



Reiki and Lupus

Working with Individuals and Couples

BY MARSHA R DROZDOFF, ACSW, LCSW

MY SISTER-IN-LAW FRANNIE was zany, creative and comical. She even learned how to be a clown and would dress up at community events if it meant making a child or someone in need smile. However, lupus, a chronic autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks itself and destroys healthy tissues and organs, was not a comedy in her life or in the lives of countless others who deal with its impact day in and day out, at times causing a fight for one's life.

Sometime after I married into the family, I learned that this kooky sister-in-law had a condition known as Raynaud's disease; the blood vessels were affected mostly in her fingers and toes causing those extremities to feel very cold at times. She didn't make a big deal of it, and instead did yoga and meditation in New York City before it was popular to do so to help with the symptoms. She loved to cook, and she could create magic with a pair of old jeans and her sewing machine, with simple pieces of wood or with any kind of art supply.

Years later she was diagnosed with lupus (lupus is sometimes the underlying cause of Raynaud's disease) and hated when she had to take steroids as part of her treatment since it caused her to gain weight and develop what is known as a "moon face" appearance. Sometimes her joints would be painful, but those were generally silent struggles. Her motto was that life was for living—and living she did! She moved to Las Vegas and would tell me about the wild horses that came down into the valley. She worked with a close friend to pick up items that were left and never retrieved in the casino hotels and delivered them to Native American populations in Northern Arizona. She loved the Elders and was even unofficially adopted by one of the tribes and allowed to participate in some sacred ceremonies. When she felt reasonably well, one couldn't hold her down. But lupus flares (as they are called) can be unpredictable,

and they held her and can hold others back from doing what their hearts desire them to do, despite the strongest will and intention.

Over time, Frannie developed kidney complications and needed to go on dialysis three days a week. As a social worker, I have had experience working with individuals with end stage renal disease (ESRD) who need dialysis, and because of that I know that Frannie had one of the worst reactions to the treatments; she would cramp terribly and sometimes pass out while receiving dialysis. Because she had lupus, she was told that she wasn't a candidate for a kidney transplant, and based on that knowledge, she made the very

difficult decision to stop her treatment and allow a natural death to take place; she just knew that she couldn't go on that way.

Then, while Frannie was visiting with me in Tucson, one of my social work colleagues who had had prior experience working with ESRD told Frannie that she *was* eligible for a transplant in spite of the lupus diagnosis and needed to get evaluated by the transplant team when she returned to Las Vegas. Before her evaluation was even completed, a young woman died in a car accident. Suddenly there was an available kidney that was an excellent match. Incredibly, Frannie had a new lease on life.

Although there were some problems with the transplant due to the lupus, and later cardiac difficulties, we had Frannie with us for nine more years. During that time, I would sometimes do Reiki on her when I visited to soothe her physical distress and comfort her spirit. When I thought that she was in a bad decline towards the end, I decided to attune her to Level I so that she could work on herself—even up to the possible time of her passing. I, of course, also sent her oodles of Reiki as needed! Though it's been seven years or so since her death, I still feel inspired by her life and grateful for our relationship, and I continue to do distant Reiki sessions for her.



Photo courtesy of Marsha R Drozdoff

Frannie.

Working with Couples

To bring things to the present time, a few months ago I was looking for potential new contacts and markets to promote my Reiki practice and enrollment in Reiki I classes. I thought of Fran-nie and decided to reach out to our Lupus Foundation of Southern Arizona in Tucson; one of the board members who is also a lupus survivor responded and not only expressed interest in receiving a Reiki session from me but also inquired if I could do “couple’s sessions” at their upcoming Couple’s Retreat. I offered her and anyone else coming through the lupus group a discounted rate for sessions, classes and this potential retreat.

Quite honestly, I had never before done a Couple’s Reiki session. I had taught Reiki I classes to breast cancer survivors who brought their spouses/partners to the class over a decade ago through a grant to enhance intimacy and communication. I had also worked with other couples who had taken Reiki classes together over the years, and I had designed ways in which the couple could work on each other at the same time if desired to enhance their relationship and support each other’s healing. I had not, however, worked as a practitioner doing Reiki with two individuals at the same time. I asked Spirit if this was possible and was told that it not only was possible but was going to be wonderful! I knew from times when I did Reiki “waves” at community events that as long as there was a closed circuitry, the energy would move well.

