

Consider some four-legged role models.

Thom Rutledge

I have the good fortune to have married a woman whose very soul is directly connected to the animal kingdom. We live on a farm where I am the proud papa of dogs, cats, horses, goats, ducks, and one rooster named Drumstick.

Some of you are animal people too. You know who you are; you are the ones who have relationships with our animal friends, as opposed to “own pets.” Others of you are definitely not animal people. The vast majority of the non-animal people I know are very patient --- even intrigued – with the animal people. The more extreme non-animal people, however, don’t get this animal thing at all. They are the ones likely to stop reading at this point, thinking, “Rutledge has clearly lost it.”

But I haven’t lost anything. Quite the opposite: I have found something. I fall into a third category that I call secondary animal people. We are the ones fortunate enough to spend enough time with an animal person to become converted. Or if you prefer the disease concept, we “catch it.” We will never have the same mystical depth of connection you Originals have, but we, the Secondaries, definitely get it. We not only learn to love the critters deeply, we also get a glimpse into something you animal people have always known: the animals are our teachers.

I am grateful that a day does not pass without my being aware of my animal teachers, but there is something very special --- very important --- about tuning into my animal gurus over the past month since the terrorist attacks.

My golden retriever is so easily entertained. He seems to know two states of mind: rest and play. Cats, of course, are Buddha’s, with their keen focus in the present moment. I am sitting on my porch as I write this, with my cat, Roman, purring in my lap. We both appear relaxed, but compared to Roman, I don’t have a clue about relaxed.

My wife is an equine therapist. Her horses are her co-therapists when working with human clients. I would not dare to try to explain how that works, but I am in awe of what her clients appear to take from their interactions with these big four-legged therapists.

Whether you are an animal person, a secondary animal person, or a non-animal person, take a lesson from our animal brothers and sisters. Simply pay attention and see what you may learn. We think we are smarter, but in times like these, I have serious doubts.

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