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WALKING THE LONG PATH: THE ART OF GENUINE REIKI PRACTICE

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Throughout humankind's history of healing therapies, such as Therapeutic Touch, and their often-attendant Eastern mystical practices, such as reiki, charismatic individuals have contributed to the path of healers' development.

Mikao Usui wrote a manual of his teachings on reiki in 1920. In April of 1922, he opened his first "Seat of Learning" in Harajuku, Tokyo. His teachings inspired the senior population, who experienced them as a return to the older "spiritual practices."

Reiki is a healing art evolved from Eastern visions of what our universe is and how it functions. Today, in the West, we grow master teachers, who, like their patients and students, have rushed up the ranks through an "instant" reiki system of weekend seminars, offering little, if any, foundation in Eastern thinking, and who are continuing to churn the master-making machinery.

Is reiki a valid complementary healing modality? Yes. Are there honest, serious master teachers? Yes. However, qualified reiki masters are rare, and the responsibility of learning to navigate the legitimate reiki path belongs to the student.

I believe that background knowledge in Eastern disciplines and concepts is a prerequisite for both a genuine master teacher and for serious students who wish to achieve a deep, committed reiki practice. The truly qualified master teachers have accomplished a change in their world view that is all encompassing, and a student using a solid background in Eastern philosophical and spiritual views is more likely to recognize this quality in a prospective master teacher.

Attaining a stage of authentic personal change in any Eastern discipline along The Path demands that a seeker prepare for a five to ten year journey of intense intellectual study, and another five to ten years of actual practice: in all, approximately twenty years of mental, emotional, and spiritual practice precedes an actual change in awareness - and changing one's awareness, the perspectives that guide one's life, is the first step along The Path.

Eastern traditions

Because a strong historical case can be made that modern reiki is a rediscovery by Mikao Usui Sensei of an ancient Tibetan practice known as Medicine Buddha, I will sketch a few Medicine Buddha basics, seeking a credible foundation, from an Eastern viewpoint, speaking to contemporary reiki practice.

Tibetan medicine is rooted in India's Buddhist system, taught as early as the sixth century BCE. From the Buddhist mind-set, physical disease is a dynamic, energetic manifestation of mental, social, and spiritual disorder.

Buddhism is a directed contemplative or meditation practice on the universal level of "correct living" and involves tapping into mental, social, and spiritual healing energy as it peels away layers hidden behind the diseased physical manifestation. Essentially, these are the identical attitudes taught in today's genuine reiki practice.

Within this Indian Buddhist foundation, the Tibetans broadened their healing practices adding various treatments and medications. The Tibetan Buddhists created a healing system, called Medicine Buddha: respecting spiritual contemplation, meditation, intuitive mystical healing methods - including hands-on energy manipulation - all coalescing as a healing system based on the Buddhist precepts of "right perception" and "right action", and of health being a harmonious balance between humankind's integral relationship connecting our physical, mental, spiritual, and natural worlds as various manifestations of one energy or life force. The intent of Medicine Buddha practice is to manifest one's natural energetic potential.

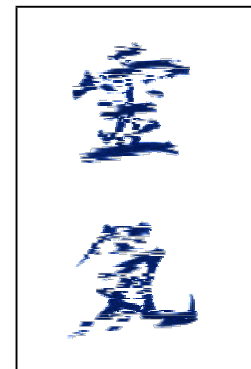
Healing through the Medicine Buddha takes place via a series of empowerments designed to awaken the innate healing energy that lies within. Practicing the Medicine Buddha meditation, and receiving empowerments from a qualified Buddhist meditation master, go hand in hand for both the healer and patient. In modern reiki, the reiki master imparts empowerment to the patient or student or fellow healer in levels called "attunements." Attunements open the subject to their innate energy potential in stages.

