

# Blessings from Zephyr

Source: [Reality Sandwich](#)

*The following is excerpted from [The Dharma of Dogs](#) edited by Tami Simon, published by Sounds True.*

by [JP Sears](#)

*Twelve years ago I fell face first into the tutelage of a Zen master named Zephyr. He showed up when I needed help finding my lost heart, my playfulness, humor, ability to cry, and curiosity for life. My master was such a compelling teacher that most of the time I had no idea he was teaching me anything, yet somehow he knew how to slide through the limitations of my mind, allowing his grace, wisdom, and compassion to permeate my heart and soul. While I'd love to tell you stories of my trials, tribulations, face licks, and cuddles with the great Zephyr, I'd probably be too biased to do him justice. Instead, I'll step back and let him tell you our story . . .*

## **I Arrive**

My name is Zephyr. I'm a divine aspect of oneness who enjoys rolling in decomposing rodents. I decided to incarnate into a dog's body for a few reasons. First, doG is God spelled forward, so my current incarnation is a great way for me to experience who I really am. Second, the universe smells absolutely fascinating through a dog's nostrils! And third, there was a redheaded human who lost his heart and desperately needed help finding it. That human is JP, my dad. I'm not JP's biological son, but I've never told him that – I don't think he could handle it.

My dad's spiritual quest started when I – in glowing, freshly reincarnated Dalai Lama-like fashion – arrived in his life as an eight-week-old, three-pound maniac dachshund puppy. JP was 161 years old (twenty-three in human years, if that's how you count), had just moved to California, and was trying to make something of himself. He was struggling to make a living, terrible at playing fetch, insecure, and too scared to feel as scared as he really was. His heart was so calcified that he didn't even know he wanted me. Luckily for him, someone gave me to him as a gift, so he ultimately had to receive what he needed, even though he didn't want to at the time.

### **Tao of Being Grounded**

As a teacher, I knew I had my work cut out for me right away. My dad was incredibly ungrounded in his emotions, as he lived in his head. (The lineage I come from recognizes that a *high* Intelligence Quotient is just code for a *low* Emotional Quotient.) His ability to rationalize anything caused him to outsmart himself, yet he was blind to the consequences – becoming increasingly disconnected from his emotional heart.

I commenced my dad's training. I began teaching from *The Doctrine of Puppy Teeth Piercing Skin*. I'd bite Dad's feet whenever he walked around the apartment without shoes on. I found his annoyance so amusing! He'd say, "Zephyr is just an obnoxious puppy giving my feet puncture wounds!" What he didn't realize was that I was getting his attention in the only way I could and teaching him to be grounded. He was so resistant to receiving this lesson that sometimes he would walk over the couch and hop onto a chair to get to the other end of the room, an external manifestation of how he strategizes to avoid his heart on the inside.

I put in two years of consistent foot-biting effort before Dad finally began to have the courage to keep his feet (and emotions) grounded. He is starting to learn how to fetch his

own heart, at least a little bit, which is a lot better than when I began mentoring him.

## **Tao of Presence**

Growing up in San Diego, I let my dad take me to the beach all the time. All I wanted to do when I was there was dig in the sand. My dad just loved to watch me dig. He often asked, "What are you digging for?" I would answer, not with words because he never learned to speak dog, but with the interpretive dance of more passionate digging that clearly said, "*What* am I digging for? To dig! There's no agenda. The joy of digging is always in the dig, not in what you find." I also ate a lot of sand. This wasn't for any particular teaching purpose; I just liked my dad's perplexed face as he wondered why I ate so much sand.

Dad always looked to the future. His thoughts of what he was supposed to find blinded him to the pure bliss of having his nose in the sand of life and enjoying the dig for digging's sake. I'd let him believe he was enthralled with watching me dig, while in reality I knew he was beginning to feel the desire and delight of being present in his own journey instead of being so destination driven. Sometimes I would even rub myself in dead fish to congratulate him on how well he was practicing presence, but he has never known how to take a compliment.

## **Tao of Innocence**

As time went on, my dad didn't need me to bite his feet as often. That made it easier for me to become the rawhide of his eye. He thought there was something about me that he just loved. The truth is that I did just the right amount of cute dog stuff to draw something important out of the underground well of my dad's unconscious. You see, long ago, before he can even remember, Dad turned his back on the pure innocence of his child self. I would never wish this on anyone, not even a

pretentious cat. Dad unfortunately betrayed his own childlike gifts. There were times in his human puppyhood that he felt safer when he pretended to be in control, strong, and stable, instead of rooted in his authentic self. He buried it under the dirt of his façade. We dogs know that it's okay to be scared, especially about things like thunder, vacuum cleaners, and flashlights, but my dad didn't know this.

I taught him how to unearth his childlike self by projecting it onto me. He needed to be lovingly fooled into doing this for a few years before he could begin to realize that the love and affection he felt for me was really love and affection he had for the most sacred parts of himself. I helped him find what had been hopelessly lost and buried. It makes my tail wag when he sees less and less of the four-legged, brown, furry mirror that he's looking into and realizes more of his connection with who's looking into the mirror – his innocent inner child.

## **Tao of Vulnerability**

When I was seven years old, I developed back problems. There were two reasons for this. First of all, I'm in a dachshund's body. It turns out that the talent Germans have for designing cars doesn't carry over into their engineering of the hybridized bodies of dogs. The main reason, though, was that I needed to develop a bad back *for my dad*. During these first seven years of my work with him, he made significant strides into his heart, emotions, innocence, and presence, but he was still only going paw-deep into it all. I knew he was finally ready to submerge to the depth of his heart; he needed to have the shell around his heart shattered with a lesson in vulnerability.

