

reiki is

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Foreword

For a while I was a little concerned that I don't have a succinct answer to the question "What is Reiki?" Now I feel that it is somehow appropriate, beneficial even, for it to be so. This book contains thoughts on what Reiki means to me. It describes some of the qualities and effects of this gentle energy and hints at some of the profound changes in one's life that can come with the use of Reiki.

The order in which the topics are presented is generally from the tangible at the beginning of the book to the more mystical aspects at the end. The book can either be read in sequence or delved into at random for inspiration.

Reading this book is not a substitute for attending a Reiki course - no book can be. However, for those contemplating taking such a course, it will give a feel for what you would be letting yourself in for. For those already using Reiki, I hope that it opens up new areas for investigation.

My Reiki training has all been with the Reiki Network, which is an international organisation of Reiki Masters (teachers) who all teach to a common, high standard. Courses are available from Reiki Masters in this organisation or others such as the Reiki Alliance. There are also many independent Reiki Masters who teach without belonging to any such organisation. More information about the Reiki Network is available at www.reiki-network.net on the Internet.

Reiki is a warm tingling feeling

It is common for people using Reiki to feel a warm, tingling sensation in the hands. I have felt this from the day I was attuned to Reiki. For me, the sensation varies from session to session. During some Reiki treatments my hands, particularly my palms and finger tips feel pleasantly warm, with a slightly surreal glowing aspect to the feeling. At other times the heat is so intense that if I didn't have a lot of faith in Reiki I would withdraw my hands as from a scalding pot. The soft, gentle, warm feeling is very relaxing. The intense heat tends to leave me in a state of awe, of wonder, of amazement.

People receiving Reiki often have similar sensations, although there is occasionally a feeling of cooling. Indeed, the first time I received Reiki I felt a slight numbing, although it was not unpleasant. Overall, I would say that I do not have as strong sensations when receiving Reiki as when giving it. Some people have found the reverse to be the case. Some people don't have any physical sensations at all. This highlights one of the difficulties in describing Reiki: it is different for every individual. This does not just apply to the physical sensations but also to the mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. In short, Reiki touches every individual in a different, unique, personal way.

Reiki is something different for everyone

One of the difficulties in describing Reiki is that it seems to be something different to everyone who chances upon it. This is initially evident in the range of physical sensations which people feel when using or receiving Reiki: hot hands, cold hands, tingling fingers, numbness, nothing and so on. It is even more marked when one looks at how people set about using Reiki to enhance their own or other people's lives. The range of applications of Reiki is still being explored: it's bounds are not yet known. However, we can get a feel for the diversity of its utility by looking at how people currently use it.

For some people Reiki is primarily a first aid technique for promoting healing of physical injury. For others it is a way of coping with, or even curing, chronic disease. There are quite remarkable stories of Reiki used in these ways. There is little doubt in my mind that Reiki can also be used as a preventative technique with regard to disease and, with second degree Reiki at least, with regard to accidents. For some people, Reiki is first and foremost a stress management tool. This has been a major use in my life, together with another hugely important area: the harmonising of relationships. There are others for whom Reiki is primarily a spiritual way – a path to higher levels of awareness and consciousness. Of course what Reiki means to an individual is not only quite unique but changes with time as we grow. In my case, for example, the spiritual aspects of Reiki have gradually come to dominate my understanding and use of it. At times I feel that Reiki is so diverse that about the only common factor in everyone's impressions of it is that it is benign. Most people who come across it also end up regarding it as something wonderful.

Reiki has as many facets as there are paths through life.

Reiki is not understood in Western scientific terms

There is no complete description of Reiki in the usual scientific sense. There is talk of it as a form of subatomic energy, expressible in the field of quantum mechanics. The problem with such a description, if it exists at all, is that it is completely inaccessible to the vast majority of us. In other words it is gobbledygook. We may choose to accept the word of renown scientists working in such esoteric fields. The trouble is, once the technicalities are beyond our comprehension, we are into the realm of faith or trust or plain belief. The reason that we have faith in science is that we have truly accepted the overall school of thought. In other words, we understand and see the day-to-day utility of simple mathematics, physics, logic and so on. As the more esoteric branches of science appear to come from the same school of thought, we accept what the scientists say as truth. We are usually quite justified in doing so but nevertheless, for the layman, it is an act of faith.

It is interesting to note that the scientists working at the boundaries of existing knowledge are usually dealing with unproven theories or new models of some fundamental aspect of our universe. Such theories are then tested against existing observations and new experiments are devised to determine their applicability. It is important to understand that the whole thrust of science is to construct a consistent model which describes our observations of the universe. This is a very useful approach but it does have limits. For example, any aspects of the universe which we cannot observe are clearly not going to be encompassed by the scientific model. One may say that things which we cannot observe are not a part of our universe and in a sense this is true. Unfortunately, a scientist has a more restricted definition of observation than we do in everyday life. Notably, a scientific observation needs to be repeatable and it needs to be measurable in an objective way. This is fine for things which we normally observe with our external senses:

touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. It may even cope with other aspects of our peripheral nervous system - in particular the internal proprioceptive sense which allows us to be aware of our posture. However, our conscious self is aware of much more than these physical senses. We are aware of, we can observe, our moods and feelings and sense of joy or sorrow, of pleasure or pain. In fact, it is these internally generated states which are important to us. They may be triggered by external sensations and they may relate to certain patterns of brain activity but they are not the same as the external stimulus, nor the brain activity. As a result the branch of science which attempts to describe these observations - psychology - is a 'soft' science. In other words, the experiments upon which it is based are not objective (as they rely on an individual's description of their mental state) or they are not repeatable (which is usually the way with the more objective branch of behavioural psychology).

In summary, the scientific approach, when applied rigorously, has fundamental limits to the extent to which it can describe our universe. The subset of our conscious awareness which is describable by the rigorous scientific mode is essentially that part which pertains directly to the peripheral nervous system, i.e. physical sensation. The softer sciences such as psychology and social science attempt to describe the issues which are more directly important to us – those issues which relate to our happiness. These sciences are necessarily subjective or based on non-repeatable experiments. Because of this they do not form a consistent model. To understand our universe fully, we have to move into this more woolly realm. When we do so, our best source of information is not the scientific papers but our own awareness. To take the step of accepting the validity of our own awareness in addition to rigorous scientific experiment is the single biggest hurdle that we in the West face in our search to understand our universe. I did not exactly realize it at the time but this is the step which I took during my first weekend course in Reiki.

