

Chapter 33-Pets

Much like owning a beautiful piece of artwork or painting rooms a specific favorite color, owning a beautiful pet can enhance a person's living environment. But a problem can arise when the desire to take care of or be loved by a pet outweighs a person's desire to establish relationships with other human beings. It can become a substitute for finding a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, or partner. For pet owners not looking for a mate and content to only share their lives with pets, this chapter is probably not for them. When the need for control over an animal becomes a substitute for a relationship, red flags do begin being raised.

For individuals consciously or unconsciously experiencing chaos in their lives, owning a pet might provide them with a sense of control over another external object. When you see an individual walking down the road with three pit-bulls attached to a chain, one cannot help but wonder if having these dogs is not substituting for a personal sense of control. The pit bulls may project a sense of strength or provide a sense of security which the person perhaps lacks. Maybe the owner feels powerful and protected like no other time. For individuals who live in areas that are unsafe, owning a pit-bull or rottweiler may provide a feeling of safety, as well.

Regardless of why someone chooses a certain pet, it is often allowed to take the place of another human being. Animals (particularly dogs) will pretty much love a human being unconditionally. Most dogs treat their owners completely non-judgmentally, unless the animal is being abused or neglected. It generally does not matter what you say, what you wear, how you look, your personality type, how old you are, your opinions on life or other people, what you do for a living, or how you treat other

people, dogs (and to some degree other pets as well) will love you no matter what. However, when an animal accepts an individual unconditionally, it may interfere with the person's ability to change or seek out a relationship with others. How many times have you seen someone treat a pet with the utmost care, but to a stranger on the street, he or she may be rude or disrespectful?

Millions of people own pets, but it's a problem when a healthy, vibrant, fun-loving, and intelligent individual with lots of potential and many opportunities in life somehow gives up on the possibility of a relationship in order to care for a pet. For whatever reason, many who would love to be loved and give love to another human being have given up on the possibility of having a decent relationship in their lives in place of owning a pet. Maybe the individual doesn't believe he or she has the best looks, the best personality, or the ability to relate to others. Some people may not be the easiest people in the world to get along with, or even have the desire to get along with others. Often times, owning a pet can be a quick and simple substitute. For whatever reason, an otherwise sensitive and caring individual may decide that rather than give his or her love and energy towards another human being or take the chance of being in a relationship, he or she will devote energy exclusively to a pet instead.

I am not saying that everyone wants or needs to be in a relationship with another person. For many, relationships have resulted in a lot of frustration and pain. They may have risked loving another person and made great sacrifices, but weren't accepted or appreciated by the other person. They may have gotten hurt very badly, been abused or neglected by someone they truly loved and cared for. The pain can make a person shy away from any positions in which he or she might conceivably be hurt again.

While developing a relationship with a pet may provide a sense of warmth, calm, companionship, or predictability, in the end it may not be as satisfying as a person would like. Some people may want to experience the feeling of satisfaction from being a volunteer or a Big Brother or Big Sister. There are many opportunities for doing volunteer work in a hospital, a senior citizen home, a school, or an orphanage in which your energy system goes outward. These opportunities can provide a strong sense of satisfaction for many people. The experience of interacting with someone when you are doing volunteer work may be a greater experience than walking a dog. Having a pet can demand so much responsibility that it becomes an excuse for not reaching out to other human beings, trying to develop a relationship, or being able to participate in opportunities that will lead you outside yourself. But pet owners can find themselves married exclusively to their pets. It can become a very convenient way to avoid social interactions, going out, having fun, or doing something that you truly enjoy, such as interacting with family members or friends. There are many women and men out there who may be unhappy and not even realize why they cannot find another person with whom to share their lives, and the responsibility of owning or being controlled by a pet may be a part of it.