



Green Eggs & Ham Dog Training?

by *Suzanne Clothier*

For most dog owners, Dr. Seuss's classic tale *Green Eggs & Ham* seems an odd place to look for inspiration. But as a Greek mathematician soaking in his tub found out centuries ago, inspiration can be found in the most unlikely places.

Trying to make it perfectly clear that he absolutely hates green eggs and ham, Sam I Am's friend describes where and how he *still* would refuse to taste this dish:

- in a house
- with a mouse
- in a box
- with a fox
- with a goat
- on a boat and so on. . .

Looked at from a slightly different viewpoint, *Green Eggs & Ham* might also be an accurate reflection of how many dogs view responding to a command. Here's a little spoof on what a dog might say:

I do not always heed commands
My dear but often silly man
I might not sit if near a goat
How could I lay down on a boat?
Perhaps I'd lay down in the house
But not if I have seen a mouse
Don't tell me "heel" when I've smelled fox
Or found the biscuits in the box
I'd find it odd to hear words said
If you were standing on your head
And wonder if "stay" means "do come here"
If you said it to me from a chair
I cannot always just obey
Whatever silly words you say
'Cause if I'm staring at the cat
I will not hear you - that is that!



It is easy to forget that we, just like our dogs, are creatures of habit. And while this is sometimes a good and helpful thing, it can also backfire - especially in a training situation. If we are using our bodies and/or voices in certain habitual ways while giving a command, the dog may depend upon ALL of those clues, even if we are not aware of them.

One simple and fun approach to improve your dog's response to your commands - no matter what's going on around him! - is to borrow ideas from *Green Eggs & Ham*. Ask your dog to sit here and there or everywhere! While you're in a chair, while you do your hair, at the store or on the shore. For each skill your dog has, try to find new and interesting ways and places for him to practice. Be patient - this may be news to him! Step back as needed to helping and rewarding, and take note of how much your dog may be leaning on in the cues you've provided unawares.

Very often, when we think a dog "knows" something, we forget that this knowledge may be very contextual - he only knows it at home or in familiar settings, or when you're standing in a certain way. Take the time to lay down on some grass, stare up at the clouds, and put your dog through his paces. It's an eye opener to realize how patterned we are - and thus how patterned our dogs can become.