

Sacred sound – An exploration of the power, efficacy and beauty of sound healing with voice and drum

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This paper seeks to discuss modern sound healing practices, rooted in ancient traditions, as viable interventions to enhance psycho-spiritual health and to assist in the evolution of humanity. Presenting data from both one-to-one and group sound healing sessions, this paper shows that at this time of both psychological and ecological crisis, Sacred Sound offers tools that are valuable, safe, relevant and effective.

Keywords: Drum; evolution; healing; health; human energy field; voice; psycho-spiritual; sacred sound.

Human context

SOUND based spiritual, transformative and healing practices have been part of human life for thousands of years. From Ancient Egyptian Temples to Kirtan in modern yoga centres, from indigenous shamanic traditions, through Christian liturgy to New Age affirmations, sound, in the form of rhythmic drumming, chanting, prayer and song, has been used to create unitive experiences and bring about psychological and spiritual transformation. Sound has been understood as the source of creation, a way to petition 'Spirit' for assistance, and as a means of healing and shifting states of consciousness by various cultures. Ashley-Farrand, (2000, pp.27–32), mantra and meditation teacher describes the relationship between several cultures and sound. For example 'In ancient Egypt the 'singing sun' created the world with its 'cry of light' through the tongue of the creator... everything in existence was born. He goes on to describe how the Mbuti of central Africa chant to the forest, to awaken the trees and ask for assistance with their problems; In Africa and Haiti trance drumming is used to connect with subtle realms; Hindu and Buddhist Sanskrit mantra are used for self-healing,

self-realisation, worship and calling on power and protection from deities. Many of these come from the Vedic tradition and despite geographical distance the Melanesians of New Guinea use chants that have links and similarities with Vedic knowledge and practice, illustrating how widespread geographically these sonic practices are. He also explains that the Amazonian Shamans use sound to clear what Rael calls sludge, or stuck energy, from the chakras using sound, and they understand that 'all physical forms are the sound and vibration of the infinite Self' (Rael, 1993). Both the Vedic and Shamanic views of the human energy body are reflected in modern Sound Healing practices, in that they are based on the awareness of a subtle energy system, with different layers, such as the emotional and mental bodies, energy lines (known as meridians) and energy centres (called chakras) all of which can become blocked and polluted with 'sludge' or unbalanced, discordant energy, leading to disease. These ancient practices stem from shared concepts of a human energy field (HEF) intrinsically interconnected with nature and the cosmos (Rael, 1993; Johari, 2000; Paul, 2004; Villoldo, 2001).

In the bible in John 1:1 (The New King James Version) it is stated '*In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God*'. One interpretation of this is that God created the world with sound. Christians use sound in the forms of hymns, Gregorian chant, Liturgical Christian prayers and chanting the Rosary as methods of worship, creating altered states of consciousness and petitioning to and connecting with God. In the classic Kabbalistic text the 'Orchard of Pomegranates', Moshe Cordovero states that in the Kabbalistic Jewish tradition it is understood that '*manifestations of God's attributes descend into human consciousness in the form of sound. By linking themselves to these sacred vibrations the prophets of ancient times came to see that all worlds, all stages of consciousness, and all beings are one*' (Ashley-Farrand, 1999). We can see therefore, that many traditions understand sound as seminal to life, the gateway to the Divine and to unity with all things.

Literature review on sound research

Physics and acoustics researcher, John Stuart Reid (2020), has been studying sound vibration to understand the properties and potential of the therapeutic use of sound on the physical body. and the effects of sound on cells and understanding its properties by making sound visible, called *Cymatics*. His research has shown that sounds radiate spherically, rather than in waves, and how music creates beautiful holographic bubble forms. He describes the images created by the geometry of music as mathematical correlates of the musical pitches and intervals. He also describes how these sounds imprint invisible patterns of energy (similar to what the Amazonian Shamans tell us) when they encounter membranes such as water or skin. His research shows how little we really understand sound and its properties and effects.

Creath and Schwartz (2004) measured the effects of music, noise and healing energy on the germination of seeds and concluded that sound vibrations (music and noise)

as well as biofields (bioelectro-magnetic and healing intention) both directly affect living biologic systems, and that a seed germination bioassay has the sensitivity to enable detection of effects caused by various applied energetic conditions.

They concluded that '*Because practitioner healing energy for seeds to germinate faster are similar to healing energy for a specific human ailment, this bioassay has potential as a means of determining practitioner effectiveness and as a means of screening practitioners for studies of effects on human populations*' (2004, p.120).

In her PhD thesis on Healing through Sound, Shelley Snow found participants experiencing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual effects, in particular release of emotions and trauma, more positive patterns of thinking and pain relief, as well as enhanced relaxation, calm and a change in life perception (2011, p.iii). She concludes with a call for more research into sound healing, specifically on group sound healing approaches, on the release of trauma and other forms of emotional healing, as well as on the variety of states of consciousness (ASC) induced by these practices (2011, p.213).

However, as we deepen our understanding of the body mind connection, more research on the effects on the whole person, not just the physical body, can be beneficial. The study of psychological effects of sound tend to centre around music.

