

HANDS OF

BY PARVEEN CHOPRA

Rapidly gaining in popularity, reiki and pranic healing use the energy, which is around you and within you, to make you healthy and whole



BEFORE
The aura of
a diseased
person

"Why did this have to happen to me?" cried Maya Ravindranath, 35, when confronted with a tragedy that left her with multiple rib fractures, head injuries and a spinal dislocation. Maya had fallen off the parapet at her mother's house in Madras. The 10-foot fall left the bank executive unable to walk or, for that matter, do any of the elementary things that we take for granted.

Maya's husband, M. Ravindranath, was in England on a scholarship, but her children, Srinivas, 12, and Lakshmi, 9, provided her the much-needed familial support system. Remembers Srinivas: "I cried to see Mom that way, but I knew God would heal her, I had faith."

Seven nightmarish months followed for Maya: Moments dominated by agonising visits to various doctors and hospitals, 50 X-rays, abdominal belts and neck collars, rigorous physiotherapy exercises—a prison-like existence where recovery seemed like a distant destination.

It was then that Ravindranath decided to take his wife's case to the caring hands of a pranic healer in Delhi.

Come sundown, and the Aurobindo Centre in South Delhi resembles any busy hospital's outpatient department. A large number of patients of different ages and ailments await their turn at the healers' hands with an air of uncertain expectancy. But the difference becomes clear when the attendant, espying the photojournalist accompanying you, questions: "Are you going to take pictures of the patients or of the energy?" Another person asks: "Is that a Kirlian photography camera you are carrying to shoot the patients' auras?"

Indeed, the patients have assembled here to take treatment from one of the 15-odd practitioners of pranic healing, a new drugless therapy that entails the transfer of an energy, whose existence is probably unknown to most of us, from healer to patient.

At this pranic healing centre, you meet Ravi Kher, a Delhi high court advocate, who had a paralytic stroke last year and lost his ability to speak. While extensive allopathic treatment failed to improve his condition, after just three days of pranic healing, Kher could move his affected left limbs and also speak a few words at a time.

One more case of what seems like another miraculous cure at the same clinic is that of Renu Rosha, a real estate agent. Rosha was a thyroid patient for five years and was constantly on steroids, but was completely cured after 15 days of pranic healing. Says she about the beginning of her recovery: "In the first two sessions, I felt something warm coming out of my body and I was almost sweating in winter—but later it became all right."

Another system that uses hands as the instruments of healing is reiki. In a sense, reiki is more of a hands-on approach for, unlike pranic healing, it involves the actual laying of hands on various parts of the body.

And going by the growing number of cured and happy patients all over the country,



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DHEERAJ DEVGIN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PALLEE

HEALING

reiki, too, is entering the healers' handbook.

Last winter, Suman Sahai, a 44-year-old housewife living in Noida, lost all sensation in her right hand—save a frequent shooting pain. After doing the mandatory rounds of doctors in vain, she started taking reiki sessions from a retired army officer in her locality. In the very first session, she says: "I got so much relief that I fell asleep at his house. After eight sittings, the problem cleared, except in the fingertips."



Maya relives her initial encounter with a pranic healer: "The first time I visited a pranic healing centre, I saw people gesticulating away. I thought, almost irreverently, "What is this mumbo-jumbo?" But with my very first session itself, I discovered I was a clairvoyant. I could actually see all the aura colours. I understood what was happening. I began feeling as if this is what I had been waiting for all my life. I took to it like a fish takes to water."

She attended the sessions for over two months and gradually felt her strength increasing. Maya simultaneously carried on with her physiotherapy course, but found that while in physiotherapy, she would improve by 80 per cent, then fall back by, say, 10 per cent, in the pranic sessions there were no downs, it was always up.

Maya's physiotherapist told her: "I think this is what you were waiting for."

While pranic healing's curative aspect is usually emphasised, reiki is finding wide application as a tool for personal and spiritual growth too. Reiki masters claim that it makes you "whole and complete". Only appropriate things happen to you, and you live in abundance. In short, reiki is about taking your life in your own hands.

