



Reiki Transforms Shelter Cats

BY SARAH HAUSER
PHOTOS BY SARAH HAUSER

I HAVE BEEN A REIKI PRACTITIONER for ten years, working almost exclusively with animals. Besides my private practice, I spend considerable time volunteering in several shelter environments. Having worked with thousands of shelter animals, I have seen Reiki help in profound ways while the animals have taught me deep and enlightening lessons. As I most often work with cats in the shelters, I will describe the dynamics of traumatized arrivals and how the *Let Animals Lead™* form of Reiki, taught by Kathleen Prasad and practiced by the Shelter Animal Reiki Association (SARA), affords a connection with these cats through which the most amazing healings and breakthroughs can occur.

I have been a member of SARA for many years while volunteering at Bideawee's Manhattan and Westhampton facilities, BARC Shelter in Brooklyn and Downtown Veterinary Clinic. My use of Reiki has confirmed the William Rand studies which show Reiki to be useful for both humans and animals,^{1,2} and the Mayo Clinic study which cites the benefits of this gentle, yet powerful method.³

Most animals arriving at a shelter environment are traumatized, whether physically or emotionally. Emotional trauma could relate to having lost a beloved human or be connected to a physical illness or associated with having been rescued from an unsafe and chaotic situation.

The shelter is a stressful environment for animals—the activity of people and other animals, unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells—can all be highly stressful. Some animals have never been away from their owner and home that they are used to, some have been living on the streets and have never been inside, and some are physically sick or injured. These variables not only make it uncomfortable for the animals but can cause difficulties for the staff taking care of them, as they are apt to be reactive and resistant due to fear and lack of trust.

Reiki is a practical, kind and non-threatening method of making the first connection. Creating that connection makes

a huge difference and can change what was a pre-arrival negative momentum to a positive one forming a bond of trust between animal and human. This connection could be the first chance that the animal has ever had to develop a relationship of trust with a person.

After that connection happens, it is easier to help the animal become more comfortable, better socialized, to heal from physical injuries and to have the chance for adoption into a loving home eventually. This feeling during connection is about being in the moment—in a place of true humility and listening. Here is how I try to make this connection.

The *Let Animals Lead™* form of Reiki, taught by Kathleen Prasad and practiced by the SARA, makes a distinction between the Reiki hands-on approach used with people and an approach in which animals lead the session. Animals will show us how close or far away they wish to be.⁴ Because Reiki does not require you to be hands-on—and in this case, it is best to start with your hands off; Reiki can be shared with animals even if they are required to stay inside a kennel while you work with them. This hands-off approach provides flexibility as well as an opportunity to help in a way that is safe and non-threatening.

Since the pure consciousness of Reiki exists at the deepest level of being, where there is no time and space to restrict the energy, the practitioner can effectively share Reiki with an animal regardless of where it is situated relative to the practitioner.⁵ As Reiki opens the channel of energy, healing and communication, between the animals and humans, can go in both directions. We can feel each other's energy, and I believe that we receive healing from each other.

When I first meet a cat that is in a kennel, most often I will sit outside it with the door closed, sharing the energy. I am not “doing” Reiki to it, instead, sharing the energy and the cat is welcome to absorb as much or little of it as it wishes. Whether you are sharing Reiki energy, or any other modality with an animal, letting go of expectations is vitally important.

I have worked with many cats that were said to be unadoptable. They could not be touched and were thought to be

Left: Gingas, one of the lovely shy cats at Bideawee who has blossomed with Reiki.

hopelessly feral or “bad.” Because Reiki is a non-threatening method of connecting, I have even been able to work successfully with cats who usually might lunge and attack people, and feral cats who have never been touched by a person. I have had the pleasure of seeing these cats gradually become more comfortable, more affectionate, and eventually be adopted.

When I am working in one of the cat rooms, where cats are roaming free and are not in kennels, I will sit down at a comfortable distance from them and let the Reiki start flowing. Inevitably, as the energy fills the room, at least some of the cats come closer to where I am. Even the shyest will at least receive relaxation from it, whether or not they move closer or stay distanced.

When there is a new arrival, the shelter staff often asks me to share Reiki which helps all cats in the room as it is a chance for a positive start with each other. Shortly, they will all lay down and become sleepy, sighing and letting go, as though this is the peace that they have been looking for so long but have been unable to find.

The shelter staff often tell me that they have a much easier time of handling and interacting with the animals after I have worked with them, noticing how much more comfortable the animals are. One volunteer told me that there always is “the Sarah effect” on days that I come there. Even though these cats receive kind attention, playing, petting from the many dedicated volunteers, there is a level of peacefulness and harmony between the animals that is different than on other days. This difference is an indication of the power of the Reiki energy.