The use of music as a means of inducing positive emotions and subsequent relaxation has been studied extensively by researchers. A great deal of this research has centered on the use of music as a means of reducing feelings of anxiety and stress as well as aiding in the relief of numerous pathologies. (Salamon, et al., 2003).

Sound healers believe that the field of sound therapy has huge potential. Since 1998 The College of Sound Healing (CoSH) has been training sound healers and developing tutors, as well as collecting data on the

effects of sound healing in the form of client feedback. However, despite being rigorous in its training and practice (it is a member of the Therapeutic Sound Association, the Complementary Medical Association and the IICT) it is extremely difficult to find funding for research and feedback forms with all that data are simply kept securely stored.

There are other colleges in the UK also researching sound, for example, The British Academy of Sound Therapy (BAST). However, healing research is often seen as unscientific and not taken seriously by academics and mainstream science, a point also made by Sonnex, (2017), who says that *'refusing to investigate a phenomenon on the grounds that it appears to be outside of our present understanding seems, at best, supercilious, and at worst, ignorant; it also seems to contradict the whole purpose of scientific enquiry'*. This being the case it is difficult to find funding and as professional standards and training are relatively new to this 'alternative therapy' this research is still in its infancy.

Energetic patterns and the subtle energy field

'If you want to know the secrets of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration' – Nikola Tesla.

In his book *Shaman, Healer, Sage* Alberto Villoldo (2000), a medical anthropologist who studied for more than 25 years with Amazonian shamans, describes encountering a luminous energy body, centred around the chakras, that records and reflects our life's experiences. This understanding of the HEF echoes that of the Vedic and Buddhist traditions, who similarly describe what is commonly called the aura as being made up of energy centres (chakras) and subtle bodies (koshas), which together are the means through which consciousness expresses and experiences itself in the human body (Johari, 2000). In the tantric tradition 'the culmination of the evolution of creation is in the individuated self', which uses four internal work organs of consciousness... the

mind (manas), the intellect (*buddhi*), the ego or I-consciousness (*ahamkara*), and the feeling self, being or nature (*chitta*), (Johari, 2000). These aspects of consciousness are seen as different layers within the HEF, that reside one within another like Russian dolls. The human being is then *'kept in contact with the entire order of creation through prana, the vital life force which comes as breath'* (Johari, 2000).

According to these ancient belief systems, imprints form in the aura when painful emotions that accompany trauma are not healed (Rael, 1993). These imprints are areas of discordant energy that block the flow of vital energy (also known as *chi* or *prana*) and create disharmony in the field. Depending on where the disharmony is located, this can lead to patterns of thinking, feeling and behaviour that are triggered by crises or emotional stress, and those scripts then play out in our lives. Additionally, long-term imprints create physical tension leading to illness. Similarly in Authentic Power Practice, Zukav describes emotions as energy in motion, which, if painful in nature and not felt and expressed appropriately, remain stuck in the HEF leading to illness (Zukav, 2001). To restore the whole system to health and balance these imprints or blocked emotions or thoughts need to be removed from the aura (Villoldo, 2000, p.57). This is the aim of Sound Healing. Once the energy flow is in harmony the body/mind heals itself.

Using sound to heal

Sound healing can be defined as the application of sacred sound to the human energy field, in order to bring back harmony and balance where there are discord and imbalance.

'Bells, gongs and cymbals are not only for rhythm but for creating unusual tones... with a capacity to shatter old patterns within the physical body and within the subtle bodies as well' Ted Andrews (1992, p.156).

What makes sound sacred? It is understood by sound healers to be the context and

intention. Historically humans have created sacred sound in many ways focusing their intention via ritual invocations, prayer, the calling in of power and protection from unseen spirits in other realms, and from gods and deities etc. (Neihardt, 1932; Gale, 2014; Paul, 2004; Andrews, 1992). Jonathon Goldman (1992), a prominent sound healer, musician, author and teacher expresses with a simple equation the essence of healing sound:

$$\text{Frequency} + \text{Intention} = \text{Healing.}$$

It is believed that sound is able to affect the human energy field because we are made of sound. Modern physics tells us that everything in the universe is made of vibrating energy including the cells of our bodies. Everything that vibrates makes sound. The idea that the universe is not simply physical in nature as Newtonian physics led us to believe, but is actually made of energy, stems from the work of Albert Einstein, Max Planck, Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, leading to the science of quantum theory.

Stemming from this work, Bruce Lipton, developmental biologist, states in his book *The Biology of Belief* (2005) '*Quantum physicists discovered that physical atoms are made up of vortices of energy that are constantly spinning and vibrating; each atom is like a wobbly spinning top that radiates energy. Because each atom has its own specific energy signature (wobble), assemblies of atoms (molecules) collectively radiate their own identifying energy patterns. So every material structure in the universe, including you and me, radiates a unique energy signature.*'

The fact that energy and matter are one and the same is precisely what Einstein recognised when he concluded that $E = mc^2$. Simply stated, this equation reveals that energy (E) = matter (m, mass) multiplied by the speed of light squared (c^2). Einstein revealed that we do not live in a universe with discrete, physical objects separated by dead space. We are slowed down sound and light waves, a walking bundle of frequencies tuned into the cosmos. We are souls dressed up in sacred biochemical garments and our

bodies are instruments through which our souls play their music. The Universe is one indivisible, dynamic whole in which energy and matter are so deeply entangled it is impossible to consider them as independent elements.' Lipton (2005)

