

*Mystic Order:
How the Dimension of Mysticism may have emerged in Usui Shiki Ryōhō*
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ABSTRACT

This article explores why Reiki may be experienced not only as a healing practice but also as a spiritual path. Starting from the historical reconsideration of Reiki's early development, it examines how transformative experience may become communicated through narrative, symbols, ritual, practice, and contemplation. Particular attention is given to the Reiki symbols and *reiju* as possible forms of transmission and experiential participation. Drawing on phenomenological approaches to mysticism and earlier studies of Reiki practice, the article identifies recurring characteristics, including awareness of a transcendental presence with agency, receptivity, a shift in personal agency, transformation, and experiences of interconnectedness. It proposes that these processes may help explain the emergence of Mystic Order within Usui Shiki Ryōhō as a shared dimension of meaning that remains open to personal discovery and interpretation. Mystic Order is therefore approached not as a fixed doctrine or final stage, but as an ongoing process through which transformative experience may be communicated, embodied, and renewed within a living tradition.

INTRODUCTION: MORE THAN A HEALING TECHNIQUE

Reiki is a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modality, best known for its practice of laying on of hands with the aim of improving well-being.

Reiki emerged in Japan during the 1920s under the name Usui Reiki Ryōhō. Within the received Reiki tradition, a pivotal moment in its formation is associated with a profound transformative experience of Mikao Usui (1865–1926) on Mt. Kurama in 1922. In this article, I refer to this account as the Kurama narrative. One of the Reiki masters (Reiki teachers) trained by Usui was Chujiro Hayashi (1880–1940), who subsequently trained Hawayo Takata (1900–1980). In the late 1930s, Takata introduced Reiki to the West under the name Usui Shiki Ryōhō.

In the decades following its transmission from Japan to the West, practitioners developed a rich variety of interpretations concerning its meaning, purpose, and spiritual significance (Jonker 2016). Some approached Reiki primarily as a healing modality. Others understood it as a path of personal growth, self-cultivation, or spiritual development.

Takata recognized her granddaughter Phyllis Furumoto (1948-2019) as her successor. Furumoto expressed her own interpretation and understanding of Usui Shiki Ryōhō in what is known as the Nine Elements (that I do not work out in this article) and Four Aspects of practice: Healing Practice, Personal Development, Spiritual Discipline, and lastly Mystic Order. When I refer to Usui Shiki Ryōhō hereafter, I refer to Furumoto's perspective.

For many people, Reiki begins with a simple experience. Someone places their hands gently on the body, warmth is felt, tension begins to soften, and a sense of calm or connectedness emerges. What initially appears to be a healing technique often develops into something more. Practitioners frequently describe changes that extend beyond physical well-being: a growing sense of inner peace, increased awareness, experiences of guidance or presence, greater compassion toward others, and a feeling of being connected to something larger than themselves.

The Four Aspects are a way of articulating the development of both the practitioner and the system, but the developmental movement they describe is not necessarily unique to Reiki. I related Western Reiki to Hanegraaff's discussion of healing and personal growth as central concerns within New Age alternative therapies. Within this broader field, Hanegraaff distinguishes between the more psychologically oriented Human Potential Movement and the more physically oriented Holistic Health Movement. The Human Potential Movement emerged during the 1960s as a broad and highly diverse field of theories and practices concerned with the development of human capacities beyond ordinary psychological functioning. Initially rooted primarily in humanistic psychology and the ideal of self-actualization, it gradually moved toward transpersonal and spiritual perspectives. From the late 1960s and particularly during the 1970s, the meaning of human development expanded to include mystical experience, transcendence of the self, oneness, and cosmic awareness (Hanegraaff 1998; Hammer 2006; Puttick 2006). Seen from this perspective, the movement from Healing Practice through Personal Development and Spiritual Discipline toward Mystic Order may be understood as a Reiki-specific articulation of a broader pattern of personal and spiritual development recognizable within Western holistic and alternative spirituality (Hanegraaff 1998; Jonker 2016).

It falls outside the scope of this study to elaborate on this development further. I limit myself to indicating that this broader developmental pattern did not begin with the Human Potential Movement. It forms part of a much longer history within Western esotericism in which spiritual practices were understood as paths toward transformation and salvation. Already in late antiquity, broadly Platonic and Hermetic currents sought forms of spiritual knowledge and practice through which human beings might become liberated from their ordinary condition and regain awareness of a deeper divine reality (Hanegraaff 2025). In my earlier study of Reiki, I traced aspects of this continuing development through Emanuel Swedenborg and later Western

esoteric currents, showing how ideas concerning spiritual reality, transformation, and the relationship between the human and the divine continued to be reformulated over time (Jonker 2016). The Human Potential Movement may therefore be situated within a much longer Western search for paths through which human beings might be healed, transformed, and spiritually realized. Viewed from this perspective, the influence of the Human Potential Movement on Western Reiki was not an isolated development. Throughout its history, Reiki appears to have developed in interaction with the intellectual and spiritual currents of its time. New Thought and the Holiness Movement may have contributed to the religious environment surrounding figures such as Bizan Suzuki, Tokio Yokoi, and Mikao Usui, just as the Human Potential Movement and Holistic Health Movement later provided a cultural language through which Furumoto could articulate Reiki as a path of personal and spiritual development.

