



The Healing Power of Sacred Sounds

By Fadel Behman, M.Sc., Ph.D.

"Of all the methods for altering brain state, the use of sound is the most ancient and primordial. Vibration is the fundamental basis of everything that exists, from the stars and galaxies to our bodies and minds." Tom Kenyon, Brain States

We stand at a very interesting point in history. We are at the seam where the "magic" of shamans and healers of ancient cultures and wisdom traditions is being joined with the latest discoveries in "science." Throughout history, healers have used vibrations, specifically the audible vibrations of sound and music, as a pivotal modality, to induce and enhance healing states of consciousness.

We recognize musical instruments because a tone is not made by one single frequency. Only in a laboratory is it possible to produce a tone that exists of (almost) one single frequency. Nobody would like such an instrument, since this sound has a very clean, cold, soulless timbre. A tone of an instrument always contains several frequencies. These frequencies are related to each other. The relationship between frequencies of pleasant tones appears to be simple: in addition to the base frequency, there is the double frequency, a frequency three times the base frequency, four times the base, etc. These additional frequencies are called overtones or harmonics. The contribution (volume) of the separate overtones determines the timbre of the tone and is different for each instrument.

A number of physicians and hospitals have recently begun to utilize the singing bowls with cancer patients and others suffering serious, catastrophic illnesses. Mitchell L. Gaynor, M.D., Director of Medical Oncology and Integrative Medicine at Strang-Cornell Cancer Prevention Center, affiliated with New York Hospital, authored the best-selling book, *Sounds of Healing*, in 1999. Subtitled *A Physician Reveals the Therapeutic Power of Sound, Voice, and Music*, the book is a resounding endorsement of the principals outlined in this article, and cites numerous research projects from around the world as scientific "proof" of the ability of sound and music to heal.



"Sonic driving," a term introduced by cultural anthropologist and shamanic teacher Michael Harner, is the use of sound, primarily regular rhythmic drumming to help an individual "journey" into their mind, or into a "non-ordinary reality" (NOR) for creativity, healing, problem solving, and generally accessing a greater wisdom. Such drumming is usually in the theta range. The tempo of tribal drumming from Africa, the Caribbean, and South/Central America is often in the alpha wave frequencies.

Electrical activity is always going on in the live human brain. Different frequencies correspond to different states of consciousness. In a nutshell, "normal waking" consciousness means the brain is generating electricity in the "beta" frequency (13-25 or more cycles per second); "alpha" (8-12 cps) is generated when we are daydreaming, in light trance, or the early stages of meditation; "theta" (4-7 cps) is what is commonly referred to as the "hypnagogic" state - in between waking and sleeping, where we frequently experience bursts of insight, intuition, and creativity; and "delta" (0.5-3.5 cps) is mostly deep, dreamless sleep.

About Singing Bowls

There is very little information available in written form on the singing bowls. Their origin is somewhat of a mystery, and seems to be shrouded in secrecy. They have been used for thousands of years; anecdotal evidence claims that they pre-date Buddhism, and were created and used by the Bon. Originally the term "bon" designated the various existing religious and magico-ritual traditions, very probably based on elements common to the heritage of pan Asiatic Shamanism. However, the people of the Himalayas used the bowls. One thing is certain, contemporary Western people are deeply moved in a special way when they first encounter the singing bowls. Many feel that their spirit has been touched when they listen to the living sound of the bowls.

I have played the bowls for many people... I have yet to encounter a negative response. A frequently heard comment is that although the sounds are completely new and different from anything they have ever heard, there is something extraordinarily familiar about them. This feeling is less strong when heard from recordings than in person. The sound from the bowls instills great space and peace. A sense of well-being and relaxation is experienced. The vibration seems to synchronize with brain waves for therapeutic effect.

The metal "Singing Bowls" from Tibet, Nepal, and northern India have become increasingly available in the west over the past decade. Compared with overtone chanting, the bowls are relatively easy to learn to play. Most people can make a bowl "sing" in the first 5-10 minutes.



Singing bowls have a magical aliveness, and they interact in distinct ways with different people and environments when played. Handcrafted by different makers, each bowl has a unique voice. They are comprised of the seven metals representing different planetary influences. Together these metals produce a profound sound which can penetrate deep within the body and mind creating a subtle healing, also useful as an aid to meditation.

The bowl is played by holding it in the flat open palm of one hand, allowing the body of the bowl to vibrate freely. Within the basic tone of each bowl are overtones that present an initial perception, which then unfolds itself to the patient listener. The "beat frequencies" often heard on high quality bowls are the results of two or more wave trains passing simultaneously through the same region. This can have the effect of synchronizing the brain's hemispheres with a "binaural" beat, as well as encouraging entrainment. The oral tradition ascribes three primary uses to the bowls from ancient times: synchronization, internal massage, and to travel without moving the body.

Synchronization

The sounds of the bowl have an incredibly effective. Or, it may be viewed as bringing about a more meticulous organization of pulse and heartbeat. In a larger context, it may refer to being "in synch" with the Tao, with the flow of life in and around us. Often, although our clients are presenting smaller problems, from a larger perspective, these can be understood as being "out of synch". In a ritual manner, playing the bowls for a group of individuals has the effect of bringing into alignment the frequencies of each person with that moment in time and space, as well as with the frequency of the group. Such synchronizations have a heightened effect if the bowls are played in sacred space (churches, pyramids, etc.), or at significant cosmic moments (solstices, equinoxes, etc.)



Internal Massage

When a singing bowl is struck, an individual can feel that the air around the bowl also vibrates. These powerful vibrations spread through our bodies, and this results in a very delicate internal massage of all the cells. Our bodies consist of almost 80% water, and water is an excellent medium to carry vibration. The human body is a living entity of vibrations and wavelengths. A healthy organ is well tuned, meaning that it vibrates only at its own frequency, while the frequency of a sick organ is disturbed. Our language still uses the phrase "to be of sound mind and body." Singing bowls recreate the original harmonic frequency, and stimulate the body to rediscover its own harmonic frequency. By making the body vibrate to the frequency of the bowl, when it is synchronized, it can vibrate independently. By placing singing bowls onto the body directly over organs or tissue parts, and then sounding the bowl, vibration is "sent" into the body and internal massage is created. Bowls can be placed on Chakra points to open or "attenuate" them through a sympathetic resonance of sound and vibration. They can be placed around or along the body including the head, to bathe the body or tone it in a "sound bath."

Travel Without Moving the Body

Many ancient and contemporary esoteric practices speak of "astral travel," or "astral projection." Both the American and Russian government spent considerable time and money during the cold war in researching "remote viewing." If, as Dr. Larry Dossey and others have hypothesized, consciousness is "non-local," certain stimuli seem to provide an environment conducive to the direct experience of this phenomenon.

Dr. Fadel Behman's current research, teaching and holistic energy therapies address the new frontier of integral health, raising consciousness and offering a practical approach of wellness of body, mind and soul. Dr. Behman is the founder and director of the Holistic Health Energy Institute in Montreal, Canada.