



Reiki and Canine Transitions

Supporting Your Dog's Final Journey

by: Kathleen Prasad

“There is a cycle of love and death that shapes the lives of those who choose to travel in the company of animals. It is a cycle unlike any other. To those who have never lived through its turnings and walked its rocky path, our willingness to give our hearts with full knowledge that they will be broken seems incomprehensible. Only we know how small a price we pay for what we receive; our grief, no matter how powerful it may be, is an insufficient measure of the joy we have been given.” —Suzanne Clothier

Patty was panting, clearly anxious and uncomfortable. The German shepherd mix, who had been rescued by BrightHaven sanctuary several months earlier, was getting closer to death. BrightHaven supports many animals in their final days in this life, and I knew Patty was a very lucky dog to have found her way here. As I sat next to her, offering Reiki, she looked up at me. I had the strong feeling that I should massage her forehead as I offered Reiki. As I sat with her, petting her, she stretched out her head toward me, and her breathing became less labored. Within a few more minutes she had stopped panting altogether, sighed, and finally I could see that she was able to fully relax. I could feel a strong emotion of gratitude surrounding and encompassing us. I could sense that she realized and appreciated all the love and care she received from everyone at BrightHaven who loved her so much.

Soon after this Reiki treatment, Patty passed away peacefully, closely surrounded by her BrightHaven family and friends, both human and animals alike. She had come to the end of this part of her journey, but I knew it was merely the beginning of another one, just one that we cannot so easily see ...

Reiki is a wonderful support to dogs as they go through the death and dying process. Japanese in origin, Reiki is a system for spiritual healing and development that utilizes a series of precepts for people to live by, as well as healing meditation and focus techniques to support an energetic rebalancing and re-harmonizing of the body, mind and spirit. As dogs grow closer to death, their essence moves more fully into the spiritual realm. Reiki can help us continue to connect and support our dogs as they get ready to leave their physical bodies.

Connecting with our dogs within a Reiki treatment is a way of communicating more deeply from our heart to our animal's heart, becoming more aware of the love and compassion that exists between us, and of our deeper connection beyond just our physical relationship. When we can be present for our dogs in this way as they go through the death and dying process, we are able to support their journey in a very profound way, realizing all the gifts they have given us throughout our time together, and realizing they will always be with us in our hearts. As we walk this difficult road with them, we will be profoundly changed by it.

In addition to healing meditations (see “Being Gratitude With Your Dog”), there are also Reiki precepts, which can provide support for canine caregivers. The founder of Reiki, Mikao Usui, created the Five Reiki Precepts as guides for living a more balanced life. When supporting our beloved dogs in their transitions, all kinds of emotions can come to the surface for us, and the Five Precepts can help us to bring ourselves back to stability and balance, which in turn is the emotional state that most helps us to help our dogs.

Healing Through Writing: The Five Precepts Exercise

Focus on one precept at a time. Write the precept at the top of your paper. Then just write whatever comes to mind. Don't worry about form or length; just write what comes easily: thoughts, feelings, memories and so on. Allow yourself 10-20 minutes of uninterrupted time to write. Writing is a great way to heal and release issues that may come up during this time with your dog.

1. Just for today, do not anger.

We might feel anger at not being able to “cure” our dogs or that we couldn't stop the progression of the disease; or anger at ourselves that we didn't notice earlier, take different actions or somehow be able to stop things from progressing to this point. We must learn to surrender to what is, rather than what we wish something “might have been.” It is always easy to look back and second-guess oneself, but spending emotional energy on anger will only take away from the energy you have to support your dog from a peaceful place.

2. Just for today, do not worry.

We might worry about what the transition will look like: if our dog will be in pain, and what each day might hold for our dear doggie. Not knowing the future, and the fear of the unknown, can be very intimidating. Facing this uncertainty and surrendering to it will help us to remain present and courageous as we navigate the unknown, together with our dog.

3. Be humble.

We might wish we could control the journey, making it smooth and easy for everyone concerned. We must learn to accept the dying process, whatever it might look like, in all its complexity and mysteriousness. Dying is a spiritual experience beyond our comprehension, a part of the cycle of life that we all must experience at some point. Being able to be there for our dogs, as simple and humble witnesses to the process, will provide much comfort to them.

4. Be honest in your work.

Our relationships with our dogs always come from the deepest, most honest places within ourselves—they will accept nothing less from us. In turn, our “work” at this particular time in our dog’s life is to be open and honest—present—by his side, whatever this journey may look like—for all the joy and sorrow in the fullness of our memories, our love and our relationship. We must allow our dogs to take this journey in their own way, and we must strive to accept all that this entails as best as we can.

5. Be compassionate to yourself and others.

When we must face our beloved dog’s death, it is easy to be hard on ourselves, wanting to have been able to “fix” things. Often we might ask ourselves, “What more could I have done?” or “What could I have done differently?” Our dogs love and accept us for whatever decisions we make, knowing that we loved them and did our best for them. Just as they always loved us unconditionally and completely throughout their lives, so, too, do they love us as we support them through their transitions. We must learn to let go of regrets and guilt once they have passed.

Because dogs are so sensitive to our moods and feelings, they will sense our distress and grief at approaching the time of transition. This can cause them concern and worry. By using healing meditations and the Reiki precepts, we can help ourselves to stay in a more balanced emotional state, which in turn helps our animals relax so that they can focus on their own inner journey of transition. Becoming a partner and helper to our dog as he or she passes will be one of the hardest things we will do in this life, but how could we do any less for him? Our love and gratitude for all the joy they have manifested in our lives will carry us through. 

Kathleen Prasad is an author, animal Reiki teacher, founder of Animal Reiki Source and President of the Shelter Animal Reiki Association. She is also a registered practitioner with the Shibumi International Reiki Association. She teaches Reiki classes at BrightHaven Holistic Sanctuary and Hospice in Santa Rosa, California. For more information about her educational and informational programs, please visit her website at www.animalreikisource.com.



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Healing Meditation: Being Gratitude With Your Dog

Sit in a comfortable position, spine straight, with your shoulders and arms relaxed. Relax your entire body as you breathe deeply a few times. Imagine there are roots growing down from the base of your spine, deep and wide into the earth. Imagine that the powerful, grounding energy of the earth can flow up these roots into your heart center, giving you stability and peace.

Take 10 breaths, and on each in-breath, feel the earth energy coming up into your heart. On each out-breath, release any emotions, fears or worries you may feel inside you. With each successive breath, feel more and more stillness and stability within you. Once you have completed the 10 breaths, allow yourself to sit for several minutes in the space of earth energy and stability that you have created with your breath.

Once you feel yourself fully calm and connected to the earth, bring your dog to your mind. Allow yourself to think about the experiences you’ve had with your dog for which you are grateful. Focus on the parts of his or her unique being for which you are grateful. Imagine that your heart can expand out of your body, creating a beautiful state of gratitude all around you. Simply invite your dog into the space. Imagine that within this heart space, all is perfect and balanced. Feel gratitude enveloping both you and your dog. Let go of your expectations (along with any worries about what needs to be healed) and continue to breathe the calm and strength of earth energy into your heart as you share this space of gratitude with your dog for several minutes up to an hour.