

*Much to Love about the “The Loved Dog”*

*Reviewed by Kathy Meyer, VMD*

When I first picked up “The Loved Dog,” by Tamar Geller, I have to admit, my expectations were low. It had all of the trapping of yet another celebrity-centric, “trainer du jour” treatise of questionable techniques, reminiscent of Cesar Milan. Photogenic Tamar blinds us with her smile on the cover and the first few chapters outline the requisite components of this genre--the difficult/abusive childhood, the opportunity to observe canids (in this case, wolves) in a natural setting, the formulation of a novel approach to understanding dogs based on these personal experiences, and the serendipitous meeting of LA celebrities, most importantly Oprah, so that credibility is assured and the method can be marketed.

Imagine my surprise when I got past the biographical information and found nothing other than perfectly sound advice on training dogs and dealing with common behavior problems. Throughout the book, Tamar reinforces the idea that dog owners don’t just deal with specific behaviors. The dog’s behavior is dependent upon the relationship between dog and owner—one of trust and respect—and a common language so the dog understands clearly what you want him or her to do.

At the onset, Tamar denounces the use fear, pain, and exhaustion to coerce dogs from displaying specific behaviors. Then she goes on list her version of what a dog needs: security, companionship, understanding the hierarchy, surprises/excitement, food and exercise, mental stimulation, and love and connection.

The most useful information for the dog owner is offered in the last third of the book, where techniques for teaching various skills, such as sit, come, backing off, “chilling down,” stay, housetraining, walking politely, and being quiet. The techniques presented are in-line with those currently found in progressive, humane, dog training texts and are likely to be successful for most dogs and their owners. Tamar recognizes the value of clear feedback to dogs and gives excellent advice for both positive and humane negative feedback.

If I have complaints about the book, it would be include its style, which is very “soft and fluffy,” the use of celebrities to confer credibility, less than perfect organization, and the presentation of techniques that are well-known and accepted in the dog training world as new, revolutionary, and unique. Tamar is a compassionate individual who cares deeply about dogs and has made it her mission to aid them by reducing suffering through humane and appropriate training. The soft style of the book, even perhaps its title, may put off more scientific or masculine types. The presentation of information was not done in a clear way and the book would have benefited from a table of contents and an index. Finally, Tamar applies her own terminology to techniques that are well recognized in dog training. Her “magnet” technique is known as lure training for most of us. Her “relevance” training is known by various other terms such as “Learn to Earn,” “No Fee Lunch,” and “Protocol for Deference.” She did not coin the term “jackpot” treat.

But, those relatively minor flaws aside, this book presents excellent advice for dog owners and I would not hesitate to recommend it. I have heard the expression that there is not limit to the amount of good that can be done if we don't worry about who gets the credit. Perhaps Tamar is familiar with the works of others and has chosen to present the techniques as her own. Or, perhaps Tamar has not read about or observed current humane training techniques and has developed the similar approaches in a manner analogous to convergent evolution—various individuals have come up with similar techniques because they work! If Tamar can use her celebrity client connections to promote effective, humane dog training to the masses, I applaud her efforts.