

Message in the massage

By Ruth Ostrow

TEN years ago I fell off a horse and hurt my leg. I went to see a Swedish masseur about fixing the injury. At first I lay on my stomach as he kneaded the tender area, then he asked me to turn and lie on my back. By this stage I'd gone into a relaxed space, happily drifting with the music, aware only of the smell of warm oil and soft hands on my skin.

Suddenly, I felt an urge to cry. I started to cough as the swell of emotion began to rise. "Don't block it, let it come up," said the masseur as I opened my eyes, and through the tears noticed that he had his hand hovering above my throat.

"What are you doing?" I cried, feeling like the victim of strange hocus-pocus. "It's a Japanese healing system, called reiki," he replied, as calm and nonchalant as if this were an everyday event. "I'm helping you release some blocked emotion, which will help relax your muscles."

That was the first I'd heard of the ancient healing art that has since become popular around the world. Although intrigued, I did strike the event from memory until a few years later, on another massage table, I began to feel a powerful heat in my right ear, which had been giving me problems. Again I opened my eyes to see the masseuse holding her hands above my head. I had not mentioned my earache. "I'm just doing a little reiki on you," she said. The next day my earache was gone.

This time I became extremely interested, deciding to interview her teacher, reiki master in the Jin Kei Do lineage, Faye Wenke, who explained that the system was based on the transmitting of healing energy as practised by ancient Tibetan, Chinese and Indian yogis for more than 1000 years using symbols, exercises and sacred words.

I was fascinated with this energy I could feel but not see and began research into the Chinese art of chi kung, a more tangible system of energy manipulation and martial arts. Chi kung practitioners are often seen slicing 10 planks of concrete with one chop of the hand, or healing a wounded opponent with a few hand movements -- simply by harnessing the same energy source as used in reiki.

Both systems are derived from the same principle. Chi means life force in Chinese culture, ki (as in rei-ki) means life force in Japanese.

But whereas reiki draws down on the energy around us to heal, chi kung cultivates the energy at the navel centre of the body through a series of meditations, mantras and exercises, and uses it for healing, fighting or forms of body discipline.

Over the years I've witnessed discernible effects of energy channelling, having studied with Taiwan-based chi kung master, Buddhist monk and author Shan-Fo. I've been thrown off balance in class by one of his students standing on the other side of the room. And using a chi kung technique, I've sent energy to a friend overseas I sensed was in trouble, who rang an hour later, saying that she'd been in an accident but had felt me beside her like a ghost.

Such is the mystery of energy vibration that is only now being considered by science. So it is of no surprise that I'm attracted today to a lecture by Japanese doctor of alternative medicine Masaru Emoto, author of several books including *Messages from Water*, who is in Australia talking about his work as consultant to the Society of Vibrational Medicine in Japan.

Emoto has conducted a number of experiments that show the effect of energy on water. He argues that just as kiai, the fighting sound of Samurai warriors, can cause a vibrational frequency that partially paralyses the opponent, and just as beautiful music and loving words have been proven to have a positive effect on growing plants, so energy, sound and emotion can affect water.

He holds up photos of crystals that have formed in ice, claiming that when positive energy is given to the water via beautiful music or kind words, the crystals that form are pristine. When bad vibrations are passed through the water, and unpleasant noises made, the crystals become unformed or broken. "Which begs the question of what negative or good intentions can do to the human body, composed 70 per cent of water," says Emoto.

Though scientists have yet to ratify Emoto's results or prove that there's a skerrick of truth in reiki, I take the view from personal experience that positive words, loving thoughts and sending healing energy to needy people or difficult situations is always helpful and sometimes miraculous.

Recent studies have indicated that sick people who are prayed for have a higher recovery rate than those not prayed for. Call it Jesus, reiki, God or placebo effect, there is a profound, healing magic in remaining positive -- particularly in these difficult times.

www.ruthostrow.com

© Ruth Ostrow

First published in *The Weekend Australian* SAT 24 AUG 2002