

Singing Bowls

A Guide to Healing through Sound



by Dirk Gillabel

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1. A Shamanic Encounter

I am the master of the tone... All creatures, all things, even the seemingly lifeless ones, give off tones. Each being, each thing produces a special, characteristic tone which, however, changes as the states of being or thing by which it is produced change...

The sound brings forth all forms and all beings. The sound is that through which we live.

An old lama in Tibet

In the summer of 1989, on a truly mystical tour of southern England, the Tibetan singing bowls first entered my life. At the legendary grave of King Arthur in Glastonbury a young man sat in front of the tombstone making beautiful sounds with two shining metal bowls. A member of my group explained that these were singing bowls. She advised me to visit Joska Soos, an authentic shaman in Antwerp who uses singing bowls in his life work as a healer, giving private sessions he calls "shamanizations". Since I have always been a spiritual seeker, I decided to explore a shamanization first hand.

On the 6th of November my life was to be steered in a new direction. The sun was bright when I arrived at the home of Joska Soos. One in a long row of houses, his stood out from all the others with a front garden full of tall and bountiful plants, through which a small path led to the door. Ringing the bell I looked through the glass into a hallway with many strange paintings. Down the stairs he came, singing in a low voice. Opening the door he cordially invited me in. The paintings immediately captured my attention. Resembling abstract art, they had another dimension. Radiating and

alive, they communicated on a level I had never experienced. Joska explained that beside being a shaman he was also a painter. Most of his paintings are of light-sound beings from other dimensions which he perceives with his inner eye. Later on he would tell how these beings, composed entirely of light and sound, are found throughout the cosmos. It has been a closely guarded secret among shamans that these beings exist, and it has always been strictly forbidden to talk about them, but because he believes this knowledge will benefit all people. Joska Soos paints these mysterious, powerful beings, in spite of some angry fellow shamans.

On the second floor we passed through a living room, filled with Buddhist paraphernalia. Going on to the third floor we came to the tiny room where his shamanizations take place. Joska Soos is a sound initiated shaman. In shamanic circles this is the highest degree of initiation. Knowledge of sound is one of the greatest of the mysteries of life and creation. As we are told in myths and esoteric teachings, the world is constantly being created and maintained by sound. New Age philosophies and healing practices that utilize the effects of vibration and sound are actually based upon older philosophies and spiritual doctrines.

Joska Soos sat down behind a group of seven metal bowls and played them during the session together with his drum, a set of small, high pitched Tibetan cymbals, and constant guttural singing. Afterwards I inquired about the metal bowls which, to my surprise, had produced such wonderful sounds. He explained that these "singing bowls" originally were made in Tibet by Buddhist monks. When I asked where I could buy such bowls, he offered those in front of him for sale. "Take what you want" he said. I could not believe that I could actually buy his bowls. "I have more in the back, I will replace them." Two nicely polished bowls of medium size had really caught my attention, so the choice was not difficult. I have never regretted buying them, they

remain the best I have. In the following years I bought several more from him, all of superior quality compared to any others I have seen anywhere else.

I played my first two singing bowls every evening for half an hour, exploring and enjoying their sounds. In the following months these sounds opened me up, clearly they were working both psychologically and on subtle levels of my consciousness. It is difficult to put it into words; the change in me was profound. I felt more free and happy. In this way I discovered first hand how the singing bowls can be special tools for personal transformation. Since that time I have added on to my collection, allowing me to do group sessions and individual treatments.

On many more occasions I visited Joska Soos and continued to learn about the singing bowls and the importance of sound. He taught me how to sing as the shamans do, with a low guttural sound, and how to bring forth a mantra from within myself. Learning how to use sound and mantras has had as equally a liberating effect on my consciousness as has playing the singing bowls. Mantras and the free form of vocalization known as toning can be used together with the bowls to create a profoundly transforming experience. Singing bowls are carefully crafted items with mysterious origins. In order to fully understand and appreciate their value I decided to learn about their history.

2. Ancient Origins

Music without words means leaving behind the mind. And leaving behind the mind is meditation. Meditation returns you to the source. And the source of all is sound.

Kabir

Ancient teachings proclaim that everything in our physical world, each structure or form, has a unique tone. This tone determines the nature and essence of that form. Access to this tone gives the power to change the form. Legends in Mexico and Peru tell of ancient people whose scientists could cleave massive blocks of stones with sound along precise harmonic lines. In addition, they would "resonate" the blocks into position. Thus the majestic and accurately constructed temples of Uxmal and Machu Pichu were built with songs of sound. The power of sound was further used within the temples to harmonically purify a person, bringing him to a higher spiritual level. Sound can also be deadly. It is known that the legendary "kiaiu" cry of the samurai warriors in medieval Japan could kill instantly.

Music and sound making instruments are as old as humanity and have always been used, especially by shamans, to promote healing. The bowl is one of the most primal and useful forms created by humans, so with the development of metallurgy it was natural to make metal bowls. After trial and error some would have been found to make beautiful sounds; sounds which had a particular effect on the mind of the listeners. Thus singing bowls were born.

That metal bowls can make beautiful sounds and be used as tools for meditation and healing is new to the Western mind. Very little is known about how the bowls were used in the past. Even in Tibet they were not that well known, and were kept and used secretly by the monks and lamas. This was changed by the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1951, which contributed to the gradual appearance of singing bowls on the western market in the 1960's and 70's. The destruction of monasteries and temples forced many monks to flee the country, taking with them what they could. Many of them, living in poverty in Northern India and Nepal, had to sell their belongings. Even the lamas in London, from whom

Joska Soos obtained his excellent bowls, had to sell some of their possessions to survive. And so the singing bowls became known to the public.

Long hidden from most of the world, we now know these particular sound making bowls have existed for at least 4000 years. Evidence is found in the excavation (1938) of an old Bon temple dated at 2400 BC, in which two Singing Bowls were discovered. A spiritual advisor of the Dalai Lama traced the singing bowls back to a primitive and animistic sect related to the indigenous people of Nepal that was dedicated to fire worship. From there the bowls were carried across the silk route, and found their way into Tibet. The true origin of singing bowls remains uncertain, but use by the Bonpo practitioners of the Bon religion clearly implies ancient links.

When Buddhism reached Tibet in the eighth century it found a widely practiced and fully developed Bon tradition, animistic and shamanistic in nature. Buddhism tried to suppress Bon, but in the 10th or 11th century Bon organized itself formally along with Buddhism, insuring its survival. Similar to but definitely distinct from Buddhism, Bon, which stands for Truth and Reality, regards itself as a universal religion in the sense that its principles are true and valid for all of humanity. When we look at pre-Buddhist Bon we find religious practices comprising rituals, ceremonies, divination, offerings, sacrifices, exorcism, and plant medicine with priest-magicians performing magical operations to bring about the well-being of their clients, overcome hostile demonic powers, and eradicate causes of misfortune. As an animistic religion Bon does not differ from others anywhere else in the world, with dance, song, and sound as essential ingredients in their rituals. They have a typical class of priest-magicians trained in the secret use of mantras and songs enabling them to bring the physical world within their control and ensure the normal course of natural events. Despite their differences, Buddhism and Bon

influenced each other. Bon took over some Buddhist practices and Buddhism incorporated some shamanic Bon rituals. The fact that singing bowls were made and used in Buddhist monasteries guaranteed the survival of these shamanic metal bowls.

The Lamas who used the bowls were masters of sound. They used them in secret and kept them exclusively for themselves; never mentioning the rituals or the bowls. In shamanic circles all knowledge about the power of sound, including the light beings painted by Joska Soos, has been carefully kept secret. Initiation in sound is the highest level of initiation; sound is such a powerful force. In religious and shamanic practices the use of sound is ancient and primal. All world traditions express the most fundamental energy underlying the manifestation of the universe in terms of sound. In the physical world humans participate in the expression of this fundamental energy with the use of their voice and musical instruments. Singing bowls have survived thousands of years as shamanic instruments, affirming their effectiveness in shamanic work.

To understand fully the use and effect of the singing bowls picture them in the world of shamanism. In the earliest human communities the service of a mediator between the world of myths and that of ordinary reality was required. To ancient man the existence of other worlds next to this one was a matter of fact. The physical world seemed to be ruled, vivified and structured by spirits, demons and gods. To reach these entities and the energies that embody them, man must somehow reach through the aperture between the worlds and contact that more causal level. A special person who, by his abilities to dream, to imagine, and to enter a state of trance, the shaman was able to participate in the creative forces behind the veil of the physical world. He could enter an altered state of consciousness and access the world of spirits. There he would enact a ritual of discovery, cure and salvation. By solving a problem on the

spiritual plane, with its causal forces, a physical problem such as sickness, bad weather, or a dispute, would also be resolved. Each shaman uses his own techniques to enter the trance state, based on the teachings of his master and his own experience. The use of sound, through drumming, singing or other musical instruments, was frequently used because the power of sound is very effective. It easily brings the shaman into contact with spiritual dimensions, entering first his own spiritual self, then his unconscious, followed by the collective unconscious of humanity, and finally the realms of otherworldly beings.

Singing bowls are not just musical, sound producing objects. Sacred shamanic instruments, they have been crafted to effectively bring a hypnotic state of consciousness, a trance which opens the door to the inner world quickly and swiftly. At the same time they help restructure disharmonies on the non-physical causal level, promoting healing on the physical plane.

3. A Divine Craft

The Tao is like an empty bowl,

Which in being used can never be filled up.

Fathomless, it seems to be the origin of all things.

It blunts all sharp edges,

It unties all tangles,

It harmonizes all lights,

It unites the world into one whole.

Hidden in the deeps,

Yet it seems to exist forever.

I do not know whose child it is;

It seems to be the common ancestor of all,

The father of all things.

Lao Tzu, in the TaoTeh Ching

When metals were first discovered in the veins of the earth primitive man made them into tools. The ancients felt a deep connection with metals and the earth that led to the creation of charms, ornaments, and vessels to be used in rituals and celebrations. To them certain metals had correspondences with man's inner organs, a tradition kept alive by Chinese medicine. These metals affect not only the body, they also influence man's consciousness, soul and spirit.

