

REIKI: ENERGY WORK OR SPIRITUAL HEALING?

By Cara Gallucci, CBS, RMP

Recently I became aware of another discrepancy in how Reiki practitioners think about Reiki. I say “another” because I have known for years that Reiki has grown an abundance of branches with different points of view. We can’t assume that any two Reiki practitioners practice the same way, believe the same things about Reiki, or speak the same language about their practice. The latest topic that has come to my attention has to do with whether we consider Reiki to be a type of energy work or a form of spiritual healing. One Reiki Master goes so far as to suggest that we should always present Reiki as spiritual in nature, not only because (to her) it is *not* “energy medicine,” but also because to discuss energy alienates the many doctors and nurses she has worked with over her long years of practice in and out of medical settings. Her comments prompted me to think deeply about my own beliefs and experiences in this regard.

Does calling Reiki “energy” make it sound “too New Age” to the ears of medical workers and those who eschew so-called New Age ideas? I agree that there are ways people talk about energy that can be off-putting, even for someone like me who is open to the concept of bioenergetics. But energy is NOT inherently a New Age concept. It belongs as much to physics, chemistry, biology, and other hard sciences as to spirituality and metaphysics. Energy is no more New Age than stepping into the sun and feeling its warmth on your skin or watching crops grow, powered by sunlight. It is no less a part of our everyday experience than flipping a switch in our homes or offices or hospitals and having machines operate, thanks to the current that flows. Do we consider nuclear scientists who work with the powerful energies inherent in atoms to be New Agers? I think not!



When Einstein recognized that $E = MC^2$ (Energy equals Mass times the Speed of Light squared), he gave mathematical form to the idea that energy is inherent in matter—ALL matter. He also gave voice to the principle that energy is primary, for it cannot be created or destroyed; it can only change its form.

From the beginning, I have thought and spoken of Reiki as energy, and I have experienced it as having energetic attributes, like feeling heat move through my hands when Reiki is flowing.

We are told this Japanese word translates as “Universal Life Energy,” what we might also call bio-energy, or living energy. This force sustains life, just as food and water nourish the body. Yet in being universal and alive, this energy has a sacred spiritual quality. In China and Japan, it is known as Chi, Qi, or Ki when transliterated. In India, the living energy is known as Prana and is considered an aspect of Divinity. Whether considered as Chi or Prana, the concept of life energy is very ancient. It unites the bio-physics of energy with the spiritual realm, connecting spirituality and healing.

There is much about Reiki that is mysterious and spiritual. The early Reiki Grand Masters were spiritual giants, and the way in which Mikao Usui developed Reiki healing puts it squarely in the domain of spirituality. The story, as I learned it from John Harvey Gray, who heard it from Hawayo Takata, goes something like this. As a Christian seminarian



in Japan at the turn of the 20th century, Dr. Usui took up a challenge from his theological students. They asked if he truly believed what the Bible said. When he replied that he did, they asked why they could not heal the same way Jesus did, because Jesus said they should be able to do so. This sincere question spurred Dr. Usui on a years-

have learned Pali, a dead language of India, so that he could read the ancient scrolls in Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayan countries he visited. Buddha was known to heal in a similar way to Jesus—and there are many who believe that Jesus himself traveled the East, where He was known as Isa or Issa. Perhaps Usui read about both Buddha and Isa in ancient Pali scrolls. Earlier, in the mid-1800s, a Russian named Nikolai Notovich had been laid up with a broken leg in a Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas, where he also studied ancient scrolls. Firmly convinced that he had discovered the path of Jesus during His so-called “lost years,” Notovich wrote a book called [The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ](#) detailing the secrets he discovered in his travels. It’s even possible that Usui knew of this book by Notovich.

Although Dr. Usui learned a great deal in his travels and studies, he still did not know how to heal. He felt he had all the ingredients, but he did not know how to create the perfect recipe. Back in Japan, Usui vowed he would meditate on a mountaintop until he received the intuition he needed to put it all together—or, he would die trying. He told the innkeeper at the base of the mountain sanctuary that if he did not return in 21 days, the innkeeper should send a party up to retrieve his dead body.

On the 21st day, Dr. Usui saw a light approaching him from a great distance in the sky. It got larger and brighter as it got closer. The light entered him through the third eye chakra in his forehead. Another light and then another and another followed, until he received full initiation into the secrets of Reiki. When he walked down the mountain that day, he was able to heal, and he was able to teach others how to heal, too!

