



Reiki:

what animals can tell us

Ann Baldwin, PhD, physiologist and reiki master, explains how interacting with animals and their energy fields increased her understanding of the therapy

What is reiki?

Reiki is a Japanese name, meaning spiritually guided life energy (commonly known as universal life energy) – an energy that animates us all and is found all around us. Reiki helps to harmonise body, mind and spirit. Receiving reiki from a reiki practitioner is a relaxing and soothing experience that reduces the debilitating effects of stress and anxiety and promotes natural healing.

To become a practitioner it is necessary to study under a reiki master and receive reiki attunements. An attunement is a special ceremony to awaken the inner healing power of a person by connecting him/her to the unlimited source of universal life force energy. This starts the process of healing within the person and also enables the person to give direct healing to the self, other people, animals and plants.

Reiki practitioners, using their hands, are able to sense the subtle energy fields that

surround living creatures and detect areas of imbalance.

Reiki is used by approximately one million practitioners worldwide, and in at least 100 hospitals in the US⁽¹⁾. One study performed at Portsmouth Regional Hospital, New Hampshire, indicates that reiki helps patients to reduce their stress levels pre-operatively and induces a calming effect that assists in decreasing the amount of pain medication required post-operatively⁽²⁾. Reiki was also used on heart transplant patients and was found to reduce post-operative depression, pain and organ rejection⁽³⁾.

It may be surprising that a physiologist like myself should be interested in reiki, regarded by many as a 'touchy feely' subject. However, for many years I have been interested in how emotional stress increases people's susceptibility to diseases and in discovering ways to neutralise the damaging effects of stress.

One day somebody came to work for me as a data analyst and I discovered that she was also trained in reiki. Gradually, she persuaded me to seriously consider reiki as a healing modality. At first, I was sceptical, and even after my first reiki attunement I was still not convinced it did anything more than make one feel good. However, bit by bit the beneficial physiological effects of reiki that I witnessed and measured in people and animals proved to me that the reiki was working.

Touching horses' energy fields

As an animal lover, horse owner and volunteer for a therapeutic riding foundation, I have had plenty of opportunity to give animals reiki and watch how they respond. I think animals can teach us a lot about reiki because they provide an authentic response that is not masked by scepticism or falsely enhanced by positive expectations. In addition, it is quite clear that

‘ Horses allow reiki to work on them to promote natural healing and bring them back to balance if needed ‘



Left: Ann Baldwin PhD performs reiki on a horse

Above: Horses are attuned to the healing energy of reiki

much you need, moment by moment?

Once, I was asked to treat a horse with a strained suspensory ligament. I was not told which leg was injured, so I felt the fields around each leg with my hands. The field of the right leg followed the shape of the physical leg but the field of the left leg was greatly enlarged just above the hoof like a large ball.

I gave reiki to the left leg while squatting on the ground by the side of the horse. After a while he deliberately nudged me gently with his nose and knocked me off balance. I then gave reiki to the right leg and he left me alone. When I returned to the left leg, once again he nudged me with his nose and pushed me off balance, as if to say that he'd had enough.

The next week when I saw him, I felt the energy fields of both legs and sensed that they both now followed the outline of the physical legs. Later I found out that he had just been checked by a veterinarian and deemed ready to return to work.

Many horses seem to thank you after you have given them reiki, by coming up to you and touching your hands with their noses, sometimes breathing gently over your hands. Often when you run reiki energy, horses respond immediately by coming up, even from a distance, and sniffing the backs of your hands. What do they smell? Why does the smell only appear when you run reiki energy? These are questions that we would never think of asking if not for observing how animals respond to reiki.

Dogs' response to reiki

For horses and dogs, reiki produces profound relaxation. Horses manifest this relaxation by licking, chewing, lowering their heads and closing their eyes. Often they 'lean' into the energy. Dogs stop moving, sit down, lie down, close their eyes and lower their heads in front of them on the ground.

Not all dogs are comfortable with reiki; they generally have smaller energy fields than humans and some dogs are just overwhelmed at first, looking at the reiki practitioner suspiciously or barking. Usually, provided the practitioner keeps a respectful distance away, even these dogs will relax to

horses are sensitive to their own energy fields and to those of humans and other horses.

If you assume a relaxed state of mind and approach a horse from a distance of about 30 feet, you will reach a point at which the horse responds; he might momentarily stop grazing, raise his head and look at you. Carry on approaching the horse, stepping closer, and when you are about 10 to 12 feet away, a similar thing will happen. Go even closer, to about four feet, and it will happen again.

With training, either by yourself or from an energy healer, you will be able to sense the horse's fields with the palms of your hands, and even tap on the field boundaries and see the horse respond. This is a true communication that requires no words. Horses need to be sensitive to energy fields because they are prey animals and must perceive the most information they can about the people and other animals that they encounter.

Horses' response to reiki

Horses allow reiki to work on them to promote natural healing and bring them back to balance if needed. Some horses actively seek out reiki once they have got used to receiving it from a particular practitioner, while others are less assertive and may prefer to receive reiki from a distance. In this way, animals retain a large degree of control over their own process of healing, including how much reiki they will take and under what circumstances. Their intake of reiki energy is minutely calibrated moment to moment.

