

THE ENTRANCE TO REIKI – AN OVERVIEW

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Introduction

One of the core elements within Reiki practice is the gifting of the essence of Reiki and the passing down of the connection with *reiki*² energy from Master to student. This practice can be termed as a *rite-de-passage*³, an event that marks a person's change of status on a significant occasion. Since the founding of Usui's Reiki method of healing, many new Reiki styles and traditions have come into being, characterised and founded on new interpretations or implementations of Reiki's elements, including that same *rite-de-passage*. A common denominator in these is the existence of some degree of dogma, orthodoxy and orthopraxis. This article reflects on recently published academic literature while also providing the necessary context that serves to inform these discussions. In doing so, we wish to contribute to a depolarization between differing viewpoints, as well as support attempts to bring harmony between Reiki styles and practitioners. Even more, we consider depolarization within the worldwide Reiki community as being crucial for a future that leads us into harmony and one-ness.

Japan: *reiju*. Buddhism and *Shintō*

It is generally assumed that Usui Mikao founded Reiki in 1922, and started what we know today as Reiki practice. One theory is that when the Great Kanto Earthquake (*Kantō daishinsai*) of September 1, 1923 occurred, Usui wanted to help the citizens of Tokyo but realized that, in doing so, more people were needed in order to provide *reiki*. It could be that this situation gave rise to the need to develop a certain rite that he called *reiju* which was later interpreted in the West as *initiation* (to the Reiki style at hand) or *attunement* (to the *reiki* energy). Today, many variations of the rite exist, differing not only between the various Reiki traditions and styles, but also between each individual level of Reiki initiated into, within the same school. Nonetheless, based on current research and conclusions, it seems that at the time of Usui there was only one single version of the *reiju*. This ritual was offered during Reiki classes and at periodical (weekly, monthly) gatherings where Reiki treatments were exchanged. Today, this is still the case in the gatherings of i.e. *Jikiden Reiki*, *Komyo Reiki*, *Gendai Reiki-ho*, and of the *Usui Reiki Ryōhō Gakkai* organization. In other (mostly Western) Reiki styles the essence of the iteration ritual, and with that the practice of it, was forgotten.

¹ Dori-Michelle, Liad and Jojan are 'both-sider': each being both Reiki Master and scholar.

² This italicizing the term *reiki* is a convention that Beeler (2016) established as a means of differentiating between the practice of the system of Reiki and the energy that is *reiki*.

³ *Rite*: a religious or other solemn ceremony or act. I.e. in Christianity: baptism. In Reiki, initiation.

Ritual: a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order. I.e. in Christian denominations, specific forms of baptism. In Reiki, the *Usui Shiki Ryoho* initiation, the *Jikiden* initiation, the *Gendai* initiation etc.

Rite-de-passage: a ceremony or event marking an important stage in someone's life, especially birth, the transition from childhood to adulthood, marriage, and death. In Christianity: baptism. In Reiki, marking the entrance to Reiki, and later in time to Reiki 2 and another one to Reiki mastery.

In the academic field of religious studies, it is commonly assumed that new rites emerge when two religious or spiritual practices converge and influence each other. In the case of Usui and the ritual he composed, we can say that he was influenced by both *Shintō* and Buddhism. *Reiju* was traced by Horowitz (2015) in the Buddhist ritual *Kanjō* and by Jonker (2016) in *Shintō's* ritual *Chinkon Kishin*. *Chinkon Kishin* and *Kanjō* are rooted in the Japanese animated worldview that is ever present in their religious and spiritual practices (including Usui Reiki Ryoho) as well as in daily life. This worldview holds that *kami* represent nature's breath of life or consciousness, the deification of *ki* energy, as well as the so-called Japanese pantheon of gods/deities. The other way around, *ki* is the divine outflux and *ki* is the working force of *kami*. One crucial element of *Shintō* is purification and the *reiju* reflects the cleansing of the relation or channel between the divine world (*kami*) and the practitioner to let *ki* flow. A nice interpretation of *reiju* into English is therefore: "Blowing off the dust of one's soul". The forgetting of this iterative rite suggests that this type of cleansing is not repeated, albeit some argue that the self-treatment has functionally replaced this rite. Within the *Shintō* context of *kami*, *ki*, and cleansing though, this iteration does not equal self-treatment, neither functional nor ritualistic.