Bells have been made in almost every culture in history. The most ancient Chinese bells are more than 3000 years old. The art of designing and casting bells reached its peak in ancient China during the western Zou (1122-771 B.C.) and eastern Zou (770-249 B.C.) dynasties. It is likely the art of making singing bowls paralleled bell making since they are similar musical instruments. Tibetan monks and lamas also make and use classically shaped hand bells, and would have had an interest in the technology of their casting as well.

Bell metal has always been bronze, a fusion of copper and tin in various proportions. Pure copper or any other elementary metal by itself does not produce good tonal quality. Often a small amount of lead, zinc, or even iron is present in order to produce particular sound qualities. The

composition of the alloy and its state of hardness varies according to properties desired for the bell. Copper is hardened by tin, making the bell both rigid and capable of giving and springing back, all essential to ringing. Bells of brass (copper and zinc) have a poor sound because they lack the strength of bronze.

Almost nothing is known about the craft of making singing bowls during the time before the Chinese invaders destroyed the Tibetan monasteries and temples. Lama Lobsang Molam said the secret of making the singing bowls was lost a "very long time ago". At the same time others say they are still being made in India and Nepal. Although some importers and shopkeepers are purposely vague about how or where they have bought their singing bowls, some clearly state that old, antique bowls are no longer available. Joska Soos was told by the lamas in London that singing bowls were made at four Tibetan monasteries. According to lama Lobsang Molam the Jang and Hor monasteries near the Chinese border produced especially good quality bowls.

There is evidence that new bowls are being produced in Nepal and India. Some are hammered, others are machine made, while a combination of both methods also occurs. The thicker, yellowish, polished singing bowls are made in the eastern Indian state of Manipur, a well known center of handicrafts and metallurgy. The darker looking singing bowls are made all over Nepal, largely produced by Tibetan refugees in small family workshops. The largest production of singing bowls is across the river from Kathmandu in Pathan, the metallurgy capital of Nepal, where the tradition of making of metal ware, coins and metal art dates back 1500-2000 years.

The basic process is not complicated. After it is mixed, the molten alloy is poured onto a flat stone and left to cool as a round metal plate. This plate is beaten with hammer blows into the bowl shape. Each bowl is different from any other,

as the precise amounts of metals, their relative proportions, the thickness of the plate, the size of resulting bowl, and the hammering itself all vary in the process of its making. Therefore no two bowls have exactly the same combination of sounds. Two bowls may at first sound similar, but each actually has a unique combination of the fundamental tone plus partials.

Most singing bowls have a typical bowl shape. Some have straight high walls, others are more saucer shaped. There are rare and unusual bowls with a short, thick, solid metal stem attached to the bottom, to hold the bowl. Joska Soos has one of these with an almost completely flat bottom. Occasionally a cast bowl will turn up. The sound lacks the richness and complexity of hammered bowls. Some of these are possibly made of brass alone, judging from the poor sound quality. The metal of a true singing bowl is under tension due to the hammering process. Do not be fooled by the superficially nice sound of a cast bowl, it can never match up to the real thing.

According to tradition, singing bowls are made of seven metals. In reality not all bowls have all seven. In accordance with the seven visible planets the seven metals are: lead for Saturn, tin for Jupiter, iron for Mars, copper for Venus, mercury for Mercury, silver for the Moon, and gold for the Sun. According to Joska Soos, a little piece of meteorite is added to the alloy to make a connection with the cosmos since as it travels through the cosmos it gathers its vibrations.

The seven metals correspond to the seven planets and the inner energies of man. In esoteric teachings, in both the East and the West, the seven visible planets are perceived as outer symbols of higher forces working within our solar system and on Earth. As a sacred number seven is the manifestation of creative principles. It is 3 plus 4, spirit and matter, the Trinity in relation the world made up of the four

elements. As sacred instruments, with the seven traditional metals used in their making, singing bowls are made with the intention of creating harmony and resonance with the inner aspects as manifested by the organs in man, and the outer aspects as expressed through the planets.

As the organs of our solar system the planets and their cyclic rhythms influence the physical organs of man and his psyche. Mercury induces the rhythm of mundane thoughts and communication. Venus stimulates love. Mars activates desires and passions, while Jupiter brings feelings of devotion. Saturn is the Lord of higher thoughts and the crystallization of consciousness. The Sun both synthesizes and is the source of inner light. The Moon reflects this light and elicits emotions. A separate eighth aspect is often mentioned in esoteric teachings. In alchemy it is antimony, the eighth metal. The eighth spiritual sphere of the Gnostics is the Ogdoad, above and separate from the seven lower spheres which pertain to the seven planets. The Ogdoad refers to a divine realm where man is in unity with the cosmos. The addition of meteorite in the singing bowls is significant as it provides this very link with the cosmos.

Joska Soos explains that each metal has seven sound vibrations. A singing bowl made of seven metals then has forty nine different sounds. Trying to distinguish them helps to expand one's consciousness. Even though some bowls are not made with seven metals, it is still a valuable and rewarding experience to listen to all the different sounds. According to who you ask the number of metals used is five, seven, nine or even twelve, and meteorite is not always mentioned.

Some people believe singing bowls were made for no other reason than eating. The seven or even five metals could not possibly make an appetizing or healthy food container and are not necessary to make a functional cooking pot. Singing bowls often have thinner bases than walls. This gives a good

sound, but would be a disadvantage in cooking, leading to burnt food on the bottom. If singing bowls were made and used only for eating, they would be handled a lot, increasing the risk of breakage. It is better to use a cheap clay pot or wooden bowl for one's dinner. If it breaks it can easily be replaced. Singing bowls can and do crack and break if dropped or struck too hard because the hammered metal is under tension.

From the limited knowledge we have about singing bowls we do know they were considered to be sacred instruments and used as such. As with all sacred and ritual tools, working with singing bowls is working with a flow of energy expressed as life energy, healing energy, or spiritual energy. The Tibetan lamas told Joska Soos that certain bowls had been filled for some time with the bones of dead lamas to transfer the high energy of spiritually evolved lamas into the bowls. These charged up bowls would then be much more powerful when played. Lama Lobsang Molam tells of a sacred singing bowl from India which is believed to have been used by the third Buddha, Wasong. It has become a sacred religious relic and is housed in Kungar Awa, a special building behind Drepung monastery in the capital Lhasa. On July 15th Tibetans visit and make offerings to this bowl. If a person with negative karma rubs it with a stick, it gives either a bad sound or no sound at all. A person with positive karma will produce a strong and pleasant sound.

Some surprising results emerged when I had my singing bowls dowsed with a pendulum by a psychic. No information was given beforehand, in order to not influence him. He dated the bowls I had purchased from Joska Soos (who bought them from the Tibetan monks in London) correctly as having been made before 1950. Of these the oldest dated 1869; the others dated from 1925, 1936, 1940. A small bowl purchased during a shamanic workshop (see next chapter) dates from 1937. All the others came from

commercial importers who bought them in Nepal and India, and were dowsed to date after 1970. This supports the theory that most of the singing bowls available in shops are recently made. On occasion an old bowl may show up in a shipment, but most of the more recent bowls are made in Nepal by Buddhists and non-Buddhists for the sole purpose of selling them. In my dowsing session an exception to this was one supposedly made by Buddhist monks in 1977 for the altar of their temple. It has seven metals. Of the four older bowls the oldest one (1869) was not made by Buddhists, but by Bons for magic and healing, to be used in combination with a dorje, and in secret. The number of metals in each bowl varied widely, with only three bowls actually containing the full seven metals. The rest had two to five metals, and none of them appeared to contain meteorite.

4. The Mystique of Singing Bowls

Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the secret places of the soul.

Plato

Singing bowls are surrounded by a mystique worthy of sacred objects. Seven has long been regarded a holy number. With their traditional seven metals the singing bowls bring together the macrocosm of the planets and the microcosm of the body. Meteorite is sometimes included to add a cosmic dimension to the spiritual qualities of the bowls. The Tibetan monks who used the bowls kept them secret and the true origin of the bowls is hidden deep in the

shamanic past. It is no wonder that a special dream presented itself to me several months after my first meeting with Joska Soos. At that time I was playing my first two bowls on a daily basis.

In my dream I walked into a room with exotic paraphernalia. In the middle of the room was a table with different objects on it, among them a singing bowl. I hunched over the table, looked into the big bowl, and held my head close to it as I rang it. A particular wonderful sound filled the room. When I woke up the sound kept coming back into my mind. The dream urged me to look deeper.

A few weeks later while visiting Joska Soos I told him about it, hoping he had a bowl like the one in the dream. He brought out several big ones, but none matched the sound. Then he said: "Wait a moment, I have a special selection in the back that ordinarily I would not sell, but I will make an exception for you." He returned with some nice bowls with equally nice sounds, but I kept on nodding. "No, the sound is not the same." Finally there was only one bowl left he was very reluctant to show it, but he did. As I struck it and heard the deep full sound a wave of excitement filled me. This was it! Exactly the same sound that I heard in my dream! Convinced that some higher forces were at work, he decided to sell me the bowl. The largest in my collection, it relaxes me deeply when I play it on my chest, and after half an hour I am totally refreshed.

My first encounter with a group session came two years later at a shamanic event at the Center for Relaxation and Body Work in Mechelen, a city in Belgium. Before this I had played the bowls exclusively for myself, so this was something new. Two women, Martine Goossens and Liliane Boels, played singing bowls, accented by a variety of drums and unusual musical instruments. It was a primitive but powerful sound experience, truly archaic in character. The

event had an empowering effect on me. Turning into my inner world I experienced impressions of demons, awesome beings connected to the "music". In Tibetan Buddhism internal "demons" such as these are considered to be latent fears, usually of sickness or death. The only way to overcome them is to bring them into the forefront of consciousness. It is for this reason the Tibetans paint demons on the walls of their temples, to remind the monks to face their own fears. The uninitiated find them frightful, and if encountered in the inner world, they run away from them. Looking at the paintings serves as an exercise, teaching one the fear resides in oneself.

After the session they offered singing bowls for sale. I struck a small thin one that gave an exceptionally clear and sustaining ring. Everybody in the room turned their head. Upon hearing the sound the image of a temple immediately presented itself in my mind. Without hesitation I decided this was a bowl worth having in my collection.

Shamanic work with the singing bowls and other shamanic instruments inevitably leads to work with energy and energy beings. In the group session I noticed that Martine was a stable woman and well rooted but Liliane was not. Because of her extreme sensitivity Liliane ought not be occupied with this kind of shamanic work. However, she compensated for this by wearing a protective bronze mirror on her chest. Observing this it became clear to me that consciousness and intent are very important when working with the singing bowls.

