**End of Life Decision-Making for Pet Guardians**

The decision to euthanize is the most painful and difficult part of having a companion animal in our lives. If the animal has inconsolable pain, the choice would seem a little easier. But still, it is never easy.

Veterinary workers, especially those who are empaths, feel a lot of the pain that the animal is going through. In the veterinary field, we agree to administer humane euthanasia to animals who are terminally ill. Most of these animals are ready. Some of them would have preferred to wait a day or more. When that happens, it can make the veterinary workers physically ill, sometimes for an entire week afterward. Are we accepting some sort of energetic karma for them? What if they needed that last little bit of time to achieve their purpose or get a message across? Some animals are ready to let go long before their people. This can be equally as difficult to watch from a compassionate viewpoint.

Even though coming to the decision is troublesome, it is much easier to make informed decisions if the animal and guardian have established a relationship with a veterinarian they trust. The pet’s physician should be willing to provide tools to help with the process, whether through pain-alleviating techniques or medications or support for grief counseling.

A person should never feel rushed into making this life and death decision. Similarly, if the animal is not in obvious pain, maybe we should not speed up fate either. Even if an animal has cancer or a deformity, it may not be appropriate to request euthanasia if the pet is otherwise healthy, comfortable, and happy. Calm, rational communication and an open mind should make it easier for everyone involved to discuss these issues either when they are imminent or earlier in preparation.

Whenever a pet passes, whether naturally or assisted, it is important to honor the grieving process. If we feel stuck in a certain part of the process for too long, then therapy may be helpful. There are local support groups for anyone who needs them. Often the loss of a pet opens up all the pent-up pain and distress that we otherwise kept contained, such as loss of a job or significant other.

Animals, even in their passing, are still helping us—by assisting in the expression and release of emotion and guilt. They would never want us to feel guilty—that is a human construct. Animals do not judge us, so if hospice care, heroic surgical intervention, or chemotherapy are not within our ability, the animals would not fault us for that.

When trying to decide if “it’s time” for a beloved pet, take time. Slow down. Be honest and compassionate enough to allow the pet to go if he or she needs to. Be brave, too, about the upcoming “journey” they are about to make. Because energy is only transformed, never created or destroyed, there is likely new adventure waiting for everyone.

The unconditional love we learn from animals is a tangible healing tool that can help us make their transition a little easier. The joy and memories of fun and mischief will always be with us if we focus on them instead of the pain of saying goodbye.