Of the Four Aspects, Mystic Order has often remained the most difficult to define. Unlike techniques of treatment or specific practices of self-development, Mystic Order was never fully explained in fixed doctrinal terms. Instead, it was frequently left open to personal discovery and interpretation. My observation is that many practitioners have sensed that Mystic Order points toward something important within Reiki, while at the same time finding it difficult to articulate precisely what that might be.

This openness also introduces notable tension. While Western alternative spirituality increasingly emphasized individualized spiritual development, Mystic Order points toward a shared dimension of meaning without defining that meaning doctrinally. Individual experience and collective orientation are therefore not necessarily opposed: practitioners may interpret their experiences differently while recognizing them as participation in a shared dimension of Reiki practice.

These observations raise an important question that becomes the central question for this article.

What is it about Reiki that causes many practitioners to experience it not merely as a healing method but as a spiritual path, pointing toward something deeper than physical healing alone?

Let me start with a brief historical reconsideration. Recent historical research suggests that Reiki emerged through a broader process involving multiple religious and cultural influences rather than through a single isolated event. As a result, the attention shifted away from founder-centered explanations toward broader processes of religious, therapeutic, and cultural interaction (Jonker 2026d)¹. Such reconsiderations do not necessarily diminish the spiritual significance that practitioners attribute to the Kurama narrative. Rather, they create space for a different question. If the narrative is not approached primarily as a literal historical report, how might it function as a

¹ In the period 2022-2026, several discoveries were made such as that Rev. Tokio Yokoi got recognized in the so-called Takata story and that Mikao Usui for several years was supervisor at a Christian Missionary School. This caused a chain-reaction of new insights leading to a newly reconstructed early history of Reiki (Jonker 2026d).

vehicle through which transformative experience is communicated and interpreted by practitioners, and transmitted from teacher to student?

This study approaches the Kurama narrative from this phenomenological² perspective. Historical reconstruction and phenomenological interpretation therefore address different dimensions of the same tradition: the former investigates historical emergence, while the latter explores lived meaning and spiritual experience. While such studies help illuminate Reiki's formative background, they do not fully explain why Reiki continues to be experienced as spiritually transformative today.

This study also approaches Reiki from that experiential perspective. It explores how transformative experience, together with the ritual, symbolic, and communal life through which it is communicated, may be transmitted, embodied, and continually renewed within a living Reiki tradition. The central working hypothesis is that Mystic Order may be understood not primarily as a separate fourth aspect of Usui Shiki Ryōhō, but as the connective process through which this transmission takes place within a living Reiki tradition.

From this perspective, the formative experience traditionally associated with Mt. Kurama, the Reiki symbols, *reiju*, contemplative engagement with the symbols, and the experiences reported by practitioners (Jonker 2010, 2012; Beeler 2015) are not treated as separate subjects. Rather, they are explored as successive expressions of a single dynamic process through which transformative experience becomes shared, embodied, interpreted, and renewed across generations of practitioners.

The chapters that follow trace this movement from transformative experience and symbolic expression, through ritual transmission and contemplative interpretation, toward Mystic Order and the experiences reported by practitioners themselves. Together they suggest that Reiki may be understood not only as a healing practice but also as a path of spiritual transformation.

1. MT. KURAMA, TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE, AND THE REIKI SYMBOLS

The discussion that follows focuses first on the three symbols traditionally introduced at the second-degree Reiki class. Together they illustrate a phenomenological movement from an awareness of a transcendental presence through transformation growth toward a sense of unity with all-that-is, providing a framework for exploring how transformative experience may be communicated within Reiki practice. The Master symbol will be considered later in relation to transmission from teacher to student and continuity of the practice, and Mystic Order.

Many Reiki practitioners are familiar with the traditional account that Reiki emerged following a profound experience on Mt. Kurama, a sacred mountain north of Kyoto. According to the received narrative, Mikao Usui undertook a period of intensive spiritual practice and retreat, culminating in an experience that fundamentally

² This article distinguishes between *historical* research, which investigates what may have happened in the past, and a *phenomenological* approach, which explores how Reiki is experienced and understood by practitioners today.

transformed his understanding of healing, spirituality, and human potential. Whether interpreted historically, symbolically, or spiritually, the Kurama narrative occupies a central place within the collective memory of Reiki.

