

Choosing Compassion

BY MARIANNE STREICH

As a green Level I practitioner, I gave a treatment to a friend's mother who was in a great deal of pain following hip replacement surgery. My own mother was in my mind as I began the treatment. I felt regret that I had not been able to alleviate her pain during her lifetime. A deep desire to take away the client's pain filled me as I gently placed my hands on her hip.

A few moments later, a wave of nausea raced through my body. I stepped away from the treatment table, thinking the room was too warm and intending to turn down the heat. Instead, I fainted, crashing into a bookcase on my way to the floor. You can imagine the consternation of the client. For the next three hours, I sat in a reclining chair feeling almost comatose, as if I could not move. I continued to feel tired for a week afterwards. My friend's mother felt great the day after the treatment—I had indeed taken away her pain!

While this is an extreme case, unlikely to happen in the routine practice of Reiki, it illustrates a degree of identification with the client that made me vulnerable to taking on her energy. I learned several valuable lessons from this experience, one of which was the importance of coming to a treatment from a place of compassion, as opposed to empathizing or identifying with the client.

Empathy may be defined as “the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.”

If we find ourselves empathizing to the degree of taking on the client's pain or discomfort, it is wise to examine what may be underneath the empathy. Looking at the situation described above, I realized that I felt grief over the loss of my mother and guilt that I couldn't “fix” things for her. I identified the client with my mother, and I had a need to prove that Reiki works. Ego was involved, and I was attached to the outcome.

Many factors can influence empathy: guilt for feeling well ourselves when another is ill; feeling responsible for the well being of the client; a belief that we know what is best for the client and what healing should take place for them. Empathy can also enmesh us in the client's drama, making us more vulnerable to their energy. Awareness of the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that



may connect us to the client can assist us in setting aside these factors prior to a treatment and can reduce the probability of our taking on the client's pain or other forms of their energy. Awareness can also serve as a reminder that we may need to make a renewed commitment to our own healing. (See my article, “Healing the Healer” in the Winter 2008 issue.)

It should be noted that taking on someone else's pain is different than feeling a client's pain in a corresponding place in your own body as a message of how to proceed during a treatment. This kind of pain dissipates as the treatment progresses and does not remain in the body after the treatment. Taking on a client's (or anyone else's) pain means that the pain remains in your body after the treatment, sometimes for several days to a week, and leaves you feeling tired and depleted.

Compassion, on the other hand, can be defined as being “moved by the suffering or distress of another and to have a desire to relieve it.” (But not identifying with, or projecting oneself into the other's suffering.) Within the context of Reiki, I interpret compassion as holding the space of unconditional love for the client (or any person or situation) so that healing may take place.

Compassion is the willingness and the intention to BE the Light of Divine Love—to come from that place within that is our very essence and that is the most powerful healing force in the universe. At the same time, we also know that the client IS the Light of Divine Love, and we perceive them as Light. There is no ego involvement, no pity or condescension or judgment. Compassion does not “feel” the client's pain or take it on, but simply acts as a bridge between the client and the Higher Power. It is Light interacting with Light in a beautiful dance to accomplish healing.

As I begin each treatment with gassho and reiji-ho, my intention is to choose compassion and to remain in that space throughout the treatment so that I might facilitate the highest possible outcome for the client.



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