Vivek Gaur, 33, who is in the infrastructure leasing business, finds reiki very soothing. And whenever he is anticipating an unpleasant encoun-

ter with a difficult client, he gives advance reiki to the meeting. Says he: "It is remarkable how people respond to a positive build-up." Others use reiki to improve relationships, to fulfil desires and even in mundane matters such as making a computer behave or bringing a "dead" telephone to life.

But how do these systems work? Quite simply, reiki and pranic healing involve working on our bioenergy body or aura (which permeates the physical body, and extends a few inches beyond it) and our chakras (there are seven major chakras in the body, each related to an endocrine gland, each with its specific colour). Disease first manifests itself in the aura, before even appearing in the physical body. Energy healing works on the aura level and corrects the blocked or malfunctioning chakras to cure the disease.

According to Barbara Ann Brennan, healer, researcher and writer of popular books such as *Hands of Light and Light Emerging*, there are two types of life energy that are used in healing: "One that surrounds and permeates everything is the universal energy field and the one associated with human beings is the human energy field, more commonly known as the human aura."

Pioneering work to investigate the human energy field was started in Eastern Europe half a century ago, work which is, unfortunately, still imprisoned in the quasi-science category. Most

AFTER
The aura changes
after a healing
session



people would have heard of Kirlian photography, named after Semyon Kirlian, its Russian inventor. It is a technique of photographing objects immersed in a high-frequency, high-voltage electric field. What you see are glowing, multicoloured emanations said to be auras or biofields.

In India, too, a handful of people are experimenting with Kirlian photography. One of them is Dr Ramesh Singh Chauhan, who is now working with the pranic healing centre in Bangalore.

Dr Ashwini Chopra, who runs the 22-bed Aashlok Hospital in Delhi, and is well-versed in both reiki and pranic healing, is convinced that the cutting edge of scientific knowledge has validated the bioenergy field. He even plans to employ Kirlian photography as a diagnostic tool.

Reiki and pranic healing are quietly coursing through the better-off sections of Indian society, particularly in the metros. Over the past five years, an estimated 1.5-2 lakh people have attended reiki workshops. Dr V. Sukumaran, a paediatrician from Madras, who advertised his workshop in Delhi last month, had 150 enthusiasts enrolling, a group so large he could not accommodate all in one workshop. In Bombay's suburban trains, a watchful eye can detect many commuters doing self-reiki, even while balanced precariously on each other's toes. In Surat, there is a Reiki Street because almost every household there has at least one reiki graduate. The number of masters who conduct reiki workshops has crossed the 100 mark. Pranic healing, on the other hand, already has 1,500 active healers in India.

According to Krishnan Veerapan, one of the six pranic healers who worked on Maya: "Till Maya came to our centre, I had never encountered such a case before. It was a turning point for the centre itself, because it involved the regeneration of bones, muscles and tissues. This in turn meant a complex combination of techniques which, in the early stages, we ourselves were not sure of. But the fact that she was amazingly recep-

tive was a great help, for she was able to receive and immediately assimilate the treatment."

Maya's quick recovery in the short span of five months impressed her healer, who remembers



his patient with gratitude: "The confidence we gained then has helped us to fine-tune our abilities today."

Reiki (pronounced ray-kee) is a Japanese term that means universal life force energy. The system was recovered from ancient Indian texts about 150 years ago by Mikao Usui, a Christian minister in Japan. For ki or vital energy, that animates and sustains life, the Indian equivalent is prana, a key concept in yoga. The term prana was borrowed by Choa Kok Sui, a Filipino of Chinese extraction, who developed pranic healing a decade ago.