Kanjō is a ritual that served to transmit the essence of esoteric Buddhist achievement from master to initiate. It employs a threefold technique (mudra-mantra-mandala) to identify the initiate with the divine locus of the ritual and replicate/recreate its power. Horowitz (2015) explains that this transmission encapsulates all the system's sacred elements. In Reiki, these include energy, symbols, lineage, and Usui's moment of achievement. This constellation, like the planting of a seed, is transmitted from the Reiki Master to the Reiki student. According to Horowitz, for the original *reiju* no artefacts were used; it was all matter of legitimacy, energy, intent, and state of mind where the *reiju* recreates the sacred space in which Usui received the essence of Reiki on Mt Kurama. The *reiju* recreates Usui's experience itself and therefore ensures a connection with the source of Reiki. Considering Horowitz, we propose *Kanjō* as a major contributor for the *initiation* part of the *reiju* into Reiki practice.

Chinkon refers to the procedures for healing and directing spirits; by extension, it also refers to joining a deity's spirit with a human subject or its soul. *Kishin* means possession or visitation by the spirit of a *kami*. One interpretation in English is therefore: "Calm the mind and unite with spirit". *Chinkon Kishin* relates to Japanese shamanism where in this ritual, a tripartite relation is practiced between teacher, student and *kami*. The teacher performs as a shaman who can contact the divine world and pass on special abilities onto the student, in this case healing capacities plus the capacity to communicate with this divine world in the same way the performing Master does and thus becomes a shaman him/herself. Considering Jonker, we propose that *Chinkon Kishin* is a major contributor for the *attunement* part in the *reiju*.

In conclusion, Usui created a *rite-de-passage* into Reiki practice that involves and interconnects the divine world, one's soul, healing capacities, connection to the source of Reiki, and doctrinal transmission for the purpose of personal development and healing.

The West: initiation. Developments and consequences

What happened with the *reiju* when Reiki came to the West? It is believed that Usui trained Hayashi in this ritual and in turn, Hayashi trained Takata accordingly. Our current knowledge points to Takata being trained in one type of *reiju*, commonly translated as initiation or attunement. During the decades of Takata's teachings, she saw reason to refine the one ritual into two;

Reiki 1 and Reiki 2. Looking back, this came with unintended consequences. Within the worldview of many Reiki practitioners, a belief developed that one needs a Reiki 2 initiation to ensure the symbols and mantras will work. Thus, a second *rite-de-passage* emerged, this time from Reiki 1 to the Reiki 2 status.

We know now that in her final years, Takata started to train and acknowledge Reiki Masters, alternating between two training models; a Master training without Master initiation and a Master training which includes a Master initiation of her design. Fueston (2016) traces only nine Takata Masters (including Phyllis Furumoto) who received this Master initiation⁴. Nonetheless, all 22 gained Takata's acknowledgment as Reiki Master and (to our knowledge) received her permission to train others. While we may never know why she chose one model or the other, her acknowledgment of the Reiki Masters was equal whether or not they received a Master initiation.

After Takata's death, a schism occurred between Furumoto and Barbara Weber Ray. We notice that distant- or remote-initiation is part of the Master training in Weber's lineage while this is not the case and even not commonly known in Furumoto's lineage. At this stage, it is not entirely clear who had permission to perform the Master initiation. However, in the early 1990s when Furumoto served as Grand Master or lineage bearer (for those who had acknowledged her as such, like within The Reiki Alliance), permission was given to other Reiki Masters to perform this initiation. This step profoundly impacted the spread of Reiki. Furthermore, the Master initiation was increasingly emphasized to such a degree that within her represented Reiki style, the Master fee of \$10,000 (the original fee Takata charged for all her trained Masters) was destined for the Master initiation itself.

It can be argued though, that this increased emphasis came with some unintended consequences concerning the commodification of the Master initiation. Initially, the Master training concluded with a Master initiation as an indication that the student had reached the level of Master and as such, was acknowledged by the training Master. Through the emerging commodification, in some cases, the initiation has become a product in and of itself. In such cases, now there are two steps, the training and the initiation. Furthermore, influenced by free market forces, the Master initiation fee began to diminish as did the time involved for Master training⁵. Consequentially, this emphasize and import of the Master initiation resulted in certain people receiving the Master initiation *before* the training has even begun. In doing so, a shift is created regarding the moment that acknowledgment is received. This led to a new approach of Master

⁴ To our best knowledge, this is the chronological order of acknowledgement by Takata of her 22 trained Masters, reflecting the two philosophies.

