

Spiritual healer Serge Benhayon 'not a cult leader': court

By [Michaela Whitbourn](#)

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A former Sydney tennis coach turned spiritual healer who is suing a former client for defamation over social media posts branding him a sexual predator and cult leader has told the NSW Supreme Court he "always" had full consent before touching patients.

Serge Benhayon, 54, is suing one-time client and acupuncturist Esther Rockett for defamation over allegations she made in a series of blog posts and tweets starting in November 2014, which he says portray him as delusional, dishonest, a sexual predator and the leader of a "socially harmful cult".



Universal Medicine founder Serge Benhayon, right, outside the NSW Supreme Court on Tuesday.

Photo: AAP

Ms Rockett, who has described the Universal Medicine founder as a "sleazebag guru", accused Mr Benhayon of performing a "sleazy ovarian reading" on her during a treatment session, inappropriately touching her and engaging in inappropriate conduct towards women.

Mr Benhayon commenced defamation proceedings against Ms Rockett in 2015 and the three-week hearing started on Tuesday.

In his opening address to the four-person jury, Mr Benhayon's barrister Kieran Smark, SC, said it was "not a crime to call someone a sleazebag guru" because "there is freedom of speech" but Ms Rockett should not be surprised she had been sued for defamation and the kind of proof required to meet the serious allegations she levelled against Mr Benhayon was "very high level".

He said Ms Rockett appeared to have "taunted" or "challenged" Mr Benhayon to sue her for defamation.

Mr Smark told the jury they would be "comfortably satisfied" by the end of the trial that "Mr Benhayon is not the leader of a socially harmful cult" and he promoted a set of teachings that "at worst, ordinary people would think ... [were] harmless".



Esther Rockett leaves the Supreme Court in Sydney on Tuesday.

Photo: AAP

Mr Benhayon denies each of the claims made against him, and Mr Smark said "it doesn't get much worse" than calling someone a sexual predator.

Ms Rockett has pleaded a range of defences, including truth and honest opinion.

The Uruguay-born Mr Benhayon, who moved to Australia at the age of six, grew up in Maroubra and became a successful tennis coach before moving into spiritual teaching and healing. He now lives near Lismore in the NSW Northern Rivers region.

During an initial stint in the witness box, which is expected to continue on Wednesday, Mr Benhayon described himself as a "teacher and practitioner" and a "business owner".

He told the court that shortly after his 35th birthday he returned to "the state of being" he enjoyed during his first nine years of life and experienced an "incredible amount of joy".

Mr Benhayon said that after this time he was "given access to a whole range of modalities" or techniques that could be taught to others, including "esoteric breast massage" and "connective tissue therapy".

He said his teachings on these techniques, which were offered in courses under the Universal Medicine brand, were derived "from the tradition known as the ageless wisdom".

He said the ageless wisdom had a "very strong lineage that includes the divine messengers", including Hermes, Plato, Pythagorasm, Jesus and Muhammad.

Mr Benhayon said any touching during treatment sessions was done with the consent of the client, who was "always fully clothed".

“You can touch someone in their heart and they know whether you are being sexual or not.”

Serge Benhayon

"You can touch someone in their heart and they know whether you are being sexual or not," Mr Benhayon said.

"We all know who is not safe. We are all aware of energy all the time," he said.

He said a light touch was sufficient because he was working with the person's own energy.

Mr Benhayon said Ms Rockett was "fully clothed" during his sessions with her in 2004 and 2005, which was "typical in sacred esoteric healing". He said he was trying to "re-establish ... her kidney energy" which was low at the time.

“I proceeded to do a technique that applies both hands just over the lower abdomen and incorporates the uterus.”

Serge Benhayon

"I proceeded to do a technique that applies both hands just over the lower abdomen and incorporates the uterus," he said.

He said he told Ms Rockett where he was going to place his hands and he was "explaining to her the compromised energy I could feel in that area".

Mr Benhayon said he asked if she had experienced sexual abuse, as "her body was definitely registering compromise".

Mr Smark has accused Ms Rockett of being "fixated" on Mr Benhayon and suggested she "viewed it as her mission to bring him down". Ms Rockett has yet to give evidence.

The hearing continues on Wednesday.



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