



How to Use Singing Bowls

1. What are Singing Bowls?

In 1951 China invaded Tibet. Then the Chinese began to destroy most of the monasteries and temples. Many monks fled the country. Living outside their country and in poverty created pressure to sell their belongings. In this way singing bowls became slowly known to the public.

Before the Chinese invasion no one had ever heard about these particular sound making bowls, although a singing bowl had been found in an excavation in Tibet, proving they existed some 4000 years ago.

From the sparse knowledge we have, we know that the Tibetan lamas used the bowls secretly and for themselves alone, although it seems reasonable that other monks were using them too. The practice of the singing bowls actually came from shamans before Buddhism even was present in Tibet.

Singing bowls profoundly affect and harmonize body and soul. Their sounds allow a deep state of relaxation, and as a result one becomes more aware of one's inner being and center. Placing and playing singing bowls on the body promotes a deep sound massage of every cell and organ, resulting in a remarkable feeling of well-being.

What do singing bowls consist of? Traditionally they were made of seven metals corresponding to the seven visible planets. Of course it is impossible to find out what you have for sure without destroying your bowl. The singing bowls now made in Northern India and Nepal are typically made with three or five metals, a few of them have been made with all seven metals. No two singing bowls are the same, as they are each hand made. Quality thus varies, and one has to be careful when buying a bowl.

2. Relaxation into Inner Space

The most obvious effect of singing bowls is the deep relaxation they can produce. I have seen people going into a state of deep relaxation in only five or ten minutes. After a stressful day, I play my biggest bowl, and after half an hour I feel totally relaxed. A welcome healing tool in our modern times!

For the best results, lie down in a comfortable position, and place the bowl on your chest. It is advisable to put an anti-slip mat (small rolls of it are available in hardware stores, an open mesh rubber matting usually for kitchen use) under the bowl, so it will not slide down. Take the striker in your hand and strike the bowl. It takes a little practice to strike the bowl at the right angle. You will notice that,

because the bowl is so close to your ears now, that you can hear more of the lower sounds. Most important is that you can feel the physical vibration of the bowl going into your chest and from there spread to other parts of the body. Some people can even feel the vibrations go through their legs. The chest, being an air chamber, acts as a resonator, and the sound waves traveling through the body are a fine massage to all the cells and organs, plus the sounds picked up by the ears make the brain waves go into a relaxed state.

Depending on the shape of your body you might want to raise up your head a little, otherwise the bowl the bowl might slide towards your face. You can always use a finger tip or two to control the position of the bowl to get it just right. Listen to the sound waves and their patterns, the lower and higher sounds and let yourself ride on an ocean of sound. It will make you so relaxed that after a while you may forget to strike the bowl again. Of course you can put the bowl on your belly, or even on your legs if you want to. Again, depending on how you are built you can lie face down and put the bowl on your upper back. It's not as easy, but it can be so good for tension there.



3. Hitting with Love

The most obvious way to get some sound out of a singing bowl is to strike it with a striker. Striking has to be done at or close to the rim, as this brings out the best sounds. You have to find out for yourself at what angle to strike the bowl to get the most out of it. You will notice that each time you strike there is a slightly

different sound effect. It all depends how you strike the bowl, and that will be different with each strike. Hitting a singing bowl with a striker needs to be done gently, with love. More force will not produce more or stronger sounds, and you do not want to break or crack the bowl! Never strike hard with an bare unpadded piece of wood. That part of the striker is for rubbing around, not striking. You can use many strikers, depending on the size and composition of the singing bowl. The first thing to do is to get or make a series of wooden strikers of different diameters. There is no fixed rule about what works, experimentation is the key. If you tap the bowl very 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 and leather. Harder woods (wrapped with cloth) often generate harsher 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. Another kind of striker is soft drum mallets, they come in different sizes and are worth having. Some are made for use with frame drums. For really big bowls use a base drum pedal beater from a drum set. It has a big felt top and it brings out the beautiful low sounds of big bowls. Every singing bowl is a unique handicraft, and you have to experiment to find out what striker works best with what bowl. Don't be dependent on what you can buy, making your own often is the best.



4. Rub to Make Them Sing

Rubbing a bowl makes it sing, that is where they got their name. What actually happens is that one tone is enhanced and all other tones disappear, creating a pure and penetrating ring. This does not work well with all bowls, although they still will have a nice sound effect while the other tones remain more in the background.

