



# Compassion Fatigue and Animal Rescue

## How Reiki Can Help

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**T**HOSE OF US with a passion to help shelter/sanctuary animals know what difficult work it is. On the one hand, we feel an inner mission to rescue animals who are in trouble, to comfort animals who are traumatized and to help abused animals back to a place of health and wellness. Unfortunately, spending lots of time with animals who have seen all manner of negative experiences takes its toll on us as caregivers. No matter how well intentioned we might be, if we spend a significant amount of time caring for abused and traumatized animals, this will begin to wear away at our hearts, unless we take pro-active steps toward healing.

As Reiki practitioners who work with rescued animals, we may often find ourselves spending time with the animals having the most severe issues. In addition, we may be asked by shelter/sanctuary staff to be present and hold a calming space while an animal is euthanized. This may be for an animal we feel close to, having created a Reiki relationship over a period of time. Practicing Reiki can help us to stay centered, strong and balanced amidst all the chaos we observe, sense and feel.

According to the Humane Society, “compassion fatigue most often affects people whose personalities are characterized by empathy and a deep awareness of the suffering of others.”<sup>1</sup> At particular risk are staff asked to perform euthanasia on the very animals they have saved and cared for. According to the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project,<sup>2</sup> the symptoms of compassion fatigue vary but can include excessive sadness or bottling up of emotions, isolating oneself, feeling mentally and physically tired and having difficulty concentrating.

If you recognize some of these symptoms in yourself, and you work with rescued animals, chances are you have compassion fatigue. However, this is good news, because your own awareness of your suffering is the first step to getting well!

Reiki holds the keys to healing your heart and mind, and getting back on track to helping the animals! Let’s take a look at the precepts and see how they can help point us towards wellness.

### For today only, do not anger

Take a moment to get in touch with any feelings of anger that may have built up over time due to the animal abuse and neglect you have witnessed. What are the specific issues that elicit the most anger inside you? Did you carry this anger home with you after your time spent at the shelter/sanctuary? Notice how stuck your breath is inside your body when you are in a state of anger.

### Reiki Practice: “Belly Breath”

**Sitting meditation:** Place your hands on your lower belly. Take ten deep breaths in. Imagine the breath as a beautiful healing light that can fill your body all the way to your lower belly. Imagine you can release all your stresses from the day with each exhale. Notice how the more open and expansive your breath is, the harder it is for anger to hold onto you.

### For today only, do not worry

Focusing on the past month, how many times did you feel worried about the animals you were connecting with? Which issues caused you the most worry? Did you carry this worry home with you after your time spent at the shelter/sanctuary? Notice how disconnected you feel from your surroundings (and your inner self) when you are in a state of worry.

### Reiki practice: “Reiki Bath”

**Standing meditation:** Find a peaceful place to stand with your feet shoulder width apart, and your hands resting at your sides. Close your eyes and imagine the energy of the sky as a beautiful bright rain of light and goodness flowing down through the top of your head, through your body and out the soles of your feet into the earth. After several minutes, reverse this visualization. See the strong stable energy of the earth flowing up through the soles of your feet, through your body and out the top of your head. Feel yourself unified with the earth and sky through this beautiful bath of light.

### Be grateful

This precept is really about remembering the positive. Sometimes in difficult situations, we forget that every cloud has a silver lining. Figure out what your silver linings are for the animals that you work with. Perhaps a fearful animal you have worked with is showing progress. Maybe an animal who was abandoned finally found a forever family. Even in the case of an animal who died, were they given kindness in the last moments of their life? Or perhaps their life has illuminated cruelty in a way that will teach and inspire people to help. If we take some time and look deeper into situations, we can always

<sup>1</sup> Carreen Maloney, “People Care Starts With You,” animalsheltering.org.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.compassionfatigue.org/>.

find things to be grateful for. In fact, some of life's most difficult teachers are also the most profound.

**Reiki practice: "Remembering Gratitude"**

**Walking meditation:** Take ten minutes to walk outside in nature. As you walk, focus on the mantra "Thank you..." Allow your mind to go where it will: to animals, people and situations in your life for which you hold gratitude. Notice how your mind and heart shifts in as few as ten minutes with this positive focus.

**Be honest**

Reach out to others who know what you are going through (fellow rescuers) or to your Reiki friends who share an empathic view of the world. The Shelter Animal Reiki Association<sup>3</sup> is a group of over four hundred people around the world who spend time with rescued animals and use the practices of Reiki for support. If you can find people who understand, but can also offer you a positive and encouraging word, all the better! Figure out your boundaries. What part of your rescue work is the most gratifying? Which parts are the most overwhelming? Spending time becoming more aware of how your time with rescued animals affects your inner state will help you to move toward balance.

**Reiki Practice: "My Experiences Today..."**

**Writing Meditation:** Set aside ten minutes each day when you get home from your shelter/sanctuary to write about your experiences. Don't edit your words; just let them flow. About once a week, find a time when you feel peaceful and rested to read over what you've written. Read with the intent to find clarity about what is most healthy for you, so that you can find a way to help animals, but not at the expense of your own health.

**Be compassionate to yourself and others**

Sometimes rescuers remember their compassion for the ones they care for, but forget to be compassionate to themselves. Recognize your limitations, and remember your self-care. It's okay to be there for others, as long as you take positive steps towards balance for yourself. The heart is the center of your being, so make sure to nurture your heart.

**Reiki Practice with the animals you care for: "Heart Moon"**

Take 10–15 minutes for this meditation. Sit nearby your animal. Imagine your heart as a beautiful glowing moon. Keeping your focus on your heart, imagine this light can gently expand all around you. This light is full of love, kindness, healing and balance. Gently invite your animal into this beautiful heart space. This is a space to share loving-kindness. This is a space where hearts can touch, and in that connection, the deepest healing can manifest, for both you and the animal.

Reiki helps us remember that there is always hope. You are not alone. You are as strong as the earth and as expansive as the sky. All will be well. Take some time for Reiki, and watch you and the animals you care for shift back into wellness! ✨



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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.shelteranimalreikiassociation.org/>.