5. Vibrational Healing

Sound will be the medium of the future.

Edgar Cayce

In 1990 while involved in a Reiki group, I had my first encounter with the healing power of the singing bowls. Usually I would bring a few bowls to play for the group after our Reiki work was finished. Gerda, the group leader, asked if the bowls could help relieve her frequent severe headaches. Sometimes they lasted several weeks and she felt as if her head was split in two.

Gerda sat on a chair while I played a bowl with a clear sustaining sound around her head for five minutes. The best one I have, it is one of the first two I bought from Joska Soos. After a deep breath she told me that as I played, energy in her head focused itself in the center of the forehead, or Ajna chakra, and then left her head in a forceful stream. Her headache was gone, but she remained skeptical because in the past it would return quickly. This time was different and a few weeks later a visibly happy Gerda told me that her headache had not returned at all.

An explanation of this is that disharmony, existing on the energetic level in and around her head, was restructured by the sound. The healing potential of the singing bowls was clearly demonstrated; the word healing is used in its broadest sense and indicates a positive change in a person. This change can be physical, psychological or spiritual with all three levels linked together. In another situation, following a group session with the bowls, one of the participants said he still could feel the sounds of the singing bowls one week later. The experience had triggered a

profound change in him and he said he felt "so much better". In a certain sense this also constitutes a healing.

The body has its own built in healing system and can repair itself, but the perpetual stress of hectic lifestyles keeps the body out of balance. Sometimes a little help is needed. Soothing sounds and music can be very helpful, bringing the physical, psychological and spiritual bodies back into harmony. Patterns of sound vibrations create movement and resonance in the energy fields and space surrounding the body. A delicate energy system, the body is influenced by its environment. As the singing bowls are played the sounds create energy fields that fill the room, and the body absorbs them. Deep stress is neutralized in cells and organs, enabling them to return to a healthy state.

Different bowls will have different effects on the body. The most fundamental way of differentiating bowls is as male (yang) and female (yin) bowls. A male singing bowl gives a strong, direct, straightforward sound. A female bowl gives a soft, indirect, encompassing sound that envelops and nurtures. A yin, or female, bowl has a rim the same thickness as the rest of the wall of the bowl, whereas a yang, male, bowl has a rim which is much thicker than the walls. It is the rim that produces the fundamental note, giving the bowl its characteristic sound quality.

Because the sound of each bowl affects different people on different levels, a wide variety of reactions and experiences can be expected in group sessions. Most experience a relaxation of the body, mind and emotions that is deeper than they have ever experienced. For a few physical problems have disappeared, as with a woman who had suffered from constant burping for several months. It ceased altogether during the session. Tension she was holding in her stomach had caused the burping. Deep relaxation and inner harmony released it. Relaxation is the first step toward coming back into contact with your own

body. Many people hold tension in their body, not knowing how to allow themselves to relax.

For Laura, a sensitive woman, keeping her awareness focused in her body was difficult, often causing great fear. During a private session she trembled the entire hour. Seeking insight we spread Tarot cards; they explained her solar plexus and heart chakras were unbalanced and too open. The heart chakra is responsible for defining personal territorial space. When it is too open there is a tendency to over-identify with other people. The function of the solar plexus chakra is the formation of energetic connections with one's environment, especially with people. Laura had the tendency to lose herself and over identify with what she saw, both in her environment and in other people. Sleep problems were a part of her lack of inner stability, and for months she had been waking up every night at around two o'clock. Following the session she slept through the entire night and woke up the next day totally refreshed.

Physical sensations during singing bowl sessions are common. As blocked energy is finally released it begins to move, with resulting pleasure or pain that may suddenly arise and subside. It can be felt in any part of the body. Psychic impressions and sensations emerge as deep layers in the inner self never before consciously experienced are opened up by the profound relaxation brought by the sounds. Some people see colors with their eyes closed. It can be a solid field, or one color changing into other colors. In a private session a sensitive, intelligent, high functioning autistic child saw the color purple change to blue, then aquamarine and back to purple over and over again. Others have seen light flashes or sustained brilliant lights at the level of the Ajna chakra. Located between the eyebrows, it is associated with entrance into the inner world.

The seven energy centers known as the chakras regulate, balance and transform the flow of life energy. Physical and

psychological disturbances will result if any of them are either under active or overactive. When asked how the singing bowls affect the body, Joska Soos said when played with strikers they act directly on the chakras. When played by rubbing them around and around with a stick they act on the aura in its totality. These observations are based on his psychic sensitivity and personal experience, and one could argue this is only one man's experience. However, in years of working with the bowls I have had many people report strong sensations in the areas of the body that correspond to the chakras. Awareness of the fact that the singing bowls have an effect on the chakra energy centers is important in any kind of shamanic or healing work with the bowls. The seven major and many minor chakras are dimensional portals for the assimilation of energy of a higher vibration. Each of the major chakras is connected to a major nerve plexus and glandular center of the endocrine system. The balance of the endocrine system is important to our health, likewise the philosophy of the chakras is that proper functioning of each major chakra is critical to the cellular health and overall balance of each organ system. The chakras regulate the flow of vital energy to the organs, helping to establish strength and balance in the physical systems. Therefore abnormal or weakened chakra function can create a weakness in the corresponding area of the physical body. Emotional, mental and spiritual issues also contribute to the healthy or dysfunctional condition of the chakras, with a tie to behavioral patterns including addictions and other imbalances.

When people come into contact with their inner selves during the sessions, persistent thoughts may arise. Often about unresolved relationships, a way to resolve them is discovered by letting go of preconceptions or blocked emotions. Those who are able to go smoothly into the inner world often see images with symbolic meaning. Usually these images apply to the person's present situation. More advanced, experienced spirit travelers can have spirit

journeys through their inner world visiting landscapes, animals, and spirit people. Animal images are the most frequent, these are usually explained as power animals. Over the years I have had a few clients who have come into contact with higher levels of consciousness where things and beings are so abstract it is difficult or impossible to bring the experience into words. Nevertheless these experiences are real and are always uplifting, love and light pour freely on those spiritual levels.

It is extremely rare to encounter a person who does not like the sounds of the singing bowls. Skeptical people lose their initial resistance immediately when they hear the musical, soothing sounds of the bowls. There are those who do not like the sustained high pitched sound of a bowl when it is rubbed. This may indicate blockages to the higher spiritual truths in life. It is up to the person to accept the sound and release the blockage. In a group session I walked around the group ringing a pair of Tibetan cymbals, which have a very intense high pitched sound. When I arrived at a certain woman, she suddenly burst out in tears. The intensity of the sound broke through blocked emotions she was holding about a relationship. As she allowed herself to accept the sound and let it go through her, her emotions were allowed to flow freely. It took several minutes of crying to release all the tension.

Autistic people are often very sensitive to sounds. A high functioning, intelligent autistic woman in her fifties became anxious with her first exposure to the sounds of the bowls, but convinced herself not to be afraid. It is characteristic of autistic people to have problems feeling their body or bodily sensations. She relaxed and had the feeling of being one with the world. The sounds allowed her to forget her body and connect with the world in a conscious state of mind. At the same time she was more able to connect with her body and physically felt better after the treatment.

When introducing the bowls to people direct experience is far more effective than any explanation about the bowls can ever be. While giving free sound massages with the singing bowls in a local shop I encountered a young man who was there with his wife. I mentioned my work with Tibetan singing bowls and asked if he had ever heard of them. He was not interested at all and turned to leave, but as soon as I hit the bowls, the magical sounds instantly brought a change of heart and a "wow" escaped his lips, followed by "Honey, have a look at this!". This reaction is typical. The sound captures attention on the spot. People are entranced. Perhaps a vague memory of a lost inner harmony overrides their busy daily consciousness. The bowls do indeed take one out of ordinary reality.

Aside from the initial wonder when hearing the sounds, the first noticeable reaction when the bowls are played around and on the body is profound relaxation. Deeper than just relaxing on a couch, it is quick and not limited to the physical body. The mind relaxes and one enters into an inner space that feels so good it takes several minutes to get up after the last bowl has sounded. People are always surprised how deeply they have been affected by a singing bowl treatment. They feel clearer and happier and this feeling often remains for several hours or even for days. "I still can feel it vibrate in me!" one woman told me on the telephone several days after a personal session. The effects of the singing bowls might be quite sensational, but let us not forget that they are also linked to silence. Strike a bowl once and listen to the sound ebbing away into silence. When it is not physically audible anymore, hear it in your mind. This leads you to your inner silence, your inner true self, it is here the mystery of life unfolds.

6. Altered Brain Waves

Music is a miniature of the harmony of the whole universe, for the harmony of the universe is life itself, and humans, being a miniature of the universe, show harmonious and inharmonious chords in their pulsations, in the beat of their hearts, in their vibration, rhythm and tone.

Hazrat Inayat Khan

An invitation to an open house at the Stone Mountain Counseling Center in New Paltz, NY, led to an interesting experiment. The owner of the center asked me to bring some singing bowls. I lectured about the bowls for a small group of people. All were very interested. One of the participants, Barbara, was hooked up to a brain wave monitor while I placed the bowls on and around her. Barbara had been suffering from depression for some time. On the monitor this showed up as high amplitude Theta and Delta waves. At times during the session, these brain waves would drop dramatically. This surprised Stephen, who runs the center. Her average brain wave shifted towards Alpha and Beta, indicating an uplifting mood. After the session Barbara told us that she was feeling calm, happy and radiating. She had also seen numerous images.

Brain waves are categorized into four groups: Alpha, Beta, Delta and Theta. Alpha waves (7 to 12 Hz) arise when the eyes are closed and the mind is in a relaxed state. In the deeper states associated with Alpha waves (5 to 7 Hertz) there is a loss of awareness of the environment as one drifts in a profound state of relaxation. Beta waves (13-30 Hertz) reflect a state of alertness, attention, arousal and anxiety. High Beta waves cause high energy levels and even hypertension. Theta waves (4-7 Hertz) are responsible for a state of drowsiness and dreaming. It is a twilight state which we normally only experience as we wake up or fall

asleep. Delta waves (0-4Hertz) are related to the deepest, most relaxed state of sleep.

