

# **Reiki for Recovery: Tapping into Universal Energy to Transform Addiction**

By Andrea Rae, B.S., RMP and Eileen Wurst, M.A., RMT

Addiction is something which plagues our society more and more. As life becomes complicated, we turn to alcohol, drugs, food, sex, love, gambling, over-working and television to numb our emotional and physical pain, and escape our confusion. Many have found that the use of Reiki as an adjunct to traditional therapies has been a useful way to softly work with the core issues that trigger addictive behaviors.

A common misconception within Western society is that life is meant to be happy all the time, but as human beings we experience a range of emotions whether that is grief, fear, anger, love, joy, sadness. In Buddhist literature, they talk of emotions being like weather. Sometimes we feel caught in a cloud of grief, desperate to escape the bad weather, but as hard as we try we cannot seem to escape it. It is in times like this that we turn to drugs, alcohol or food to give us a false high. Engaging in addictive behaviors to avoid our emotions becomes a habit, and we get stuck in a loop of avoidance and substance abuse.

When we are intent on resisting feeling our emotions, the emotional pain is often exacerbated. The act of avoiding can result in more suffering and pain, forcing us back into our loop of seeking the substance or activity of choice to avoid the growing intensity of our emotions. Over time this becomes a strong habitual behavior which becomes very difficult to break.

One way of looking at different levels of addiction is presented by Charlotte Davis Kasl in *Women, Sex and Addiction*. She makes reference to there being four levels: pattern, habit, compulsion and addiction. Many of us possess patterns and habits that we have developed to cope with life, and to manage our feelings, but that does not always mean we have an addiction. It is worth exploring our tendencies no matter where we fall on the continuum as a way to grow and become more aware.

Addictions can be highly destructive to our lives, but compulsions, habits or patterns can numb us to life leading to a robotic, mechanical experience of life. Emotions are not something to be scared of. We shy away from our emotions based on our conditioning, our judgments and our fear that we will not be loved if we show how we feel, but exploration of our emotions can actually enhance our life. In suppressing our grief, our anger, our fear, inadvertently we shut out joy, or we experience joy only with the feeling of fear and tension lurking in the background. Life is exhausting when we are expending energy on a constant basis to hold our feelings down.

Suppressing emotion drains our core energy reserves, and it adds stress to our body. Over time, we accumulate painful events in our life that we stash away and don't process. For many, there is a deep sense of grief and loneliness related to these unacknowledged parts. We have deserted parts of ourselves on some level. For example, for those who have experienced trauma as a child whether that be physical, sexual or emotional abuse, these

experiences remain locked in the cells of the body and no amount of denying makes the nagging irking feeling go away. In these situations, allowing ourselves to connect to the body feels awful, so we find a way to disassociate from our physical, emotional and spiritual self so we don't have to connect with the debris that remains from those traumas. We set ourselves up for life with a growing need to suppress our feelings. It becomes imperative that we do anything we can to hide ourselves behind our addictions so that no one discovers what is within. This is the vicious cycle of addiction and denial that we enter believing we have no choice. It is only by admitting that we have a problem that we can commit to dealing with the core issues that underlie our addiction.

The authors of this article, Andrea Rae, B.S., RMP and Eileen Wurst, M.A., RMT bring their combined experience of over 25 years in working in healthcare as an occupational therapist and social worker respectively. Both have had over ten years each in working with and teaching Reiki. Over the last 4 years, Eileen has developed The Reiki Training Program ([www.reikitrainingprogram.com](http://www.reikitrainingprogram.com)) in Seattle which is the only licensed vocational school of Usui Reiki in WA state. She offers 125 hours of training for those wishing to become Reiki practitioners and additional structured curriculum for those pursuing Reiki master certification. Over the last 14 years, Eileen has been working as a social worker in a variety of fields (geriatrics, mental health, domestic violence, career transition) and currently has a private practice which focuses on individuals in career and life (recovery and post-surgery) transition.

Andrea has her experience in.....over the last three years, she has become part of the Reiki Training Program as both a student and now facilitator of several programs: Reiki for Children and Reiki for Recovery.

