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DAVID LESER  
MEETS SELF-  
STYLED HEALER  
SERGE BENHAYON.

# THE DAVINCI MODE

*"I know more than any scientist in my inner heart ... I know everything about the universe and how it works. I can answer any question about any mystery in the world, any mystery in the universe."*

— Serge Benhayon's message for the "New Era", January 1, 2012.

**A** FEW YEARS BEFORE SERGE BENHAYON REALISED HE WAS the reincarnation of Leonardo da Vinci, he was a junior tennis coach on the north coast of NSW. What prompted Italy's greatest Renaissance painter and polymath to reappear in the lush hills of Alstonville to teach tennis 480 years after his death is a mystery, even to Benhayon.

It all started in April 1999 when the following words suddenly came to him: "Heaven shines on those whose hearts bleed with love and compassion bestowed upon you as my kingdom."

These weren't from Da Vinci's mouth, but whomever – and wherever – they came from, they blew the Uruguayan-born, Sydney-raised tennis player away. "I thought [the words] came from my head," he says now, "but they were coming from my heart. I fought them. I thought they were ridiculous. Even though they were beautiful, my head said, 'That's impossible. Who do you think you are?'"

Benhayon, the scion of a wealthy clothing manufacturer from





the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo, was married with four children. He had a job teaching tennis in Alstonville. He had plans to buy a tennis centre on the Sunshine Coast. This was definitely not part of the plan. “In my head, everything was saying, ‘Play it safe, Serge. You’re good at what you’re doing. Stay doing what you’re doing.’”

But how to do that when you’re starting to realise you are the modern-day expression, not just of Da Vinci, but also Imhotep, a 27th-century BC Egyptian high priest; Alice A. Bailey, a theosophist, occult teacher and author of 24 books on “esoteric healing”; as well as Pythagoras and St Peter.

“The embodiment of previous incarnations, in terms of being told what I was and wasn’t ... came because I resisted the work,” he says rather cryptically. “I didn’t want to do it. I just wanted to continue being a tennis coach.”

Perhaps he was having a psychotic episode? “[No], because everything was really still and sensible. It wasn’t voices I was hearing. It was an energetic impulse, what we call an ‘impress.’”

From this “impress”, or “drop of energy”, Benhayon could see there was “energy all around us”, and that he, Sergio Benhayon, former Maroubra primary school student and pupil at South Sydney High, was “connected energetically” to an ancient lineage of “living wisdom” that included Florence-born Da Vinci, a “Claimed Son of God” who’d once served mankind through Ishvara and thus had “access to the true Universal Heart”.

But why, of all places, Alstonville? “I’ve never sat and pondered that question,” Benhayon says.

Certainly the charms of this town, nestled between Ballina and Lismore, and boasting a riotous profusion of purple Tibouchina blooms during autumn and winter, would not have been lost on the creator of the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. Nor would the fact that Alstonville is cheek by jowl with Byron Bay, Bangalow, Goonengerry and Mullumbimby, where people have been yearning for a new paradigm ever since the consciousness-altering 1973 Aquarius Festival.

Since Serge Benhayon’s “amazing 10-fold rise in awareness”, he has been issuing treatises – seven books in all, plus dozens of lectures and seminars – on the “energetic laws” of the universe and how “nothing can stop the Claimed Sons of God” from reappearing “over and over again until each and every single human is united as one, by their true light”.

Benhayon says these Claimed Sons of God, or “High Initiates” (like himself), have “inaugurated the New Era and will continue by the thousands to grow and inspire others”.

Judging by the number of hungry souls now taking up Benhayon’s “esoteric” teachings in Australia, the UK, Europe and Canada, this would appear rather a prophetic statement.

Over the past decade, about 15,000 people have flocked to his annual retreats in Lennox Head, NSW, England and Vietnam (not to mention his workshops, talks, presentations, lectures and private healing sessions at his clinic in Goonellabah, east of Lismore) to hear this 48-year-old reincarnate, this “5th degree Initiate” and member of the ancient “hierarchy”, expound on “ageless wisdom” and the “esoteric nature” of all things on earth.

Although he has no scientific or medical qualifications, Benhayon is head of Universal Medicine and has a team of conventionally trained physicians, physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, psychologists, naturopaths and ophthalmologists working with him in the area of “esoteric medicine” (including “esoteric chakra puncture”, “esoteric connective tissue therapy”, and “esoteric

breast massage” practised only by women).

