



Bon Voyage, Ma Belle Shanti

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By Michael J Tamura, 4/23/17

Just a gentle tap on my heart, but it made me look up. We locked eyes.

“What took you so long?” She said. “I’ve been waiting here for you.” She started pumping her front paws up and down, up and down, up and down, smiling. Three rounds. Always three rounds. It signaled the beginning of her greeting dance for me. Then, she continued by circling counter-clockwise three times and clockwise three times. She ended with a few more front paw pumping, facing me; this time, however, she did all that within the tight confines of a crate stacked on top of two other puppy crates. This was exactly the dance she reserved only for me every time I came home, when she was Aiko in her previous Akita body.

“Wow, that’s amazing!” The pet store manager said, looking at me with saucer eyes. “I’ve never seen such an instant connection. It’s like you’ve already known each other for a long time.” We had. The dog-soul Raphaëlle and I had known as Aiko had returned, this time as a 10-week-old Great Pyrenees pup. She was an all-white fluff-ball with a curled tail - just as she’d shown not only us but a half dozen other psychics, even strangers, in our dreams and meditations, that this was the way she would come back. So, what took us so long to come and get her at the brand new pet store in town, a 10-minute drive from where we lived in Parker, Colorado, in 2003? We’re a bit slow on the uptake - hey, we’re just human!

That was how Shanti and I hit it off this time around. On one hand - or paw - we’ve already had a very long-term, on-going, soul relationship. Both Raphaëlle and I

have known this extraordinary soul over the course of many incarnations, both hers and ours, since the days of pyramids and pharaohs in ancient Egypt. You’ll read about all of that and so much more in the book Raphaëlle’s been writing, **Shanti’s Lives: A Story of Animal Reincarnation**. It’s a most remarkable story of the tapestry of relationships that we weave with one another and our soul mates in the animal kingdom throughout the course of history and spanning the continents. But, if I have to wait to read Raphaëlle’s book, you’ll have to wait for it with me. For now, I want to keep this a simple tribute to one of the wisest and most loving souls I have ever had the great blessing to know and love. In the past 14 years, five months, 3 days and 14 hours that she was incarnated as Shanti, I got to experience one of the most profound relationships with a soul from

any realm.

Fourteen years sound so brief in the span of a human lifetime, yet, in those few years, Shanti lived an incredibly rich and full life and lovingly shared that with so many of us. I’ve known her as a furry daughter growing up from infancy to her early years of adulthood. Soon after that, she became one of my



most trusted friends and confidantes. Then, one day when we were on our morning walk and enjoying our communion, I realized that she had become a most beloved grandmother, my respected elder. Sometimes, I felt that time was moving too quickly, but then, I would be reminded that whenever I was with Shanti, time disappeared. I was then just learning to live in eternal life; Shanti was already living it.

A friend of ours has a son who is the confirmed reincarnation of a most respected and beloved Tibetan lama and spiritual teacher. She has told us that her son has never spoken a harsh word to anyone in his entire 18 years of life thus far. For most of us, that would be hard to imagine. Yet, I know it's true and I could believe that there are souls in this world who are *that* kind, gentle, and peaceful because I've known Shanti. She has never spoken a harsh bark or acted aggressively in any way toward any human or animal in her entire lifetime - even at the end of her life here on earth, when we were preparing to put her down.

The final five days of her life this time around were the most difficult for both Raphaele and me. Those were the five days of making the decision that it was up to us to set her free from her tired, old, and pain-filled body and setting up everything to make that possible. It became clear that her love and devotion to us were so great that she would endure whatever agony to give us another day in her company no matter how much we showed her that we wanted her to go whenever she was ready. She was a guardian angel at heart. She wasn't about to be derelict in her duties. Great Pyrenees are known the world-over for their remarkable talents and devotion to guarding flocks of sheep and other livestock. It has long been said that there is no greater love than that of laying one's own life down for another. And, Shanti was - and still is - all love.

For me, living with Shanti, especially during the past two years, was like living and caring for an aging saint, a holy person. What would *you* do and how would *you* feel, if you were entrusted to care for a living saint in your home; someone who has loved, served, healed, and guided so many souls in her life? You would be so grateful to be in her presence that you would want to anticipate her every need and provide whatever she needed, posthaste. It wouldn't matter if she needed to be escorted outside in the middle of an icy, stormy night. You'd jump out of bed; throw on whatever clothes were available on the way; put on your winter coat and boots; throw on your scarf, hat, and gloves; pick up the umbrella and the flashlight, while opening the front door; and help her out to take care of business. You'd stay out there for as long as she wants, holding your bright, multi-colored umbrella over her, even if it were an exercise in futility, since the winds were whipping the rain and icy slush from all sides under the canopy of intended protection. And it would tear your heart out that you can't even give this incredible soul a few minutes' respite from the elements or her discomfort. Yet, you wouldn't think twice about doing it all over again and again. That's a bit of what I experienced living with this saint, who wouldn't ever consider being seen in public without her full-length, pure-white, fur coat on. (You know she's a saint because even animal activists don't mind that she does.)

