



Sunday Read

Soup for the soul

Stress, recession, lifestyle disorders and broken relationships are prompting unique ties in the city. Lekha Menon profiles communities that are bound by the quest for wellness

Lekha Menon ★★★★★

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While pressures of modern life often drive people apart, ironically, these very factors are also creating new ties. And it's most evident in the numerous wellness communities sprouting in the city.

A few like-minded individuals come together, indulge in therapeutic techniques, and soon, a new family is created and new relationships forged. With a hint of spirituality, large doses of practical tips and a common meeting ground, these groups are proving to be the new urban networks.

They are vastly different from the existing yoga, Art of Living or Vipassana groups. For one, there's little commerce involved and no hierarchy.

There are no self-styled gurus or celebrity endorsements either - just the aam aadmi getting together to seek solutions for healthy living. And it's the internet, especially social networking groups, that are playing a huge role in connecting them. Here are four such communities that are transforming the lives of those who are a part of them.

EFT **India** Yahoo group forum: Tap stresses away

Tap your body and drive your problems away. Sounds a tad simplistic? But that's the core of Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) - a way of balancing the body's energies by addressing emotions.

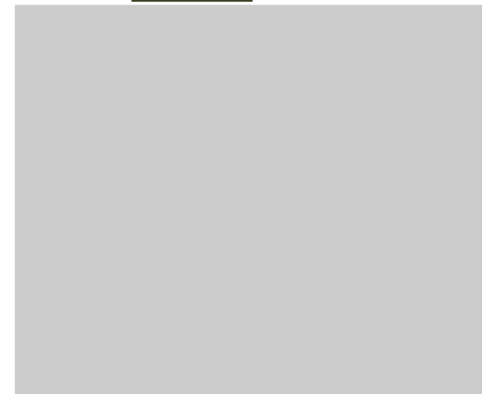
Based on acupuncture principles, instead of needles, the body's energy meridians are stimulated by tapping them with fingertips. "EFT says the cause of negative emotions is a disruption in the body's energy system. Once balanced, the body heals itself," says Jasmine Bharatan, a practitioner.

EFT workshops have a large following; currently the EFT **India** Yahoo group forum has close to 400 members. "People post their problems here and others chip in with solutions. We might not socialise or go for movies together, yet we are part of each others' lives," says Nidhu Kapoor, a member.



An EFT session in progress (Satish Malavade)

Offline too, followers make an attempt to meet up. "We discuss problems and apply EFT principles of tapping. Called 'borrowing benefits', here we tap and pray for solutions to one person's problems, but the energy released benefits everyone present," explains Shilpa Deshingkar, a practitioner of healing techniques.



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What matters is that people should feel nice - online or offline - Jasmine Bharatan

Tapping apart, there is another effort, also initiated by Jasmine, that's generating a lot of interest. 'The Good News Channel' is a three-month old Facebook page that exhorts people to share "all the good things in life". And going by the response (with over 600 members), it appears Mumbaikars are more than happy to participate.

Sample these responses. Anand Tendolkar, a member, writes: My good news is that I'm bouncing back faster from my upsets.:). While another follower Dimpy Bhardwaj posts: "My daughter is participating in a singing competition. Whether she wins or loses, she puts in her 100%...it makes me happy."

The idea is to get people to share positive thoughts. "There is far too much negativity around us, what matters is that people should feel nice - online or offline, doesn't matter," says Bharatan.

Mumbai Vegans: Wellness on a platter

The menu at this potluck follows strict guidelines: Every item is a vegan dish. Vegetables aren't peeled. No dairy products, white sugar, white rice or refined grains. Use of only cold-pressed oils, unrefined sugar or jaggery.



Vegans discussing all about healthy eating

Meet the Mumbai Vegans, for whom food is a way to achieve an end; in this case, good health and prevention of diseases. And the potluck is the medium to interact with those who've changed their lives through diet.

Initiated by Nandita Shah, founder of Sharan, an organisation that spreads awareness about holistic health, the potluck is a culmination of "Peas vs Pills", a workshop on natural living and healing. "Initially, there were only 20 people.

Now, each of our workshops has no less than 50-60 people," says Shah indicating the growing interest for new diet philosophies. "Most of us are conditioned about how and what to eat. I ask them to make a change for a

month and see what they feel."

People will try something new when they feel it's logical - Nandita Shah

The change is minor, say, giving up milk, non-veg or white products. But when it yields great returns, people are willing to turn vegetarians. One such convert is Seimaa Manjuratna, who, like most others "is interested in a better way of living". "Moreover, it's fun meeting people, learning recipes and sharing stories," she says.

The Mumbai Vegans also connect through blogs, emails, yahoo groups and facebook. Now, there are more plans to spread the message - a vegan food festival, designing vegan menus for cafes, seminars on specific conditions such as hypertension, cholesterol etc. "People will try something new when they feel it's logical," reasons Shah.



Delicious vegan spread at a potluck

Besides, what better reason to connect than good health?

Discussing spirituality: The meditation group

On the surface, the get-together at banker couple Usha and Anil Menon's house looks like a regular meeting of friends bonding over appams and stew. But fun apart, they are here for a serious purpose: to discuss the significance of chakras.

This group of spiritualists, meet once a month to talk about wellness-related issues - from styles of meditation to stories of Buddha to chakras. After a topic is dealt with in-depth, group meditation is practised. "None of us are gurus, we simply try to explore these subjects together," says Jamuna Rangachary, a writer.



Started by Suma Varughese, editor of Life Positive magazine, the idea was to create a network of like-minded people. Interestingly, another wellness session led to the formation of this one. "A few of us had attended an acupressure workshop, and something clicked. Meanwhile, I realised there is a lot of curiosity among people to know the real

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