

Animal emotions

Lawrence Anthony, 61, died of a heart attack before his planned March 2012 conservation gala dinner in Durban, South Africa, to raise international awareness of the rhino-poaching crisis, and to launch his new book, *The Last Rhinos: My Battle to Save One of the World's Greatest Creatures*.¹ Following his death, there were reports that some of the elephants he worked to save came to his family's home in accordance with the way elephants usually mourn the death of one of their own.²

Anthony, a legend in South Africa, international conservationist, environmentalist, explorer, and bestselling author is remembered and missed by his wife, 2 sons, 2 grandsons and numerous elephants. Anthony had a reputation for bold conservation initiatives, including the courageous rescue of the Baghdad zoo at the height of the 2003 US-led Coalition invasion of Iraq (*Babylon's Ark*, 2007).

His bestseller, *The Elephant Whisperer* (2009), recounts the story of a herd of wild African elephants on the vast Thula Thula game reserve in the South African Kwazulu. The herd was doomed to be shot for dangerous behaviour when Anthony intervened to try and save their lives. After a few dangerous not so successful attempts, Anthony was overwhelmed by an inspiration that he should live with the elephants, caring, feeding and befriending them, so saving their lives.

Two days after Anthony's death, the wild elephants showed up at his home led by two large matriarchs. Separate wild herds arrived in droves to say goodbye to their beloved man-friend. A total of 31 elephants had patiently and solemnly walked single-file over 12 miles to get to his South African house. We must clearly be in awe how these obviously intelligent and wonderfully grateful animals could sense the death of someone they loved. Clearly they have a great memory and emotions of love that moved them in such an organized way.

Lawrence's wife, Francoise, was especially touched, knowing that the elephants had not been to their house before that day for well over 3 years! But yet they knew where they were going. The elephants obviously wanted to pay their respects, honouring their friend who had saved their lives. They stayed for 2 days and 2 nights without eating anything, and one morning, they were gone, just as they had come.³

Although I have had no real close encounters with animals of the wild, except in local zoos, I am convinced (partly because of my love for animals, partly because of my love for the Dharma) that animals have emotions, the sophistication of which, as we see here in the elephants, clearly equal to those of humans, or even surpassing them, in cases where we behave less than human.

In this connection, I do have some happy memories of animal encounters. As a secondary school student in Melaka, Malaysia, I had a remarkable cat that would gently chirrup⁴ at me when it was time to get up for school. If I dozed on, she would then mew louder into my ears. After that, if I lazed on, she would give my toe a good bite – that would always wake me up!

¹ Hamba kahle, "Lawrence Anthony the Elephant Whisperer." Conservation News 7 March 2012.

² Marc Bekoff (7 Mar 2012). "Elephants Mourn Loss of "Elephant Whisperer" Lawrence Anthony". *Psychology Today*.

³ On how animals grieve the loss of their human friends: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/animal-emotions/201111/grief-mourning-and-broken-hearted-animals>.

⁴ A cat sound between a meow and a chirp: for different kinds of cat sound, see <http://www.a-house-full-of-cats.com/catsounds.html>; also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat_communication.

Another loving cat I had, showed her love for me in a truly cat-like way. One day, she quietly came up to me with a dead rat in his mouth, placed it at my feet, and chirped at me. Animal specialists might take this as some kind of imprinting behaviour.⁵ The question then is whether she was treating me as a large kitten, or was simply being Machiavellian, bribing me for love and attention, or perhaps it was simply feline love and gratitude. Such accounts of animal conduct give us some clear hints of a different level of intelligence and emotions that we need to understand and respect.

Buddhism is full of inspiring animal stories, especially in connection with the Buddha. One of the most interesting of such accounts is that of the elephant and the monkey who attended to the Buddha in solitary retreat in the Parileyya forest (Dhammapada Commentary, story 1.5).

Noticing how the lone Buddha conducted himself, the elephant Parileyyaka followed suit. Taking a small sal branch, he swept the area clean. Then he took the Buddha's water-pot and fetched some water, and prepared some hot water (the forest was cold in the nights and mornings.) First, he produced sparks with a pair of fire-sticks, which he worked with his trunk. Then he dropped some small twigs on the sparks, and kindled a fire.

Then he pushed some small stones into the fire. When these stones were hot enough, he rolled them with a stick into the water in a depression on a rock. When, with his trunk, he felt the water warm enough, he went and knelt before the Buddha. Knowing that the water was ready, the Buddha then went to the rock to wash.

When the Buddha was leaving for his almsround, the elephant took his outer robe and bowl, carrying them on his head. At the edge of the forest, the Buddha took the robe, donned it, and then carried his bowl, bidding Parileyyaka to remain in the safety of the forest.

When the Buddha returned from his almsround, Parileyyaka received the Buddha in the same way, taking his robe and bowl, and following the Buddha, then placed them before his abode. As the Buddha took his meal, Parileyyaka fanned him with a small tree branch. Then while the Buddha was resting during the night, Parileyyaka would hold a large stick in his trunk, pacing up and down, guarding him from any dangerous animal.

Now, a monkey saw how the elephant went about his daily chores for the Buddha. One day, he saw some stick-honey. Breaking the honeycomb and placing it on a banana leaf, he offered it to the Buddha. At first, the Buddha did not eat it. Wondering why, the monkey then examined the honeycomb, and noticed some insect's eggs, which he promptly removed.

The Buddha then took the honey, to the great delight of the monkey. While jumping from tree to tree in joy, a branch he grasped broke, and he fell into a sharp stake and instantly died. Having departed in joy, he was reborn as a glorious deva.⁶ A moral of the story here is that animals, too, happy and well-treated are reborn in heaven.⁷

Given the proper respect and right conditions, animals, too, are capable of positive emotions and wholesome actions. And the great thing about being human is that we are capable of learning to better ourselves from such marvellous conduct of other beings.

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⁵ On imprinting, see (Gadhabha) Samaṇa Sutta (A 3.81 = SD 24.10b): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/24.10b-Gadhabha-Samana-S-a3.81-piya.pdf>

⁶ DhA 1.5/1:59-66 = Tr E W Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, 1921 vol 1:179-183.

⁷ See "Animals go to heaven," (R68): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/090121AnimalsGoToHeaven.pdf>