Reiki: Just The Facts

Part XIV

Attunements

by Don Brennan

What exactly is a Reiki attunement? Called Reiju in Japan and attunement in the west, an attunement could be considered to be an empowerment or an initiation. By empowerment, we mean that it activates a part of ourselves that allows us to channel the cosmic energy we know as Reiki. By initiation, we mean that some kind of transformation has taken place. Rather than becoming something new, by awakening our soul center we become more of who we really are. We return to our original nature.

The word Reiju can give us some insight into this energetic process. We know from examining the kanji for the word Reiki that Rei describes the Miko, a young female shaman who devotes herself to bringing forth the blessings of life giving rain. Her role is to simply bring forth the rain and to allow each plant to take in whatever it needs. The Reiki teacher acts like the Miko, compassionately bringing in the cosmic energy, allowing each student to receive exactly what he or she needs.

Ju, in Reiju, means to cut, to open, to empty and to receive. In order to receive, we need to empty ourselves of ourselves and be completely open. As Frans Stiene says, "we need to cut away our ego, the 'I'. When the 'I' is out of the way we are completely open and thus a perfect vessel to receive."

He goes on to quote from "No Beginning, No End: The Intimate Heart of Zen," by Jakusho Kwong: "When you receive something, you have to let go of everything, even yourself, the one who is receiving. Past, present - yes! even present! - and future, everything must go. Then we have true receiving."

Attunements are gentle processes, where both the teacher and the student let go of their human nature. The teacher allows the energy to flow like rain and each student uses this energy in uniquely individual ways to connect with the cosmic soul and to return to his or her original nature.

Ever since Reiki was taught in the west, many myths about attunements have been created. One that is very persistent is the idea that Reiki attunements cause healing crises in students. Every person has an individual response to attunements. For some, an attunement may allow for clearing and healing to take place. But this is not a necessary process that everyone has to go through.

The attunement is merely a ritual performed by a teacher to carry out the intention to connect the student with the source of Reiki. Basically the ritual keeps the human part of the teacher busy so he or she can be clear, in order to help the student awaken the soul connection with this energy.

Did you know that there might be hundreds of different attunement rituals practiced by western teachers? A precise number, just like the precise number of Reiki practitioners in the world, is impossible to determine. I myself have had over a dozen different attunements from Reiki masters from all over the world.

About 15 years ago, I was exchanging attunements with a dear Reiki friend from North Carolina. We were both becoming aware of many different styles of western attunements. My friend offered a very useful metaphor as to why so many different attunements still worked to connect people with Reiki.

“What we’re doing,” he said, “is boiling water.” “Boiling water,” I asked? “Yeah, like when the men folk get in the way during the delivery of a baby. They send them out to boil water to keep them busy and out of the way. Spirit is doing the real work.”

Westerners have over emphasized the ritual of attunements. Many have been told by teachers, who were told by their teachers, that a healing crisis comes with attunements. Some teachers feel that an attunement is not successful unless the student goes through a crisis. Other teachers actually plant that expectation and most of their students do indeed have problems. But the western teachers, who do not plant such expectations, see only a few students who have these kinds of difficulties. And in the traditional Reiki schools in Japan, there are no reports of students having such reactions.

During an attunement, the teacher performs a ritual to carry out the intention to connect the student with the source of Reiki. Basically the ritual keeps the human part of the teacher busy so he or she can be clear, in order to help the student awaken the soul connection with this energy.
We’re just boiling water.”

What is even more interesting is that none of these western attunements is the same as those originally performed by Usui sensei and Hayashi sensei. And yet, millions of Reiki practitioners have been successfully initiated into Reiki. Again, this demonstrates that no matter what we humans do to try to change Reiki, the source remains eternal and unchanged. Clearly, it is not the ritual of attunement that matters. The ritual helps both the teacher and the student to let go of human ego and to return to their original nature. This helps us to be connected again with the Cosmic Soul, as we are meant to be, and then we can be channels for this peaceful healing energy from source.

If we base our Reiki opinions on one teacher, one school, one healing community, we accept everything we are told as the way it is. But when we meet with Reiki masters from around the world, study the teachings from the Japanese schools, and get a consensus from all the different Reiki schools in the world, we have a broader perspective and a deeper understanding of Reiki. It becomes much easier to separate Reiki urban legends from real facts.

It also becomes easier to dismiss the claims of some westerners at bringing through bigger, better, latest, greatest, more powerful forms of Reiki. The source of Reiki energy is eternal and unchanging and is beyond any sort of human manipulation. None of these so called “more powerful” forms of Reiki has ever been acknowledged as more powerful by the consensus of the world Reiki community.

We connect with the Cosmic Soul by way of an attunement. Keep in mind that the entire Reiki class is a profoundly spiritual and transformative experience. What is sometimes attributed to be a response to an attunement is often the result of the cumulative experience. And that will be different for every individual. We are immersed in energy and receive guidance from spirit throughout the class. In other words, a lot is going on. So if we are struggling after all of this to find balance with assimilation, our connection to the Cosmic Soul, to soul energy, allows us to heal in exactly the way that we need to heal.

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