How do brain waves fit in with singing bowls? Alfred Tomatis, a French surgeon, did experiments on the relation between the ear, the brain and the nervous system. He discovered that sound actually charges the brain. The little known reason for this is that the first function of the ear is to make sure the cortex receives sufficient neural energy through the "charging" effect of sounds. This is often overlooked because doctors are misguided by the generally accepted idea attributing a primarily auditory function to the ear. Actually hearing is a secondary function. It is a well-known fact in zoology that the auditory apparatus acts as a charging or energizing dynamo. It furnishes current to feed the brain. Tomatis goes even further and explains that the chain of small bones in the ear does not simply carry sound from the outer to the inner ear. This sequence bones has the function of putting the entire cranium into resonance. Sound picked up by the eardrum circulates by means of this chain of small bones throughout the cranium which as a result is made to vibrate. The sound is distributed and regulated by a constant pressure in the labyrinth.

The listening function does not only affect the ear, it mobilizes the entire nervous system. This activation of neurons regulates muscle tensions and the position of the body. Tomatis explains that higher frequency sounds generally resonate in the brain and affect cognitive functions, such as thinking, spatial perception, and memory. Middle frequency sounds tend to stimulate the heart, lungs, and the emotions. Lower sounds affect physical movement.

This explains the link between the sounds of the singing bowls and the effects they produce. Brain waves are rhythmic changes in electrical energy, receding and swelling again and again like waves of the ocean. The sounds of the singing bowls are likewise rhythmic, and it is easy to hear

waves of low, medium and high frequency in each bowl. Sound waves that correspond to the four kinds of brain waves can be heard when playing a bowl. Singing bowls seem to have a well balanced amount of each of the four kinds of waves; listening to the bowls is like listening to brain waves. Knowing that sound has such a profound effect on the brain, the bones of the skull, and the entire nervous system, it is no wonder that singing bowls can have such a profound effect on people. It explains why participants in a session are so relaxed and happy afterwards, and how the sounds work to create positive changes on physical and psychological levels.

The sounds produced by singing bowls are rhythmic and soothing, they come and go, again and again. Even though they are monotonous the beauty of the intricate sound patterns they produce makes them fascinating. Before you know it, you are entranced. One day I had a sudden realization, hypnotism and trance states work in the same way. In hypnosis an individual is led into a trance state by means of monotonous, repetitive verbal commands, a swinging a pendulum, eye fixation, and muscle relaxation. We can also slip into a trance state naturally. Hypnotic or trance states are not that exotic, they happen to us every day. Daydreaming, crossing over into sleep at night, the transition of waking up in the morning, watching television, or watching the white lines on the highway all are ways of falling into hypnotic state of relaxation that corresponds to alpha brain waves. In "primitive" cultures trances are often produced by singing and dancing

In a trance the senses are more developed and accurate. A hypnotized person will experience increased concentration and complete relaxation. The same seems to happen in singing bowl sessions. More than once participants have reported that as the session progressed their hearing became clearer and they could distinguish more sound

combinations.

In hypnosis the individual allows the hypnotist to make suggestions. In the hypnotic state of mind it is possible to recall or resolve past memories which relate to current blockages. Old, outdated, and inappropriate patterns of behavior can be dropped in favor of new and more rewarding ways of being. The purpose of hypnosis is to change the human being in a positive way. Similar to hypnosis, the sounds of the singing bowls produce an initial relaxation followed by a trance state that differs from one person to another. With singing bowl sessions, however, no one gives the participants suggestions. Instead the individual opens the doors to the inner world and experiences what is needed at that moment. Expectation can be a determining factor, a kind of self suggestion or hypnosis. This would explain why people who are already engaged in spiritual practices will have interesting experiences while other people will just deeply relax, and a few will even go to sleep.

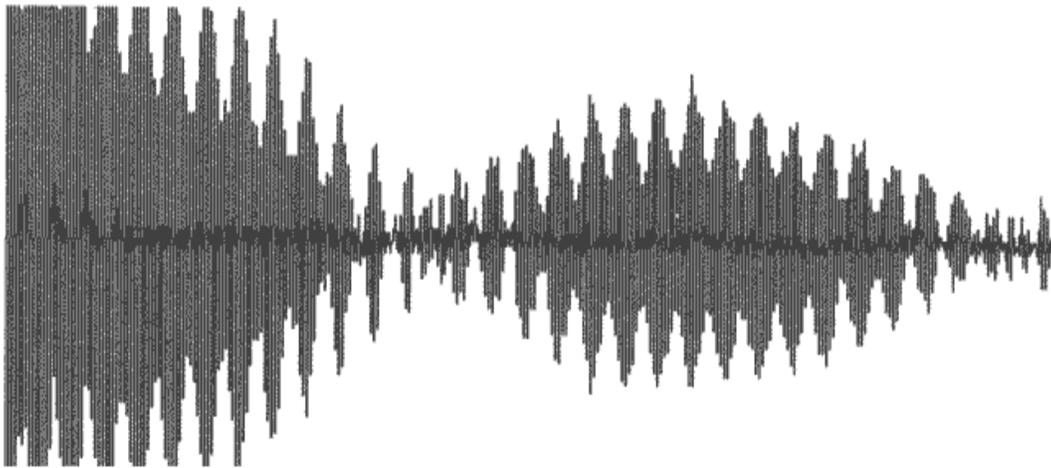


Diagram 1: The Deva bowl, rising and falling waves within waves undulating across time.

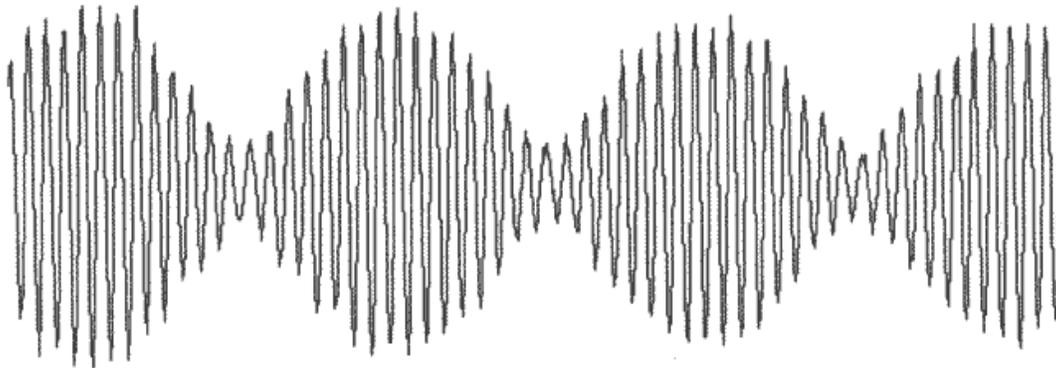
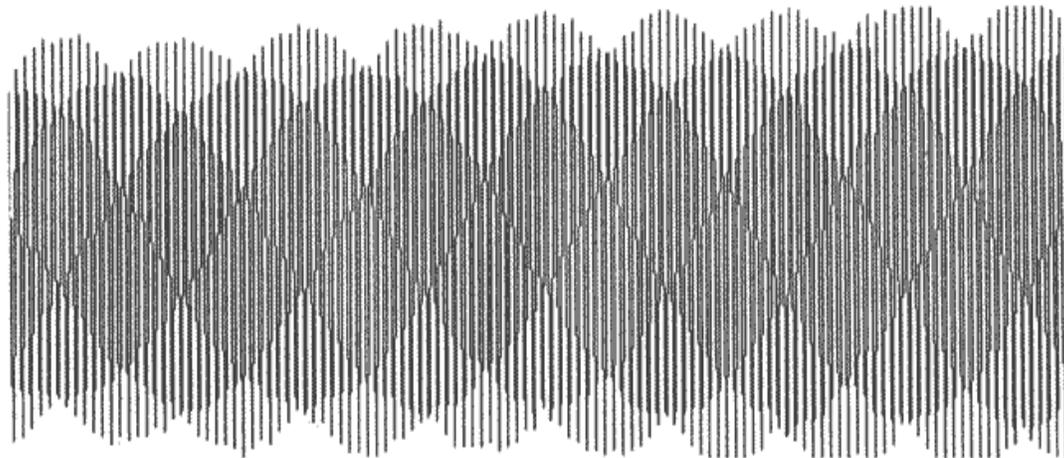


Diagram 2: The Sun bowl being rubbed, spherical packages of sound waves.



