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REIKI: TOUCH OF THE SPIRIT

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Abstract

Reiki is a healing art that hails back to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism, and was originally developed by Mikao Usui in Japan. This article presents the importance of its use for all people, regardless of their belief system, as a means of healing and involvement with other people. The author talks about her own experiences with Reiki, relieving pain for others, and helping her become more hands-on and less aloof. She also explains the basic Reiki tenets, briefly describes the seven major chakras (energy centers in the body), and how Reiki attunements begin the process of healing self and others through a mysterious source of interconnectedness, which might be likened to the Oneness in Christ that begins with the ritual of baptism.

Background

When I was first introduced to Reiki, a friend wanted to put her hands on my chakras and balance my energy. My initial response was standoffish: I'm English; didn't she understand about English people? Our personal space is about ten feet away from the body! In my family we don't hug after a year of separation, and we even try to keep each other at arm's length. The idea of healing as an actual hands-on contact seemed very strange. In our society inappropriate physical contact is a very serious issue.

As a Christian who is also a minister, I often pray for people. I can't say how or who or what responds, but something/someone does. I prefer to call this mystery God, but the name is unimportant. What matters is that there is a mysterious force at work through prayer or intentional goodwill. For instance, during my prayer life, I'd been feeling an urge to lay my hands on people but had been afraid to suggest any such thing. I knew what the response in my liberal and intellectual circles was likely to be: No way! Are you crazy? Never mind that Jesus healed people through more than just teaching and prayer. Didn't he heal people with his hands and his spit? And isn't actually being touched by someone who is not seeking gain or dominance over us, but wanting to help us, a stronger connection in a personal way than silent prayer?

My study and use of Reiki began as a means of structure to offer a laying on of hands in a non-threatening, non-sexual manner, with the intent of bringing healing for those who consented. At first, I only prayed for Christ's healing, not quite trusting the Japanese spirit of the system, but the deeper I went with Reiki, the more I understood how God's spirit was moving through Reiki to bring people

together to heal us at the many layers of our brokenness. Reiki heals physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.

Reiki

So what is Reiki, what are chakras, and what are these claims about balancing energy? Perhaps the best way to answer those questions is to tell how Reiki originated, how it is used in the West, and how it can be a means to enter into a contemplative prayer state. Table 1, a simple set of rules for deeper everyday living, gives the basic guiding principles of Reiki.

Table 1: The Reiki Principles

<p>The secret art of inviting happiness</p> <p>The miraculous medicine of all diseases</p> <p>Just for today,</p> <p>Do not anger,</p> <p>Do not worry</p> <p>Be humble</p> <p>Be honest in your dealings with other people</p> <p>Be compassionate towards yourself and others</p> <p>In every morning and evening join your hand in prayer,</p> <p>Pray these words to your heart and chant these words with your mouth:</p> <p>"Usui Reiki Treatment (For) Improvement of body and mind"</p> <p style="text-align: right;">The Founder, Usui Mikao</p>

Reiki First Degree Course, Shoden (King)

Reiki, which means *mysterious spirit*, was developed in Japan by Dr. Mikao Usui, who practiced a mystical form of Buddhism called Tendai. He'd spent his whole life seeking the holy, had studied his native religion of Shintoism, and was also a Master of martial arts. It is known that those who are immersed in the holy often have the gift of healing, and so it was for Dr. Usui. He had reached a point in his spiritual maturity where he brought healing to others and became quite famous for the work he did with poor people who were victims of earthquake injuries and had no money to pay for medical help. However, he did not teach his students with the intent for them to become healers, but for them to become enlightened.

Perhaps enlightenment is similar to what Christians would call 'becoming united with' Christ. As Jesus taught us, an enlightened person is able to live compassionately, recognizing the oneness of humanity and the world, understanding that every action and every thought affects others. Jesus was such a person. We can learn from his teachings that it is important to develop a deeper awareness of our beliefs and ideas. They can hurt or help in ways we might not even imagine.

Our interdependency becomes apparent if we look at any action or activity in our daily life. Consider something as mundane as taking a shower. When you climb into the tub and turn on the faucet, you

discover you are using natural resources, such as water, iron, tile, and so on. Someone has purified the water for our use; someone has manufactured the tub and shower equipment; someone has installed it, and so on. But shower-taking is more than just a physical experience. It began as an idea. Dogs don't bathe unless coerced. People do. When you think about it, keeping yourself clean is a means to health for yourself and for others because it prevents the spread of disease. We *are* interconnected.