Reiki is like fire

I use fire as an analogy to Reiki. Fire is actually quite poorly understood (in the scientific sense) by the vast majority of us, even in societies which pride themselves on their highly developed level of education. I looked it up in a dictionary, expecting an obscure scientific definition along the lines of “an oxidation process which emits both light and heat” or “a chemical reaction of a highly exothermic nature”. I must have a layman’s dictionary, however, for the definition began “a once-supposed substance reckoned one of the four elements; the heat and light of burning.” Interestingly, the definition did not really explain what had superseded the once-supposition.

To most of us, it doesn’t really matter exactly what fire is in some technical sense. What we are interested in is its utility. And if there is one thing we can be fairly sure of, it is that fire has been, and continues to be, of great use to us humans. For tens of thousands of years it has warmed our homes – be they caves or prestigious houses. For as long a time span it has been a means of defence from aggressors (and more latterly an offensive weapon too). This has been an extremely important use of fire. An effective defence against predatory animals has allowed us to divert our energies into less pressing activities such as technological development. Next came the lesser benefits of controllable light and then the advent of cooking. Cooking is quite a significant invention. Not only does it greatly reduce the exposure to adverse bacteria, particularly when eating meats, but it also renders a wide range of vegetable matter digestible which would otherwise be of no use to us at all. After the processing of food came the processing of other raw materials; notably the metals. This gave us huge opportunities in every field of endeavour from hunting animals to increasing our chances of sexual selection by the wearing of metallic jewelry.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that the more effort we put into controlling and overcoming the effects of natural selection – both inter species and within our own species – the more obsessed we become with sexual selection. It is easy to write this off as media manipulation but when sexual selection is the only remaining influence on the determination of the human gene pool, it is actually quite natural for us to become totally preoccupied with our sexual attractiveness.

In the immediate past, fire has been fundamental to the industrial revolution and most forms of mass transportation. So we can see that fire has been a hugely important tool for mankind for a long time. Then, just the other day on the grander scale of things, we found out what it was – in a scientific sense that is. As a consequence we made space rockets. Now don't get me wrong – I'm actually a big fan of space rockets. The point is though, you can do a lot of useful things with fire without really understanding what it is: heating, defence, lighting, cooking, processing metals and fuelling an industrial revolution and mass transportation. The utilitarian advantages of actually understanding fire better are quite marginal in comparison. For tens of thousands of years we were just following the tried and tested formula of rubbing two sticks together and piling on some dry grass and wood. It sounds a bit implausible really: “following this procedure will make your cave cosy – your friends will love to come and admire your etchings of mammoths”. To be honest, unless you'd seen it with your own eyes – and felt the warmth – you'd never believe the advertising blurb.

Now that we have a scientific description of sorts for fire, have things really changed for most of us? Perhaps, as the benefits of space exploration reach us there will be some impact. But we've done an awful lot of developing without the science. This is because, first and foremost, we are practical beasts. We try something and if it looks like we'll achieve a better standard of living then we run with it. This empirical approach is probably essential.

We have to build up some body of observations before scientific modelling has anything to work with. In the case of fire, the scientific model took a long time to develop for the simple reason that a huge amount of other science – leading up to the atomic model – had to be gone through first. Now what has all this to do with Reiki? Reiki is, perhaps, a “currently-supposed substance reckoned a form of energy...”. We don’t know what Reiki is, if we’re being honest, in a scientific sense. In fact we’re still at the stage equivalent to only a tiny fraction of caves having a fire to warm them. What’s more, if you talk to anyone who uses Reiki, their description is not far removed from “rub two sticks together to get it going and then just throw in some dead wood when you see fit”. If I heard about it down at the watering-hole I’d be creased up with laughter. The odd thing about those first cavemen to use fire, though, is that they always had a bit of a rosy glow to them...

Next time you are sitting around an open log fire with your loved ones, be thankful for science – it has truly brought some wonderful advances to the human condition – but also ask yourself this, as you look into those flickering flames: Is science the complete story?

Reiki is energy

Reiki is usually described as a natural energy. As we don't have any means to convert it to (or from) other more common forms of energy, the use of the word is, perhaps, a little poetic. However, the warmth which is often felt when using Reiki is similar to that of radiated heat, so the word 'energy' seems appropriate. There is a deeper sense in which Reiki feels like an energy and that is its dynamic, flowing behaviour. Just as heat will flow to cold areas in order to create a uniform temperature, so Reiki will flow to areas of disharmony in order to create a uniform field of harmony. It is in this sense which Reiki is sometimes said to have its own intelligence. It is not a thinking intelligence as such: Reiki will always flow so as to create the greatest harmony, like water flowing downhill. For this reason, when using Reiki for healing purposes, it is not necessary or even desirable to diagnose what needs to be healed, i.e. what is in a state of disharmony.

One may ask what is the source of this energy? This question is pertinent as we don't manufacture Reiki from some other form of energy. Furthermore, Reiki seems to come from an unlimited source – it is never depleted. For this reason, Reiki is not considered to be a personal energy but rather a universal energy. It is strongly associated with life but is usually considered to permeate the very fabric of the time-space continuum that is the playground of our universe. This, then, we can take to be the source of the Reiki energy: the universe itself; Mother Nature if you prefer. Regarding the universe from the abstract spiritual viewpoint as a single, indivisible point also makes sense when considering the source of Reiki. This is because there is no polarity to Reiki: it does not show Yin and Yang aspects (opposites) which are generally evident when we are viewing any part of the universe in a non-unified way. For this reason, Reiki is sometimes described as an unpolarised energy. When using Reiki, I tend to think of my hands as focusing the universal Reiki into the recipient, just as a magnifying glass can be used to focus the rays of the sun onto a point.

If all this talk of taking energy from thin air seems a bit far fetched then it is worth bearing in mind that current models of the fundamental physical particles – the building blocks of the universe – do not make a strong distinction between matter and energy. For example, the humble electron is often thought of as a particle with a certain mass, i.e. matter. It is also thought of as a wave form with a certain frequency, i.e. energy. There is a sense in which the whole universe can be described in terms of energies and it is within this paradigm that our understanding of Reiki most naturally fits.

Reiki is relaxing

Reiki is relaxing in the same way that a warm bath or a massage can be relaxing. The tension that has built up in muscles tends to seep away during a Reiki treatment. Similarly, the psychological stresses that have led to physical tension tend to be reduced. Reiki can therefore be used very effectively as a stress management tool. The value of this for most of us, particularly those of us living in industrialised nations, cannot be over-stated. It is widely accepted that stress has a negative effect on the immune system, thereby making us more prone to illness. It also usually manifests itself in our behaviour and therefore our relationships with others. Stress, which can be considered to be disharmony in our mind, is quite capable of creating disharmony in our body and in our relationships and thereby spreading into those around us. Make no mistake, stress can have a negative impact on every aspect of one's life. And, in the West at least, stress is endemic. Any relaxation technique will help to reduce stress. Reiki has proven to be particularly beneficial to me in this respect. Not only is it extremely effective at eradicating any stress that has built up in me but, more importantly, I am becoming significantly less prone to being stressed in the first place.

