Chapter 1
What Reiki is and Why it is Important

Definition and Background

According to the International Center for Reiki training, "Reiki is a Japanese technique for stress reduction that also promotes healing. It is administered by laying on hands and can be easily learned by anyone." Actually, Reiki is taught more as a lifestyle than just a technique, and all Reiki practitioners aim to follow the five Principles of Reiki that were received by founder, Mikao Usui, during his meditations:

1. Just for today I give thanks for my many blessings.
2. Just for today I will not worry.
3. Just for today I will not anger.
4. Just for today I will do my work honestly.
5. Just for today I will be kind to myself and every other living thing.

Even just following these five principles without practicing Reiki will help with the healing process. Emotions such as worry and anger produce an activation of the fight or flight response, leading to release of adrenaline into the bloodstream as well as stimulation of the sympathetic nerves that innervate all body organs. These responses cause heart rate and cardiac contractility to increase, so that blood circulation is enhanced and more oxygen and nutrients are provided to the heart, muscles and brain. In addition, the stress hormone, cortisol, is released, which helps convert carbohydrates to glucose (Robert Scare, Eight Keys to Brain–Body Balance, pp. 40–41). These reactions are beneficial in the short term because they provide the body with extra energy. However, they can be detrimental in the long term because chronically high concentrations of cortisol lead to sustained increases of glucose in the bloodstream and reduced release of insulin which can cause type 2 diabetes (Rosmond, 2003). Chronically high concentra-

tions of blood glucose also lead to deposition of fat around the abdominal area, muscle wasting and impaired function of the immune system (Robert Scare, Eight Keys to Brain–Body Balance, pp. 113–114). Elevated stimulation of sympathetic nerves (fight or flight response) for prolonged periods increases the workload of the heart and is associated with heart disease (Florea and Cohn, 2014; Holwerda et al., 2018) and impaired regulation of blood pressure (Holwerda et al., 2018). Blood circulation to the gastrointestinal tract is also restricted which may lead to digestive problems (Bonaz and Sabate, 2009). The principles, "Just for today I will not worry", "Just for today I will not anger", do not mean that one must never experience these emotions. Obviously that would be impossible and even undesirable. When these emotions arise, the object is not to be overwhelmed by them but to experience them and then let them pass. Practicing Reiki and/or receiving Reiki enables this process, partly because Reiki stimulates the parasympathetic nerves which help the body relax (Mackay et al., 2004; Baldwin et al., 2008; Diaz-Rodriguez et al., 2011).

The Reiki principles, "Just for today I give thanks for my many blessings" and "Just for today I will be kind to myself and every other living thing" also aid in the healing process because they help one focus on the positive aspects of life. Barbara Fredrickson, a psychology researcher at University of North Carolina, has performed experimental studies showing that when people experienced positive emotions, such as joy, contentment and love, they saw more possibilities in their lives. In addition, this broadened sense of possibilities enables people to build new skills and resources that they can use in other parts of their lives. Fredrickson refers to this concept as the "broaden and build" theory (Fredrickson, 2004).

The Reiki principle, "Just for today I will do my work honestly" can be interpreted as taking responsibility for one's life and for the attainment of one's goals and ambitions. Realizing that one has control over how one
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responds to outside events and personal interactions is a healthy, empowering experience. There is nothing more debilitating than blaming others, complaining, making excuses and waiting for others to act on one’s behalf. So even just living by the Reiki principles can have profoundly beneficial effects on one’s physical and psychological health. Although receiving Reiki sessions has many benefits, as will be described in later chapters, learning and practicing Reiki on oneself provides the ultimate gain.

English Oxford Living Dictionaries provides a more mechanistic definition of Reiki: Reiki is “a healing technique based on the principle that the therapist can channel energy into the patient by means of touch, to activate the natural healing processes of the patient’s body and restore physical and emotional well-being”. This definition leads to more questions such as: “What type of energy?” and “How does one channel the energy?”