Dr. Usui might have seen this interconnectedness as inter-being (a term used by Thich Nhat Hanh [1999], a wise Vietnamese Buddhist monk). Dr. Usui began to teach a Japanese military doctor, who was a Christian, about Reiki. This man, Hasaki, was more interested in how to apply Reiki to healing physical problems, and so a system of symbols was developed to call up certain forms of energy that balance the chakras.

I have recently done some meditations on the energies, and to my surprise can detect actual differences in the feel of the energy from each symbol. For instance, when I meditate on Cho Ku Rei (Figure 1), seeing the symbol in my mind's eye and imagining ki flowing into my body, I feel a coarse and gritty energy. Cho Ku Rei is said to bring about physical healing and so it is expected that this energy be dense. I feel a softer lighter energy with a similar meditation using the Sei He Ki symbol (Figure 2).

Figure 1.
Cho Ku Rei
("Show Koo Ray")

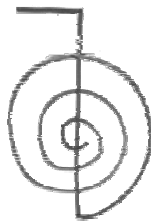


Figure 2.
Sei He Ki
("Say Hay Key")



This energy is said to correspond to heavenly or spiritual energy. So, the sweetness that I experience seems appropriate. Of course, I ask myself, is this energy real, or am I imagining something and responding to suggestion? That is hard to answer, but in the West it is now being discovered that energy from a healer's hands can actually be detected. Dr. Walter Weston (1998) notes that healing energy can be measured at the electro-magnetic frequency of plus or minus 7.83 hertz. Furthermore, healers can emit as much as two hundred volts of healing energy. By the way, anger or angry people can have a negative affect on others.

Although the idea of energy healing techniques is a relatively new concept in the West, Hinduism has long recognized human energy centers in the body and calls them chakras, which means wheels. This tradition developed at least four thousand years ago in India. In the Hindi system, the body is thought to have seven major chakras, or whirling centers (like wheels) of energy, located along the midline of the body and associated with different glands and behaviors. There are also forty-two minor chakras. As it turns out, research in the West is beginning to confirm the presence of energy centers, and energy layers of the body have been measured. Although it might not be accepted in many conventional medical circles to talk about the 'auric layers' of the body, nevertheless they exist, can be detected, and can be balanced.

A Reiki practitioner must go through a series of attunements. Each one is a special ritual, which a

Reiki Master performs on the student: these rituals vary somewhat, depending upon where the Master learned the technique. One aspect common to all Reiki systems is that the student 'receives' the symbols and is thus empowered to tap into the various types of energy. The first attunement is said to begin the process of opening the student's energy centers. This allows her to begin healing herself. As much as anything, it seems to me this is a ritual of enablement because it gives permission to the recipient to actually expect healing for themselves through their own hands and minds. Reiki does not purport to be religious, and yet is connected to a benevolent force in the universe.

Many Christians might call this force *Mystery or God*, whereas for atheists and non-Christians, it needs no particular name. It is also a means to connect with the community of Reiki practitioners, and perhaps in some inexplicable way joins their energies (intentionality of goodwill) together. It might be likened to the Christian tradition of baptism with water, which mystically immerses a recipient in the Body of Christ, and might also be translated as becoming one with the world-wide community of Christians.

The second attunement is given when the student seeks to begin healing others, and is a ritual similar to the first. This appears to be a 'stepping-up' of energy. Often, these attunements result in 'clearing,' which refers to the clearing away of physical, psychological, and spiritual problems. Although these clearings may be a result of suggestion, it seems to me that they are beneficial, and are paralleled by a process of clearing-out that occurs as part of contemplative prayer. For instance, when I was going through my spiritual direction internship, during a time of intense daily prayer, using scripture, I often went into a semi-sleep state, aware of a sort-of bubbling up of old painful memories as if they were literally being removed from my psyche — or at least raised to conscious awareness where they were less likely to create unconscious and potentially harmful transference reactions.

A third attunement is done for those students ready to become Masters, which means they are allowed to teach Reiki. I am a Reiki Master, but in reality I am still a student who is continuing to learn and grow.

During the practice of Reiki, the healer lays her hands on or above the recipient's energy centers, and while focusing her attention on a symbol, invites ki energy to flow through her hands into the recipient. Ki, the Japanese word for spirit, can be likened to prana in Hinduism, or chi in acupuncture. Christians might call it the Holy Spirit.

Some of the benefits of Reiki

Learning and practicing Reiki is a good way to reach out to loved ones and friends, bringing comfort and healing in so many ways. My husband, Philip, has often been my guinea pig and we've both benefited from the practice by becoming closer. After his major back surgery, I used prayer and Reiki to restore the circulation to his feet. We'd just gotten home from the hospital: Philip could hardly walk and was sedated. The doctors told me to be certain to keep his feet warm because circulatory problems could be dangerous. I managed to get my good man into bed, where he fell fast asleep. His ankles and feet were freezing cold. There was no way I could wake him to get him moving about. So I prayed, and I laid my hands, palms-down, on his feet. Within minutes his ankles and feet warmed up and never got cold again throughout his three-month recovery.