For many practitioners, however, the historical details are less important than the deeper question the story raises. What kind of experience was powerful enough to become the foundation of an entire spiritual tradition? And why does this narrative continue to resonate so strongly more than a century later?

As mentioned before, recent historical research suggests that Reiki emerged through a broader process involving multiple religious, therapeutic, and cultural influences rather than through a single isolated event. Yet even within such a process-centered understanding, transformative experiences remain important. Spiritual traditions often develop not merely from ideas or doctrines but from experiences that later become communicated through stories, rituals, symbols, and practices.

For this reason, it may be helpful to approach the Kurama narrative phenomenologically. Rather than asking only what happened historically, it may also be asked what kind of experience the narrative seeks to communicate.

Many Reiki practitioners report moments that are difficult to describe in ordinary language. Some speak of feeling guided by a presence greater than themselves. Others describe healing as occurring through rather than by them. Still others report experiences of profound peace, interconnectedness, or a temporary softening of the usual boundaries between self and other. I come back to this in chapter 5, *Mystical Experiences in Reiki Practice*.

Such reports do not prove that these experiences are identical to whatever may have occurred on Mt. Kurama. Nevertheless, they suggest that the Kurama narrative may function as more than a historical story. It may also represent a transformative process that continues to be rediscovered by practitioners in their own practice.

Experiences of profound transformation are often difficult to express directly. Religious traditions throughout history have therefore relied upon stories, rituals, images, and symbols to communicate realities that transcend ordinary language. Within the Japanese cultural context, visual forms and written characters frequently carry layers of meaning that cannot easily be conveyed through speech alone. Rather than functioning merely as labels, they may serve as vehicles through which experience itself becomes communicated.

This observation opens an intriguing possibility. The Reiki symbols may represent more than technical ritual devices. They may also function as attempts to communicate aspects of transformative experience.

Such an interpretation remains phenomenological rather than historical. It does not claim to reconstruct the original intentions of Usui or any other historical figure. Rather, it explores whether the symbols may be read as expressions of themes frequently encountered within spiritual transformation and Reiki practice.

The First Symbol: Encounter with Presence

The first symbol is commonly associated with power, energy, or activation. Yet viewed from the perspective developed here, it may point toward something deeper.

Many Reiki practitioners describe moments in which healing seems to occur through them rather than being produced by them. The experience is not one of personal power but of participation in a larger process already present.

From this perspective, the first symbol may be interpreted as representing encounter with Presence. It points toward the discovery that healing begins not with control but with receptivity to something greater than oneself. Beeler introduced the term *surrender* for this (Beeler 2015, Beeler and Jonker 2020).

The Second Symbol: Transformation and Reconciliation

The second symbol is often associated with emotional healing, mental balance, and harmony. It therefore resonates closely with another recurring theme found in spiritual traditions: transformation.

Practitioners frequently describe processes of emotional release, acceptance, forgiveness, and increasing inner balance. Through continued practice, what once appeared fragmented gradually moves toward greater wholeness.

Viewed through this lens, the second symbol may represent the movement from fragmentation to integration, from resistance to receptivity, and from conflict toward reconciliation. It expresses not merely emotional healing but the deeper process through which a person gradually becomes transformed.

The Third Symbol: Interconnectedness and Unity

The third symbol is commonly associated with distance healing and connection beyond ordinary limitations of space and time. Beneath these practical applications, however, lies a deeper intuition: separation may not be as absolute as it appears.

Practitioners often report a heightened awareness of connection, participation, compassion, and shared humanity. While individuality remains intact, the sense of isolation diminishes.

Viewed phenomenologically, the third symbol may therefore be interpreted as expressing interconnectedness. It points toward the realization that healing occurs within a relational field in which separation gradually gives way to participation.

Whether these interpretations correspond to the original intentions behind the symbols can no longer be determined with certainty. Yet from the perspective of contemporary practice, the symbols may be understood expressing a recognizable movement: encounter with transcendental presence, transformation of self, and realization of interconnectedness.

Together they describe a pattern reflected in many accounts of Reiki practice. If this interpretation is valid, the symbols represent more than techniques used during treatment. They become reminders of a transformative path—one that begins with receptivity, deepens through inner transformation, and culminates in an expanding awareness of connection and participation in a larger reality than oneself.

The next chapter turns from symbolic expression to ritual transmission. If the symbols communicate aspects of transformative experience, how are these experiences shared and embodied within a living tradition? The answer leads to the practice of *reiju*.

2. *REIJU* AND THE TRANSMISSION OF TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Symbols can communicate an experience, but symbols alone cannot create one. A map is not the territory, a description is not the experience itself, and a symbol is not the reality to which it points. If Reiki is understood as a spiritual path rooted in transformation, then another question immediately arises: how is such transformation transmitted from teacher to student?

