

**Healing With Sound**  
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“All I could hear was, ‘You’re going to die, you’re going to die.’” Marisa Harris vividly recalls the frightening words that ran like a continuous loop through her mind after she was diagnosed five years ago with an unidentified primary cancer, meaning her doctors couldn’t find the source of her illness. “That sound was so paralyzing. It was psychologically destroying me as well as physically.”

Marisa’s doctors predicted she would die within nine months and considered her condition so hopeless they didn’t even recommend treatment. But her encounter with a medical oncologist who incorporates sound healing into his practice changed—and saved—her life.

### **The Science of Sound**

Inner harmony may be more than a lyrical, philosophical description of the ultimate state of being. An increasing amount of evidence demonstrates that our bodies are literally a symphony of vibrations that can be lulled back to health using sound.

“Everything is in a state of vibration, from electrons moving around the nucleus of an atom, to planets moving around stars,” states Jonathan Goldman, writer, musician, teacher and director of the Sound Healers Association in Boulder, CO.

In fact, there is a law of physics that states that the universe is in a continuous state of vibratory motion, which means that the universe is filled with sound. “If it’s vibrating, there is sound. It may not be audible, but just because something doesn’t fall within our audible band width doesn’t mean it’s not a sound,” Goldman says. “This concept that everything is in a state of vibration includes the various parts of our body, such as our organs, muscles, bones, etc. We are indeed like an extraordinary orchestra that is playing a suite of the self.”

Einstein’s famous equation  $E=mc^2$  mathematically explained that matter and energy are different forms of the same thing. According to the new perspective of Einsteinian and quantum physics, the biochemical molecules that make up the body are actually a form of vibrating energy. In his book, “A Practical Guide to Vibrational Medicine: Energy Healing and Spiritual Transformation,” Richard Gerber, M.D. explains the impact of that perspective: “Since all energy vibrates and oscillates at different rates, then, at least at the atomic level, the human body is really composed of different kinds of vibrating energy.”

When the various parts of our body are vibrating at their optimal frequencies, we are in a state of health. It’s no coincidence, perhaps, that we say our body is “in harmony,” or in “sound health.” When a part of the body starts to vibrate at a frequency that is not in harmony, it results in disease.

This is the premise upon which all forms of energy medicine are based, including acupuncture, homeopathy, hands-on healing as well as one of the more recent entries into the complementary and alternative medicine tool kit: sound healing.

“It is possible to use sound to project back into the body the correct resonant frequency of the body part that is vibrating out of harmony, causing it to return to its natural frequency and return to a state of health,” Goldman says.

He is referring to the concept of resonance and the scientific phenomenon of entrainment. In a landmark discovery in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch scientist Christian Huygens noticed while lying sick in bed that the two pendulum clocks hanging side by side on his wall were swinging together in identical rhythm.

“Huygens realized that that wasn’t possible, because there was no mechanism connecting the two clocks,” states Jeffrey Thompson, D.C., B.F.A., founder and director of the Center for Neuroacoustic Research in Encinitas, CA. “The pendulum of another identical clock on a different wall was not swinging in unison with the other two. The reason those two were swinging in sync was that the internal mechanisms of the clocks were using the wall as a sounding board and syncing up the two through vibration.” This discovery led to the creation of an entire branch of mathematics.

More recent studies have found that entrainment happens on all levels of nature, including among humans. Women who share living spaces such as college dormitories report that their menstrual cycles become coordinated. Other research demonstrates that such biological synchronization happens with brain waves and heartbeats during normal human conversations.

In the 1970’s researchers such as Dr. Gerald Oster of Mt. Sinai Hospital and Robert Monroe of the Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences verified that they could entrain brain waves using pulsations called binaural beats by presenting two tones of different frequencies separately into the ear. The resulting entrainment is observable on EEGs, which is brainwave mapping equipment.

A December 1993 article in Scientific America is considered to be the definitive article on coupled oscillators (entrainment). “It explains that everything in the universe dances together because it’s an ecological universe. The basic idea is that everything in the universe—both animate and inanimate objects—swings together, dances together, resonates together because it saves energy to dance with a strong beat that’s already happening rather than making up your own,” Thompson states. This includes humans. He explains that human bodies tune to the most dominant world clocks or pulses that they’re exposed to, which are usually cosmic pulses such as moon phases or length of the day.

Entrainment therefore is a process by which things—be it pendulums, people, planets or other—align their movement and energy together to match in rhythm and phase. The entity with the more powerful vibration, when projected onto an entity of similar frequency, will cause that entity to vibrate in unity—in resonance—with the first object.

### **Sound for Healing**

Sound is a part of every major spiritual tradition on earth and has been used as a healing modality for millennia in certain cultures and parts of the world. Before being scientifically proven, the concept of a universe that vibrates was a mystical truth. The ancient Sanskrit words *nada brahma* translate as, “The world is sound” or also as, “Sound is God.” “The concept that we are all vibratory beings is what our ancient mystics have told us,” Goldman says.