Although energy healing originated in India, Buddhism may have taken it to China, where qi or ki was investigated further. It then became the

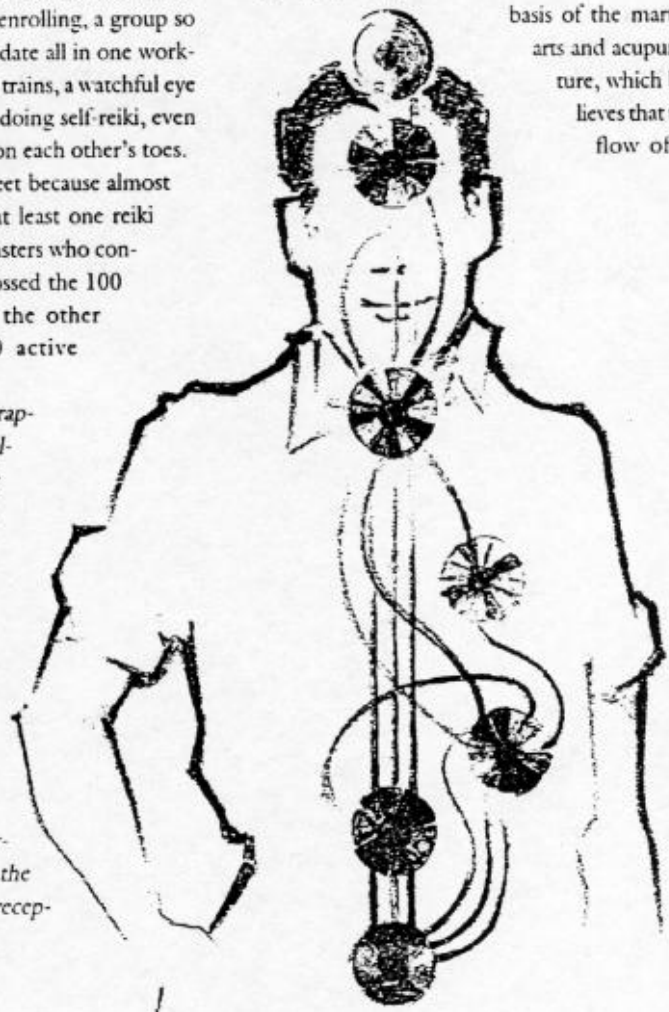
basis of the martial arts and acupuncture, which believes that the flow of ki



THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF REIKI

- *Just for today I will live the attitude of gratitude—that is, give thanks for my many blessings*
- *Just for today I will not worry*
- *Just for today I will not anger*
- *Just for today I will do my work honestly*
- *Just for today I will be kind to my neighbour and show love and respect for every living being*

Mikao Usui
Reiki founder



through the body's 12 meridians can be manipulated to cure disease.

But it was the legendary healing power of Jesus Christ that triggered the discovery of reiki by Usui. The story goes that one of his students asked him whether he could heal like Jesus. Usui found the answer after years of fine-combing through religious texts the world over. His search fructified in some Sanskrit-Tibetan sutras and he developed his own healing power through austerities and meditation before starting to teach.

Reiki officially came to India in January 1989 when a German master, Paula Horan, held a workshop in Bombay for about 30 people. One graduate, Shamal Durve, went on to train as a master. She and eight other masters are now part of the Reiki India Research Centre in Thane, the only reiki cooperative in the country. They have initiated over 10,000 people into reiki and now plan a bigger retreat-cum-centre in Badlapur near Bombay.

Pranic healing followed a little later. The man who has played a stellar role in spreading it is C. Sundaram, a Bangalore-based industrialist, who had spondylitis so agonising that he was almost crippled. Recovery started when, admitted in a pain clinic in the USA, he was given pranic healing. Curious and grateful, he met the master, Kok Sui, and started the Pranic Healing Foundation in 1992. Today he is the president of the All India Pranic Healing Association.

Kok Sui doesn't fit the stereotypical image of a guru. A chemical engineer by training and a successful businessman by profession, his aim is to demystify the subject. In his lucidly written book *The Ancient Science and Art of Pranic Healing*,

he says that no special inborn healing power is needed to perform paranormal cures—anyone can do them with a little training.

The master cites three major sources of prana: Sun, air and earth. Trees and plants absorb so much prana from these sources that they exude an excess of it. Tired or sick people can benefit enormously by lying down under trees. Fresh fruit, raw vegetables and sprouts are good for health probably more because of their high prana contents rather than their nutritional value.