The right striker is crucial, it needs to be bare wood and of a smaller diameter. Softer woods will work, but hardwoods, such as found in commercially made jazz sticks, are by far the best for rubbing around the rim of the bowl. Press the stick firmly against the rim of 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 will gradually bring out the singing. Not all bowls lend themselves to rubbing. The thicker the metal of the bowl, especially the rim, the nicer the sound. Sometimes a light tap to start the sound, then commencing with the rubbing, will make it work more easily. Do not expect to get immediate results. It is a skill that has to be developed. The right pressure is crucial, and you have to hold the bowl firmly and control it with your fingers. Usually it can not be done with the bowl placed on a pillow or holder. With patience and the proper hardwood stick, rubbing thick middle size and small size bowls produces penetrating, clear partials as all other tones are subdued or 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. Where do you find a nice round wooden stick? It is a question people often ask me. Well, you do not have to look far, they are all around you, although you probably never thought of it. I have sticks made from wooden handles of kitchen utensils. I have one made from the handle of a bathroom plunger. I have a couple of sticks I found in a surplus store. My favorite striker is one I made from a small oak tree which I had planted myself in the garden. The wood needs to be clear and smooth, free of checking and cracks. See what you can find, and keep an eye out for a good jazz stick

5. Singing Bowl Fountain

A fountain with singing bowls? Yes, you will like this one! Put water in your singing bowl, fill it a third or half way, and hit it with a padded striker, preferably a soft striker. As you strike softly you will notice nice patterns of ripples on the water. They are the sound waves traveling over the surface of the water from the wall of the bowl towards the middle, creating interference patterns. Quite nice to see. You will also notice that you can now see the four nodal points from which the sound emanates: the place where the striker hits (a), the place opposite to it (b) and the two points half way between a and b on the wall of the bowl. As you continue with rhythmic striking, gradually increase the strength of the blow. The force of the sound waves will push the water upwards and a multitude of water

drops jump up and down the bowl, a fountain of sound propelled water drops! Some bowls work better than others. Do not strike your bowl too hard trying to make it happen.

Also notice that as water is added the sound of the bowl gradually changes. As the different tones of the bowl are generated on different places of the bowl, the adding of water dampens the tones that are generated at the spots where water is filling the bowl. You also can hold the bowl and slosh the water around as you strike it. Do it where spills won't matter. This produces a whirling sound that is really fun to hear. Try placing the water filled bowl on your body as you are lying down, then strike it, feel the watery sounds. Just more great ways of experimenting with the sounds of singing bowls





6. Toning with Singing Bowls

Singing bowls have a fundamental tone and partials that are well within the frequency spectrum of the human voice. Tuning into one tone of the bowl, one can sing this tone while the bowl is ringing. The same can be done for the other tones of the bowl. It is a fun and pleasant way to discover the sound qualities of the bowls. One can also hum with the sound of the bowls, it is a question of letting the sound come out of you in a natural and fluent way, letting the bowl take you to a sound place you have never been before. Do not think about what sound to make, let it come out from the body or from your emotions and then slide the frequency of the sound up and down to match those of the singing bowl. It might develop into one single tone, or into a series of tones, or even into a short mantra. Experimentation is the key here.

7. Waving Like a Fish

A really nice way to use a singing bowl is what I call 'waving'. Hold your bowl firmly with spread fingers at the level of your head. Strike it with a bare striker (unless the sound is too harsh) at the rim, and hold your mouth wide open at the level of the rim. Close the back of the throat, do not breathe through the mouth, and move the lips a little bit up and down. What you are actually doing is using

the mouth as a sound board, thereby enhancing one of the partials of the singing bowl. It takes a little practice of shaping the mouth in the right way and holding the bowl at the right level, but soon one tone is much louder. Then the mouth is in the right shape for that tone, and by making your mouth a little bit wider and smaller, you can create a 'wawing' effect. It is like a fish taking air, or imagine that you are uttering a waw-waw sound, but without making a sound yourself. The effect is marvelous and people will always look up at you, asking how you did that. You might want to turn the bowl around a little to get the maximum effect as the strongest sounds come from the four nodal points around the rim. The 'wawing' effect works best with small or thick bowls, but large bowls can also have high partials that can be enhanced. Sometimes it is possible to enhance a second lower or higher tone. Also, it is easier to get the effect if you use a harder striker. Too soft a striker and it will not work.

