

The Reiki Symbols

- Ongoing Research

by

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The Four Original Reiki Symbols

The Reiki symbols (*shirushi* in Japanese) have been the source of great interest and much discussion over the years.

Sacred or Secret?

Takata-Sensei taught that the Reiki symbols were sacred and as such should be kept secret - not shown to the uninitiated. To this end, her students were required to memorize the symbols and were not permitted to keep written copies of them.

[Takata-Sensei believed that the symbols should be treated with respect – even the practice sheets used by students in her Reiki classes had to be disposed of respectfully, rather than simply crumpled up and dumped in a bin.]

While the four symbols used in Usui Shiki Ryoho and Usui Reiki Ryoho are still considered by many of us to be *Sacred* (or at least, of *sacred significance*), ever since two of the symbols (the SHK and the HSZSN) were first revealed in a Reiki book: 'The Challenge To Teach Reiki' by A.J. MacKenzie Clay, (published in 1992), the belief in the need to keep them secret is no longer generally considered relevant.

[I think it is also important to remember that (as will be discussed in the following pages) the four symbols/their names are not *exclusively* the 'property' of Reiki.]

Many people, on first hearing about Reiki, have jumped to the conclusion that knowledge of the four symbols will give them the 'power' to do Reiki.

But this is not the case.

To reveal the visual representations of the four symbols, or the Japanese words which form their names (and for that matter the Anglicised meanings of those Japanese words) is not to 'give away' their power - their 'secret'

The 'secret' of the four symbols is something which cannot be expressed in words or images, but can only *truly* be understood by experiencing the symbols once *properly initiated* into Reiki.

To be effective as 'keys' to Reiki, the symbols need to be 'psychically imprinted' on the student by a Reiki Teacher as part of the Initiation/attunement process.

For this reason, I have no problem in presenting and discussing the four Usui Reiki symbols here.

In the following pages you will find examples of the symbols, their *jumon* or mantras, and information concerning their significance and status within Reiki.

You will also find information concerning: the Buddhist significance of three of the symbols; links between some of the symbols and Japanese 'new religions'; various attempts to link the symbols to unrelated belief-systems; views as to how the symbols came to be incorporated into Reiki; and also the *kanji* and / or *katakana* written forms of their *jumon*, along with guides to their proper pronunciation, and actual meanings.

Bubbles of Light?

It is a common belief, amongst many *western* lineage Reiki practitioners, that Usui Sensei originally 'discovered' the four Reiki symbols in Buddhist texts - and that he re-experienced them (in 'bubbles of light') and received understanding of their true significance, in his visionary experience on Mt. Kurama.

However, in one of Takata-sensei's recorded talks, she tells the 'Story of Reiki'. In the recording, she clearly states that Usui-sensei discovered a *formula* for accessing healing in the Buddhist texts, there is *no* mention of him finding the Reiki symbols in the texts. She also states that on the last day of his meditative fast, Usui-sensei saw a vision of millions of multi-coloured bubbles; *then* he saw a great white light; and *then* he saw appearing before him: "what he had studied in the Sanscrit" in glowing, golden, Sanscrit letters.

In this telling of 'Story of Reiki', Takata-sensei makes no mention of the four Reiki symbols *per se* - in bubbles of light or otherwise. Rather, she states that Usui-sensei saw Sanscrit text - a vision of a *piece of text* he had read in a Sanscrit sutra.

Introduction of the symbols into Reiki

Recently, some sources have claimed that, initially, Usui Sensei did not use symbols in the Reiki system - that they were in fact something he added at a later date, out of the need to incorporate an effective focussing method to assist those students who were experiencing difficulty in feeling, and differentiating between, certain aspects of the Reiki 'energy'.

(In fact, the way that many people tell it, we might be forgiven for believing that one day Usui Sensei just plucked four symbols out of the air at random to use as the first 'Reiki add-ons' !)

However, in a discussion (in 2002) with a Reiki Master from Japan, we were talking about this issue of the introduction of the symbols, and the version of the story he shared, seems to put things in a slightly different perspective.

Ongoing research seems to continually reveal new information as to the history and nature of 'original' Reiki.

It has recently been suggested that originally (- rather than being a purely therapeutic modality,) Usui Sensei's system was essentially a spiritual-philosophical one (incorporating certain Buddhist and Shinto elements) - a system 'for the improvement of body and soul' - that is, a system primarily focussing on self-development, but one which *also* incorporated a self-healing element.

If this was indeed the case, then 'Reiki', as it came to be understood in the West (i.e. as essentially a purely therapeutic modality), would seem to be a natural 'outgrowth' from this original spiritual-philosophical system.

Now, according to the Reiki Master Jiro Kozuki, when it came to incorporating symbols into the therapeutic element of his teachings, it was not so much a case of Usui Sensei creating four *new* symbols – nor, for that matter, *importing* symbols from outside sources -but rather, selecting four symbols which were *already a feature of his spiritual-philosophical system*, and assigning them new significance as 'keys' (or as NLP terminology puts it: 'Resource Anchors') to assist focus of intent as part of the evolving 'therapeutic modality' aspect of the system.

Four symbols – no less, no more

Whether the symbols *were* a part of Reiki from the very outset, or were added some time later, one thing that we know for certain is that there were four symbols – *and only four*.

However, since the early 1980's, several Reiki practitioners have developed their own personalized 'brands' or styles of Reiki. As part of the development of these new styles, some people began altering the significance attached to one or more of the original symbols. Some started using modified versions *in place of* the original symbols (e.g. mirror images, etc), or even replaced one or more of the originals with a completely different symbol. Others began using modified versions *in conjunction with* the originals. Yet others, added symbols from various different spiritual/esoteric systems, and also added brand new, *channeled*, symbols from numerous diverse sources.