Pranic healing works by cleansing the negative, used-up energy (which explains why the healer often keeps by his side a bucket of salt water, considered a good absorbent of negative prana) and by energising the patient's system through projecting prana. Advanced healers can even change negative prana into positive prana.

Kok Sui writes that pranic healing is very fast and effective in treating both simple and severe ailments such as headache, toothache, fever, sore throat, mumps, gas pain, arthritis, lung infection, heart problem and hearing problem.

Now, how do you learn to become a healer? According to Krishnan Veerappan, managing trustee of the Pranic Healing Foundation of Delhi and corporate resident manager of MRF Ltd, one learns to identify the energy, to receive the different energies and to use them for healing in the first level course. In the second level, you increase your healing power and, in the third, you learn to use the system for psychotherapy. The next stage is devoted to developing spiritual powers. The first and second are two-day workshops that cost Rs 750 and Rs 1,000 respectively.



HANDS OF HEALING



YOU TOO CAN HEAL

Pray: "Lord, make me thy healing instrument. Let my entire being be filled with compassion for others who are suffering. Lord, let your healing power flow through this body. With thanks and in full faith." Repeat twice. Place your hand on the affected area of the patient and say: "In His name, you are clean, whole and perfect! You are healed. So be it."

Choa Kok Sui
Pranic healing founder

THE ROLE OF THE SEVEN CHAKRAS

The chakra	Colour	Area of body governed	Gland	Psychological function
Crown/ Sahasrar	Violet	Upper brain, right eye	Pituitary	Opening to the higher consciousness, bliss
Third eye/ Ajna	Indigo	Lower brain, left eye, ear, nose, nervous system	Pineal	Intuition, power
Throat/ Vishuddha	Blue	Bronchial and vocal apparatus, lungs, alimentary canal	Thyroid	Creativity, communication and self-expression
Heart/Anahata	Green	Heart, blood, circulatory system	Thymus	Love and compassion
Solar plexus/ Manipura	Yellow	Stomach, liver, gall bladder	Pancreas	Willpower
Sacral/ Svadhishthana	Orange	Reproductive system	Gonads	Sexual energy, emotions, creating and protecting life
Base or root/ Muladhar	Red	Spinal column, kidneys	Adrenals	Survival issues, stability, seat of kundalini energy

There are several levels in reiki teaching. In the two-day Reiki I workshop, the master makes you a channel, through "attunement", for the universal life force energy. The energy is said to enter through the crown chakra and flow out of the hands. You are taught 27 positions where the hands have to be placed for three minutes each, and the points where more energy should be given when treating a specific ailment. For example, an asthmatic patient must be given more reiki at his heart chakra and the lung tips. After attending this workshop, most people feel a distinct tingling sensation in their fingertips and, when giving reiki to friends, they are told that their hands are very hot.

In Reiki II, three Japanese symbols and the mantras that go with them are taught (in reiki, symbols and mantras are closely-guarded secrets). They intensify the reiki energy and also help you do distant healing. Reiki III focuses on personal and spiritual growth. The fee for Reiki I varies from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000, and goes up considerably for higher levels.

Not all graduates of reiki or pranic healing workshops can hope to become equally potent healers. Dr Ramakant Keni, who officially practises spiritual healing at Bombay Hospital, argues: "To become a good healer one must build up energy through meditation. Besides, developing healing powers takes years." Adds Ashima Singh, a former Doordarshan announcer and pranic healer: "There is a karmic entitlement to one's healing capacity." Businesswoman Meera Kotak, who has set up a reiki centre in Bangalore, openly acknowledges that one of her colleagues is a much clearer

reiki channel than she is.

Since, in reiki teaching, each master is autonomous, the course material and emphases vary. Bombay-based R. Chandran stresses living the "attitude of gratitude", one of the five principles of reiki. He prescribes gratitude even to the road we walk on, the telephone we use, and so on.

