

REIKI

History, Beliefs, and Practices

Identity: Reiki, usually translated “Universal Life Force,” is defined as the “art of applying, through precise technique, the universal life energy (*ki*) to promote healing and wholeness.” Having its origin in Japan, Reiki is also known as the Usui Shiko Ryoho System of Healing.¹ The website of The International Center for Reiki Training responds to the frequently asked question “What is Reiki?” by stating: “Reiki is a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing.”² More specifically, “Reiki can be defined as a non-physical healing energy made up of life force energy that is guided by the Higher Intelligence, or spiritually guided life force energy.”³

Founders: Mikao Usui (1865-1926); Chujiro Hayashi (1880-1940); Hawayo Takata (1900-1980)

Statistics: Estimated 50,000 Reiki Masters and 1,000,000 practicing Reiki worldwide⁴

History: Dr. Mikao Usui, born in 1865 in the village of Yago, Japan, is the original founder of Reiki. Although little is known about Usui and while accounts of his discovery of “Reiki” vary, it is reported that in pursuit of knowledge about the healing miracles of the Bible and following study of Buddhism Usui had a mystical experience in 1914 on Mt. Kurama in Japan. Through that experience Usui claimed to have discovered healing power and is said to have performed healings. In the years following his experience, Usui lived in Kyoto and while there sought to perfect his techniques and principles. Reiki entered the West through a woman by the name of Hawayo Takata, a Japanese-American living in Hawaii. During the later years of her life she toured the United States widely and introduced the Reiki system especially to people interested in New Age thought and practices. Reiki became popular in the United States in the 1980s, in the context of a growing interest in “alternative medicine” techniques. As even the casual browser in the “alternative medicine” section of bookstores will discover, many varieties of Reiki have developed based on the experiences of individual practitioners.

Beliefs and Practices

The word “Reiki,” it is said, derives from two Japanese words: *Rei*, which means “God’s Wisdom or the Higher Power,” and *Ki* which is “life force energy.” Thus, Reiki is “spiritually guided force energy.”⁵ Three basic assumptions underlie Reiki: belief in the existence of a “universal energy” (*ki*)⁶ in the universe; the theory that when the flow of energy through the body is blocked or hindered, physical and emotional illness results; and practitioners are able to channel life-force energy into the body—which is done by touch or by passing hands lightly over the person (where an “aura” of energy is thought to exist).⁷ Through workshops and training sessions individuals are led through three stages of initiation: “attunements”⁸ that enable practitioners to become more effective

¹J. Gordon Melton, *New Age Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1990), 382.

²www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html

³www.reiki.org/reikinews/whatislg.html

⁴www.reiki.org/FAQ/HistoryOfReiki.html, 8.

⁵www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html

⁶“Ki is also the Chi of China, prana of India, the Ti or Ki of the Hawaiians, and has also been called odic force, orgone, bioplasma and life force.” William Rand, “Reiki Energy,” www.reiki.org/reikinews/whatislg.html, 1.

⁷Christopher Partridge, ed., *New Religions: A Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 232.

⁸Attunements, according to one source, are “transmissions of energy which open your inner healing channel allowing more Universal Life Energy to flow through you,” so that a cleansing can take place. Tanmaya Honervogt, *The Power of Reiki* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 24.

channels of energy for physical healing; attunements to help practitioners become effective channels for emotional healing as well as healing at a distance;⁹ development of healing powers, and reception of a special healing symbol.¹⁰ Following Usui, the founder of Reiki, Reiki practitioners often speak of five core principles of Reiki meditation: do not worry; do not get angry; honor your parents, teachers, elders, friends; earn your living honestly; and, be thankful and respectful to every living thing.¹¹

Those who practice Reiki often insist that while it is spiritual in nature, it is not a religion or belief system. “Practitioners often say,” a newspaper article states, “that Reiki dovetails with religion because Reiki brings them closer to the experience of their religion. But they also insist Reiki is not a religion itself.”¹² Yet Reiki practitioners nearly all speak of “God” and the deity’s relation to the practice, though according to their various understandings. “Reiki comes from God,” states one website.¹³ “Reiki is guided by God-consciousness.”¹⁴ *Rei* in “Reiki” is “the Higher Intelligence that guides the creation and functioning of the universe...Rei is called God.”¹⁵ “God” is “male and female energy,” “mother-father God,” “Divine Love,” “Higher Power,” “Goddess Energy,” and “Spirit.”¹⁶ The attempt has also been made to “Christianize” Reiki, making use of the practice to “create a closer connection for them [Christians] to God.”¹⁷ A massage therapist who uses Reiki has stated, “Basically, you’re asking God to use yourself as a vessel for energy into the person so you can promote peace and healing.”¹⁸ Still another practitioner states, “The central precept of Reiki is the communication of universal love [God] and a harnessing of our natural, tactile healing powers.”¹⁹

Numerous Reiki handbooks discuss the use of various techniques, hand movements, symbols, etc. They also include testimonials of experiences of physical and emotional healings.