In exploring addictive patterns during Reiki sessions, clients are encouraged to accept their feelings, and to be curious about how the emotion feels in their body. Clients are encouraged to allow the emotion to surface and be expressed. To express the emotion the client might feel the urge to cry, or make noises such as sighing or screaming. A system like Reiki views all emotion as "just energy", so rather than suppressing the expression of this emotion, a Reiki session helps to release of the emotion and the resistance to the emotion. No emotion is viewed as negative and no judgment is attached to any emotion. The Reiki energy makes the process of releasing emotions smoother.

### **Treatment Methods and Hand Positions**

It is important for an individual suffering from an addiction or compulsion to become aware of their patterns in times of stress as it is typical for stress to trigger addictions. Specific stress triggers may be: getting fired, starting a new job, divorce, moving house, family illness, and death. These triggers can make life more difficult to cope with and can push us into feeling the need for greater control, which ironically results in individuals using addictive substances and activities to suppress the feeling that life seems out of control. If the client learns how to give Reiki to themselves, they have at their disposal a technique they can use to self-soothe through such cycles to aid them back to balance.

Another effective tool dealing with addiction issues is using a method Eileen developed called Bodywork Counseling. It is a non directive method in which the client initially scans the body in their mind, identifying any areas in the body that are causing discomfort. They are then encouraged to examine the feeling or sensation more closely sharing anything that comes to them if they wish to (clients are not required to share insights). The practitioner continues to offer Reiki either moving through standard hand positions, or as guided by your intuition. The client is gently guided to notice any colors, sounds, textures and thoughts that arise during this exploration. They are always in control of the session and are supported in exploring the energies that arise in the body. For some, the session can become a journey with emotions being released at a deep level. Often profound insights can be revealed during these sessions.

Alternatively, you can offer Reiki as you would to any other client, allowing your intuition to guide you to the areas that need Reiki. We have noticed some patterns in our sessions, and the following is a sample of common hand positions used when working with a client with addiction problems.

### **Hand Positions**

- Head – Place hands either side of the head over the temples.
- Back of the head – Place either one or both hands under the head, above the occipital ridge.
- Neck and Forehead - slide one hand under the neck, below the occipital ridge, and the other hand can be held lightly across the forehead. You may need to stand to assume this hand position, or stand on the side of the person.
- Shoulders – slide hands under the shoulders from behind the person. (this is optional, but tension in the shoulders is common and gives people time to adjust and relax before offering Reiki to places where emotions may be more charged.
- Heart – Place one or two hands over the heart chakra being conscious of the emotions, and gently introducing touch. It may that initially you will feel drawn to start with you hands off the body, and as the energy relaxes you may be able to introduce touch.
- Upper abdomen – This is a powerful area. You will be connecting with the solar plexus, the power center, but you will also be connecting with the liver and the stomach. Again, be aware whether you may need to begin with hands off the body initially.
- Lower abdomen – Place one to two hands covering the lower abdomen. This corresponds to the 2<sup>nd</sup> chakra or the navel chakra
- Adrenals – The adrenals are positioned above the kidneys. Slide the hand under the body to cover the kidneys and adrenals. You will have to do one side at a time.
- Lower Back – Lower back is a site that can become depleted in times of stress. Slide the hand under the back. It could be treated in combination with the 2<sup>nd</sup> chakra.
- Knees – Remember that you can offer Reiki both over and under the knees. If you have time to do one knee at a time, place one hand under and one over the knee.

- Feet – Finishing the session at the feet is grounding for the client. Placing the hands over the soles of the feet will give Reiki to the acupuncture point Kidney 1 which is energizing and grounding.

These hand positions are similar to those outlined in the *The Official Reiki Handbook* as the recommended positions for clients with addictions.

### **Case Studies**

(Each study is based on several clients both Eileen Wurst, M.A., RMT and Andrea Rae, B.S., RMP have worked with. Names and certain details have been changed in order to protect the confidentiality of each case)

#### ***Case Study 1***

Reiki brings to light whatever emotions are being suppressed by the addiction. One client, Barbara, had used drugs like cocaine and ecstasy on a regular basis over a period of almost ten years to distance herself from the pain she felt of not being loved and cared for in her family of origin. She felt both her parents had emotionally abandoned her after the birth of her younger brother. When she was ten years old, Barbara was looked after by her maternal aunt for several years while her parents went through a difficult separation and eventually divorce.