The answer to the first question is not obvious. Some Reiki scholars, such as James Oschman, have proposed that Reiki energy is electromagnetic. This idea makes sense because the heart and brain both generate measurable electromagnetic fields (biofields) that extend away from the body. These fields are very weak and challenging to measure but, in the late 1960s, an ultrasonic sensitive detector called a Superconducting Quantum Interference Detector (SQUID) was developed. In 1970, Cohen (1970) reported the recording of the electromagnetic field of the heart (a magneto-cardiogram) using a SQUID. Two years later, Cohen (1972) described the use of a SQUID to measure the electromagnetic field of the brain (a magnetoencephalogram).

If Reiki energy were electromagnetic, then it would be able to interact with the heart and brain biofields, alter their vibration frequencies and consequently modify the electric currents producing the biofields. Since electrical conduction systems in the heart coordinate the contraction of the various heart chambers, altering these currents would influence cardiac function. Likewise, since information is passed between the brain and other parts of the body by electrical currents traveling along neural pathways, altering these currents could adjust brain function.

However, there are some major problems with this theory which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The answer to the second question, “How does one channel Reiki?” is based on the purported existence of energy portals, called chakras, in the body. The word “chakra” is Sanskrit for “wheel” and chakras are believed to spin: pulling energy into the body from the environment and returning energy to the environment. The idea of the chakra system originates from traditional Indian religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. According to Hindu and Buddhist texts (Lochtefeld, 2002; Jones and Ryan, 2006), the seven main chakras are arranged in a column along the spinal cord, from the base of the spine

![Diagram of seven Chakras](image)

**Figure 1.1**
Diagram of seven Chakras.
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(coccyx) to the crown of the head (Figure 1.1), connected by a vertical channel. If one believes in chakras, it is easy to imagine Reiki energy entering the crown chakra, flowing through the central channel and exiting through the root chakra at the base of the spine. According to the theory, energy can also enter or exit the vertical channel through the other chakras that are not associated with the crown or coccyx. In addition, energy can flow to and from the central channel through minor chakras connected into the system. It is rather like the lymphatic circulatory system in the body, but moving energy rather than lymph (a fluid containing infection-fighting white blood cells). However, the lymphatic system connects with the blood circulation within the body whereas the chakra/channel system connects with energy in the environment. The channel concept is consistent with Reiki energy entering the chakra system from the environment and then flowing out of the minor chakras located in the hands during the healing process.

Some people have noticed that there is a correspondence between the positions of the main chakras and the locations of important glands (Roney-Dougal, 1999) (Figure 1.2). It has also been noted that the positions of the main chakras correspond to some degree with the nerve plexi or nervous networks that serve specific organs in the body (Leadbetter, 1927) (Figure 1.3) but the literature is very scant. Nevertheless, these correlations have led to the theory that chakras act as transducers, transforming environmental energies, such as Reiki, into electrical and chemical signals within the body (Wisneski and Anderson, 2009).

At present there is no convincing scientific validity for the existence of chakras. The closest evidence available for the presence of energy centers in the body arises from the use of a gas discharge visualizer (GDV), in which a small, pulsed electromagnetic field is applied to the fingertips to induce a flow of electrons in the skin and possibly deeper connective tissues (Korotkov, 2004). These free electrons accelerate towards the GDV positive electrode, gaining enough energy to cause further ionization to form an electron avalanche on the surface of the electrode. The electronic 'glow' of this discharge can be captured by an optical charge-coupled device camera system. Konstantin Korotkov, from Saint-Petersburg Federal University of Informational Technologies, Mechanics and Optics, developed software for this device to translate the electronic responses of the fingertips to an energy profile of the whole body (Korotkov, 2009). The link between fingertip responses and functions of specific organs and organ is based on
acupuncture meridians (Mandel, 1986). When the data of the ten individual fingertips are collated and interpolated, an image of the full body energy field is created. This is illustrated in Figure 1.4. Gaps in electro-photonic emission supposedly indicate impeded transfer of electron density into the body’s tissues and an abnormality in the energy supply of organs and physiological systems. Such deficiencies are seen as gaps in the image of the body’s energy field that is produced by the GDV camera and software. According to Korotkov (2012), and based on the principles of Ayurvedic medicine, a specific part of every finger is also associated with a particular chakra. More information about this relationship is described in the literature (Deshpande et al., 2013) but empirical evidence is lacking. The GDV camera has been certified as a medical device by the Committee on New Medical Technique of the Russian Ministry of Health. The review of 136 exploratory studies on its use as a diagnostic instrument in medicine shows that it is comparable to other more standard devices under a wide variety of conditions (Korotkov et al., 2010).
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However, databases of results as well as methods of standardization need to be made accessible to the public and published in peer-reviewed journals to validate the GDV as a truly scientific instrument.