Reiki is harmony

Reiki is often described as a harmonising energy. On a physical level, we might say that a body is in harmony if it is not showing any symptoms of disease. Reiki can certainly help a body move towards such a state. Similarly in the mind we might consider a state of harmony to exist when there is nothing troubling us. Again, Reiki helps the mind to reach such a state. These aspects of harmony are internal to an individual.

We would more often use the term harmony when referring to the relationship between two or more people. This kind of harmony can be more difficult to bring about. This is because disharmony within each of us as individuals tends to find expression not only in disease but also in disharmony in our relationships. By bringing an individual into a more harmonious state, Reiki clearly has a knock-on effect regarding relationships. The second level of Reiki (second degree), which allows it to be focused on more abstract entities than individuals, can be used as a more direct means of harmonising relationships. The interesting point about applying Reiki to any of these (or other) issues is that not only is the immediate problem lessened but, over a prolonged period, similar difficulties tend to occur less frequently and with less trauma. This preventative aspect of Reiki is one of its most powerful and amazing facets.

There is a deeper issue, regarding harmony, which is not easily expressed but is worth touching upon. The very basis of physical existence is the separation of unity into two opposing poles: Yin and Yang, positive and negative, male and female and so on. Such pairs of opposites exist at all levels down to the most fundamental particles of physics. This separation is not a bad thing. Neither can one pole be judged better than the other: Which end of an electrical battery is more beneficial, the positive or the negative? They have to be equally important as each pole can only be defined relative to the other. However, this division of unity

is actually disharmony in its purest form. Now this is a little odd – that which underlies our existence is the very same as that which we wish to reduce or eradicate from our day-to-day lives. If we were to eradicate disharmony totally from within ourselves then all separation would cease: we would be truly at one with the universe. The self-realisation of such a state (i.e. the direct personal experiencing of it) is a recurring theme in many spiritual and philosophical teachings, particularly in the East. To be aware of such a state is to be enlightened and to be able to see the beauty in every moment of life. This, I think, is the end point of Reiki: total harmony on tap.

Reiki is improved natural healing

Healing is the primary use of Reiki, at least initially. This is such an important aspect of Reiki that it is often referred to as a healing energy. It is probably more accurate to think of Reiki as an energy which facilitates the natural healing processes of the body. To use Reiki in order to accelerate healing is very simple. A treatment usually lasts one hour with the practitioner placing his hands on the patient's body in various positions, normally for about five minutes at a time. The practitioner focuses the Reiki through his hands and into the patient.

Reiki will flow through clothes and is, in fact, effective once the practitioner's hands are within the energy field surrounding the patient – a few inches from the skin. Because of this, some schools of Reiki teach a non-touching treatment. However, it is more relaxing for the practitioner to rest his hands on the patient and touch has its own therapeutic value if the patient is comfortable with it.

Injuries such as cuts and grazes can be treated immediately, with Reiki applied directly to the area of the wound, usually for twenty minutes or so. One of the interesting points about a Reiki treatment is that there is no need for a diagnosis. In other words, the practitioner does not need to know what is wrong with the patient. In fact, it is probably preferable for the practitioner not to think that he knows what the problem is. The reason for this is that Reiki is somehow intimately linked with consciousness and intention. It is therefore most effective when applied with the minimum of beliefs – the minimum of prejudices – regarding its impact. To hold such beliefs might constrain the Reiki and is therefore best avoided. The Reiki is then free to flow where it is most needed: to the area of greatest disharmony.

Another important feature of Reiki is that it promotes healing on all levels: physical, mental (including emotional) and spiritual. In

this sense it is a holistic therapy. Furthermore, as Reiki does not require a diagnosis it can aid the healing of problems that have not yet manifested as noticeable symptoms. From a symptomatic viewpoint, Reiki is therefore an excellent form of preventative medicine. Another interesting concept behind the use of Reiki for healing is that it tends to work first and foremost with the root cause of a problem. As a result, it may take a while for a symptom to disappear but when it does, a fairly profound healing process will have occurred and the chances of relapse are greatly reduced.

All things considered, Reiki is a simple, safe and effective way of encouraging natural healing. It is perhaps not surprising then, that in Reiki circles there are countless tales of healing everything from minor injuries to major chronic diseases. There are no guarantees though: terminally ill people are still likely to die if they receive Reiki treatments. In such cases the patient often finds a great peace through the Reiki – as if it is easing the process of dying which we must all face sooner or later.

Reiki is a complimentary medicine

The basic effect of Reiki is always to increase harmony. As a result, Reiki is truly complimentary to all other treatments – both conventional and alternative medicines. Similarly, there are no contra-indications to the use of Reiki. In other words, there are no conditions for which the use of Reiki is inadvisable. This makes Reiki a very simple and extremely practical tool. Indeed, after using Reiki for a while it begins to feel as natural as breathing air or drinking water.

When used in conjunction with other forms of medicine, Reiki tends to increase the effectiveness of the other treatment. As a consequence, in cases where drugs are being prescribed, the dosage is likely to be lower or required for a shorter period by patients who are also receiving Reiki. Of course, the Reiki will also help to reduce undesirable side-effects of other treatments.

It is not quite true to say that Reiki cannot have any ill effects. This is because Reiki always places greater emphasis on long term harmony than short term harmony. When there is no conflict between these two, all is fine. However, there are cases where a recipient of Reiki will go through a temporary period of increased disharmony when this is the only way to reach a more harmonious state in the long term. An example in the field of physical disease is the treatment of arthritis. In this case, the increased circulation and awareness in the area which is healing can cause an increased sense of pain for a short period. A more common example is in the realm of emotional disharmony. Such cases often involve suppression of some feeling, sometimes over a period of several years. The only way to treat this, whatever type of therapy is being used, is to release the accumulated emotion. This can be such a major shift as to be frightening. In all cases the ill-effects are short-lived.

Reiki is not a religion

It is important to understand that Reiki is not a religion, nor is it a cult. It does not involve worship of any particular person or god. As Reiki is not understood in a scientific sense, at least at present, it has a certain mysterious quality to it. However, the same could be said for many of the things that are important in life, like love for example, or life itself come to that. I have not come across anyone who has experienced Reiki and felt that it is in conflict with their religious beliefs.

Although Reiki is not a religion, it most definitely can help one find spiritual tranquility. For those with a religious conviction, Reiki can play a part in the religious side of life. For example, it can be used during prayer or meditation to increase the sense of peace.