Eileen remembers Barbara telling her that she felt different than the other kids in her small upper class private school growing up apart from her brother, who went to live with their grandmother and who went to the same school as her, yet, Barbara said she wouldn't have traded the difficulty of being in school for receiving the unconditional love her aunt was able to give her at that time. When she went back to live with her mother as a young teenager, she turned to ecstasy to make her feel 'so far away' from the pain and depression she felt her mother was in. Barbara told Eileen that she thought numbing herself out to the pain was the only way she could cope while she lived at home. When she left to go to college for a few years, which, she told Eileen she 'failed miserably at', her addiction to using drugs followed her. "It was the only coping skill I really had to deal with stress". The new and overwhelming experience of a large out-of-state university coupled with difficulty of the course material led her to use ecstasy again and then cocaine on a regular basis. She dropped out her sophomore year.

Barbara began what she called 'soul searching' at that time and traveled across the country tapping into the counterculture festival and concert scene. Her father sent her money to cover expenses. She felt at that time in her life she had found a 'home' on the road and stayed for several years. She used pot at this time until she happened to encounter Reiki and meditation being taught at an outdoor festival. The Reiki teacher had asked Barbara to be the 'demonstration client' while the teacher placed her hands over Barbara's head, neck and shoulders. Barbara noticed that for the next week she did not have as much of a need to use pot. She returned to the Reiki teacher there and asked to be taught level I. She learned to practice hand positions on herself, felt the energy itself had replaced something deep within her, like the love she had remembered feeling as a child when she lived with her aunt. She learned to practice hand positions on herself,

specifically being drawn to giving her head and solar plexus extra attention each day. After the month-long festival concluded, Barbara made her way to Seattle and found Eileen's Reiki circle. She wanted to learn more.

Over the next two years Eileen worked with her in master training. Barbara told Eileen she has found a method, Reiki, to keep herself in emotional balance. She no longer takes drugs to do so. She has returned to school part time at the community college here and seems to be focused on nursing as a career. Barbara wants to be in a profession where she can give back to others and hopes to use Reiki in her practice.

When the stressors of her life seem to make her feel askew, she sets up a session with Eileen to assist her in 'jump-starting the energy' to help her get back to center faster.

### ***Case Study 2***

Joanna was a twenty five year old girl who lived with constant anxiety and tension, disguised by a broad smile. She found herself drawn to Reiki, but she was not sure why. Joanna used alcohol, pot, cigarettes and food to suppress her emotions, particularly her anger and sadness, and her confusion. She had low confidence and a tendency to be highly self critical.

Initially, when Joanna learnt Reiki she found it difficult to receive, preferring to give. In receiving Reiki, her body flinched involuntarily. Although this eased over time, often she still felt agitated receiving Reiki even though she did enjoy it. Gradually she learnt to receive Reiki and to allow herself to express her emotions in the presence of her colleagues and Reiki practitioners. She began to feel some relief from this work releasing old patterns of thinking and she began to accept her emotions, although this wasn't always easy. Her addictive patterns would fluctuate, but she continued to work hard on herself, although she did have the feeling that there was something at the root of her problems that she hadn't uncovered yet.

After several years of counseling, Joanna did discover the truth. She uncovered a trauma that had occurred in her childhood. She had been sexually abused. Although she had suspected this, it was not something she had been aware of. It became clear that her trauma had been at the core relating to her low self esteem, her patterns of self blame, her feelings of being a bad person, and her addiction patterns using food, alcohol and drugs. As she worked through this trauma, she gained a clearer awareness of her emotions and began to recognize her patterns. When she was processing particularly difficult emotions, she had strong urges to drink and eat compulsively, and needed to be particularly careful. Rather than being self destructive, she began to choose options that were nurturing, energizing and empowering such as self Reiki, sports, walking, biking and meditation as a way to manage her feelings. Now Joanna uses self Reiki everyday, and regularly receives Reiki.

