

Reiki: A Theological Reflection
The Usui System of Reiki Healing
by Robert T. Sears, SJ, PhD

Since the word *Reiki* means *Universal Life Force Energy*, it strictly speaking refers to the energy and not the specific techniques taught by Reiki Masters. The literal translation in Japanese of the word Reiki breaks down as *Rei* (universal energy) and *Ki* (internal energy). The techniques are more properly called the *Usui System of Natural Healing* after the founder of the system, Dr. Mikao Usui. However as *Reiki* is the common name, this is the name we will use here.

A Reiki healing is very simply performed. The practitioner places his or her hands upon the person to be healed with the intent for healing to occur, and then the energy begins flowing. The Reiki energy is smart since the Universe is a very smart place indeed. The energy knows where to go, and what to do once it gets there, or else is being directed by a higher intelligence. The energy manages its own flow to and within the recipient. It draws through the healer exactly that amount of energy, which the recipient needs. All this happens without direct conscious intervention by the healer. The healer's job is to get out of the way, to keep the healing space open, and to watch/listen for signs of what to do next.

The usual oral history of Reiki that has been handed down is as follows. (see www.sacredpath.org) Dr. Usui was a Christian minister and was the head of a Christian Boys School in Kyoto, Japan. One day some of the students asked him if he believed in the healing miracles which Jesus did were literal or metaphorical. Being a Christian minister he answered "I believe they were real healings ". They asked him why no one was healing like that today. Since he had no answer to the question, he immediately resigned his post and went in search of an answer.

With this he resolved to find the way in which Jesus had healed. This immediately set him on a journey of many years. Studying first at Christian schools in the US, for where else to learn of Jesus, but with no results. In the Christian schools the method was not known.

It was suggested he study Buddhist writings since the Buddha had also healed. This took more years studying at a monastery in the Orient. Nowhere could he find the answers. In Japan he toured many temples asking for knowledge of how the Buddha had healed. At each one the monks said they used to heal like that but now were more concerned with spiritual rather than physical well being. In one small monastery he found some ancient Sanskrit writings from India (or perhaps Tibet). In these writings he found the symbols for healing, but lacked the ability to use them. After a few more years of study, he felt he had come to an understanding and that to go further required in depth meditation. He declared to the monks of this monastery his intention to fast and meditate for 21 days at a nearby mountain and that if he did not come back they should come and get his body.

He went to the mountain and gathered 21 stones with which to count the days. Each day he would throw away a stone and in this way count the time. On the 20th day nothing had come as yet and he threw away the last stone saying "Well, this is it, either I get the answer tonight or I do not ". As morning approached, he could see a ball of light coming toward him on the horizon. The first instinct was to get out of the way, but he realized this might just be what he was waiting for, so allowed it to hit him right in the forehead. "I am what you have waited for. " As it struck him he was taken on a journey and shown bubbles of all the colors of the rainbow in which were the symbols of Reiki, the very same symbols in the Tibetan writings he was studying but had been unable to understand. Now as he looked at them again, there was total understanding. When he

again became aware of his surroundings, the sun was high in the sky, telling him that the journey had taken a few hours.

After returning from this experience he began back down the mountain and was, from this moment on, able to heal. Then follow four miracles that he was able to perform – the healing of his toe that he stubbed on the way down, the eating of a full meal after his 21 day fast with no ill effects, the healing of a girl's ailing tooth where he stopped to eat and the healing of the arthritis of a monk at the monastery where he stayed. He wanted to share his healing gift and spent the next seven years in the beggars section of Tokyo healing the poor and sick people. Some returned to begging after the healing because it was a simpler life. So he learned choice was needed. They didn't value the healing, so he realized payment was needed.

There is much fiction in this history according to modern investigations. Recent facts affirm that Mikao Gyoho (who took the name of Usui when he received the gift of Reiki) was born Aug. 15, 1865 in the village of Yago, which is in the Yamagata district of the Gifu prefecture in southern Japan. His tombstone indicates he was married and had a son and a daughter. His son took over the family business after Dr. Usui died of a fatal stroke at the age of 61. The son did not take over the Reiki organization that Dr. Usui started. The present story from Japan is that Dr. Usui's business began to fail which left him in great debt, and with a desire for something more than just material gain. His memorial stone says that one day he went to Mount Kurama on a 21-day retreat to fast and meditate. At the end of this period he suddenly felt the great Reiki energy at the top of his head, which led to the Reiki healing system." According to one witness, he would meditate under the waterfall on Mt. Kurama, and one day he had a *satori* experience. Some time after this he opened the "Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkei (Healing Society)". He opened a clinic in Harajuku, Aoyama, Tokyo in April of 1921. He offered healing to many from far and wide. There is no mention of healing the beggars before opening the "for-pay" clinic/school. However, in 1923, with the devastating Kanto earthquake, he did take Reiki to the thousands who were injured or sick in the aftermath. His fame spread and he traveled throughout Japan. During a stay in Fukuyama, he suffered a fatal stroke. This was March 9, 1926. He had taught Reiki to over 2000 people in only 5 years!

