



# Sustaining a Reiki Community

BY DEBORAH DIXON AND MARY KENDALL

**U**NDERSTANDING ANY COMMUNITY is always complex. The key ingredients of what makes a community good, how to build it, and how to sustain it are difficult to nail down. A virtual community is even more elusive, and this topic generated a lot of discussion during the pandemic. Some Reiki folks took to Zoom easily. Others treated it as a desperate reach for connection, and others refused to partake. It was dis-comforting to move an intimate hands-on practice to the computer. Our Reiki community learned a lot during this time, and the lessons continue to grow and shed light on community building and the changing nature of community in an increasingly virtual world.

The pandemic changed so much about how we approached one another. In our community, we often did early virtual meetings casually without talking points and certainly without ring lights and microphones. We didn't bother to don perfunctory Zoom shirts or even tidy our rooms. It felt temporary, and our connection effort was not as strong as when our energy bodies were physically together. We longed for the day we could schedule Reiki clients for in-person treatment and offer in-person classes again. Our small Reiki community clamored for "real" Reiki shares and study groups. We longed to huddle and chat, sip tea, and read physical body language once again.

Simultaneously, virtual existence had profound effects, forging powerful connections across cities and continents. Before the pandemic, some of us had never offered distance Reiki professionally, let alone distance Reiki classes. The International Center for Reiki Training rose to the challenge and began offering virtual classes and attunements, and many of us followed suit. There was praise for many

aspects of the new format—the ease of attending from home, no travel, and no need to dress up, and Zoom was conducive for discussion and Q & A. Attunements still felt powerful and effective. Perhaps we can find those with whom we resonate best within a virtual space. After all, we know Reiki doesn't need physical proximity.

We have received a lot of feedback about virtual teaching. We found that an important drawback in our virtual classes was the difficulty for beginning students to practice Reiki with one another. A new practitioner needs to figure out what Reiki energy "feels" like in person. It takes time to recognize and accept one's own Reiki energy. With practice comes the self-assurance that you really are channeling Reiki, but those first steps can feel awkward. We missed the support of in-person sharing during this stage. Another community member said, "Meeting virtually felt less powerful energetically for me than in person, but I still valued the experience. It helped me keep my personal practice going and reinforced my motivation." One of our members who teaches Reiki said, "I prefer in-person Reiki classes. I would likely not take one online, or offer one unless specifically requested. Losing personal connection is a large disadvantage."

Conversely, many individuals not only expressed gratitude but also preferred virtual events. One of our learners said of her virtual learning experience, "I have felt the energy in a very real way. It has been a life-changing experience, very fulfilling. An online class allows me to 'get in the zone' and feel more connected to the experience. I might feel somewhat intimidated and distracted in an in-person class." And from another virtual member, "It was a lifeline...I appreciated getting together to share our energy and hope. Meeting online was also an advantage

when I moved. It allowed me to attend without having to drive distances, especially at night.”

Introducing new teaching ideas mitigated what we perceived was being lost through virtual use. Breakout rooms were so successful that we now commonly use breakout groups for in-person classes. Breakout opportunities foster close connections and allow participants to speak freely away from teachers and hosts. When classes went virtual, shared journaling became more common for teachers to connect with students. Teachers gave journal prompts, and students shared responses with the teacher and sometimes with the group. This way of connecting is now becoming the norm for in-person classes. It has helped new practitioners find words to express their experiences with Reiki. From a teaching standpoint, it has been truly enriching as teachers gain a deeper understanding of everyone’s experiences.

Another development outliving the pandemic is scheduling smaller and more private in-person Reiki shares for specific classes. This began for local virtual learners who wanted to gather, and it has continued allowing new practitioners to bond even more with classmates. Perhaps the most valuable lesson from online teaching was the power of Holy Fire® Placements, which we use in person, even in classes featuring traditional attunements.

Eventually, as “normal” life resumed, clients returned to our offices for treatment, and classes could be in person again. Our Reiki community still offers gatherings both virtually and in person. In-person Reiki events in our community that have been successful are a monthly lunch gathering where we get to know one another and talk about Reiki, meetings to plan a new volunteering initiative, and outdoor gatherings to explore earth-based practices. However, overall, in-person participation in live events has been noticeably sluggish. We wanted to know why getting people to join again in person was so hard. Was it the travel issue? Was it the scheduled time for the events? We are trying to understand better how to sustain and build virtual events as attendance burgeons and additional groups form to satisfy unique interests. We are also reassessing in-person events—what draws interest, and what needs do we satisfy by meeting in person?

