



The whole Barkhas family practices yoga with Jaya. Here, "mom" Peony works with her.



Do you have a "Doggi"?

Dogs can learn yoga right along with you

Vanessa Salvia • Spot Magazine

Suman **BARKHAS** puts a twist on the traditional yoga practice. For him, downward-facing dog is not just for humans. A yoga and tai chi teacher based in Eugene, OR for 10 years, when Barkhas noticed his dog Jaya doing what looked like yoga poses, he encouraged it.

Jaya, whose name means "Victory" in Sanskrit, was adopted from Eugene's Greenhill Humane Society four years ago. "When we got this dog, she was very much abused and scared," says Barkhas. "She had been traumatized. Having a good environment and a family playing with her, Jaya was able to come out of that fear." Stretching in the form of "downward dog" with all four paws on the floor and the hips bent upward, is natural for dogs. But Barkhas's three teenagers began using treats to train Jaya to remain in the position for extended times.

"Working with the food was a big challenge for Jaya," says Barkhas. "She was always nervous about food. The trick of putting a dog biscuit on her nose and having her stay there for a minute without moving or eating helped to teach the pose and patience, which was rewarding because Jaya's behavior changed. It cultivated discipline." Barkhas says this also taught Jaya to hold the poses without growling or moving.

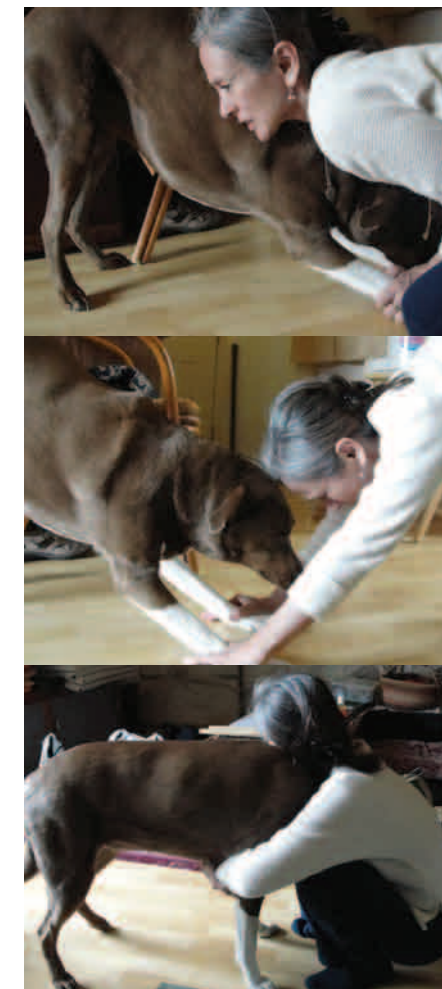
Barkhas was born 48 years ago in the Mongolian capitol city of Ulan Bator. He trained as a yoga monk in India in the early '90s, then traveled throughout Asia and India teaching yoga for nearly a decade. While traveling, he met his wife, Peony, who hailed from Eugene. They settled there for good together 10 years ago.

"I learned yoga as a teenager and started practicing on my own," says Barkhas. "I started meeting monks from India and one of them invited me to come to India. I was searching for, 'How do I live in this world in harmony and be peaceful and happy? I found the answer in yoga.'"

Since settling in Eugene, Barkhas has continued teaching yoga and tai chi in parks, community centers, and at Peace-health Medical Center at Riverbend. He also works with yoga and tai chi instructors training for Oregon licenses.

While Barkhas has decades of training and experience, he believes that with patience, anyone can involve their dog in their yoga practice the way his family has. "It was a gradual change," he says. "You train your pet while you're playing with them and taking walks so they walk without pulling. For Jaya that discipline took several months of walking every morning; her fear and trauma was deep."

Barkhas's children taught Jaya how to stand and hold a position, and how to open doors. "It took several months to a couple of years to get used to that," he says. Now Jaya has mastered standing on two legs with a biscuit on her nose, holding the position for about a minute — "which is really good focus," says Barkhas. Jaya also now lies down and stays in position for as long as instructed. "It's the beginning of training," Barkhas says. "She's not mastered, not yet."



