The Reiki Levels Explained
by Richard R. Rivard

This page is one of a series where I give my ideas on aspects of Reiki and/or energy work. The pages are intended to give some “food for thought” and some are only my viewpoint. While a number of facts are included, you should decide for yourself how much (if any) of the content feels right to you.

Also discussed in this article:

- Time Required Between Each Level / How Much Should You Pay? / Who is the Better Teacher for You?

Most Reiki Masters now offer the complete Reiki training program in 3 or 4 steps. Originally these were called Shoden, Chuuden, Okuden, Shinpiden and Shihan (teacher). Outside Japan you will usually see Reiki 1, Reiki 2, Reiki 3 and Reiki Master.

The First Step
The first step is called First Degree Reiki, Shoden, Reiki Level I or just Reiki I. The student receives reiju (aka denju or initiation) where he or she is assisted to the Reiki energy and taught various hand positions and methods for administering Reiki on the self and others. The main concepts or affirmations of the founder are explained, as well as the ideals around the practice of Reiki. The student may receive from 1 to 5 reiju, depending on the style of Reiki being taught, usually at least one each day of class. Classes were typical 2 to 3 hours in length and held over 4 or 5 consecutive days. In Japan, this level is called Shoden.
(See www.threshold.ca/reiki/menu_t.html for Threshold Reiki 1 content)

The Reiki Ceremony
The Reiju and multi-attunement process apparently has it’s roots from the time when the founder, Mikao Usui, would perform a blessing or transformation ceremony on the student the first time he or she would take a given level (and possibly at other times as well.) During the Tokyo years (1922-26) a small ceremony was intended to mark the possible transformation the student might experience due to the class content. Prior to 1922 before Usui organised his teachings into a more structured approach, it may simply have been a type of blessing. Due to Usui Sensei’s great natural Ki or radiant energy, this ceremony would often help the student acquire and flow stronger his or her own healing Ki over time, simply because they were within his the range of his Ki. Later, in 1926, Usui’s students made something like this a standard procedure in every Reiki Ryoho class they taught. The activation of the Reiki energy happens with the first one, and the additional may serve to simply boost the energy if the student makes use of Reiki daily. (Some teachers feel the additional ones are unnecessary, or simply give them after the class, over the next week or so.)

To this date the original Japanese Reiki society still gives
reiju to everyone at their weekly or monthly meetings.

The Second Step
The second step is called Second Degree Reiki, Chuuden, Okuden, Reiki Level II or just Reiki II. The first 3 Reiki symbols and their use are taught and the student receives another attunement, or up to 3 attunements (one for each symbol), depending on the style of Reiki being taught. After this, the symbols can be used to increase the strength of the Reiki energy, deal with mental and emotional issues, and to assist Reiki at a distance. Some instructors teach additional symbols as part of the curriculum. In Japan, this level is called Okuden (sometimes Chuuden), and has two parts to it. In the original Japanese system you would not be offered this level of training unless you can exhibit certain energy sensing skills. However originally it was presented to the student immediately after the Shoden training. Dr. Hayashi and some of his students were known to teach the first 2 levels close together (within a week) at times.

(See www.threshold.ca/reiki/menu_t.html for Threshold Reiki 2 content)

Mikao Usui, would perform an energy blessing on the student to mark the transformation achieved at each level of training (for the first 8 levels - to Nidan).

The Third Step
The final 2 steps may be taught as one process (as was originally introduced into the West) or may be split into 2 parts (the original Dr. Hayashi approach and the way Japanese masters continue to teach). The first part is called Reiki III, Okuden, Shinpiden, Reiki 3(a), Advanced Reiki Training, or the Practitioner Level (as in Japan). It includes the Usui 4th (master) symbol and its use, and another attunement. Again, some instructors teach additional symbols as part of the style of Reiki. In Japan this level is called Shinpiden (sometimes Okuden). In the original society it is not offered to many students.

