

the good life

getta life...getta good life

AUSTIN STYLE

Want a touch of heaven on Earth? A good massage takes you there

"There is but one temple in the Universe and that is the human body. Nothing is holier than that high form. We touch heaven, when we lay our hand upon the human body."

— Thomas Carlyle, Scottish philosopher

I stumbled a bit as I walked across the parking lot, looking for the suite. I stopped a minute and took a deep breath. The last thing I needed was to fall again and knock something else out of whack. Looking at my broken pinkie I pouted. I'd been feeling a little beat up lately. Feeling a little low, out of sorts and out of balance. I was trying to do good, eating well more often than not, getting my Om on at yoga several days a week, but clearly, I needed some extra help. It was a combination of things; back pain, headache, allergies and all around me—at work and at home—there was just too much going on. On top of it all, I had a hard time falling, and staying, asleep. Just as I was on the brink of getting really sick and tired, I got a couple of massages. They were enough to refresh my childlike faith that the Supreme Being cared about me. Personally.

I found **Kathy Casey's Excellence in Touch studio (521-415-9691)** and entered gratefully. "If it's okay with you, I'm going to do a combination of Swedish massage and Reiki on you this evening," she said, smiling warmly. "I think the combination of muscular and energy work will help bring you back into balance on several levels and would work better than either one alone." Reiki, Casey explained, is spiritually guided life force energy. Healing is more than getting rid of uncomfortable physical symptoms; it is the return to greater wholeness, to balance and ease.

As I lay on the table, before she ever laid a hand on me, I began to relax. The combination of soothing music, the massage room's clearly spiri-

tual vibe and the subtle scent of lavender slowed my breathing, and with it my scattered mind. As she worked on my tight neck and shoulders, lower back, hands and feet, stress melted away. Sometimes, her hands lay still and quiet, the Reiki. For the first time in a long time, the stress backed off, and I felt my body subtly recalibrating to its usual vitality.

"I don't know why some people think massage is a luxury. I think it's essential to maintaining health, given the stress we're all under," she said. "We go to the doctor to get relief from physical maladies and they prescribe meds and sometimes surgery. It's documented that massage can bring relief to back pain, carpal tunnel and many other symptoms. It's truly healing in the real sense of the word." Perhaps the ancient spiritual texts were referring to massage when they mentioned anointing with oil and laying on of hands for healing. "I'm convinced of it," Casey said. "What else can it be?" I left feeling lighter, more graceful, than I'd felt in a while. That night, I slept well and woke up refreshed.

A few days later, I found myself at the entrance of **Daya Day Spa (512-374-1010)**. I was here to experience Batu Panas, a massage using hot and cold stones, reputed to realign the chakras or energy centers in the body, release toxins and promote healthy circulation. I wasn't clear how having rocks placed all over me was going to do all that, but I was about to find out.

I've long been convinced that one of the manifestations of heaven on earth is the day spa. Daya—an Indonesian word for energy—reinforced that belief. As we walked through the garden atrium, **Adrienne Williamson** explained why the hot stone massage has become the most popular of Daya's signature treatments. "The stones allow a deeper massage because the mus-

cles soften and release tension more quickly," she said. "That brings oxygenated blood to the tissues and increases lymphatic flow. Like all massage, it balances the body toward health."

Williamson arranged warm, smooth black stones along either side of my spine. She placed stones in my palms, on the soles of my feet, across my lower back and used two large stones to massage every ounce of tension away. Williamson alternated using river harvested basalt stones, heated to a temperature of 120-140 degrees, with white marble stones chilled in icy water to create a delicious experience that left me feeling grounded, earthy and alive. Afterwards, I showered in a copper-lined rain dome that recreated sounds of the rain forest and emerged convinced that well-trained and committed massage therapists are actually thinly disguised angels sent to get us back in touch with our essential selves.

"Heaven often seems to make an appearance within the context of a massage session," said **David Lauterstein**, cofounder and codirector of **Lauterstein-Conway Massage School (512-374-9222)**. "Bodyworkers have the profound opportunity to amplify health and wholeness and to elevate pleasure as an essential component of healing." Clients often have extraordinary physical, emotional and spiritual experiences during a massage session, even when alleviation of pain is the primary goal. "When we're in pain, there's nothing more we want than to be pain free. But our ultimate goal is not to just be pain free but to feel good." Still, there's an element of the mystical in the whole process. "Touch is the only thing that combines structure and energy," Lauterstein said. "Touch expresses the passing on of life energy." And that truly is heavenly. ☸

A true convert, Anoa Monsho has decided to give up her cell phone and use the money she saves to get regular massages. You may e-mail Anoa at anoasho@goodlifemag.com.