Reiki is an experience

There is a bizarre sense in which writing a book about a subject like Reiki is a pointless activity. This is because Reiki is one of those things, like falling in love or having an orgasm or becoming a parent or reaching a deep state of meditation or just watching a sunset, which has to be experienced. Words can never convey the sensation. You cannot delegate the act of experiencing. If you really want to know what Reiki is, you have to feel it for yourself. For me, thankfully, my first encounter with Reiki was as profound and unexpected as first falling in love. For many people it is a slower revelation, more apace with understanding what it means to be in love.

Reiki is helping oneself

A relatively unusual feature of Reiki is that it can be used to treat oneself. In other words, one can place one's hands on one's own body and focus the Reiki into oneself. This has the practical advantage that one can accelerate one's own healing at any time without having to rely on, or pay for, the services of someone else. Some people regard any act that they perform solely for their own benefit as something bad – a selfish act. The question is, which is more selfish: to help to cure oneself or to off-load the responsibility onto someone else? It is no more selfish to reduce one's own ill-health than it is to do one's own washing up.

Reiki is helping others

It is, of course, possible to treat other people with Reiki. In fact some people make a living out of it as professional practitioners. Because Reiki is so simple and safe, it is an ideal way to help family and friends who are open to such things. Quite apart from the usual benefits of Reiki, a treatment in a loving relationship can be a wonderful bonding experience. This is especially true if the treatment can be reciprocated. When treating someone who has an illness, both parties should be committed to the process. Several one hour treatments are usually needed to make real headway, due to the fact that Reiki will tend to tackle the cause of an illness before the symptoms.

Reiki is self-responsibility

Reiki is a tool which we can use to treat our own ills. This seems like a simple concept and indeed it is. However, as one actually starts to use Reiki in this way one realises just how much we have handed over responsibility for our own welfare to others. We expect doctors to fix physical problems; we go to counsellors and therapists to tackle emotional and psychological difficulties; we rely on the love of those around us to maintain our self-esteem. Such dependencies may not be a particularly bad thing. However, once we have delegated the maintenance of our health in this way it is only logical that when we are not well, it is someone else's fault. We blame government and authoritarian figures for our anger and frustration; we blame work colleagues for our stress and irritation; most of all we blame those that are closest to us for our misery. Then, when we have run out of people to blame, we blame life itself: "I am so unlucky that this has happened to me". So we think of ourselves as victims, powerless victims.

To hold Reiki in one's hands is to hold a tool for fixing one's own ills. It is then no longer tenable to deny responsibility for the fixing. It is like seeing a loose screw everyday and wondering "when is someone going to tighten that screw?". When one day you find yourself face-to-face with the loose screw but you are now holding a screwdriver in your hand, you can no longer expect someone else to tighten it. So it is with one's happiness: when one has a tool for maintaining one's own happiness, it becomes impossible to hold anyone else responsible for that happiness. In fact, that self-responsibility was always there – the only thing that has changed is that we have accepted it.

To see that nobody else is responsible for our happiness; not only to believe this intellectually but to know it, undeniably; can have a major impact on our lives. It is no longer possible to think "you make me angry" or "you upset me" because such thoughts no longer have meaning. This is not to say that one immediately

ceases to feel anger or sadness, it is just that the responsibility for these emotions is seen to lie with oneself. As a result, one might think “I hoped you would do this but you did that instead and because of the difference between your true behaviour and my expectations, I chose to become sad”. When one sees the true cause of such emotions, it rather takes the sting out of them. Then a couple of liberations take place. Firstly those around you are liberated from the burden of your expectations. They are freed to be their true selves without having to try to guess what you want of them. They are freed of the guilt and shame that has grown out of your anger and sadness. They are freed from the shackles of living their lives as extensions of your ego. The second liberation is one which takes place inside oneself. To realize that we, alone, are responsible for our own happiness or unhappiness is to be free from external authority. It is total and complete power – not over others but over oneself. People in positions of authority may still influence material aspects of our day-to-day lives but our emotional response to that is something else, something which we choose.

As with so many aspects of Reiki, this self-responsibility tends to filter out and touch all parts of one’s life. Soon one begins to think of a job not as something one is forced to do; a career progression is no longer something that is thrust upon us. Because other people’s behaviour is no longer crucial to our happiness, our fears, suspicions and jealousies can drop away. The result of this is a rejuvenation in the way in which we relate to people. It is a breath of fresh air for the soul.

Reiki is making the most of sad times

Things do not always go the way we would like. In the world around us and in our personal lives, events occasionally happen which we can only regard as tragic. Such tragedies traumatise our mind. This trauma can run deep into the unconscious, which means that we do not have direct control over the way we process the tragedy – the way we synthesise it into our being. Consequently it is rather hit-and-miss as to whether we are psychologically damaged by the happenstance or whether we grow wiser and more whole. Using Reiki at such times can encourage the latter to occur rather than the former. The reason for this is that Reiki reaches into the deepest unconscious levels of the mind and works to bring whatever is there into greater harmony. Quite often in such circumstances a deeper understanding of the world can materialise, as if from thin air, at the conscious level. Even when this does not happen, the Reiki will tend to calm a troubled mind and lead to a feeling of peace. There are periods when we need peace more than anything in the world. To have a reliable method for finding peace is a truly wonderful thing and Reiki is one such method.

Reiki is not needing to know

When using Reiki to facilitate natural healing, it is not necessary to know what the problem is – what needs to be healed. It is only necessary to apply the Reiki. This is an unusual modus operandi for most of us: to choose to do something without knowing what we hope to achieve. Of course there is still some intention; namely to promote healing; but there is no need for more detailed knowledge. To do something in this way, without needing to know, can be very refreshing. It highlights just how much we crave knowledge in our day-to-day lives. I am not referring to some esoteric scientific knowledge but rather more mundane things: we want to know what the weather will be like tomorrow; we want to know when we are next going to see our lover; we want to know whether we'll still have a job next week. In short, we crave knowledge about the future, which is security. In a sense, this is what the mind is designed for: it is a prediction machine.

The problem is, we don't tend to be very selective in the use of our prediction machine. We usually keep it running twenty-four hours a day, allowing it to predict about things which do not need to be predicted. In fact there is little, if anything, that we truly need to know about the future. Indeed we cannot know the future - we can only make predictions. From time to time our predictions will be wrong. Then, because we have grabbed hold of the prediction and cast it into an expectation, we become distressed. This does not make for a happy, productive life.

Let us imagine, for a moment, that we could avoid this distress by becoming perfect at our predicting. Let us imagine that we could predict with absolute accuracy, that we could indeed know the future. In such a life there would be no shocks, no distress really, but neither would there be any joy. It is true that when we fulfil a hope we experience a moment of pleasure, of joy even. However, if the hope has reached the level of certainty where it has become

knowledge then we do not feel joy. All we feel is a rather blank and somewhat arrogant tick mark against our prediction.

