

Natural Dog Success Story: Healing Energy

Reiki helps dog deemed unadoptable find her forever home.

Denise Flaim

The dog: Lali, a one-eyed American Pit Bull Terrier mix who arrived as a stray at Berkeley Animal Care Services in California.

The problem: The staff at this municipal shelter didn't know Lali's history, but they could read the shorthand: Bite wounds on her face, ears, and body — some old, some fresh — and her sightless left eye suggested she had been used as bait for fighting dogs. Trembling and pacing, Lali refused to relax, and shelter workers knew no one would adopt such a tattered, restless soul.

The holistic approach: Kathleen Prasad, co-author of "Animal Reiki: Using Energy to Heal the Animals in Your Life" (Ulysses Press, 2006), volunteers at the shelter to give Reiki treatments to its animals.

Developed in Japan a century ago, Reiki means "universal life energy," and is used at hundreds of American hospitals to speed healing and relieve pain in human patients.

"It's not your energy doing the healing, it's energy from the universe that goes through you and to the client like a magnet to exactly where it's needed," Prasad says. "It's very gentle, yet very powerful."

How it helps: In any type of energy medicine, from homeopathy to acupuncture, energy imbalances are believed to create disease and impede recovery. "What Reiki does is rebalance your energy," Prasad says. "Then your immune system can kick in and you can heal yourself."

The shelter dogs Prasad works with are under great stress, which can manifest physically, such as having difficulty shaking off a persistent case of kennel cough or recovering from wounds like Lali's.

How it works: "Some dogs prefer to lie several feet away from me" until they are comfortable with the Reiki that Prasad is sending — an energetic exchange most humans might miss because we are so programmed only to "look with our eyes and touch with our hands."

Once they are comfortable, "some dogs come over and push their bodies into my hand," Prasad says, adding that oftentimes it is an area on the dog that is injured or hurting.

Reiki practitioners say their hands sometimes feel hot and tingly as they act as conduits for Reiki, but hands-on contact is not mandatory. Reiki can also be delivered over distance.

The results: Amelia Funghi, the shelter's volunteer coordinator, says two things typically happen after Prasad works with an animal: "They calm down and relax. And it seems to create a change or opening that wasn't there before, and many get adopted or fostered shortly after."

As for Lali, her first Reiki session lasted less than an hour. Ten minutes into it, she lowered herself to her side, sighed deeply, and closed her eyes. Funghi rushed over to see if anything was wrong: It was the first time since Lali's arrival that she had stopped pacing long enough to lie down.

Six weeks after arriving at the shelter, and three weeks after her first Reiki treatment, Lali went home with a family who thought she would be the perfect companion for their Bulldog, who also had one eye.

Other applications: Prasad often uses Reiki with terminally ill animals, mainly to help the owners come to terms with the transition. Prasad also teaches Reiki to staff members of a guide-dog group to help the "career change" dogs that do not make the program and so must be re-homed.

Resources: There are several different schools of Reiki, and there are no special credentials required for a practitioner to learn this energy healing. Students progress through three or four levels of expertise, with the final and most difficult level that of Reiki master, which enables a person to teach Reiki and give "attunements," in which the ability to access Reiki is



conferred.

Almost 100 veterinarians are listed as Reiki practitioners with the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (www.ahvma.org).

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