Another example of physical help from the use of Reiki was the pain-free last months of life of my 89-year-old mother-in-law. She had bone cancer with a severe ache in her hip. While we sat on the porch swing one summer, talking about death, she told me she was not afraid. She was ready. But she graciously accepted Reiki healing, not to prolong her life but to reduce the pain. I laid my hands on her hip. We both felt a lot of heat and energy moving. Although Reiki did not cure Mom's cancer,

it did relieve her pain for quite a long time.

Reiki and contemplation

Reiki meditation is also an aid to entering the contemplative stage of *lectio divina*, which is a tried and true prayer technique that opens us to the presence of God through scripture. The scripture is read several times with different focal points - *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. In the contemplatio stage, focusing on a Reiki symbol such as Cho Ku Rei, helps to quiet the mind, allowing God to speak in any way God chooses, perhaps through a word, an insight, or an image.

I incorporate Reiki into spirituality groups. In a recent series of mini-retreats I facilitated for Disciples of Christ women, my participants were open to learn about healing and hungry for techniques to help others and themselves. I usually begin with meditative music and then guide them through the use of *lectio divina*. This helps relax and connect the group, and centers them in God. It is also intended to allay any fears about Reiki being something magical or contrary to their Christian belief-system. After we have finished sharing our stories that have arisen from the scripture, we do some self-healing.

Sometimes I use a guided meditation, called Hatsurei Ho, from a CD developed by a British Reiki Master, Taggart King (2002), who is one of my teachers. This is a quiet time of reflection that opens people to receive and experience ki energy.

Another exercise that I often use is to guide participants to gently lay their hands on each of their own chakras, from the crown to the hips (for the root chakra), and allow ki to flow into their bodies. A few minutes is spent on each chakra before proceeding to the next. Recipients pay attention to how the energy feels. This self-healing is easy to learn and is a way for participants to experience a sense of peace and love. For women, it is particularly important they recognize that it's okay to heal themselves. After all, an empty bucket can't water the plants.

Table 2: The Major Chakras

<u>Chakra</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Imbalanced</u>	<u>Balanced</u>
Crown	Top of head	Overly intellectual, confused, spiritually addictive, skeptic	Wise, knowledgeable, conscious, spiritually astute
Brow: Third eye	Forehead between eyebrows	Nightmares, delusions, can't concentrate, poor memory, poor vision	Psychic, clear vision, Accurate interpretation Imaginative
Throat	Throat	Chatter, can't listen, stuttering, fear of speaking	Clear communication, Creative
Heart	Heart	Co-dependent, possessive, jealous, shy, lonely, isolated, bitter, critical	Compassionate, self-accepting, healthy relationships
Solar plexus	Base of sternum	Judgmental, aggressive, blame fixing, defensive, insecure, anger turned inward.	Self-assured, spontaneous, strong-willed, high self-esteem
Spleen	Spleen/naval	Sexually addictive, Genital problems Lower back problems	Sexually stable, Emotionally stable
Root/base	Base of spine at genitals	Rigid, hoarding, greedy, fearful, wasteful, restless,	Stability, ability to relax, generosity, connected to earth

This chart was compiled from *Essential Reiki*, by Diane Stein, and *The Healing Energy of Your Hands*, by Michael Bradford and information provided to me by my teachers, Susan Caldwell, and Taggart King.

Learning Reiki

All people, Christian or otherwise, can employ the Reiki technique. Reiki is quite easily used to increase connectedness with others, especially family and friends. I recommend that individuals practice self-healing for twenty-one days by laying their hands on one major chakra each day, and focusing on the flow of ki into their body. At the end of twenty-one days, having treated their major chakras three times, they will be more comfortable with self-healing. Hopefully, they will soon feel empowered to begin Reiki on other people who consent.

So where do you begin learning Reiki? The numerous resources on the Internet are quite overwhelming. If you cannot find a personal recommendation to a good teacher, it may be necessary to reflect upon just who to call, trust in the goodness of the universe, and allow yourself to be guided to the right teacher. Reiki, like Christianity, is an ongoing practice that deepens and grows us in a rather inexplicable way. To my surprise, for instance, I am now quite comfortable laying my hands on others. This is a far cry from that English woman I used to be who was shocked when my friend suggested she 'heal' me. One aspect of my brokenness was a need to get beyond that British cultural limitation which kept me aloof. Now I can readily hug others.

