



A conversation with Rishi Hridayananda

Rishi Hridayananda began teaching the Shatkarmas when she was a swami living in an ashram in Kolkata. Every Sunday the ashram would host up to 500 people as she led them through laghoo (short-form intestinal wash), kunjla (regurgitating salty-water) and neti (washing nostrils).

40 years on and Rishi is still teaching these practices running the twice-yearly Master Cleanse. I spoke with her on the final day of my first week-long Master Cleanse.

Me: You are famous for your 'salt-water parties' complete with 'bar-tenders' who pour your salt-water. Why is this party atmosphere important?

Rishi: It's a way of helping people loosen up and to let them know it's OK to burp and fart. It's OK to let go of these things. The belly must be relaxed when you do this practice. Tension tightens you up and makes the practice slower and longer. So I make it light like a party and we have fun.

Me: I was surprised at the fine line between the number of glasses of water required for laghoo (short-form intestinal wash) and doing the full shankarprakashana (long-form intestinal wash).

Rishi: Actually, that is a very individual thing and will be influenced by a number of factors like your diet; whether you eat meat, drink alcohol and caffeine, as well as your personality. Some people 'hang on' to things at a mental or emotional level and may then find it more difficult to let go at this physical level. And that's the thing about these practices. They work on all the koshas (layers of your being) and transform your personality.

Me: The week involved a lot of rest and introspection. I had lots of dreams and old memories popped up, things I hadn't thought about for years.

Rishi: Yes, this can happen. It is important to be able to witness these happenings of the mind to allow them to be released as they arise.

Me: Is this why we are doing trataka meditation (steady-gazing at an object) daily?

Rishi: That is a big part of it, but also it makes the eyes luminous and you become irresistible (Laughs).

Me: Some people had headaches after doing the practice. Is that just about coffee withdrawal?

Rishi: It could be caused by caffeine or sugar withdrawal. It's a good idea that you do some preparation beforehand. For a few weeks before the Master Cleanse, start to gradually reduce your caffeine and alcohol intake so you don't shock your body by suddenly stopping. This is why this practice is done in Spring and Autumn when the weather is mild. You must remember that you become very vulnerable to all things at this time. You're like a baby so you wear a hat and sunglasses if you go out in the sun, rest is important and mouna (silence) especially when you're eating. If you talk through your meal, that is where your energy is going, not into your digestion.

Me: Are there people who should not do Shankarprakashana?

Rishi: Again, this is a very individual thing and this is where experience comes in. It's important that I meet everyone before they do Shankarprakashana. Everyone is different and it's not until I meet them and talk to them that I have a sense of which practice they should or shouldn't do. This is why you can't learn these practices from a book. You need someone with experience keeping an eye on things.

Rishi Hridayananda will be hosting one of her Salt-water Parties at Narasoma Retreat Centre in Ubud, Bali, August 2019 for 2WiseWomen.

Master Cleanse

24-31 August 2019

Narasoma Retreat Centre, Ubud Bali

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