

The Inner Smile

by Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S.



The 'inner smile' is a Taoist practice done to raise the vibration of energy throughout a person's body. It is traditionally incorporated into the practices of qigong and tai chi.

And can be done at any time of stress with great benefit – allowing an individual to replace negative thoughts and feelings with the positive energy of an inner smile. Doing so serves to release blockages caused by negative emotions such as anger, thereby opening free flow throughout the liver energy system and helping an individual become what Chinese medicine describes as a “relaxed wanderer.” This simple act is traditionally believed to activate healing capability and bring a person into balance and alignment as the smile spreads throughout the body - including their muscles, vital organs, endocrine glands and nervous system.

Chinese medicine teaches us the grave importance of releasing feelings as they arise in a considerate manner. This may happen through sharing them with another or writing about them in a journal. Consistently doing so ensures they don't accumulate and wreak havoc on one's mental state and physical body. In the long run, it minimizes the toll that negative emotions instill upon the health of our vital organs – remembering that excessive anger injures the liver, fear injures the kidneys, grief injures the lungs, worry injures the spleen and overjoy injures the heart according to the Law of the Five Elements.

Healing through positivity is a concept that has become more widespread throughout America due to the rising levels of stress.

Creating an inner smile during a difficult situation when working toward conflict resolution goes a long way. This is enhanced through maintaining appropriate boundaries while sharing words with great sensitivity for another's feelings. It is an approach that empowers a person to keep their qi and love flowing, even when the going gets tough.

This approach to health and healing has been in existence for centuries, originally beginning in the times of ancient China. Well known qigong teacher Mantak Chia and founder of the Universal Tao System brought awareness of the inner smile to many health seekers during the 1980's with the publishing of his book, **Taoist Ways to Transform Stress into Vitality**. And Norman Cousins was influential in bringing the healing power of laughter to the forefront of the consciousness for many Americans. This took hold in 1979 when his book, *Anatomy of an Illness* was published, which shared how he had healed himself of a degenerative connective tissue disease through self-induced bouts of laughter while watching the Marx Brothers movies and Candid Camera television shows. He had also done research on the biochemistry of emotions, which he saw as the key to success in becoming triumphant over illness.

According to Taoist tradition, the inner smile works to strengthen function of the thymus gland which is one of the first areas of the body impacted by excessive stress. It is considered to be the “seat of greater enlightenment, love and qi flow.” The Taoist sages also believe that smiling causes the organs to release a honey-like

secretion that serves to nourish the entire body. And when a person is filled with anger, fear or undue stress they produce a poisonous secretion that hinders flow of qi and produces unwanted symptoms such as

indigestion, high blood pressure and insomnia. And Western medicine teaches us that increased health of the thymus gland results in strengthening of the immune system.

Creating an Inner Smile

Rest the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth, just behind your front teeth. Then create an inner smile. As you do so, feel the corners of your mouth lifting gently and your eyes smiling. Next infuse yourself with the feeling of loving kindness. And notice how the vibration of your energy is lifting, as your entire being is filled with a deep sense of peace. Then, if need be, send a smile to an area of your body that needs special healing. Next, bring your attention back to feeling reverberation of your inner smile throughout your entire being.

The satisfied feeling and emission of positive vibration gained through the act of smiling is substantiated by the discovery that smiling releases neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine – with both promoting relaxation and lowering blood

pressure, while serotonin acts as an antidepressant. In addition, smiling activates the thyroid gland, which relieves the impact of excessive stress. In fact, a study performed at Wayne State University found that people who appear to be smiling in photographs live longer. And a study conducted at the University of Kansas compared the effects of imitating a smile, faking a smile and making a genuine smile. It found that the heart rate for those with a genuine smile returned to normal quicker and reported to be less stressed and experiencing greater happiness.

The combination of both Eastern and Western approaches provides all the more reason to bring on an inner smile whenever possible. It feels good and is something that is easy to do, one that has long-lasting positive effects on daily disposition and the creation of ever-lasting health and well-being.

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