Within Reiki traditions, the answer is found in the practice of *reiju*.

Today, *reiju* is often translated into English as "attunement" or "initiation". While these translations capture certain aspects of the practice, they may also obscure their deeper significance. The Japanese term carries connotations of receiving, bestowing, or transmitting a spiritual gift. Rather than emphasizing the acquisition of something new like merely laying on of hands, *reiju* suggests participation in something already present: universal energy.

Since the emergence of Reiki in Japan in 1922, *reiju* appears to have occupied a central place within early Reiki practice. It was not merely performed once at the beginning of training but was repeated regularly during classes and gatherings. Contemporary Japanese Reiki traditions and organizations like the Usui Gakkai that preserve older forms of practice continue to offer *reiju* repeatedly rather than treating it as a single event. This suggests that *reiju* was originally understood less as a one-time qualification and more as an ongoing process of participation and cultivation.

From a phenomenological perspective, this distinction is important. In many spiritual traditions, transformation for practitioners is not understood as the acquisition of knowledge but as participation in a living process. One does not simply learn about compassion, surrender, or enlightenment. One gradually becomes transformed through engagement with practices that cultivate these qualities.

Viewed in this way, *reiju* functions as more than a ceremonial gateway into Reiki training. It becomes a ritual through which practitioners repeatedly enter into relationship with the transformative dimension represented by the symbols and teachings of Reiki.

The significance of *reiju* becomes even clearer when viewed alongside the interpretations of the symbols discussed in the previous chapter. If the first symbol represents encounter with transcendental presence, *reiju* invites receptivity to that presence. If the second symbol represents transformation and reconciliation, *reiju* becomes a ritual through which that transformation is nurtured. If the third symbol represents interconnectedness, *reiju* embodies participation in a living network of relationships extending through teacher, student, lineage, and community.

This interpretation also sheds light on a recurring theme found in Reiki practice: surrender (Beeler 2015; Beeler and Jonker 2020). Practitioners frequently report that the effectiveness of Reiki appears greatest when they cease attempting to control the process. Rather than directing or forcing outcomes, they learn to become receptive.

Healing seems to emerge not through personal effort alone but through cooperation with a process already unfolding.

The practice of Reiki repeatedly encourages movement from doing toward allowing, from striving toward participation, and from self-assertion toward trust. In this sense, surrender does not imply passivity but a different mode of engagement with perceived reality. *Reiju* may therefore be understood as a ritual expression of this movement. Through repeated participation, practitioners gradually learn not only to perform Reiki but also to inhabit a particular way of being. The emphasis shifts from acquiring a technique toward cultivating receptivity.

Such an understanding helps explain why many practitioners describe Reiki as a path rather than a method. A method can be learned and mastered. A path unfolds over time. It transforms not only what one does but also who one becomes.

Yet an interesting development occurred when Reiki spread beyond Japan. While Japanese practitioners often continued to experience symbols and *reiju* primarily as practical and ritual tools, many Western practitioners began asking a different question: *What do these symbols mean?*

This question would profoundly shape the Western understanding of Reiki. The next chapter therefore examines how the symbols moved from ritual instruments to objects of contemplation and interpretation, opening new possibilities for understanding Reiki as a spiritual path.

3. FROM RITUAL TOOL TO SYMBOLIC CONTEMPLATION: THE WESTERN RECEPTION OF REIKI SYMBOLS

When Reiki spread from Japan to Hawaii and later throughout North America and Europe, it entered a cultural environment vastly different from the one in which it had originally developed. This transition affected not only the language used to describe Reiki but also the way practitioners understood its symbols, rituals, and spiritual meaning.

Within many contemporary Japanese Reiki traditions, the symbols are often treated primarily as practical tools. They are learned, applied, and eventually internalized through continued practice. Once their function becomes embodied, some practitioners report relying upon them less consciously. The emphasis remains on practice itself rather than on intellectual analysis of symbolic meaning.

Western practitioners, however, frequently approached the symbols differently. Instead of asking primarily how the symbols should be used, many began asking a different question: *What do these symbols mean?* Or perhaps: *What do these symbols reveal when approached as objects of contemplation?* This shift may appear subtle, but its consequences were profound.

Throughout Western religious and philosophical history, symbols have often been regarded as objects of interpretation. Sacred symbols invite reflection, contemplation, and the search for deeper meaning. It was therefore natural that Western Reiki practitioners began exploring the symbols not merely as ritual instruments but also as carriers of spiritual insight.

As a result, the symbols gradually acquired an additional role within Western Reiki. They became subjects of meditation, contemplation, and spiritual reflection. Practitioners explored possible connections with Buddhism, psychology, esotericism, and comparative spirituality. Whether this development reflects the original function of the symbols is difficult to determine. Yet it represents an important stage in the evolution of Reiki.

