



FEELING ALIVE

Gail Bailey

INNER BODY PILGRIMAGE

What do our vital organs and glands have to do with our state of mind and our emotions? Much more than we'd think, as Gail Bailey finds out when Tao instructor Gabrielle Euteneuer welcomes her into the 'country' of Inner Smile meditation

MOST of us are familiar with the saying "Your body is a temple," but have you ever thought about the inner body as a country? What kind of homeland would yours be? Would the heart be as peaceful as an isle off the Mediterranean or as combative as a war-torn nation? And as king or queen of your own inner motherland, would your constituents throw flowers at your feet or start a riot that dogged your every step?

For over 20 years, senior Universal Tao instructor Gabrielle Euteneuer has been inviting others to take a pilgrimage through their organs, glands and bones through a variety of simple meditative practices and gentle movements. Based on ancient Chinese Taoist exercises, Gabrielle has pooled her experience in Qi Gong, t'ai chi and energy work into Tao Motion practices that work towards creating a harmonious relationship with one's internal body, mind and spirit.

"We are so far away from us. Some people live metres above the earth and are not connected with their body. They are just taking the body along with them as they go about their business. We know where New York or Berlin is, but some of us don't even

know where our spleen is."

To be honest, I failed the internal geography test in my session with Gabrielle. But she was very forgiving, taking the time to show me exactly where my essential bits were located, and also their corresponding emotions – more on that later!

At age 16, Gabrielle began practising yoga postures in her birthplace of Germany, even before she knew what yoga was. But she was looking for something more. "I was 20 when I met my first t'ai chi teacher. At that time, t'ai chi was not very popular in Germany. I started off with a beginner class and from my first movement I knew it was for me. This is why I am still with the Tao." Soon after, Gabrielle felt she wanted to share what she had learned with others, especially after training with Master Mantak Chia, the originator of the Universal Tao system.

Ancient Taoists, who lived in remote areas of China more than 2,500 years ago, devoted their lives to focusing on nature, anatomy and the purpose of the organs and glands. Through developing meditative practices and exercises that focused on allowing *qi* (life force) to flow through major meridians in the body (for example the

mid eyebrow, heart and solar plexus), Taoists sought to create a more habitable inner world, one based on vitality and good health. Tao exercises are a form of self healing, transforming blocked energy and negative emotions in our bodies (and minds). When we lose the life force in our body, which can be caused by negative emotions, poor posture and other bad habits, illness and disease have free reign. "When there is no *qi*, the body becomes like a country without borders," says Gabrielle. Thus, in order to prevent illness and disease from taking over, we must nourish our *qi*.

"The ancient Taoists believed that the body is like an inner country. Nourishing your inner country is the only goal – nourishing trust and love, not anger. Mantak Chia says that nature is our example. Nature believes in abundance. If we adopt this [belief] then we are open to the unlimited possibilities within ourselves. When you bring harmony to your inner country, you can change what you attract in your outside world."

The Inner Smile meditation that Gabrielle showed me one afternoon gave me first-hand understanding of the foundation of Tao exercises. The



Inner Smile is just that, smiling inwardly, with a strong mental picture of our key organs and glands. Many of us know what it is like is to genuinely smile at a neighbour, our family or friends, but how often do we send a smile to our brain, organs, digestive system or even our bones?! What would this feel like?

Pretty marvellous, actually. As Gabrielle led me through the Inner Smile meditation, the body as a country analogy hit home pretty quickly. Imagining my favourite place in nature, with the rising sun in the horizon, I sent little smiles to my heart (warmth, joy and compassion), spleen (openness and flexibility), lungs (honesty, courage and integrity), kidney (inner trust, gentleness and calmness), bladder and sexual organs (creativity and positive emotions). Sending smiles internally resulted in a subdued euphoric state. If you can remember what it was like to be a child at play in the sun, then this is the state you are trying to recreate when you work through the Inner Smile meditation.

