

How I Found Tao

By Kelli Thomaides

It was a Saturday afternoon, and I was by myself in my apartment as usual. I had lived alone for the past two years, and spent most of my time running around and doing errands. But this Saturday was different, because I had such horrible back pain that I could think of nothing else. All week I told myself that I would have to get a massage during the weekend, because I had no time to do so during the week. My back was literally full of knots, and every point was tender and painful. I often neglected myself, and put so much energy into work and other “important things” that self-care came last.

It had been two years since I went to a place called the Teal Center and a woman did reflexology on me. It was such a calm and peaceful place, and plus they had one of those Zen Gardens with the miniature rake and soft sand to play with. I liked to pick up the little rake with my hand and skim it along the sand to make patterns. It was very calming. So when I decided I needed a massage, the name “Teal Center” popped in my head and I remembered how tranquil it was. I just knew that was where I needed to go. And it’s sad to say I actually looked forward to playing with the Zen Garden because it represented a moment in time where I could just relax and not worry about anything. My mind was always racing and I could not be at peace inside my head.

When I finally picked up the phone to call the Teal Center, it was already one o’clock in the afternoon and I figured it would be too late to schedule a massage. A young man named Gabriel answered the phone – to me he sounded like a surfer dude- and his voice was so relaxed. I remember thinking “I doubt anyone can be that relaxed, but if he is then I want to learn his secret.” I



told him that my back was all in knots and that I needed a massage. I described my symptoms and he said, “Ok, I will try to fit you in. Let me call you back.” I was thrilled when he called me back five minutes later with an appointment time of two thirty, saying the therapist who was going to work on me would do acupressure. “Acupressure sounds perfect”, I said.

I drove on highway 66, knowing perfectly well how to get to the Teal Center in Arlington. However, I somehow passed the town of Arlington and kept driving for fifteen minutes. I ended up getting off at the Nutley Street North exit in a different town and wondering “How did I end up all the way out here?” I felt pulled in that direction but I also knew I would miss my appointment if I did not get back to Arlington. I got back on 66 and easily found the Arlington exit. I was late to my appointment, but the therapist still saw me. Her name was Cathy, and she did reflexology on my hands. I was amazed that just by touching my hands, all the knots in my back came undone. I was crying so hard that she had to hand me a box of tissues. Cathy told me that I was releasing karma I had already paid back, but was still carrying around. It confirmed my suspicion that there was a purpose to the suffering I had experienced, and I felt such relief that I could *finally* let this baggage go. I felt like a blank slate; I felt revitalized. I had the idea that I really wanted to change and do something different, now that I had gotten beyond some “tests”. I asked Cathy what I could do, and she said, “Try to help others to be vegetarian”. She was adamant that I talk to her husband who was in the waiting room. I walked into the waiting room, blotting my face with tissues and sniffing. I felt so stupid standing in front of Cathy’s husband and the receptionist, neither of whom I knew, with tears all over my face. We made small talk and then I thought, “I don’t know what to say to them. I should just leave”. I told Young and Gabriel “Goodbye” and walked out.



However, I had read “The Celestine Prophecy” which emphasizes the concept of synchronicity. Synchronicity involves meeting certain people at a particular time and place, who lead you where you need to go on your path. People who believe in synchronicity know that coincidences happen for a reason and we must not ignore them. The main character in the book prepares and learns, and then as the right timing comes, he is able to meet people who impact his life and lead him further down his true path towards enlightenment. The most important thing is timing, and the knowledge that if you miss out on connecting with someone you may never get another chance. I believed in synchronicity because life experience had taught me it had to exist. I connected to one of the most important and influential people in my life because I asked for her business card, and then I left it sitting on my table for one month. Each time I walked by it, I glanced at it and thought, “I should call her.” Once I did, my life was a whirlwind and we led each other through major positive changes. I felt the same nagging sensation at the Teal Center and knew there was *something* I was supposed to get from those two men, although I didn’t know what it was. I believed I would make a big mistake if I ignored this strong urge to talk with them.



So I turned around, opened the door and went back inside! After I entered the reception area, I asked Young for a business card. Then I just stood there and stared at Gabriel. I could not think of anything to say, and I was waiting for him to tell me something. But I did not even know *what* I wanted him to tell me. He stammered and said, “Uh...we’re having a party tonight and there are going to be a bunch of people there who practice Tao.” I said, “Oh really? I’ve always been interested in Eastern religions and philosophies,

especially Tao. I’d love to go.” Who was talking?! This certainly was not me, because I did not go to strange people’s parties! However, I found myself getting directions from Gabriel. I thought he said it was fifty minutes away, and I said, “An hour away! I don’t think I can go.” But Gabriel laughed and said, “No, I said fifteen minutes, not fifty.” When I glanced at the directions I saw that his house was off the Nutley Street North exit. I told him, “I know exactly where that is. I was just there”. I knew this was the kind of coincidence mentioned in The Celestine Prophecy and that for some reason, I needed to go to this house off of the Nutley Street exit.

I got in my car and drove to the house in Vienna. I could not believe I was going to a stranger’s party, but I felt that I needed to for some reason. When I showed up I introduced myself and told everyone, “I don’t know any of you guys and I don’t know why I am here, but hello!” They said, “Don’t worry, we know why you’re here.” I spoke to a lot of people about their Tao practice and began to feel more and more interested in what these people were doing. The odd thing was that as much as I was enjoying myself, I had an equal sense of panic and could not stop looking at the door. Part of me wanted to fling open the door and run out of there. But as I was talking to a young man named Aaron, I remembered a dream I had about five years earlier. I had a dream that I was walking into a small house, and there was a big brown wooden rectangle against the main wall. There was a guy in a red t-shirt who was teaching me things. The dream did not seem particularly special, but it had always stuck in my mind. As I sat talking with Aaron, I remembered my dream and it occurred to me that *he* was the guy in the red t-shirt and that *he* was teaching me important things-

about Tao. Everything made sense at that moment and I knew I was supposed to be there. When Aaron mentioned there was a ceremony that night, I agreed to do it. After the ceremony, I kept asking questions because I wanted to learn more about this Tao thing. I looked at one of the girls I had just met named Jessica and said, "It is amazing that I came here today. I have been looking for something like this my whole life." Jessica laughed and said, "And this is just the tip of the iceberg!" And it was.