To explain the success of the virtual community, we might turn to the obvious convenience of logging on while dinner cooks and staying connected even while moving

away from the local group. However, there are clues it runs deeper than this. Like many businesspeople, energy workers find that the reluctance to return to in-person gatherings has something to do with more than clinging to sweatpants and skipping commutes. The grounded comfort of being at home and finding connection around their home has been positive and healing for many. Sharing energy with neighbors and connecting with local establishments is at the core of what we call community and can become another way for many communities to develop, including Reiki. Virtual connections can create space and time to help foster this.

Similarly, prioritizing self-care occurs more easily virtually for those who don’t have disposable time, such as busy professionals, students, and parents. More people from many places and very different lives are now showing up. Our Reiki community creates support events to answer questions and topics that arise during classes and meetings. We can book the Zoom room for a gathering the following weekend to practice distance work or share hands-on practice on the fly without finding a mutually convenient physical space and considering commutes.

Participation is something that every organizer of community events deals with, whether in person or virtual. We find that a gathering of just two or three people is still community building, and maybe especially so. Speaking freely and willingly to bring up diverse, even unusual topics or questions seems to happen easily with smaller groups. As an organizer, I find it discouraging to see many people sign up for an event and then drop out one by one before it happens. However, another perspective is simply that many people *did* sign up. There was an interest and a desire to be connected, which is important. It helps us gauge what we offer and when and how successful we are in creating a space or event where people want to be and creating a connection even when showing up isn’t doable. For instance, you might never make it to the ice cream social in your neighborhood, but feel grateful and connected for living in a community that has one.

Some of our virtual support events with the most consistent attendance include Holy Fire® Experiences, Reiki Master Circles, Clinical Reiki and Research Meetings, Distance Reiki Circles, book clubs, and many support spaces for specific classes that last for a limited time as needed. We schedule events monthly or bi-monthly, and they range from thirty to ninety minutes. Many events that began less structured became more so as groups continued to meet.

We sense we cannot make community, but it sometimes happens, and we want to create a space where it might happen. It is more than hosting or leading a gathering. We have nurtured spaces where people will feel comfortable sharing or not sharing and going off-topic because being connected and safe allows many things to arise.

Many issues about what makes a virtual Reiki community successful are open to debate. The option to turn off video might add a layer of ease for some people who appreciate a break from being on screen while creating a layer of frustration for others. Not being visible would seem to make it more difficult to connect energetically and compound the drawbacks of the virtual experience for many. We have tried it both ways and are still on the fence as to what works best. We have also explored how much structure to provide, and an important lesson we learned is how important it is to allow open time to share, ask questions, and to feel free to go off-topic. Many excellent discussions often follow these little tangents, and frequently, people mention wonderful resources for those new to the topic.

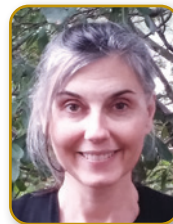
The amount and type of open time varies with the kind of event. Events where Reiki is being received or shared will have a few minutes of open time, at the beginning, to chat and ask questions before starting Reiki. Other events where energy work is not the main event might start with a presentation or information sharing and then open for discussion to allow participants to share what is on their minds. Community members step up to present, lead, and share their expertise and unique interests.

As teachers, we are creating more hybrid options where lectures and discussions occur virtually and table practice and attunements happen in person at a separate time. We can share recordings for future reference. The space

between the virtual and in-person sessions allows people to digest information and prepare questions for when we meet next. Many of us appreciate the hybrid classes and do not miss the long and sometimes multiple day classes.

The challenges of building a virtual community and rebuilding in-person events have shown us how organic the process is. We have learned the gift of enjoying the journey by being flexible and releasing expectations. The results are Reiki practitioners with devoted practices and better Reiki teachers who can hone their skills, present topics, and lead Reiki shares. Whenever we take our compassion into the world to share Reiki, we have a loving team of friends behind us. ■

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