True joy can only come from the unexpected. I glanced up, a moment ago, and a flock of gulls swirled into view, riding the stormy wind coming off Loch Broom, dancing an unchoreographed dance in the sky, in my vision; a beautiful dance and then they were gone. For a few seconds I had been transfixed, purely experiencing life. That is joy. Then my mind, having been caught off guard, came barging in: recording, labelling, analysing, filing away this experience so that next time it might jump in with prediction.

When one begins to see that expectations about the future are detrimental to our enjoyment of life, then one begins to let go of the need to know. In a sense it is a bold step: to reduce the need to know is to reduce the need for security. However, it is not really a bold step when the change is driven by a deep awareness of how we are stifled by our own need for security. To satisfy this need we build high walls and electric fences and post guards around our very existence: we construct our own prison where we can safely exist but this is not life; this is not being alive. What happens when we leave behind this need for security? Quite literally, anything could happen. However, some modes of thinking begin to fall by the wayside. Suspicion, for example, is of no meaning without a need to know. Jealousy can no longer take a hold. As one pays less attention to the predictive ranting of the mind, so one becomes more aware of the present. To lose oneself in the present is the way to find joy. We all have moments of this. Why not make them more frequent, more prolonged? Then walking down the high street to the corner shop becomes an adventure again.

Reiki is being honest

There is an amazing peace that comes with using Reiki. To begin with we find reasons for its use: we want to become better people, more healthy, more helpful, more loving, more loved, more relaxed, more enlightened. Then, as the Reiki is flowing, there comes a strange, gradual change in our motivation. The Reiki feels good. This most simple of gratifications replaces all our complex motivations. This is a peaceful state to be in, for we are no longer particularly aiming for some goal, trying to change the world. Instead we are just sitting back and enjoying a beautifully simple part of life.

Something quite interesting happens when we begin to detach ourselves, even temporarily, from our complex motivations: we begin to see the motivations more clearly. It is like holding at arms length something we have been clutching to our chest; we can begin to see it as it really is. This is the crux of self-knowledge - to know the true motivation behind our actions. Usually, the true motivation is not what we had convinced ourselves of. We think we are acting generously when really we are seeking praise and so on. When the true motivation is seen, it is not deniable. Then we are being honest with ourselves, whether we like it or not. And soon we find ourselves being more honest with others.

Reiki is laughing at oneself

Using Reiki gives us some quiet time; it gives us some space. In that space, as we begin to discover who we are, it gradually becomes clear that things are not as important as we like to make out. In general we take life seriously, too seriously. We like to assume that life has a meaning, even though we are not sure what that meaning is. Then all our little actions and ambitions can have a meaning – they can find their place in this grander goal that our life is all about. Alas, this is all fantasy. There is no meaning to life. It just is. You and I are totally insignificant. We might aspire to run a big corporation or build an empire or wage a war or change the world in any number of ways. It is all to no avail; deep down we shall never have that sense of self-importance that we strive so long and hard to foster. Superficially, we might begin to feel important but it is not true. Deep down we know it is not true and so the lie needs more and more bolstering to maintain its place at the core of our ego. To begin to see the myriad of ways in which we carry out this bolstering; to see the subtle self-deception that it requires, almost ceaselessly; this insight is at first shocking and then just farcical. So, gradually, we begin to laugh.

Reiki is not worrying

Worry, together with its big brother fear, plays a central role in the lives of most of us. We don't generally need to worry about being eaten by lions anymore. So, instead, we worry about losing our baggage at the airport or the possibility that the newsagents will have sold out of our favourite paper. We spend vast amounts of time and energy thinking about such things. Usually we can't reduce the risk so we buy lots of insurance and carry on worrying anyway. Alternatively, we stop doing things with our lives because they are too risky. To be worried is an unpleasant state to be in. Therein lies the problem: we spend large amounts of time dedicated to an activity which we don't enjoy and is of very little practical value to us. Reiki, particularly at the second level, provides a way to nibble away at this worry. To begin with it provides a certain amount of comfort; it actually works to satisfy our demand for security. Then, when the mind is a little calmer, the Reiki begins to chip away at our need for security and highlight the futility of worry. Slowly, ever so slowly, we begin to spend less time worrying. We pay less attention to those little concerns that pop into our mind. Then we are free to spend that time enjoying life instead. And we are free to live life to the full.

Reiki is not feeling angry

Anger is a form of mental illness. It occurs when the universe does not behave according to our expectations. Our mind, based on its carefully constructed beliefs, has formulated an expectation but it has got it wrong. We can laugh at our mistaken belief but usually we do not do so. To laugh at a belief is really to laugh at the whole mechanism, the whole process of our mind. So instead we cling to the belief that has led to the mistaken expectation – perhaps we can yet bring the universe into line? Of course, it is not so: The unstoppable force has met an immovable object; things get heated; the heat is anger.

Sometimes anger is suppressed, in which case it will probably fester and feed a less transient mental illness or it will come to manifest itself as a physical illness. At other times the anger is vented, usually in the direction of another individual in which case it fuels anger or fear or both in that person. Anger and fear are closely related. Anger is really a fear of things as they are, a fear of the truth. Anger is probably the most negative, the most destructive of emotions. Anger is never, ever, of any use. It never leads to any benefit either to ourselves, to others nor to society as a whole. It never has done and it never shall.

Anger is an illness and as with any illness, Reiki can be used to treat it, to aid in the healing of the anger. This can be very effective when used to deal with a particular suppressed anger. Just as with psychotherapy, Reiki can lead to a huge emotional release in such cases. More importantly, Reiki will begin to erode the fundamental source of anger: it will begin to relegate beliefs to their rightful place as approximate models of the universe. This sort of shift, I think, tends to be more likely when Reiki is applied to oneself. There are some changes which are so personal, so deep, so profound, that we have to carry out the whole process ourselves: we have to be the instigator and the architect and the mason; we cannot turn to others for help in making such a change; we cannot

shirk any of the responsibility; the drive, the energy, behind such transformations can only come from a place that is so central to what we are that it takes precedence over our longest-held beliefs. There are some things that can only come from within.

Anger and love are almost diametrically opposed; so much so that the two cannot co-exist. When you are feeling anger toward someone you may want to still be loving them but you are not. You are surely much happier when it is the other way around - when a part of you thinks that you should be angry but the anger is annihilated by the love you feel. So, to abandon anger, to remove it from one's being, through Reiki or otherwise, is to make much space for love to occupy.

Reiki is knowing that one is loved

It is normal to have a deep-seated need to feel loved. The whole basis of love is so deep in our unconscious (some would say central to our being) that it defies analysis and logic and description at the conscious level. Because the root of love is so deep within us, its outward expression and the expression of our need can cover a huge diversity of our actions. For example, the desire to be valued in our workplace is actually an expression of the need to be loved. There is not a huge problem with the need to be loved but it can sometimes place a strain on those around us – on our relationships with those around us – as if we are trying to suck too much out of someone or something.

