

Begone, vile toxic emotions!

By Ruth Ostrow

'It is only love and kindness that can truly heal our souls'

WHEN internationally renowned spiritual teacher Rabbi Laibl Wolf was last visiting Byron Bay on a lecture tour it was May 5, 2000 - the day mooted by the great prophets as Armageddon. As the planets lined up ominously in the sky, I spent the day with the rabbi studying the secret and ancient mystical system of cabbala which he teaches in the US, Europe and around Australia.

The world didn't end. That time. This visit is another story. As we pick him up from the airport as part of his latest nationwide tour, the second plane has just crashed into the World Trade Centre in New York, where several of his family members are based.

We hurry home to the television to watch in disbelief as the horror unfolds. But despite the proximity of the tragedy to his own life, the rabbi stays calm and composed.

At one stage during the day I turn to him and ask this learned man a few vital questions. "How can you remain so calm? And how are we supposed to cope with such tragedy? Such fear? Such terrible loss? How do we resume our day-to-day lives?"

Wolf says these philosophical reflections are ironically the subject of his new lecture series on mental agility entitled MindYoga.

"The answer is in how we train our minds," he says.

"We have to prepare our minds by stretching ourselves spiritually, every day, in order to cope when things get dark and troubled," he explains.

"Unless we practise a repetitive, spiritual work-out, our minds become flabby. And like any flabby muscles, we don't know how to use them to run fast when we suddenly need to.

"We find ourselves without awareness or inner strength to draw on in times of personal loss, illness or global tragedy. We fall into doubt and fear, and fail to understand the meaning of things," he says, as graphic pictures of charred rubble flash across the screen.

Wolf, who has spent time with the Dalai Lama and is on a mission to bring more spirituality into traditional religions, says he teaches his disciples to begin the day with an "exercise" regime aimed at strengthening their inner reserves and faith. "I call it my spiritual health spa, which students can do at home. As soon as they awaken, they start exercising their souls, as they would their limbs, in a yoga class.

"The first part of the spa is to learn positive thinking, which is reinforced by prayer. It sounds almost too simplistic but the cabbala teaches that we manifest what we think. If we send negative thoughts about ourselves and others out into

the cosmos then we are liable to create that outcome. We are all very powerful beings. Therefore, it is imperative we train our minds through meditation and prayer.

"Too many of us walk out of our houses in the morning defeated by our thoughts even before the day begins."

He says he teaches his students to visualise a flame of light. "Every small flame of light can drive away tenfold its equivalent in darkness. So we sit quietly and fill our hearts with love, and send out thoughts of peace. Then we say a morning prayer.

"Prayer is very important as it reinforces our connection with the Maker, and expresses our gratitude to be alive."

He says proper breathing is also important. "Breath is our life force. It helps us harness our emotions, it oxygenates the cells and brain. In yoga the body is the temple of the soul. We must nourish it."

Next the rabbi promotes a "spiritually" healthy diet. "We say grace each time we eat, in order to honour the soul of the food, and the sacrifice made for our vitality." He says Zen masters also practise mindfulness when they eat, chewing every mouthful slowly and carefully to honour the food. Which also aids digestion.

But he says the most important factor in his MindYoga program is dealing with toxic emotions that lead to disease and suffering.

"Just as cigarettes and alcohol are eliminated in most health regimes, so too are the emotional toxins of anger, jealousy, fear, avoided in the spiritual spa. Cabbala teaches that anger weakens our immune systems and is destructive to others around us," says Wolf, whose cassette Transforming Anger and Negative Emotions is a bestseller in the US.

He says he teaches his students to recognise that a hurtful person is probably just hurt themselves and in dire need of our compassion, not our rage.

"It is only love and kindness that can truly heal our souls," he says prophetically, poignantly, as the sun sinks in the Western sky, and the world as we have known it disappears from sight, forever.

www.ruthostrow.com

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