From Hayashi to Takata

This development may also have been influenced by the way Reiki was transmitted from Japan to the West.

Practices that may have appeared self-evident within one cultural context now require explanation within another. What previously functioned simply as part of a living practice became an object of curiosity and interpretation. Practitioners began asking why a symbol was used, what it signified, and what deeper realities it might communicate.

The transmission from Hayashi to Takata therefore involved more than the transfer of techniques. It also initiated a process of cultural translation. As Reiki entered a Western environment, symbols increasingly became vehicles through which practitioners explored the deeper spiritual dimensions of the tradition.

The Question of Translation

A particularly intriguing possibility concerns the translation of the forms themselves.

In English and many European languages, the term symbol carries strong associations with representation and meaning. A symbol is generally understood as something that stands for something else and therefore invites interpretation.

The Japanese situation is more complex. Within Japanese religious culture, visual forms may function simultaneously as signs, ritual devices, mnemonic (memory) aids, practical tools, contemplative supports, or expressions of spiritual realities. The distinction between tool and symbol is often less sharply defined than in modern Western thought.

This observation becomes especially relevant when considering the relationship between speaking and writing in Japanese. Because many Japanese words share identical pronunciations while possessing different written forms and meanings, written characters often communicate layers of significance that remain hidden in speech alone. In this context, a written form may function not merely as a representation of meaning but as an integral part of communicating meaning.

This distinction is not merely theoretical. In spoken Japanese, meanings are sometimes clarified by referring to, reproducing, or even writing the intended character (*kanji*), particularly when different words share the same pronunciation. In some cases, speakers may even sketch a character in the air while speaking to indicate

the intended meaning. Written forms therefore function not only as representations of speech but also as carriers of semantic distinctions and cultural associations. This broader linguistic context suggests that visual forms may communicate dimensions of meaning that are not fully recoverable from pronunciation alone.

Viewed from this perspective, the Reiki symbols may originally have occupied a space somewhere between practical tools, visual expression, and ritual device. With hindsight, one may therefore wonder whether the English word symbol fully captures their original function.

Perhaps the forms were intended not only to represent ideas but also to communicate experiences. Perhaps they functioned as visual gateways through which aspects of Reiki practice could be remembered, embodied, and transmitted. This communicative function is not limited to the three Reiki symbols. Even the written form of the word *reiki* (靈氣/靈気) illustrates how visual representation, semantic nuance, and cultural associations become intertwined in Japanese writing. Rather than merely recording pronunciation, written forms themselves participate in the communication of meaning.

The Emergence of Contemplation

Yet precisely because Western practitioners approached them as symbols, new possibilities emerged.

The symbols became objects of contemplation. Practitioners began asking what the symbols might reveal about healing, consciousness, spiritual development, and the nature of reality itself. Reflection on the symbols gradually encouraged reflection on the practitioner.

Seen in this light, the Western reception of Reiki symbols may have contributed to an important development in the history of Reiki. A practice originally centered upon healing and cultivation increasingly came to be understood as a spiritual path. The symbols provided a bridge between experience and interpretation, between ritual participation and contemplative reflection.

This does not mean that the Japanese and Western approaches are mutually exclusive. Rather, they may represent complementary perspectives on the same reality. The Japanese emphasis reminds practitioners that symbols are meant to be lived rather than merely analyzed. The Western emphasis reminds practitioners that lived experiences often invite deeper reflection and understanding.

Together, these perspectives suggest that the symbols function on multiple levels simultaneously. They are *practical tools* used within treatment and ritual, *visual expressions* of transformative experience, *contemplative gateways*, and *vehicles* through which spiritual insights may be communicated across generations and cultures.

As practitioners engage more deeply with these dimensions, another question naturally arises.

If symbols, ritual transmission, and contemplative reflection all point toward a deeper pattern within Reiki, what is the nature of that pattern itself?

Within Usui Shiki Ryōhō, one possible answer is found in the fourth aspect of the system: Mystic Order.

4. MYSTIC ORDER: THE TRANSMISSION OF TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Among the four aspects of Usui Shiki Ryōhō, Mystic Order is perhaps the most intriguing and the most difficult to define. Healing Practice can be experienced directly through treatment. Personal Development becomes visible through changes in daily life. Spiritual Discipline is expressed through practice and cultivation. Mystic Order, however, points toward something less tangible.

Many practitioners encounter the term long before they feel they understand it. Some associate it with lineage and transmission. Others associate it with synchronicity, guidance, interconnectedness, or a sense that *reiki* energy unfolds according to patterns larger than personal intention. Although these interpretations differ, they share a common intuition: that Reiki involves more than technique alone.

Perhaps this difficulty is not accidental. Throughout the history of spiritual practices, some realities have proven easier to experience than to define. Traditions often communicate such realities indirectly through stories, rituals, symbols, and practices rather than through precise doctrinal explanations.