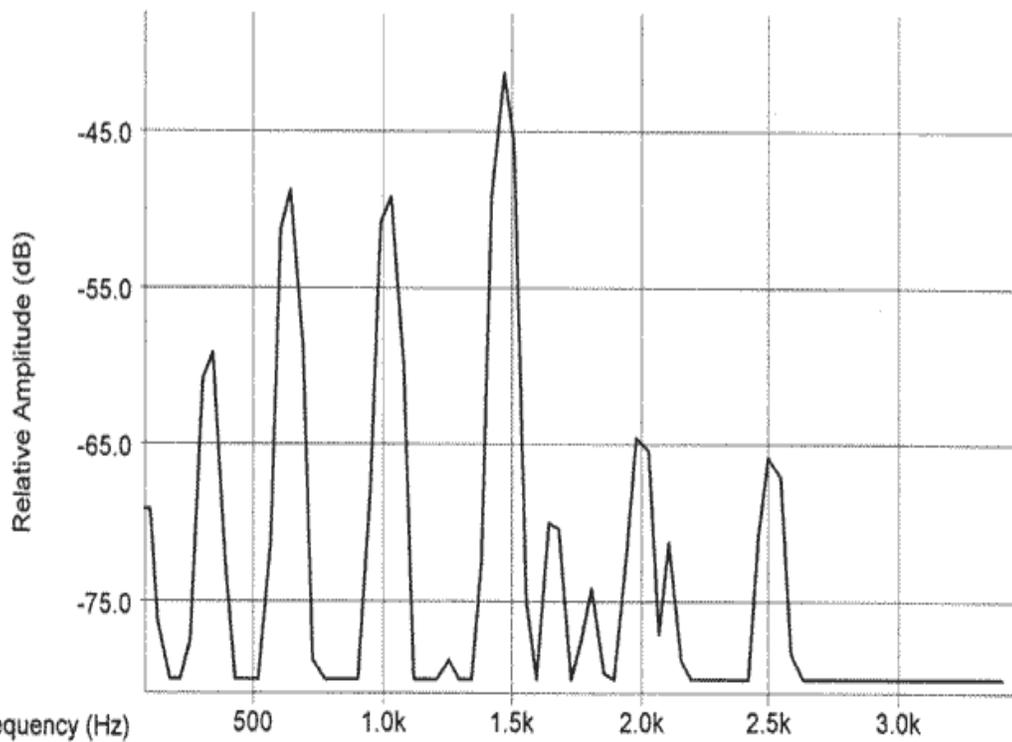
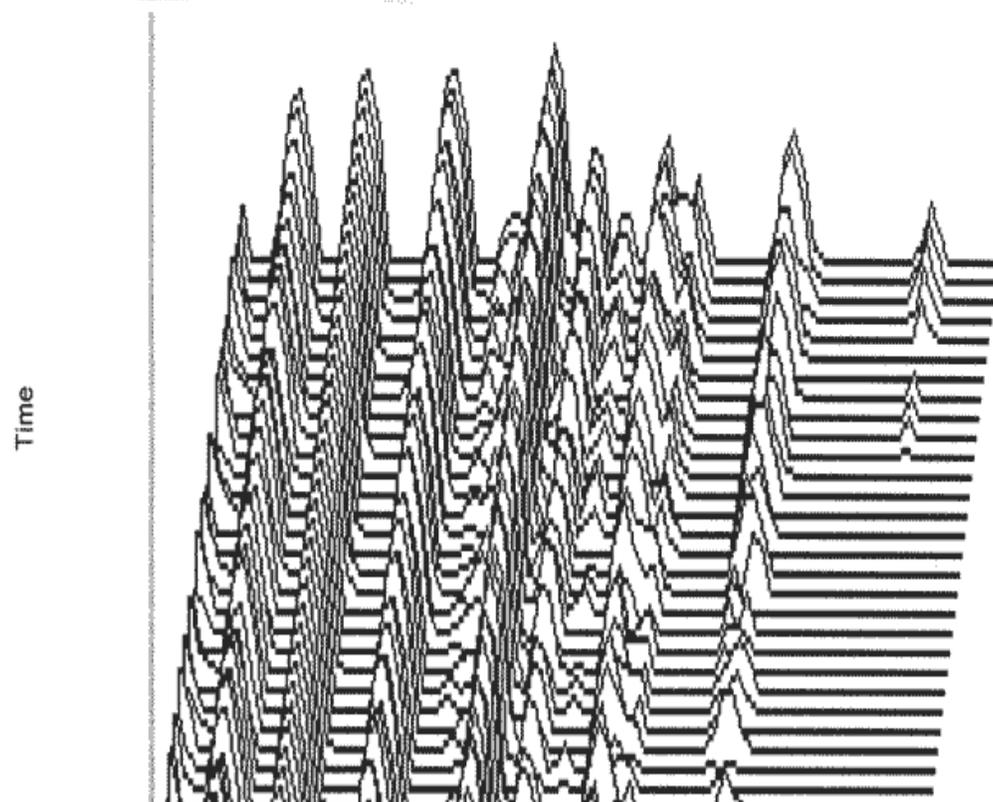


Diagram 4: Frequency spectrum of the Butterfly bowl, 1 second after initial strike. This is a thin bowl of medium size, producing many partials due to the thinness of the bowl's wall and its size. It has ten partials with the one of 1465 Hz being the most intense.



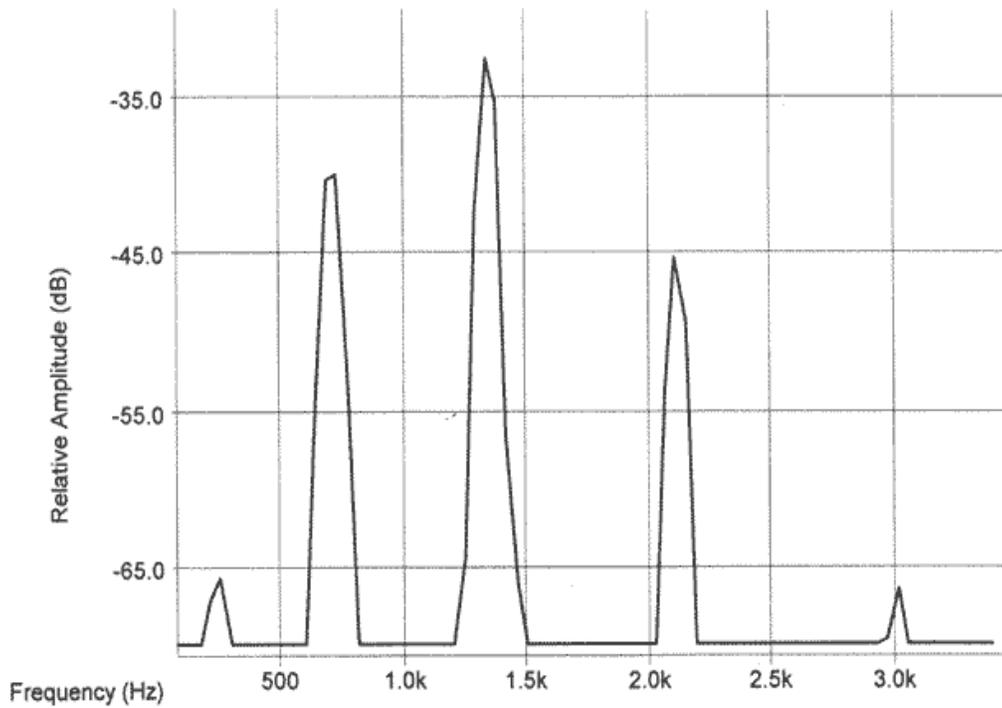


Diagram 6: Frequency spectrum of the Diamond Ring bowl $\frac{1}{4}$ of a second after initial strike. It is a small, heavy bowl with a thick rim, thus producing only five tones. The hum tone is a weak 250 Hz, the fundamental is 712 Hz. The strongest partial is 1347 Hz followed by two weaker partials of 2110 Hz and 3016 Hz.

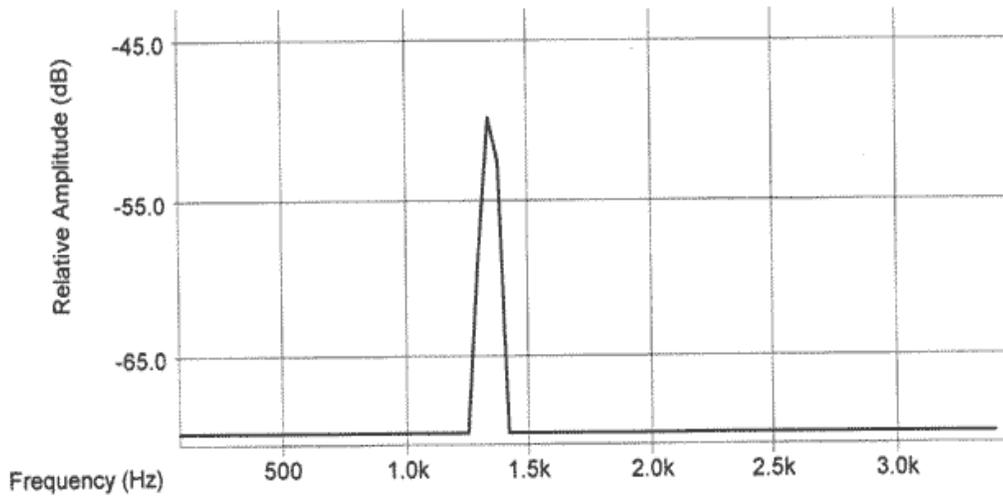


Diagram 7: Frequency spectrum of the Diamond Ring bowl, this time rub with a hardwood stick. Only one tone is produced, 1347 Hz; with this bowl it is the first partial after the fundamental tone.

Table 1: Frequencies of Singing Bowls in Hertz

	Butterfly Bowl	Alpha and Omega Bowl	Deva Bowl	Diamond Ring Bowl	Sunset Bowl
	9" wide	1 ¼" wide	8 ½" wide	7 ¾" wide	9 " wide
	3 ¾" high	5 ¼" high	2 ½" high	2 ½" high	3 ¾" high
Hum tone	126 Hz	87 Hz	238 Hz	250 Hz	86 Hz
Fundamental	328	253*	699+	712	291+
Partials (* loudest tone; + tones generated by rubbing)	642+ 1015 1465* 1650 1993 2537	498 804+ 1162 1572 2016 2509	1304 * 2042	1347* 2110 3016	+ 580 900*1 124 1293* 1461 1750*

	2946	2735			2203*
	3147				2771

7. Harmonious Sound Waves

All music, based upon melody and rhythm is the earthly representative of heavenly music.

Plotinus

When I first heard the singing bowls, I perceived a harmonious blend of sounds. After a few weeks I began to distinguish the different tones in each bowl. These are the partials, and a trained musician is able to appreciate their richness immediately. Singing bowls are actually far more complex and rich in partials than anyone can distinguish completely. A computer with a microphone and a sound program helps us look a little deeper into the intriguing world of sound waves, showing how beautiful and complex the sound waves of the singing bowls really are.

To fully comprehend the sound analysis of singing bowls, an understanding of the acoustics of bells is needed. The ring of a bell, or singing bowl, is always focused near the rim, where the maximum elastic movement and resonance occur. To get the full potential of the sound it is necessary to strike a bowl on its rim. Each bowl has unique patterns of vibrations that produce a great number of sound frequencies. Visualize a tuning fork as a thin vertical slice of a bowl, then imagine the bowl as a set of tuning forks

bound together. Although a singing bowl has no stem, like a tuning fork there is a node (point of no movement) near the base, with the wall of the bowl resonating like the prongs of a tuning fork. Both tuning forks and singing bowls have other intermediate nodal regions associated with higher frequencies, or partials. In a tuning fork the intensity of the partials is purposely subdued, while in a bowl or bell the series of frequencies along nodal regions between the rim and the node at the base is enhanced. Irregularities in the cutaway profile of a singing bowl are responsible for the character of the vibrations, determining not only the frequencies the partials but also their intensities. This explains the wide range in sound quality, timbre, and partials among the hand-crafted singing bowls. No two are alike.

