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# Harnessing the Power of Sound Baths and Deep Listening

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**W**hat stresses you? Lack of time? Lack of money? Conflicts with friends, family, coworkers? An overabundance of to-dos? While your list is a uniquely you, there are many stressors in modern life to choose from. With advancements in technology and an emphasis on “more” — more money, more time, more youthful, more fit, more social media moments to capture — most are operating in a constant state of reactivity, firing on all cylinders. This “modern lifestyle” is frying the nervous system and many of you are looking for an excuse to stop, even if just for a minute. This is one big reason why meditation and mindfulness are becoming more popular: these practices give permission to pause and breathe.

A sound bath offers a moment of stillness. It provides an opportunity for authentic connection both with yourself and others, while temporarily disconnecting from the digital and outside world. A sound bath gives you permission to take a break from the stresses of life and take the opportunity to truly rest and restore. A sound bath is a way to access a moment of peace and rest, an opportunity to gather in community and a space for healing.

## **What is a Sound Bath?**

A sound bath is a deeply-immersive, full-body listening experience that intentionally uses sound to

invite gentle yet powerful therapeutic and restorative processes to nurture the mind and body.

A sound bath can be a one-on-one session, or it can be a group event. Sound baths can be performed for groups of ten to crowds of ten thousand people, in locations ranging from museums to hospitals to corporate conferences. The experience begins with you lying down or seated in a comfortable position, often with a blanket and an eye mask. Whether you use either one is totally up to you. Covering the eyes can help reduce outside stimuli and light. And as your body downshifts into a relaxed state, your body temperature often drops; you can use the blanket to cover up when necessary.

To maximize the benefits, sound baths are often started with a few minutes of guided focus on the breath, followed with different sounds and frequencies being introduced in succession. The sounds are often created by a variety of overtone-emitting instruments including tuning forks, gongs, shruti box, Himalayan and crystal singing bowls, chimes and voice. No matter what resonant instruments are used, you are most likely to feel immersed in waves of sound. The goal of the experience is to invite deep rest and relaxation, and explore self-inquiry and self-discovery.





The experience can last from twenty minutes to two hours, or even longer. As a participant (or a sound bather, as I like to say), all you need is an open mind and the ability to get comfortable and listen.

### How Does it Work?

Sound may bring balance, relaxation and a sense of wholeness to the body and mind. It has the potential to reach all levels: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

When you sink into a sound bath and guide your awareness to your listening, you allow your brain waves to slow, shifting from a more active state (beta) to a more relaxed state (alpha) or even a dreamlike state (theta). The sounds introduced during a sound bath are an invitation into a deeper state of consciousness, an opportunity to unplug from external stimuli and to gain perspective on what is going on within you.

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I describe sound baths as therapeutic and restorative for a reason: not everyone is going to end the session feeling super blissed out. Your body, mind and spirit hold the energetic imprints of all of your experiences (in Sanskrit this is referred to as *samskara* — the

idea that repetitions of habits and traumas create “grooves” or psychological imprints), and sound vibrations have a way of shaking things up and changing those patterns. Sometimes this can feel more chaotic than blissful, but think of the process like a washing machine cycle: your dirty clothes may get churned around for a bit, but in the end you are left with a clean load.

During a sound bath you might feel a sense of peace and calm one minute, and a feeling of unease the next. No matter what feelings start to arise, there is no need to be alarmed or concerned, these emotions are surfacing because the environment is promoting a release from within. Gently guide your attention back to the sounds in the present moment, or to the natural and steady rhythm of your breath, and let them support you through these feelings. Even when therapy and restoration are uncomfortable, that discomfort has a purpose. It is information bringing you closer to a resolution and personal growth.

### How to Engage in Deep Listening

Deep listening is listening from a receptive and open place so that you can receive intricate and often subtler levels of meaning and intention. It is an ongoing practice of suspending reactive thinking and opening your awareness to the unknown and unexpected. When you sit back and listen without superimposing any personal agenda or ego onto what you are hearing, rich and incredible things begin to reveal themselves.

There is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is the simple act of perceiving sound through the ear. Unless you are deaf or hard of hearing, hearing is automatic, effortless, and constant. It simply “happens”. Listening on the other hand, is a learned skill, something every one of us deliberately and consciously chooses to do.

Listening requires concentration and attention, so that your brain can process meaning from sounds, including words and sentences. Listening even goes beyond processing the sounds you hear. You can “listen” and comprehend what is being said (and



not said) through different verbal and non-verbal signs, picking up information from someone's body language, the energy of the room, the words being used or the tone and pitch of someone's voice.

Finding space to listen in a world as active, over-stimulated and noisy as the current one can be a challenge. Even the best listeners can struggle to quiet the mind and be fully present. But when you tune out from constant status updates, non-stop news cycles and instantaneous access to every song/movie/show ever made, you can clear mental space to listen deeply. Try the following strategies the next time you are in conversation with yourself, your friends or your clients. You may be surprised by the new insights that emerge, ideas that take shape and healing that occurs.