Barely scratching the surface then, we have sketched a case for the historical development of today's reiki by visiting the sixth century Buddhist teachings of the Tibetan Medicine Buddha:

1. Medicine Buddha involves a laying-on of hands similar to Reiki.
2. The ability to perform Medicine Buddha healing is transmitted to the student through an empowerment given by the teacher, similar to a reiki attunement.
3. The views and attitudes of Medicine Buddha practice closely parallel the system now known as reiki.

A Twenty-year, three-day seminar

Here are two Japanese characters. The top character, "rei," is defined as "spirit." The bottom character "ki," is defined as "energy." It is fair to say that the term "reiki" means "spirit energy" or "life force." However, if I contemplate these words in the Western sense, I cannot grasp their true meanings. It is imperative for the Western student of reiki to understand that they are embarking on a journey to a place in our comprehension where we come into direct contact with, and are changed by, the dynamics of language.



Learning to use everyday Western terms in an Eastern sense, to conceptualize in a "reiki" style, is key to understanding how reiki healing succeeds. Without this knowledge of the difference between Eastern and Western concepts of energy or life force, we can be given the tools of the energy healing profession but will not possess the ability to take instruction on utilizing them; the nomenclature, esoteric symbols, meditation instruction, and even information coming to us through meditation practice will be misinterpreted.

After our three-day reiki seminar, we will frame our certificates and open our notebooks. But we will encounter symbols and meditation instructions through our Western conceptions of what the Eastern symbols and instructions are offering us. The symbols, mantras, and instructions are meant to communicate aspects of life force energy in the reiki sense, in the Eastern sense - but we have no idea what that means!

A Few Words About Reiki's Founder

Two versions of Mikao Usui's life, and his discovery and development of the system known today as Usui reiki, are running the race of legend.



The earlier story is a popular mystical version originally espoused in the West by Mrs. Hawayo Takata, and further popularized by Mr. William Lee Rand in his book, *Reiki; The Healing Touch*. The recent version, without the bells and whistles of mystical visions, is far less colorful. It is gleaned from information made available by Mikao Usui's actual descendents who are alive and well, and working today in Japan. Confirmation of this less popular version comes from Tatsumi Sensei, a student of Chujiro Hayashi, one of Usui's personally trained masters. Tatsumi Sensei passed away in 1996, at over ninety years old. Mikao Usui's story - according to Tatsumi Sensei - runs thus:

Mikao Usui was born on August 15, 1865 to a highly spiritual, Tendai Buddhist family of the Samurai class in Kyoto. Young Mikao Usui showed himself to be a serious and fierce

student rising into the robes of a Tendai Buddhist Monk. He studied with and attended many spiritual groups, and on numerous occasions he endured grueling twenty-one day "Lotus Repentance Meditations." He performed this meditation once on Mount Kurama, where it is said he experienced a mystical vision while standing under a waterfall and received the esoteric reiki symbols and teachings. However, this mystical vision legend is not borne out, because the meditation session in question actually occurred late in his life, long after he started teaching his healing system that came to be known as Usui reiki.

Mikao Usui embodied the traditions of the Samurai class. As described by one of his students: "He was physically big, quiet in manner, and extremely powerful. Mikao Usui did not suffer fools willingly and became quite abrasive at times. He often grew righteously angry and impatient, particularly with people who wanted results but were not prepared to work for them."

Although he did not have a title for his teachings, he referred to them as a, "...method to achieve personal perfection." The term "reiki" seems to have been introduced by Usui's student, Chujiro Hayashi, Reiki Master. The title used by Usui's original students was and still is, *Usui Teate* (Usui Hand Touch) or "Usui Hand Healing." The title, reiki, is unknown by Usui's students.

Mikao Usui Sensei died from a stroke in Hiroshima in 1826. The famous reiki healing hand positions were recorded on paper just before Usui died, by Chujiro Hayashi. Today, an impressive monument to Usui Sensei stands in Tokyo.

