

yoga

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A Show of Hands

The subtle work of Reiki can enhance your yoga practice and bring your inner healer to light.

By Catherine Guthrie

Last year, Kate King's sciatica had her dodging any pose that might tweak her sacrum and spark the familiar, uncomfortable jolt down her leg. But now that King, a Kripalu Yoga instructor, has learned the healing technique of Reiki, she uses it when she moves into poses that threaten her sciatic nerve, like reclining twists. "The surge of reiki energy helps loosen and free blocked energy," she says. "Since my Reiki training I'm more capable of experiencing the flow of prana in my yoga practice and in my daily life."

A Japanese word, *reiki* means "universal life energy"; the same term, capitalized, also names the alternative healing modality that aims to channel this energy through a practitioner's hands and transmit it to the client. Reiki practitioners don't regard what they do as manipulating clients' bodies. Instead, they believe they are mere conduits of reiki energy and that their hands need only rest on or hover above a recipient's body to get the job done. In fact, they claim Reiki can even be accomplished long distance by a practitioner's focusing energy and intention on a person.

Reiki is relatively easy to learn, and someone who has acquired a certain level of mastery (the levels vary according to whom you ask) can pass the technique on to others. During Reiki courses (often taught in a series of weekend workshops), students are lectured on the history of Reiki and instructed in the hand positions—in a typical 45- to 90-minute session, the practitioner places her hands in a series of 12 different positions either on or over the client's body. Most important, prospective practitioners are given "attunements."

An attunement is the energetic unlocking of an individual's reiki energy. According to Reiki's underlying principles, everyone has the innate ability to channel reiki energy, but that ability is very difficult to access unless a Reiki teacher turns it on. As William Rand, founder of the International Center for Reiki Training, explains, a meditation master might be able to uncork his or her own inherent Reiki ability, but rather than requiring years of work to accomplish this feat, an attunement creates "a shift in the person's energy field that allows them to immediately begin channeling reiki."

Scientific evidence of Reiki's benefits is scant, yet proponents believe that the technique has the power to clear physical and emotional disturbances, thereby enhancing the body's natural healing abilities. Almost every Reiki practitioner has a collection of stories about clients who attribute miraculous recoveries to the modality. But Reiki pros are just as quick to steer clear of guaranteeing results. "Only a client can assist in her own healing," says Linda LaFlamme, executive director of the International Association of Reiki Professionals. "There is no such thing as a healer; the Reiki practitioner is merely a facilitator for this energy."

A yoga practitioner since childhood, LaFlamme feels that yoga and Reiki are strongly complementary. "Both yoga and Reiki bring you into a place of stillness and clarity," she explains. "By uniting body and mind, each enhances the other." And just as Reiki invites life force into the body, yoga creates pathways for life force to flow more freely.

Since King learned Reiki eight months ago, she uses it in both her personal yoga practice and the one-on-one classes she teaches in Billerica, Massachusetts. "Reiki doesn't so much inform my yoga practice as it has become my yoga practice," she says. "I've come to see each posture as a pure expression of prana—or you could say 'spirit' or 'reiki.' It's really all the same thing."

To find a Reiki practitioner in your area, visit www.iarp.org. To learn about Reiki classes, visit www.reiki.

org.

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