I'm sure I could write an entire book on all that we experienced just during the final five days with Shanti. Of course, during that time, doubts would surface. Were we really doing the right thing? What if



it's not her time yet? But, every time, almost immediately after such questions arose in our minds, we would receive confirmation from Spirit that this was, indeed, Shanti's time; that everything would fall into place on Sunday, her appointed day of departure.



Friday, the day after we made our decision that we had to help Shanti on her way, the miserable weather we'd been having for over a month suddenly backed off. Shanti and I were able to spend almost every minute of the day in communion with one another, indoors and out, while Raphaele went on errands and made the needed arrangements for Sunday. Shanti seemed more at ease than she had been in months. She also slept peacefully on and off throughout the day. Come dawn Saturday, as I walked Shanti out of our front door, a huge raven perched upon a tree branch right in front of us, crowed right at us. It was saying, "Everything is set. Shanti's time is coming."

By Saturday evening, we received confirmation from Grace, the vet, who helped Magic, our cat, make her graceful exit seven years earlier, that she would arrive home from her extended trip by that evening and can come over on Sunday afternoon. When we called Beverly, Shanti's and our long-time friend and care-giver, she dropped all her remaining plans for the weekend and assured us that she would come to help us and transport Shanti's body to her daughter's beautiful pet crematorium after Shanti's departure. When she contacted her daughter, Jackie, who was out-of-town for the weekend, Jackie cut her trip short to come back to help us. They both said, "Anything for Shanti."

It appeared that everything was falling into place for Shanti's departure on Sunday, just as Spirit kept reminding us all along.

Just before dawn Sunday, I heard Shanti get up for the fourth time that night. Since Raphaele and I both slept in our clothes so that we could tend to Shanti as quickly as needed during the night, I was up and out of bed to hug her as she sleepily pat-pawed into the room. Outside, a most glorious dawning glow and a crisp, clear stillness welcomed Shanti and me. She knew this was her day.

Twenty minutes before the vet was to arrive at our home, Shanti walked up to the window and started to bark her silent bark (she had laryngeal paralysis a couple of years earlier and had lost the use of her vocal chords - but, not her barking!) She used to bark this special bark whenever she was aware that Beverly was on her way to pick her up to take her to Beverly's farm, if Raphaele and I were going out-of-town. She would always start to bark about twenty minutes before Beverly's arrival. This time, however, Shanti was waiting for Grace who she's never met before. Sure enough, the vet arrived and Shanti headed straight for the front door. She welcomed Grace and escorted her into the living room where Raphaele and Grace took care of the necessary paperwork. All the while that they did that, Shanti stood right besides Grace, leaning on her. When we were ready to go out to the back deck to give Shanti her grand

send-off, Shanti walked right out with us, went straight for her special bed we had set-up for the occasion, and lay down on it. "I've been waiting for this," she said.

Raphaelle hugged Shanti's torso while I caressed her face and cradled her head, the way I did each time I helped her to fall asleep over the past few weeks whenever she needed comforting. As soon as Grace began administering the series of medications, Shanti fell deep asleep. I saw her spirit pull away from her body like shimmering strands of bright white and silvery light. Almost instantly, she was 99% out heading heavenward. Within a few minutes, the last few strands of her light left her body; everything became a brilliance of white and silvery light. Both Raphaelle and I felt Shanti pulling completely up and out of us. An opening appeared in the heavens, like the sun shining through a break in the clouds, and a whole host of angels, spirit guides, and human and animal friends - my mother and our teacher amongst them - welcomed Shanti through that heavenly gate. Never have I experienced such a joyous celebration and outpouring of respect and love for an animal soul's return home.

I felt that a great boon was bestowed upon me as I got to see Shanti as she truly was: a beloved and immensely respected being: wise, loving, huge, and magnificent. In her larger purpose, she served as an ambassador and a kind of bridge between humanity and nature. During her lifetime as Shanti, she directly touched the hearts and lives of well over a thousand people and animals: hundreds of students, friends, family, and visitors at our home; all of our neighbors, their families, visitors, and animals on our daily walks; hundreds more through Beverly's large extended family, farm animals, and friends as Beverly took her to family get-togethers and picnics, church events and socials, nursing and elderly care home visits, her grandchildren's sporting events, errands, and, of course, to roam on her farm with all of the horses, dogs, cats, goat, and mule. And, through our many posts on social sites, thousands more around the world got to know Shanti.