From the Kabbalists to the Sufis to Tibetan monks, from the Aborigines, to shamans, to the Vedic holy men, the belief has always existed that the cosmos is a sea of vibration and that sound is the vessel that transports us to bathe in that ocean. It is through sound, then, that we not only re-harmonize our physical body, but that we also reconnect to the universe because the phenomenon of entrainment is repeating throughout the cosmos on every level, from the magnificent to the minute. It is through sound that we realize we are one with the universe; it is in us and we are in it.

Marisa Harris, the woman diagnosed with cancer and told that she would die within nine months, experienced this mystical concept in a very real way, within the context of modern medicine.

The medical oncologist she found who told her something other than that she was going to die was Mitchell Gaynor, M.D. Gaynor has a private practice in Manhattan, is a senior Medical Oncology Consultant at The Strang Cancer Prevention Center and an Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine at the Weill-Medical College of Cornell University. He is also at the forefront of a new medical paradigm that incorporates sound for healing.

In 1991, Gaynor treated a patient who was a Tibetan monk, and he introduced Gaynor to Tibetan singing bowls. In his book, “The Healing Power of Sound: Recovery from Life-Threatening Illness Using Sound, Voice and Music,” Gaynor writes about his first encounter with the bowls. “It was almost as if I didn’t have a choice in the matter, because I immediately intuited that playing the bowls would change my life and the lives of many of my patients.”

When Harris met Gaynor, she, too, heard new sounds. “Dr. Gaynor was the first doctor who said, ‘No one knows when you’ll die,’” Harris recounts. Among other holistic recommendations such as dietary changes, Gaynor suggested that Harris come to his bi-monthly support group. She reports being hesitant. “I didn’t want to go. I thought it would be a bunch of patients sitting around talking about how miserable they are.”

But she did attend. Gaynor walked into the room carrying large bowls. “I had no idea what he was doing,” Harris says. “I thought maybe he was going to cook for us!”

What Gaynor cooked up was an ethereal mélange of sound, visualization and meditation. “For the first time I was able to let go of the anxious, fearful, frightening sounds,” Harris says of the experience. “For the first time I felt hope.” She says she felt better, but still was hearing what she calls “frightening sounds” of being told she would die. “Dr. Gaynor asked me to sit by the bowls and let the sounds of the bowls come in. The frightening noises that were screaming in my head started melting and I started hearing other voices, voices of my friends saying, ‘Don’t give up’ and of Dr. Gaynor saying there was hope. Instead of pressing against my head, the negative noises just became sounds.”

The bowls Gaynor was using were crystal singing bowls, which are similar to Tibetan bowls. Both types are struck gently with a mallet, which is then rubbed around the rim of the bowl to elicit the sound of the vibration. The sound that emanates grows loud and has a startlingly powerful resonance that is not only heard but also physically felt in the body. It is believed that such bowls act as coupled oscillators with the body, resonating frequencies that call to the dis-harmonious parts of our body, inviting them to entrain to the healthy, healing vibration. The bowls, in a sense, sing us back to health.

Not only did Harris conquer her fears through the sound-centered meditation practice, but she found the vibrations alleviated her physical pain as well. She was suffering severe abdominal pain due to the cancer, which was thought to be perhaps stomach or pancreatic. She found by using the bowls and toning—making sounds with her voice—she was able to banish the pain. “The sound seemed to break up the pain,” she reports. “I felt it was breaking down the cancer cells. I could feel it flowing out of my body.” Harris bought her own bowls and started chanting at home. “I could feel it. I could feel the difference. I was no longer in excruciating pain. The knots inside me would break open. I really began to feel that there was something very special about sound.”

Gaynor suggested some sounds for Harris to chant based on Sanskrit mantras. She opted for ones closer to home. “I have three children. I chanted their names, my husband’s name and everything that was precious to me.”

Eventually Harris had chemotherapy, but prior to having it, her health improved dramatically, including her cancer markers coming down to normal and her liver functioning normalizing, among other things.

Harris brought sound into her life in many ways. “I started going to rehearsals of [the New York] Philharmonic. I allowed the music to enter my body and would write in my journal. The music helped me to look at my life, set priorities, realize it was time to let go of things that weren’t serving me.” And be calm and at peace, in order to open to possibilities. “That’s more than anything what the sound did for me—at the time, my mind was so narrow and closed down. And the sound just opened it up so that I could see how many possibilities there are and things I could try.”

Gaynor cites in his book many scientific reasons why sound had such a profound effect on Harris as well as dozens of other patients, but he also believes it goes deeper than research, which he states in his book and also shared in a recent telephone interview. “On a fundamental level, people are experiencing who they are with sound,” he says.

