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## THE HEALING POWERS OF ANIMALS

CATHY MALKIN

*When we give animals the opportunity, they can reach into our painful, hurt places and mend and soothe. The ways of animals and how they heal us are mysterious, but stories I have heard over the years convince me beyond a doubt that animals are some of the most accomplished and accessible healers we may ever meet.*

- Susan Chernak McElroy,

### Introduction

Animals are natural healers with amazing and magical abilities to heal humans in profound ways that are holistic in nature. They bring us healing for our minds, bodies, emotions and yes, even our spirits. Animals have the ability to heal us: The library of clinical studies proves the healing efficacy of animals over and over again (Delta Society). The anecdotal evidence is even more abundant. For many, their direct, personal experiences of being healed by animals offer further proof that animals are genuine healers.

Whether we share our lives with companion animals, receive a visit from an animal assisted therapy team, or benefit from an assistance/service animal, the therapeutic benefits can be felt immediately by all those involved.

Why are animals such wonderful healers? The answer is simple: animals make us feel better by simply being fully present with us in a loving, nonjudgmental manner. We can also participate in these healings. The human-animal bond is strengthened when we invite animals into our hearts.

### Historical notes

Since the beginning of time, long before animals were domesticated, humans and animals walked together in a mutual partnership, sharing the Earth. Since the beginning of time, our ancestors recognized their deep connection with animals and the innate healing powers that animals possess. Our ancestors affirmed their symbiotic relationship with animals, acknowledging their mutual interdependence. Yet our ancestors embraced a deeper consciousness that recognized the interconnection with all beings – human and non-human.

For thousands of years, the human-animal bond was strong and healthy. Animals still play important and fundamental roles in the lives of indigenous people. “In the universe of primitive people, animals were integral – as equal partners, or even superiors. An animal ancestor was the tribe’s totem: animal spirits accompanied human souls to the land of the dead; people talked to animals and, in the time before people, animals could talk and were like people. The first gods of humans were animals symbolizing elemental forces of nature. Sacred dogs in China, sacred cats in Egypt, and animal imagery in the Judeo-Christian tradition are all a part of our heritage. In our century it seems only children regard animals as equals. . .” (Hines & Bustad, 2000)

Michael W. Fox, along with other historians, believes the domestication of animals created a deep split in the human-animal bond. By domesticating animals, humans began to dominate, exploit, and treat animals as objects and property. This type of treatment was further encouraged through the misinterpretation of the word, “dominion” in the Book of Genesis, Part I which contained instructions on how people should view all of God’s Creation. “The word “dominion” in Genesis is often interpreted as divine sanction for all forms of animal abuse. But the original meaning of the word, ‘dominion’ comes from the Hebrew verb *yorde*, which means to come down to; to have communion and compassion for.” (Fox, cited in McElroy, 1997)

In the 17th century, with the rise of industrial society and the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm, the bond between humans and animals further deteriorated. According to this belief system, the mind, body, and spirit are separate and disconnected entities. Human consciousness saw animals as separate “robots” in fuzzy, winged or gilled bodies and incapable of thoughts, feelings or free choice. This further perpetuated the myth that animals and nature were separate and disconnected from humans. Humans mistakenly believed they were superior to animals. The human-animal partnership was replaced with a hierarchy, placing humans above all of nature. Humans may use these attitudes to justify or excuse cruel or insensitive treatment of other animals. (Hines & Bustad, 2000)

Separated from their animal brethren, part of the human spirit was disconnected from human consciousness.

What humans and nonhuman animals have in common is that they are a combination of body and spiritual biological forms animated by spiritual essence. It is interesting to note that the word, “animal,” comes from the Latin, *anima*, which means life principle, breath, air, soul, and living being. (Smith 1999) The Latin definition of *anima* speaks to the true essence of all beings on earth, humans and non-humans included. Ultimately, at the core of our essence we are all spiritual beings: there is no difference between us. Non-humans and humans are the embodiment of spirit. It is this disconnection from Spirit which has left humans sick and full of *dis-ease* on all levels of their being.

