

Wax On, Wax Off

By Kelli Thomaides

When I first started spending time at the Tao temple, it took all the energy I had just to drive there. I even fabricated reasons not to go: I was tired, it was a long day, I had to get up early, I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone. But as I turned onto the highway, I remembered the warm Tao energy and knew I made the right decision.

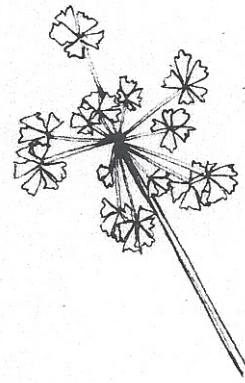
After I pried my tennis shoes off and stepped into the cozy temple, I always felt two things: relieved to be there, and so voraciously hungry that I could eat every vegetable, noodle, and ounce of soup in sight. Later, with a belly full of vegetarian goodness, I would talk to Young, Gabriel, Aaron -and others who had more experience with the Tao practice. I learned a lot by listening to them and asking questions. After a few weeks, I asked how I could contribute. "You could bring some fruit for the altar", my friend Jessica suggested. So the next time we had qi gong class, I brought a carton of strawberries.

"Thank you", Young said as I handed him the fruit. Young was our qi gong teacher. I sat down with him, and we began chatting about qi gong and exercise. I mentioned that every day I spent two hours at the gym doing all kinds of activities: spin class, yoga, swimming, weight training, and running. He said I didn't need to spend sixty dollars a month on a gym membership. "You want to exercise? I know good exercise. Go to the temple and wash the floor.... mow the grass...that can make you big and strong. And you don't waste the money."

I didn't want to do housework. Besides, my spinning class was a more effective cardiovascular workout than mowing the lawn. But Young had given me many helpful suggestions already, so I thought I'd try this one. I looked over at him. He smiled and made circles in the air like he was wiping windows. *Wax on, wax off.* I pictured the Karate Kid doing tai chi on cliffs and scrubbing cars. Maybe I was supposed to learn something about humility.

A couple days later, I gritted my teeth, made a detour on the way to the gym, and pulled up in front of the temple. As I waxed on and waxed off, I fancied myself a Cinderella type. But underneath, I was more like one of Cinderella's evil step sisters. I held a sponge under the faucet. "Why do I have to scrub the kitchen sink? I'm tired and I spent all day yesterday cleaning my *own* apartment. Now I have to come here and clean the temple?" I wrung the sponge, twisting it into an hour-glass shape, and watched the water trickle out.

My resistance toward helping out at the temple took many forms. But despite that initial resistance, I eventually felt great when I left the temple with a twinkling toilet and



Drawings by Akie Fukinbara

shiny sink in my wake. I began to realize that I was really accomplishing something. I wasn't just wiping away dust bunnies, I was helping to create a space where people could restore their spirits and learn about Tao. And the more I scrubbed, the more connected I felt to the temple and the community. It became easier for me to open up to others. I'd never experienced a learning process that integrated my mind, heart, and body in this way. The energy I gained from the Tao practice began pouring into my everyday life, and I could see the benefits of cultivating Tao.

I wanted to share this with others, but it was hard to express to people why I practiced Tao. I felt like Neo in the Matrix when he is questioned by the agents, and his mouth melts into sticky, rubbery goo. Cultivating Tao had transformed my life, made me a happier person, and given me clarity. But I was still too new to understand exactly what was going on, let alone to explain it to others. Fortunately, it didn't matter that my mouth melted into rubbery goo, as long as I maintained the intention to help others and to share my experiences. In the meantime, I could help by cleaning, cooking, and just doing what needed to be done.

The little things I did might have seemed trivial, but they weren't. I now had the support of the Tao Practice, which provided a meaningful context for my actions. When I contributed- by talking with others about Tao, donating items, or helping out at the temple- I was investing in my own spiritual growth. I was expressing my sincerity of heart through action.

I have changed so much since I started cultivating Tao. I've gotten new perspectives on my life, changed my habits, moved, and had different jobs. The one thing that's remained constant is that contributing improves my attitude and makes me more grounded and humble. I can always rely on it to rejuvenate me when I'm tired, weak, or lost.

It's such a unique opportunity- to be able to provide a safe, bright space for people to come together and grow spiritually. I think it's wonderful that regardless of what's going on in my own life, I can always contribute to others and support their growth. Learning how to give and receive at a Tao temple has forced me to grow up in many ways. I am ok with getting help from others, and I think of how to make them comfortable, too. I put my own problems aside for a couple of minutes, or even a couple hours. I serve tea. I listen. I cry. I laugh. I live. ▣