As a note to clinical practitioners, firstly, just because it is not possible at present to make an iron clad, evidence-based case for channeling Reiki through the body, that does not mean that it might not happen. Secondly, regardless of the mechanism by which Reiki passes from a Reiki practitioner to a client or patient, Reiki has measurable beneficial effects on physiological and emotional well-being that will be described in detail in Chapters 5–13.

Short History of Reiki

This history of Reiki is based on information from Japanese Reiki Masters, Hiroshi Doi and Tadao Yamaguchi, who are members of the original Usui Reiki association, Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkai. More detailed information can be found in books that they have authored (Tadao Yamaguchi, Light on the Origins of Reiki and Hiroshi Doi, A Modern Reiki Method for Healing). Other information was obtained from Reiki Masters William Rand and Frank Arjava Petter, both of whom visited Japan extensively and communicated with members of Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkai and their relatives. Their books (Frank Arjava Petter, Reiki Fire and Walter Lubeck, Frank Arjava Petter and William Lee Rand, The Spirit of Reiki) provide an accurate view of Reiki from a Westerner’s context.

Reiki is related to Buddhist Qigong which is used as a means of attaining better health, higher self-awareness, and developing the higher potentials of the mind and body. Qigong is a Chinese practice of aligning breath, movement, and awareness for exercise, healing, and martial arts training, and extends back more than 4,000 years. Reiki was rediscovered by Mikao Usui (1864–1926), of Kyoto, Japan at the end of the nineteenth century. Usui chose the name “Reiki” which is usually translated as “universal life force energy”. Mikao Usui was a well-educated man who had studied Christianity, Buddhism, psychology, history and medical science and had traveled to Europe and America. However, he was not always successful in his various businesses and had reached a point where he needed to seek something other than material gain. According to historical information, he used to meditate near a waterfall on Mount Kurama and one day, while on a meditation retreat, he received a sudden experience of healing energy. During this process, he realized that his purpose in life was to use this energy to heal others and to train those who wanted,
to join him in the healing practice. In 1922 he founded the Reiki association Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkai to preserve and promote the teachings of Reiki. Usui trained more than 2,000 people to practice Reiki, but only 21 people reached the highest level. Several of those were officers in the Japanese Navy, including Captain Chuiro Hayashi. Hayashi (1879–1940) was the last high level practitioner certified by Usui (in 1925). Hayashi opened a Reiki clinic in Tokyo under Usui’s instructions to develop Reiki Ryoho. Usui died in 1926 after suffering a stroke.

Hayashi worked actively in his Reiki clinic with 16 healers until the outbreak of World War II. During this time, he met a woman named Hawayo Takata who was referred to his clinic because she was suffering from some serious diseases. Takata received Reiki sessions and she completely recovered. As a result, she decided to study Reiki with Hayashi for a year before returning to her home in Hawaii and starting a Reiki clinic. After further training from Hayashi, Takata taught 22 Reiki instructors before her death in 1980, and is considered to be responsible for bringing Reiki to the West. However, she simplified Hayashi’s Reiki style, omitting some of its Tibetan roots and developing a simplified hand position system. Some of the instructors Takata had trained altered her teachings somewhat and formed their own groups. On the other hand, until her recent death, Takata’s granddaughter, Phyllis Furumoto, continued to train Reiki practitioners while adhering closely to Takata’s teachings.