Lenore is a big, beautiful tabby cat who was adopted from Bideawee as a kitten but brought back after a year due to aggressive behavior. She was extremely agitated upon her re-

turn, becoming overstimulated quickly and detesting other cats. Lenore lashed out at staff members as they tried their best to calm her. As she was growing more irritated, they gave her space by leaving her kennel open so she could come out and explore.

In my first session, she was in an empty kennel hiding behind a box, peering out at me. Her eyes were huge, her pupils nearly the size of her irises. I began to let the Reiki flow from where I was sitting, about eight feet away. I spoke to her softly saying that I was there to help her and everything would be okay. Some cats prefer silence, but in her case, I felt that speaking in a quiet voice was helping her. I could feel her fear, so I did not stare at her but occasionally glanced in her direction to see how she was doing. I pictured light coming out of my hands, surrounding her. It felt like we started to make a connection. I saw her eyes relax a little bit. I asked her silently if she could blink at me to tell me she was doing okay, and after a bit, she blinked. That felt like the time for us to end the first session.

Two days later, we had our second session. This time, Lenore was on the floor behind a large plastic container with enough space for me to see her peering out at me. As I let the Reiki flow, I kept speaking to her gently and softly, reassuring her she was in a safe place and that she would be taken care of and loved. Little by little her eyes and body relaxed, and I felt a deep connection. Then she peacefully laid down her head. In the third session, she was again behind the plastic container. The container had holes in it so that I could see parts of her through it and her peering out at me from the side. She stared with big eyes, less stressed than previously. I offered her Reiki, and she began to settle down. I spoke to her softly, feeling our connection.

Each session after that, I felt an increasingly stronger connection with her. Speaking in a soft voice as I was sharing Reiki with her had a powerful effect. I could see that behind whatever aggressive behavior she displayed there was a very sensitive cat; she was startled by the slightest movements and sounds. I was able to feel Lenore’s desire for connection but that she was fearful and cautious and needed time and space to come closer on her terms.

After a while, Lenore was relocated from Manhattan to Westhampton, a bigger facility with a chance for her to have her own room. I visited to help her feel more at home and help her get off to a positive start. She recognized me and the energy she was receiving. I could see her eyes relaxing and, little by little, she came out of her hiding place and began exploring the room coming close to me at points, rolling on her back for a bit, comfortable with some petting and even playing with a string toy. She was more peaceful when I left than earlier that day.



Lenore was hiding inside this little house when I first came to work with her in Westhampton. As I worked with her, slowly she emerged from the house into the room.

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Over time, as Lenore's trust increased, she started to trust other staff members and became friendlier. Once we had made our connection through Reiki, I was able to reach her, and it then opened her world to other people as well. Lenore continues to do well in Bideawee's beautiful Westhampton facility, and hopefully, the perfect person or people will soon adopt her.

I am fortunate to have studied Reiki through the master level with Sheryl Schlameuss Berger and to have attended a "Reiki III, Animal Reiki Teacher Training" course taught by Kathleen Prasad. What I have learned through all my training and experience is that at the heart of Reiki is a feeling of complete openness and that it is vital for a practitioner to let go of whatever they think should happen and any idea of making something happen. We need only enable the Reiki flow, allowing the energy to go where it is needed.

Spending time and sharing your love with an animal is always a beautiful thing to do, but Reiki can also help a practitioner reach the animal on a deeper level. There is something unique and very tangible sensed physically and mentally by both the giver and receiver of Reiki. Animals



Reiki with Sherrie, Willie and Bandit at Bideawee. All three cats were nearly completely feral when they arrived.

respond to a person's openness and willingness to give up whatever their expectations may be to experience the moment and the connection with them. That moment of connection is where the most beautiful and unexpected experiences, healings and breakthroughs can happen. For me, the joy of those moments will always be my connection to the beautiful shelter cats. ✨



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Endnotes

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- 3 <https://dahlc.mayoclinic.org>. (2018). 9 Facts about Reiki. [online] Available at: <https://dahlc.mayoclinic.org/2015/12/29/9-facts-about-reiki/>.
- 4 Prasad, Kathleen. "The 6 Pillars of the Let Animals Lead™ Method of Animal Reiki – Kathleen Prasad's Animal Reiki Blog." Kathleen Prasad's Animal Reiki Source. January 13, 2019. <https://www.animalreikisource.com/the-6-pillars-of-the-let-animals-lead-method-of-animal-reiki>.
- 5 William Lee Rand, *Reiki, The Healing Touch First and Second Degree Manual* (Southfield, MI: Vision Publications, February 2016), 49.



Saul, Amana and Bandit gather around for Reiki in Bideawee's "shy cats" room.