

# oils ain't oils

Having hot oil dripped over your forehead may sound like torture, but **Bronwyn McNulty** found it quite beneficial.

**M**y last experience with hot oil was back in 1985. It was the day before my school formal and in a budget bid for super-lustrous hair I picked up one of those VO5 hot oil treatments.

The hot oil treatment I had today, in the hands of Ayurvedic practitioner Raman Das Mahatyagi, was very different.

Shirodhara is the name of the procedure in which hot black sesame oil is dripped onto your forehead from a specially designed copper pot. It sounds weird, or like something you could try at home with a bottle of Crisco and the help of a friend. However, I had heard it was a deeply relaxing experience great for alleviating stress, headaches and insomnia. It's also said to improve mental concentration and memory, and be good for epilepsy and depression.

## homely comforts

My expectations of a bustling clinic wafting aromatherapy oil smells were dashed when I pulled up outside the Yatan Holistic Ayurvedic Centre in Gordon, on Sydney's north shore. Only a modest sign at the front of the suburban house indicated I was at the right place.

I was ushered in by Mr Mahatyagi's friendly assistant, and led into a home office where Mr Mahatyagi talked briefly about the nature and benefits of Ayurvedic treatments. Shirodhara, he told me, is ideally part of a seven-day detoxification, purification and rejuvenation treatment known as Panchakarma. Black sesame oil is used, he says, because of its ability to penetrate

cells and remove toxins from inside the body. It is dripped onto the forehead, or third eye – also known as the ajna chakra – because this is the central point of the endocrine system, so it helps to balance glands and hormones.

Then we were off downstairs to a big white room that felt clinical and cosy at the same time. I could hear birds chirping and, finally, smell something not dissimilar to aromatherapy oils.