(See www.threshold.ca/reiki/menu_t.html for Threshold Reiki 3 content)

The Fourth Step
The fourth level is called Reiki Master, Shinpiden, Gokuikaiden (highest level), Shihan (teacher), Reiki Teacher, Reiki III / Master or just Reiki III. Sometimes it is simply called Shinpiden. Here the student is taught how to give Reiki attunements and possibly how to teach Reiki. Some instructors require an apprenticeship period to allow time to practice and integrate the teaching process. Others offer detailed documentation, ongoing support, and co-teaching of initial classes to guide and encourage the new Reiki teacher. In the original society, this level is only conferred on the head of a branch or chapter within the society.

(See www.threshold.ca/reiki/menu_t.html for Threshold Reiki Master/Shihan content)
In the West (outside of Japan), all of the above may include additional Reiki techniques and instruction in complementary healing practices, depending on the master/teacher. Some teachers offer ongoing Reiki exchanges or Reiki circles where Reiki can be shared amongst practitioners and introduced to newcomers. Please verify what you will be taught at each level, and the support you can expect, especially if you are moving between Reiki Masters.

Note: In much of the teachings that have come from the far east, "Master" has been a term that many have used to refer to someone who is an enlightened teacher. However, in the title "Reiki Master", the term "Master" is essentially a representation of the Japanese word "Shihan" which can be translated into English as "teacher" or "example." Often the head of a group, family business may be thought of as "shihan" as well.

In Japan however, a student refers to their teacher by the term "sensei." But this is not a term a teacher would use for himself.

"Reiki Master" was the term first used for the teacher when Reiki was brought out of Japan in the late 1930's, and it seemed to stick (for whatever reason). Therefore "Reiki Master" means a "teacher or instructor of Reiki".

A Reiki Master or Shihan simply has the knowledge and capability to transfer the ability to use Reiki to a student. As in any other disciplines, teaching ability, spiritual growth and knowledge differ from teacher to teacher, and are usually determined by their own life and occupational experiences. Also, some teachers focus more on teaching while others focus more on healing.

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Time Required Between Each Levels

In many schools in the West, students are taught that they must space their Reiki levels apart by a certain number of months. This is usually due to the fact that this was what they were taught, and they may not be aware of evidence to the contrary. It may also simply be the internal wisdom of the teacher that is being employed. While I respect the right of a teacher to decide how they wish to teach their classes, I have found that it is usually the student who knows best as to how close they should take the Reiki Levels with me.

To begin with, it was originally thought that Reiki 1 and 2 should be spaced 3 months apart. This is because we know that Dr. Hayashi (the person who taught Mrs. Takata) would
often make this one of his requirements if you were paying for class by working 8 hours a week in his clinic. Although in the case of Mrs. Takata, I believe she had to wait one year.

However, on my visit to Japan in November 2000, I met Mrs. Chiyoko Yamaguchi, an 80 year old student of Dr. Hayashi. She teaches Reiki 1 and 2 the way she learned from her teacher when he came to her village in 1938. Dr. Hayashi taught her and a group of others, both Reiki 1 and 2 over 5 consecutive days, about 2 hours each day. A Japanese Reiki book called "Iyashino Te" has confirmed that originally the old Reiki society used to teach this way as well.

In Japan, Reiki (originally called Té-até) was often taught one-on-one after the Shodan or initial stage. The student progressed at his own pace, monitored by the teacher.

Here in Canada, Wanja Twan explained that at least 9 students received Reiki 1 one weekend in 1979 from Mrs. Takata and Reiki 2 the following weekend from her.

If you find you are drawn to a specific teacher and his/her methods, then you may want to follow their guidelines on how fast or slowly you proceed with your Reiki training. It is also quite acceptable to switch to another teacher if you feel the current one no longer resonates with you and your needs. Your spiritual growth can take you along many paths and to many teachers. But above all, Trust in yourself.

How Much Should You Pay?

I think that the first thing one should ask is why you have concern about this issue (if you do). For some it is an ethical question, for others it is financial or abundance related. It is interesting that many people take issue with the price of some Reiki training, but have no difficulty or concerns when looking for training in other areas.

