

MORE PEOPLE ARE DISCOVERING THE UNIVERSAL ENERGY THAT REIKI MASTER ROLAND BÉRARD CALLS 'THE ENERGY THAT WE DRAW ON TO MAINTAIN LIFE'

Revival through reiki

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The lights are dim. Calming music plays in the background. A sweet aroma fills the air.

I'm lying on a bed, covered by a blanket. My eyes are closed. Someone's hands are placed on my body over the blanket. At times, the hands feel hot. At times, I feel hot. After a while, I don't feel the hands anymore.

I can hear what is going on around me - people talking, doors closing-but I feel removed from it. My body goes numb.

It feels like 20 minutes, but it has been an hour. I get up, feeling disoriented. There. I'd done it. My first reiki treatment.

People have been using spiritually guided life-force energy for healing purposes since the 1800s when a Japanese man in search of healing power had a mystical experience.

But it is still relatively unaccepted in the Western world, says Anthony Pantazopoulos, a reiki master who operates a health centre in Verdun.

"A lot of this stuff is very esoteric. But more and more people are opening up to it," says the 36-year-old, who turned to energy work after he cracked a vertebra playing football and was almost paralyzed.

He tried physiotherapy, chiropractic, massage. "Nothing seemed to help me," he says, until he began doing acupuncture, tai chi, and eventually reiki.

"After 10 years of suffering, it's relieving my pain," Pantazopoulos says.

He is not alone in his experience. Two years ago, Chantal Leboeuf weighed close to 300 pounds, with high blood pressure and respiratory problems, and says she was at risk of a cardiac arrest.

Reiki and other natural healing work helped her lose 92 pounds, stabilize her blood pressure, improve her breathing and make her calmer, the 48-year-old says. "Alternative medicine changed my life completely," she says, "on the spiritual



JOHN KENNEY THE GAZETTE

Reiki master Anthony Pantazopoulos works on client Krzysztof Rosiak.

and physical level."

It's a simple process, reiki masters claim. (The title is given to those who complete all levels of reiki training and can teach the technique to others.)

All you have to do, they say, is be open to the universal energy that reiki master Roland Bérard calls "the energy that we draw on to maintain life" or the spirit that leaves us when we die.

"I call it the God source, the healing energy, the universal life energy, which is an energy of unconditional love," says Jade Chabot, reiki master and director at the W Hotel's Away Spa.

During an "attunement," a spiritual initiation, reiki masters help students open the energy centres on their bodies by drawing sacred symbols - kept secret from non-students - into the air above them.

"All of us have the ability to channel it," says reiki master Craig Cormack, who teaches tai chi and qigong in Verdun and Westmount. "By putting the symbols into the person's aura,

it's like turning on a light switch. ... As soon as you put your hands down on somebody, the energy flows through you."

It is very similar to the biblical practice of "laying on of hands," adds Bérard, who does reiki out of an office at the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex. The only difference is that reiki uses the symbols - discovered by Japanese scholar and philosopher Mikao Usui - to help increase the effect and connect with the recipient on a deeper level. "It's like amplifiers," he says.

Reiki speeds up the healing process, Chabot explains, helping clear up bruises, cuts and headaches, as well as anxiety and fatigue. People with emotional problems are those who use reiki the most, she adds.

Claude Chalkoun says he uses reiki on himself to relieve stress. "It's a regular way of feeling better, releasing the energy which is blocked," says the businessman and lawyer.

While most insist that reiki is

complementary to traditional medicine, some take it a step farther.

"In 50 years' time, the idea of using drugs or surgery to cure anyone will seem barbaric. We'll be manipulating people's quantum energy, as a number of frontier types of medicine are attempting to do already," reads the official website for Lynne McTaggart's book *The Field: the Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe*.

But McGill University physics professor Guy Moore says that while energy does exist in the body, healing work based on energy fields has no basis in physics. "There's no good reason to believe it makes any sense," he says.

A one-hour reiki session can range from \$50 to more than \$100, but people generally don't pay for it, Pantazopoulos says. Rather, practitioners do reiki on each other, friends and family. The practice is transferred from person to person in a series of day-long workshops, which also

cost upward of \$100 each.

The Natural Health Consultants Institute in N.D.G., which offers courses in holistic health care, has seen its reiki course demand double in the last five years, reiki master Shant Kanachian says. The Canadian Reiki Association's membership is almost 400 and each year since 2003, 30 per cent have been new members. The continuing education centre at Vanier College in St. Laurent offers non-credit courses in reiki as part of its life skills curriculum. Some hospitals in the United States allow reiki practitioners into their operating rooms to give treatments before and after surgery.

Each person's experience with reiki is different, Pantazopoulos says. My reiki session left me with nothing but relaxation and a few insightful comments from the reiki master about me and my life.

But, Pantazopoulos reminds me, effects are not always immediate. "I'll have people call us up six months later and say, 'I understand now. It helped me so much. I didn't realize it at the time,'" he says.