Gaynor sets forth a paradox, suggesting that the value of sound comes from silence. “Inner harmony needs to be understood from the Eastern perspective. The goal of sound healing, as well as the goal of practices such as yoga and meditation, is to find an inner silence. In the West, we have a mistaken definition of silence. We think it is the absence of sound. There is no such thing; even atoms have a sound. Silence is a more metaphysical term that you can only experience, not really understand with the rational mind. In silence is the capacity to really understand who you are, to understand more about inner harmony and infinite harmony. The capacity to understand this rests in your heart or your essence or your core. So that’s really the goal of all this.”

Gaynor has found that using sound has a profoundly calming effect on his patients during one of the most traumatic moments of their lives—dealing with their cancer prognosis. “We do everything as at any other oncology practice, but we also let people experience various forms of sound therapy. Invariably, when people experience this they tell me it’s the most relaxed they’ve been in their entire life,” he shares. “So on the most stressful day of their life, they’re having the greatest experience of inner peace that they’ve ever felt. Most people would think that’s impossible, but I see it every day. It goes to show how much power this modality has.”

In addition to playing singing bowls, Gaynor often encourages his patients to chant simple Sanskrit *bija* mantras or to make their own tones, perhaps articulating the sound of their fear or anger or sorrow. Thus, the act involves not only sound, but also deep breathing. “That combination is able to change the harmony in someone’s body,” he says. He means this quite literally, as a cascade of physiological effects takes place as a result. “You start seeing alpha and beta waves in the brain wave patterns and decreased stress hormones, such as ACTH and cortisol. Breathing becomes deeper and slower, heart rate decreases and blood pressure decreases.”

## **MUSIC, SOUND AND VIBRATION**

There is extensive research on the healing benefits of music. But when sound healers such as Gaynor, Thompson and Goldman speak of sound, they are usually not referring to music, but rather to single tone frequencies, or notes, that are measured in cycles per second. These are sounds such as those made by singing bowls, tuning forks and drums, or that are vocalized as mantras or vowel sounds.

Most sound healers believe such sounds are not just soothing, but that they can actually heal on a cellular level, changing molecular structure due to the vibrational quality. The basis for this goes back to the concept of entrainment, or coupled oscillation, and incorporates the fact that the human body is more than 70% water.

The Center for Neuroacoustic Research's Thompson has been conducting sound research for more than 20 years. To explain how sound can affect the body on a cellular level, he cites what happens when you wipe a wet finger around the rim of a clean wine glass. "It will sing like a Tibetan bowl. If you fill the glass halfway with water and run your finger around the rim, you will see the vibrational pattern in the water. It makes a mathematical mandala design."

He goes on to state that the same effect happens to the cells in our bodies, because "the cell is a little bag of water and, if you tune the vibrational frequency just right, the little cell is like the wine glass and now that wine glass—or cell—is starting to vibrate to the sound and the mandala pattern is in 3D." Thompson points out that this is the concept behind using ultrasound to smash kidney and gall stones—if you keep amping up the frequency, eventually you shatter the "wine glass."

He uses the potential of sound not to destroy, but to heal, by taking the frequency up to a point where it's not going to shatter the cell, but rather brings it to the highest possible energy state it can contain. "If we use sound frequency tuned precisely to certain cells and boost them to their highest possible metabolic state, we've initiated a super healing state. We've pushed the cells into a higher metabolic state than they could ever go by themselves. So we can expose certain organs to certain frequencies and watch the organ respond to that by increasing its healing rate."

"I've been considering the possibility that certain forms of cancer may be the disintegration of the coupled oscillator control systems of certain parts of the body," Thompson shares. "They lose their ability to dance with the rest of the system. The coupled oscillator system is broken, and those systems form their own little coupled oscillator with other cells in the region and soon are off and running, doing their own thing."

### **PARTNERS IN SOUND**

Even with all the evidence behind sound healing, most practitioners are hesitant to hold it up as a stand-alone panacea. For example, Gaynor finds that healing with bowls is even more effective when combined with breath, toning or chanting, meditation and visualization. As a medical doctor, he combines such complementary modalities with appropriate traditional western medical technology.

The Sound Healers Association's Goldman repeatedly points out that nothing is black and white and that it's perhaps impossible to claim that a specific sound can cure a specific condition. He also firmly believes that intention is as important as the sound itself and that that may explain why one sound or frequency works for one individual but not for another. "It's more than the sound; it's also the intention and energy behind the sound that helps create the healing effect." This strong belief in the power of intention led Goldman to create the formula  $\text{Frequency} + \text{Intention} = \text{Healing}$ , demonstrating the equal importance intention plays in the equation.

At the same time, these practitioners don't hide their enthusiasm for the demonstrated healing potential of sound. "If you can change molecular structure, then what condition cannot potentially be treated, changed, healed with sound?" queries Goldman. "The magnitude of using sound as a healing modality is limited only by the potential of our consciousness to perceive that things can be shifted and changed with sound."

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