## **Animal healers**

The use of animals in therapeutic settings has gone on for centuries. In ancient Greece, the terminally ill would receive horseback rides to raise their spirits. The first known modern use of animals therapeutically was in 1792 at a Quaker psychiatric retreat in England. The York retreat made use of a variety of farm animals which the patients learned to care for. The use of animals in the patients' treatment was felt to enhance the humanity of the emotionally ill. Through rabbits, chickens and other farm animals, the patients learned self-control by positive reinforcement. (Bustad 1980 cited in Perelle and Granville, 1993) The basis of treatment was teaching the patients self-control by having the ostensibly weaker creatures dependent on them. The York Retreat became a model for the reform of other asylums of the day (Blake, 1980 as cited in Perelle and Granville, 1993).

In 1867, epileptic patients at Bethel Hospital in Bielefeld West Germany received treatment from animals by becoming their caregivers at the facility. From its inception, pets were an integral part of the treatment protocol because of the belief of Bethel's founders that the use of animals was a common-sense approach to treatment. The animal therapy program, still in use, has been expanded to include farm animals and a wild game park (McCulloch, 1983; Bustad and Hines 1984 as cited in Perelle and Granville, 1993).

In 1942, the first documented use of animal assisted therapy in the United States occurred in Pawling, New York at an air force convalescent hospital. The American Red Cross and the Army Air Corps set up a program for convalescing veterans who were encouraged to work with animals at the center's farm and in the forest nearby to help with their recuperation. Unfortunately, no records were kept on the effect of the human-animal interaction and the program was discontinued after World War II. (McCulloch, 1983; Levinson, 1969 cited in Perelle and Granville, 1993)

Dr. Boris Levinson, a child psychiatrist, was the first American pioneer of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) to report in detail the therapeutic benefits of contact with animals and build the use of companion animals into a self-conscious diagnostic and therapeutic technique. (Beck and Katcher, 1996). Levinson accidentally discovered the value of using dogs in therapy in 1969 when a nonverbal patient of his began to show signs of improvement after meeting his dog, Jingles. Levinson concluded that Jingles was instrumental in facilitating the therapy with the child. The child's response helped Levinson to see the benefits of using a dog as a communication link between therapist and child. From then on, he began to incorporate his "four-footed therapists" into his practice and wrote extensively on the subject. Levinson advocated the use of animals in cases where affection and unconditional acceptance were indicated. He believed, "A pet can provide, in boundless measure, love and unqualified approval. Many elderly and lonely people have discovered that pets satisfy vital emotional needs" (Levinson, 1969 as cited in Perelle and Granville, 1993). Levinson described his introduction of animals into the therapeutic milieu as "pet facilitated therapy" (Levinson, 1969), and this has been accepted by most professionals as being appropriately descriptive and accurate. (Perelle and Granville, 1993)

In 1970, the American Humane Education Society commissioned a survey to determine how many institutions in the country were using animals to facilitate the treatment of patients. They reported that 48% of institutions surveyed used animals in some capacity. (Arkow, 1982)

In 1977, the Delta Society Foundation, a national nonprofit organization which promotes research in the healing benefits of animals, was established in Portland, Oregon under the leadership of Michael McCulloch, MD. At the time of Delta's creation, pets were viewed as property and luxury items. The original mission of Delta was to fund credible research on why animals are important to the general population and specifically how they affect health and wellbeing. Today, the Delta Society is located in Renton, Washington and they have broadened their goals to, "Expand awareness of the positive effect animals can have on human health and development, remove barriers that prevent involvement of animals in everyday life and expand the therapeutic and service role of animals in human health, service, and education. (Delta Society)

Over the past thirty years, the role animals play in healthcare has moved from grass roots movement to a mainstream therapeutic modality. "AAT is a goal directed intervention in which an animal meets specific criteria as an integral part of the treatment process. AAT is directed and/or delivered by a health/human service professional with specialized expertise, and within the scope of practice of his/her profession. AAT is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning. AAT is provided in a variety of settings, and may be group or individual in nature. This process is documented and evaluated". (Green Chimney) Today, the burgeoning the fields of AAT, along with humane education and the use of assistance/service animals, continues to gain widespread acceptance. Through the therapeutic use of animals, people remember who they are at their core essence – in mind, body, emotion and spirit.

