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WELLBEING PRACTITIONERS

FOLLOW MY LEADER

TRANSFORMATIONAL SAGES WORTH TRAVELLING THE WORLD FOR

THE METAPHYSICAL SHAMAN

Mar Harrsen

Ojai and Long Island, USA

Few people have the instant charisma and empathy of Mar Harrsen, a spiritual healer whose journey began after years of suffering from a chronic illness that she was told was incurable. In 2014, she went to Peru, connected with a group of shamans, and found wellness after exploring the use of plants and music in their practices. When I met her, Harrsen was working between California and the East Coast and, within two minutes of our first encounter, I'd confided my life story to her, unexpurgated. I was at Shou Sugi Ban House in the Hamptons; she had set up a base nearby the year before and was a guest therapist at the chic Long Island retreat. During a week that included gong baths and beach-walk meditation, my time with Harrsen was the most remarkable. My itinerary included various options and, as I was more intrigued by shamanism than massage, I chose a session with her. One of her trademark treatments is limpieza – a cleanse. A hen's egg was stroked across the surface of my limbs, then cracked into a glass of water and the shape of its yolk analysed. The peaks, she explained, represented shock in my system, so we discussed what it could be attributed to, either in childhood or recently. Harrsen then rubbed my arms and legs with a candle, lit it, melted the wax and interpreted the molten remains. She told me that the dramatic peaks represented past emotional shock. I had, indeed, recently suffered a trauma that left me reeling, so an hour of maternal, mystic attention was profoundly, genuinely comforting.

MARK C O'FLAHERTY marharrsen.com

PHOTOGRAPH: ANNE-CLAIRE ROHE



WELLBEING PRACTITIONERS

THE TEMAZCAL GUIDE

Yaotekatl Luis Zepeda

Riviera Maya, Mexico

"When people hear the word shaman, they think of an old man in animal skins," says Yaotekatl Luis Zepeda. "That's not me – I have tattoos, I use Instagram, I do meetings on Zoom. It's about being open to learning, that's what makes a good healer." Zepeda was born in Mexico City and learnt his early spiritual practices from grandfather figures and a year-long stay with the Huichol tribe in the Sierra Madre mountains. I met him in Chablé Maroma in the Riviera Maya. I was going through one of the worst periods of health in my life and was hamstrung by worries about my future. I was wary of the gruelling sweat-lodge-style Temazcal experience at first, as I'd heard tales of claustrophobia and fainting. But Zepeda was infectiously gung-ho, taking me through the ceremony's ancient chants and drumming as we hunched together in a stone hut, pouring water on blazing "grandmother stones" ("older than we are"), burning copal incense and filling the space with intense heat and steam. As the session progressed and the hut sweltered, my limbs tingled intensely and I felt the thump of my heartbeat in my ears, but I breathed more deeply and easily than I had for a long while. I felt as if my mind and body were being cleaned. "Some people see visions of their ancestors," Zepeda told me as I emerged more than an hour later, red-faced and drenched in sweat. I blinked, euphoria flooding my body. I had seen something in the hut: a shadow hovering above Zepeda's left shoulder. Not malevolent but protective, as though someone was there watching over me. I exited with incredible clarity of mind. "Every ceremony is sacred," said Zepeda as we caught our breath. "But it's all about what you need from the journey. Now look ahead, breathe deeply and put your feet on the earth." LIZZIE POOK chablehotels.com; healingholidays.com



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THE BLIND HEALER

Ibu Ketut Mursi Ubud, Bali

Let's get the *Eat, Pray, Love* clichés out of the way. Admittedly I fled to Bali at a difficult time, but I was there for escapism rather than enlightenment. Or so I thought. A friend versed in spiritual matters insisted I visit Ibu Ketut Mursi, the intuitive blind healer at Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Ubud. The resort slopes towards the Ayung River, a blossom-soaked Eden in the dip of a lush valley. Right on the water's edge, the spa is imbued with regenerative energy and has a pacifying air. Just as well, I was nervous. During something akin to a massage and a reflexology session, I was patted and stroked from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes, as Mursi divined information. She relayed her insights, covering everything from my characteristic nuances and job prospects to future romances. It was encouraging: I was given specific timescales and details of forthcoming good fortune.

I was uplifted by some profound comments and moved by others. I left dazed, grateful and more at peace. Though I can't fully explain what happened, I know healing took place.

JOHN O'CEALLAIGH ritzcarlton.com; healingholidays.com

THE TCM LEADER

Troy Sing Hong Kong, China

Australia-born Sing is one of Hong Kong's most lauded Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners. He specialises in male and female fertility and women's health, but I first attended his cosy clinic at Health Wise Chinese Medicine in 2000 to help with sinus issues. That he was a native English speaker (unusual back then) was reassuring, as he helped me understand why he was combining acupuncture in certain areas of my body with a customised herbal tonic. I returned often, most notably for help with conceiving my second child, and ended up writing a book with him about the traditional Chinese path to health. For Sing, Chinese medicine is about releasing blockages and regaining balance between yin and yang. He is eloquent on fertility. "Every organ needs to be working at its best to facilitate pregnancy," he explains. Acupuncture at specific meridians, combined with moxibustion and taking Chinese herbs, opened my body for conception. Sing now treats an increasing number of men for issues related to sperm production, quality and swim ability, many of which he believes are due to environmental toxins. Years later, the same women who came for fertility treatments return for help with menopause. KATE O'BRIEN chinesemed.hk