

A cosmic poke in the third eye

By Ruth Ostrow

THE call comes at 8pm. A man called Graham is speaking in an earnest voice. "I thought you may want to know. Jwala is in town. And she is taking a workshop tomorrow morning teaching people how to have cosmic orgasms."

Now 8pm is not a good time for me. It is wedged somewhere between dish-washing time and bath time. A time of night when all one is thinking about is how to wash a child's hair without tantrum and how to remove burned tomato from a non-stick pot.

The thought of having a cosmic orgasm -- an hour-long, nonstop, spiritual experience as practised by yogis, gurus and Native Americans in order to merge with the universe -- frankly gives me a headache.

"I'm not in the mood," I say, hanging up and going back to my dishes. You become blase living in Byron Bay, with its ridiculous array of personal growth workshops.

But somehow, as the night wears on, I begin to feel that I deserve a cosmic orgasm; that I deserve to have an hour of absolute, unadulterated pleasure so spiritually intense as to reveal the meaning of life.

It has been a bad week.

Our mosquito and garbage disposal problems haven't been solved. I've developed an eye infection. My mother is coming to stay over the weekend and I haven't done the shopping.

"Okay," I say, returning Graham's call. "I'll have a one-hour, mind-numbing, cosmic orgasm for \$15. What do I need to bring?"

The first thing I am told about cosmic orgasm workshops is that you don't need a partner. Getting close to our maker in that special way is a personal experience.

The second thing I am told is to bring a mat.

"Don't want to bruise your coccyx," says Graham.

I turn up the next morning at a beautiful country retreat. Jwala, who has no second name, is walking around in Persian-looking gear with a headdress harking back to the time of the pharaohs.

"Actually, it is goddess gear," explains Jwala. "I make it myself."

That's not all Jwala does. Based in California and touring Australia, she is something of a legend in the US. A pleasure-positive activist, peer of infamous sexpert Annie Sprinkle, author of the self-published *Sacred Sex: Ecstatic Techniques for Empowering Relationships* and recent student of Harley Swiftdeer of the Cherokee Deer tribe, she travels the world teaching Tantra and "the healing power of sex".

Which all sounds wacky to us Westerners, who were told "stop it or you'll go blind". But I have found since reading about Taoist and shamanic practices that many ancient and respected religions use sexual energy as a healing and spiritually enriching force.

Cosmic or "energy" orgasms are a bona-fide experience, according to a New Age friend who has them. She says they are like a thousand coloured lights flashing up the back of the spine and shooting out the top of the head. They are not genital orgasms and usually happen without any genital contact, when one is fully dressed.

By breathing in a certain way and contracting certain muscles in the lower regions, it is possible to direct energy up the entire body and prompt the release of certain euphoric chemicals until the body goes into convulsive bliss.

Back to the workshop and a group of women (and two men) are sitting in yogic positions on their mats, looking expectant. Hungry for convulsive, cosmic bliss, they have the kind of drooling look I get in restaurants before I'm fed.

"The first thing I want you to do is move your pelvises like undulating dolphins," says Jwala, and I realise why my coccyx is at dire risk.

We lie down, knees up, undulating for about 10 minutes and breathing in a manner she calls the Fire Breath, which is "like blowing out candles on a birthday cake". We also tense and release our pelvic-floor muscles, which are the muscles used to stop the flow of urine.

Jwala tells us that energy goes where the mind goes. So we are told to visualise energy or balls of coloured light circulating around our lower body or "root" chakra, then to take the sexual energy up to the heart chakra, then the throat, before allowing it to explode in bliss at the "third eye" and shoot out through the top of the head. This process takes 50 minutes.

"Some people may start crying if they hit an energy block. This isn't all about pleasure. We hold in repressed grief and anger and the orgasmic energy won't flow freely until our pain is released. Some may start choking, coughing or even gagging before they feel bliss," she says.

"Bum! There's always a catch," I mumble under my breath.

"Whatever comes up, let it out. You are safe here," she whispers.

So off we go. Undulating like dolphins, wailing like fire engines and moaning deep and low. As usual, some people become noisy early. I can hear screams of pain, moans of delight, a few coughs. Thankfully, no gagging.

I keep breathing and hoping I will explode in coloured lights that resemble sparks of lightning. "C'mon bliss, c'mon bliss," I keep thinking to myself as my mind goes up the chakra scale.

"C'mon bliss," I think, beginning to panic that with only 45 minutes to go, a cosmic orgasm will pass me by.

More than 20 minutes later I am in a sweat. "C'mon bliss ..." I say, snorting so hard my nose almost blows me backward. My coccyx has almost worn a hole in the mat. My head is banging up and down with each undulation. I have nearly

knocked myself unconscious.

I have lost track of time. I am in agony. I am hyperventilating, my toes have gone rigid and numb. My mouth is dry and tingling. "Come on, bloody bliss ..."

Suddenly it starts happening. Yes, yes, yes, coloured lights, oh my God ... miraculous, I'm ... it's almost, almost ... I'm about to ...

"Okay, open your eyes and sit up slowly," says the voice of Jwala, penetrating my cosmic convulsion. "How do you feel?"

"Incredible! Unbelievable! Fantastic!" are the moans coming from people who exploded in ecstatic delight, saw God, touched the roof and circled the moon.

I have been struck mute. No words can explain the bitter rejection and frustration that comes from what I have just experienced: cosmic coitus interruptus.

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