Principles of sound healing

There are several principles at the heart of sound healing. These include resonance, entrainment, rhythm, intention and musical interval:

Resonance – everything has its own unique frequency and sound can be used therapeutically in constructive or destructive ways within the human body/mind to effect change. For example, particular frequencies are used in the NHS to break up kidney stones, others to destroy the cell walls of certain cancers. High intensity ultrasound, vibrating at 1–2 megahertz heats and destroys cancer cells and Dr Mitchell Gaynor (oncologist) claims that '*sound can redress balance on any level... and improve any medical condition*' (Reid, 2019). Dr Bruce Lipton (2005) believes that we will one day be able to '*tailor a wave form as a therapeutic agent in much the same way as we now modulate chemical structures with drugs*'. Sounds are also used to put someone into a state of deep relaxation. So using resonance we can positively influence the vibrations within a client's body/mind in order to restore harmony and balance to their whole system. Through the power of resonance we can also use sound to make changes in frequencies in a client through entrainment.

Entrainment is the effect of powerful vibrations of one object causing another object to shift its frequency into synchrony with the first. This synchronisation of frequencies occurs in our own bodies all the time. We can also do this consciously by slowing down our breathing, which causes our heart rate and brain activity to slow down. Thus changing one vibratory pattern within the body can cause other parts to synchronise. German neurophysiologist, Pascal Fries, believes that this also happens in the brain

itself when gamma, theta and beta waves occur in different parts of the brain. Entrainment between these vibrations allows the different parts of the brain to communicate and work together to create various types of integrated consciousness (such as mental focus, sleeping, dreaming) via neuronal synchronisation. This creates what he calls 'communication through coherence' (CTC). He said, *'I propose that entrainment with delay is the general mechanism that sets up phase relations subserving CTC'* (Fries, 2015, p.222)

Rhythm. We also become entrained through shared rhythm, the next principle behind sound healing. For example, when walking, we naturally fall into step with each other and our rhythms become synchronised. Different rhythms can also affect our moods. A two beat, such as a march is active, dynamic and enlivening. It is strong, stimulating and can be stressful. Whereas a three beat is softer, more receptive, peaceful, flowing, such as a waltz. This beat is also found in lullabies and the rocking motion of putting a child to sleep, as it is soothing.

Intention, the importance of which cannot be underestimated. It is the energy behind the sound we make, and the consciousness that practitioners embody, that makes all the difference to the outcome of sound healing. Sound is therefore understood as the carrier of consciousness. For example when someone speaks, whether they are shouting in anger or gently soothing someone's pain, we can feel the emotional energy and the intention behind it. Because of this the human voice is the most potent sound healing tool available to practitioners. Intention allows the healer to direct the sound exactly where it is needed. For example to send sound down through all the chakras or into particular parts of the body. It is the intention of healing and highest good that transforms the sound into a healing energy. The merging of consciousness and sound with the intention of the client's highest good allows the healing power of sound to move through us, rather than be created by us. The most powerful of these sounds are harmonics.

Harmonics are the tones produced in whole number mathematical ratios that vibrate at frequencies above the fundamental note played. For example when we play or sing middle C that is the fundamental note. Harmonics are produced when any sound is made and are mathematical ratios of the struck note. These vibrate twice, three times, four times etc., as fast as the fundamental, and are also heard at the same time. The faster the vibration the higher the note. Overtones are any resonant frequency produced above the fundamental, but not necessarily a whole number ratio, and therefore not necessarily a harmonic. We are not always aware of the overtones produced with a note, but as different overtones are more prominent in various instruments and voices they blend to create unique sound signatures that enable us to recognise that we are hearing our mum, a cello, a piano or a beloved friend. That sound personality is called the timbre. These harmonics are so important to sound healing as *'most of the energy of natural sound is in the harmonics, which carry the information or consciousness'* (Heather, 2015).

Musical interval. We can harness the power of harmonic ratios to create harmony in the HEF during healing through the use of musical intervals. For example a ratio of 2:1 creates an interval of an octave, which feels very balanced and thus can be used to create a feeling of balance and calm. The 5th interval, created by C and G played together are also used at either ear to create hemispheric synchronisation; where the left and right hemispheres of the brain resonate in a state of coherence creating a deeply healing and relaxing state of consciousness.

Together, these principles provide the sound healer with a variety of ways to support the healing process of their clients. For example to support someone with depression, where they are feeling stuck in a painful emotion, *'dissonant intervals can be used to stir up the emotions, bring unresolved emotion to the surface, which can then be resolved by moving to the consonant interval above'* (Gardner, 1997, p.112).

Sound healing – the process

The first step in sound healing is **connection**, and this is usually achieved during an altered state of consciousness (ASC) created by slowing the rate of breathing. Most healers would then, ground and connect to the earth and to above to ‘spirit’, as they enter into an almost dreamy state of consciousness where they are deeply feeling and listening, focused and allowing themselves to be guided by their intuition and/or helping spirits (Mackinnon, 2012, p.120; Gale, 2013; Maza Mau Yaze, 2011). In shamanic healing we then create sacred space. This might involve the lighting of a candle, and will usually include some type of purification of the healer and sometimes the client, such as smudging with sage or rattling to clear the energy field, followed by a ritual prayer and invocation to connect with and welcome helping spirits.