Some other reiki teachers are innovating freely. Dr Sukumaran is affiliated to the Golden Age Reiki School in England, that teaches 13 symbols. Still not content, he has added some more symbols to the list and has also incorporated bits from pranic healing and the Silva Method.

And then there is distant healing, a part of both reiki and pranic healing. It is not unusual for a group of healers in Delhi, for instance, to receive a request from Bangalore, 2,000 km away, to send energy to a child with double pneumonia. One case of successful distant healing is Sharada Balagopal, 66, who had an angina problem and was taken to the ICU of a Kochi hospital. According to her son, Prakash, a pranic healer, he energised her from Delhi and she was back home in two days.

More incredible than distant healing is pranic surgery, which is still at an early, almost exploratory, stage in India. One person who has benefited from it is Deepak Thapa, a 32-year-old accounts officer with a private firm in Delhi. Thapa had trouble reading his accounts books—a scanning of his aura revealed a hole in it and some knotted nerves under his left eye. He was treated last month by a team of pranic healers and clairvoyants. In the "operation", one healer cleaned his channels that link the chakras, while the other two directed concen-



(Clockwise from top) R. Chandran; Shalini (right) and Sheeba Loganey; Sherwood and Deepti Finley; teaching reiki full time



Group treatment is a part of reiki workshops



trated pranic energy to liquefy the area around the hole before allowing it to reconfigure.

A relieved Thapa says he can now "see the stars again" and can read much better.

There are at least two other energy healing systems available in India. One is jorei, developed by Mokichi Okada (1882-1955) in Japan. He taught that all matter is created by the invisible, spiritual realm. Illness too is induced by impurities produced in the spiritual body. When they are removed, the body reverts to a healthy state. In jorei, light is the energy channeled. The Japanese Mokichi Okada Association (MOA) has started a spacious clinic in Bangalore, where 20-odd patients receive treatment every day. Mykari, also from Japan, invokes the souls of one's ancestors as the energy source.

But which is the best system? Or, how do reiki and pranic healing compare? Nalin Nirula, who left his family's fast-food business in Delhi and is a reiki master, admits that pranic energy works faster as a cure. "It can bring down blood pressure in half-an-hour or make gall bladder stones disappear in no time." Reiki, on the other hand, roots out the cause of the disease and for that reason it may be a little slower, he adds. Nalin's wife, Renu, also a reiki master, says that pranic is material energy which anybody can generate and manipulate, while reiki is spiritual energy.

But Ramanathan Kasinathan, a retired banker affiliated with the Maharashtra Foundation of Pranic Healing, insists: "We don't use personal energy—we use universal energy." This human or universal conundrum is easily resolved by understanding that a healer has to "fuse the personal psychokinetic energy with the cosmic energy," to quote one healer.

Reiki enthusiasts also single out the many dos and don'ts in pranic healing. For example, non-vegetarian food, liquor and tobacco are believed to deplete energy and bring disharmony to the chakras. Besides, you may end up giving an excess of energy, potentially harmful for the patient. In reiki there is no danger of overdose—the receiver draws from the healer as much as is required and where it is required. Veerappan's argument in favour of pranic healing is that, unlike reiki, the master, Kok Sui, is constantly upgrading the teaching.

Such difference of opinion notwithstanding, many reiki graduates are learning pranic healing and vice versa, to absorb the best from the other.

Absorbing the best from these systems are the affluent and the educated. You come across many celebrities at reiki and pranic healing workshops and centres. Actress-turned-health food manufacturer Waheeda Rehman has recently learnt reiki. Film star Akshay Kumar plans to learn it. Designer Ritu Beri's mother, Indu Beri, attended a reiki workshop when they were still conducted in hotel rooms by visiting masters from abroad. One of the patients at the Delhi pranic centre is Hans C. von Sponeck, chief of the UN mission in India, who suffers from sciatica. His wife has attended reiki and pranic courses and is a healer in her own right.