Based on the belief that the systems and organs of the body are “centres of energy” that support a life of balance, esoteric medicine considers illness and disease the result of “ill choices” that have created “energetic disharmony” rather than random events or genetic predisposition.

**D**R ANNE MALATT, A BANGALOW EYE surgeon and daughter of doctors herself, is one of Benhayon’s strongest supporters. We meet in her surgery where the *Mona Lisa* casts her famously inscrutable gaze over us from a framed print on the wall. “I can’t say [if Serge is the reincarnation of Da Vinci] but what I can say personally is that I believe in reincarnation. The majority of the world believes in [some form of] reincarnation, so belief in God or belief in reincarnation isn’t exclusive to Universal Medicine.

“The core tenet of Serge’s teachings is energetic integrity and being willing to discern for yourself ... and the great thing about him and the reason why there are several doctors, nurses and allied-health practitioners working with him is because he is very much in favour of Western medicine. [But], like us, he understands that if Western medicine were the holy grail, we’d all be well, and we’re not.

“I find Universal Medicine illuminating because it gives me an understanding that there is something beneath the symptoms. What we deal with in medicine – the symptoms, the illnesses, the diseases – that’s on the surface, but there’s a root cause within from where that all comes.”

Kate Greenaway, a physiotherapist for the past 27 years and also from a family of conventionally trained doctors, concurs. “People come into the clinic who know nothing about energy, but they do know whether their bodies are well or not.”

A north coast farmer, whose wife went to see Benhayon a few years ago, takes a different view. He speaks on condition of anonymity. “My wife wasn’t well,” he says, “and a friend of hers talked her into going and seeing that idiot and he said to her, ‘You have a break in your aura and an evil spirit has entered you and it’s residing in your liver and kidney.’ She was very f...in’ distressed and I was horrified.

“A week later she was diagnosed [by a doctor] with two massive brain tumours and was dead within a few months.”

One businessman, who also won’t be named, says he went to see Benhayon after his brother took his own life. “He told me my brother would be stuck in some astral plane for years because he committed suicide, and because he had dark energy. I said, ‘Mate, that’s such a head-f... I hope you don’t go around telling other people that shit.’”

A third man tells me, via Skype from the UK, that when he became extremely ill three years ago, he went to see one of Benhayon’s “esoteric healers” and was told he had “bad energy” and that he had been “living the wrong way”.

His parents were students of Benhayon and had sent him to see this “healer” because they refused to believe his ill health was anything more than “energetic imbalance” and the result of his “choices in past lives”. (Benhayon insists he is fully supportive of conventional medicine.) This man was later diagnosed with a rare illness, which he declines to name for fear of being identified.

He believes his parents’ embrace of Benhayon has done irreparable damage to his relationship with them. “I was really close to my parents before, but I now have the feeling that I have

**A vision shared:** eye surgeon Dr Anne Malatt (below) is a supporter of Serge Benhayon’s methods.



**“LIKE US, SERGE UNDERSTANDS THAT IF WESTERN MEDICINE WERE THE HOLY GRAIL, WE’D ALL BE WELL, AND WE’RE NOT.”**

experienced their death. There's an incredible harshness and coldness about them now. I can literally predict their conversations. It's not them that's speaking any more. It's Serge."

GOOD WEEKEND has spoken to others – partners, siblings, sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, friends, flatmates of Benhayon's supporters – who make almost identical claims. One man, his voice thick with grief, describes how his relationship with his daughter has been rent apart. "I was trying to get her to realise that this guy was a charlatan and she said, 'Dad, if you continue to talk negatively about Universal Medicine, I don't want any more to do with you.'"

This man's marriage has also collapsed. "After my wife got involved with Serge, the rot set in. Foods changed. No dairy. No bread. She would go to bed with her iPod plugged in and listen last thing at night, and first thing in the morning, to Serge's lectures.

"Then, all of a sudden, I would find Universal Medicine symbols under my bed. For 2½ years there was no lovemaking. If I touched her breasts, I was groping. If I drank, she'd sleep in the other room. Even if I came back from the pub and hadn't drunk [any alcohol], she refused to sleep with me because I brought back 'pub energy'.

"We used to have an extensive music collection; it just disappeared. We had books on philosophy: Socrates, Plato, the Bhagava Gita, the Upanishads ... She said, 'You don't need them any more.'"

To understand how this could happen, it is necessary to enter Serge Benhayon's esoteric world of "prana" and "fire". Most of us seem to be dwelling in the lower spheres of "prana" or negative energy. We think the wrong thoughts, feel the wrong feelings, eat the wrong foods, listen to the wrong music, read the wrong books. We also sleep at the wrong time ("ideal" hours are 9pm to 3am), exercise the wrong way and make love in inappropriate ways, especially men.