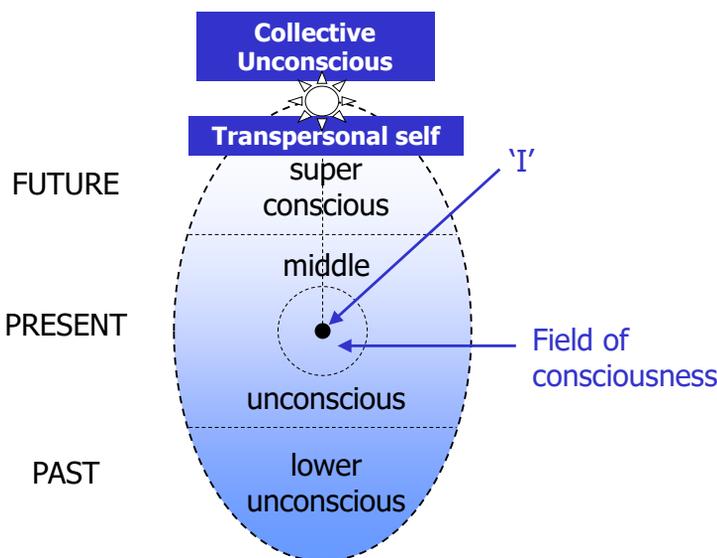
From a transpersonal psychological viewpoint, using Assagioli’s model of the self, the first step in the healing process is to transcend identification with the conscious self (or ‘I’, the personality limited in time and space) and identify instead with the transpersonal or higher Self (*soul self*, eternal spir-

itual essence), feeling its connection to the universe, the ocean of consciousness or the collective consciousness in order to channel healing sound. See Figure 1: Assagioli, 1965).

In order to connect to the soul of the healing client, we connect from our own soul to that of the client so that we can align ourselves with the vibration of their energy field so as to be able to interact successfully with it. This is called sympathetic resonance. Connection to a wider field of consciousness for guidance and to create unitive states within nature has also been described as co-creative intelligence ‘*the ability to think and feel with our world... following guiding signals*’ (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). This connection to nature, also used in Shamanic sound healing, is used in the ‘Work that reconnects’, based on Joanna Macy’s environmental activism which similarly ‘*helps people discover and experience their innate connections with each other and the self-healing powers of the web of life*’ (Macy, 2020). This connection to a wider field of consciousness, created through an ASC is maintained throughout the healing process.

Once the healer is in an ASC where they are able to sense where the client’s energy

Figure 1: Assagioli – Psychosynthesis, the model of the self



is out of balance or stuck they allow the process to unfold. This can be quite organic, with the healer working intuitively, or they may follow a particular protocol, several of which are taught during training (COSH, 2020). It is important that the healer trusts the process, keeps their intellectual, rational mind out of the equation and allows the intuition to take centre stage. At all times the healer watches the client for responses to the sounds made.

Case studies

The text boxes show four cases with a variety of clients and their issues to illustrate how the

therapeutic application of sound can affect a wide range of psychological and physical symptoms. Details of the exact treatment for all the four cases are not noted here, and the names have been changed. Generally a maximum of 21 minutes of applied sound is usual, as more than that can overload the client with energy, and each protocol takes around 21 minutes to complete. The healer's voice, tuning forks, drum, rattle (used for breaking up stuck energy) and also for creating an ASC, bell and feather (for smoothing the HEF) are generally the tools used.

John. Five-year-old child with epilepsy experiencing grand mal seizures, absences with incontinence, anxiety and low moods. In the case of a child it is imperative to have a parent present and in this case, it was deemed best to do the session in the child's bedroom with the family present. *Shabda* Mantra chants were offered to two deities invoking their assistance in removing obstacles to the healing and fear of change in the whole family dynamic. The therapist engaged the whole family in a smudging ritual using sage and an honouring song. The whole house was cleansed with rattle, bell and chanting to remove any disharmonious energy stuck in the home. A ritual invocation was practiced to call in and welcome the support of ancestors and helping spirits of both healer and the family. John was lying on his bed and, using gentle drumming, stuck energy was released from his aura. Chants and songs were sung into his heart while he was held in the arms of the healer. Afterwards a feather was used to smooth and release a residue of heavy energy found at his left side. The healer was guided to stand behind the head of the bed and make three loud noises down and through the boy's body and energy field. Everyone laughed afterwards and there was a palpable sense of relief. The child was grounded with deep sounds and chose a green bubble to close his aura. Grounding is done to ensure there is a strong connection from the root chakra into the earth. Sound healing often results in a natural 'high' and can leave the person very spaced out and ungrounded. This can be dangerous if one is driving home. Hence healers are trained to 'ground' their clients at the end of a session. This is done with a deep, loud sound from drum or voice, often combined with rubbing the feet and a clear intention to bring the client's HEF into contact with the earth. The aura or HEF is closed at the end of a session, as during healing the field is naturally open. It needs closing to create an energetic boundary, so that if the client encounters discordant or unbalanced energy when they leave, they have some protection. The client is invited to choose a colour to surround their HEF that feels secure and comfortable to them. This way of working is common to many training courses including the College of Healing and the College of Sound Healing, as well as many Reiki courses. During the session John was curious and playful but became very sleepy during the heart song. His mother cried several times witnessing the session.