When she was hardly a year old, Shanti healed a little toddler girl. Raphaelle and I were walking her through miles of inter-connected parks in Sacramento when we noticed the girl waddling toward us way ahead of her older brother and mother. Shanti stopped as soon as she noticed the girl heading towards her and suddenly prostrated herself on the ground as flat as she could possibly make herself. She then crawled on her belly toward the little girl. When Shanti reached the girl, she slid her nose and mouth onto the girl's feet. The girl froze for a moment, then, she started jumping up and down shrieking in delight, "Doggy! Doggy! Doggy!" She was gleefully whopping Shanti's head with both her hands. Meanwhile, Raphaelle and I heard desperate screaming coming from her mother waving her arms and running to catch up to her daughter. Raphaelle gestured to her and told her everything was all right, that our dog wouldn't hurt her daughter. Yet, the mother continued to shout out something as she ran toward us. When she finally arrived to within a few feet of her daughter, she stopped, mouth agape and eyes wide-open. She started crying and saying, "It's a miracle! It's a miracle!" We didn't know what she was talking about. She then turned to us and explained that her daughter had been terrified by all dogs from



the time she was born. She said her daughter had never even gotten close to a dog, much less had touched one. She told us that she would start screaming, terrified, at the sight of a dog. This was the first time in her life that her daughter not only approached a dog, but delighted in touching one. Shanti had that effect on people, young and old, everywhere she went.

So many times, we would be walking Shanti and even truckers would stop in the middle of the road, roll down their windows, and ask, "What kind of dog is that?" Once I was walking Shanti in Ashland, Oregon, while Raphaele was at the hairdresser's there, and as we were passing a large parking lot, the owner of a business clear across the other side of that parking lot came out of his office building and shouted, "What kind of dog is that?" I walked across the parking lot to get closer to him and told him that Shanti was a Great Pyrenees. The man dressed in a business suit walked over and asked if he could pet her. Instantly, he was on one knee petting Shanti's head. Then, he asked if we wouldn't mind coming into his office building so that all his employees could meet Shanti! Walking with Shanti in a town was like that.

One of the most amazing miracles I witnessed Shanti bring about was when she was not quite a year old. I was walking her one morning through a tougher working-class neighborhood and we were passing a single-family home with three little boys playing on the front yard. I smiled at the kids having fun and we were about to pass them by when suddenly the front door to the house blasted open and out stormed an enraged father, looking like the Incredible Hulk, blood vessels ballooning out of his temples, screaming at the boys. I stopped in my tracks thinking, "Dear God, he's going to kill them." I had to act quickly to defuse whatever rage this 6-foot-5, 250-pound hulk of a man was going to inflict upon the boys. But, before I had the time to even consider my options, the man froze and turned toward Shanti.

"What kind of dog is that?" He asked. I told him that she was a Great Pyrenees and her name was Shanti. "She's.....she's so beautiful. Can I....can I come and touch her?" He asked, almost shyly.

Thank you, God! "Of course, you can," I invited him to come. He lumbered over to us and fell on his huge knees on the grass. His massive hands gingerly patted Shanti's abundant fur and he broke into a smile befitting his stature.

"Boys," he shouted toward the kids, "come see this beautiful dog." The three boys ran over and joined him in petting Shanti. They laughed and marveled at Shanti's whiteness, fur, and beauty. After a couple of minutes, the big man got up, put his arms around all three boys, and said to them, "Well, it's time to go inside. Let's go have some breakfast."

Shanti the Great Pyrenees. Shanti the show-stopper. Shanti the healer. Shanti the sage. Shanti the saint. Whatever Shanti might be at any given moment, she's the great



communicator that allows her to be that. Whether she's barking every five minutes at seemingly nothing, looking at you with those soulful eyes, smiling her funny, crooked grin, wagging her tail, or leaning against your legs, she's communicating. If you had the great fortune to learn to listen to what she's saying, you learned a lot from her. Over the years, she's taught me far more than I could ever explain.

Underlying all of the lessons I've learned from Shanti was the lesson about the true meaning of beauty. To me, every strand of fur on Shanti was more beautiful than all the diamonds in the world. In fact, I couldn't see anything about Shanti that wasn't exquisite, graceful, and elegant. Where others may have pointed out certain imperfections in her build, I only saw perfection. I feel I know perhaps a little of what Walt Whitman may have experienced in those simple leaves of grass, about which he wrote his masterpiece.

When you love without limits, you see beauty beyond measure, no matter where you look, no matter what you look at. Loving a baby, you see beauty as you change his diaper or wipe her snotty nose. You celebrate that all systems are working. Your heart fills with gratitude. Shanti's constant barking became music to my ears (except when she was barking in pain or discomfort). No matter what she did, there was never anything for which I needed to forgive her. For beauty you find everywhere, when you are loving, but beauty is nowhere to be found, when you aren't. Although it has been said that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, I tend to think that it is instead in the *heart* of the beholder. Shanti taught me with her life that love is the true source of all beauty.

Thank you, Shanti, for all that you are, for all that you've shared with so many of us. I commend every atom of your spirit to our Heavenly Father. May you enjoy every blessing that heaven bestows upon you. I love you without end.



For Shanti

Hooked Heart, Line and Sinker

Song For Shanti

Lyrics & Music by Michael J Tamura ©2015