Unfortunately, in teaching their modified or 'new' Reiki styles to others, many of these would-be innovators neglected to explain where the version of a symbol (or for that matter, its significance/purpose) they were using/teaching differed from the original. And so, many of *their* students who in time went on to teach the particular style to students of their own, didn't even know that they were using and teaching altered (or for that matter, additional) symbols.

At the first meeting of the majority of Reiki masters (in Hawaii in April 1982), it seemed that Takata-Sensei had possibly taught slightly different versions of a couple of the symbols to different masters. However, these variations were in the main probably more to do with the different students' *memory* of the symbols as shown to them, and to the individual student's calligraphic/drawing skills, than to intentional alteration of the symbols on Takata-Sensei's part.

(As mentioned above, Takata-sensei's students were required to memorize the symbols and were not permitted to keep written copies of them)

The Symbols and their *Jumon*

Each of the four Reiki symbols has an accompanying Japanese mantra/phrase - frequently referred to as a *jumon* ('spell' or 'incantation'). In 'western' lineage Reiki this *jumon* is commonly used as the symbol's name.

There has been some debate over the precise meaning of the *jumon* accompanying each symbol.

As we will see, two of the Reiki symbols are actually the Japanese written form of the accompanying *jumon* – presented in *kanji* characters, and this helps with the translation of the meaning of these particular *jumon*, as, rather than simply representing the *sound* of a word, *kanji* are directly indicative of the *meaning* of the word.

However, when it comes to the other two symbols, arriving at the true meaning of the *jumon* has been a more complicated matter. These symbols are not *kanji* characters, and in the 'western' lineage of Reiki we had only been aware of the 'romanized' written form of their *jumon*.

We have to remember that, just as in English where (for example) the words 'rite', 'write' 'wright' and 'right' all have the same sound, yet have different spellings – and different meanings; so too in Japanese there are a great many words that sound the same, yet are written in different *kanji* characters - and have very different meanings.

When Mieko Mitsui took 'western' lineage Reiki to Japan in 1985 and apparently discovered that 'original' Japanese Reiki had never actually died out as had previously been thought, many people expected they would finally learn precisely which *kanji* were used to write the *jumon* associated with these two symbols - and therefore gain some understanding of the proper meaning of the *jumon*. But this was not to be the case.

From one prominent source, the Reiki community was to learn that apparently, in Japan, the symbols (rather conveniently, some might think) were not generally used any more.

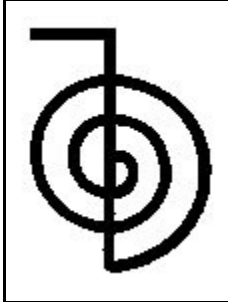
However, from other sources it has since been discovered that both the symbols and their *jumon* are indeed still used.

Yet it seems, the *jumon* - where actually presented in written form - are generally not written in *kanji* characters (which would provide a reasonably clear indication of their meaning), but rather in *katakana** - one of *two* Japanese phonetic syllabaries (used in addition to *kanji*), which merely record the *sounds* rather than the *meaning* of the words.

[*NOTE: some people have commented how they find it odd that the *jumon* are written in *katakana*. The other syllabary - called *hiragana* - is used to provide suffixes and prefixes to *kanji* characters, and to write purely Japanese words, while *katakana* is used on official documents and to write words of foreign origin. The Reiki *jumon* it seems, are considered by many to come under this latter category - as Reiki only became popular in Japan after being re-introduced from the West, it is considered by many to be a 'foreign import'!]

The Symbols

Symbol 1: The 'Power' symbol



[NOTE: some styles of Reiki use either a complete 'mirror-image' version of this symbol, or a version with the top line running from the *right* to the centre, but with the spiral as depicted here. Symbol 1 as shown here - drawn from top left to right, then the vertical line down, and then an anti-clockwise spiral inwards to the centre - is the version used by Takata Sensei and by Usui-Sensei himself.]

The *jumon* accompanying Symbol 1 is: "Choku Rei"

Pronunciation:

[Japanese, like any other language, has many dialects, with slightly different ways of pronouncing the various word-sounds, so this is presented as a *rough guide* only]

Choku:

The U in choku is almost mute. (In Japanese, 'U' is only fully vocalized when it is the initial syllable)

Choku is pronounced somewhere between 'Choke' and 'Shoke' - but with a very slight pause in the middle:

'CHO-KE'

Rei:

There is no true 'r' sound in Japanese. On occasion, the letter 'l' has also been used to represent the actual Japanese sound represented here by the letter 'r'.

For example, the word we now write as 'Reiki', Takata-sensei wrote as 'Leiki'; however, neither is quite right (there just isn't an accurate way of representing the Japanese word-sound using the letters of the English alphabet)

The actual sound identified by 'r' in transliteration is pronounced with the tip of the tongue and is a sort of a blending of 'r' & 'l'.

Rei is pronounced as a cross between 'Ray' & 'Lay' - but with the slightest imaginable 'echoing' of the Y:

RAY-y

When written in *katakana*, choku rei looks like this:

チヨクレイ

When written in one particular set of *kanji*:

勅令

Chokurei refers to an Imperial Edict, Proclamation or Order ("by command of the Emperor").

Yet, written in a different set of *kanji*:

直靈

it can be translated as 'direct spirit(s)', or more conceptually as something like: 'In the presence of the spirit(s) [i.e: *kami*]'.

[This is one reason some people consider the symbol to be of Shinto origin.]
It has, on a number of occasions, been suggested that Symbol 1 represents a coiled snake with its head raised.

On hearing this, some people have sought to "jump cultures" and attempt to link Symbol 1 to the 'kundalini serpent' of Indian tradition.

However, according to some theories, associated with *honji suijaku* (a doctrine of Shinto-Buddhist syncretism), the real forms of *kami* are actually snakes...