One of the most obvious differences when comparing singing bowls to each other is the duration of the sound. Some have a long sustained ring, while others stop within a few seconds. The duration of the ring is dependent upon material, size and profile. The metal must be sufficiently hard. Hardness depends upon the proportion of tin in relation to copper. More than one percent of lead will weaken the alloy and have an adverse effect on the duration of the tone. Larger masses of metal are capable of more acoustical energy and will vibrate longer. Among my collection of singing bowls, the ones that vibrate the longest with the strongest sound have considerably more mass in relation to their size. The thick walls and rims produce strong, clear sounds with harmonious partials.

When the rim of a singing bowl is hit by a striker, the bowl's wall is momentarily forced out of the round into a more elliptic shape. The distortion sets the small tuning-fork-like cross-sectional areas into vibration. In the region of impact, they are forced outward, while one-quarter around the bowl's periphery from the point of strike the motion responds inwardly. The alternating inward and outward

movement produces the fundamental pitch and the hum tone. The result is four nodal points on the circumference which produce four equidistant vertical nodal lines, or meridians, from the rim to the nodal point at the base of the bowl. Further nodal meridians are formed because the bowl's initial deformation is not a pure ellipse. When a bowl is partially filled with water and struck, the sound waves originating from these four meridians can clearly be seen rippling over the surface. When you strike the bowl (with a padded striker, you don't want to break the bowl!) a little harder, the elastic movement of the bowl's wall will cause a fountain of water drops to shoot up and out of the bowl.

What tones are generated when a bowl is struck? Upon impact, the strike tone dominates momentarily. It wavers and cannot be measured as a specific frequency. Below the fundamental is the hum tone, vibrating the longest as it fades into infinity. The partials of higher frequencies are of a shorter duration. In contrast to singing bowls, bells are tuned to specific partials, mainly a minor third, fifth, and octave. Because the acoustics of bells is complex, tuning is essential to the harmonious blending of tones when two or more bells are heard simultaneously. Because singing bowls are not tuned, combinations of two bowls will not always sound right. However, some will produce interesting and pleasing effects when played together.

With standard bells the frequencies of the first six or seven partials adhere to a strict harmonious relationship to the fundamental. The upper partials can be inharmonious because the vibrating segments of the bell, where these upper partials are produced, are shorter. In sound analysis, this is even more so with singing bowls. Only the first and second partials have a near harmonious relationship to the fundamental. The rest of the upper partials are inharmonious. Irregularities in the shape of a bowl also contributes to this considerably.

After a singing bowl has been struck tonal decay sets in as the energy is dissipated. The partials fade at different rates. This shows up clearly in spectral analysis. Higher frequencies dampen more rapidly than lower ones. Tonal decay undergoes a subtle and continuing transformation which varies according to the size and profile of the individual bowl. Spectral analysis also shows the cyclic pulsation (periodic rising and falling in intensity) of the partials. The intensity of some partials pulsates strongly (a couple of times a second), while the others are almost constant. Where does this flux come from? In a good bell perfect symmetry produces an even ring. Occasionally the ring of a bell is uneven, creating beats or pulsation. The causes of this are in the casting: lack of symmetry, irregularities in thickness, and the composition or homogeneity of the metal. This all occurs frequently with singing bowls. The hammering process gives an asymmetrical shape despite the general overall bowl shaped appearance. With hammer blows all over the surface, the thickness of the metal varies over the entire bowl. The homogeneity of the metal mixture is not ideal; some bowls even show areas of pure copper which turn green from oxidation. Some bowls have engraved inscriptions which distort the symmetry of the bell, changing the sound.

Are imperfections undesirable? If not too dominating, irregular pulsation contributes to the beneficial effects that singing bowls have on people. Pulsating sound waves cause hypnotic and trance states. Like listening to the waves of the ocean or to the heart beat of our mother they make us feel good. They have a soothing and calming effect. Studies have shown that vibrations from rhythmic sounds have a profound effect on brain activity. Drumming, rhythmic singing, and movement can transport a person into other realms of reality. Shamans use these methods for healing, but it is not exclusively their realm, people from all over the world use the same techniques to go into trance states.

I have done a sound analysis of some of my singing bowls. The computer generated diagrams show the patterns of sound waves when of all the tones are sounding at the same time. Each position on the diagram shows all the tones at that moment, each diagram shows a series of moments in time. As each tone has a different frequency and amplitude, tones will strengthen or cancel each other out as they go along. This produces many different patterns, which show up when we scale up the diagram. It is like a microscope, getting a bigger look at a smaller moment of time. Each magnification reveals more detail and more patterns. Each bowl is identified by a name I have given to it.

Diagram 1 is the wave patterns of the Deva bowl. The diagram length is 10 seconds. Groups of sound patterns rise and fall within other groups of sound patterns. All are harmoniously structured in sine waves, rising and falling as they travel across time.

Diagram 2 has a length of 0.81 seconds and shows a close-up of the sound patterns of the Sun bowl while it is being rubbed with a hardwood stick to accentuate the partials. Here the wave pattern is almost circular in form.

Diagram 3 shows the sound waves of the Diamond Ring bowl as it is rubbed with a hardwood stick. This produces a fluent sound pattern. The diagram length is 1.37 seconds.

These diagrams show how complex, well structured, and harmonious sound waves produced by good singing bowls can be. When a bowl is struck its sound waves emerge all together, creating an intriguing blend of composite waves and "wave packages".

This analysis of the singing bowls according to their frequencies yielded interesting results. Of prime importance is the fact that singing bowls do not emit well defined frequencies. The fundamental and its partials fluctuate

around a central frequency which varies slightly each time the bowl is hit. A sample bowl produced a fundamental fluctuating between 269 and 271 Hz. The first partial fluctuated between 770 and 775 Hz. The third partial was between 1428 Hz and 1436 Hz. The first hit produced central frequencies of 270 Hz, 773 Hz, and 1432 Hz. The next hit will not produce exactly the same results. It might give central frequencies of 265 Hz, 766 Hz and 1402 Hz. The slightly different results depend on how the bowl is struck: the force, the angle, and the kind of striker. Nevertheless, each bowl has its own characteristic fundamental and partials stretching out over three to four octaves. Usually the first and second partial are close being to exact multiples of the fundamental, but the rest of the partials can deviate considerably from their respective places with the shape and quality of the bowls contributing to the distortion.

Some tones pulsate greatly in intensity, while others are very stable in their output. The fundamental tone is not always the strongest, usually the first or second partial dominates. Thin bowls and big bowls tend to have many partials (see diagram 4 and 5). Small thick bowls, especially those with thick rims, have very few partials (see diagram 6). The fundamentals of small thick bowls are two to three octaves higher than big bowls. When they are being rubbed, big and middle sized bowls produce three to five of the partials of the bowl. In general these larger bowls do not make a good sound when rubbed. Instead they give a scraping, metallic sound. Rubbing a small, thick bowl produces one clear tone. It can be the fundamental or the first or second partial, depending upon the bowl. These tones will be intense but pleasant to the ear. Like bells, singing bowls also have a weak hum tone one third of an octave lower than the fundamental.

Table 1 shows the Butterfly bowl, a middle sized thin bowl (9 ¼" wide, 4" high). It has a hum tone of 126 Hz. The

fundamental is 328 Hz, close to E in our musical scale. All tones except one fluctuate widely in intensity. This is the first partial of 642 Hz; not only is it stable, it is the strongest in intensity. The bowl has a total of eight partials. (Partials over 3000 Hz are not strong enough to be heard or recorded).

The Deva bowl is 8 ½" wide, 2 ½" high. It has a fundamental of 699 Hz (an F in the musical scale) with only two partials. This is one of my favorite bowls for private sessions. When rubbed it produces only the fundamental.

The Diamond Ring bowl (7 ¾" wide, 2 ½" high) is similar to the Deva bowl, but when rubbed the first partial of 1347 Hz is the only tone generated. The first partial of 1347 Hz is both the strongest tone when the bowl is hit, and the only tone generated when rubbed (see diagram 6 and 7).

The Sunset bowl, a middle sized thin bowl (9" wide, 3 ¾" high), does not allow a single tone to be generated when rubbed. Instead a series of four partials is produced.

Sometimes when two Singing Bowls, are played together, a "floating" sound effect is created. This happens when the tones of the two bowls are similar. The Sun bowl and Mercury bowl are a nice example. The frequencies of the Sun bowl are:

158, 427, 818, 1289, 1759, 2020, 2384 and 2560 Hz;

those of the Mercury bowl are:

129, 410, 780, 1249, 1782, 2030 and 2391 Hz.

The frequencies of my Fire bowl and Tree bowl are even closer together and thus create an especially dissonant sound effect.

The Fire bowl has 130, 379, 730, 1161, 1680 and 2262 Hz.

The Tree bowl has 128, 368, 721, 1162, 1678 and 2234 Hz.

The sound frequencies of singing bowls are more complex than they appear. They display interesting patterns of fundamental tones and partials resulting in unique musical instruments which, although not tuned, allow for an interesting sound display.

8. Buying a Singing Bowl

All the sounds of the earth are like music.

Oscar Hammerstein

After having seen and heard the singing bowls, you may want to buy one. It is important to know how to select a good bowl, you do not want to later regret that you spent your money on a poor quality bowl. Here are a few tips to take into account when you have decided to invest into a unique healing instrument.

First, find out who is importing singing bowls. If you just go to a shop to buy one, the best bowls have most likely already disappeared. Contact the importer, express your interest in the singing bowls, and leave your telephone number so he can call you back as soon as a new shipment has arrived. In Belgium I knew of four people who imported singing bowls, and only one was a shopkeeper. By leaving my telephone number with all of them I was always one of the first to look through a new shipment.

Take your time. Depending on how big the shipment is, it can take a lot of time to find the bowl you really like. Once I

spent more than an hour going through a room full of well selected bowls. The choice was difficult, and I ended up with two of them. Most importers are very patient and understand the need to thoroughly check the goods. After all a singing bowl, especially a bigger one, is expensive. If you have your own strikers, take them with you. You will want to hear how a bowl sounds with both hard and soft strikers, and often shops will only have the harder kind. At least take a small piece of felt or wool to wrap around the hard striker at the shop. If you have a soft drum mallet, take it along.

What do you need to look for? First, it is important to find a bowl you really like. The sound of it has to please you. Not just a little bit, you need to feel connected to its fundamental and the different partials. If you do not find a bowl that fits you, wait for another shipment. Singing bowls are a serious investment, and you do not want to end up with a bowl that has little effect on you. Remember that you are buying it for meditation and/or healing.