One reason for energy healing's popularity with the urban and the urbane is that they are keenly aware of the limits of western medicine and the potential of alternative therapies. Observes Harmala Gupta, who has researched the role of alternative medicine in combating cancer: "Modern medicine disempowers you—you remain at the mercy of the doctor and the system. Reiki and pranic healing empower you."

Predictably, energy healing, a revolutionary concept for orthodox medicine, is attracting many doctors. Quite a few have meshed it into their practice. Bombay-based Dr Tejinder Kaur Sahi says her patients find "extraordinary healing powers in me", which she attributes to living reiki principles. Another surgeon, Dr Pradip Diwan, finds reiki particularly effective in head injuries, asthma, spondylitis, allergies, paralysis and diabetes. His gynaecologist wife, Dr Priya Diwan, uses reiki on expectant mothers to ease delivery. As for pranic healing, 5-10 per cent of its healers and patients in Delhi are allopathic doctors. Energy healing systems do not rail against modern medicine, talking instead of the complementary nature of their role. Take medicine, by all means, they say, but energise it to increase its potency.

This complementary role is taken seriously by Dr Sukumaran and C. Sundaram, who are planning hospitals near Madras and Bangalore.



HANDS OF HEALING

In pranic healing, negative energy is removed





HANDS OF HEALING

respectively, where energy healing will augment alternative systems of medicine and allopathy. While these projects may take a year or two, the Apollo group of hospitals in Madras and Hyderabad has already set up pranic healing centres and the new one in Delhi is likely to follow suit.

Such is the popularity of reiki that its teaching has become a remarkably lucrative career option. Shalini Loganey, 28, was a journalist with a women's magazine till 1994 when she learnt reiki and attended a handful of personal growth workshops. Then, on a trip to Germany, she became a reiki master and now holds workshops in Delhi with her sister, Sheeba. American reiki masters Sherwood and Deepti Finley find India a better place to work in than the USA. The husband-and-wife team plans opening four reiki clinics, including two in Lucknow and Patna.

Yet if you look closely, you will find warts on the ostensibly pristine body of energy healing practice. Flak comes even from some who have tried reiki or pranic healing. A documentary filmmaker walked out of a reiki workshop because she felt that the master was talking down to the group. Rakesh Ralli, a Delhi real estate agent, finds that the reiki attunements needlessly mystify the system.

There are differences even within the charmed circle of reiki masters. Bombay-based Harjit Lamba claims that the three reiki symbols taught by others have become distorted and that she was handed the correct ones by an American master in the direct lineage of Usui. Then, easy access to mastership and the purely commercial motives of

some masters today has propelled the Reiki India Research Centre into instituting a rigorous apprenticeship programme.

In contrast, pranic healing is better regulated by regional federations, out of which the ones in Delhi, Bangalore, Bombay, Hyderabad and Kottayam are very active. The only criticism of this system is that, in the wrong hands, it can be counterproductive.

All the same, energy healing is expected to grow in popularity in India, following the trend set in the West. Appropriately, it has come to the fore just when the more conventional alternative systems such as ayurveda and acupuncture have acquired respect and legitimacy here. More than their acceptance, the recent popularity of energy healing indicates that the mechanistic model of man and the universe is giving way to a deeper understanding that everything is a play of energy.



Today Maya walks normally and has taken the pranic healing course herself. Indeed, there is no greater proof of the power of the treatment than when the patient herself turns healer.

Philosophises the newly-initiated Maya: "I feel all this was destined to happen for me to be able to come over here."

—with inputs from Suma Varughese in Bombay and Dipankar Das in Delhi

A team of pranic healers and clairvoyants performing an eye "operation"



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Sona Towers, 2nd Floor, 71 Millers Road, Bangalore, Ph: (080) 2269992/3;
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▶ Reiki by Bodo J. Baginski and Shalila Sharamon is usually sold at reiki workshops; for pranic healing books, contact: Health Accessories for All, 157/6 PB 2153, Gunrock Enclave, Staff Road, Secunderabad 500 003; Barbara Ann Brennan's Hands of Light and Light Emerging are published by Bantam Books and are available at select bookstores in India