Takata-Sensei translated Choku Rei as 'put the [spiritual] power here', and there is also a possibility (I stress the word 'possibility') that the symbol is a calligraphic stylization of the kanji character *choku* itself:

直

- which has many meanings, including: direct; in person; at once; & near by...

In my researches, I have also come across reference to the term *choku rei* in the writings of Masahisa Goi, founder of the religious group *Byakkō Shinkōkai*. For example, in 'The Future of Mankind', Goi writes:

"In the beginning, Great God took His body, His light, and divided it into various rays of light. He then functioned 7 rays of light to operate *as the power source* of human beings. These 7 rays of origin, which I call *chokurei* (direct spirits from God*), are the image of God working in this world of mankind..."

*NOTE: Chokurei, as used by Masahisa, translates literally as 'direct spirit(s)' - the 'from god' part is simply implied.

Basic Uses of Symbol 1:

Symbol 1 can be used to increase the power/flow of Reiki, or to assist in focussing Reiki more intensely at a given location, or to a specific intent.

The symbol can be used as an 'energy cleansing' / 'energy blessing' for food, drink, or possessions; and may be employed as a seal or amulet of protection.

Some practitioners use Symbol 1 to cleanse a room of negative atmospheres; or to 'seal' a treatment.

And while in 'western' forms of Reiki, the symbol may be used in conjunction with one or more of the other symbols, (with the intent of increase their potency) in 'Japanese' lineages, it is primarily utilized in a stand-alone sense.

A 'secret, Shinto form' of the *jumon* choku rei?

Recently, there have been rumours among some sections of the Reiki Community about - as I have heard it called - a 'secret, Shinto form' of the *jumon* choku rei.

This 'secret' form, it transpires, is the phrase: *nao hi*.

Now, while the phrases choku rei and *nao hi* do indeed have the same meaning:

'direct spirit'

it is somewhat of an exaggeration to portray *nao hi* as a secret, Shinto *jumon*.

It is important to be aware that, as *kanji* are of Chinese origin, each character has two forms of pronunciation or 'reading': the *on yomi* or Chinese-derived reading, and the *kun yomi* or native Japanese reading.

For example: the *kanji* for 'mountain', in its *on yomi* reading is: *san*, but the native *kun yomi* reading is: *yama*. (Both are in common usage in Japan)

In exactly the same way, rather than being a 'secret' form of the word *choku*, the word *nao* is simply a different 'reading' or way of pronouncing the *kanji* character:

直

Choku is an *on yomi* (Chinese derived) reading, and *nao* is simply a *kun yomi* (native Japanese) reading.

[However, to my knowledge, *hi* is not a *kun yomi* counterpart to *rei* - the *on yomi* reading of the second *kanji* in the phrase choku rei:

霊

But while *nao hi* may not be a secret Shinto *jumon*, it *is* the term used to describe an important concept in the philosophy of the Japanese religious group or 'new religion' known as Omoto.

[It is claimed by some that Usui Sensei had connections with the Omoto group (led by Nao Deguchi and her son-in-law Onisaboro Deguchi) and that he may have been influenced by Omoto philosophy]

The Meaning of *Nao Hi*

So, just what is *nao hi* - this 'direct spirit' of Omoto belief (or, as it is sometimes also rendered: 'pure spirit')?

In an interview about Omoto belief in 1997, Yasuaki Deguchi (d. June 18, 2002) - a grandson of Onisaboro Deguchi had this to say about *nao hi*:

"Human spirituality is comprised of one spirit and four souls. The one spirit is that which we refer to as *naohi* (lit. direct spirit). *Naohi* may be understood as the simplest, purest, innermost aspect of the human spirit, embodying supreme good and ultimate beauty."

For further insight into the nature of *nao hi*, I have selected several quotes from a four-part work by Onisaboro Deguchi, entitled 'Divine Signposts':

"God endows human beings with *naohi* and thereby He gives the human soul limitless power. Thus does the body and soul of those in whom *naohi* functions fully shine with a beautiful light."

"The power which stirs and activates the soul failing through tiredness and distress is *naohi*."

"That which is able to save your body and soul is *naohi* given by God."

"True wisdom is that which one does not acquire from learning, but that which God gives, that is, the light of *naohi*."

"May all of you value *naohi* most highly; do not wander in darkness, but turn yourselves to light and follow the path."

"When in your body there dwells *naohi*, though you may be weak, you need not shrink with fear even before the strongest enemy."

"If you are favoured with *naohi*, even if you have lost the way in the dark you can find the light and true path."

"If you are favoured with *naohi*, your prayer to God becomes certain and true; happiness can be yours, because your heart conforms to God's heart."

So, could the Omoto concept of *nao hi*: "the power which stirs and activates the soul failing through tiredness and distress..." have been a contributing influence in Usui Sensei's choice of the *jumon* choku rei to accompany the 'power' symbol?

I feel that this is indeed a possibility. It certainly merits further research.

Symbol 2: The 'Mental-Emotional Healing' symbol



A *probable* source of this symbol is frequently seen in Buddhist temples.

This source is the written character 'Kiriku' (pronounced somewhere between: *k'rik* and *k'lik*) - one of many *shuji* or 'seed' characters used by Mikkyo Buddhists as meditative foci.

'Kiriku' is the Japanese rendition of the name of a particular character from the 'Siddham' form of the Sanscrit script. In Sanscrit, this character is called 'Hrih'.

Beyond its meditative use, the sacred Siddham (or 'Shittan') script (brought to Japan in the 9thC) is employed by Mikkyo Buddhists exclusively for writing mantras, sutras and magico-religious Tantric formulas.

Two versions of the Kiriku 'seed' symbol are shown here:



- the 'formal' version on the left and an example of a stylized version of the same character on the right.