There is a close connection between Reiki and love. To receive Reiki is to feel loved. Therefore, our need to receive love from other sources is not so great when we are receiving Reiki. As with so many aspects of Reiki, not only is the immediate problem being addressed but so is the long term issue. So, with prolonged use of Reiki we begin to know that we are loved, regardless of whether or not we see physical signs of love around us. Then, like a starving man who has gobbled a few mouthfuls of food, we can begin to savour love and appreciate it to the full.

Reiki is unconditional love

Love, in its purest form, has no conditions attached to it. Unfortunately, for love to find its way from within us to an outward expression, it has to wend its way through layer upon layer of belief and desire. These beliefs and needs, themselves often starved of expression, attach themselves to love like barnacles to a passing ship. Then our expression of love, more often than not, becomes conditioned: “I love you but when are you going to paint the garage door?”, “I love you but if you quit school now I’ll never speak to you again”, “I love you but you’ve got to choose between him and me”.

Reiki is an expression of love. In a sense, Reiki is love. The particularly wonderful thing about Reiki as a form of love is that it does not depend upon the more conscious levels of the mind – it does not depend upon words. Reiki can be considered to be love that is bypassing most of our belief systems and therefore bypassing our needs, which are our conditions. Reiki is pure love: Reiki is unconditional love. When we apply Reiki to ourselves, we are loving ourselves unconditionally. As soon as we think about it, our beliefs say that such self-love is untenable or undesirable. But at the level at which Reiki operates, there is no doubt. At that level we love ourselves as we are. We accept what we are. Then there is nothing to be proved, no-one to dominate.

Reiki is universal love

Reiki is unconditional love and unconditional love is actually universal love: a love of everything in the universe and a love of the universe as a whole. Our conscious mind may relate the love to a particular individual but in reality the love is universal. If love is truly unconditional then it does not depend on someone's behaviour. This not only means that it is independent of whether or not they do the washing up. It also means that it is independent of whether or not they destroy the rain forest, commit rape, murder, cause a nuclear holocaust or violate whatever your most basic beliefs are. That is unconditional love and that is universal love. It is not that all these horrendous deeds suddenly become acceptable. It is just that Reiki does not carry with it our beliefs about what is good and bad, our sense of justice, our need for security. Reiki is not making any comment at all on the actions of individuals - we might still judge such actions as undesirable - but Reiki is a love of the individual, any individual, and hence the universe. It is possible to find a love for someone who, because of their actions, one had deemed unlovable. To discover such love is one of the most profoundly beautiful and liberating experiences imaginable. As with all facets of Reiki, what applied to others is equally applicable to oneself. To love oneself unconditionally is to love the whole of creation, to love life itself.

Reiki is not of the intellect

One difficulty in discussing Reiki is that it is not something which exists at the intellectual level. The whole essence of Reiki is something which only exists in less conceptual spaces - spaces without words - spaces of love and strange sensations and indescribable feelings and unpredictable effects. The best one can hope for is, through a poetic use of language, to convey some flavour of what Reiki is about or some inkling of the ways in which it can touch our lives. At the end of the day though, Reiki is not here to be talked about. It is here to be felt or, perhaps, it is just here.

Reiki is letting go

When I first encountered Reiki, I was forced to conclude that there were important and enjoyable things in life which my rigid scientific view did not encompass. So I let go - not of science but of the rigidity. Since then letting go has become a recurring theme.

We become attached to all sorts of things: material possessions, ideas, beliefs, ambitions, religions, jobs but above all we become attached to other people. We become attached to these things in an attempt to satisfy our need for security. This need for security is not just the desire to be looked after if we should become sick or old. The real need is to feel secure in who we are - in the part we play in the physical world. If we can create a certain stability in our lives, a pattern to our existence, then we have created an identity for ourselves. It is this that underlies our attachment: our desire to create an identity for ourselves. Without attachment our lives would be unpredictable, indescribable, intangible even. So, we attempt to create stability; we fashion our ego from the media of beliefs and desires and relationships. We identify ourselves with our ego and our ego depends on stability. Unfortunately for the ego, the whole basis of the physical universe is chaos. This chaos exists not only at fundamental levels of subatomic physics but percolates upwards to weather patterns and human relationships. As a result, the ego - our identity - is nothing but an illusion.

When we apply Reiki to something which we have an attachment to: one of our hopes or relationships for example; we usually have some desired effect in our conscious mind: we want to bring our hope into being; we want to reinforce the permanence of a relationship. However, Reiki works in mysterious ways and, as often as not, the outcome is not that the world changes to match our desires but that our desires soften to embrace the world as it is. Before we know it, we have let go of an attachment without any of the intense pain which would normally accompany such a transition. When this has happened a few times, we begin to have a

trust in the Reiki, which is no more than a trust in life itself. With such a trust, the need to direct our lives, the need to be in control, begins to diminish. So we begin to let go in a more profound way: not just of individual attachments but of the very desire for attachments at all. When we can let go in that way then we shall be free to follow a natural path through life. It may be a smooth path or it may be an erratic path; the diversity that life has to offer is really only bounded by our beliefs, by our attachments. To let go is to live life in the present, without conflict or strife; it is to live in a state of joy.

Reiki is not learnt, it is awakened

We are accustomed to acquiring knowledge in the form of words: We read books and listen to knowledgeable people speak. However, there are other ways to expand our knowledge - ways based on direct experience. So, for example, to become familiar with a piece of music we just listen to it. Similarly, to discover the taste of a wine, we usually drink it (or at least taste it). Now, informative words could be strung together to give an inkling as to what the music or wine is like, but most of us would not gain any real feel for them without the direct experience. The acquiring of Reiki is somewhat like this. So, the ability to use Reiki is not passed on by means of words, although these are the basis of peripheral teaching about Reiki. Instead, the ability to use Reiki is awakened by means of particular Reiki processes. These processes, usually called attunements, are themselves learnt as the final stage of Reiki 'study'. Without having gone through the process of being attuned to Reiki and using it for healing, the details of these attunement processes would be meaningless, like seeing a musical score without ever having heard music. Many people are sceptical, beforehand, about this method of propagating knowledge. In the case of Reiki, it is the only method available.

The question arises: how did the first person to acquire Reiki have it awakened in him? The origins of Reiki are really in the realm of legend. However, Reiki as we know it can be traced back to a certain Dr. Usui who lived in Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. How he discovered Reiki is not known precisely. Most versions of the story involve him learning various languages so that he could read ancient Eastern texts and then meditating on top of a mountain for a prolonged period. In comparison, the direct attunement method doesn't seem like such a bad idea after all!

