

“RESCUING REIKI FROM MEDIOCRITY”

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“In every process of life structures of creation are mixed with powers of destruction in such a way that they cannot be unambiguously separated. And in the actual processes of life, one never can establish which process is dominated by one or the other of these forces.”

-Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume 3

Popular sentiment holds that health is the norm and illness is a deviation from that norm. This widespread attitude, derived from traditional medicine, has led to an obsessive pursuit of health at all costs among many “wellness workers” including Reiki practitioners. Illness is viewed as opposing health and is seen as the great hidden enemy. Illness is likened to a nefarious “sleeper cell” lurking in the shadows, waiting patiently to strike at the most unsuspecting and inopportune moment.

Just as death becomes our inevitable fate the moment we are born, so, too, illness becomes an inevitable fact of life that spares no one. The compulsive search for good health and new remedies will not prevent illness from occurring. I am not suggesting that taking care of oneself or taking preventive measures is a waste of time. I am saying that every death among mere mortals is precipitated by some manifestation of illness.

As long as illness is viewed as *opposing* health, our aim as natural healers will be misguided at best and detrimental at worst. Illness does not oppose health. Illness *complements* health, and this fact must be clearly understood by those who labor under the umbrella of holistic healing, and especially Reiki practitioners, if they are to have an effective healing intervention with their clients. To the extent that Reiki practitioners view illness as something terribly amiss and bypass or even repress the underlying value of illness, they will miss a real opportunity for helping their clients in the unique way that natural healers are in an optimum position to provide.

A Point of Clarification

This notion that health is good and illness is bad underlies the medical model that is prevalent in our culture today. The medical model presupposes that health alone is good, and illness, the polar opposite of health, is intrinsically bad. The strength of this model is also its Achilles Heel. While not denying the excellent and at times even heroic work of traditional medicine, the medical model glosses over the value of illness in the healing journey. Pragmatically speaking, physicians today simply do not have the time or the resources to examine what value and meaning illness might hold for their patients. I submit that this examination is, in fact, one of the chief functions of the would-be Reiki practitioner. The process of examining illness and its intrinsic role in the life of the spirit of our clients is an integral part of being an effective healer.

The Problem in a Nutshell

One of the dangers of “buying in” to the medical model is that it puts a huge and, in my view, unnecessary strain on the prospective Reiki practitioner. The enormous stress of having to produce a dramatic healing (read “cure”) can only lead to burnout, disillusionment, or even ridicule. Our aim indeed is *healing*, but the healing we provide comes from demonstrating compassion, an open mind

and a listening ear in addition to “doing Reiki”. When good things happen from our Reiki sessions, we consider it a genuine blessing.

Let’s be clear on this. I am not suggesting that we adopt a passive or fatalistic attitude towards illness. Rather, we will want to follow where the illness is leading us with our clients and to discover *together* the underlying wisdom of the illness. In so doing, we then become an active and integrative participant of the total healing process. We will then not have to pretend to be Junior Doctors proffering a cure for what ails our clients, but rather a temporary but loving companion in our client’s own healing journey. Herein lies our value as co-workers in a true integrative approach to healing.

Reiki Master or Reiki Practitioner?

One of the symptoms of the dysfunctional and even silly thinking that takes place as a result of unconsciously subscribing to the medical model is the advice that is being bandied about that it is preferable to procure a Reiki Master over a Reiki practitioner, especially if one has a serious illness. This is so much nonsense! Any Reiki practitioner who has received legitimate training in a Level I or Level II Reiki class should be able to conduct a Reiki session with complete confidence. (When I say “legitimate” training in Level I, I am referring to learning in a hands-on class conducted over a ten to twelve hour time span where students practice giving Reiki to each other, learn twelve optimum hand positions and why they are used, exchange feedback, and learn about the uses of Reiki in both a clinical and non-clinical setting.) What really matters in the long run is the Reiki practitioner’s skill with healing work, the credentials the Reiki practitioner brings to the Reiki session, the personal experience the Reiki practitioner draws upon to assist her in providing a Reiki session for her client, and how the Reiki practitioner was trained and by whom. The prospective client will want to discuss these issues with the Reiki practitioner, but the defining issue is not whether a Reiki Master is preferable to a Reiki practitioner but whether the one providing the Reiki session has an understanding and familiarity with illness issues and has the actual capacity to help.

Reiki and Breast Cancer

N was diagnosed with twenty-two cancerous nodes necessitating a bilateral radical mastectomy. Twenty-four hours before the scheduled surgical removal of her first breast, *N* received a one-hour session of Reiki from me with discussion prior to and following her session. During the discussion following her session, *N* reported feeling peaceful and relaxed and emotionally receptive to the surgery. Her sense of well being remained for several days after her surgery.

N continued to receive Reiki on a weekly basis following her discharge from the hospital and during the time she underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatments. During these Reiki sessions, *N* and I discussed her feelings about the surgery itself, the removal of her breast, and her perceived loss of femininity. She confided that these discussions, which followed her Reiki sessions, were valuable to her in sustaining a sense of emotional equilibrium.

N felt so gratified by what she was experiencing from her Reiki sessions, that she decided to take my Reiki Level I training class with her daughter so that she could give Reiki to herself. *N* continued to see me throughout the months leading up to the removal of her second breast. After each session, we discussed how the Reiki seemed to be helping her to focus on the past wounds and abuses she suffered from significant men throughout her life. We also discussed the possibility of her dying and what fears and wishes she had about her own death. *N* reported that these discussions acted like a floodgate being lifted on all her pent-up emotions. She left each session with a sense of self-understanding and inner peace.

Many months later, following the removal of her second breast, *N* and I conducted a short improvised “funeral ceremony” for her lost breasts. For quite some time, *N* had been experiencing an unexpressed and indefinable sense of loss and was troubled by not knowing what had happened to her breasts and where her breasts were. Our informal funeral service brought closure to that concern and a sense of profound serenity for her.

There was no cure for *N*’s cancer as the cancer had metastasized elsewhere in her body six years later. But *N* had always made it clear that she had been healed in her mind, emotions and spirit, and that the Reiki sessions and her ability to give Reiki to herself were as valuable to her self-understanding as the medical treatments she had received for her physical health.

The Body, Mind, Spirit Continuum

Any cursory examination of the claims being made for Reiki, especially on the Internet, would lead most laypeople to skepticism. Some of the claims are exorbitant and some of the methods of teaching are questionable at best. The Reiki class I teach is very simple and yet highly intensive. My colleagues and I understand that Reiki as healing energy does most of the healing work, and this much is a given. What is required now, more than ever, are practitioners who are not afraid to get their hands dirty, so to speak, in the healing work we Reiki practitioners profess to offer. This “Old Age” modality is not for dabblers or dilettantes, but for those souls who have a commitment to easing the burdens of others who suffer from illness and to get involved on a personal level with that suffering while retaining that professional distance that is essential to ethical and professional work.

Reiki will address all three levels of the body, mind and spirit simultaneously and will help to uncover the underlying cause of illness on each level. Working with those levels with others as a healing practitioner is based on working on all three levels in one’s own personal life as well. Herein lies the great challenge and opportunity Reiki represents for the would-be practitioner: for our clients and their illnesses become our most effective and valuable teachers and assist us in gaining that wisdom of heart so necessary for our work as natural healers.

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