For about 15 minutes I explored a terrain unknown to me, but one I definitely wanted to return to. Breathing deep, I noticed the usual dull ache in my lower back. Kidneys, I learned, are associated with stress and fear. Focusing my breath, originating from my centre (and not from my chest), I placed my hands on my kidneys and felt how they expanded and contracted

– eventually bringing some relief. Over the years of adapting Tao exercises, Gabrielle has developed a series of breathing and sound exercises that work to heal symptoms in the lungs, heart, spleen, kidneys and liver.

“Nourishing your inner country is the goal – nourishing trust and love, not anger”

Before coming into contact with Tao exercises, Gabrielle used to suffer from poor health. “When I was living in a small community I was usually the one who would come down with colds. Here I was doing exercise and yoga and the others around me who didn’t do anything didn’t suffer from much at all.

“Through the Inner Smile, you are taking a pilgrimage through your inner country and all the major organs are like provinces. You can create perfect weather in yourself. It is like when you are sitting at the beach and seeing the

sun rise, you sit there and you feel calm and inner peace. But first you have to be aware of how your organs feel. You are the king and queen of your inner country and the body cells are the people who live there. You bring happiness to them when you are looking after them.”

When Gabrielle tells me that you can also do the Inner Smile before getting out of bed, walking down the street (eyes open though!) or while working out, I get even more excited since I know I have difficulty sitting still for more than 10 minutes. On the cross-trainer one evening after work, I thought I would give it a try. I am sure people around me thought it strange that I was staring off into the distance with a smile on my face (with not even an iPod as a viable excuse).

Another basic Tao meditation is the Micro Cosmic Orbit. It works directly with opening the major meridians (channels in the front and back of the body) so that *qi* can flow more freely. The Micro Cosmic Orbit meditation locates the major meridians, which are also connected to emotions. Opened meridian points generate positive influences and closed ones the contrary.

Improved immune systems, a stronger nervous system and relief from some chronic illnesses, like arthritis and allergies, are some of the results Gabrielle has witnessed over the years from those who have

adopted Tao meditative practices and t'ai chi exercises. “You can start Tao at any age because the exercises are easy to do, but one of the most important ingredients is to be playful like a child. Lots of things just dissolve. People have told me that their chronic illnesses have disappeared.” Even more importantly, says Gabrielle, is a change in mindset that comes along with connecting to the inner centre. She calls it opening to a life of “optimism without borders”.

If you’re thinking this is just an internal journey, then think again. Gabrielle combines her meditations with gentle t'ai chi movements, which is a form of meditation in motion. A sequence of slow, flowing movements works not only to improve *qi* circulation, it also massages muscles, tissues, organs and glands, resulting in improved flexibility.

Watching Gabrielle in action is like watching a dancer on stage oblivious to an audience. “One of the main goals of the Tao is to connect with your heart. When you connect with yourself in this way, then you can heal yourself. If you have the attitude that you are nourishing your inner world, you can bring energy from your heart, which is gratitude, respect and love for yourself and others.”

Dividing her time between her beautiful home in Karamea and Europe doesn't feel like 'work',

Gabrielle says. “In my workshops in Germany this year, I had about 30 people for nine days. It was like I was on holiday. I like to share and inspire others with these extraordinary exercises. This is what I love to do.” Her goal, though, is to spend more time in New Zealand, which has become like home to her.

While Gabrielle sits on my couch in the late afternoon sun, I am reminded of an article I recently read about ‘real’ versus ‘fake’ smiles. Real smiles are not found solely at the upturned corners of the mouth, they also need to be located in the eyes. Throughout my talk with Gabrielle I was amazed at how animated her entire face was. And yes, it was infectious. ✨

Gabrielle will present two workshops at Mana Retreat in the Coromandel, the basic Healing Love & Intimacy workshop, from 10 to 14 February 2006, and the Inner Alchemy workshop, from 24 February to 1 March 2006. For more details on these workshops, visit www.taomotion.com or email Gabrielle Euteneuer on info@taomotion.com. The first two Fitness Life readers to enrol in the Healing Love & Intimacy workshop will receive free entry.



Photographs: Gerald Shacklock

There's
a handy
new way
to cut out
sugar