Reiki is not judging

We spend much of our lives evaluating what things are worth to us, to what extent they are likely to progress our desires. We apply this process of judging not only to things and ideas but also to people. We judge people in many different ways: we judge their attractiveness, their wealth, their intellect, their morality. These judgments are all made against our internal beliefs - the beliefs we have taken on-board from our culture, our society, our parents, our schooling and our past experiences. Then, having formed a judgment, we condition our relationship with a person according to this judgment. This conditioning places a restriction on the relationship - it restrains our behaviour in the relationship; in many cases it stifles the relationship from the very outset.

Reiki is operating at a level where judgment does not exist (except, perhaps, in the most primitive form of harmony). When treating someone with Reiki, even though we may already have formed judgments about them, we soon reach a state where the judgment is of no interest to us. This is an unusual state for us to be in during a relationship: disinterested in whether the other person is good or bad, useful or useless, interesting or dull, a potential lover or not. It is a beautiful state to be in because when we are no longer interested in the judgment then our behaviour is no longer conditioned and the relationship is no longer constrained. Then the relationship - any sort of relationship - is given its own vitality, its own freedom to follow what path it will.

It follows, of course, that when we treat ourselves with Reiki we become less interested in judging ourselves. This is a radical change for most of us. As it takes effect, our relationship with ourselves, which is no more or less than our relationship with the universe, our life, becomes free from conditioning. Then we can become truly alive.

Reiki is taught in three stages

Traditionally, the teaching of Reiki is divided into three levels, or 'degrees'.

A first degree Reiki course imparts the ability to focus Reiki through the hands and use it for hands-on healing of oneself or others. This is a complete product in its own right and many people have no desire to pursue the more esoteric higher levels of Reiki. Anyone can take a first degree Reiki course. No previous knowledge or experience is required and it is not possible to fail to take on-board the Reiki, due to the direct nature of the attunement process. The first degree course is usually taught over two days.

The second degree of Reiki is concerned with the unifying aspects of Reiki. In practical terms it provides the ability to treat someone with Reiki from a distance. Perhaps more importantly though, it begins to show the link between Reiki and consciousness. The wider applicability of Reiki in our lives - for example in dealing with fear - is an important part of second degree Reiki. The second degree course takes about the same amount of time as the first degree, which is a pre-requisite. It is desirable for someone to have been actively using Reiki for a while, three months say, before taking the second degree.

The third degree Reiki course imparts the ability and knowledge to teach Reiki. In particular, the details of the attunement processes are learnt. In the traditional schools of Reiki, the third degree study is a lengthy process, usually taking a year or more. The trainee not only prepares teaching material but gains a deeper experience and understanding of the role Reiki can play in spiritual development. Someone who has graduated from a third degree course is usually referred to as a Reiki Master, which merely means that they are qualified to teach Reiki.

Reiki is taking things slowly

Reiki does not work very fast. At least in the Western industrialised nations, we have grown to value speed. The more instant something is, the better. If we have to wait, we become frustrated. To wait is to waste time and time is precious; time is a valuable, limited resource. It is true: time is precious. However, waiting for something to happen is only a waste of time if we spend the period with our attention focused on that future happening.

When we are stuck in a traffic jam it is not that which is a waste of time, it is thinking about when we are going to arrive which is a waste of time, a waste of life. If we were to spend the time, instead, observing the raindrop wending its way down the windscreen, seeing its changes in speed and size and the odd little diversions that it makes from a straight path; if we were to do that, we would not have wasted time, for we would have been experiencing the joy of life.

When we start to use Reiki, we feel the same old impatient feelings. A standard Reiki treatment takes a whole hour. For any illness other than a superficial wound, several treatments are probably going to be necessary to really get the healing process going. Is it really worth the time spent doing this? To begin with there has to be a powerful motivation - such as a serious illness - or great discipline in order for us to stick at it. However, after a period we begin to appreciate the relaxation that comes with the use of Reiki. The mind may still clamour for great intellectual or sensual stimulation but we pay less attention to it. Then one of those strange Reiki side-effects begins to happen: we begin to realize that most of the things that we spend our lives rushing to do are not quite as urgent or as important as we had been pretending. To do something slowly is to savour the process itself. Furthermore, to have great patience, to have infinite patience, is to detach oneself from expectations and live in the delight of reality, the delight of the present moment.

Reiki is unmasking

There is something rather odd which I have often noticed when using Reiki: the person I am applying the Reiki to appears differently to me than they do the rest of the time; the person appears ordinary. It does not matter how special - how kind, or attractive, or wise, or important - I usually see the person as. During the Reiki treatment they just seem incredibly ordinary. What has happened is that the recipient of the Reiki is in a relaxed state and is therefore not so intent on putting on a social act - on putting on a mask. But we do not only wear masks ourselves; much worse than that, we put masks on other people. We see people as bold and brave and indestructible and superior; or we see them as weak and pitiful and inferior. When we see people like this, we are not seeing people at all: we are seeing the masks of our own making - carved from our beliefs and our desires. To strip away these masks is to see people as they really are: not superior, not inferior, just equal, just ordinary. To see this ordinariness can have a profound effect. The reason for this is that to see someone as they really are - as an ordinary person - is to see something of indescribable beauty, of perfect beauty. Most of the time we play at beauty: we dress ourselves up and act out our chosen roles. The more we play this game, though, the more we are hiding our true beauty which is our true selves. To use Reiki is to relate to someone as a complete equal; the whole concept of inequality - of superior and inferior - becomes meaningless, vanishes.

What happens, then, when we use Reiki on ourselves? Naturally, we begin to see ourselves as we truly are. This can be quite shocking, for we have invested huge personal resources in constructing our own masks, particularly the ones for our own benefit - our self image. So it can be somewhat disappointing to see that, after all these years of effort, we are not actually any more important or more loving than we ever were; we have only erected an illusion. So, finally, we are forced to understand that we are not and can never be a better person than we are; we cannot be a better

person than anyone else. It does not matter which self image one had chosen to emphasise: importance or subservience, being macho or caring, attractive or down-to-earth hippie. Whatever mask we have nurtured can be seen for what it is. Then we begin to lose interest in playing the game of mask-making. When that happens, life becomes much easier and vast amounts of personal energy are freed-up for happier pursuits. We begin to know ourselves.