Kath. Kath had experienced a pulmonary embolism brought on by varicose veins, and now presented with polycystic ovary syndrome and fibroids. Kath came for three sessions over three weeks. Each week she received 21 minutes of sound that included the use of drum, voice, rattle, bell and feather.

Claire. Presented with benign tremor, chronic pain, healing for stomach issues. Healer used drum, rattle, feather, bell and voice. A maternal ancestral energy line was sensed between heart and solar plexus chakra that needed healing. Ancestral energy lines are energy patterns handed down through genetics, as well as unconsciously learned behaviours that can be sensed in the HEF (Barron, 2019). Rattle – lots of heavy, stuck energy released. The healer felt the presence of her maternal grandmother, who was working hard to carry away dark debris throughout the session. The healer was instructed to make a loud sound, which initially she resisted. The instruction was repeated and, in spite of feeling self-conscious, she allowed a loud yell to emerge. It felt like the sound had banished a cloud of unbalanced energy. She toned and sang to bring the client back to balance, harmony.

Dinah. Dinah was recovering from a life situation that had left her with abundant emotional debris. She was processing the after-effects of an emotionally abusive relationship that had left her feeling devastated. The healer drummed, rattled and smudged the whole house beforehand. Drummed around the body, toning and drumming to release blocks. Dinah experienced the clear visual image of a black cloud in the shape of a bear, which was present throughout.

Outcome feedback

Within 24 hours. Feedback was received from John's mother:

‘There’s definitely been a shift in the feel of the house. The largest and most stark change was an immediate calmness the morning following his 1st treatment. He has an abundance of nervous energy and was constantly moving to deal with it (wouldn’t settle even in a hug or a conversation), so to have a calm, considered response to normal stimuli was a big surprise for us. He enjoys going to sit and ponder outdoors, which hadn’t happened prior to healing. He now even vocalises the need to go lie on the grass when he’s overwhelmed emotionally. He’s always enjoyed human touch but couldn’t settle... this has changed entirely, where he comes to cuddle, gives cuddles, and can discuss freely his love for his family and negative emotions he feels without getting overwhelmed and beginning to do displacement activities (which was his normal). This morning I asked if he was fine and he said yup. I asked “in a calm way?” and he said “calm

and good’. He’d been chatty not in a silly uncontrolled way, but in a clever, thinking kind of way, like his brain has had a chance to catch up. It feels like ... his mind has the space it needs, uncrowded with excess energy to function.

I can now let John into my energy field without anxiety. He’s opened up about being sad that he feels seasick... the fact that he’s telling us these things is lovely’.

The effects of the session were immediate and long lasting.

The general protocol for these sessions is that either the drum or voice is used to scan the HEF for imbalances, blocks or discordant energy. Sounds are focused into that area until it becomes clear. Once the whole HEF is scanned in this way the voice or rattle is used to pick up on any other areas that may need balancing. Any big blocks are broken up very effectively with the rattle. The bell is then used to soothe and heal the field with a soft, gentle sound.

Finally, the feather is used to smooth and finesse. The feather is a very sensitive tool and is a wonderful aid to sensing energy as any disharmony can be felt in the movement of its filaments within the field

Feedback after the first session. Feedback from Kath:

‘That felt amazing. I felt a shift during the session. I found a feeling of warm energy with the drum and felt very supported and held in the upright position. I also felt tingling in my shoulders, like a massage and like a loofah in my aura across my shoulders. The centre of imbalance in my right hip now feels lighter as does my womb. I had forgotten to say that my right hip was the site of the blockage where I had my varicose vein. I was aware of that area for several days after the session. Then it went away and I found I was more focussed on my work and more proactive in my life. I felt more capable of dealing with challenges as they came up. I’m feeling more inspired and have new ideas coming’.

Feedback from Claire.

Two weeks after first session. Feedback from Claire:

‘Mum is really happy I’m working on this. She told me since I began this healing work they’ve discovered my maternal grandmother has stomach problems too. It’s a B12 deficiency which impacts the gut. My mum’s sister has been treated for ulcers in stomach. Bacteria are present from birth causing bloating, wind – helico bacterial pylori. It is found through a blood test. Issues with Ferrotin, low protein stored in body, B12 or Ferrotin issues in all women in the line’.

During and after second session. Feedback from Kath:

‘I LOVED THAT! With the drum I felt very intense energy around my ears. At the right ear I felt a build up of energy, very intense like pressure. My left ear felt different, nicer,

like expansion as if the energy were moving through. With the rattle the hearing in both my ears both went clear (tinnitus) straight away. I particularly loved the rattle across my shoulders. Its left me really calm and in the moment’. (The tinnitus stopped during the session.)

Feedback from Claire:

‘I’ve been sleeping like a baby since the healing. The pain has moved from my left side towards my back. I have proteins and lucosites in my urine, an infection. Maybe kidneys like my mum. Pain moving from stomach (power) to kidneys (fear). I associate this with the message my mum had to put up with abuse and disempowerment, but I won’t put up with that. I am breaking the patterns. After the second session... I feel amazing! I looked in the car mirror and I had to look again. I didn’t recognise myself. My face seemed different somehow’.

