

SOUND HEALING

Tamara Watson's personal journey of self-understanding and acceptance helps to shed some light on a truth, that is, sound has an energy that can be tapped for healing.

The word is out! Sound heals dis-eases that manifest in an array of diverse symptoms, from physical pain and chronic malfunctioning of the body's systems to addictive behaviour and clinical depression. My personal experience can attest to this. In this context, writer Anais Nin's words, *"music melts all the parts of our bodies together"* is a literal truth.

Before retreating to Hollyhock, a healing centre on Cortes Island off Canada's west coast, I asked a friend if I could bring along her didjeridu, which neither she nor I could play. I didn't know why, but I felt it was important to bring it with me.

Soon after I arrived, I met Shine, an Australian shaman. The next day I had a didjeridu and song healing session with him.

The didjeridu, or yidaki, is an instrument that originates from Aboriginal Australian culture. It is made traditionally of eucalyptus wood that has been naturally hollowed out by termites. When played by blowing through an opening at the top with a technique known as circular breathing, it produces a continuous drone, filled with overtones or harmonics. These encourage the brain to produce alpha waves, which facilitate a meditative state and healing for both player and listener.

Before the session Shine asked me a few questions about my intentions for the healing. I lay down fully clothed on a blanket he had spread out on the floor. He covered me with a thin cloth. As he began to play the didjeridu around and over my body, I was taken into another realm of consciousness. My logical mind was stilled while my physical body twitched and undulated in response to the deep rhythmic tones of the instrument. Visions of places and people from other times arose, and a state of clear awareness that transcended the boundaries of place and time overtook me. I knew instinctively that I needed to play the instrument myself.



Towards the end of the session all I could hear was Shine's voice. His song, sung in a foreign tongue, reached into the depths of my consciousness, its power surpassing even the vibrations of the didjeridu. He sang over my heart, and I physically felt it soften to allow the healing vibrations in. My entire body relaxed, and I felt I was being held in the palm of the earth. Emotion suffused me. I became the vibration of bliss.

The effects of my experience lasted several days, and helped to restructure the course of my life. I found the courage to confront habits and beliefs that masked emotional pain, brought to the surface by my sister's death months earlier. I began my days once again with Yoga that gave me happiness, and I stopped smoking. I also began to play the didjeridu.

Each time I played the didjeridu over the next week I felt compelled afterwards to make sounds with my voice. Not a musician, I was always shy about singing, but I heard rhythms inside myself and needed to voice them. When I did, a torrent of sounds emerged, from deep drones, growls and wails to ethereal tones and melodies. Seated, with my eyes closed, I often saw vivid colours and I let my body bend and sway in unison with the sound. The experience was initially cathartic, clearing my most deeply held physical, emotional and mental tension. As I continued to play and use my voice it became more and more a meditative experience, creating peace and stillness within me.

I became entranced with the ability of sound to transform my emotions and thoughts, and began to research explanations from science and ancient healing traditions. I discovered the use of *mantras*, and chanted them into the didjeridu.

Literally 'mantra' in Sanskrit means "saving the mind." It may be only one or a few syllables, or several phrases like a verse. They embody universal truth, a state of concentration, or express a wish. When you



THE POWER OF SOUNDS

Sound is easily accessible, instinctual and powerful, it is also one of the most primal of healing practices. The underlying structure of the universe is vibration which produces sound energy. Creation myths throughout the world credit sound as the force that manifests divine consciousness into physical form.

The Vedas say the universe originated with mantras, or sacred sounds that contain the genetic patterns of all beings and things. The Bible credits creation with the spoken word. Egyptian mythology says that Thoth used his voice to create. According to the Hopi Indians, Spider Woman sang the Song of Creation to give birth to all life forms. The Australian Aboriginals believe divine beings wandered the Earth in Dreamtime and sang everything into existence.

Certain sounds facilitate healing by creating altered states of consciousness. A changed perception of time and space creates a physiological change in brain activity. This affects the nervous system – the physical body.

