



Reiki for Veterans

BY EILEEN DEY, M.A., RMT & MICHAEL EMANUEL, RMT

After the US went to war in Iraq, families of deployed soldiers began coming to me for counseling and Reiki. Listening to the worries of parents and spouses and helping them to deal with their own fears, I realized that when these soldiers returned home, we would be seeing a new generation of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) sufferers.

PTSD, the anxiety disorder that often occurs when an individual has been exposed to a traumatic event, is something veterans have often suffered in silence. Shutting away their combat experiences, they hope that the lingering feelings of confusion, fear and anger will somehow disappear. Yet the numbness isn't numb. When they return to civilian life, they remain in a perpetual state of heightened alertness, which can be aggravated by the loss of the support of a structured military life. Many find a way to cope with this, stoically living with their fears, not letting on to others how they really feel. For others more numbness is required. Left untreated, it is not unusual for PTSD sufferers to turn to alcohol and drugs—anything that might help them numb

meeting. They received me courteously, although what most were really thinking, I will never know. Then one of the administrative team, a counselor, leaned across to me and quietly informed me that he was actually a Reiki Master and that he was pleased to see me. However, he went on, due to the limits of his job description, he was not able to cross the line and teach or practice Reiki with his clients.

This was the breakthrough I had hoped for. I felt that an opening had been created; I could breathe a little easier. But that was just the beginning. Over the course of the next couple of years, various staff from the Veteran's Center visited my training program and Reiki Circles, but we never seemed to get any closer to a program for veterans. Emails, correspondence, phone calls were all exchanged, but as time went on the idea of implementing any kind of Reiki work with the veterans seemed little more than another well-intentioned pipe dream.

Then one day, after I had given up hope, I received a phone call asking if I would be interested in teaching Reiki at the cen-

AS MORE AND MORE AWARENESS GROWS OF THE BENEFITS OF REIKI ON PTSD AND HEALING INJURIES, OFFERING REIKI SESSIONS OR CLASSES TO YOUR LOCAL VA WILL BECOME EASIER AND MORE ACCEPTED, AND BENEFICIAL FOR ALL INVOLVED.

their memories of the past. The tragedy of this route is how it numbs their present and future too, affecting their relationships with others, their jobs, their lives.

Knowing that Reiki has the effect of helping to unblock emotional obstacles and bring the mind, body and spirit to balance, in 2004 I felt compelled to reach out to the local Veterans Center to see if there was a possibility of offering Reiki, either in session or class form.

Approaching the US Government was a daunting task. Back then, I had the impression that alternative care was not respected and did not know whether any other practitioners were offering this work to veterans. I conducted an Internet search and compiled the small amount of research material I found, wrote a cover letter, and sent healing energy to the project and to the initial meeting.

To my delight I did get a response and a request to come and meet with staff. Passing through the doors of the Seattle Veteran's Center with the giant American eagle emblem hanging overhead, I was nervous, even though I felt charged with the presence of Reiki all around me. I inhaled deeply and went in to my first

meeting. Timing is a funny thing though, and while it all makes sense in the end, the Tao does not always make the route obvious. After having held space for so long, that call came just as I was in the midst of a large life transition, which was to include me moving away from the Seattle for an unknown length of time.

And that could have been the end of this tale, but for one of the Universe's happy "coincidences." As all of this was happening, a former student, Michael Emanuel, by then a Reiki Master Teacher himself, came to a monthly Reiki Circle I held that was open to anyone interested in Reiki. He had not attended one of these for quite some time and only went that evening because he felt a real need to go about an hour before the circle started. The circle was much the same as others, except for two men, both complaining of significant physical pain and both on extensive medication. They had come together for moral support, and I think they may have been somewhat concerned that they might be entering a witch's coven. They were both in so much discomfort they had gathered the courage to see if Reiki could help relieve some of their symptoms. It did, though not in the way

either man expected. These were short sessions, just 20 minutes, yet both men felt profoundly moved by their respective experiences. One of them said that he came to have his leg fixed and instead something big had shifted inside. Fighting to keep control of his emotions, he said he felt a calmness he hadn't felt in years, indeed since before he was in the first Gulf War. It was only then that we discovered they were both vets, and both were now interested in knowing if Reiki could help with their PTSD, a condition neither had mentioned before the session.

Michael was hooked. He now knew why he had needed to come to the circle that night. Early the next morning he was on the phone to me to ask my views on whether we might be able to persuade the Department of Veterans Affairs to embrace Reiki. Perhaps even more than I had allowed myself to think, he was convinced the need was to teach Reiki to veterans, not just offer sessions, so they weren't just "patients" in the VA hospital sense, but active participants in their own healing. I knew he was right, and now I knew who to hand the torch to now that I was leaving Seattle.

In the months that followed, Michael worked with the Seattle Veterans Center and finally was able to get a Reiki I training day together, hosted at the Vet Center, supported by Vet Center staff, so veterans would be in familiar surroundings and only among other veterans. By now my own life plans had changed again, and I was unexpectedly back in Seattle. So in November 2006 Michael and I set out to teach the first Reiki class. Ready as we could be for what we thought might be a very difficult day, with Vet Center counselors on hand in case of issues, we were both awestruck at the immediate effects that the healing energy of Reiki had on such a complicated and debilitating disorder. We had both had concerns as to whether it would be hard to teach Reiki to men trained for war. This was a self-selecting group of volunteers to be sure, but never was there a group more energetically aware, or more willing to discuss, explore and experiment with the possibilities of metaphysical energy. Far from being a difficult day it was wonderful and humbling.