One Friday afternoon in the middle of the summer, I herniated a disk in my spine. It hurt way more than I thought it would! I was pacing around with my back arched trying to outrun the pain that I had initiated. It got Dad's attention. I could

feel his heart fill with things he despised feeling: fear, sorrow, and helplessness. I could also see him trying to retreat into his head, thinking, "Maybe Zephyr just has an upset stomach, and this needs a little time to pass." It was no upset stomach! Those were always easy for my dad to recognize because I would surprise him with a puddle of vomit to step in. Oh! He would get so angry when my upset tummy taught him how mindful he wasn't being. But I digress . . .

After a half day of watching Dad fight the feelings in his heart by retreating into the rationalization-scape of his head, I decided enough was enough! I love him so much that I was willing to do whatever it took to help him crash deep into his heart, so I aggravated my herniated disk to the point my legs stopped working. It got the attention of the deepest of deep epicenters in his heart; he scooped me up immediately and took me on a middle-of-the-night ride to the emergency pet hospital. (Please note: although I don't ever recommend being vulnerable and driving, my dad got us there safely.) The shell broke open! Decades of emotional plaque liquefied, and my dad's heart came back to life. His tear ducts, which seemed cryogenically frozen for so long, were in full-fledged flow mode. While my body wasn't very happy and my legs weren't very hoppy, my spirit was hopping with happiness.

That weekend was filled with back surgery, morphine tripping (less vomiting than with ayahuasca, which is unfortunate), and the clinical smells of the pet hospital. While I hung out there for a few days, my dad spontaneously broke down crying at random times, becoming a puddle of pure, grade-A vulnerability. He was finally strong enough to feel weak and vulnerable. His obedience to his heart was improving. He was a good boy.

## **Tao of Neediness**

When I got out of the hospital, I could barely stand, let alone walk. My dad had to do everything for me. I was needy

because my dad needed me to be needy. He needed someone to model how to receive help because he didn't know how to accept it. He always denied his neediness so he could strategically stay disconnected from people, and he was goofy enough to call it "self-sufficiency." *Ha!* As a kid, he developed a bit of an allergy to his birthright to the kind of healthy need that facilitates human connection.

I was all too happy to let him carry me everywhere, do physical therapy on my legs and back, prepare special food, and cancel his appointments so he could be with me. I was showing him how okay I was with being needy. I've always been a glutton for attention, which made this an easy lesson for me to teach, but a hard one for my dad to learn.

It's been five years since my back surgery, and I've completely recovered. However, I'm no longer allowed to jump off the couch, in order to prevent further back issues. (I do have a little resentment about this. I always loved doing my Superman impression.) Despite this fact, every few months I do have a minor flare-up of pain. I teach from these episodes because Dad can still get a little too lost in living the unlived parts of his life, dancing with the devilish mistresses Shoulda, Woulda, and Coulda, who live in his head. These Minor Back Pain Teachings usually don't last longer than a few hours because my dad can now find his way back home to his heart through the scent trail of vulnerability pretty quickly these days.

## **Tao of Detachment**

Even though my dad doesn't understand the sacred geometry of smells, he is smart enough to know that I won't be around forever. Based on his human arithmetic, he thinks I'm twelve years old, and he's coming to terms with how the infinite only chooses to inhabit a finite body for so long. He's seemingly grown wise enough to know that once he's learned all the lessons I came here to teach him, I too shall pass. I love Dad

enough to be willing to leave him when he *needs* me to, not when he wants me to. If I stay longer than he needs me, then he'll forever continue to exclusively credit me for his gifts that I've taught him to discover, thinking that *I'm* the gift. If I'm always around when he feels his open, vulnerable heart, then it will be too easy for him to keep mistakenly thinking that *I'm* the gift. It's a bit of a Pavlov's Human Conditioning. I will leave when the time is right so he can fully own the gifts of himself that I've pointed him toward.

### **When the Student Is Ready**

For now, I'll continue to carry my stuffed bunny into Dad's office when he's taking work, life, and himself too seriously. I'll squeak the hell out of it to remind him to be less attached and more playful, less certain and more curious, less rational and more feeling. I'll continue to lie on my back and rub his hand with my belly just to let him know that I care. I'll continue to take him on walks a couple times a day because he seems to love them so much. With each activity, his knowledge that every interaction is a fleeting blink of temporariness grows right along with his appreciation for our time together. When the student is ready, the master will disappear. When that time comes, I haven't decided yet if I'll take a one-way ride into the dream world at night or if I'll perhaps ask my dad for help taking my Earth leash off. If I do decide to ask, I know that he loves me enough to help.

Sniff on, my friends.

Zephyr

### **Zephyr's Advice for a Good Life**

1. If you love someone, show them your belly.
2. Know that the world is overwhelmingly filled with love, except for vacuum cleaners – those are inherently evil.
3. Now is always the right time for a treat.
4. It's always Now.

5. Two treats are better than one.
6. Sleep on your back with all four paws in the air like you just don't care.
7. Sniff everything and everyone; don't be afraid of intimacy.
8. Don't *not* drool. It's bad manners.
9. It's okay for humans to sit on the couch, too.
10. Wake up to eat breakfast before taking your morning nap.
11. Whenever vomiting, aim for the carpet.
12. A toy without a squeaker is no toy at all.
13. Help make the world a better place by chasing more tennis balls.
14. A car ride with your head hanging out of the window can cure anything.
15. People need a lot of guidance. Train them thoroughly. In fact, train them to think that they've trained you; it will help them be more obedient.