I suppose most of this has to do with the fact that in the West, the master level class was first offered by Takata-sensei for $10,000. While this price seems very high to most, many people are unaware that in some cases Mrs. Takata would allow the student to provide her with Reiki 1 and 2 students as partial payment. So in some cases a master student may have paid about a tenth the price. Harue Kanemitsu, a Takata Reiki 1 and 2 student, explained to me that Mrs. Takata had to get a very large number of students for Dr. Hayashi to teach on his visit to Hawaii. Their class fees were paid to him (the equivalent of about $10,000 in today's currency) and this was how Mrs. Takata was able to pay for her training and permission to teach. So for her own master students, she offered this choice of monetary payment and/or student referral.

In Japan, any kind of training is expensive and it is typical to see prices like 150,000 Yen (about $1250 USD) for Reiki Master. We do not know what the founder Mikao Usui
originally charged, although it is believed that a student would join Usui’s dojo (training hall) and pay a periodic payment, allowing him or her to attend any lectures or classes held there. It is also typical of Japanese custom to repay someone for any teaching or healing, even if it is offered for free. Since Usui had a wife and 2 children, this was how he was compensated for his work and how he supported them. (Japanese Reiki Master Hiroshi Doi assures us that Usui Sensei was.)

The original society that founded in honor of Usui Sensei (Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkai) now charges about $90 USD for admission to their closed group, and $15 USD for each monthly meeting you attend. That is the extent of your financial commitment. But we know that in 1938 Dr. Hayashi was charging 50 Yen for a 5 day class (2 hours a day) of either Reiki 1, or a combined Reiki 1 and 2 class; equivalent now to about $5000 USD.

For some people, teaching Reiki is an avocation; that is, they already have a full time vocation and they may feel they are more than compensated to live the lifestyle they desire. Or their income may be supported by a partner or family member. In their case, they may feel the urge to tithe themselves and give back to the community. These people can sometimes offer Reiki training for free or very little.

Other people may rely on Reiki to supplement their family income or it may be their only source of income as they spend their full time in a healing/teaching occupation. These people may offer standard or higher rates for their teaching services.

I suggest you look at the offerings of a few teachers, perhaps look at a few books and decide what it is that you feel you need with your Reiki training. And always follow your inner wisdom when it comes to choosing a teacher. I feel You do know what's right and best for yourself.

Who is the Better Teacher for You?

Which is the better teacher? This depends on the individual as well as your own needs and preferences. Some teachers offer lots of support and lots of information. Others may offer a more nurturing process. Some have very short classes, others offer long courses or spread the training out.

In recent years it has become possible to take distant Reiki training as more and more Reiki teachers get on the internet. As a Reiki teacher understands the skill of giving distant empowerments (attunements), they can simply send supporting documentation to their student and schedule the attunements. This is working out very well for those in remote areas, and those who are housebound. This type of format can also allow the student to take a class at their own pace.
Personally I found that as my needs changed over time, I was drawn to different teachers. To date I have received training from several masters, both in live and in distant training sessions. I even found myself in Japan taking master level training from Hiroshi Doi-sensei, as well as crystal and Sekhem-Seichim-Reiki Training from my friend Tom Rigler.

The "best" teacher may simply be the person you feel an urge to learn from, at any given time.

Some Reiki teachers spend more time in a professional healing environment, while others may simply do this on a volunteer basis. Many Reiki masters teach Reiki outside of their normal work and for others it is their daily livelihood.

However, just as I suggested concerning how much you should pay, I feel it is best if you ask within yourself if a certain teacher is best for you. You can also do a mediation and ask to be directed to the most appropriate teacher at each level of your training. Then trust in your own inner guidance. Once you have begun training with one teacher, you may want to complete all your training with him/her, or feel the urge to move to one or more different teachers as you progress.

Above all, try to find someone you do feel comfortable with. There are lists of teachers available on the net, some of which I show at my home page under the Resources section. (See www.threshold.ca/reiki/home.html)