

May the force be with you

By Ruth Ostrow

"MOVE very gently. Shut your eyes. Feel the body," says the teacher as the class starts moving softly, sensuously, to the sounds of our own heartbeats.

It is an amazing sensation - inner stillness. No thinking. Going deep into a warm, safe, feeling space.

As I move with slow, steady steps, I can feel the blood surging, hear my breath soft and heavy, sense my arms expanding and delicately contracting as the muscles stretch. A gratifying moan escapes the lips.

This is Dru Yoga, one of the most recent forms of yoga to appear on a burgeoning scene. Its magic is that it seems to blend two disciplines: traditional Indian yoga, and the mysterious, increasingly popular Chi Kung that emanates from the Orient and contains a series of painfully slow, graceful movements resembling Tai Chi.

Like a dance, Dru Yoga rocks the body, moves the energy, takes you into such a luminous place that it feels as though lights have been turned on. It's electric and calming at the same time. It plays with energy channels through the body, much like acupuncture and shiatsu do, massaging them and helping our organs and limbs to release.

Most importantly, it helps connect us to the breath and to the wisdom of the body. Our teacher is Dr Mansukh Patel, whom I wrote about last week. Here on a world tour and to bring his peace flame through the streets of Australia, he also teaches a form of yoga said to have been practised by Mahatma Gandhi.

Dru Yoga, which is taught by Patel and his team in trouble spots and war-zones to help nourish, balance and calm traumatised people, was practised in India for 5000 years. It is claimed by Patel to be one of the precursors to the meditative martial arts disciplines such as Chi Kung that spread through China and the East at the time.

According to Patel, "Without love of your own body, it is impossible to love any other body." Which is why he teaches inner peace before external peace.

"We all hold such pain, such rejection in our bodies - betrayal, abandonment, anger. It is important to make peace with ourselves before we can love those around us."

Patel's words, delivered at a weekend workshop, remind me that it doesn't matter what discipline we practise, be it yoga in any of its forms - Hatha, Iyengar, Astanga or the Oriental arts such as Tai Chi and Chi Kung, it's vital we connect with our bodies.

Not only in the traditional "exercise" way, where we are always pushing, forcing, cajoling and bullying our bodies into fitness, but in a gentle art of appreciation. We so neglect our bodies in the daily round of life. Criticising them, stressing them, depriving them of food or over-feeding them, lolling about then sprinting around to compensate, all the while ignorant of the beating of our heart, the

preciousness of our breath, the exquisite eroticism of feeling energy surging through our channels and sparking up and down the spine.

In yoga, the life force that is gently released through practice is called Kundalini. In Chinese medicine it is Chi, in Japan it is known as Ki (as in the healing discipline of reiki). But regardless of the name of this force - which was understood by the gurus of Tibet and the East to have enormous power - it can cause waves of pleasure and release.

And, more importantly, it can cure us of emotional blockages, help us deal with illness and flush the body clean so our minds remain alert.

"In yoga we find that motion can transform emotion through releasing stagnant energy caught in our limbs and organs. Everyone goes through emotional trauma. The thing is not to end up on tranquillisers and drugs," says Patel.

His disciples explain that while regular exercise is invigorating to the body's own chemicals and hormones, it does little to help the practitioner locate inner peace and joy.

In Eastern practice, the body is the temple of the soul. We see our hearts as a sacred altar to worship at. God is encased in that beautiful space, in the tenuous beating, the fleeting moment of being alive. In yoga we pray by looking inward, centring ourselves as we extend the body outward. Inviting in the light through breath and meditation.

"We can then transform this inner peace to kindness and compassion to all beings," says Patel.

A Tantra teacher once said to me: "As I receive pleasure, so too does the world receive pleasure through me." Connecting with the body is not something to be guilty or frightened of, but to revere, savour, enjoy and then share.

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