A Lutheran Response

A Christian critique of Reiki will need to focus on philosophical assumptions and “spiritual” aspects of the system in light of the biblical understanding of God and His presence and actions in the world. The reader is encouraged to see the following evaluations:

New Age Movement

Yoga

Although Reiki teachers and masters have varying understandings of the concept of “God,” nearly all speak of the reality of the “divine” as a “life force” or “Higher Intelligence” affecting the human condition—and even the human spiritual condition. One Reiki practitioner even goes so far as to say, “In a certain sense, everyone is God, because his or her innermost core is divine.”²⁰ Such a view, not uncommon among Reiki masters, stands in radical opposition to what the Holy Scriptures teach regarding God and His relationship to creation. At its core, such a view makes no distinction of being or essence between God and humans,

⁹Some Reiki practitioners believe that it is possible through a process of “visualization” to send Reiki’s healing energies” to individuals present at a distance in some other location. Reiki masters speak of “Absentia Treatments” that are “similar to offering prayers.” Phylameana lila Dély, *The Everything Reiki Book* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2004), 97.

¹⁰The summary given in this paragraph is taken from Partridge, *New Religions*, 232.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 233.

¹²Cynthia Billhartz, “the force within,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, Section E (November 2, 2005): 1

¹³www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html, 2.

¹⁴www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html, 2.

¹⁵William Randy, “Reiki Energy,” www.reiki.org/reikinews/whatislg.html, 1.

¹⁶Joyce Morris, *Reiki: Hands That Heal* (Boston: Red Wheel/Weiser, LCC, 1999), 1.

¹⁷Website called “Reiki for Christians,” www.christianreiki.org/, 1.

¹⁸Cynthia Billhartz, “the force within,” 1.

¹⁹Carmen Fernandez, *Reiki: how to channel the power of universal love and healing* (London: Anness Publishing Limited, 2004), par. on inside of cover flap.

²⁰Walter Lübeck, *The Complete Reiki Handbook* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Light Publications, 2000), 16.

between God and the universe. It insists on a radical immanence: The divine nature (God) is *in* all things and all people in the sense that He may be identified with creation.²¹ Nowhere in the Scriptures is God ever identified with, or essentially one with, the universe. In fact, in his speech before the Areopagus in Acts 17, St. Paul directly addresses the materialistic pantheism of the Greek philosophers. In the words of one New Testament scholar, “Paul starts with his hearers’ belief in an impersonal divine essence, pantheistically conceived, and leads them to the Living God revealed as Creator and Judge.”²² Quoting from pagan sources, Paul grants that God “is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’....” (Acts 17:27b-28). But the “*in him*” in apostolic teaching is proclaimed as the personal transcendent God “who made the world and everything in it,” who is “wholly other” than creation. God is not a mere “life force” or “higher intelligence,” but the “Lord of heaven and earth.” He is not “served by human hands” as though He needed any help, “since *he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything*” (Acts 17:24-25). Moreover, this God sent His own Son into the world, raising Him from the dead and appointing Him as Judge of “the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31).

The Reiki practitioner sees himself or herself as “a vessel for energy [“life force energy”] into the person so you can promote peace and healing.”²³ Through the manipulation of an alleged energy field (emanating from God), people are healed. People are thought even to be healed at a distance through a process of “visualization,” a New Age meditative technique (also called “guided imagery”) whereby a person concentrates on an image in his or her mind in an effort to make something happen. Such practices are not only foreign to scriptural teaching on health and healing but must in fact—in our view—be labeled an idolatrous worship of the creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25).

Three points seem pertinent, in general, regarding any reference to the Bible to legitimize or establish some kind of precedent for “healing” activities today—as “Christian Reiki” proponents attempt to do.

First, the Bible records many healing activities done by Jesus and His apostles, but it rejects the horrifying suggestion that human beings are themselves in any way responsible for the healing of human ailments through special divinely given “powers” (Acts 14:14-15) or that healing in this life is itself an ultimate good to be sought above all else. As a once lame man clung to Peter and John who had healed him, Peter had to remind him and onlookers that it was Jesus who had given the man “this perfect health” (Acts 3:16). Furthermore, healings in the ministry of Jesus and His apostles served God’s larger purpose of manifesting His intent to redeem human beings from sin and its dreaded results—the final removal of which will be known and experienced by believers in Christ when He comes to take His own to heaven. Second, readers of the healing activities recorded in the Bible need to be cautioned against the use of *descriptive* narratives as somehow providing *prescriptions* for the church of all times and places. Nowhere do the Scriptures give either command or promise to the church of all ages that God will perform healing miracles as He did in the days of Jesus and the apostles. Thirdly, the Scriptures urge us to place our trust in the God who personally cares for us (Ps. 37:5; 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:7). We pray that in all things His will may be done and that we receive the grace to be patient in the midst of human suffering. Through such suffering God carries out His gracious purposes and reveals His compassion and mercy (James 5:7-11). Further, prayer for the healing of the sick is not a human-centered mental process of “visualization,” but an expression of trust and faith in the personal God who in His own time and way answers the requests of those who are in emotional and physical need and who care for the needy.

For Further Reading

Melton, J. Gordon. *New Age Encyclopedia*. Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1990
 Partridge, Christopher, ed. *New Religions: A Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004
 Rand, William. *Reiki, The Healing Touch*. Southfield, MI: Vision Publications, 1991.
 Winker, Eldon. *The New Age Is Lying to You*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994 (p. 172).

²¹See Walter Elwell, ed., *The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 369, for a summary of the various pantheistic views.

²²F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 336.

²³Billhartz, “the force within,” E, 1.

Links and Websites

www.reiki.org

www.reiki.nu

<http://www.thefreencyclopedia.com/definition/word.aspx?w=Reiki>

<http://reiki.7gen.com/>