

Healing touch



Yogini Murdeshwar paints idols, nature, and yantra-like sketches to heal people

At the crack of dawn everyday, Rakesh Sehgal reaches for his iPod to play the soulful Baat karni mujhay mushkil. For the next 23 minutes, he listens to each note with rapt attention.

The 30-year-old is no Mehdi Hassan fan; a daily dose of Raag Pahadi helps him forget his migraine

woes. Sehgal belongs to the growing breed of Mumbaikars who are exploring the healing properties of alternate therapies.

From music to colour and even pets, therapists are innovating to help people de-stress. The methods are different but the purpose is common—to calm the mind which, in turn, heals the body.

Most of these therapies, however, work in conjunction with regular medication. While music uses the vibrations generated through notes to strike the right chord with our system, colours help unblock and balance energies in the chakras.

And animal lovers will surely vouch for the instant healing after a few minutes of fun and games with their pet.

While some healers focus only on the mind and its related problems like stress, anxiety and fear, others aid recovery from physical ailments. Yogini Murdeshwar, 32, heals through the body's chakras. She believes that each chakra (or area representing various body parts) has its own colour and frequency.

And, depending upon the nature of the ailment and the chakra affected, she makes a painting, which her client can meditate on. "The imbalance in the chakras can be corrected with colours and paintings that emit positive energy," she says.

Her clients, who come for problems ranging from broken relationships to financial worries, meditate and draw energy from these images and colours. "A painting, like a thought, is very powerful and if you want to change your life, you need to alter the way you think," says Murdeshwar who has recently finished a black and red Durga painting for a single mother.

She doesn't promise any miracles; she merely claims to "help people come to terms with the situation and grow". Her canvases are not always a riot of colours. Sometimes even a charcoal work or a pencil sketch can work wonders for people, she believes.

The former HSBC Bank executive quit her job four years ago when she "felt a strong desire to paint." With no formal training in art, Murdeshwar believes that it was a streak of spirituality that brought her closer to the brush.

Her first work—the result of hours of doodling— turned out to be a painting of Shiva. Over the last three years, she has painted idols, nature, mandanas and yantra-like sketches. The therapeutic paintings, of course, come at a price. Starting at ₹8,000, the cost can go up depending on the size of the work.

But not all believe in a spiritual approach to healing. For Radhika Nair and Rohini Fernandes of the Animal Angels Foundation, a loving lick from a pooch, or just 10 minutes of brushing his hair, is the best way to de-stress and feel lighter.



Nair (left) and Fernandes own 20 therapy dogs, mostly labs, cocker spaniels and golden retrievers

"A pet has multiple benefits. You feel confident when he listens to you; an hour of

playing ball can make you forget your worries," says Nair, 26, who, with Fernandes, started the Foundation in 2006. Their first therapy dog was Fernandes' Golden Retriever, Angel, after whom the Foundation is named.

The duo now has 20 therapy dogs, mostly labradors, great danes, cocker spaniels and golden retrievers, all known for their friendly temperament. Fernandes, a dog trainer, ensures that her therapy pets never growl or get aggressive.

Their list of clients is varied; stressed urban professionals, senior citizens, patients at rehabilitation homes and children with behavioural or learning disorders. Nair explains that the line of therapy differs with the patient's need.

A playful dog can help an autistic child sharpen his motor skills; Alzheimer patients enjoy playing ball or merely brushing a dog's hair, while hypertension patients unwind with a dose of paw-sitive therapy. "Research has shown that stroking an animal for 30 minutes can bring down blood pressure and heart rate," she says.