

Crystal-clear exorcisms

By Ruth Ostrow

RAYM comes to the door carrying a bag full of crystals. With his mass of blond hair, ruddy complexion, working-class accent and shorts, he looks like he'd belong behind the counter of a pub. In fact, he's one of the growing band of energy clearers who banish negative energy from homes and offices.

His brochure announces: "In the case of Spirit manifestation, ghosts, hauntings ... suspected alien abductions, or interference from the third dimension, Raym will happily locate the cause and either transmute it into light, or escort it safely home."

After that sort of preamble I guess I expected someone in something a little more flowing, or at least wearing gear from the movie Ghost Busters. But though Raym looks pretty average, his conversations aren't. His mobile rings and he starts telling the caller: "Look, there's a fabulous haunted antique shop I want you to check out with me this afternoon.

"A clairvoyant friend of mine," he says enthusiastically, as he looks around the room.

I have called Raym (who needs no surname) because things haven't been great lately. Someone told me that my house may be full of "bad energy". In a world where top corporations in the US -- and increasingly here -- are paying feng shui experts handsomely to cleanse their buildings and rearrange the furniture, and ghost movies such as The Sixth Sense are really hip, the thought of detoxing my apartment appealed to me.

Having earlier burned Native American "smudge stick" in a do-it-yourself ritual that exacerbated my husband's hay fever, I decided it was time to call in the professionals.

I had heard about Raym while in Byron Bay. He and his wife Chicchan (pronounced Chicc-han, not Chicc-ken) organise the Starlight Healing Festival in the region each year. Someone I know told me he regularly did cleansing work in Sydney, so I gave him a call.

Raym wanders around my home for a while, nodding his head. Then he starts moving his arms in different directions -- a human divining rod.

"Yep. Your property is pretty clear. But I have some bad news."

I turn pink.

"You are not clear. You seem to have some negative attachments hovering around you that need clearing."

"Negative attachments? Do you mean ghosts?"

"We prefer to say entities or beings from another dimension."

Many doctors, therapists and naturopaths have come up with theories to explain my odd personality: premenstrual tension, post-menstrual tension, premature

midlife crisis, mid-week crisis, allergy to milk, separation anxiety, hyperglycaemia. Possession by hostile entity is a new one.

Should I subject myself to a psychic exorcism? As the old Jewish joke about chicken soup goes: "Can't hurt!"

Raym, who was a factory worker before turning artist, then energy clearer, explains he is going to take me on a past-life regression using the laying on of stones, which is an ancient healing art practised by the Mayans and ancient Egyptians. I am very excited. Well, doesn't everybody secretly want to go back, back, back and see if there are any memories there? Beyond death, beyond consciousness?

So the next thing, I'm lying on the floor with crystals around my head, body and arms. Raym waves a very large crystal -- which could easily belong in a sex shop -- around me. Then he lays crystals all over my body, meticulously. It takes ages to put a thousand stones in their exact place. "Breathe deeply," he says, talking in a hypnotic way as he works. He finally finishes but, out of the blue, I get a tickling throat. It gets worse and worse and then suddenly I am coughing violently, the crystals falling off my body and on to the floor.

"I'm so sorry," I try to apologise, as Raym picks up the pieces. But ghost-busters never lose their cool, and he begins the laborious process of laying them on again.

Then back I go in time, on a journey. I see myself. I'm in a hospital ward. It's 1940s wartime. I'm a nurse, working in the middle of some horrific epidemic. I'm not sure if this is my past life or a scene from *The English Patient*, but dying from some plague certainly would explain why I am such a hypochondriac.

Before I have the answer, I start to feel it again. A huge tickle in my throat. "Oh no," I think, fighting it. Suddenly I am coughing again, so hard that the crystals go flying everywhere. One has landed in my eye, others have fallen around my ears.

With the patience of Job, Raym starts laying again and trying to help me back on my journey. It's no use. The coughing continues. The good news is that it has obviously scared away the entity, who clearly doesn't want to be hit in the eye by gobs of spit, because after a while Raym announces I'm "all clear".

I sit up, and actually feel clearer. The house feels clearer and lighter after Raym leaves. Seriously. And things get much better.

I am never certain what I believe in when it comes to things mystical, but I don't think it actually matters. The power of positive suggestion can work wonderful magic too.

From the heart

Dear Ruth,

I'd like to comment on the spate of medical "self-help" books on the market at present. The notion that one's thoughts create illness and cancer makes me so angry. How many ill people will swallow the message that they've caused their own problems? I can't bear such opportunistic charlatans.

Jane Anderson, e-mail

Dear Ruth,

Re your column on whingeing (Review, 27/11). If your friends don't take your advice, give up. They don't call you for it anyway -- they just hope you'll tell them what they want to hear. The adage on advice goes: "The wise don't need it and fools don't heed it."

Vickie, e-mail

Dear Ruth,

I recently read a story on rage and how it is the fast life we lead in the city that contributes to it. I would like to add that it's also the lack of control we have in our neighbourhoods that causes such anxiety. With all the noise, smells, renovations and insensitive development swamping our suburbs nowadays, we can't even find sanctuary in the privacy of our homes. No wonder so many of us feel powerless, frustrated and very tired.

D. Ann

Richmond, Victoria

Dear Ruth,

There is another way to connect with the wilderness of the soul and to make peace with it, without doing the desert thing. It might not be quite as geographically exotic but it is very effective. It also provides a sanity-restoring break from the overload of these times. Vipassana meditation retreats are held regularly in the Blue Mountains and Queensland, and occasionally in other centres. They usually run for 10 days, and there is no eye contact or verbal communication between participants. A very freeing experience! I have done one and was left with a profound sense of inner serenity.

R. Secomb

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