Stop feeding this "prana", accept the message that Benhayon has been vested with delivering, and we will move into positive energy, into the "fiery emanations of the Atmic womb of God".

A few years ago in Mullumbimby, a book-burning ceremony was held in the garden of Universal Medicine's lawyer, Cameron Bell, where Benhayon's students were invited to throw their books onto the pyre. Most of the volumes were on Chinese medicine, kinesiology, acupuncture, homeopathy and other alternative healing modalities, all of which Benhayon has decreed "prana".

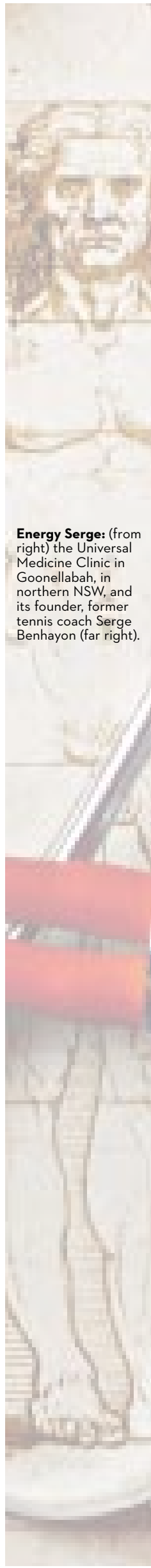
"I thought I was going to a barbecue," one man says. "And then I thought, 'What the f... is going on here?' It was just like the ritual burning of books in Nazi Germany."

This man was initially open to Benhayon's teachings, given his knowledge of – and curiosity about – ancient spiritual traditions and alternative healing practices, but he soon recoiled.

"There is a lot of judgment and control over people's lives. At one point a few years ago, Serge graded his followers openly and publicly for the amount of 'love and light' they were holding. That led to a lot of comparisons and self-recrimination among his students.

"He presents himself as perfect, with no vulnerabilities. He once said publicly, 'I have never felt any sadness.' He also said, 'You can't know God if you don't eat garlic' and 'You're incapable of being the love you are if you eat dairy.'"

EVEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NORTH COAST OF NSW's willingness to embrace the counter-culture, an audience with Serge Benhayon is an



**Energy Serge:** (from right) the Universal Medicine Clinic in Goonellabah, in northern NSW, and its founder, former tennis coach Serge Benhayon (far right).

experience never to be forgotten. We are facing each other in a large room at the Universal Medicine Clinic in Goonellabah, the sweeping lawns and pink magnolias outside bathed in sunlight and birdsong.

Benhayon is staring at me with intense, dark eyes. His sylph-like figure will barely shift during the next two hours. Seated a metre away are his first wife, Deborah Benhayon, and current wife, Miranda Benhayon, neither of whom appear happy to see me.

The air is charged with tension, not to mention the strong whiff of legal grapeshot. This is the end of a difficult week for Serge, with newspaper reports questioning whether he is running a cult and causing the dissolution of dozens of relationships, claims he fervently denies.

What further disturbs the atmosphere is that the Benhayons are aware that Miranda's mother, Trish Threlfall, has spoken to GOOD WEEKEND and accused Benhayon of using his position as Miranda's tennis coach 17 years ago to drive a wedge between her and her daughter.

In an anguished interview at her home in

tinue to have a relationship with my dad and continue to have an amazing relationship with Deborah and Serge."

Serge and Deborah Benhayon separated shortly after the tennis coach began appreciating the implications of his new spiritual calling. "Deborah was afraid that this [media attention] would [eventually] come and ruin the family," he says. "I said if I were to stop, I'd be shutting down my heart, and I couldn't do that."

That was in about 2002. Benhayon says he and Miranda got together "well after that year" and she offers, "We've been married just two years."

Deborah Benhayon adds, "Would I be sitting here ... if I felt that there wasn't integrity?"

GOOD WEEKEND has spoken to a number of Benhayon's former tennis colleagues, including Steve Parr, head coach at Zone Tennis in Brisbane, who says he fired Benhayon at Alstonville for poaching other coaches' players, including the young Miranda Smith, whom Parr himself had been coaching.

"Never," Benhayon says. "I left Steve."