The previous chapters have explored several dimensions of Reiki that at first appear distinct. I began with the transformative experience associated with Mt. Kurama. I then examined the symbols as possible expressions of transformative experience, *reiju* as a ritual of transmission, and the way Western practitioners increasingly approached the symbols as objects of contemplation and spiritual reflection.

Viewed together, these elements reveal a common pattern:

- Experience becomes expressed through symbols.
- Symbols become embodied through rituals.
- Rituals become internalized through practice.
- Practice becomes reflected upon through contemplation.
- Contemplation gradually transforms the practitioner.

One important symbol, however, has not yet been considered: the Master symbol. This symbol occupies a somewhat different place within Reiki tradition from the three symbols discussed above. Whereas the second-degree symbols have long been employed during treatment and can be explored phenomenologically as expressing a movement from Presence through Transformation toward Unity, the Master symbol became strongly associated with the transmission of Reiki itself.

Historical research indicates that the precise origin of the Master symbol cannot yet be established with certainty. Rather than functioning primarily as an

additional treatment symbol, it gradually acquired a distinctive role within the ritual transmission of Reiki (Jonker 2016).

From the perspective developed in this article, and building upon earlier work on Reiki initiation and transmission (Beeler, Horowitz, and Jonker 2019), this historical development also invites a phenomenological interpretation. Instead, it may point toward a different dimension altogether: participation in the continuing transmission of transformative experience. Seen in this way, the Master symbol does not primarily symbolize another inner experience. Rather, it symbolizes entry into the ongoing life of the tradition itself. The practitioner is no longer concerned only with receiving, embodying, and integrating transformative experience, but also with preserving, communicating, and transmitting it to others through practice, ritual, and teaching.

This understanding places the Master symbol in close relationship with what Usui Shiki Ryōhō later came to describe as Mystic Order. If the three second-degree symbols express the content of transformative experience, the Master symbol may be understood as expressing participation in the continuing transmission of the Reiki tradition itself. It points toward the ongoing communication of the constellation of transformative experience, ritual, symbols, lineage, and practice through which Reiki is continually entrusted, embodied, renewed, and rediscovered by successive generations of practitioners. Rather than representing a fourth stage within the transformative movement itself, it symbolizes the continuity of that movement within a living tradition. What emerges is not merely a collection of techniques but a process.

This observation suggests a conceivable way of understanding Mystic Order. Rather than referring to a hidden teaching or fixed doctrine, Mystic Order may point toward the ongoing process through which transformative experience becomes communicated, transmitted, embodied, and renewed within a living tradition.

In this sense, Mystic Order is not something added to Reiki. It is the pattern that becomes visible when one observes how the various dimensions of Reiki relate to one another.

Such an understanding helps explain why many practitioners report experiences of meaningful coherence arising through years of practice. An unexpected insight emerges during self-treatment. A conversation occurs at precisely the right moment. A symbol that once appeared simple gradually reveals additional layers of meaning. Connections become visible that were previously unnoticed.

These experiences do not necessarily require supernatural explanations. Yet many practitioners describe a growing awareness that their practice unfolds within patterns of meaning larger than conscious intention alone. The language used to describe such experiences varies—guidance, intuition, synchronicity, grace, flow, or interconnectedness—but each points toward an awareness that life may contain dimensions of order not entirely generated by deliberate planning or rational control.

A similar movement can be observed within Reiki practice itself. At the beginning of training, many students focus primarily on technique. With experience, however, the emphasis gradually shifts from performing Reiki correctly toward participating more fully in the process unfolding through practice. Reiki becomes not

only something one does but also something one receives, participates in, and embodies.

Mystic Order may therefore be understood as the recognition of this participatory dimension. It points toward the possibility that healing, transformation, symbols, ritual transmission, and spiritual development are not isolated activities but interconnected expressions of a larger whole.

Importantly, such an understanding preserves the openness that has long characterized Mystic Order within Usui Shiki Ryōhō. The purpose is not to provide a final definition. Mystic Order has often been left open to personal discovery and interpretation. The present discussion therefore explores one conceivable way of understanding its deeper spiritual implications rather than proposing a definitive explanation.

If this interpretation is valid, then Mystic Order represents neither an abstract philosophy nor a hidden doctrine. It describes an ongoing relationship between transformation and participation. It is the recognition that the path of Reiki unfolds through a dynamic interaction between experience, practice, symbol, ritual, reflection, and community.

The question that remains is how such participation is actually experienced by practitioners themselves. Do the experiences reported within Reiki practice resemble patterns identified elsewhere in the study of spirituality and mysticism?

To explore this question, the next chapter turns to the experiences of practitioners themselves.

5. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN REIKI PRACTICE

Up to this point, I have explored Reiki from within its own narratives, symbols, rituals, and practices. The discussion has focused on how transformative experiences may become expressed through symbols, transmitted through *reiju*, reflected upon through contemplation, and integrated through what Usui Shiki Ryōhō calls Mystic Order. A further question arises now. Do the experiences reported by Reiki practitioners resemble patterns identified elsewhere in the study of spirituality and mysticism?

The discussion that follows does not present new empirical fieldwork. Rather, it offers a phenomenological synthesis derived from previously published research on Reiki practice, including ethnographic studies, earlier analyses of Reiki mysticism, investigations of ritual transmission, and recurring experiential themes reported within Reiki communities. Particular use is made of earlier studies on Reiki mysticism (Jonker 2010; 2012), ethnographic research on Reiki practice (Beeler 2015), studies of Reiki initiation and transmission (Beeler, Horowitz, and Jonker 2019), and research on surrender and agency in Reiki practice (Beeler and Jonker 2020). The purpose is not to demonstrate how frequently particular experiences occur, but to examine whether experiential patterns reported within Reiki practice correspond to characteristics identified in the broader phenomenology of mysticism.

To explore this question, this chapter draws upon the phenomenological framework developed by Kees Waaijman. Earlier research (Jonker 2010, 2012) has already suggested that Reiki practice displays several characteristics commonly associated with mystical experience. The purpose here is not to classify Reiki as belonging to a particular mystical tradition, but to examine whether experiences reported by practitioners resemble patterns identified in the broader study of mysticism.

Waaijman identifies ten recurring characteristics of mystical experience. While not all appear equally prominent within Reiki practice, several emerge repeatedly in practitioner accounts. Among the most relevant for the present discussion are Presence, Passivity and immediacy, Shift of the act-center, Transformation, and Unity.

Presence

Many Reiki practitioners describe a sense that something is present which exceeds ordinary awareness. Some speak of profound peace, others of guidance, support, or a heightened sense of sacredness. Although such experiences are rarely described in precise theological terms, they often involve the perception that something greater than the individual participates in the healing process.

This characteristic corresponds closely to the theme of Presence identified by Waaijman and resonates with the interpretation of the first Reiki symbol discussed earlier in this article.

Passivity and Immediacy

A second recurring theme concerns the experience of receiving rather than producing. Practitioners frequently report that Reiki appears most effective when they stop trying to control the process and instead allow it to unfold naturally.

Passivity in this context does not imply inactivity or withdrawal from the healing process. Rather, it refers to an active receptivity in which practitioners remain fully engaged while experiencing healing as something received rather than manufactured through personal effort alone. The practitioner participates but does not experience themselves as the sole source of action. This characteristic therefore points toward a participatory mode of agency, one grounded in receptivity, cooperation, and participation rather than control. Such a relational mode of participation has often been expressed in spiritual traditions through metaphysical-human relationships in which the individual does not act entirely from the self but in cooperation with a reality experienced as greater than oneself.

Within Japanese religious traditions, a similar dynamic has sometimes been described through the distinction between self-power (*jiriki*) and other-power (*tariki*), particularly in Pure Land Buddhism (Jonker 2026e). Although Reiki developed in a different context, practitioner descriptions of healing as occurring “through” rather than solely “by” the practitioner suggest a comparable movement from self-directed control toward active receptivity and participation in a transformative reality experienced as greater than the individual self. The contrast does not imply a rejection of personal effort, but rather a shift in emphasis from self-directed striving toward participation.

Shift of the Act-Center

Many practitioners also report that Reiki seems to possess its own direction or intelligence. Hands move intuitively, insights emerge unexpectedly, and treatments unfold in ways that exceed conscious planning. The practitioner remains involved yet experiences the process as arising through rather than solely from the self.

Waaijman describes this phenomenon as a shift of the act-center. Instead of experiencing oneself as the exclusive source of action, one becomes aware of participation in a process larger than personal intention alone.

Transformation

Perhaps the most significant characteristic is transformation. Reiki is valued not merely because unusual experiences occur, but because sustained practice often leads to lasting change.

Practitioners frequently describe increased compassion, greater emotional balance, deeper self-understanding, and a growing sense of trust and acceptance. These changes rarely occur suddenly. More often they unfold gradually through years of self-treatment, treatment of others, and participation in the Reiki community.

This emphasis on transformation has appeared throughout the present article and forms one of the strongest connections between Reiki practice and mystical traditions more broadly.

Unity

A final recurring characteristic concerns Unity. Practitioners often describe feeling more deeply connected to other people, to nature, and to life itself. Within this growing awareness of connection, compassion may become more consistently embodied in the practitioner's attitudes and actions. Relationships are increasingly experienced not only from the perspective of the separate individual, but as forms of participation in a wider field of connection, hence 'Unity'.

