



When the Reiki Practitioner's Cup is Empty

On returning to foundations, fresh eyes and what it means to live your Reiki practice.

By **Bronwen Logan**

There is a well-known story in Zen tradition about a student who visits a teacher for tea. The teacher pours the tea until it overflows the cup... and keeps pouring. The student, alarmed, points out that the cup is full. The teacher nods: "You are like this cup. How can I show you the teachings unless you first empty your cup?"

This is the spirit of *shoshin*, 'beginner's mind', a concept from Japanese Zen that has something to say to every Reiki practitioner and teacher, regardless of how many years we have spent learning this art.

Shoshin speaks to me in a very personal way, and it isn't just because I'm an avid tea drinker. Divorced over 10 years ago at the beginning of perimenopause, I spiralled through a crisis of

confidence. Who was I as a woman, a friend, a writer, a lover, a mother and as a Reiki practitioner and teacher? Things that I believed so strongly in and about myself!

It was bewildering.

I had become no one.

As I began to cobble my life back together, I struggled to find my way into the Reiki teachings, into my truth. I couldn't find it in a book, or in anything I was told. Where was it inside me?

Shinpiden, the Japanese name for the Reiki III teachings, translates as Mystery Teachings and are spoken of as a lifelong study, the true beginning of the practice. I realised, >>



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as I reached out to the teachings again and again, that I was a mystery to myself and maybe it wasn't such a bad thing to be.

I had questions, unquenchable curiosity. I was desperate for a good strong cup of tea!

If Shinpiden is the starting point of the teachings, what does that tell us about how we are meant to hold everything that comes before it?

The Ladder We Were Handed

The three levels of the system of Reiki are Shoden, Okuden and Shinpiden. In English we often call them Level I, II, and III, which sounds like a progressive ladder, each rung leaving the previous one below.

But Shoden, from the Japanese, does not mean 'Level One'. It means 'beginner teachings'. Not because beginners are less capable, but because beginner implies openness. Receptivity. A willingness to not already know.

The same precepts that a Shoden student first encounters are the very same precepts that a Shinpiden teacher works with every single day.

For Today Only Do Not Anger.
For Today Only Do Not Worry.
For Today Only Be Grateful.
For Today Only Practice Diligently.
For Today Only Show Compassion to Yourself and Others.

They are not beginner content. They are the foundation of everything, and the foundation never stops being relevant.

When the Cup is Already Full

Many of us come to the system of Reiki with an already-full cup. We may have trained in other modalities, read widely, collected certificates. We have language for what we do. We have a way of explaining it. And that can be genuinely useful... until it isn't.

The problem is not knowledge. The problem is when knowledge becomes a wall between us and direct experience. When we stop noticing what is actually happening in a treatment because we already have a story for it. When we teach what we have memorised rather than what we have lived. When we have a wise quote for every situation, but no wisdom from the heart.

Do we still ask the simplest possible question: What is Reiki? Not as a trivia exercise but as a genuine inquiry. Sitting with the *kanji*, *Rei* and *Ki*, spiritual energy, experientially, not intellectually. Letting the meaning land in body, mind and breath.

The most transformative moments in a practice do not always come at what we imagine is the beginning. Sometimes they come when we are brave enough to start again. When the wisdom is there but it needs to be initiated through compassion for ourselves and others.

Shoshin is the willingness to look freshly, to be surprised, to not know in advance what we are going to find.

What does this look like practically? It might mean going back to your treatment practice and asking, honestly, whether you are working >>

from habit or from presence. It might mean sitting with the precepts again as if for the first time *Kyo dake wa*, for today only (or just this very moment), and noticing what they actually say to you today, not what you decided they meant years ago. It might mean reviewing your teaching materials and asking: is this what I know or what I have embodied?

Some questions might not be comfortable, but that's not the point. They are the questions that keep a practice alive.

After many years, I have returned to the words I wrote, the ideas I formed and the things I believed and have asked, "Is this true for me?" I find myself stripping back assumptions I didn't even know I had. I thrill to find myself being brave. And it is the feminine quality of the practice that also matters to me now.

The Quality of Our Practice

Roughly 80 percent of Reiki practitioners are women. I think it is worth pausing on that and on what it means for how we hold and share this practice.

There is a difference between telling someone about your practice and discussing it with them. Telling assumes you have the answer. Discussing means you are willing to explore together, to not be the authority, to be genuinely curious about the other person's experience and understanding.

In the Japanese understanding of the system, this quality is not peripheral, it is central. The *In* and *Yo* of the system, the feminine and masculine, the receptive and active, Earth and Heaven energies, are meant to be in balance. The receptive, still, listening quality is not a lesser thing. It is what makes genuine transmission possible.

When Mikao Usui initially offered what we call *Reiju* to students, there was, traditionally, no physical ritual at all; he was simply sitting. Together they were simply sitting. Fully present. A quality of open, receptive presence is not incidental to the system. It is the system.



I find this deeply encouraging for how we approach our conversations about the system, with our clients, our students, each other and ourselves. Less explaining, more exploring. Less telling, more being curious together. That is a genuinely female gift and it is time we offered it fully.

An Invitation

What would it feel like to sit with your practice today as if you had never encountered it before?

Not with the eyes of someone checking whether they are doing it right. But with the eyes of someone genuinely curious about what

this is, what it feels like, what it might be asking of you today. There's no one judging you. No one to impress.

That is the Second Spring. Not going back. Not starting over. But bringing everything you are to the practice with fresh eyes and finding, perhaps, that there is more there than you knew. You hold the empty cup out, ready to receive and see what will fill it up.

The beginner's mind reminds us:

In the expert's mind there are few possibilities, but in the beginner's mind there are many. ■

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