Paul Denning, now the head coach at Alstonville



Bangalow, Threlfall recounted how her daughter went to live with the then 31-year-old Benhayon and his family one day a week when she was 14, but that this soon turned into a full-time living arrangement. "I just went absolutely ballistic," she said. "I had no input into it. I used to say to my husband, 'Can't you understand we shouldn't be giving our child to a man we don't even know, someone who promised she would make Wimbledon? She has to be with us.'"

Serge Benhayon denies ever promising his former tennis pupil that she would reach Wimbledon. "That would be ridiculous," he says.

Miranda Benhayon, now 31, insists that her decision to live full-time with her tennis coach was one both her parents supported. "We all entered into this agreement together," she says.

Trish Threlfall categorically rejects this and expresses heartbreak that she has only seen her daughter once in nearly 12 years, and this despite sending her text messages saying, "I love you."

Miranda Benhayon counters: "I don't actually have contact with her at all by choice, because it hasn't been love. When we started off [in] tennis, it was a family thing; it was all of us in it together. She pulled away from that and that's why I con-

Tennis Academy, says he and Miranda were both coached by Benhayon but that he, Denning, looked elsewhere for a coach because he felt uncomfortable about Benhayon.

"To be frank, I left because I felt he was trying to control my life, [but also] because he was really a bit weird with her [Miranda]. He was so controlling over her." Miranda Benhayon rejects this, claiming that any decisions made about her life were done in total consultation with her father.

Steve Rigby, president of the Alstonville Tennis Club, says he asked Benhayon to resign as head coach because his focus had turned to "faith healing". "He was a terrific coach and a really good businessman, but he'd lost interest in it."

**A**T SOME POINT AFTER BENHAYON'S transformation from tennis coach to esoteric healer, he realised that the vast body of human knowledge and wisdom accumulated over centuries – the sages and songs, the parables, prayers and consolations, the secular and spiritual traditions, the teachers, gurus and philosophers who had inspired generations, the rituals and cultures that had come to reflect the diversity of the human



(The Therapeutic Goods Administration [TGA] launched an investigation of some of these products last month after the *Medical Observer's* political reporter, Byron Kaye, was advised to contact the TGA by medical experts. As a result of the investigation, Universal Medicine's website is now in compliance with the regulatory requirements of the Therapeutic Goods Act, however, the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission is understood to be looking into a number of complaints.)

The art has gone, too, replaced by Da Vinci prints. "One of the reasons I like saying I have been, or I may have been, Leonardo, because I never actually say it, I hint at it and I joke about it ... is to show that he [Da Vinci] did something just more than paint. He left an impression, an energetic quality, on earth that was greater than just the paintings. When you stand in front of his paintings, you get a really good feeling. I've observed people in galleries and it's the paintings they stand in front of longest."

More than Picasso, Chagall or Monet? "Yes ... they don't stand in the same way [in front of those paintings]."

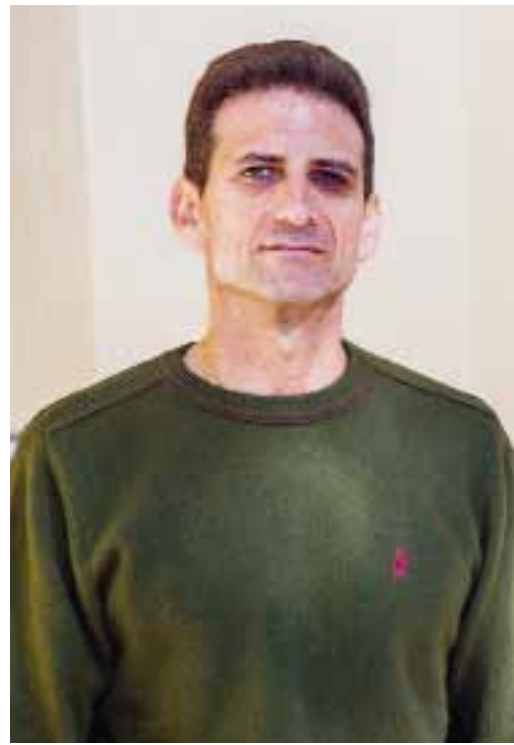


project, the passion and anguish that had inspired great works of art – most, if not all of these, contained offending energies that had led us away from the truth. These needed to be rejected.

Check the music collection of Benhayon's students (they are not "followers", he insists) and many of their classical, jazz, pop, soul, country, folk and rock favourites have been replaced by the "genius talent" of Benhayon's student Chris James or Benhayon's wife, Miranda, or son Michael, who is also a "chakra puncture" practitioner and teacher.