On the day of the retreat, I arrived early at the hotel to clear the space, set up the room as I desired and put Reiki and stress reduction materials on a small table that I decorated to create a sense of welcome. I brought my music, a bell, hand sanitizer and sign-in/consent forms. I had been informed that I would be working with seven couples for about 20 minutes per session. As I later learned, some knew what Reiki was, some Googled Reiki while waiting for their sessions, some were very willing and open participants and others were perhaps a bit reticent and even uncomfortable.

I took a few minutes during each session to introduce myself and to see what they understood or what basic information was needed. I also inquired, especially from the lupus survivor, what discomforts she (they all happened to be women) might be experiencing in her body and joints. In order to work with both clients at the same time, I had the couple sit in two separate chairs facing each other with their knees and hands/fingers touching and invited them to close their eyes; the energetic circuitry was complete. In this way Reiki would be able to flow between them as though they were one person.

My first couple had been married for 31 years. I first moved to the back of each one, using the fire serpent symbol to connect their chakras. Like a dance, I flowed from one to the other as spirit

guided me. It was enjoyable for me and felt very fluid. Something touched this beautiful woman very deeply, and there were sweet and gentle tears that flowed towards the end of the session. What felt particularly lovely was when I invited both to open up their eyes, and it seemed as though they were seeing each other through new eyes and open hearts.

My second couple had been married for 16 years and had moved to Tucson just that year. She had been in a spiritual order years before, and he was a retired, licensed massage therapist. I noticed that there was much warmth in his throat chakra and both had increased energy flowing through their sacral areas. This was not surprising since with chronic illness, there is often much that needs to be communicated and shared about one’s fears or needs but often held back to protect the other from adding to his or her emotional suffering.

The next couple had an additional issue: the male spouse had been in an accident four days before. He had a mild concussion and headache so I worked a little more on him, including on his shoulder and neck, knowing the energy would flow to her as needed.

One of the spouses in the following couple had issues with noise from the adjoining room; I later explained that with Reiki and mindfulness, one learns to bring awareness to what is in that present moment without being too distracted or disturbed. The lupus survivor had a background in the practice of yoga, and perhaps because of that, she was able to enter into a very relaxed state.

One couple interrupted the flow of the session when the spouse had to go to the bathroom; perhaps he wasn’t feeling well or felt embarrassed, but I did notice that he was very tense during the session. In this retreat setting, I had no knowledge about any of the couple’s history and what other stressors they were experiencing beyond what they might have spoken of beforehand. However, as in the case of this man, I just continued to trust Reiki and to provide as much healing as possible without getting attached to any particular outcome.

There was also a much younger couple who had been married for only three or four years; my heart went out to them in having to deal with a chronic condition so early in their married life together. They both relaxed into the session and hopefully felt more renewed, restored and interconnected in their love.

Many Reiki symbols were integrated into these precious sessions. The Usui Mental/Emotional symbol was especially valuable when I perceived emotional distress within a couple. Also, as a Karuna Reiki® Master teacher, during all seven sessions, I used my eyes to draw and direct many of the Karuna symbols when I felt guided to do so. Zonar was helpful to prepare their systems at the start of each session. Halu was useful if I felt that there were old issues. Lots of Harth went into the heart chakras for all the

participants. Gnosa was used for wisdom instead of reactivity, hurt and pain. Iava was helpful to heal former relationship issues that might be interfering with them being loving and present with each other. If a couple appeared to need to establish new patterns and behaviors, Kriya seemed to come through. Shanti was directed to all for there to be peace even in the midst of health challenges and Rama at the conclusion of the session to join them together and ground them in unity.

So, what did I learn from this exquisite afternoon?—that couple's sessions can be lovely and that I want to pursue offering them not only at retreats, but as part of my Reiki practice. In terms of logistics, 20 minutes is not adequate in this type of circumstance; we had planned for two 20-minute sessions followed by a five-minute break for me to stretch, have a light snack or go to the bathroom if needed. Since couples were sometimes delayed for various reasons in starting their sessions, I never had a break and was even running behind in the schedule by about 15–20 minutes towards the end. Before I began, I thought that I might feel fatigued doing seven 20-minute sessions in a row. Not having a break made that seem more likely to me. But instead, I actually felt energized, and coupled together with the usual results of offering Reiki, my heart felt full of gratitude and expansion.

One of my biggest surprises was that sometimes, when I had my hands on each partner at the same time, I felt as if I were connecting with Christ-like energy coming through me; since that is not part of my spiritual path, I felt blessed and delighted.

Thank you, Frannie, for helping to guide me to this wonderful experience at the Lupus Retreat; without you and your journey with lupus, I might never have received this special gift! 🌸



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