During Reiki sessions with Joanna, she often feels fear and her body shakes as she connects with her feelings. She needs a lot of reassurance and support, and is always encouraged to go at her own pace. Sessions with Joanna are usually intuitively led, but

common hand positions are the head, the heart, solar plexus, lower abdomen and the kidneys. At times when the fear is particularly present, she experiences a sharp feeling in the kidneys which in the Chinese Medicine relate to fear. She enjoys receiving Reiki over the kidneys and finds it very calming and reassuring.

### *Case Study 3*

Bruce had been a Reiki master for several years and met Eileen at a mutual friend's Reiki circle. As often occurs at such events, there was honest and open communication among participants. Bruce shared his experience in working with Reiki over the last fifteen years. He learned to use it on himself during his recovery from alcohol addiction. During the initial years of his recovery, he also learned how to play several percussion instruments (tabla, djembe, sakara). He had always had an interest in tribal music. He told Eileen that the repetitive beat of the drum coupled with using his own hand to conduct Reiki energy created a 'healing bubble' for him during those difficult years. Eileen, always having had an interest in the effect sound healing had on herself and clients invited Bruce to a Reiki circle she was forming to explore the experience of music, sound and Reiki. Some of the Reiki students and practitioners coming to the circle suffered from a range of addictions and compulsive behaviors.

One recent Reiki I student, Laura, was currently involved in a relationship outside her marriage that had developed into a 'love addiction'. The addiction was causing her to miss days from work and running her energy down. Laura had just started self-Reiki treatments. She shared with Eileen she felt the addiction was unhealthy and morally inappropriate, but didn't know how to end it.

Laura, and several other Reiki students came to that first sound healing circle. Bruce came with his variation of drums and brought another musician friend who played guitar. The musicians started off with a gentle melody of string and soft beat. Participants acting as conduits for the Universal flow rotated amongst other group members laying on several massage tables. After about 15-20 minutes the music ended and the members switched positions. Some participants had brought drums, rattles and singing bowls themselves, and as the next session began, added their own healing 'notes' to the background harmony of the musicians.

At the end of the evening, the group that had attended seem charged with light., Several days later, Laura phoned Eileen to tell her that she felt her body and mind had 'shifted' to a place that would not 'allow' her to continue the destructive addictive relationship. Laura was able to break it off and to tell her husband what had occurred. She told Eileen her husband was initially quite upset, but loved Laura very much and wanted to work through the issues with her. The couple had made arrangements to pursue counseling to assist with the situation.

Eileen made plans to coordinate a follow-up sound-Reiki circle for the next month. After attending the three hour event, several more participants with compulsions and other destructive habits reported to Eileen they seemed to be assisted in repatterning their own behaviors. Since that time (over 3 years ago), the Reiki Soundscape continues to be offered monthly, now at a yoga studio, to accommodate the groups that get as large as 25-30 members.

Eileen feels that the Reiki Soundscape circle is able to produce the effects it does by combining tactile vibrations from the instruments played by musicians with healing intentions. These vibrations then totally surround the participants. The human contact of hands-on-healing also reassures and nurtures each participant, allowing them to further relax into the sounds being generated. The introduction of the universal energy known as Reiki further stimulates the release and rebalancing of an individual's energy system. Eileen feels there is an ebb and flow between the sounds releasing and the Reiki restoring. Then it will switch, the sounds restoring, the Reiki releasing.

Participants are also directed to additional support strategies listed below.

### **Additional Support Strategies**

Support is necessary in times of high stress for anyone with addiction issues. Without additional supports, an addiction can strike quickly. The following suggestions are ideas that can form a supportive framework as part of your every day life. You should not wait for a crisis to hit to introduce these ideas into your life. If you have addiction issues it is important to use strategies to prevent a crisis from occurring.

***Counseling in conjunction with Reiki***-more practitioners are doing integrative work and find it helpful to address cognitive, behavioral solutions to addiction.

***Attending AA, NA and SA groups***-the validation and support experienced in such settings are often key tools towards recovery.

***Self Reiki*** is a great tool to use when emotions are charged. Common places to give yourself Reiki during these times are the heart, and the upper and lower abdomen which corresponds to three chakras centers – heart (fourth), solar plexus (third) and navel (second) chakra, but you should also follow your intuition if it directs you to an area other than these.