After the third and final session. Feedback from Kath:

‘Usually after healing.... The base chakra has always been eager to heal but responds by causing gynae issues with bleeding for a few days. This time it was very light and only lasting a few hours. This is conformation that it is healing. For about 5 days I had been experiencing an uncomfortable sensation in my upper to mid back. The feeling felt like a suction vacuum, which disappeared and left a cooling sensation within minutes of Hara finishing. This could have been an energy ‘hook in’ but I also have been clearing away residue of old relationship issues from when I was in my early 20s where I sustained physical abuse to my back. Again she had to ‘chase’ something out of my right hip and leg, which I have on going physical issues with. This is a circulation problem, also a social circulation issues, the two for me are much entwined. Varicose veins from pregnancy 18 years ago, flared up in 2017, six months after losing

my partner, (social circulation, stagnating through grief). My feet have been numb for a while, Hara tapped my feet to open my foot chakras and instantly my feet felt tingly and alive. Immediately after Hara had finished, my head (and it still does 4 days later) feels so much clearer, like a cloud has lifted and I can think clearly and I have had so much energy. I mowed the lawn in the heat wave, which I usually shy away from!’ (Sometimes the rattle is tapped against the body where it is felt to be necessary.)*

Feedback from Claire:

‘The whole experience has had remarkable results for me. I felt energy shifts during treatment sessions with lasting results. We focussed on my ancestral line and by the 3rd treatment I have been symptom free. All the pain on my left side, in the stomach and under the diaphragm has completely gone’.

Six months later. Feedback from Dinah:

‘It was an immensely potent experience that helped me to process residual feelings and clear away emotional pain. I felt physically lighter in the core of my being than I had felt in years after the session. It was without a doubt the most therapeutic tool that I have come across in my healing process’.

From the relatively small amount of feedback presented here it shows that sound can have profound effects on the psychological and physical state of clients. These results also reflect the findings of Snow (2011) discussed in the research section earlier. Just as mindfulness was once the province of Buddhist meditators and is now in mainstream use within therapy, sound healing has the potential to bring about a shift in the way we view health and healing.

Transpersonal therapy practice for groups with the Medicine Wheel

Sound healing is also a powerful tool for transformation when used in a group setting. The author created and facilitated group workshops and the Sounding the Medicine Wheel course, using sacred sound healing practices from around the world in response to the developing awareness of mental health issues in her community. We hear in the media on a regular basis that we are in the midst of a mental health crisis. MIND the mental health charity published a report on access to talking therapies in 2013 in which they describe some of the difficulties in accessing treatment. One in 10 people have been waiting over a year to receive treatment. Over half have been waiting over three months to receive treatment. Around 13 per cent of people are still waiting for their first assessment for psychological therapy. Timely access to mental health services is a critical issue. Considerable harm can be caused by long waits for psychological therapies, which can exacerbate mental health problems and lead to a person experiencing a mental health crisis. The wider human costs of long waiting times are devastating and can have detrimental effects on all aspects of a person’s life. Yet far too many people are still waiting too long to receive treatment. Half of the service users reported that the number of sessions were not enough. 11 per cent said they had to pay for treatment because the therapy they wanted was not available on the NHS. Two of the MIND (2013) recommendations are:

1. To prioritise funding for further research on the effectiveness of psychological therapies.
2. To commission a **wide range of psychological therapy types** and also ensure people have a choice of therapists, appointment times and locations.

The author believes that the data presented below shows that group sound therapy with Sounding the Medicine Wheel could offer one possible affordable and efficient means of meeting this need.

‘Shamanic ceremonies and other tools and techniques are applied with the aim of transformation in the sense that they aim... for our world view to change...from a material one to a more spiritually connected one... bringing about ...reconnection with forces and ideas that we “have forgotten”’. (Mackinnon, 2012, p.103)

Working in a group in this way can have a more profound effect than one-to-one therapy can provide. Shamanic therapist and academic Christa Mackinnon (2012, p.102) said:

‘shamanic work also creates fields where... participants of groups... have a direct, intense holistic experience that produces the desired connections, shifts and transformations’; and that ‘adding a transpersonal dimension to the healing process helps us to ‘expand our consciousness, to experience our soul, our connection with spirit and as being an embedded part of the whole and of being whole ourselves’.

To assist in healing, we are looking for recovery and personal and spiritual growth.

Sounding the Medicine Wheel

The Medicine Wheel, or Sacred Hoop is a Native American symbol used to represent several spiritual concepts, which vary across North America. It is like a map of the universe and of the self, that usually includes four sacred directions, plus father sky, mother earth and the spirit of within, each symbolising different aspects of health and the cycles of life. The medicine wheel is usually represented as a circle divided into four quadrants, as shown in Figure 2. The four colours also represent the four seasons and the four nations of the earth (Neihardt, 1932).

A Medicine Wheel course could run over several weeks, it is used as a map of the self and of the cycles of life, which allows transformational work to include mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects and integration of the whole self. The Medicine Wheel is also used as the structure of the course. The methodology, however, includes sonic practices from many traditions, including Sufi, Jewish, Sikh, Shamanic and others.