Reiki is connecting

Have you ever felt that you're not really getting through to someone? It is like you are on different wavelengths, not really in tune with each other. Well, Reiki is the opposite of that. Reiki is very much about connecting two people together. When using Reiki on oneself, it is about connecting with oneself - the true self or inner self. This whole process of connecting becomes very evident, completely explicit in fact, at the second level of Reiki. This allows one to connect with someone who is elsewhere and hence send them Reiki from a distance. It sounds outrageously implausible but by the time one has progressed to second degree Reiki one has usually given up worrying about the scientific plausibility of the whole thing and one is happy just to ride the wave and see what happens. To feel connected with someone is a wonderful experience. In a sense, I think it is what we are striving for (usually with limited success) in our personal relationships. In any case, from this state of being connected there arises love. It is not a love founded on any desire (which much of what we term love is, when we are being honest). A love that is born of a connection is an unconditional love, which is also an indestructible love. One way to feel this unconditional, indestructible love is to use Reiki.

Reiki is simple

There is a refreshing simplicity about Reiki - like water flowing in a mountain stream. We can spend ages analysing it, finding new ways to describe it, but the actual substance of Reiki is simplicity itself. This is apparent in the method of using Reiki: just placing one's hands on something and letting the Reiki flow. There is no complex equipment. There is no application of theory. There is no great disciplining of the mind or body. Using Reiki is child's play (probably quite literally). As one uses Reiki, this simplicity begins to work its way into our thinking and our understanding of life. It is true that there is a vast complexity in our lives: there is the myriad of relationships, each one resting on a tower of beliefs and then together interwoven into the most incredible design; there are the high-technology gadgets which we have given up trying to understand but which we use because, well, they work don't they? There is the almost infinite mass of regulation - laws and social rules - by which we run our lives. Underneath this complexity, though, is something totally simple: life itself. To glimpse this once in a while is like a breath of fresh air.

Reiki is transforming

The intention, when using Reiki, is to bring a little more harmony into the world - into a life or a relationship. This usually happens, though not always in exactly the way we thought it might. In any case, there is a transformation: a change from disharmony to harmony. We are often faced with a dilemma in life: we desire harmony but we also desire stability, which is security. The latter desire actually results in disharmony. It makes us resist change. Life, by its very nature, though, is not static. So the desire for harmony and the desire for stability are in conflict with each other. Reiki does not pay much heed to the status quo. Like life, Reiki always favours change - to a more harmonious state. The transformation process itself can be painful as there is part of us which is resisting the change. Luckily, the Reiki is not only encouraging the transformation but is also easing the pain involved. As we use Reiki more, particularly on ourselves, it begins to erode our general resistance to change. This is probably the biggest transformation of all, for it is a facilitation of all other transformations. The third level of Reiki is primarily concerned with transformation. This is because when one awakens Reiki within someone else, one is the agent of a significant transformation in that person. This is quite a responsibility and it is why Reiki should not be 'pushed'. An individual must have an inner urge for such a transformation or we are just playing games of manipulation, games of the ego. Transformation and the ability to be transformed are critical to our lives - possibly more so now than ever before. Reiki is intimately bound up with this transformation process.

Reiki is compassion

We are compassionate by nature. Some of us suppress this compassion because it does not fit with the image that we wish to portray. More often our actions are driven by a complex mix of the selfless compassion and selfish desires: our desire to be valued, to be loved. These motives can be difficult to unravel, if we bother to probe them at all. When using Reiki something rather odd happens: the feeling of compassion comes to the fore. We may set out with a complex web of desires but as the Reiki flows, so they drop by the wayside, until we truly desire nothing for ourselves. Then we are left with a deep sense of compassion - untainted compassion. One might have thought that this would feed our ego: "Hooray, now I am truly compassionate!" It is not so, for to be compassionate is to become oblivious to one's own past and fears and desires. Then one can see another's pain. This is a very humbling experience - I have rarely known moments of such devastating humility.

Reiki is a promoter of deep insight

We are accustomed to gaining knowledge - learning - by reading and listening and watching. We observe the world around us. Sometimes we experiment a little and see what happens. The knowledge we gain is stored away in our memory and if we are very young or practise a lot then this knowledge can worm its way into our unconscious. The accumulation of such knowledge constitutes our beliefs about the world and shapes who we are: it underpins our every thought and action. However, this is not the only way to gain understanding of the universe. There is a precisely complimentary process where, instead of knowledge moving from the outside inwards, it starts from our core and moves outwards. This mode of gaining an understanding is very powerful for the simple reason that such an understanding is irrefutable: it is an insight. Because an insight has arisen from the core of our unconscious it is representative of our true self, rather than the complex web of social, scientific and religious beliefs that underlies most of our learning.

Regular use of Reiki, particularly on oneself, facilitates this process of insight. This is because the process of insight is actually a process which tends to harmonise our mind. Whereas learning by external observation often leads to conflicting internal beliefs (usually at unconscious levels) and hence mental stress, learning by insight leads to an understanding which permeates all our unconscious self. The process of insight quite often involves overthrowing ingrained beliefs which are no longer beneficial to our lives. This kind of transformation can be quite a shock, as one begins to understand the ramifications of an insight. Fortunately, Reiki not only provokes insight but it also provides the means of coping with the resulting changes: these are times when we need a little gentle nurturing to help us assimilate our new-found knowledge.

Reiki is being oneself

We tend to spend much time and energy controlling our own behaviour so as to please others. Although this is a laudable aim, such self-censorship can be so oppressive and consuming that our own enthusiasm for life is dampened. When this happens, we have defeated our own purpose. If one really wants others to be happy, the best thing one can do is exude a natural joy of life, for such joy has an infectious quality to it.

One of the most obvious and powerful effects of Reiki, particularly when used on oneself, is to bring harmony to one's state of mind. A large part of this psychological calming consists of reducing or eliminating the gap between who one actually is and who one thinks one should be. Such a difference between reality and the ideal is the fundamental source of stress in our lives. Of course, it is extremely difficult - some would say fundamentally impossible - to consciously change who we are. The effect of Reiki is to move the ideal one thinks one should be so that it more closely matches who one actually is. The consequence of this is that life becomes much less of a struggle and more something to be savoured.

Reiki is seeing the world a little differently

We hold quite rigid views of the world: of how it operates and what is true. These views are based on our direct experiences but are heavily conditioned by our education and upbringing. To experience Reiki is, for most of us in the Western world, to experience something quite outside the scope of our conditioning. It is to experience a wonderful aspect of life which we had never even imagined. Of course, with direct experience one has no choice but to expand one's view of the world to encompass the new discovery.

The interesting thing about experiencing Reiki is not so much that one modifies one's view of the world but rather that one begins to see the extent to which what one sees in the world is dependent on upbringing and past experiences. Our thinking cannot escape this conditioning: Our thoughts will always be shaped by our past. However, to become aware, of just how arbitrary our understanding of the world is, allows us to become sensitive to other views of the world and other aspects of life which we had previously been blind to. To at least partially overcome our biases is one of the most enriching changes in life – not just for ourselves but for those around us.