After Hayashi’s death in 1940, it was thought by most westerners that Reiki had more or less disappeared in Japan. However, in the 1980s it was discovered by several Western Reiki teachers that the Usui Reiki association, or Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkai, had been perpetuated in Japan, but on a members-only basis. Since the 1990s, there have been successful efforts by several Western Reiki instructors, such as William Rand, to re-establish some of the lost Usui Reiki teachings previously dropped from Western Reiki. In addition, Japanese Reiki Masters are being encouraged to promote Reiki in Japan and, as a result, it has gained in popularity. In 2014, William Rand became aware of, and developed for teaching, a more refined Reiki energy called “Holy Fire” which is available for Reiki Masters to learn if they choose. The use of the word holy in the name Holy Fire is not intended to have a religious meaning, but rather a meaning of being whole and complete. It is claimed that once a Reiki Master receives the Holy Fire energy, the energy continues to grow in strength and vibration, cleansing more deeply and healing more powerfully.

What Happens During a Session?

Healing Space

Reiki sessions are usually performed in a quiet room dedicated for that purpose. It is preferable that there is minimal disturbance. The room might be in a private house (Figure 1.5) or in a clinic and will contain a Reiki table, similar to a massage table, equipped with a headrest and pillow and covered with a clean sheet. In many cases, soft, ambient music will be playing to help the relaxation response, but most practitioners will ask whether or not you would like silence. Reiki is also being offered increasingly in hospitals. In this case, the Reiki practitioner will give Reiki to the patient while they rest in their hospital bed in the ward or private room. The ward will probably not be quiet, and other people will be entering and leaving the area, but Reiki can be given anywhere under most conditions.

Meeting the Client

The practitioner will greet the client and usually ask for a short history about any existing physical, emotional, mental or spiritual issues and problems. If the client is new, the practitioner will explain the process and ask them if they mind being lightly touched or whether they would prefer to receive Reiki from a distance. Placement of the hands is never intrusive or inappropriate. Most clients do not mind having the practitioner place their hands on them in the approved hand positions. However, the practitioner can just as easily hold their hands a few inches from the surface of the client’s body if necessary. This is the time when clients should inform the practitioner if they have any special needs or restrictions with regard to lying on their back. The practitioner can modify the client’s posi-
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Experiencing the Session

Next, the client removes their shoes and lies on the padded Reiki table, face upwards, with their arms resting by their sides. They remain fully clothed but usually remove their coat or jacket. Normally the client closes their eyes. The practitioner may scan the surface of the client's body with their palms a few inches away to locate any areas of heat or coldness, which usually indicate areas that need healing. Then they will begin the hand positions, starting at the crown of the head and working towards the feet. During this time, the practitioner will be channeling Reiki to the client. The client may feel heat, tingling, a pulsing sensation or nothing at all. If the client is not aware of sensations during the Reiki session, this does not mean that nothing is happening. Clients almost always feel refreshed, more at ease and deeply relaxed after a session and may experience other physical or psychological benefits later on, regardless of whether or not they were aware of sensations during the session. Reiki is cumulative and clients usually experience additional sensations and responses if they continue with further sessions. Sometimes, the practitioner will inform the client what they are sensing while the session is in progress, but often practitioners will work in silence and wait until the end to speak with the client.

Clients with Back Problems

If the client has issues relating to their back, the practitioner will usually ask them at some time to lie prone on the Reiki table. To ensure that the client is comfortable in this position, the headrest cushion encircles a hole in which the client places their face. The cushion is draped with a clean, soft piece of fabric, which is changed for every client, and is shaped so as not to block the hole. This headrest cover may be disposable or may be made of cotton or flannel (freshly laundered). The Reiki practitioner will not manipulate the back but will apply Reiki using similar hand positions as for the front of the body.

Time Duration of Session

There is no specified time duration for Reiki sessions but they usually last for 30 or 60 minutes, agreed by the client and practitioner in advance. Sessions given in hospitals or hospices are usually shorter (15–20 minutes) because other staff in the hospital will often need to provide a variety of other services and care to the patient.