The Delta Society holds one of the most comprehensive libraries of clinical research on improving human health with service and therapy animals. A multitude of clinical studies listed on the Delta Society's Health Benefits of Animals bibliography validates the healing benefits animals offer humans. Whether animals are introduced to people in hospitals, correctional institutions, residential and treatment centers for people with emotional and physical issues, senior homes, foster homes, orphanages, classrooms, or live in our households, they convey positive healing benefits which can now be measured.

Companion animals, in particular, can heal humans of many physical, emotional, mental and spiritual ailments. These amazing healers can cure loneliness, help lower high blood pressure, reduce heart disease, and reduce stress. Studies have proven that companion animals foster empathy and promote positive self-esteem in children and seniors. People tend to live longer and healthier lives when they share their households with companion animals.

<p>Kite Chaser (aka KC) came into my life in 1993. KC assisted me in all aspects of my life: visiting classrooms as humane education volunteers teaching students about being kind and</p>	<p><b>Cathy and KC The Keeshond</b></p>
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responsible to animals and wildlife; teaching me and my students animal communication; helping people as animal-assisted therapists; and assisting me with the challenges I face as a person with a physical disability. KC is the only dog to receive an honorary Masters degree "Conscious Canine," from John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California for his "compassionate" work. KC crossed the Rainbow Bridge in January 2002. Although in Spirit, he continues to be a great source of inspiration to me. His words, through my interpretations will be featured in the upcoming book, *Awakening to Animal Voices - A Teen Guide to Telepathic Communication with All Life* by Dawn Baumann Brunke



## **Animal Assisted Therapy**

Susan M. Brooks, PsyD, of Green Chimneys Farm and Wildlife Center in New York State describes the basic tenets of AAT:

1. AAT is a triangular relationship; one that is dynamic and flowing.
2. One must have respect of the animal as an animal. AAT does not anthropomorphize. You do not assign or project human emotions onto the animal. AAT does not "use" animals, but works in conjunction with the animal's basic temperament and capacities.
3. AAT is cognizant of stress in the triangle, either from or towards the animal or humans.
4. The therapist involved in AAT must be knowledgeable of the history of each in the triangle... i.e. has the dog been fearful of slippery floors and becomes stressed walking down the hallway of a hospital?... or has the person you are working with have a history of abuse to animals in their past?
5. Therapists utilizing AAT must be aware and create a sense of balance in the dynamic and flowing triangular relationship.
6. Therapists utilizing AAT are aware of and concerned about safety issues at all times in the relationship with the person and for the animal.

The therapist establishes the boundaries which connect humans and animals as part of AAT. The therapist looks to the strengths and weaknesses of the animal as well as their personal issues as the coordinator of the triangle... i.e. if the therapist is asked to assist with grief counseling utilizing AAT and personally does not deal very well with death and dying, the therapist must realize that boundary in themselves. The therapist must know what one brings to the triangle at any given moment and how that energy impacts the dynamic flow of the triangle. (Brooks, Green Chimney)

The field of AAT provides animals a vehicle to do what comes naturally to them: going about their heartfelt business of loving humans unconditionally in an authentic way. "By their physical presence, responsiveness to human contact, and simple needs, they give their owners a sense of emotional security that is often missing from today's fast-paced and rapidly changing world. Pets offer a consistent, readily available source of warmth, trust, and unconditional love. If we were lucky our mothers were a source of these qualities during our infancy. But, more than likely, we haven't felt them since. Animals, however, with their instinctively loving and attentive qualities, remind us of this blissful state." (Ruckert, 1987)

It should be noted, however, that not all people will respond to animals in a positive way and therapists who introduce AAT must be sensitive to what is best for their client.