Since his death in 1826, there have been five successors in Usui Shiki Ryoho Gakkai in Japan. The current successor is Ms. Kimiko Koyama. Not until 1980 was reiki popularized in the West.

The secret art of inviting happiness,
 The miraculous medicine of all diseases,
 Just for today, do not be angry,
 Do not worry and be filled with gratitude,
 Devote yourself to your work and be kind to people,
 Every morning and evening join your hands in prayer,
 Pray these words to your heart,
 And chant these word with your mouth,
 Usui Reiki Treatment for the improvement of body and mind.
 Mikao Usui Sensei

How do Western students of Eastern thought begin to fathom our familiar language in a new and unfamiliar way? The answer lies in the question; we begin understanding as "beginners." We learn to see the world as if looking at it for the first time. To heal using energy, one must grasp energy intuitively. My first yogic teacher, Eden Ahbez, taught that the world's true path to healing is revealed through nature. The historical Buddha, Gotama, also understood this truth. One day he was asked the meaning of his great teaching. He answered by holding up a flower.

The reiki student sees a flower; the reiki healer also sees the flower, however, the reiki healer sees the entire universe in a single flower. The genuine reiki healer grasps one universal energy through a long-practiced, holistic vision. If we wish to think in an Eastern sense, we would not call the flower a flower. We must perceive its true energy and think, "moon, sun, rain, cold, warmth, light, photons, soil, worm castings, nutrients, cells, molecules, atoms, electrons, protons, and neutrons - and we can take this list back to the moment preceding the Big Bang, if we so desire, because one who understands energy knows that the flower was never planted on the earth. It grows out of the earth, all that is the earth. The earth is not only an orbiting planet, but also a dynamic, integral piece of the universe; which universe is born of infinity. Since there is no word that can describe infinity, the answer to "What do you call a flower?" is simply that you do not!

Gotama Buddha's student, Ananda, looked at the flower in silence, and not a word passed between them. Although, being pragmatic, understanding that words are here to stay and we will continue using them, in the East one might say, "A flower is not a flower, then again, it is a flower." This is also a reminder that the genuine reiki healer lives simultaneously in two worlds, the esoteric and exoteric, the mystical and mundane, the metaphysical and physical; and the truth of each world is to be found in the midst of the other.

Energy is a single quality offering itself through innumerable variations on a dynamic theme: one energy, many manifestations! Thus, we embark on the journey of seeing energy through fresh, holistic eyes, beginner's eyes.

Energy is one and many. Energy is whole, and this means we are an expression of energy, and not only our physical bodies, but our mental and emotional selves - these also are referred to as energy bodies. Remember, one energy, many manifestations. When reiki healers offer healing, they heal the whole individual. Many times, this extends to the individual's outer environment: family, friends, the workplace, living space, etc. We are whole as the flower is whole; while its roots touch the earth, its petals touch the sky.

Saying that energy is dynamic, means that energy is potential. If energy is potential - a dynamic force - what direction is it moving in? As expressions of energy, how can we hope to heal ourselves if we have no notion of where we have been, how we arrived at this time and place, or where we are going?

When a reiki master feels energy, the master senses a direction. From the seed to the flower, the flower to the field, the field to the forest, and beyond to infinity - energy moves from the simple to the complex. Arleta Soares, Reiki Master, of the Usui and Karuna systems, and a healer of deep insight and considerable power, teaches that healing with reiki is a peeling of the onion from the obvious manifestation of the disease to the multiple levels and often complex roots of that disease. Reiki heals in the same direction that energy moves, from the simple to the complex. Reiki heals using energy as energy uses itself, as an expression of the whole.

In the Western sense, Albert Einstein defined energy as mass times the speed of light, squared. This is not a wrong understanding. It's brilliant! However, it is, by reiki standards, incomplete; it is only a physical measurement. In reiki, we accept this physical measurement, yet we learn to intuit a broader measurement - one that changes the meaning of "energy," "potential," and "life force." Einstein, when questioned about his work in physics, showed his spiritual intuition developed during a lifetime of contemplating energy. He answered, "I am only chasing God's footprints, trying to understand how God works."