***SHK*** is the mental emotional symbol which means, “to create a new habit” and it is useful to incorporate into your self Reiki routine and sessions with your clients. Diane Ruth Swchewmaker outlined a process of using SHK to clear addictions in the magazine in Summer 2003. Specifically, she used this procedure to clear her own cigarette addiction. It would be valuable to refer to this procedure.

***Master Symbol*** – If you have completed Reiki III, then the Master Symbol, can be used when addictive urges are strong. It gives you a deep connection to the inner flow of Reiki beyond the emotional level.

***Reiki in the home*** – Surrounding yourself with Reiki gives you the feeling that you are in a cushion of Reiki. Using CKR, the power symbol, you can clear your home, your workspace and your car. If you are drinking or taking drugs, the residual energy will be present in the house, so it is useful to clear out this heavier energy in addition to giving yourself Reiki. You will notice a big difference in the way the house feels.

***Distance Reiki*** – You can also send distance Reiki to your addiction. to help you release your addiction. As an example, using the distance Reiki symbol, visualize yourself with the urge to drink, or eat, or go out to the local casino. Send Reiki to the situation and to strengthen this, identify an intention that will focus you on your commitment to release your addiction.

***Meditation*** will certainly be of benefit in working with the rapid thought processes that can be common for people with addictions. It is common to get into patterns of compulsive negative thinking, self berating and self hating habits. For some, meditation can help calm these thoughts and give you the space to let go of these habits. Connecting with earth energy is particularly useful in calming fear.

***Yoga*** is often referred to as a moving meditation, so if still meditation is not working, meditation on movement in yoga can be a useful tool. It connects you with the body, allowing you to connect with the physical rather than the mental, and often at the end of a yoga session you will feel more connected and centered. Regular practice as part of your routine will support you working towards being more connected with yourself. Another moving meditation would be Tai Chi.

***Connecting with Nature*** – Walking is a very calming, centering activity. Connecting with the energy of nature, the trees, the leaves, the flowers, the earth will connect you to your inner energy flow through the connection with the purity of the energy of nature. Thoughts become clearer, solutions to problems arise, and the inner commotion begins to settle down.

***Music*** – Playing or listening to music, be that tranquil healing music or rock and roll, connects us with our inner energy flow. It can be very freeing to listen to loud rock and roll which may tap into our inner teenager giving us a method of freeing that charged emotion. Playing music is a way of aligning with our core energy, and in the same way that meditation or yoga leaves us in a blissful place, music can take us their too. Toning is also powerful way of centering our energies.

***Sport*** – Sports are a way to connect with our bodies and a way to release pent up emotions. Physical activity will aid the flow of energy in the body. There are many sports which can act as an outlet for anger or frustration in a productive rather than a destructive way. It is a great stress reliever.

## **Conclusion**

The benefit of exploring and challenging our addiction is the profound shifts that can occur. Emotions that have been with us for eons can quickly rise to the surface; issues that we have been hidden from suddenly don't seem anywhere near as bad as we thought they were, and in our counseling we move through issues much more quickly than we imagined. Although at times we feel thrown back into those old patterns of feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, these times don't seem to last as long and don't seem to have the same intensity. As we face our fears and our emotions, we find that we can

live a different, more complete life. It becomes evident that there are many parts of life that we have been missing out on by numbing ourselves. Now we are able to make an informed decision to face both all parts of life. We begin to find hidden complexities in the emotion of grief, we discover an inner well of power that was hidden by our fear, and we discover the humor and fun that can be a part of our anger. Emotions are not unilateral. Getting to know our emotions and developing a relationship with our emotions allows us to live with them and hopefully avoid falling into the trap of addiction.

In essence the debris or the imprint of the past clouds the truth of who we really are. As we offer Reiki, we are working to clear some of this aside to allow the truth within to shine through and illuminate our patterns and addictions for what they really are. The truth is that under it all, we are perfect and the perceived imperfections are an illusion that that distracts us from the truth of who we really are. Our addictions, our issues, our problems don't disappear when we discover the truth, but their significance fades. Surrounding ourselves with Reiki and doing things that connect us with source energy makes life manageable and gives us a simple way of accessing our bliss. Reiki connects us with that part of ourselves that remembers joy and bliss and the beauty is it can be accessed any time

#### References

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