

# Creating a Healthy Living Space

By Susanne Kikuta

The outside world is crazy and unpredictable. I want to come home and feel like I can let go of the day, rest, and recharge. I have always tried to create this kind of space. My Tao practice gives me the energy to make positive change and teaches me the greater reasons why it is important to have positive habits in my daily life. I am working toward something better rather than simply “going with the flow” ...downstream, that is.

I have learned from experience that a healthy living space is truly beneficial. Three things work best for me: cleaning, creating focused centers, and cooking vegetarian. Now that I have found a system that works, I strive to make my home a haven.

## Cleaning

First, I keep my place clean and orderly. I want my home to be a reflection of me. I can't relax when I am surrounded by clutter. It's distracting, and makes me feel messy, heavy and tired. So, I get up and clean it. At home, I want to let go of my worries. If there are dishes piled up in the sink, I feel uneasy. When things are in the right place, I feel calm and at ease.

This may sound neurotic, but actually, my desire to keep a clean space comes from a greater desire to be clear and without distractions. This way I can center myself. If my life is cluttered, I get confused. There are times when the mess must wait, but if it can be put right away, why not? Everything has a place in this world; I help them to get them there.

I wonder what my mother thinks about my born-again cleaning habits. I was never a clean person. I would find ways to hide my mess. I always put off cleaning because I had more important things to do. I realize now, that putting time into cleaning actually gives me more energy, sharper focus, and higher productivity to do the important things in life.

Have you ever come home and felt like you were an alien in your own home? Your things have taken over, and you are in the way. Cleaning also means clearing. I have made it a practice to regularly go through my things and evaluate its necessity and value. Every drawer, even the small ones with a lot of little things in it, is thoroughly checked. Everything gets the same questions. What have you done for me lately? Old things = old energy.

It is difficult to get rid of things. I keep things for sentiment-

tal value...and they collect dust and get lost with the other things I never use. I often kick myself for getting rid of something, claiming to myself that I really need it. Loss is painful. The truth is: I am much better without it. One goal of my practice is to keep what is necessary for the present, and let go of as much as I can. This way, I can allow new things into my life and grow closer to my highest self.

## Creating Focus

I like to have what matters most in front of me. When I bought a desk, I became much more organized with my work, studies and finances. Before I got the desk, I would find a cozy spot at the foot of my bed, on the couch, or at the kitchen table. It was easy to get distracted. My business matters often got put off or simply forgotten. I was notorious for not returning phone calls, I rarely used my email, and my finances were ignored. My simple pine desk was heaven-sent. Finally, I know exactly where I can focus and get down to business.

My altar is my spiritual “desk”. It is where I focus my scattered energy and center my attention. It is the first thing I look at when I get home. Each time I pass by, I see the flowers, fruit and incense bowl, and I appreciate the simplicity, vitality and beauty. I remember what is important to me. I realign myself with Tao. It's bright, colorful, and makes me feel peaceful and, at the same time, highly aware.

Taking care of the altar makes me happy. The tasks are simple: wiping it down, buying fruit, arranging flowers, and lighting incense. Yet, it is the responsibility of doing these simple things that make it incredibly meaningful and meditative. My practice has shown me the necessity and immense benefit of discipline. Of the thousands of things I do every day, taking care of my altar is the most special. It is time for me. I slow down, put the distractions on mute, and remind myself what is important. I connect to the beauty, my values and purpose. I feel a glowing happiness, deep appreciation, and a sense of responsibility and unending opportunity. Doesn't it make sense to have something like this in your home?

## Cooking Vegetarian

At first thought, vegetarian food may sound very boring: steamed veggies and salads. In truth, when done right, vegetarian cooking is innovative, exciting and TASTY! Vegetarian cooking is adventurous and requires creativity. When I was a kid, I entertained myself by making crafts from toilet paper rolls, wax paper, and egg cartons. Now, the kitchen is my playground, and these creations have a greater purpose. Cooking vegetarian is a compassionate act that heals the soul. It is a positive and creative way to bring people together.

In the beginning, it was very difficult for me. But learn-

ing how to eat and cook vegetarian has been a great way to make positive changes in my life. The Tao practice has given me many opportunities for breaking out of patterns, and eating habits are a major pattern. It has been challenging, but rewarding. I love that through my food, I can share something nourishing and kind.

In our Tao practice we are able to make a vegetarian vow. After I made this vow, my relationship with food dramatically changed. My commitment and dedication to a compassionate lifestyle was my investment, and my returns came quick and were plentiful. My cooking got recognizably better and continues to do so at a shocking rate. Now, my creativity and passion flow into my food. Also, my family and friends are much more supportive of my vegetarianism.

Cooking vegetarian is the quickest way to recharge my mood and transform my environment. The task of cooking a whole meal after a long day weighs heavy before I begin. Yet, once I get started, I am energized and dancing to the music.

My entire apartment lights up when I cook. The air becomes cleaner and more alive. The vibrant colors of the vegetables; the aromatic herbs; the sound of chopping crisp, fresh bell peppers... nothing beats it. Vegetables are like works of art. Have you seen the cross-section of a head of purple cabbage lately? Breath-taking. Cooking vegetarian positively changes any environment. Try it yourself.

These three simple practices allow me to have a place where I can fully rest, be productive, and steadily grow. My home is where I refresh and renew. When I put thought and effort into bettering my home, I get back a sense of clarity, increased energy, and inspiration. Thanks to my Tao practice, I am finally creating a truly healthy living space. ▣



Photo by Peter Brinker



Drawing by Alie Fukinbara