” is through sports. In this context, we ignore their differences and instead focus on their athletic skills and abilities.

A third quality I see in many dogs is “unconditional love” for their person(s). Dogs can easily feel our emotions. They will try to console us, support us, encourage us, and just want to be with us. They do not judge us; they forgive us, and they eagerly await the next opportunity to do something fun with their person(s) outdoors. The



emotional bonding of love between the dog and their person is often palpable and beautiful to witness. These are but a few of many desirable qualities we can learn from the canine species.

We are entering the winter season of holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. Let us see if we can choose to let go of our judgments of the “others,” who in some way are not like us. They may not be Christians; they may not have the same skin color; they may not support our political views. Nevertheless can we, like our dogs, practice the core qualities of acceptance and tolerance that we all value in each other? Can we be more open minded; can we seek common ground? Can we listen without judgment? Can we just *listen without judgment*? At the same time, the holidays add more stress with all of the additional activities and responsibilities. There is even more reason to seek the joy of movement in the great outdoors, to clear our lungs and our emotional well being. If you do not have a dog, ask to borrow your neighbor’s dog and take it for a walk and enjoy the joy of movement. ■

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