Sound also heals through resonance, the quality of a sound vibration that encourages other objects and beings to vibrate at the same frequency. As water supports the movement of sound vibrations, and our body is 70% water, we are naturally receptive.

It is believed that sound vibrations release blocked tension, helping to restore the natural circulation of energy (also called prana, qi, or chi) throughout the body. By encouraging altered states of consciousness vibrations also directly affect the nervous system and the physical body.

Sound also combines well with other energy forms, acting as a carrier of their vibrations. Effects of therapies such as acupuncture, Reiki and crystals are intensified when accompanied by sound.

Methods are now being developed to include ultrasound, electronic instruments that use specific frequencies – tuning forks, crystal bowls, Tibetan singing bowls and bells, the didgeridoo and the voice – to balance each of the chakras (energy centres) and organs.

chant a mantra, you are charging your breath with its energy. As you breathe, the mantra's vibration is carried throughout your body to affect your physical, emotional and mental frequencies.

I was astounded by their power to release and generate energy. I could feel tremors in my body while I repeated the mantra and soon afterwards, I became aware of more subtle, yet potent effects later. My consciousness was shifting, and I slowly allowed long-held fears to be acknowledged, felt, and eventually released.

As sound broke through my rigid thought patterns to unlock blocks in my energetic system, I became aware that the events unfolding in my life were more and more often synchronous with my conscious wishes. I effortlessly began to desire and eat foods that nurtured my weakened immune and digestive system and helped to balance my nervous system.

I was given a Tibetan singing bowl, and later I purchased a pair of *ting-sbags*, or bells. I loved their sounds and would play them for personal pleasure, placing the bowl on my abdomen and feeling its vibrations inside, or holding it in my palm and striking it softly with a wooden mallet, letting its ringing fill the space with its deep base note and high overtones. Alternately I held the wooden mallet upright, and with a stirring motion around the outside of the bowl created a subtle and high-pitched ringing as the friction caused the metal bowl to vibrate. Playing the bowl always brought me to a quiet state of peace and happiness.

Often when I returned home from a chaotic environment, or when feeling emotionally stressed, I would ring the bells repeatedly over my head and along the front of my body to create high frequencies that immediately soothed and calmed me. I occasionally played the bowls and bells during treatment sessions,

but my use of them was purely intuitive. I wished to know more about them and Tibet's ancient healing traditions.

I met a Tibetan Lama in Thailand who was able to give me healing and instruction with them, and invited me to work with him. I learned that my instincts were right, and new ways to use the instruments. He informed me that the *ting-sbags* in particular were able to repair gaps in the auric field and were useful for healing and protection when they were played as I had used them, repeatedly and loudly around the body.



Initially I knew only two mantras. Later I discovered a verse mantra that I wanted to sing, but was unsure of the Sanskrit pronunciation. I also wondered if the melody used was important. Within a couple months I met Shanti Shivani, sound healer, musician, and teacher of Nada Yoga, the Yoga of sound. She recorded the mantra for me, invited and urged me to play the didjeridu with other musicians, and introduced me to *kirtan*, devotional group singing. She also gave me increased confidence to trust my voice and my inner sounds. Within weeks I was initiated to another favourite mantra.

I am using what I have learned from my experience with sound to give treatment sessions, where sound is often combined with other energy balancing techniques such as acupressure, Reiki and crystals, to amplify their effects. I am also teaching others how to use sound for self-healing, and the important role intention, or consciousness, has for its effectiveness.

When I prepared to leave Canada two years ago, I instinctively felt there was something about sound and the voice for me to discover in Tibet. My search led me to the work of Tom Kenyon, sound healer, scientist, musician, and author.

He will visit Tibet in November to document Tibetan nuns' chanting while it is still possible to do so. Their sounds have never before been recorded, or heard outside of Tibet. Tom Kenyon's intention is to create a CD, DVD, and book to document the journey and the nuns' legacy, and in this way share it with the world.

I look forward to the shared wisdom that will result from Tom Kenyon's expedition, and my own journeys in the future to explore world cultures where sound is a powerful healing tradition. ■