

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING GROUP GONGBATHS

The following are suggested guidelines for giving a gongbath to a group of people.

CHOOSING YOUR VENUE

Choose a venue that is in a quiet location so that there is no disturbance from outside noise. You will need to ensure that there are no interruptions during the gongbath. Post a “No Entry” notice on the door before you begin. Ideally you need to choose a venue which doesn’t have a floor that creaks. This is very distracting during the gongbath when you are trying to move quietly between instruments.

PREPARING THE SPACE

Before people arrive smudge the room with some sage, and use a pair of tingshas or a high-pitched singing bowl or bell with a pure tone to clear the room energetically.

If you are doing the gongbath in a public space that is used for other purposes, you may have to smudge more thoroughly, especially in the corners. If the energy feels heavy or sticky play the gongs for a few minutes in addition to using the bowl or bells.

For really dense energy, use Paulo de Santos wood. Clear energetically for as long as you feel is necessary. If you are Reiki attuned, use symbols in the space. Light candles to symbolically bring light into the space. Gongs make their own sacred space wherever they are used, so as soon as you have set up the gongs and are ready to begin, the energy vibration of the space will begin to rise.

ARRANGING YOUR INSTRUMENTS

Arrange the gongs and other instruments so that they are in the most convenient places for you to play. This sounds obvious, but it’s amazing how often one finds previously unseen obstacles during the gongbath that can get in the way; the last thing you want to do is trip over anything and cause a commotion while people are in a deep state of meditation.

Arrange your mallets and flumeys so that you can pick them up quickly when needed, and use rugs under each gong so that you can put them down again soundlessly. Arrange your other instruments with enough room to play each one conveniently.

Get everything out of cases and bags, ready to play. If the room is big enough, arrange one gong stand so that you can move it around the clients when playing, to diffuse the sound. Situate the smaller gong you will use for the walking gong techniques in a convenient place, with a suitable mallet ready nearby.

Prepare yourself in advance by wearing soundless clothing which won’t make rubbing or swishing noises when you play; this can be distracting to the participants.

PRE-GONGBATH CLIENT CARE

When your clients start arriving, welcome them into the gong space. Encourage them to visit the toilet before you begin. In order to fully benefit from the sounds of the gongs it is recommended that people lie down. You may need to provide mats, blankets and cushions for their use unless you have asked people to bring their own mats to the session.

Ask the participants to arrange themselves on the floor, not too close to the gong stands; I always leave a three foot space between clients and any instruments so I have room to manoeuvre. Get them comfortably settled. Check with elderly people or anyone with back problems that they are able to lie down. Some people may be more comfortable in a chair or reclining on cushions with their legs bent.

The main thing is that they're comfortable and able to relax completely in their own cocoon. Check if anyone has tinnitus or sensitive hearing, and suggest they lie furthest away from the gongs with their feet nearest to the gongs. The gong is not known to adversely affect tinnitus when played sensitively; it's usually higher pitched instruments like tingshas played too loudly and too near the ears which can cause distress, so make sure you keep these away from people's heads when playing, and keep the volume down.

Check that everyone is comfortable – hand out extra blankets or cushions if necessary. Ask if there is anyone who has not had a gongbath before. This is important, as it affects the amount of volume you can use. If there is anyone who has not had the gongbath experience, just give a quick briefing on what is involved. Tell the participants that any higher volumes of sound will only be momentary; that if at any time they are uncomfortable or find the sound too much, that they are free to leave as quietly as possible. As everyone settles, allow a silence to fall in the gong space.

PREPARING TO PLAY

It's good to lead your attendees into a deeper space before you start the gongbath, to aid their entry into slower brainwave states and thus a deeper meditation experience. If you allow the silence to fall for a couple of minutes, it will start to permeate the whole space. Then you can talk them into it in your own way.

I always assure people that they are in a safe, loving, nurturing space that will support them in their sound journey. I assure them that any reactions they may have are entirely normal for them - it is a different journey for everyone. I may add other comments depending on the group present. Then I lead them in via focus on the breath, and always begin with the Universal Greeting, which sets the stage and centres everyone in a quiet space, including me. Before you start playing, set the ego aside and silently ask to be a pure and clear channel for healing sound to flow through you for the Highest good of everyone present, or your own similar intention.

THE GONGBATH

If you have prepared yourself properly you will now be ready to play the gongs and other instruments. Try to make a seamless transition between the gongs and different instruments, weaving a tapestry of sound into the space. This is why thorough preparation and laying out of instruments is vital, so that this flow is not interrupted except by intentional pauses.

This is part of the skill of giving a gongbath. Be very present in the process in order to minimise any extraneous accidental noise, e.g. mallets clacking, accidental tinging of singing bowls etc. When you have finished playing, be very quiet and don't move around so as not to disturb the silence.

POST-GONGBATH CLIENT CARE

Allow your clients time to come too naturally after the gongbath. The period of silence after the gongs have finished playing (Shunyata) is very deep and profound, and it's good to leave people in it for several minutes – maybe up to ten minutes if they have gone really deep and are not showing signs of stirring. I never rush this important time. When you feel ready, gently bring them back to the consciousness of their body, normal reality and the room in your own way. Allow everyone time to come back at their own pace. There is no hurry.

It's likely that everyone will be very quiet and not ready to speak at this point. Often they sit in silence for several minutes, just re-orientating, and no-one wants to move. Check that everyone is OK. Offer glasses of water and tell the participants that they will need to drink plenty of water during the next forty-eight hours to aid the flushing through of any toxins that may have been released during the gongbath.

Gradually they will come back to normal reality after their journey. If anyone wants to share their experience, allow them to. If they'd rather leave quietly without speaking, or just be quiet in the space that's fine too. Hold the space for them - supporting, listening and tending to their needs.

Assure them that if they have any questions or want to discuss their reactions to the gongbath in private, you are available by phone – maybe hand out cards with your number. Make sure that they are grounded before they leave. The water should have grounded them a little. If appropriate and there's time, offer herbal tea. Encourage stretching, and stamping of feet when they are standing up to further assist in grounding.

Sheila Whittaker – College of Sound Healing Gong Practitioner Training Tutor

~~~~~