

Keen to revitalise herself, SARAH NIVEN attended a curious class of shaking yoga

IF THE pressures of life leave you so stressed that sometimes you feel the urge to shake someone, then the good news is you're not alone. However, if you really want to make a difference to how you feel, perhaps you should consider shaking yourself.

In a bid to start the year feeling rejuvenated, I signed up for a workshop where participants are encouraged to shake their bodies for emotional and physical release.

Over the years I've tried some pretty weird things - from Scottish country dancing to colonic irrigation - but I must admit I was nervous before my first shaking session. Not only did I have no idea of what to expect but I was anxious as the workshop was due to last two hours, which seemed a long time to shake.

The course was led by my regular yoga teacher Kamini Hala and although she had taught me many intricate contortions in my weekly yoga class, I quickly realised that detailed instruction didn't apply to shaking. Once I was shown the basics - plant your feet fairly wide apart and firmly on the floor to ground you - it was really a case of, well, just shaking. Or, as Kamini put it: "Connecting with the energy that is all around us and allowing it to shake you."

She demonstrated how shakers can turn as they shake, something that left me dizzy, although she appeared unaffected. It transpired she had had plenty of recent practice, having just returned from a four-day retreat which involved shaking for up to six hours a day.

An integral part of the group shaking also involved repeating a mantra "om swastiasu ratu bagus", which roughly translates as: "I am leader, I love myself." Helpfully it was written on a board in front of us along with a picture of Ratu Bagus, the 59-year-old Indonesian spiritual teacher and healer who inspired the practice. A spot of further research revealed that shaking dates back beyond Ratu - the early Shakers were a Christian group who shook when they prayed and the Quakers used to quake.

Kamini said that we didn't need to use that exact mantra: "You can repeat to yourself, 'I am free' or 'I love myself.'" She continued: "Anyone can shake, regardless of whether they have any religious beliefs or not and can still feel the benefit.

SHE added: "Everything in creation vibrates and shaking is a natural way of releasing tension and emotion. As it is a form of meditation you are also focusing on your body and general awareness. I always feel calm and refreshed after a shake."

With this glowing endorsement I concentrated on telling myself that I am free and I tried to allow my body to do its own thing, as opposed to self-consciously shaking it myself. Apparently this gets easier with practice. For the

first few minutes it felt relatively natural - rather like a good stretch. Then after half an hour I realised my concerns about the length of the session were justified.

Two hours of shaking is a long time, although the heavy beat of the Aboriginal-style music helped and we were told it was fine to stop for a drink of water or a break.

"Try moving your knees faster," Kamini suggested to me as everyone else shook and twirled with abandon. There was the occasional moment of laughter and lots of other expressive outbursts, which I was told were all part of the process of letting go.

I realised just how tense my shoulders were and wished I'd indulged in a glass of wine beforehand - something that generally helps if I'm attempting to move with music. I mentioned

this half in jest to Kamini who informed me that a lot of shakers don't drink alcohol and that her own partner, a former army major and fine wine enthusiast, now never touches the stuff since being introduced to shaking.

Some long-term shakers do, however, drink the liquid from a herb of the tobacco family in the belief it helps them focus the mind but Kamini assured me this is optional and not recommended for beginners.

One recent convert was Sabrina, a 28-year-old accountant who had been to three shaking sessions and credited it with helping her through a difficult time.

"I recently had to move out of my flat for financial reasons and was feeling quite low. I'd never heard of shaking before and it sounded bizarre but thought I had

nothing to lose by giving it a go," she told me. "I could feel the benefits by the end of the first session and am definitely feeling more relaxed physically and mentally. I don't understand why it works but it does for me."

OTHERS in the group proved to be equally enthusiastic. Roger, who works in computers, had never looked back since being introduced to shaking by his brother John, while Rose, 52, a retired optometrist, has two daughters who also practise it and say they've gained a clearer perspective on life as a result.

In all honesty, after two hours of trying to allow my body to shake

'I was impressed by everyone's total lack of inhibitions'



Pictures: PHIL YEOHANS

MOVE IT: Sarah finds shaking can be liberating - but it's also quite hard work

Shakin' all over

naturally with limited success. I think I'll be sticking to yoga as my main form of relaxation and as yet I have had no sudden urge to give up the wine. But I am aware that unusual pastimes like this can take a while to grow on you and I was impressed with everyone's enthusiasm and lack of inhibitions.

It is not often you share a room with strangers who are prepared to laugh, shout, shake, twist and turn without worrying about anyone else's reactions.

Once you've got your head around the idea, shaking can be a liberating experience. I wouldn't rule out spending 10 minutes every evening trying to shake away the stresses and strains of the day but I think I will stick to doing it in the privacy of my own home.

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