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Reiki and Mindfulness

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IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION, the Lotus flower is often considered the most beautiful flower in the world; it grows, however, in the swamp or in muddy waters. This is my story about great value and beauty that has grown out of tragedy and loss.

On January 8, 2011, I was at a Reiki retreat at Kenyon Ranch in Arizona with my husband, who is an Advanced Reiki practitioner/Personal Reiki Master. My husband is a wonderful support whether I am teaching Reiki in my home or facilitating Reiki programs and Energy Shares in the community as an Usui and Karuna Reiki® Master teacher.

Out of respect for our teacher, colleagues and the healing process, the

retreat leaders requested that we turn off all cell phones. My husband forgot to turn his off, and we were surprised to receive a call from our son-in-law in New York who had just heard on the news about the horrific shooting of our beloved congresswoman, Gabby Giffords, and her constituents who were at the community event; six victims died including a 9-year-old girl. As the news kept coming through, my husband and I could barely breathe, sensing the horror, the enormity of loss and the senselessness of this type of violence. We began to send Reiki to support all those impacted by the shooting and, as a mini Reiki community at the retreat, started

using rituals, prayer and Reiki to support our own healing.

I work in the University of Arizona Medical Center which quickly was in the forefront of national news. There were make-shift memorials in the front of our hospital, and we did our jobs with integrity and professionalism as our own hearts were breaking. It was into this grieving environment that a member of the Tucson Meditation community came to the volunteers' department in our medical center a few months later; she offered to start a "Stillness Meditation" program to help healthcare providers to heal, as well as any individual in the Tucson community who needed a weekly opportunity to breathe

together, to try to release some of the trauma, quiet our minds and find some level of peace and equanimity again. This wonderful meditation teacher also taught us how to do walking meditation and to recite the Metta Sutta, which I will share later in this article.

After 2 1/2 months, this meditation teacher handed the group over to me; I was less than thrilled since I already was facilitating numerous groups at work and had not received training as a meditation teacher. I do have a long-term Buddhist practice and have trusted spirit through the years to guide me into opportunities to help alleviate suffering and support healing of the human heart and spirit. This was clearly part of my path and mission; there was no turning back.

I recruited some of the Stillness Meditation group participants who were also cancer survivors and Reiki trained by me to assist with our evolving meditation group and community. A few became greeters to welcome, sign in and orient new participants to our group. One became the energy clearer of the auditorium where we meet. It is delicious to be in her presence before individuals enter the room as she energetically clears the space in the circle and blesses each chair. I too do my Reiki energy clearing as well as putting symbols in the center of our circle. I then meditate for 15 minutes to prepare myself to connect with wisdom and compassion to support each person who attends with his or her particular healing needs.

For over a year I felt as though I was facilitating in the shadow of the original meditation teacher. Then, Spirit let me know that “enough was enough” and that it was time to be myself and bring my own unique style and passion to the group. The first thing that changed was the name from Stillness Meditation to “Mindfulness and Meditation.” There are many individuals who insist that they

cannot meditate—cannot quiet their minds nor sit still. Whether or not that is true, the reality is that we all can bring mindfulness to our daily life. I began to read books about it, read quotes by the Dalai Lama and Thich Naht Hanh and started cultivating my own mindfulness practice. Some of the premise of mindfulness is: to be in the present, to bring a sense of curiosity, to release judgement and replace it with growing compassion and to avoid ‘drama’ and ‘trauma’ that minds have a propensity to create. What I have been learning is that it is the nature of the mind to wander and to try to create narrative all the time, replaying aspects of the past or projecting in a futile manner into the future. What we have is the moment, the present. We can learn in that state of inquiry to compassionately ask ourselves if something is “pleasant,” “unpleasant” or “neutral.” When the mind tries to get busy while doing a meditation practice, one can notice it and even label the process going on, such as mind wandering, mind worrying or mind traveling. One can also do this with emotional states and identify and label the emotion when one feels sad or angry or fearful; by returning to the breathwork, mantra being used, sound or sensation being focused upon, it becomes more and more natural to cultivate and to return to inner calm, clarity and caring.

