

Tending the Wind – Chapter 17
Reiki – Part 2
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Some reiki teachers do not emphasize (or even discourage) close study of the kanji characters associated with reiki, saying either the character meant something else in the context it was used, or the character was not originally an important aspect of practice. Any modality with its origins in Daoism and Chinese medicine, however, calls for a very deep experiential study of the imagery evoked by the characters. Chinese characters, and by extension kanji, are well suited to philosophical and spiritual concepts since they convey a sense of something without absolutely defining it, allowing the reader's ideas to transform as the pictographic landscape is reflected upon. Studying the kanji of reiki in this way opens new doors to the understanding of reiki as a thing and a process.

The word reiki itself is a combination of two kanji, rei and ki. Various translations of reiki in Japanese dictionaries include “aura” and “an atmosphere or feeling of mystery.” Rei in Chinese is líng (raindrops falling through a cloud + three mouths, speak, opening + shamans working), translated as *spiritual*, *numinous*, *transcendent*, and *efficacious*. It conveys the ability to invoke something through spiritual work. The imagery of the rain being summoned is reminiscent of the “big rains” associated with the dragon in Chinese mythology, and the pericardium in Chinese medicine as the organ capable of enveloping that process. (Reiki energy is said to exit the palm at a pericardium point.) In Daoism, líng is described as spiritual power, something that lies within each person and becomes manifest as one is transformed and purified just by mindful living in harmony with the natural cycles and processes of the Dào. Ki is qì, so reiki is líng in its active form.

Transformation and purification within the body are said to occur at three energy centers called dān tián (*cinnabar fields*) – an upper one in the head between the eyes, a middle one in the chest near the heart, and a lower one in the abdomen below the navel near the kidneys and mìngmén. (Physiologically, these areas do exhibit a comparatively high degree of electromagnetic activity.) Dān shows a red mineral (cinnabar) represented by a dot found in a mine; an alternate version shows the mineral inside a kiln being purified into a more potent form. Cinnabar is primarily mercury, a fluid “living metal” prized for its transformative qualities and often used in ancient Chinese alchemy. Tián is a pictograph of a tilled field. Together dān tián suggests the cultivation of personal transformation and purification. Jīng-qì (transformative qì) is said to reside in and disperse from the three dān tián, thus their great importance in Daoist meditation and breathing practices. This is also reflected in the reiki transformation ceremonies, during which the teacher blows a gentle breath on the student's three dān tián.

Through transformation and purification the Daoist adept is said to become transcendent (i.e. inspirational, moving, able to radiate qì), a result of the spiritualization of matter-energy, not spirit separated from matter or an external spirit gifted to form; it is an entirely personal process fed by experience. Those with more experience (ancestors) were thought more likely to know transcendence, so the reference to “connecting with one's ancestral self” in Usui Reiki Ryoho makes sense. It is the connection to one's innate ability to repeatedly move with, be transformed by, and eventually become like the Dào with its characteristic natural spontaneity. In reference to the extraordinary vessels of Chinese medicine, this is analogous to the qián trigram and its chōng mài – through personal transformation one becomes like the universal influences themselves, able to radiate energy that then affects one's environment.

Transcendence does not require years of experience so much as the willingness to transform – a sense of open pliability, but in keeping with one's inner nature. This leads to zìrán (spontaneous self-becoming), the very essence of the Dào and the height of health in Chinese medicine. To practice reiki on oneself is to mindfully engage in personal transformation, becoming, and transcendence. To practice reiki on another is to offer a type of qì that helps the patient in their own process of letting go (old habits,

engrained reflexes, pathologic patterns) and opening to their own natural and spontaneous flow. Then the different types of body-mind qì can move freely and harmoniously.

The first three symbols taught in Reiki II, and the fourth taught in Reiki III, serve as aids in treating self and others. In the past these symbols were kept secret, but over the years their forms and meanings have been published with increasing frequency and detail both in books and on websites. This is appropriate for two reasons. Most importantly, the symbols by themselves hold no secret power; it's the use of them in a mindful way that makes them influential. Secondly, patients have the right to know what they're being treated with, like being able to read the ingredient list on a bottle of herbs. (It should also be remembered that Usui gave students the symbols as helpful tools, like training wheels, not to be relied upon once the student gained a deeper understanding for the full potential of reiki.) The symbols, and their associated kanji, are therefore described here in the order reiki students learn them.

Symbol 1 looks basically like a counter-clockwise three cycle inward spiral, but drawn starting from the end of a downward stroke. It originates from Daoist spiritual texts. Its associated Japanese phrase is cho-ku-rei, which is spoken or thought of while drawing the symbol. Cho in Chinese is chāo (walk, move, leave, depart + summon, convene), translated as *surpass, exceed, or cross over*. Its imagery suggests gathering something as one prepares for action. Ku in Chinese is kōng (hole + carpenter's square, work), translated as *sky, empty, unoccupied, or in vain*. (It could also be viewed as a hole for work, like acupuncture points.) Rei is líng. Altogether, cho-ku-rei is translated for reiki students as "infinite to good effect." The imagery suggests gathering transcendent energy to a specific location for starting treatment. Symbol 1 is used in reiki to focus the energy like a lens, either concentrating it or expanding it. Another variation offered by some teachers is choku-rei, where choku in Chinese is zhí (ten eyes saw no concealment), translated as *straight, direct, vertical, at once, honesty, or simplicity*. The imagery would then suggest the immediate, direct and unadulterated appearance of transcendent energy.