The number of organizations from mainstream to grassroots who incorporate AAT continues to grow. At the simplest level, they start with therapists who incorporate a dog or cat into their therapy, as with the H.A.R.T program in Mahopac, New York or the Share-A-Smile group in Santa Monica, California. There are programs which use horses

to help people heal emotionally ill people, such as the Epona Center in Tucson, Arizona or Green Chimneys in New York State which helps emotionally injured children reclaim their stability. People with physical, emotional and learning disabilities may work with a physical therapist who uses her dog to motivate her patient to push a little further, or instills motivation and confidence through equestrian healing (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association). For individuals with disabilities, equine-assisted activities have been shown to improve muscle tone, balance, posture, coordination, motor development as well as emotional well-being. There are now over 500 North American programs which partner horses in the treatment and rehabilitation of persons with a wide range of disabilities. They feature riding for the handicapped for therapy, recreation and/or sport. (Hines & Bustad, 2000)

## Conclusion

The more humans open their hearts to animals, the more profound the healing experience. "Now we can conclude that to be healthy, it is necessary to make contact with other kinds of living things. If human beings are going to reach their full potential for health, they must not limit their companions to their own kind. If people are to come to terms with their own animal nature, they must feel the rest of the living world around them." (Beck & Katcher, 1996)

Now, more than any other time in history, the aid of animals is needed to help heal humans. Our spiritual side has been neglected in our current culture: we have lost our souls in the chaos of our fragmented world. It is this loss of connection that creates so much *dis-ease* among us. "Most of us seem to need animals as part of our lives; our human nature is bound up with animal nature. Isolated from it we are diminished. We lose part of our heritage." (Sheldrake, 1999)

Animals show us the way home to our higher essence. To find their spiritual home, humans must first recognize their interdependence and interconnection with Mother Earth and her myriad of creatures. The next step is to embrace and recognize all species on earth as our teachers, healers, companions and familiars. "Animals can offer a way home. In their innocence and wisdom, in their connection to the earth and its most

### Cathy and Kobe Bear



A gift from KC, Kobe Bear arrived in my life a year ago. Kobe Bear is a 3 year old rescued Keeshond. He currently assists me in my work in animal communication and humane education, carrying on KC's legacy.

ancient rhythms, they show us a way back to a home they have never left." (McElroy, 1997)	
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There are a number of organizations that help people and their companion animals become animal-assisted therapy teams, humane education and assistance/service animals work in:

Organizations that certify all types of animals:

Delta Society <http://www.deltasociety.org>

The Foundation for Pet Provided Therapy (aka Love on a Leash) <http://www.loveonaleash.org>

Organizations that only certify dogs:

<http://www.therapydogs.com/>

Therapy Dogs International, Inc <http://www.tdi-dog.org>

**Cathy Malkin** has shared a deep and special bond with animals since she was a young child, She shares her love for animals and nature by devoting her life to helping animals and the environment through animal communication, human education and animal-assisted therapy. As an Animal Communicator, Cathy strengthens and nurtures people's relationships with their animal companions by telepathic communication with their animals. A Humane Educator since 1996, Cathy has taught thousands of children and adults in Contra Costa County how to live responsibly with animals and nature. Cathy, in partnership with her dog, KC, were Animal-Assisted Therapists for eight years until KC's passing two years ago. She is currently working with her dog, Kobe Bear, to become a Pet Partners team with the Delta Society. Cathy is the author and publisher of a newsletter, *Animal Muse*, where she writes about the human-animal bond. Cathy holds a Masters Degree in Interdisciplinary Consciousness Studies (focused on the human-animal bond).

Cathy currently lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her husband, George and her animal family, Mona-Marie, Elvis and Kobe Bear. [www.animalmuse.com](http://www.animalmuse.com)

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