This characteristic resonates strongly with the interpretation of the third Reiki symbol developed earlier and with the broader understanding of Mystic Order discussed in the previous chapter. Unity does not eliminate individuality; rather, it transforms how individuality is experienced by situating it within a larger relational whole.

Reiki as a Spiritual Path

Taken individually, none of these characteristics proves that Reiki is a mystical tradition. Similar experiences may occur in many religious, spiritual, artistic, and even secular contexts.

Viewed collectively, however, a recognizable pattern emerges. Presence, Passivity and immediacy, Shift of the act-center, Transformation, and Unity have appeared repeatedly throughout this article. They emerged in the discussion of Mt. Kurama, reappeared in the interpretation of the symbols, became embodied through *reiju*, deepened through contemplation, and found structural expression in Mystic Order.

From this perspective, Reiki may be understood as more than healing practice. It may also function as a path through which individuals encounter dimensions of experience traditionally associated with mysticism and spiritual transformation. The significance of Reiki lies not only in what practitioners do, but also in what they gradually become through sustained participation in the practice.

The closing chapter draws together the themes explored throughout this article and reflects on what they may reveal about Reiki as a contemporary spiritual path.

CONCLUSION: REIKI AS A PATH OF TRANSFORMATION

This article began with a simple question: why do so many practitioners experience Reiki as more than a healing technique?

The answer that gradually emerged is that Reiki appears to operate on multiple levels simultaneously. It functions as a method of healing, a practice of self-cultivation, a ritual tradition, a contemplative discipline, and for many practitioners, a spiritual path. These dimensions are not separate from one another. Rather, they form interconnected aspects of a single process of transformation.

The structural logic of the present study may be summarized as progression through five interconnected stages. (1) Transformative experience becomes expressed through symbols; (2) symbols become embodied through ritual; (3) ritual becomes internalized through practice; (4) practice becomes reflected upon through contemplation; and (5) contemplation gradually transforms the practitioner.

The Master symbol complements this movement by pointing beyond the transformation of the individual practitioner toward the continuing transmission of that transformative process within the living tradition of Reiki. In this way, it provides a symbolic bridge between personal transformation and what Usui Shiki Ryōhō came to describe as Mystic Order. What initially appears as a collection of separate elements within Reiki thus reveals an underlying pattern of transmission and transformation.

From this perspective, Mystic Order may be understood not as a hidden doctrine or fixed teaching, but as the dynamic process through which the transformative tradition of Reiki is communicated, embodied, interpreted, and renewed within a living community of practitioners. It is the connective pattern that links experience, symbol, ritual, practice, contemplation, and personal transformation into a coherent spiritual path. Seen in this way, Mystic Order functions not only as an organizational principle within Usui Shiki Ryōhō, but also as a way of understanding how spiritual insight becomes shared, sustained, and continually rediscovered by successive generations of practitioners.

Throughout this article, I have followed a movement from transformative experience to symbolic expression, ritual transmission, contemplative reflection, Mystic Order, and finally the experiences reported by practitioners themselves. Although these dimensions may appear distinct, together they reveal a common pattern. Reiki invites practitioners not only to perform certain practices but also to participate in a gradual process of personal and spiritual development.

The experiences discussed throughout this article suggest that Reiki may be understood as more than a healing practice. Many practitioners describe encounters with an transcendental presence, experiences of receptivity, shifts in the sense of personal agency, processes of transformation, and a growing awareness of interconnectedness. While such experiences do not prove that Reiki belongs to any one particular mystical tradition, they do indicate that Reiki practice may create conditions in which experiences commonly associated with mysticism can emerge.

From this perspective, Reiki can be understood as a path that moves from doing through becoming toward being. The practitioner may begin by learning hand positions, symbols, and techniques. Over time, however, the emphasis often shifts. The focus moves from performing Reiki correctly toward embodying qualities such as compassion, trust, receptivity, and presence. The practice becomes less about directing change and more about participating in it.

Mystic Order may therefore be understood not as a destination but as an ongoing process and invitation. It points toward the possibility that healing, transformation, and spiritual development are woven together within patterns of meaning that become visible only through practice itself. These patterns cannot be fully explained in advance. They must be discovered, explored, and lived.

For this reason, Mystic Order has often remained open to personal discovery and interpretation. The present article has explored one conceivable way of understanding its deeper spiritual implications. Other interpretations remain possible, and future practitioners may discover dimensions not considered here.

Perhaps this openness is one of Reiki's greatest strengths. Rather than offering a definitive answer, Reiki offers practice. Rather than presenting a completed system of beliefs, it invites participation in an ongoing process of transformation. And rather than defining the meaning of Mystic Order once and for all, it leaves space for each practitioner to encounter that mystery within the unfolding journey of Reiki itself.

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