Going through dozens of bowls one by one, exploring their intricate sounds and vibrations, will enhance your ability to judge the quality of the bowls. Not only will you be able to distinguish the partials more and more, but you will also find out that the sound of one bowl is more sustained than another. Strike the bowl and see how long the sound lasts. Some bowls die out almost immediately, but the best ones last a long time. Sounds can be clear and defined or dull and flat. A bowl may have a good high sound, but the lower sounds do not correspond. In a good bowl all the sounds are well balanced and go together. Hold the bowl up and look at the rim, if it is extremely uneven with high and low spots the sound is likely to be irregular and unclear. Look at the overall surface quality, again overly uneven surfaces result in bowls with inferior sound. Look for any small cracks in the surface. A cracked bowl still makes a sound, but not a good one. Tap the bottom to see how thin or thick it is. An overly

thin bowl may be good sounding but too vulnerable to breakage. The timbre of the bowl is most important. In musical terms timbre is governed by number, relative intensity, and distribution of the partials. Good timbre consists of a uniform series of sound waves. Some bowls just make noise and the worst bowls do not even ring. Worse yet, they may have very high price tags and are being sold as antiques.

In every shipment I have found bowls who have a disturbing "RRRRR" when struck. It depends upon how you strike them, and it can be faint. It happens because air bubbles were trapped in the metal during the cooling process. We know that with the making of musical bells, the metal alloys must be heated to the right temperature and allowed to cool under carefully controlled conditions. Cooling too rapidly can adversely affect the tone, trap some air bubbles, and make the bell prone to crack. Occasionally there are bowls with areas of almost pure copper, due to an incomplete mixing of the metals. Their quality is usually but not always, less than average.

Not all bowls are good or even acceptable. Bad bowls are a natural byproduct of the bowl making process. A craftsman may have had a request from a client for a bowl with specific characteristics. A series of similar bowls were made from which the client could choose, to find one that suited him the best. This was done because the bowl making process is not totally predictable. The remaining poor quality or unsatisfactory bowls were used for other purposes, such as offering bowls in temples. At the present time both good and bad bowls are often sold together, unfortunately not all merchants bother to discriminate between them.

When you finally go home with your well chosen bowl, it is time to find out how it produces its sound and sound effects. It takes practice and time, but anyone can learn. The first thing to do is to get or make a series of wooden

strickers of different diameters. There is no fixed rule about what works, experimentation is the key. If you tap the bowl gently with bare wood it will enhance the higher partials. Wrapping cloth around the striker will bring out the lower partials and the fundamental. The more layers of cloth, the lower the sound. Try both thinner cottons and thicker woolens or felt. Hardwood often generates harsh sounds when used to strike the bowl, so look for softer woods. Larger bowls require a thicker, heavier striker with more layers of cloth, leather, or felt. Soft drum mallets come in different sizes and are worth having. If you can find one, a base drum pedal beater with a big felt top produces beautiful sounds when used with big bowls.

Softer woods are best for strikers, but hardwoods, such as found in commercially made jazz sticks, are best for rubbing around the rim of the bowl. Press the stick firmly against the bowl to prevent a rattling sound. Think of it as riding a wave as you slowly drag and press the striker around the bowl in circles. Rubbing brings out the singing effect, hence the name singing bowls. Not all bowls lend themselves to rubbing. The thicker the metal of the bowl, especially the rim, the nicer the sound. Do not expect to get immediate results. It is a skill that has to be developed. With patience and the proper hardwood stick, rubbing thick middle size and small size bowls produces penetrating, clear partials. All other tones are subdued or will disappear. In general, rubbing thin bowls will not give nice sounds. I have only one very large thin bowl that produces a nice low humming sound when rubbed with a big oak stick.

Painting is my hobby and I like to experiment with paint, media and subjects. It was inevitable... I began to paint symbolic designs in the center of my singing bowls. It seemed so logical. After many months of playing each one had shown itself to have a definite character, not only in its tones but also in the way it affected me. Each musical instrument has its characteristic timbre, a quality that

distinguishes it from others it regardless of the pitch or intensity. There is no scientific scale to measure timbre, although it is primarily a function of the wave form. Likewise each singing bowl has its own particular timbre; a bowl can be soothing, vibrant, watery, and so on. According to the images that would arise in my mind as a result of the bowl's particular character I gave my bowls names. For example my Fire bowl has a very strong and rapid sequence of sounds. My Earth bowl, the biggest I have, gives me the sense of a solid foundation and profound relaxation. The Butterfly bowl has airy, light, and quick moving sounds. When I bought a particular small singing bowl and rang it for the first time a strong image of a beautiful temple immediately arose in my mind. Hence its name: the Temple bowl.

I do not know of any another singing bowl practitioner who paints his bowls. It is enjoyable and it helps establish a relationship with the bowls. They are much more than metal bowls with peculiar sound effects. To me they are alive, and it is my personal belief that each bowl is connected to a sound spirit. At times I feel the singing bowls are teaching me how they want to be played. An example is my Deva bowl, a small clear ringing bowl that I use frequently in private sessions to suddenly raise the awareness of the client.

If you decide to paint inside your bowl make sure it is clean first. I like to use fine green clay with a wet cloth, rinsing it clean with water. When the bowl is dry, use acrylic paint. Do not dilute the paint with water, as water is repelled by metal. Some pigments adhere better to metal than others. You have to experiment a little. I only paint my bowls on the inner bottom part, except for one that has a face painted on the inner side. Of course, any part of the bowl can be painted. The outside is vulnerable because acrylic paint will erode or peel with the handling of the bowl. Painting the inside is difficult because of the position of the

hand and brush. Steadiness and patience is important. The result can be quite astonishing, so what are you waiting for? The paint can be removed later if you wish.

Now that you have learned how to play your singing bowl, what can you do with it? Meditation is a natural choice. Sit in a quiet place and play the bowl gently, with attention and awareness. The purpose of all meditation is to become centered and still in body, soul and spirit. Bodily tensions relax and disappear, emotions are accepted and stilled, and the mind is kept from wandering. With practice, body, soul, and spirit will be clear enough to enter any kind of meditation you want to perform. The sound of the singing bowl helps you get there.

Those more advanced can meditate on the sound of the bowl itself, it is said it teaches the practitioner about the Voidness. A singing bowl, being empty by nature, teaches about Emptiness (the nature of all things). The sound of the singing bowl is the sound of the Void. For those who are open and willing to grow, or who are already spiritually advanced, singing bowls give teachings. Even if the person playing does not receive a teaching, the many beings on the spiritual plane around them will receive the teachings. The sounds of the singing bowls affect not only the practitioner himself, but also his entire surroundings. On the spiritual plane the sound of the bowls can be heard from a long distance away and will attract spiritual beings. It is said the sound of a bowl when struck goes all the way around the world and comes back again in an instant.

A singing bowl can be placed and played on the chest which acts as a natural resonating chamber. Lie down and place a piece of non slip material between yourself and the bowl. The thin rubber matting sold for kitchen use works well. Often after a stressful day half an hour of playing the bowl on my body will put me back in my center. Tensions are gone and I feel so much better. The bowls can be placed

almost anywhere on the body. Most people like it on the chest, the belly and on the upper back.

You can use your singing bowl to charge up objects. Put a small pad under the object to prevent rattling. Since the base of the bowl is a nodal point placing an object there does not interfere with the sound. Try putting a glass of water in the bowl. As you gently strike the bowl the water is structured and organized by the vibrations. Look closely and you will see little ripples on the surface of the water. Crystals or jewelry can likewise be placed in the bowl to charge them up, at the same time they amplify the effects of the bowl. This was shown dramatically during a dowsing session. The placement of a piece of meteorite in a bowl caused the pendulum to swing wildly in big circles. Another thing to do is to place a photograph in the bowl. It can be a person, place or thing you to whom wish to direct peace and harmony. Your attitude and intentions will contribute to the results.

The bowls make a wonderful addition to a yoga routine. You may wish to begin your practice with a minute or more of ringing your bowl, chanting "om" along with it. Turn around and strike it in the four directions, sending harmony around the world. Hold it (carefully) directly above your head to clear the energy there. Use it in resting periods on your chest, playing it as you relax or catch your breath from active exercises. Play it during breath work when possible. Try it with alternate nostril breathing, holding the striker with the left hand, striking the bowl on the out breath. Strike the bowl before you bow down with your arms extended behind you. Hold the pose with your head above the bowl as long as it continues to ring.

Much more can be done with the singing bowls. Only the imagination is the limit. Be spontaneous and open, and you will be guided by the spirits of the singing bowls to use them in a way that corresponds with who you are and what

you need. They were made to be played.

9. Shamanization

*Each human personality
is like a piece of music,
having an individual tone
and a rhythm of its own.
Hazrat Inayat Khan*

Little is known about how singing bowls were used in the past. They appeared in the West without instructions, and new practitioners have had to learn for themselves how to use these unique instruments. In certain ways this is not a bad thing. It is important to feel for yourself what you can do with them. The following suggestions can help you get started.

Joska Soos suggests to first listen to the bowl until the sound can no longer be perceived, then listen to it in the mind. This is a technique used in Nada yoga, the yoga of the sound. Nada Yoga explores the knowledge of sound qualities and how they affect us and tells of four states of sound. Vaikhari is the coarse, audible sound with which we are all familiar. Concentration on this state leads to the discovery of more and more intricate levels within the sound. The second state is Madhyama, a seemingly external sound that is heard but not produced physically. Pashtyanti, the third state, is an inner sound that is not produced

physically. This mental sound is heard by the inner ear. Concentration on the sound of singing bowls leads one to experience inner sounds produced in the mind. These are heard when we pay attention. In Pashyannti Nada, the fourth state, every outer sound has disappeared and a completely new sound is heard. Ultimately this will lead to Para nada, a transcendental sound above and beyond the four levels. It is heard in other dimensions on other levels of consciousness.

Why would anyone practice this technique? Like every form of yoga, Nada yoga breaks down inhibitions of the mind and brings its activities to a halt, using sound to entrap and quiet the mind. The darkness of fears, frustrations, complexes, and negative emotions dissolves, allowing spiritual progress and inner growth. Like any yoga practice it takes discipline.