Figure 3 is a brief illustration of the structure of the Medicine Wheel, which I have been developing and running courses and workshops for several years, showing the holistic nature of the use of sound as it applies to the four aspects of self – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. The struc-

Figure 2: The Medicine Wheel & the four seasons

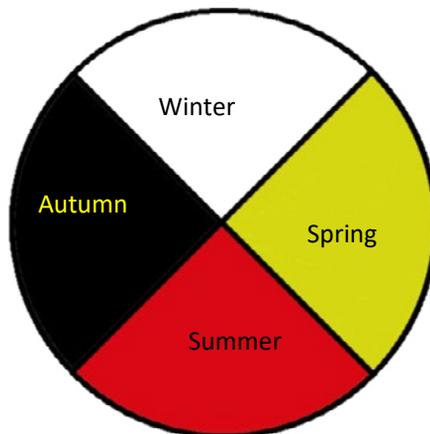
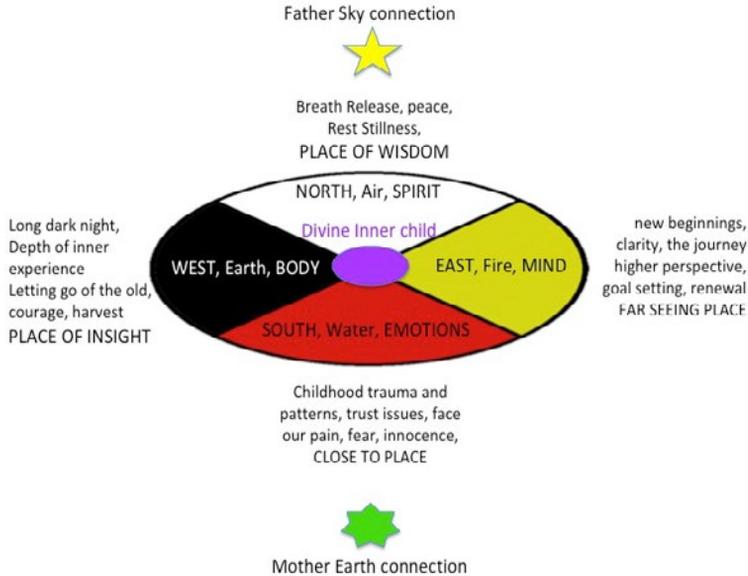


Figure 3: The seven directions of Medicine Wheel



ture follows the seven directions described in Hyemeyohsts Storm’s book *Seven Arrows*, one of the first texts to share the wisdom of Native American people.

Beginning in the East (the element of fire) the group explores tools for working on the mind, developing clarity, awareness and expansion of the sense of self and its capacities. The participants set themselves goals and focus all their work, such as the meditations or sound practices, to assist in achieving those goals. Sonic practices from Shabda yoga, part of the Vedic tradition, are used here to illicit power and protection, to call upon deities to remove obstacles from the path to the goals set and also to remove fear of change (Paul, 2004). During this first stage the main sound practice is *Bija mantras*, a Shakti yoga sound practice, from the Tantric tradition, which are sounds to cleanse, balance and raise the vibration in the chakras are introduced. These are an essential sound practice and are the foundation of each week’s work. These help clear mental, emotional and spiritual patterns from the HEF and have been used in India for thousands of years (Swami Vidyanand, 2007). As the workshop is client centred we also chant other mantra relevant to the particular goals

of the participants. Additionally, other weekly practices are introduced such as shamanic drumming and Transfiguration. Transfiguration is a shamanic practice that uses light and sound to radiate our divine inner light.

In the south (water element) we focus on the emotions and childhood experiences, developing greater emotional awareness and understanding and discussing issues such as childhood trauma, and limiting emotional patterns that have been learned in childhood. There we look at how painful experiences and fears have formed our personalities and learn about regaining feelings of trust and innocence. Here, the main sound practice is the *Shakti bija mantras*. The main aim of the practice at this stage is to use the sounds to release emotional trauma, stuck pain, emotional blocks and limiting or destructive emotional patterns from the HEF.

The west (earth element) is the place of our relationship with our body and with the earth. We focus on feelings of appreciation, gratitude and acceptance. It is also the place to learn to develop insight and courage. Here we also reap the rewards of the work done so far. As this direction relates to the autumn, the focus here includes sound practices for

releasing and letting go of what is no longer needed and what may hamper the participants from achieving their goals. *Shabda mantra* are used for this. This is also the area for deeper connection to the earth and to the body. In this direction we drum, dance and honour the body and earth, as well as learning some *Bhava mantra*, from the Bhakti tradition, which are used for expressing love, devotion and worship (Paul, 2004).

In the north (air element) we work on developing inner peace and wisdom and learn to rest fully in silence and stillness. We rest here in deep connection to spirit and begin to feel our ability to recognise our true nature and value to our community. This is the place of integration and endings, preparatory to new beginnings. The sound practices here are mainly *Nada* yoga practices, from the Hatha tradition. This includes deep listening to nature sounds or music, breathwork and chanting AUM, as well as longer time spent on Transfiguration and *Shabda mantra* for creating peace.

