

Tending the Wind – Chapter 16
Reiki – Part 1
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Reiki is the common name for a Japanese system of subtle energy healing that has gone by various names over the years. Its roots are ancient but its modern form began in the early 1900s. (The term *rei-ki* has various translations that will be explored in the next chapter along with its possible attributes as a form of qì.) The system's founder, Mikao Usui (1865-1926), developed his methods from studying ancient Daoist meditation practices with the aim of achieving "unity of self through harmony and balance." (It is known that Usui was raised and remained a Tendai Buddhist, but research suggests his system originated primarily from Daoist spiritual traditions.) A set of affirmations was used daily to encourage emotional balance, appreciation in one's endeavors, and kindness to others. A set of symbols was taught to help students awaken to their own spiritual qualities. Wúwèi, the Daoist concept of not-doing (i.e. the effortless action that proceeds from living one's life without attachment to outcome) was a crucial part of Usui's practice. This original version of reiki, known as Usui-Do, focused on self-healing and personal transformation rather than treating others. (Do is the same character as dào, in this case as a *method* or *doctrine*, not the Dào of life. Chinese characters arrived in Japan during the 5th century A.D. and are called kanji, that nation's first written language. There are also two phonetic syllabaries used in modern Japanese writing, hiragana and katakana. As Chinese language arrived, so too did various blends of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism which all greatly influenced the development of Japanese culture, philosophy, and spiritual practice.)

In the early 1920s a senior student of Usui, Toshihiro Eguchi, introduced a set of hand positions that rapidly became incorporated into an application of Usui-Do called Usui-Teate; teate means *treatment* or *medical care*, but its Kanji characters refer specifically to use of the hand. This "hand healing" technique was again used primarily for self-healing, but was also applied to treating others...a natural progression as Usui himself had treated many people. In 1925 Usui trained several naval officers, including Chujiro Hayashi who changed the practice of reiki to focus on treating patients in a clinic setting. He developed a more complex set of hand positions, a treatment style using several practitioners per patient, and a step-wise training regimen with different levels of advancement. Each level was accompanied by a set of ceremonies called reiju to assist students' connection to the reiki energy. He also used Usui's original symbols for treatment purposes. This style of practice became known as Usui Reiki Ryoho; ryoho means *treatment method*.

Not long after Usui's death in 1926 divisions emerged between existing reiki teachers and their styles. Hayashi further modified his system to focus almost exclusively on treating others, omitting more of the spiritual Usui-Do teachings. In 1935 a Japanese-American woman named Hawayo Takata came to his clinic for treatment of a terminal illness. After her cure she took the training and received her master/teacher certificate in 1938. Over the next several decades Takata further modified the system and introduced it for the first time to Western countries as Usui Shiki Ryoho; shiki means *style* or *form*. To make reiki more acceptable to post-war, and often anti-Japanese audiences, Takata changed the history of reiki, teaching that Usui was Christian; some versions even place him as the dean of a Christian college. While this distortion was perhaps understandable at the time, it eventually confused people once more accurate accounts began to surface. After Takata's death in 1980 some of her students formed an alliance and tried to standardize her system, but further divisions emerged and many teachers started to incorporate a wide array of other spiritual practices, resulting in the panoply of different reiki styles available today.

In the last few decades more effort has been placed on renewing the original forms of reiki, Usui-Do and Usui-Teate, based on documents, accounts, and training acquired from

some of Usui's and Hayashi's original students before their deaths at very advanced ages. (Hayashi's own documents were lost during WWII.) From these efforts, and discussions with current practitioners in Japan, reiki teachers in the West are designing courses to more closely match traditional style. There will no doubt be ongoing variations as more information is exchanged, but the basics of traditional reiki training and treatment are described below.

There are three practitioner levels in reiki training; more advanced levels are available to become a teacher. In Reiki I students are taught the basic concepts (*qì, dào, wúwèi*, etc.) and that the term *rei-ki* in Usui Reiki Ryoho simply refers to making a connection with one's ancestral transcendent self that is already present from birth. From this connection one may achieve harmony within, and then one is able to facilitate the healing of others using a subtle form of energy replenished spontaneously from the mystery of the *Dào*. (This differs from *qìgōng* treatment which uses the practitioner's own bio-energy reserves, replenished through the work of breathing and movement exercises.) Reiki is offered rather than directed to the patient, with the intent that the energy be used however best suits the unique path of that individual. Each student is taught Usui's affirmations, and is given four "connecting transformations" – ceremonies of remembering that help students connect to their source, and that open the energy channels of the body. (Western reiki classes refer to these as attunements, a term that has fallen out of favor in traditional circles since the ceremonies do not directly alter the student but simply remind him or her of what is already present within.) Students learn a set of hand positions to be used first on themselves, then on others. Each position treats certain meridians as described in Chinese medicine.

Reiki II builds on the material from Reiki I, and includes three "control transformations" that aid students in making use of the first three Usui symbols – images that serve to filter the energy in a specific way when drawn or meditated upon. Students are taught the form, properties, and meaning of each symbol, as well as how to use them on self and others. The first is used to focus energy, the second to harmonize the body-mind, and the third to aid one's connection to their source (or to connect to a patient at a distant location). The final practitioner level offered is Reiki III, which includes an "empowerment transformation" along with the fourth symbol used to promote self-empowerment only, not in treating others. (Students are taught that each person must find their own empowerment in life; it cannot be bestowed since it is based on one's personal understanding.) All four symbols are more like training wheels for students; once the student gains a feeling for the different types of energy the symbols are no longer needed to influence its qualities. Similarly, the hand positions become more free-form as students acquire a sense of what hand position feels right for a particular patient.

Medical research on reiki is early yet, but preliminary clinical trials have shown positive results (e.g. improved blood counts, enhanced immunity, pain relief, relaxation and emotional balance, normalization of blood pressure, decreased healing time). Many hospitals offer reiki as part of their alternative medicine programs. Reiki's benefits for terminally ill patients have also resulted in its use at many cancer treatment facilities. And although its origins are Eastern, reiki is used by people from diverse spiritual and philosophical backgrounds. It is recommended that reiki not be used for burns, broken bones (unless they've already been set), or during surgery.

After all this description the question still remains, "What exactly is the energy of reiki?" How does a "subtle spiritual energy" behave compared to the bodily *qì* described in Chinese medicine? Where does it come from and how is it invoked? And how exactly do the Usui symbols influence its behavior? Western reiki classes and websites call it universal life force energy, channeled through the practitioner like a current into the patient. This description is misleading, however, in light of recent information gleaned from original students of Usui-Do and Usui-Teate; reiki is described as a presence, or way of being (connecting to one's ancestral self), rather than a type of bio-energy conducted from the surroundings. From such presence, one is then able to help

harmonize bodily qì. To explore the possibilities of how this happens, it helps to study the kanji characters appearing in reiki, especially with reference to the last two chapters on Chinese medicine.