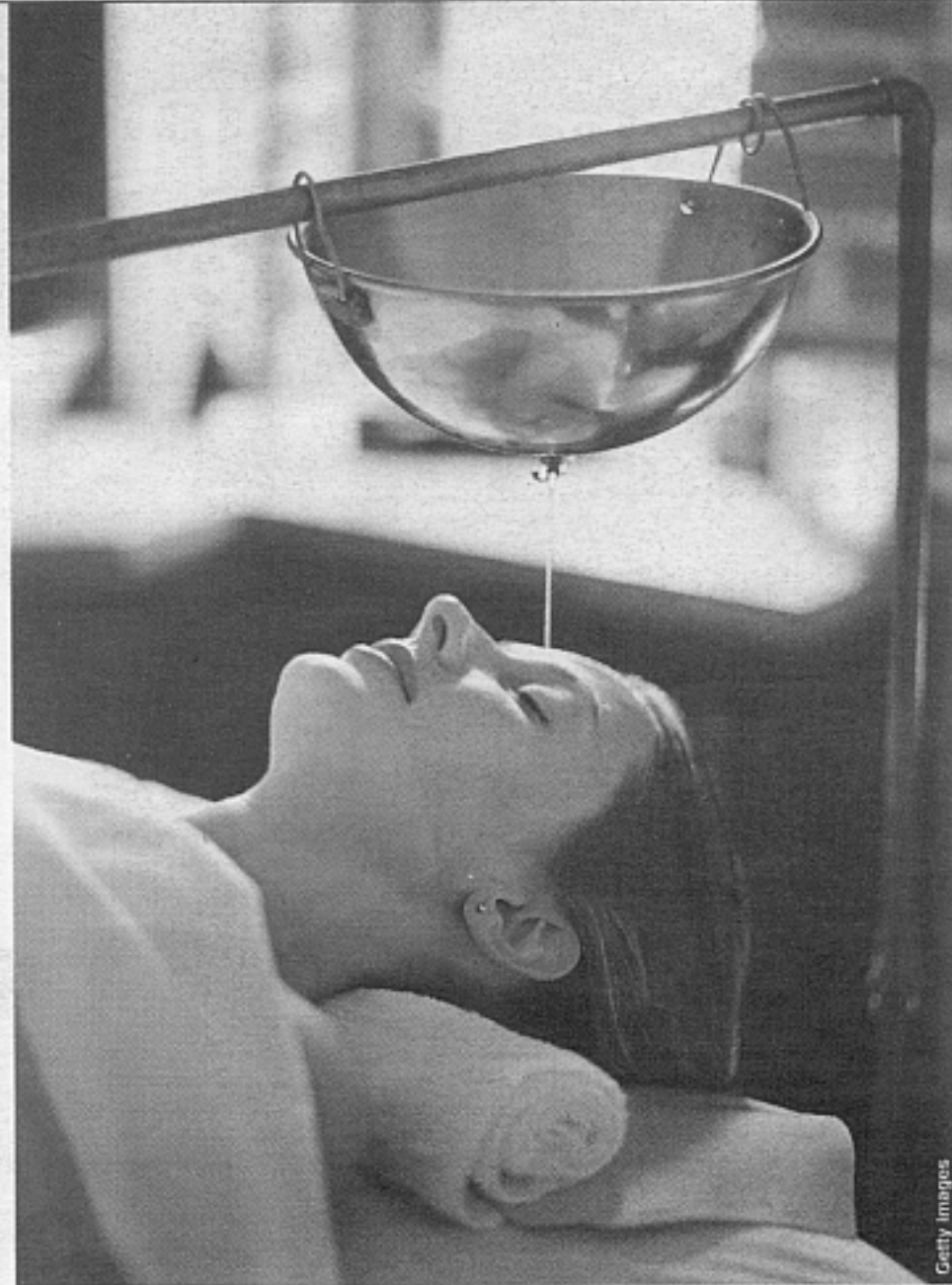
## slick trickles

Mr Mahatyagi instructed me to remove just my jacket and shoes, and make myself comfortable on the treatment table, with my head lying back over the small wedge-shaped cushion at one end.

Once I was settled, he covered me with a big towel, and fixed a couple of tissues over my eyes to prevent any oil getting into them during the treatment. The fact that he used sticky tape to affix the tissue to my face would have been a little unsettling had it not been an uncanny reminder of the method I used to keep my hot oil hair wrap in place all those years ago.

Moments later, the anointing began. With a couple of big splashes, I felt the flow of soothingly warm – thankfully not hot – oil hit my forehead. Wrinkles of surprise quickly dissipated as a feeling of comfort spread through my being almost as fast as the oil slicked its way from my forehead, through my hair and down into a bucket on the floor.

I thought how fortuitous it was that I hadn't just had my hair done. It felt nice though, the oil trickling across my scalp. But not as nice as the steady stream of



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warm sesame oil that was making constant contact with my forehead. It felt almost like a guardian angel was gently pressing a delicate finger into my head with just the right amount of pressure.

### go with the flow

Every now and then Mr Mahatyagi would sway the copper pot from one side of my head to the other, so my whole forehead felt the warm flow.

The pot ran out a few times, and more oil had to be heated up. It was during these moments that it was startlingly apparent how relaxing this oil caper was. Having that soothing flow interrupted was as uncomfortable as stepping out of the shower on a chilly winter's morning.

But as soon as the pot was replenished, relaxation reigned again. After several pots-worth of oil, my head was better basted than a Christmas turkey. Mr Mahatyagi began to slowly but firmly massage my head and face. He then

mopped up excess oil with a towel, and the session was complete.

When I finally hauled myself off the table, I felt as though I had just woken from a long, deep sleep. My skin looked rosy and dewy fresh but my hair looked ridiculous.

"Hello Elvis," my husband said when I walked in the door.

Interestingly, after I gave myself a thorough shampooing a couple of hours later, I was reminded again of the hot oil treatment I had all those years ago. Maybe it was just my relaxed frame of mind, but my hair looked so lustrous...

shirodhara is available at Yatan Holistic Ayurvedic Centre, 54 McIntyre Street, Gordon. A one hour treatment costs \$110. Call the centre on (02) 9499 7164 for details.