"Serge calls it esoteric or 'glorious' music," says one person who attended his workshop. "He says, 'This is going to be the most amazing music you'll ever hear, on another level of energy', and it's essentially cheesy '90s bad romantic pop. It's awful."

Students are encouraged to "energetically clear" their grocery shopping by placing their receipts on a Universal Medicine "clearing symbol". Check under – or beside – their beds and around their necks and there are personal Universal Medicine symbols, along with eye pillows, breast massage creams, herbal elixirs and teas that Universal Medicine sells to replace the "negative energy" with the "fiery".



**"ONE OF THE REASONS I LIKE SAYING I HAVE BEEN, OR I MAY HAVE BEEN, LEONARDO ... IS TO SHOW THAT HE DID SOMETHING MORE THAN PAINT. HE LEFT AN IMPRESSION ... THAT WAS GREATER THAN THE PAINTINGS."**

Benhayon says we all have access to this intuition – about what has integrity and what doesn't – but when I tell him I'm rather partial to Dostoyevsky and Mozart, he says, "The truth is that would be impossible energetically ... Mozart has many moments of energetic integrity but not all of it has energetic integrity."

How does he know this? "I've ... spent 18 months in EDGs [esoteric developers groups] presenting the energy of music for people to make their own minds up."

"That is untrue," says a former student. "When you're at these EDGs, Serge tells you what your response to the music should be and how you should feel about it."

I ask Benhayon how it is that he has become the arbiter of what is energetically true? "I'm just the messenger of what the world could be," he replies. "[My students] are asking me. It's not a debate. If I know the answer, then the answer has to be that ... I can feel the energetic quality of anything."

That's a huge claim. "It is to you, but anyone can learn it."

A few years ago, Benhayon decided that listening to Elvis Presley's music was once again permissible because he had returned to earth as an

"esoteric" being. Elvis started his career "fiery" but then got lost in the "pranic" world of ambition, alcohol and drugs before his death in Memphis 35 years ago. Now he was back, living the life of "quite a simple guy", his energy clear.

We are in Benhayon's private healing room ("The Surgery"), and Benhayon has just given me a 20-minute "esoteric healing", a laying-on of hands that I must admit has been rather relaxing.

I am consumed, however, by thoughts of Elvis. Where is he now?

"Somewhere," Benhayon replies.

In the world today? "Yeah."

Where do you think? "I don't disclose things like that."

Is he in America? "No."

Africa? "No."

Is he near Alstonville? "No."

Is he in Australia? "He's in Asia somewhere."

Asia's a big place. Can we narrow it down? "I don't know that ... All I'm doing is presenting it esoterically."

**B**ANGALOW IS A DELIGHTFUL VILLAGE of palms and weeping figs 13 kilometres west of Byron Bay. There are now dark rumblings here, with shopkeepers who once enjoyed good relations no longer on speaking terms. People who once bid each other good morning now cross the road or avert their gaze to avoid each other, and a number of relationships have unravelled.

Benhayon insists that "he has never told any woman to leave a man", but it appears from emails GOOD WEEKEND has seen that he has been less than impartial. In one exchange with a student, he says that her husband has been "conveniently lying", that he is "scared of love and truth", and that he is sabotaging "her glory".

Miranda Benhayon's mother, Trish Threlfall, has had her car smeared twice with eggs since talking to GOOD WEEKEND, and one local says his wife has secretly run up tens of thousands of dollars in credit-card debt as a result of attending Benhayon's retreats and workshops.

Judging from the 12 properties Benhayon and his family have listed with the NSW land title registry – plus their property in England, plus the fact that a three-day workshop alone earns Universal Medicine in the vicinity of \$150,000 – the former tennis coach is obviously doing well.

But he is quite clearly rocked by the negative publicity he predicted would be coming his way, and he doubts whether I am able to be "neutral" in describing his work and philosophy.

I tell him I'm trying but that it's important not to suspend critical thinking. It's hard, for example, not to be a little sceptical when he says – with absolute certitude – that he was once a member of a heretic Christian sect, the Cathars, in 12th-century France. Also, that his daughter Simone Benhayon, a swimming teacher now running the Universal Medicine Centre in Somerset, UK, happens to be the reincarnation of Winston Churchill.

How does he know this?

"All her life she had the similarities of it," he says. "We've observed that."

But how do you divine that she was Britain's World War II leader? "Is this going in the article?"

Yes. "Because it makes me look ridiculous ... In the temporal world that does not understand, and will not give the time to understand, it sounds ridiculous. And it makes good reading, doesn't it?"

Yes, it probably does. But as the Gospels say, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." **GW**