Here are four things I recommend to practice listening better

1. *Be silent.* Strip away the need to add your thoughts, voice or opinions to the situation. Put away your phone and also your desire to lead the conversation.
2. *Observe.* Listen to the individual sounds in your environment, noticing how all of these subtle textures weave together to create a sonic tapestry. Try it right now. Pause for one minute and listen to the sounds around you. The birdsong, the traffic passing outside, the beating of your heart. This kind of observational listening can expand your perception and help you become grounded in your surroundings.
3. *Appreciate.* If you are having a particularly stressful day, or a hard time getting out of your own head, take some time to listen with appreciation and gratitude. Connecting to the present can help you shift from a space of frustration and self-evaluation to a positive and grateful mind state. Using your listening to find sounds that soothe, or shifting your relationship to sounds that you may have previously found annoying.

4. *Shift.* Understand you come into each scenario of sound with a whole set of prior beliefs and values. Tune out the voice in your head that thinks it has it all figured out. When you shift this mind-set you can truly listen to the opinions, critiques and ideas of others. When you acknowledge this, you will gain a new perspective.

## The Healing Power of Sound

Sound, and the way you listen, can help create optimal conditions for healing to occur. The vibrational energy of sound is an accessible entry point to wellness.

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Sound has been shown to help reduce pain, increase neural connectivity, and improve the quality of life. In just one example of many, scientists in a 1997 study found that open-heart surgery patients exposed to low vibrational frequencies spent fewer days in recovery, needed less pain medication and spent less time on the ventilator after just twenty minutes of sound therapy.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, integrative health research psychologist Tamara Goldsby's 2016 study on the effects of sound bowls on human health found that people attending singing-bowl meditations or sound baths reported a reduction in pain symptoms as well as less anxiety, tension, anger and feelings of sadness.<sup>2</sup>

That said, much of the healing experienced in a sound bath is of your own making. You are the one nurturing and opening a path to your own state of wellness. The practitioner is simply creating space for you to do so. You are a catalyst for change, and it is you who creates the magic of the experience.



### Find Connection at a Sound Baths

Listening to sound is a universal experience and sound baths are for anyone and everyone, people of all different backgrounds and ages. Everyone has a desire to feel connected to self and to others. A sound bath experience facilitates that in a simple, accessible and powerful way.

In getting quiet together and listening together, you forge a community connection. You are having an individual experience while in a room with others who are having their own experience. That is the tie that binds. You are contemplating together, experiencing sound together — it is unifying.

Throughout recorded history, humans have created ways to connect to spirituality, community and ritual, often through religion. Whether you identify as religious or not, spiritual or not, there is still a need in your DNA to connect to something greater than yourself, to come together to seek intention, purpose and meaning. Something that is not happening on your phone or through social media, that is needed to be done in person.

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### Finding a Local Sound Bath Event


*Educate Yourself* - Especially if you are highly sensitive, educate yourself about the different methods and techniques for sound baths. This information will be useful in determining what style is right for you. The more familiar you are with what is offered locally, the more you will learn about what does and does not best serve you.

*Look for a Safe Environment* - It should be the number one priority of the sound facilitator to ensure your safety. Sound can deeply affect your nervous system and there are both harmful and beneficial ways in which this can happen. Find out about the environment the sound bath will take place in - will there be an opportunity to lie down? Will mats and/or eye masks be provided? What is the lighting in the room? How many people will be there?

*Find a Trained Practitioner* - The facilitator's intentions must be to your benefit, and just as in yoga or other physical activity, the practitioner should seek to understand any limitations or special needs of the participants. Ask, what is their background? What is their training? What type of experiences have they facilitated? Look for practitioners that have worked with many different types of groups and who have enough experiences with participants like you to make you feel comfortable.

### Receiving the Gifts of Listening Deeply

For centuries, sound has been used as a tool to celebrate, communicate, mourn, pray and reduce pain and discomfort. To truly receive all the gifts that come from listening deeply, you must start from a place of openness and curiosity. Listen to help transform and transport, to examine and understand the space around and within. Listen to learn, to express and to help manifest individual purpose. Through listening you share and build connections based on empathy and openness.

The most beautiful thing about a sound bath — the experience is truly in the ear of the beholder. You hold a unique relationship to sound and music, driven by your personality, your character, and the people and places that have influenced your lives. Each brain will interpret sounds differently, based on the physiology of the inner ear as well as life experiences, current mood, and other personal variables. You can create powerful shifts simply by listening to the sounds all around you, and bringing a deeper awareness to your relationship to your sonic environment. When you listen deeply, you experience more connection, compassion and empathy for others. 

If you would like to learn more about the benefits of Sound Baths check out Sara's new book: [SOUND BATH: Meditate, Heal and Connect through Listening.](#)



#### References

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