At first, with only two bowls, I played every evening for half an hour. At the time I knew nothing about Nada yoga, I just liked the sounds. After a few months an effect was noticeable. I felt more free, in the psychological sense. It was a liberating effect, although I could not quite put my finger on it as to what it actually was.

Do not hesitate to play your singing bowl as often as you can. It will certainly affect you, although it might take some time. When you come home from work, tired and stressed, lie down and play your Singing Bowl on your chest. It is recommended to put a thin rubber mat (can be found in shops with kitchen supplies) underneath so the bowl will not slide off. In twenty minutes or half an hour, you will be totally relaxed, so relaxed that you may forget to strike the bowl again. Larger bowls with lower sounds are the most effective, used with a soft striker. We live in an increasingly stressful world. Many people go out to a bar for a drink or go home to relax on a sofa in front of the television. This is not true relaxation. When achieved through proper means,

true relaxation breaks the train of everyday thought and decreases nervous activity in the body. Yoga works in this way.

True relaxation in body and soul is a conscious state that is close to but deeper than sleep, at the same time the ability to experience external events remains. This is the state often described by people attending group sessions with the singing bowls. For many it is the first time they have experienced such a deep state of relaxation. Some lose contact with bodily sensations, at the same time they remain aware of themselves and the sound of the singing bowls around them. This can be achieved by playing a bowl on your chest. Deep relaxation is an absolute necessity for the well-being of the body. It allows the body to release tensions and to recharge itself fully with omnipresent and healing life energy.

Some people like to tone (spontaneous wordless singing) with singing bowls. This is a good method to make a close connection with your bowl. It demands a good listening ear and a good resonance between your voice and the sounds of the bowl. It allows for a creative expression. You can hum, chant, "om", or sing with your bowl. In addition, the back of the throat can be used as a sounding board, creating a wavering distortion of the bowl's sound. This takes a little practice. Strike the bowl with a harder striker and hold the bowl close to your mouth. Move your throat as if you are gargling or yodeling, but without making any vocal sound. Move your lips as if you were saying ooh-wah ooh-wah. The result is a wavering wa-wa-wa sound that isolates certain frequencies of the bowl. It works best with harder strikers. Too soft a striker and it will not work at all.

The singing bowls can uplift and change the energy of a place when they are played there, with cumulative and long lasting effects. Once an hour long evening session was given in a shop, but one of the shopkeepers was unable to

attend. The following day when she came in she immediately felt a total, positive change of energy in the room. So, be aware that with your singing bowls you can uplift the atmosphere around you. Use them to purify a room, an entire house, your garden, or any other place. Put your heart into it, your intentions count. The more frequently you play in a particular place, the better. Even if there is noise nearby, entrain the sound and turn chaos into harmony.

Openness and spontaneity are helpful when working with the singing bowls. One day, when playing around with the bowls, I discovered that I could turn a big bowl upside down and put it on my head. It has to be wide enough as to not touch the nose or any other part of the head that might dampen the sound. Be careful, make sure that if the bowl slips off it will only fall onto something soft, better yet keep one hand ready to catch it. Sit on a soft rug or pillows. When the bowl is struck, the sound vibrations can be felt traveling through the skull bones, and depending on the kind of bowl, they can even be felt traveling down the entire spine. Of course the vibrations go through the soft tissues too. This is another way to give yourself a unique sound massage.

Imagination is the limit. The singing bowls can be used for other purposes. They can be used in ceremonies, traditional or magical, or in any other kind of energy work. It is up to you to discover what is appropriate for you. Over the years I have developed my own way. I experience myself as a bridge between spiritual forces and the people I am working with. The bowls are sacred shamanic tools, and sound can be a carrier of energy and intent. The beautiful, sacred sounds create an atmosphere that facilitates healing as the person playing them serves as a channel for healing energies from a spiritual source.

Observations based on the experiences of many people

show us that the sounds of the singing bowls work on the chakras; dimensional portals connecting the inner and outer worlds. Both the person playing the bowls and the participant connect with the inner and outer spiritual worlds. The time, place, participant, player, singing bowls and spiritual energies are all factors that work together in both group sessions and private sessions to create a special and unique experience.

A group session is a shamanic sound journey. Each event is unique, in it the particular sound vibrations of the singing bowls and their combinations allow an entrance into the rich environment of the human psyche. Participants lie down on a soft mat and relax with eyes closed. The lights in the space are dimmed. A few minutes of steady drumming on a frame drum facilitates the change of ordinary day-consciousness into a more relaxed and receptive state of mind. The penetrating clear sound of the abbots bell and cymbals is used to summon my guides and any spiritual entities who might want to help in the healing process of the people involved. Incense is burned to deepen the mystical mood of the event. For the next forty-five minutes a group of singing bowls of various sizes is played, intuitively creating a cosmic sound bath where the participants are able to ride the waves of sound on the sea of their own unlimited minds. Each person will intuitively experience whatever is necessary for their own inner balance and healing. It will emerge on its own out of the depths of his or her consciousness. For some it is a profound relaxation deeper than they have ever experienced. For others persisting tensions emerge and resolve. Some report inner visions of colors emerging, or images, some with symbolic meaning.

After the last bowl has rung, the participants are given time to adjust and make the change from deepened state of awareness back to their normal waking consciousness. Often they are so relaxed that they do not want to get up

for a while. A brief time for sharing and comparing experiences is provided at the end of the session. It helps re-entry back into normal awareness and is always fun and interesting for all involved.

A private session is different. The work is more direct and intense. The client lies down on a soft mat, relaxes and closes his eyes. He then enjoys the sounds and music of the singing bowls as they are played both on and around the body. I always place a bowl on the chest. A resonating chamber, it is an area where childhood traumas are often stored. Depending upon the person's anatomy, bowls can be placed on the belly. With some the back of the body is an easier placement and gives equally good results. Since the human body consists of about 80% water, it is an ideal conductor of sound. When placed directly on the body, the bowl's vibrations go through the body in a powerful way.

The harmonious sound patterns instill a feeling of immense space and profound peace. As body and spirit are touched by the living sound of the bowls, a sense of physical well-being arises that remains even after the session. This feeling results not only from the profound relaxation, the harmonically interwoven vibrations spread quickly throughout the body to give a delicate internal massage that reaches all of the cells. The singing bowls restore a natural harmony within the body and the uplifting atmosphere they create allows a greater enjoyment and peace.

People often ask where I learned to play the bowls. My initial lessons came from the Hungarian shaman Joska Soos. The rest I learned by opening my heart and listening not only to the sound, but also to the spiritual dimension behind the bowls. The energy flows through me. I eliminate thoughts and listen to my intuition. When and how to play, which ones, their placement, and what sound combinations are appropriate, all this becomes effortless. I once read that

the best meditation is done without effort. This is equally true for the singing bowls. It is a matter of effortlessly emptying oneself, making the connection with the group or person to be treated and the spiritual dimensions beyond. I play differently each time because each time the group, the patient and the circumstances are all different. Being fully present in the moment is most important.

Singing bowls come from a culture infused with religion, mysticism and magic. The bowls were crafted according to cosmological principles and used in special ceremonies. Healing work with the singing bowls requires the same attitude and intention as any other healing methods. All spiritual healers have some notion of the Divine which has created the universe and all living beings. The Divine has the ability to correct any disharmony, and thus will heal any disease. The healer often functions as the mediator. He or she will create the right circumstances, the healing method allows the innate, Divine energy within a person to correct the disharmony associated with disease, opening the doors to healing. I use the sounds of the singing bowls to create the "right atmosphere" around and in the person or group, this allows the Divine energy to start the healing process. Healing is not always in the way we want or expect, but in a way that is most appropriate for that person at that time. If the person is open and has embraced the life lesson contained in their problem it can happen quickly, even immediately. The healing process more often takes time however, a person may have some inner work to do that cannot be rushed, no one can take another persons lessons and learning away from them. Work without expectation, giving help when asked, always asking for the higher good, whatever that may be.

10. Working with Chakras

Be in tune with the Infinite, hear the soundless voice of the soul and enjoy the sweet music of the eternal Self.

Bhagavad Gita

During singing bowl sessions it is not unusual for people to experience whirling sensations in various places on their body. These areas will be found to correspond to the chakra energy centers of the subtle body. Singing bowls are excellent tools for restructuring the energy field of the body and improving the processing of energy by the chakras. The importance of the chakras in general health is becoming more widely known. Following is a brief explanation of what chakras are.

The Sankrit word chakra means wheel. Chakras are seen as energy wheels, or vortexes, turning around clock-wise or counter-clockwise. Seven major energy centers are located along the spine and in the head. Many smaller, less powerful centers are distributed over the entire body. Like a transfer station, each chakra draws upon the cosmic reservoir of unlimited life energy. It transforms, shapes and distributes this energy on the level for which it is responsible. It directs the transformed life energy to flow through the proper nadis (the energy channels, or meridian system) and controls the functions of the bodily organs and tissues. The heart chakra, for example, vivifies and controls the heart and blood circulation, and the lungs the breathing process. If by physical, psychological, or spiritual reasons the heart chakra is over or under active, ailments or diseases will affect the corresponding organs or functions. This will also affect the psychological state of the person, corresponding to that particular chakra. Therefore it is

important to keep the chakras in good shape.

Stagnant Chi, of Ki, is the result of a blocked or under active chakra. Most people have blockages in the lower three, Root, Sex and Power. The three basic issues are ego, sex, and power. Placing a bowl directly on the body in these areas can be helpful in creating inner harmony, opening the flow of energy through the chakra. The Heart chakra is easy to work with, and beneficial for all. The upper three, Throat, Inner Eye, and Crown can be worked with by placing bowls around the head, or by holding a bowl directly over the area. In general bowls with higher tones are good for the upper chakras, and those with deep sounds help the lower chakras to open.

Table 2: Correspondences of the chakras

Chakra	Function	Body part or organ	Color	Elements
Root	survival grounding	excretion organs, bones, nails, hair	red	earth
Sex	sexuality, pleasure	sexual organs, pelvis	orange	water
Navel	relationships, power	stomach. lover, gall, digestion	yellow	fire

Heart	love, compassion	heart, lungs	green	air
Throat	communication, expression	mouth, throat, trachea	blue	ether
Brow	ideas, intuition	eyes, ears, nose	indigo	cosmic consciousness
Crown	spirituality, liberation	brain	violet	divine consciousness