In the Eastern sense, when we speak of "seeing energy," we speak of using the physical flower to see beyond the boundaries of that flower's obvious presence. This is transcendental vision. To see beyond the physical is to see the metaphysical. If reiki healers are to accomplish their work holistically and with direction, in accordance with the manner in which energy works, they must meld a basic Western understanding of the physical universe with an Eastern understanding of the metaphysical. The genuine reiki healer perceives our universe in transcendental terms.

How does one describe the metaphysical and transcendental universe? Reiki, having its roots in Buddhism, would say the universe is "empty." This point is critical. If each element - including the human element - in the universe grows from all that the universe was, is, or will become, then each element is a part of every other element, and the universe uses itself to transcend itself - one energy, many manifestations! If each element is a part of every other element, then the universe is empty of "thingness," of "selfness;" nothing (no-thing) exists in the universe, however, simultaneously, everything exists, and exists as the universe; a flower is not a flower, then again, it is a flower. It is important to understand on the deepest level that a reiki healer never works on a patient, but always works on the universe, then again, a reiki healer works on a patient.

Healing the universe is not a small responsibility, and this article or a three-day seminar can only disseminate knowledge; it can't teach wisdom or compassion. Our three-day seminar will not create a change in awareness, unless we have practiced the years of work that precede that moment of change.

The students' path to healing wisdom

On The Path, a student seeks her teacher. However, the responsibility of accomplishing the groundwork lies with the student.

The work we speak of is meditation, and while one usually begins with a period devoted to experimenting with various meditation styles in order to learn the technique of directed contemplation (this period often taking years), the meditation style we are concerned about here is reiki.

Reiki meditation utilizes a system of esoteric archetypal symbols as graphic visuals, and mantras, which are spoken sounds.

Earlier, we arrived at a point of understanding that the genuine reiki healer uses their practiced, intuitive sense of energy's natural, universal characteristics to heal the universe. Any conscious actions – including healing actions – begin with awareness. One must be aware of a disturbance in the healee's energy field, in the universal energy field, in order to open the healee to healing. To heal the universe, one must practice universal awareness. Again, the genuine reiki healer learns and then practices. Learning what defines universal awareness and practicing it is referred to as meditation.

We already know a good-sized chunk about the universe: that it is essentially empty; that nothing (no-thing, including our selves) exists in the universe, yet all things exist as the universe. Therefore, you and I are the universe. When we observe the universe, we are the universe observing itself,

being aware of itself. If our bodies exist, and we are the universe, we are also our bodies. Our bodies are flesh and spirit aspects of the universe in space and time. Here comes the physical-metaphysical pitch; the universe is dynamic, energetic, aware, and being transcendental, it possesses the potential to map itself in aspects: energy creating itself in a fashion that enables it to evolve and be aware of its evolution. This is what we mean when we say, "We are not born into the universe, we are born out of it!" The universe uses itself to create itself, and this is what we mean when we say, "The universe is transcendental."

You and I can't be expected to heal others and ourselves without understanding where we came from, how we arrived, or where we are going. Now, we know the direction of our journey, and we must practice.

When we act, when we incorporate symbols and ritual in our lives, the universe is in the process of mapping itself. To the extent that our aspects perform this activity consciously, we become aware of, and awoken to the universal map. Meditating through the use of esoteric symbols and mantras is the process of discovering and practicing universal awareness. Like the words on this page, symbols aid us in reading and conceptualizing the universe. As our awareness grows, so the universe grows; meditation is transcendental in nature; the universe uses itself to transcend itself.