Symbol 2 is a combination of two squiggles, one more angular and the other more rounded, likely derived from a Buddhist symbol associated with harmony. Its Japanese phrase is sei-heki, translated as *disposition, proclivity, inclination, or idiosyncrasy*. The Chinese of sei is xīng (heart + plant rising from the ground), translated as *nature or disposition*. The Chinese of heki is pǐ (lie flat on a bed, illness + rules mouthed to criminals, law), translated as *habit or quirk*. The combined imagery suggests *natural tendencies*. Sei-heki is translated for reiki students as "everyone has idiosyncrasies." Symbol 2 is used to harmonize the body-mind (especially for emotional issues), but it also reminds the reiki student that everyone has their own way of doing things, so when offering reiki to patients the energy must be offered without judgment or attachment to outcome. This follows the Daoist concept of wúwèi.

Symbol 3 is a vertical combination of five kanji characters, hon-sha-ze-sho-nen. Hon is běn (tree with line emphasizing base), meaning *stem, root, basis, origin, own, personal, or principal*. (This is the same character used in Chinese medicine to describe one's original běn qì that arrives at mìngmén.) Sha is zhě (sun just rising, clear, pure + grain, sugarcane stalks), meaning *person or thing*. Ze is shì (right under the light of day), meaning *right, correct, just*. Sho is zhèng (foot with protruding toes, stop, arrive, limit + line), or stop at the line, meaning *proper, right, straight, just, fair, correct or rectify*. Nen is niàn (union with additional strokes suggesting contact, now, current, recent + heart), or keep current in the heart, meaning *remember, study, miss or to think of*. Altogether hon-sha-ze-sho-nen suggests that the original root aspect of a being is the right and only thing to keep in mind during a reiki treatment, since it is that aspect which guides emergence and transformation. The phrase also tells students to trust their first impressions and impulses during treatment. Symbol 3 is used to connect to one's original self, and to connect with patients (including those not present in the room, enabling reiki at a distance).

Symbol 4 is simply a vertical arrangement of three kanji characters, dai-ko-myō, translated for reiki students as “big bright light.” Dai is dà (standing person), meaning *big, large, great* or *grand*. Ko is guàng (fire over legs, a person carrying fire), meaning *light* (as a noun), *smooth, glossy, merely, completely* or *purely*. Myō is míng (sun + moon; window + moon in older pictographs), meaning *light* (as an adjective), *bright, evident, clear, to know, or to understand*. Some philosophers also translate míng as *acuity* – insight gained from the mirroring of things as they are, using a reflective stillness of mind lacking the warp of judgment, and necessarily shifting constantly in relation to one’s experience of them. Then one’s relations with a dynamic world produce no disturbance of the heart/mind, allowing harmonious interaction. Dai-ko-myō is thus the grand light of understanding that emerges from the reflective insight of the sage.

When explaining the meaning of dai-ko-myō, traditional reiki teachers offer the phrase “The Buddha sees the diamond world (metaphysical realm) and the womb world (physical realm) at once.” In esoteric Buddhism, these two worlds are ultimately understood as one and the same. Dai-ko-myō in this sense is one’s innate and empowering knowledge of the interconnection and transcendence of all things on a grand scale. From this state of transcendence qì appears to spontaneously emerge from empty space, but there is ultimately no separation between the manifest and the unmanifest; it is all one continuum, the Dào. On a smaller scale, dai-ko-myō as one’s personal light of understanding means that the empowerment derived from knowledge of oneself and one’s surroundings can only come from within since it relies on personal transformation; it cannot be bestowed. This is not merely information (which can be bestowed), but a deep experiential awareness born of seeking within as well as absorbing outside influences. This is why many traditional reiki teachers reserve this symbol for self-treatment only.

Each reiki symbol can be used alone for a specific purpose (focus, harmony, connection, empowerment) or in various combinations as needed (e.g. focus harmony at one area). When considered in sequence, however, another interesting aspect of the symbols emerges – they tell the story of what happens during a reiki treatment. The practitioner begins from a centered stillness and then places his/her palms on the body. At that moment, at the meeting of palm (and its pericardium point) with body, língqì invites the emergence and flow of body-mind qì in a way that both moves with the natural tendencies of the patient and calls upon the patient’s běn-qì for guidance. Thus reiki treatment is not the forceful insertion or direction of body-mind qì, but an invitation for the innate mystery of that patient to manifest itself naturally and spontaneously.

Reiki students are taught that this entire process is driven by intent, yì (sound from the heart), translated as *meaning*, or *intention*. Yì is the type of shén (awareness) attributed in Chinese medicine to the spleen (Earth phase): the fertile ground and centering influence for all life processes. All of one’s actions, especially if done in a mindful way, derive from intent. On a more subtle level, the meaning, sense, and significance that emerge in one’s life through personal transformation become part of one’s naturally emanating and influential qì, even before physical action is taken...thus the reference by some authors to líng as that ability of the most effective healthcare practitioners to awaken healing in others just by their mere presence, even before any medicine is begun. Yì flavors the body’s electromagnetic field which then, like any field in physics, influences the movement and behavior of any thing encountering it. Once again to quote Zhuāngzǐ: “Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve got the meaning, you can forget the words.” Reiki students are taught hand positions and symbols, but ultimately these may be forgotten as their personal understanding of reiki develops and their own unique style of practice emerges.