The last three directions become more transpersonal in nature. These directions include tools to enable participants to be

of greater service to Life and to develop a sense of deeper meaning and purpose. The direction ‘Above’ – Father Sky is the symbol for the sacred masculine. ‘Below’, Mother Earth is the sacred feminine principle and ‘Within’ is the Divine Inner child and the final direction where we focus on understanding our own unique meaning and purpose as well as our place in the universe. Here we sing traditional pagan songs, chant, drum and use sonic practices from around the globe to create ASCs, to invoke divine energy and connect to the sacred feminine and masculine deities most relevant to the participants’ needs.

To facilitate this transformation, each week certain activities are repeated, such as *Shakti Yoga bija* mantras, which are self-healing chants, used for thousands of years. With practice the vibration of these sounds can be felt in the chakras. The results of this work can be profound, especially if used regularly, as they create new energy patterns in the chakras, enhancing the flow of energy within the aura with immediate palpable effects. Some of these results are shown in Table 1. They are grouped according to the chakra they most closely connect with.

Table 1: Chakras – Energy centers of transformation & outcomes

Chakra	Enhanced positive emotion	Reduced negative emotion
Crown	Expansion, peace, Oneness, connection, bliss/ euphoria, sacredness, transformed/shifted, inspiration, awakened, aligned to higher self	
Brow	Quiet mind, balance, clarity, light, gratitude, appreciation, insight, hope, meaning and purpose	
Throat	Self-awareness, authority, beauty,	
Heart	Openness, contentment, calmness, love, nourishment, centredness, openness, compassion, joy/happiness, healing, support, encouragement	
Solar plexus	Empowerment, overcome challenges, positivity, energy, cope better, confidence,	Anxiety, stress,
Sacral	Cleansed, balanced, aliveness, relaxed, intimacy, emotional, trust, creativity	release of fear/pain, worry
Root	Safety, grounded, rested, wellbeing, improved sleep, security	

Table 2: Tool used with the Medicine Wheel and their intention

Tool used	Intention	For Self/other
Shakti yoga Bija mantra (Tantric)	Clear, balance, energise chakras	Self
Shabda yoga chants (Vedic)	Invoke power and protection, help, guidance, generate compassion, peace, healing	Self/other
Nada Yoga (Hatha) Sound meditation	Deep listening, ASCs, self healing, connection to Spirit, relaxation	Self
Shamanic Drum Journey/ Drum and chant	ASC Connect to earth/helping spirits and to elicit guidance/ protection	Self/other
Group Sound work (e.g. toning, singing etc.) tools from all over the world	Connection, invoking spiritual presence, healing for self/others	Self/other
Shamanic Transfiguration	Healing for self and all of Life	Self/other
Grounding and protection ritual (generic)	To centre, ground and become fully present and to strengthen the boundary of the personal energy field	Self
Bhava yoga (Bhakti)	Express love, devotion, gratitude, appreciation	Selfless expression of love
Authentic Power Practice	Enhance self awareness and increase personal empowerment, deepen understanding of chakras and mental and emotional patterns	Self

Table 2 above shows the tools used and rationale for including them in the course. Some of these methods are for self-healing. Other tools include shamanic drumming and journeying, expressive dance and music, authentic power practice, chants, singing and poetry. They are used for with the intention of benefitting others or for healing the earth.

Conclusion

This author believes that methods and concepts like those discussed in the context section, would not persist in our cultures for thousands of years, if they did not have real value for humanity. There is much potential in the growing resurgence of these methods. However, there is too little research in this area which needs to be addressed

with further research. Sound healing is now growing in popularity and beneficial physical, psychological and spiritual effects are clearly gained from this work, as shown in Figure 3 and in client testimonials. There is ample evidence to validate further research. The data presented here is similar to the effects found by Snow (2011). [Also see the workshop feedback from the Editor’s note*.] It shows the effectiveness of both group and one-to-one sound healing and this supports the need for more research. Another challenge is the lack of funding in this area. At a time in history with environmental disasters and unprecedented psychological and spiritual challenges facing us can we afford not to at least investigate more thoroughly?

***Editor's note**

This paper was presented as part of the 36th Mindfulness & Psychotherapy Workshop on 7 October 2019; see Plate 1.

Twenty participants attended. The Feedback included:

- Good balance of theory and experiential work. Very knowledgeable presenters.
- Subject was extremely interesting.
- The experiential exercises were brilliant.
- It is kind of innovative. It is a knowledge that generally we don't learn in a college, but if it can be helpful, why not having an open mind for it? Amazing! It could be another tool for any psychologist.

In terms of the usefulness and the quality of the workshop, the overall rating score was 4.7 and 4.6 respectively (where 5 is very satisfied and 0 very dissatisfied).

Endnote: The Editor holds quarterly Mindfulness & Psychotherapy Workshops in collaboration with and the British Psychological Society (BPS) Psychotherapy Section. The Mindfulness Reading Group meetings and workshops are open to both BPS members and non-members. If you wish to join, please e-mail the Editor drholaw@gmail.com Also see page 70 for further information.

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Plate 1: Hara Willow and her son Kris working with drums at the Sacred sound Circle workshop



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