Kiriku is the 'spiritual emblem' of both the Butsu (Buddha) Amida and the Bosatsu (Bodhisattva) Senju Kannon (or Kanzeon).

Yet, while the outward form of 'symbol 2' may indeed be *derived* from the *shuji* Kiriku, we should not fall into the trap of assuming that – in terms of its Reiki usage - 'symbol 2' must therefore have *the same significance/association* as Kiriku...

The *jumon* accompanying Symbol 2 is: "sei he ki" (or "sei heiki")

Pronunciation:

Sei: - like 'say' - but with the slightest imaginable 'echoing' of the Y:
SAY-y

Heiki:
HAY-y KEE

The *jumon* for Symbol 2 has been written in *katakana* both as sei he ki:

セイヘキ

and as sei heiki:

セイヘイキ

As to possible kanji forms of the *jumon*, (and therefore implied meaning) it would seem that we must rely on some 'educated' speculation...

When written as:

性癖

Seiheki refers to disposition; inclination; characteristic; idiosyncrasy.

However, as stated, this *jumon* has also been given as sei heiki.

Sei heiki is, I feel, quite apt, as, written in the following *kanji*:

情平気

it can refer to emotional calmness or unconcern. (*sei* here implies: emotion; feelings; passion. *heiki* = calmness; composure; unconcern.)

When written as:

聖平気

Sei implies something Spiritual, Holy or Sacred. Again, *heiki* = calmness; composure; unconcern - thus implying: 'Spiritual Composure' - the perfect antidote for mental-emotional dis-order

Basic Uses of Symbol 2:

Symbol 2 is employed in the treating of mental/emotional issues, including anxiety, stress, nervousness, fear, depression, etc; and in the treating of addictions. It can also be used to help with the release of 'wound memories' [or 'emotional body armour']

Some practitioners use the symbol to help improve memory-recall; and it can be employed as a tool for de-programming inappropriate responses to given events / situations, etc, as well as in the programming of positive habits and responses.

Symbol 3: The 'Distant' symbol



Symbol 3 is technically not a 'symbol' *per se*, but rather is a stylized combination of five *kanji* characters.

In the case of Symbol 3, the 'symbol' itself is actually the *jumon*: "Hon Sha Ze Sho Nen", written in *kanji* characters.

Pronunciation:

Hon: - rhymes with 'John'

Sha: - 'a' as in 'father' - SHAH (or even dJAH)

Ze: - the 'e' is vocalized just like the 'e' in 'bed' or 'pen'
ZEH

Shô: - the 'o' in Sho is actually a 'long-vowel' (the 'o' has a 'macron' symbol over it) somewhere between: SHOW and SHOU (SHEW)

Nen: - like 'pen'

Over the years there have been several suggested translations of the *jumon*: "Hon Sha Ze Sho Nen" - including several very misleading ones. For example, it is frequently said that "Hon Sha Ze Sho Nen" translates as "no past, no present, no future".

However, probably one of the clearest translations of "Hon Sha Ze Sho Nen" is actually:

"Correct Thought (/Correct Mindfulness) is the essence of being"

Just as calligraphers in the West - when writing a phrase in the Roman Alphabet - will frequently embellish their artwork with flourishes and overlaps, and often combine letters or allow them to run into one-another, this is also the case with Japanese *kanji* calligraphy.

There are various calligraphic renditions of Symbol 3 - all looking slightly different depending on the 'brush style' of the individual 'drawing' it.

In the example shown here, not only are there overlaps, but also certain strokes which form part of the individual *kanji* have been omitted.

As *kanji* are of Chinese origin, each character has two forms of pronunciation or 'reading': the *on yomi* or Chinese derived reading, and the *kun yomi* or native Japanese reading - e.g: the word 'mountain' in its *on yomi* is: *san*, but the native *kun yomi* reading is: *yama*. (Both are in common usage in Japan)

There are many thousands of *kanji* characters - some highly obscure & only very rarely used; however, the five *kanji* whose stylized interlinking forms the HSZSN, are to be found amongst the "Jooyoo Kanji" - that is, characters specified by the Japanese Government as approved for common use. In fact, they all come under the category of *kanji* expected to be familiar to all Fourth Grade Students.

The original five *kanji* are given below with their *on yomi* and *kun yomi*, and their basic meanings (however the emphasis is on the word 'basic' - the meaning of a *kanji* when in combination with others can be somewhat different from the meaning of the *kanji* in isolation.)

Interpretation:	<i>kun yomi</i>	<i>on yomi</i>	<i>kanji</i>
root, source, origin, essence, basis, counter for long things, book, present, main, true, real	moto, mato	HON	本
someone, person	mono	SHA	者
just so, this, right, just, proper	kore	shi, ZE	是
correct, justice, certainly, exactly, righteous	tada.shii, tada.su, masa(.ni), oo, kuni, ma, tadashi masashi	sei, SHÔ (shou	正
mindfulness, wish, sense, idea, thought, feeling, desire, attention, concern	***	NEN	念

Basic Uses of Symbol 3:

As the designation: the 'distant' symbol suggests, Symbol 3 is used to send Reiki at a distance - be it to people or other animals, places, events, situations; or even across the 'great illusion' that is time itself.

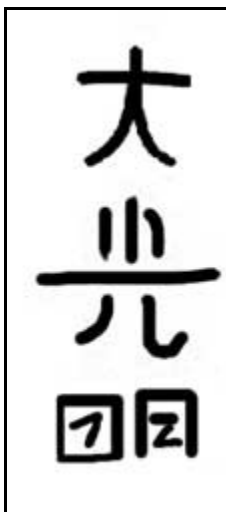
With the aid of this symbol, Reiki can be 'sent' to interact beneficially with issues or situations long since past, or alternatively, ones as yet not having manifested themselves.