I have been careful to identify this story as presented by Takata, because recently some people have questioned its accuracy. With her singular influence over the development of Reiki in the western world, her rendition has had a great influence in the West. Some Reiki Masters present the history a little differently, particularly those with ties to Japan. However, the various versions are not entirely incompatible. We do know that Usui studied the theology of both Buddhism and Christianity along with a number of other academic and esoteric subjects, and that Buddhism, Christianity, and Shintoism were all practiced together in the Japan of his era and even during the present time. So, it would not have been strange for Usui to be a Buddhist Christian or a Christian Buddhist of sorts. We also know that he developed his own healing system based on the universal Reiki energy that was similarly named in other healing systems of his time. In addition, he often meditated on Mt. Kurama in Japan, and there is reference to a 21-day meditation retreat he made there in 1922, during which he had his revelation.

To share his new-found methods with as many people as possible, Dr. Usui set up a healing clinic. After a while, he noticed that the same people returned again and again. He realized they were not maintaining their healings because they fell back into the same bad habits. Many wanted to be “fixed” without making the necessary effort on their own behalf. Believing that part of the healing that needed to take place went beyond the physical level, he developed the five Reiki ideals:

Just for today, I will not anger.

Just for today, I will not worry.

Just for today, I will be thankful and count my blessings.

Just for today, I will do my work honestly.

As with the wise reminder “One day at a time,” the Reiki ideals recognize that promising “always” or “never” presents too daunting a challenge, but resolving to do well for one day and then another and another can lead to good habits.



Before his death in 1926, Dr. Usui appointed Dr. Chujiro Hayashi to be his successor as the Grand Master of Reiki, overseeing all the other Reiki Masters and practitioners. Like Dr. Usui, Dr. Hayashi was a man of spiritual depth and power. He was even able to decide upon the time of his own death. Living in Japan, where Usui had established Reiki, Hayashi sensed that World War II was about to begin. He knew he

would be conscripted into the military as an officer, but being a healer and a pacifist, he did not want to participate in any form of violence. He called together all of his Reiki community for a celebratory dinner one evening and appointed Mrs. Hawayo Takata as the next Grand Master. He announced that he would be leaving that evening. As the dinner drew to a close, in full view of the gathered guests, Dr. Hayashi entered a deep state of meditation and consciously left his body—for good!

Although her parents were Japanese, Mrs. Takata had been born in Hawaii when her family emigrated there. In fact, she was named “Hawayo” after the family’s new state. She learned about Reiki when she suffered a debilitating stomach tumor that required surgery. Visiting Japan in search of help, she begged for a non-surgical treatment. Reiki saved her. In devoting herself to Reiki, she made a number of extensive trips to Japan to study and apprentice at the clinic. Dr. Hayashi had arranged for her to be in Japan when he left his body. Mrs. Takata returned to Hawaii before travel became impossible due to the impending war. She had to leave Dr. Hayashi’s widow in charge of the Reiki Clinic that was supposed to be in her care. After the war, when Mrs. Takata was finally able to return to Japan, Mrs. Hayashi sadly told her that the Japanese government had taken their clinic to serve as a hospital. Some Usui Reiki practitioners continued quietly in Japan, but for Mrs. Takata, the hub of Reiki shifted from Japan to her home in Hawaii for the remainder of her life, since the center Dr. Hayashi had left to her was no more. She also traveled great distances to teach. In her lifetime, Hawayo Takata trained 22 new Reiki Master Teachers from all over the world, thus ensuring that Reiki would survive her. From these 22, Reiki has spread the globe.



Mrs. Takata never lost sight of the spiritual dimension of Reiki. She considered it God-energy. And keeping good company with the master spiritual healers whose legends have come down to us, she is even reported to have raised an elderly woman from the dead! The distraught daughter of this woman came to ask for Takata’s help. When Takata arrived at the home, she found the grieving son

beside the bed where the mother lay, already dead. She did not know how to calm the daughter and son. So she simply put her hands on the body, thinking the flow of Reiki energy in the room would be soothing. (I myself have found that everyone in the household quiets when I give Reiki to one person in a home.) After a time, the deceased woman opened her eyes. She seemed confused, so Mrs. Takata told her she had been in a deep sleep. Then the woman said she was very hungry and asked for food!

In light of all these stories, it is clear that Reiki is indeed both spiritual and energetic in nature. To deny either view does not do justice to the wonderful fullness and possibility of Reiki.