It was not just that class either. We have held classes several times a year since, both Reiki I and Reiki II, and each is an amazing experience for us. In each class, in the calm, restorative and supportive atmosphere created, veterans voluntarily start sharing their feelings on their connection with the Reiki energy, many gently releasing long-held traumas in the form of stories and moments of intense personal insights.

But it is not only about releasing and healing; the classes we hold are very much about learning and experimenting too. It became very clear to us early on that these guys are very much in touch with their instincts; it is part of their survival training. We have found our work therefore has been very much about helping them re-find what they already have—this time for "revival" rather than "survival." If at first I wasn't sure how open these men would be to working with *ki*, my concerns completely disappeared when, on our second class, Michael had a whole room of ex-

marines and soldiers building up *ki* between their palms, exploring what it felt like and then passing invisible bubbles of energy to one another and talking about what they were experiencing as they did.

As the only woman instructor, I was utterly honored to be amongst such genuine and open-hearted men, willing to share and discover how using Reiki could be such a powerful tool for their healing journeys. Here are just a few examples of what veterans have experienced while taking Reiki training with us. (Names have been changed to protect privacy.)

One veteran, Craig, looking up at the clock, noted that it was 3 PM. Without prompting, he shared with us how he had felt by this time every day for years: the screaming he felt inside, the rage he didn't always manage to control on the outside. Yet here it was, 3 PM on this Saturday, and he was perfectly relaxed, happy and unbelievably calm. His sense of gratitude—even, as he said, if it was just for that day, was almost overwhelming.

Another, Paul, was in tears during an attunement. Afterwards, he explained he had finally come to know a place of peace within himself that he thought had left him long ago. He felt that by learning how to apply Reiki to himself he could actually begin to get a sense of "being quiet within" and that realization caused him much happiness, resulting in his "tears of joy."

We have yet to work with a veteran who has not been able to work with Reiki. Although some have needed follow-up sessions to get confidence that they really can feel Reiki, and several have not continued with the work, most realize almost immediately that they are able to "feel" the energy of Reiki as buzzing, heat, movement, connection.

Jesse had been trained in special operations to become aware of his auric field so that he could perceive when an attacker was nearby. During the course of the Reiki training, he was able for the first time to go into a relaxed state when one of us came near his field to do a treatment or attunement. He explained that it "wasn't easy" to just "let go" of the ability to be on alert, but he explained that by the end of the workshop he was learning a new way of dealing with people approaching him—a core fundamental of Reiki practice; the ability to sense a person's intention. This distinguishing feature allowed Jesse's hyper-vigilance to soften enough when sensing a healing intention approaching versus an intruding one.

But probably the most amazing and dramatic effect of the Reiki training was Mark's spontaneous healing story. During the afternoon of a Reiki I class, Mark shared how his long-term leg pain from shrapnel wounds had all but disappeared during the second Reiki attunement. After the attunement he disappeared to another room for a few minutes to be by himself. When he came back into the room he wanted to share with us what he had just experienced. He described how he felt an immense darkness lifted from him during the attunement. It was, he said, like an intensely-black slab floating out of him. He then told us how it had descended over 30 years earlier when he was just one

of fifteen out of his entire company to survive a firefight in Vietnam. What struck us most was Mark's incredible composure and grace as he told us his story and his experience of the attunement just minutes before. He finished by saying he would never forget the moment when the darkness descended, or his comrades that didn't make it, but that his life had just changed for the better, and he knew the black slab that had floated from him was never coming back. In an email to Michael following his Reiki I training he wrote:

"...It was a most interesting and beneficial day. I'm still reflecting on my personal experiences during the attunement. And...I wanted to pass on an overview of my pain relief results for the day. In that regard, the nerve pain in my right leg (related to a couple of old shrapnel wounds) has recently made it very hard to drive for any length of time, to sit in a chair for long, or to even sleep at night. Normally, sitting or driving will send me straight into searing pain, and frequently into strong nerve flashes. Once this gets going, the only solution is multiple doses of VA prescribed pain meds. ...

...The day of the Reiki [Level I training] session, I drove for almost two hours to get there, spent much of the session in a chair, and then drove another hour and a half home. Normally this would be an almost impossible task with this leg problem. I took one pain pill early in the Reiki session ("one" is never enough to do much for my leg). But...somehow...through the benefits of you, Eileen, and Reiki, I made it all the way though the rest of the session, all the way home,

and through the night without any other pills. That has not happened in months, and I consider it to be nothing short of a miracle. I'm still scratching my head as to how Reiki works. But...somehow it did something positive for me. And...for that, my sincerest "thank you" to both you and Eileen!..."

The Reiki work with the veterans has really just begun. But the government is beginning to be interested in alternative care to help the veterans: <http://blog.wired.com/defense/2008/03/army-bioenergy.html> talks about the Army's interest in using Yoga, Bioenergy and Reiki to help veterans suffering from PTSD. A \$1 million grant has also been offered to continue further studies in this field.

Organizations like <http://honor-a-veteran.org> offer a directory of practitioners who provide critical mind/body services to U.S. troops and their family members. Practitioners graciously donate one or more sessions free of charge to current and past members of US military families.

As more and more awareness grows of the benefits of Reiki on PTSD and healing injuries, offering Reiki sessions or classes to your local VA will become easier and more accepted, and beneficial for all involved.



—Eileen can be reached by e-mail: Reikitraining@earthlink.net or by telephone: 206.947.7687. Michael can be reached by e-mail: michael@emanuel.net or by telephone: 206.324.8424.