Some practitioners utilize the symbol when they need to 'connect' (metaphorically speaking) with people.

The distant symbol may also be used as a means of assisting interaction with deity, spirits of place, or ancestral spirits (or as some prefer to phrase it: ancestral energy-patterns)

In *some* Japanese forms of Reiki, Symbol 3 is seen as representing the transcendent 'oneness' within the practitioner, and the realization that there is no separation between the two people sharing the phenomenon of giving-receiving Reiki. [In yet other Japanese styles - Hekikuu Reiki for example - Hon Sha Ze Sho Nen is taught neither as a 'distant' symbol, nor as a symbol of 'oneness' but rather as one pertaining to mindfulness and the mental faculties in general.]

Symbol 4: The 'Master' symbol



Symbol 4 is another example of a 'symbol' that is not a symbol.

In the case of Symbol 4, the 'symbol' itself is actually the *jumon*: "dai kô myô ", written in *kanji* characters.

Pronunciation:

Dai: - the 'ai' is vocalized just like the 'i' in 'five'
DIE

Kô: - a 'long-vowel'
somewhere between: KOE and KOU

Myô: - another 'long-vowel'
somewhere between: M'YOW and M'YOU (M'YEW)

The word *dai* means 'Great' and *kô myô*, while translating as 'Bright Light', alludes to 'Enlightened Nature' or the Radiance of a numinous being or deity.

Again, there are various calligraphic renditions of Symbol 4 - all looking slightly different depending on the 'brush style' of the individual 'drawing' it.

As with Symbol 3, the *kanji* for Symbol 4 are to be found amongst the "Jooyoo Kanji" - characters specified by the Japanese Government as approved for common use, e.g: in textbooks and official documents.

In fact, they all come under the category of *kanji* expected to be familiar to all Second Grade Students.

The original three *kanji* are given below with their *on yomi* and *kun yomi*, and their basic meanings

Interpretation	<i>kun yomi</i>	<i>on yomi</i>	<i>kanji</i>
large, big, great	oo.kii,oo.ini, ufu, o, ou, ta, takashi, tomo, hajime, hiro, hiroshi, masa, masaru, moto, wa	tai, DAI	大
ray, light, shine	hika.ru, hikari, aki, akira, koo, teru, hiko, mi, mitsu	KŌ (Kou)	光
clear, open, bright, radiance	a.kari, aka.rui, aka.rumu, aka.ramu, aki.raka, a.keru, -a.ke, a.ku, a.kuru, a.kasu, akira, ake, asu, kira, ke, saya, sayaka, toshi, haru, mi, me	mei, min, MYŌ (Myou)	明

Basic Uses of Symbol 4:

The primary use of Symbol 4 is, for many practitioners, the passing of Reiki attunements to others. Symbol 4 may also be employed as a meditative focus (as in deed may any of the other three symbols)

As the 'Master' symbol it is the very encapsulation of the Reiki phenomenon itself. To practitioners of a great many Reiki styles, Symbol 4 represents the combined energies of the previous three symbols, though at a more subtle level.

The significance of three of the Reiki Symbols from a Buddhist perspective

[NOTE: It must be clearly understood that this section presents a *Buddhist interpretation* of three symbols which we *also* know as the Reiki symbols SHK, HSZSN and DKM. It is *not* the intention to imply that these symbols - when used in the context of the Reiki system - have quite the same significance as they do in a Buddhist sense]

The 'Distant' symbol:

The HSZSN *jumon* [or: *Nen Shingon** as it is sometimes called] is essentially a call to 'Mindfulness' - it reminds us of the 7th step in the Noble 8-Fold Path of Buddhism.

As mentioned above, while there have, over the years, been several suggested translations of HSZSN - including several very misleading ones - probably one of the clearest translations is:

"Correct Thought (Mindfulness) is the essence of being".

* NOTE: 'Nen Shingon' translates as 'Mindfulness Mantra'

The term: 'Shingon' translates as 'True Word' - in this context meaning 'mantra', and not signifying the Shingon sect of Buddhism. The term 'Nen' refers to 'mindfulness' (- 'Sho-nen' refers to 'correct thought').

The 'Mental-Emotional Healing' symbol:

SHK ('Spiritual Composure') is almost certainly a stylized form of the Sanscrit *siddham*-script character known in Japan as *kiriku* (pronounced: *k'rik* or *k'lik*).

Kiriku is the sacred sign or emblem of both Senju Kannon Bosatsu (a thousand-armed form of the Bodhisatva Kannon or 'Kazeon') and Amida Butsu - the Buddha Amida - (or Amida Nyorai as he is called in Mikkyo Buddhist traditions), and is regarded as itself possessing the divine grace of both of these Buddhist Deities.

It is said that Senju Kanzeon Bosatsu watches over those suffering from a distressed Heart-Mind and lends his hand at the time of their troubles...

Amida - Buddha of Infinite Light & Life - is widely worshipped in various schools of Japanese Buddhism, including Tendai. He is the main deity in Jodo (Pure Land) Buddhism; and also in Jodo Shin (True Pure Land) Buddhism which holds that Spiritual Peace of Mind and salvation are to be achieved by relying on his power.

Kiriku is essentially perceived as a single-character depiction of the *nembutsu*: the sacred mantra of Amida: "Namu Amida Butsu", and as such invokes the merit associated with the *fukushu* or recital/repetition of that mantra, thus bringing Spiritual Peace of Mind ('Spiritual Composure') to the individual reciting the mantra, or to any other being to whom the reciter chooses to 'transfer' this merit.

[NOTE: In Shingon Buddhism, the mantra: "On Amirita Teizei Kara Un" is favoured in place of the *nembutsu*.]