The ultimate goal for individuals is to be able to live more mindfully outside of a group. I sometimes encourage the participants to bring mindfulness to nature. A suggestion may be to truly be present in the moment while walking or looking outside. Anyone can bring mindfulness to seeing the colors of a bird, the way they sing at dawn or how they sit on a phone wire or even the movement of butterflies. In our beautiful Sonoran desert one can bring mindfulness to observing the flowers on a cacti or the lighting and shadows changing and shift-

ing over our mountains. Even when one washes the dishes, one can feel the water and the sensations in one’s hands while moving over differently shaped objects. One can bring mindfulness to eating and taste whatever one is blessed to have. When the group did an exercise with strawberries, not only were they delighted by the color, the scent, the sweetness but also the awareness that there is a “crunchiness” within this lovely berry. The opportunities to tune into mindfulness are limitless, and the joy from being present with life is priceless.

So where does mindfulness come into Reiki? Everywhere and in every circumstance! Let’s look at our personal Reiki practice. I was recently visiting India and saw folks greet the day with sun salutation in the Ganges. How do you greet the day? How do you welcome Reiki into your life? If you can, take a few minutes to breathe when you wake up, orient yourself to the change of lighting or sounds outside and feel that Reiki energy flowing throughout you. We are all different in how we perceive energy. I have had Reiki students who for years insisted that they couldn’t feel any energy but recipients of their sessions were thrilled with the results, sensations and perceptions. The more we learn to quiet the chatter of our minds and release judgment, the clearer we become as channels and may be able to more deeply feel the vibrations of Reiki, of vital life force energy. If you draw the Usui or Karuna symbols on your hands (or feet), do you do it out of rote? Draw it with intention and bring that beautiful state of curiosity and awareness to your connection with the symbols. Whenever you are ready to give yourself Reiki, bring a Mindful state to what your body is craving and where spirit is directing you to place your hands; this is the intent of performing *Reiji-ho* before beginning a Reiki session. When they

are on your body, “listen with your hands,” your breath and intuition to know what you are needing and perhaps when it is time to move on to another hand position. I have learned over the years to also pay attention to what I may feel within my own body when I give a Reiki session since I sometimes respond like a template of my client, helping me to better understand my client’s issues. I remind my students that I am never owning another person’s karma or pain; this is just how spirit provides information for me. I also sometimes get information and impressions that may be shared if I am guided to do so.

In terms of doing Reiki sessions on others, I remember a colleague stating years ago that she could just put her hands on someone during a Reiki session and let her mind wander into the realm of personal thoughts and issues. From my perspective, this is a loss to her and her client. This is a sacred time together filled with grace and much information if we learn to listen well. There is nowhere one needs to be during a session but present and mindful. Although many students like to close their eyes while giving Reiki I remind them that this can be seductive because it feels so good and one

can easily go into the details of one’s own Reiki session. You are there for your client. I feel that it is important to stay energetically present; it is all so interesting including the feelings of grace, connection or oneness while working on another person or even a pet. Feel and sense the changes in breath, facial expressions, movements, “pops” of energy, shifts or the myriad ways in which you experience energy.

Even when I do a distant session, I want to feel that person’s life and be present with him or her. This is so lovely if we have relatives or friends who live in other cities or countries and desire a Reiki session. Once I energetically call in that person or persons, I bring in all the qualities of mindfulness that I have already mentioned. The more you practice mindfulness, the richer this all becomes.

Before I conclude, I promised that I would return to the Metta Sutta, a practice of loving kindness. In our Mindfulness and Meditation group we always recite the Metta for ourselves, our teacher who introduced us to this version of the Metta Sutta, a benevolent being, which can include a pet or even someone who has passed, a stranger and then someone

we have forgiveness issues with. Because we offer this practice in the hospital, we also send Metta to all the patients as well as the healthcare and support teams. This is such a profound practice in which we energetically call in and connect with lives that are in need of healing and blessings. I have seen individuals smooth out old emotional wounds, expand their sense of joy and connect more deeply with humanity. Even when they experience circumstances that might have provoked anger in the past, many individuals find themselves doing Metta for that person. In terms of my Reiki practice, if I am having a challenging time, I may put my hands over my heart and offer myself Metta, stating over and over again: “May I be filled with love and kindness, may I be well, may I be at peace and at ease, may I be happy and contented.” When I do sessions on clients, I find myself silently sending them Metta before we conclude each Reiki session. I am mindful of the power of the words, the sincerity of my prayers and my best wishes for each individual who has included me on a healing quest. 

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