Reiki is a healing art that most people can master and what's more, it works in lots of surprising ways. Recently, a woman who had attended one of my workshops, told me that she'd continued to do self-healing for some time, and had received the insight that she needed a more creative life. She bought a computer and is now writing children's stories. Another woman said that she'd arrived at the workshop with a sore strep throat, and left completely pain-free. Her doctor later confirmed her recovery from this bacterial infection. These are small healings but they demonstrate how Reiki increases personal awareness, resulting in a deeper and more pain-free life. I urge everyone to

explore Reiki and determine how it might be of help in his or her life. I know it's helped me and continues to do so.

Path of Life: a workshop to relieve stress

I facilitated this workshop for the staff conference of Ashland Community and Technical College. About eleven women attended. It was only a two-hour session so the most I hoped to accomplish was give them a time of rest, teach them deep breathing, and give them an opportunity to share their stories.

I began with some meditative music, then I talked about stress and how it affects our mind, body and spirit, and also that there is such a thing as good stress. I showed them a graph that demonstrated how too much stress can take us to a breaking point, and too little can put us into lethargy and depression. I taught them some basic breathing exercises, and also some basic Reiki self-healing. Finally, I shared something about me related to stress – in keeping with a group spiritual direction practice, to encourage and allow the participants to open up their experiences. Well! God always surprises me. I shared a trivial incident about being anxious to find the building where the conference was being held and be on time. I expected this to lead them to give slight moments about their own stress, but instead one by one, these women, who mostly did not know one another (maybe that helped) opened up, seeking guidance. They related everything from the grief they were going through, to being single mothers, to coping with absent husbands, to panic attacks. They were amazing. They raised each other up. I felt privileged to attend.

Acknowledgments

Many people have helped increase my understanding of the mystery and grandeur of life. I am indebted to Susan Caldwell, a Reiki Master currently living in Versailles, KY, and Taggart King, another Reiki Master, who lives in England, and has continued teaching me through the Internet, CDs and his instruction manuals. In addition, I am grateful to Sister Carol Riley and all the sisters, faculty and staff of West Virginia Institute for Spirituality, who taught me so much about formative spirituality, and helped me to grow in many ways. Finally, my thanks goes to my husband, Philip, who is a Professor of English, and a poet, and is my constant advocate, teacher, and guinea pig. His belief in me is an act of faith and love that means everything.

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Personal Accounts:

Kathy Williams participated in a year-long meditation group at the church we both attended. She also attended a mini-retreat I facilitated in Frankfort, KY. She is open-minded and tolerant of many religious and spiritual views. She has become a dear friend who has taught me much.

Kathy's words:

The practice of meditation and Reiki has enriched my continuing spiritual journey. So many of us want to have the experience of peace, well-being and the sense of the Divine, yet it is hard to develop the discipline or the stillness and awareness that is needed. Trying to force the experience makes it as elusive as chasing a butterfly. I find that I need to allow time to find the rhythm that is conducive to such awareness.

While it is possible to develop this practice by oneself, it is much more helpful to have someone to guide you through the process. Having the spiritual director who allows 'room for the spirit' is imperative. Trusting this person allows me to relieve myself of the concern for the process, and frees me to make the most of the experience. In a group with people who are new to the idea of spiritual direction and Reiki, Christina takes the time to build a foundation of the method and uses scriptures to enhance everyone's understanding.

Each group has its own experience and feeling. Being in a group that is more open (than church) helps me to feel the energy of being in a collective spirit and is very beneficial. To be in a group where everyone has their own unique stillness—knowing that each has their own fears and desires strengthens me to be open to my own.

Learning to be 'still and know' has strengthened me in health and spirit.

Kathy Williams

Christina St. Clair is a licensed Disciples of Christ minister, and is certified in spiritual direction from West Virginia Institute for Spirituality. She recently earned a BA in philosophy and Christian apologetics, is a former chemist, with two world-wide patents for analytical chemistry, a published author, and is currently working on an MA in sacred literature.

She has led spirituality workshops throughout Kentucky. These include:

- ☐ Path of Life—a workshop to reduce stress.
- ☐ Dream Retreat—a workshop examining intuition from dreams, utilizing Jungian archetypal dream analysis.
- ☐ Scripture in Daily Living—a week-long retreat, following the Ignatian rule.
- ☐ Circle of Stones—five weeks of contemplative prayer and spiritual direction.
- ☐ God's Rainbow Mini-Retreats—a day of prayer, group spiritual direction, and Reiki healing.
- ☐ Women in the Temple—an afternoon of lectio divina incorporated into a labyrinth walk.

Christina is available to lead spirituality workshops.

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