Nine **without** Master initiation: 1975 Kay Yamasita, 1976 M. Verginia Walker Samdahl, 1976 Ethel Lombardi, 1976 John Harvey Gray, 1976 Iris A. Ishikuru, 1977 Harry Masami Kuboi, 1977 Barbara Lincoln McCullough, 1977 Dorothy Baba (born Aiki Kajita), 1978 Ursula Baylow.

Six **with** Master initiation: 1979 Fran Walker-Brown, 1979 Phyllis Lei Furumoto, 1979 Barbara Weber (Ray), 1979/1980 Bethal Phaigh, 1979 Barbara Brown, 1979 Wanja Twan.

Four **without** Master initiation: 1979 Beth Kathelin Gray, 1979 George Araki, 1979 Paul Mitchell, 1980 Shinobu Saito.

Three **with** Master initiation: 1980 Patricia Bowling (Ewing), 1980 Mary McFadyen, 1980 Rick Bockner.

⁵ It is not difficult to find examples with Google. I.e. a Reiki Master training in 2,5 days for € 371,50 on: <https://www.springest.nl/anand/cursus-reiki-master>

training, divided into levels 3A and 3B. In lineages of this type, most often 3A incorporates the initiation and is believed to support one's personal development and 3B is the practical Reiki teacher training.

Another unintended consequence is the belief that the Master initiation was an indispensable element to become Master; it became the entrance to Reiki Mastery, and one can say that again a new *rite-de-passage* (the third one) emerged. This is reflected in statements that certain individuals have a lineage of 'Master initiation' all the way back to Usui. Such lineages, however, it would seem do not exist. An alternative, and more accurate way of communicating one's lineage would be to speak of one's very first communicated *reiju* through the lineage of Reiki 1 (the *rite-de-passage*) or of a lineage of acknowledgement of mastery from one trained Master onto the next trained Master, all the way back to Usui.

Generally speaking, the diversification of the original *reiju* into numerous rituals is the result of alterations in the use of postures, symbols, mantras and artefacts during the performance of the ritual. However, this does not affect the underlying anatomy of the original *reiju*. Also, diversification takes place when spiritual practices migrate from the one culture to another. In the case of Reiki coming to the West, concepts of Japan's *Shintō*, Buddhism and animated worldview either changed or were lost which has led to changes in Reiki's rites. During the time of Takata's teaching, the relationship between the concepts of *ki* and *kami* were lost; *ki* became interpreted as universal life energy with an optional, rather than obligatory, relation with the divine world. As a result, space was given to experience Reiki either as a secular or spiritual practice, or a personalized, hybrid practice with elements of secularism and spirituality.

This is also the case in the developments of Reiki initiations as discussed above. During the last decades, we observed that many more variations have developed in the performance of the rite, such that sacred artefacts i.e. the presence of angels, crystals, new Reiki symbols, oracle instruments (such as tarot cards) and other attributes were incorporated. It is not difficult to understand that, when reading all mentioned developments above, a rich tapestry of tradition can emerge with respect to the initial *reiju*. This can and has historically led to whispers amongst the Reiki community raising concerns over whether one version is better or of higher quality than another. We observe that this emerging diversification has led to a perceived hierarchy of initiations where for some the one is believed to offer better access to higher levels of consciousness, awareness, special powers etc. than the other.

Conclusion: one family

Within the academic field of religious studies though, it is commonly accepted that rituals, symbols etc. all have meaning for their practitioners. With respect to the current diversity in Reiki's rites, we argue that all versions are true in their own right for their respective traditions and styles. Furthermore, there is no objective tool or mechanism whatsoever that can indicate, let alone measure the hierarchy of Reiki initiations. It is reassuring to realize that Horowitz in his research has compared initiations of numerous Reiki styles and concluded that an underlying pattern can be recognized amidst all of them. He calls this pattern 'the anatomy of the Reiki initiation', which undoubtedly stems back in the original *reiju*, and the *Kanjō* ritual. According to him, all versions of initiation descend from the original *reiju*, and thus they all belong to one family. This should not be so surprising, taking into consideration that all of Usui's descendant

Reiki traditions in the world stem from the same one tradition created not a century ago by the same individual.

With this notion of a family connection, it becomes clear that any polarization resulting from interpretations and developments of Usui's initial *reiju* is not justifiable. No one Reiki style represents 'chosen ones' holding true faith and the only correct *rite-de-passage*. Spiritual practices are living entities and change in time and culture. Moreover, polarization is counter-productive in the current climate, which promotes a move toward reconciliation that recognizes and champions the sacred space of mutual respect and harmony amongst all Reiki practitioners.

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