The grandmother of Western Reiki was Sensei Hawayo Takata. She was born in Hawaii on Christmas Eve 1900 of Japanese descent. When 30, she became very ill and on the verge of an operation she heard "Operation not necessary." She jumped off the table and asked if there was another way. The doctor's sister had been treated successfully in a Reiki clinic and took her there. She became well and wanted to learn Reiki for herself. At first Dr. Hayashi refused because she was a foreigner, but persuaded by her doctor he taught her the first two levels. She returned to Hawaii and there learned the necessity of charging for Reiki since a neighbor she did not charge did not value the treatments and did not get better, whereas another relative she did charge stayed well. In 1939 Dr. Hayashi came to Hawaii for a speaking tour and then trained Mrs. Takata to teach Reiki, thus making her a Reiki master. At the eve of WWII Dr. Hayashi called Mrs. Takata to Japan to be leader of Reiki and then announced he would kill his physical body through bursting three blood vessels. He thereby died. He could not participate in the war with his spiritual

enlightenment. Mrs. Takata returned to Hawaii and then eventually to California, using and teaching Reiki there as well. She did not teach other masters until 1975. Before her death in 1980 she trained 22 Reiki Masters.

There are three levels of Reiki training, with costs that increase with the training: The introductory level (with cost of \$125) is communicated in a 12 hour session (3 Friday, 9 Saturday) in which one learns to access Reiki energy "God energy" and do self healing and simple healing of others by learning the 12 basic hand positions. The secondary level (\$500) teaches the practitioner how of communicate Reiki at a distance through certain symbols. The third level (\$10,000) makes one a Reiki Master with the authorization to teach Reiki to others.

These costs are for a particular branch of Reiki training that values money to assure that the recipient takes the training seriously. Another view of Reiki is that it is God's energy and free -- see www.shareiki.org/download.htm. On that site you can download the author's comments critiquing those who would charge for Reiki. He also gives helpful answers to certain myths about Reiki such as "Jesus and Lord Buddha used Reiki for healing." He says that this is simply not true since Jesus' miracles were different from Reiki. We are not even sure of the accuracy of the legend of Usui being a Christian minister according to the actual historical research I cited. Whether Reiki masters deserve special reverence, the website comments, The Master Reiki level "is nothing special," and requires no deep spiritual experiences like *satori*. Those who have attained high spiritual states of consciousness don't make a fuss about it. It is also said that "Reiki has its own intelligence." Reiki is energy, which follows predictable patterns (always flowing to where there is the lack of harmony) but that is all. Do Reiki symbols have to be used? The website says that "Reiki will flow no matter what we do or don't do with our bodies or our will....After a long time of everyday use, symbols seem to lose their purpose. They are there for beginners to access the energy. They dissolve in overall presence of [the]energy field called Reiki." In fact, the author holds that there is really only one initiation, the first. The other two are changing *our* attitude to realizing we can do Reiki from a distance and to teaching others.

Some say that Reiki can only be used for good. It is certainly meant for good since the Reiki principles are: "Just for today I will give thanks for my many blessings, I will not be angry, I will not worry, I will do my work honestly, I will be kind to my neighbor and every living thing." Each of these principles can easily be found in Scripture. However, Reiki is not God or the Holy Spirit or the same as Jesus. Reiki energy is a creature of God and will therefore be used according to the intent of the user. The same energy is used in Martial Arts, either for good (to avoid conflict) or for avenging wrongs. There are also many different Reiki practitioners, some calling attention to themselves or desiring to make money, others simply desiring to serve people. Some people have had bad experiences with Reiki practitioners, whereas others have found it quite in tune with their Christian practice. One practitioner uses the cross of Jesus as focal source of

the energy rather than the Reiki symbols. Others join Christian prayer to the intent to let Reiki energy flow to the recipient. In every case, one is initiated through a Reiki master, but the energy does not depend on the master. It is God's energy and free for all.

As our panel discussions and questions emphasized, it is very important for the recipient to know the practitioner to make sure that they are practicing Reiki in a way that is consistent with our Christian faith. It requires the principles of discernment, such as those given in the article on "Evaluating Methods and Theories of Healing," to tell whether God is leading one to practice or receive Reiki treatment or not and from which practitioner.