The 'Master' symbol:

The interesting thing about DKM from a Buddhist point of view, I feel, is that the real importance lies in the meaning of the 'Ko Myo' *kanji*-pair

DKM: the 'Great Bright Light' can perhaps be better understood as the 'Great Komyo'

The term Komyo is something of great significance in Japanese Buddhism.

In a Buddhist sense, *Komyo* signifies 'Enlightened Nature' or 'the Radiant Light of Wisdom' - the Radiance of a Deity - not one specific Deity, but any expression of deity - be it in the form of a Buddha, Bodhisattva, 'Vidyaraja', etc. (- even a Shinto *kami* for that matter).

DKM can be seen as the manifest expression of the Light of Wisdom: the means by which illumination "dawns on us."

Komyo appears again and again in Buddhist thought, for example, we have:

the *Gobukonkomyokyo* - the Sutra of Golden (en)Light(enment)

Komyohensho - another name for Dainichi Nyorai (central Buddha of the Shingon sect)

Komyo Bosatsu - Japanese name for the Bodhisattva Jaliniprabha

(*Komyo Bosatsu* is also sometimes referred to simply as *Dai-komyo*)

Komyoshinden - the 'Palace of the Luminous Mind'

Komyoshingon - the '(en)Light(enment) Mantra'; etc.etc.

[Actually, DKM is also *another name* for the *Komyoshingon* - a very important (and powerful) mantra]

The complete phrase 'dai ko myo' also appears as part of a sacred 'nine-syllable' mantra dating from before the 8thC:

"Shiken Haramitsu Daikomyo"

- which conceptually translates as: "The Wisdom of the Four Hearts* leads us to Enlightenment"

* The Four Hearts (lit: Four Perspectives):

The Merciful Heart expresses love for everything, the Sincere Heart follows what is right, the Attuned Heart follows the natural order of things, and the Dedicated Heart holds to the chosen pursuit.

It also occurs in the name: "Daikomyo-o" - 'Great Shining Bright King'.

Daikomyo-o is one of the *daison myo-o* (great and venerable kings of magic knowledge) - compassionate yet wrathful deities who protect humans against evil influences, and who possess the knowledge and force contained in mantras.

In one respect, just as the *siddham* character *kiriku* is regarded as itself possessing the divine grace of the Buddha it represents, so too in an esoteric sense, the three-kanji phrase 'Dai ko myo' may be seen to directly represent the mystical experience of Komyo [the 'Bright Light' or 'Enlightened Nature': the Radiance of a given Deity], and as such,

may be employed by one who has *achieved* that 'enlightenment,' as a means of passing on (- to a lesser degree -) *the effects* of that experience to others.

[On a lighter note, I seem to recall that a few years back, the phrase 'dai ko myo' was also used in a Japanese advert for a powerful flashlight!!]

The Symbols and Unsubstantiated Associations

As we have seen, from the early 1980's onwards, a number of Reiki practitioners have created their own 'brands' of Reiki. Some of these people created modified versions of the original symbols, or even replaced one or more of the originals with a completely different symbol. Others use modified versions *in conjunction with* the originals or have added symbols from various different spiritual/esoteric systems, and also added brand new, *channeled*, symbols.

And, just as they had done with the actual visual *symbols* themselves, some of the creators of these new 'brands' of Reiki have also altered, added to, or even replaced the *meaning and association* – the core purpose, function and significance - of the original symbols, to suit their own personal beliefs.

It must be said that, in some instances, change to the actual significance of the symbols was due to little more than over-enthusiastic 'clutching at straws' in what was otherwise probably a genuine attempt to uncover *possible* original symbol-associations that, it was believed, had somehow been 'misplaced' in the transmission of the system down through the 'Reiki Generations' from Usui-sensei's day.

The Four Elements

For example, some people decided that the four symbols must be linked to the Four Elements: CKR to Earth, SHK to Water, HSZSN to Fire, DKM to Air. (However, some, who had subscribed to the Four Symbols/Elements association, on later discovering that the concept of the *Four* Elements is actually a *western* concept and that in Japanese esoteric thought there are *Five* Elements, rather than admitting that the association was therefore somewhat flawed, decided that originally there must have been a *fifth* symbol, and set off on a quest to discover this 'long lost' Reiki symbol!)

Heaven and Earth

Others – influenced no doubt by Taoist yin-yang theory - decided that CKR must represent the 'Earthly' energy, and SHK the 'Heavenly' or spiritual energy. (As to where the other two symbols come in, well this was and is usually glossed over.)

'Re-Buddhafied'

Yet others, focussing on the belief that Usui-sensei was a Tendai Buddhist*, decided to attempt to, as it were, 're-Buddha-fy' the significance of the four symbols.

*(Even though there is no more 'hard' evidence to prove Usui-sensei was Tendai than there is to prove he was a Christian - as was previously believed)

As we have seen, it is probable that the SHK symbol was originally *derived* from the *shuji* (Siddham character) Kiriku – which in Buddhist belief is associated with both Amida Butsu and Senju Kannon (Kanzeon) Bosatsu.

Following on with this line of thought so it seems, some in the ‘pro-Tendai camp’ decided that *each* of the Reiki symbols must represent a particular Buddhist Deity, and therefore also represent the symbolic significance *of* that particular deity.

Yet, as mentioned above, while the three symbols we know as the Reiki symbols SHK, HSZSN and DKM are *also* seen to have certain significance within Buddhism, this *does not* mean that these symbols - when used in the context of the Reiki system - have the *same* significance as they do in their Buddhist usage.

Nonetheless, these pro-Tendai Reiki folk promptly proceeded to assign a Buddhist deity to each of the Reiki symbols.