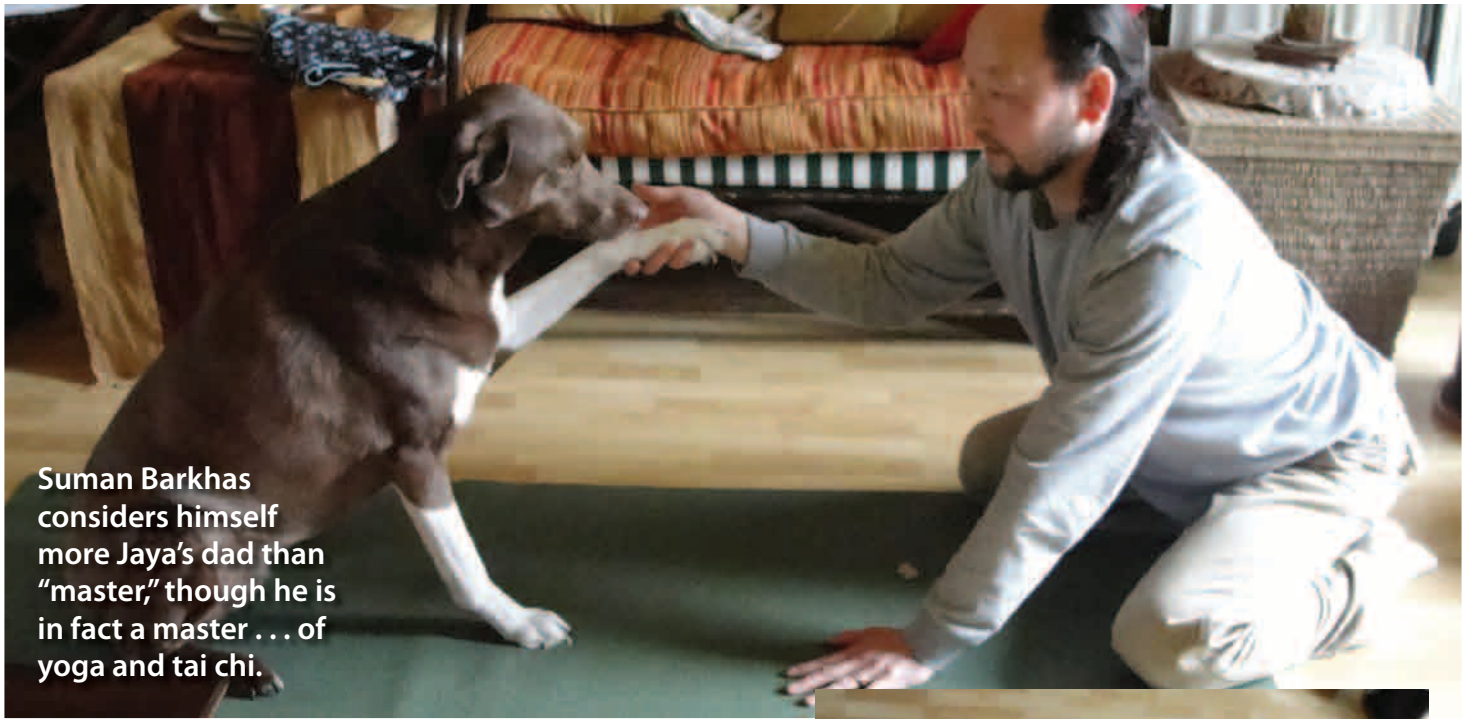
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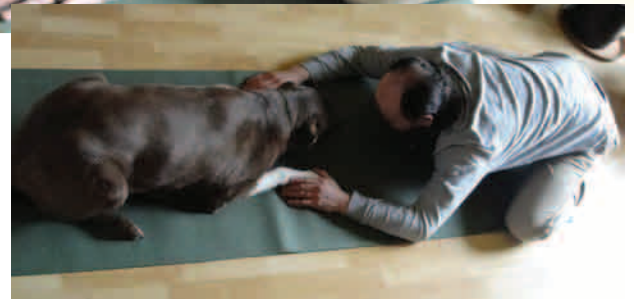
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Suman Barkhas considers himself more Jaya's dad than "master," though he is in fact a master . . . of yoga and tai chi.



Mastering is a constant process. Any dog can be trained if you give them time, especially if you train with the help of food, giving the reward each time. Of course, we have to pay attention to how to train in a nice way."

Yoga is about more than physical and mental health, says Barkhas; it's also about living in harmony with your environment. If your dog is already your best friend, then involving him or her in your practice can further strengthen that bond.

"A lot of people think yoga is shaping yourself or exercise or breathing," he says. It is not only that; it goes beyond. Once you start cultivating that lifestyle you are actually becoming peaceful with yourself and others, in harmony with plants and animals and everything. It very much goes with any faith, any belief, because we all are humans. We call ourselves superior but yet we have to learn from our environment — the plant world, the animal world — because our ego takes over. We have to lean to be humble, living peacefully in the environment and doing good to ourselves and others. Yoga teaches everything."

To learn more about Suman Barkhas and his yoga and tai chi teachings, visit TaiChiYogaCenter.com or call 541-515-0462.



Vanessa Salvia's love for animals began as a child, when stray kittens just seemed to follow her home. Thankfully, her family always accommodated the extra members. She now lives on a sheep farm outside of Eugene, Oregon, with a llama named Linda, a dog, a cat, two horses, a rabbit, two kids and a patient husband.

IF YOUR DOG IS ALREADY YOUR BEST FRIEND, THEN INVOLVING HIM OR HER IN YOUR PRACTICE CAN FURTHER STRENGTHEN THAT BOND.



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