Contrast this with the human situation of being assigned a standard dosage of medicine from the results of a blood test. In this case the concentration of drug that ends up in the blood stream varies with the time elapsed after taking the drug and may not even be what your body needs under a particular set of circumstances. Wouldn't it be better to be able to sense exactly how



Ann Baldwin
PhD gives reiki
to her dogs

Does FHT cover animal therapies?

Currently, FHT and TIS Ltd do not accept any qualifications in animal therapies for membership and insurance purposes. However, this matter is currently being reviewed by the FHT board. We welcome comments from FHT members on this topic, so please get in touch and let us know what you think about treating animals. Write to the usual address or email kyoung@fht.org.uk

reiki energy. Don't try to force the issue though; the harder you try, the more the dogs will resist.

Dogs, like horses, only produce authentic responses and will not accept the energy unless they are ready for it.

Rats' response to reiki

Even rats can sense reiki. Dr Mikaomi Usui, who developed reiki in Japan, received the knowledge that reiki has its own 'intelligence' and only goes where it is needed. In a recent study, reiki was performed on rats for 15 minutes a day and their heart rates were compared before and after the reiki⁽⁴⁾.

It was found that the effect of reiki depended on the initial heart rates. In fact, reiki only reduced the heart rate if it started off high; otherwise it made no difference. This is consistent with the teaching that reiki only goes where it is needed so that it can bring the body back to balance.

In summary

It is clear from my work with reiki that animals instinctively know about energy fields and that this gives them information about people and other animals with whom they interact.

Safety matters around horses

Working with animals is immensely rewarding, however it can also be very challenging and potentially dangerous. It's therefore vital that the therapist has a good understanding of animal behaviour and is able to read an animal's body language.

Horses, cats and dogs are the animals most commonly seen by practitioners and while many people have experience of dogs and cats, horses are a different matter. Their sheer size and weight is often daunting to people unused to horses – add to this their strength, speed and sometimes apparently erratic behaviour, and you could have a problem on your hands.

Do not automatically assume that the horse owner knows how to control their horse either. Many novice riders are becoming owners and they often have little knowledge or experience when it comes to handling horses. Such owners may also expect the therapist to be highly experienced in equine therapy – so if you are not, it may be best to refer the animal to a therapist who does understand horses.

If you do feel able to work with the horse a few basics will help you to avoid trouble. Take note of the relationship between horse and owner. Is the owner happy to go in and out of the stable? If so, does the horse happily accept this or does he try to kick or bite, or move away from the owner rather than seek contact?

Any owner who is comfortable in their horse's company will be relaxed and have control of the animal without having to resort to regular verbal commands or inappropriate physical contact.

Look at the owner's posture – if they lack confidence the horse will immediately pick this up and become wary. As a therapist working

with an animal it is vital that you are safe, so if you have any reservations do not put yourself at risk. You should expect the owner to put a headcollar on the horse and hold it or tie it up for you (according to your preference). Remember that horses cannot see directly in front or behind them so approach them from the side, speaking as you do so. If the horse is a friendly character hold out your hand for him to sniff. Make contact with the horse by stroking him along his neck and shoulder area, speaking to him all the while. Your stature and touch needs to be positive – exude confidence and the horse will see you as a natural leader.

As you work around the horse be mindful of his behaviour. Some animals can suddenly 'wake up' with a start. Always give the horse plenty of room when you switch sides, and do so via the head end rather than the back end to avoid being kicked. Remember to speak to the horse when you swap sides so that you do not startle him. Be aware of the horse as you work as his body reactions will warn you of any problems – ears flat back for example mean the horse is very unhappy and is likely to bite or kick you.

It is essential that you have adequate insurance for giving animals your particular complementary therapy. You or the owner should also contact the animal's usual veterinary surgeon and obtain permission to give treatment. Remember to wear appropriate safe clothing when working with animals, particularly horses.

With thanks to Lesley Bayley, equine muscle release therapist and reiki practitioner, tel: 07774 226204.

Animals live in the present and are continually 'sampling' the environment and assessing how it is affecting their physical and energetic bodies.

In this way they can sense whether they have an imbalance, perhaps in their autonomic nervous system, and they can allow reiki to work on them to restore the balance. Thus animals retain a large degree of control over their own process of healing.

Animals may also be sensitive to energy imbalances in humans. Dogs, particularly, are extremely sensitive to the health of their owners. In 2003, University of Florida researchers published a report in the journal, 'Seizure', noting that some dogs seem to have an innate ability to detect impending

seizures⁽⁴⁾. Seizures are caused by electrical imbalances in the brain and so it is possible that the dogs may be detecting changes in the electromagnetic fields of their owners' brains. However, this is not the only explanation for this phenomenon.

We still have a lot to learn about reiki and it appears that many animals are far more sensitive than humans to these subtle energy fields.

By closely observing animals' responses to reiki, we can learn what questions we should be asking to bring us closer to understanding how reiki produces its beneficial effects. Then we can use this knowledge to enhance our communication skills and bring balance to ourselves and to others.

References

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Ann Linda Baldwin PhD, is a research professor of physiology at the University of Arizona and director of Mind-Body-Science (www.mind-body-science.com). She can be contacted at abaldwin@mind-body-science.com