As Buddhas (Butsu) ‘out-rank’ Bodhisattvas (Bosatsu), Amida won out over Senju Kannon and was assigned to the Reiki symbol believed to have been derived from their joint *shuji* symbol, i.e. the SHK. Some even went as far as to change the name of the symbol to: *Muryouju*, others to: *Mugen Muryouju* [*Muryouju* is the Japanese name for Amida in his manifestation as ‘Buddha of Infinite Life’]

But as the male deity Senju Kannon is a very popular figure in Japanese Buddhism, it was presumably decided that he could not be left out, so Senju Kannon Bosatsu was assigned to HSZSN. Though, what connection there may be between the significance of HSZSN *in its Reiki usage* and this particular Bosatsu, is unclear. The same goes for the supposed connection between the CKR symbol and the Buddhist deity assigned to it: the Bosatsu (Dai)Seishi.

Finally, the pro-Tendai Reiki folk chose to assign the Butsu Dainichi (or Dainichi Nyorai as he is known in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism) to the DKM symbol.

[Perhaps it should also be noted that Dainichi is actually the central Buddha of the *Shingon* school of Buddhism]

However, there were yet others who, in a *similar* attempt to link the symbols to specific Buddhist deities, decided (for whatever vague reason) that the Bodhisatva Monju should be assigned to SHK, the Buddha Ashuku to HSZSN, and Amida to DKM. Finally, they too opted to assign Dai Seichi to the CKR.

So, we have those who have attempted to overlay the Reiki symbols with (conflicting) Buddhist associations, others who have sought to clothe the symbols in western esoteric Four Elements associations, and yet others seeking to associate the symbols with Taoist concept of the energies of Heaven & Earth.

Kurama Kokyo

Yet others still, have sought to read into the Reiki symbols, associations with the beliefs of the Kurama Kokyo sect – an independent ‘new religion’ with strong Buddhist ties.

The primary reason for attempting to create this association seems to be due to the fact that the temple complex on Mount Kurama (where, of course, Usui-sensei experienced the 'Reiki Phenomenon') is the *headquarters* of the Kurama Kokyo sect.

Kurama Kokyo worships a Supreme Deity known as Sonten. Viewed as the source of all creation, Sonten, 'the universal soul', is perceived as a triune deity, expressing in the world as the three spiritual qualities of Power, Love and Light.

In Kurama Kokyo belief, these three qualities are personified in the form of three deities, since ancient times closely associated with Mount Kurama. The quality of Power, seen to correspond to the Earth, is embodied by the Shinto deity Maoson (or Gohomaoson). The quality of Love, seen to correspond to the Moon, is embodied by the now familiar Buddhist deity Senju Kannon. The quality of Light, seen to correspond to the Sun, is embodied by the Buddhist deity Bishamon-ten.

The Kurama Kokyo sect also makes use of the *shuji* symbols associated with each of these three deities to represent the spiritual qualities of Power, Love and Light - the three individual aspects of Sonten's nature.

On learning this, some Reiki practitioners, it seems, leapt to the conclusion that, as Usui Sensei had experienced the Reiki Phenomenon on Mount Kurama, which is the headquarters of the Kurama Kokyo sect, then the *shuji* used by the sect to represent Power, Love and Light must surely be the source of the first three of Usui-sensei's Reiki Symbols; especially seeing that Senju Kannon's kiriku was amongst the three.

Thus it was not long before the 'Power of Sonten', the 'Love of Sonten', and the 'Light of Sonten' - with their correspondences to Earth, Moon and Sun - were being equated with CKR, SHK, and HSZSN. Also, the *shuji* representing the 'Power of Sonten' and the 'Light of Sonten' were being hailed (though as it transpired, without foundation) as probable original forms of the CKR and HSZSN symbols respectively. (The *shuji* representing the 'Love of Sonten' i.e. kiriku, of course already being more widely accepted as the probable source of SHK).

To complete the symbol set, the unity that is Sonten himself was equated with the DKM.

However there was one slight flaw in attempting to associate the qualities of the Kurama Kokyo's Sonten deity with the Reiki symbols. Although the temple complex on Mount Kurama is *currently* the headquarters of the Kurama Kokyo, the sect and its Sonten doctrine did not even exist during Usui-sensei's lifetime. In fact, it did not come into being until nearly a quarter of a century *after* Usui-sensei's death.

The Choku Rei Trail - Interlinking Threads...

(Examples of the use of the terms 'Choku Rei', 'Dai Ko Myo' and 'Reiki' in Japanese 'New Religions')

As we have seen, the *jumon* for the first Reiki symbol - chokurei - when written in one particular set of *kanji* can be translated as 'direct spirit(s)', or 'spirit direct'.

Takata-Sensei translated choku rei as 'put the [spiritual] power here', and there is also a possibility that the symbol is a calligraphic stylization of the *kanji* character *choku* itself - which has many meanings, including: direct; in person; at once; & near by.

Masahisa Goi

In my researches, I had discovered reference to the term choku rei in the writings of Masahisa Goi, founder of the religious group *Byakkō Shinkōkai*.

Goi states: "In the beginning, Great God took His body, His light, and divided it into various rays of light. He then functioned 7 rays of light to operate as *the power source* of human beings. These 7 rays of origin, which I call *chokurei* (direct spirits from God), are the image of God working in this world of mankind..."

As this was the first instance of the use of the term chokurei in any spiritual sense that I had discovered outside of Reiki, obviously I decided to do some further research into Goi and his group. Could it be that he had been a contemporary of Usui-sensei? Or possibly even a student?

However, as it transpired, Masahisa Goi was only ten years old when Usui-Sensei died; and *Byakkō Shinkōkai* had not been formed until 1955. But could there yet still be some connection with Usui-Sensei and Reiki?

It seems that Goi, who had been born in Tokyo, had been sickly from birth. By his twenties, he had completely given up on orthodox 'western' medicine and turned to spiritual practices as a source of therapeutic benefit. Unfortunately I have as yet not uncovered anything to suggest that Reiki was *specifically* amongst the practices he encountered at this time.