Symbols and mantras, like the rest of the universe, are energy forms, and they work because being aware of them they are able to communicate: their energy to our energy – one energy. When this conscious, aware, communication takes place, the symbols become the universe's way of perceiving itself. Knowing that, in the Western sense, energy follows conscious thought, and in the Eastern sense, energy is conscious thought, helps us to understand the parts that "thought and intention" play in healing. If a healee is in the room with us, we can have a hands-on reiki session. However, because thought is energy – and as genuine reiki healers we have long practiced directed contemplation – we may heal through space and time, and reiki often is used in distance healing. This is an important physical-metaphysical point to grasp; because energy is one and whole, space and time do not exist in reiki healing.

The spirit worlds

Arriving at an Eastern understanding of energy, our universal bodies, thought, and universal awareness, it is time to mention the unmentionable - an important point concerning healing style versus culture: the Medicine Buddha practice was not only mystical in its intuitive style, but also metaphysical in its appeal to The Four Devas, or what today we call the spirit guides. Consulting with spirit guides is the unmentionable element in the reiki healer's medicine bag. It is often used in secret.

Keeping this part of reiki healing subdued is largely a cultural demand. Were I a Native American Indian speaking of having completed a vision quest and finding my spirit guides, I would be a popular person amongst my peers, within my culture. However, being of Eastern European ethnicity, with flesh the color of day-old oatmeal, if I mention speaking to the spirit guides, many in my culture may ridicule my healing art and myself.

Our mainstream culture is focused through conventional science on that aspect of the world which can be measured in a laboratory, largely ignoring metaphysical perceptions measured by intuitive knowing and trusted through faith in the transcendent. We are taught six days a week to live by the table of weights and measures, and the table of periodic elements. The seventh day is reserved for broadening one's faith in the unseen and unmeasured - which for most of us includes God, and may also include Christ, saints, and perhaps angels. Spirit guides are an historical part of the reiki tradition beginning with the Medicine Buddha.

Speaking within this tradition, Lama Zopa Rinpoche said, "...You will receive much support, not only from the Eight Gone to Bliss Ones but from the four clairvoyant devas. These devas help you diagnose and understand the right method to heal..."

With a slight twist, Thrangu Rinpoche said, "In the vajrayana tradition, we regard the blessing and the power and the qualities of the deities as being innate, as being within one's own mind."

After a period of time practicing meditation and learning to read and interpret the universal energy map, many reiki healers discover their psychic abilities, the ability to be aware of subtle forms of energy, to become expert map-readers. The reiki healer uses all energy, and will use whatever the universe offers to heal a person, including spirit guides.

Observing this practice through Western eyes, we cannot validate using spirit guides, because in the west our science, healing, and medicine have become laboratory measuring skills, with only rare acknowledgment of the intuitive arts of healing.

However, if we fully engage in the practice, rather than observing from the sidelines, we soon leave behind our laboratories and find ourselves measuring and validating through a functional point of view; if it intuitively feels right and works, use it.

Transformations through reiki practice

As our meditation deepens, our universal perspectives change. One's life takes on a different panorama, and the genuine reiki practitioner finds his ethics naturally changing. Ethics evolve into a set of rules through which the healer may express compassion, and life becomes a meditation on compassion. Compassion is knowledge melded to wisdom, and it develops at its own pace. It cannot be forced, and must not be confused with kindness. True compassion is kind when it can afford to be, and harsh when the occasion calls for such action, because true compassion seeks to heal. Compassion is an awareness practice.

Reiki is a healing modality expressive of the highest quality that the universe offers - unity. The reiki healing session is a wave running through our space-time continuum that integrates healee, disease, healer, and method: all being equally responsible and actively striving together towards an improved quality of life. The entire event occurs within a framework of consciously recognizable, equalized ownership. The buck may not be passed - no one party or element is credited for the healing; reiki is humble. Like with all science, medicine, and healing modalities East and West, reiki is not a panacea. It is first, the study of a learned practice which is always in progress; next a complementary therapy; and always, the art of genuine reiki is a journey on the eternal path.

Namaste (My energy and your energy, honored as one energy.)

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