Later, Goi began studying - and was strongly influenced by - the writings of Mokichi Okada. In time, having been cured through Okada's spiritual healing practices, Goi began widening his contacts amongst spiritual and religious practitioners of the time, and actively began promoting his own theories and practices of healing, eventually leading to the foundation of the above-mentioned *Byakkō Shinkōkai*.

While I could not discover any clear, *direct* connection between Masahisa Goi and Reiki, what was becoming clear from my research was that there was a series of complex interlinking threads connecting the many and various modern-day Japanese spiritual organizations, healing groups and 'new religions'

The 'Scroll of Light'

Mokichi Okada, through who's practices Masahisa Goi had been restored to health, was the founder of the religious group *Sekai Kyusei Kyo* (Church of World Messianity) (later also known as *Shumei*) - and the originator of the healing practice called *Johrei* (which some people have sought to link, whether directly or indirectly, to Reiki).

In Okada's *Shumei* religion, the central focal point for prayer is something referred to as the 'Scroll of Light'. Seen as a direct connection to Deity, the scroll is believed to promote peace, protection, balance, and righteousness.

There are a couple of versions of the 'Scroll of Light', and one or other version hangs in every *Shumei* 'church'. The first version bears three *kanji* characters (signifying the 'Great Holy Light of Compassion'), the other version has the same three *kanji*, plus two additional *kanji* (signifying 'True Deity').

On both versions of the 'Scroll of Light' - this focal point for prayer, this direct connection to Deity – the 'Great Holy Light of Compassion' is represented by the *kanji* characters: Dai Ko Myo.

Omoto Kyo

Shumei founder Mokichi Okada had been a member of one of Japan's seminal modern-day Spiritual Groups - the *Omoto Kyo* - which had been founded in the early 1800's by a visionary named Nao Deguchi. Over time Nao, then later, her son-in-law Onisaboro Deguchi, evolved the *Omoto Kyo* belief system (from diverse elements originating within Folk Shinto, Buddhism and Christianity) to become one of the (if not *the*) most important of all the Japanese 'new religions'.

Many of the other later 'new religions' and other spiritual and healing groups evolved out of *Omoto Kyo* - and a great many more, though not actually having *Omoto Kyo* as their source were greatly influenced by *Omoto Kyo* beliefs and practices.

It goes without saying that Okada's own healing practices had been strongly influenced by his *Omoto Kyo* background. He had actually been a teacher in the Tokyo branch of *Omoto Kyo*, and as such was experienced in the performance of *Omoto Kyo*'s primary religious healing ceremony, the *miteshiro*, in which a ritual implement was slowly passed over and around the body of the 'patient' in order to drive out possessing spirits, disease and misfortune, with the aid of 'Divine Spirit' - which (interestingly I thought), the anthropologist Winston Davis [in "DOJO: Magic and exorcism in modern Japan"] tells us, *Omoto Kyo* refers to as:

"...shinki or reiki..."

Unfortunately Davis does not elaborate on this.

Nao hi

As discussed in the section on the Reiki 'power' symbol, recently, from some sections of the Reiki Community there has been talk of an alternative *jumon* for that Reiki symbol - that it has a 'secret' Shinto form, pronounced: *nao hi*.

In researching this term, I discovered that the term *nao hi* is also used by the *Omoto Kyo* and in their philosophy is used in an almost identical way to Masahisa Goi's later use of *chokurei*.

In *Omoto Kyo* philosophy, *nao hi* (which, just like *chokurei*, translates as 'direct spirit') is "... the simplest, purest, innermost aspect of the human spirit, embodying supreme good and ultimate beauty."

However, it transpires that *Omoto Kyo* also used the actual term *chokurei* itself - they even produced a magazine entitled: Chokurei-gun ("Direct-Spirit Army") - first published in 1909.

Thus, it would seem that *Omoto Kyo*, via the teachings of Mokichi Okada was almost certainly the source of Masahisa Goi's concept of chokurei.

And while there are some within the Reiki Community who (without offering any supporting evidence) would have us believe that chokurei is a mainstream Buddhist jumon/symbol - would have us believe that Usui-Sensei 'borrowed' chokurei from Tendai Buddhism, it would seem that *rather than being a Buddhist concept*, the term chokurei might well be something *exclusive* to the Japanese 'new religions' - possibly originating within the *Omoto Kyo* philosophy.

Superficial 'Training Wheels' or Essential, Deeper 'Spiritual Tools'?

As mentioned above, one theory is that the symbols were not originally a part of Reiki; but that they were introduced to Reiki by Usui-sensei at some relatively early stage in the system's development in order to help students feel and differentiate between certain aspects of the 'energy'. i.e: the *phenomenon* that is Reiki itself.

Perhaps mistakenly, this has led some people to conclude that the symbols therefore were not really all that important to the Reiki system; and as a result some practitioners have been taught to view the symbols in a very superficial light – considering them to be little more than 'training wheels' - something to be worked with initially, then to be discarded once the student has progressed a little way along the path that is their 'journey with Reiki'.

Yet others would say that taking this attitude is to have completely missed the inner significance of the essential and empowering role of symbols in relation to Japanese spiritual-transmission traditions (of which, in its deepest sense, Reiki is a prime example), and that in fact it is only when we *have* begun to feel and differentiate between certain aspects of the 'energy', when we *have* progressed a little way along the path that is our 'journey with Reiki' - that the symbols truly come into their own.

Perhaps it is that we should keep using the symbols until we no longer need them – until we *truly* no longer *need* them: until we have reached beyond *attachment to them* [i.e. achieved the ego-less state of 'non-attachment' to them].

Perhaps it is indeed *then* that, if we are wise enough to still *continue* using the symbols, their *true* worth will be revealed to us.

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