8. A Singing Bowl Helmet

Humans are born to experiment and try out new ideas. So, one day I took one of my big bowls and put it upside down on my head. I had to balance the bowl a bit, so the rim would not touch my face anywhere. Then when I struck the bowl, not only did I hear the sounds (especially the lower sounds) so much better, as my ears were almost touching the rim, but I also felt the physical vibrations of the bowl going into the skull from the contact point on the crown downwards the neck and spine, all the way down to the sacrum. Quite a sensation!

Although the sight of having a reversed singing bowl on the head looks very silly, the effect of the audible, and especially of the physical, vibrations is a unique and pleasant experience. At the same time it is an exercise in equilibrium, but after a while it becomes quite natural.

The singing bowl has to be big enough, because if the rim touches your head the sound will be immediately neutralized. This also means that you cannot strike too hard, as this makes the bowl swing and the rim will touch your head. A big, felt striker, normally used for big bowls, can be used, but you must not strike too hard. It is better to use a cloth wrapped stick and strike only the edge of the rim. Thus you get the maximum sound with a minimum of bowl swing. You might want to sit on the floor, with a soft rug and pillows, at the same time keep one hand free at all times to catch your bowl if it starts to fall. Bowls can break, they crack. Aside from the pleasant vibrations, I suspect it is a good way to resolve tension and blockages, on the energetic or physical level, along the spine. Once I heard it said that the lamas have told that a bowl should not be played on the head for too long, use your judgment about this.

9. Singing Bowls for Healing

Singing bowls have obvious healing effects. The physical vibration of the sound waves, when a bowl is placed directly on the body, massages the cells and organs in a delicate way, and releases energy blockages. Their sounds influence the brain waves in a positive and balancing way, and they have a calming effect on the nervous system. Singing bowls promote deep relaxation with subtle but sometimes profound healing effects. Once you have undergone it yourself, you naturally want to share it with other people. What better way is there than doing a healing session for your partner, family member or friend?

Make sure the person lies down in a truly comfortable position. Check them out, get pillows for support, under the head, under the knees, wherever it is needed. Shoes off, blankets if it's chilly. When you have more than one singing bowl, put one of them on the chest and the other somewhere around the body, preferably by the head. When I start out with a private session, I first intuitively feel out which bowl the person needs most, and this is the one I place on his chest (with the anti-slip mat underneath). This will be the most important bowl to play and the most healing for that person at that time. Do not strike it too hard, as it is close to the ears of the person. Nor is it necessary to strike it constantly, as the person will still be able to hear the sounds well enough even when you do not hear them anymore. Aside from these considerations it is up to you and your own intuition to feel how you have to play the bowl.

It is really nice when you play a bowl to hold it and move it around the body, passing it over the body, and especially around the head of the person. Not only does this create a nice sound effect for the person, but this technique allows you to tune in to the energies, chakras or aura of that person and work to clear any negative energies you might find by creating harmony there instead. Remember that healing is not something that has to be done this way or that way. Healing is more about tuning in and feeling out what needs to be done. Then transform the energy in a totally naturally way, without any interference of your ego. You do not heal, you help to create a space that allows healing take place. The healing will be whatever is necessary for that person, at that time, and in those circumstances.

I often put a flat pillow behind the head of the person, on which I can place a bowl to use in direct relation with the bowl I have placed on the chest. Working with the two bowls together creates a link between those two places on the energetic level, and it seems to have a really good effect on the person.

The chest is an important area to work on, as a lot of childhood traumas are stored there. Singing bowls can be placed on the belly too, but the very big bowls can be too heavy. Bowls on the legs can work too, but the legs need to be kept together, otherwise they will touch the bowl at the side and dampen a lot of sounds. The back is also a good place to place singing bowls, as long as the person is comfortable and does not have to stretch the neck sideways too much. With a little ingenuity in positioning even hips and shoulders can be worked on. Singing bowls are but instruments, and how you use them depends on your way of healing. They can be used along with with Reiki, hands-on-healing, and

massage, or whatever you discover with your own creative imagination .



10. Opening Chakras

When I bought my first two bowls from the Hungarian shaman Joska Soos, I asked him what effect they had on the human body. He said that their sounds affect the chakras and the aura in general. By way of example he showed me how to activate the third eye, by first hitting a bowl and then gently touching the vibrating rim of the bowl at the ajna chakra, located between the eye brows. Over the years I have done many group sessions, and there always are people who feel strong sensations on places in their bodies. It is interesting that these places correspond to the seven major chakras. Usually it is the ajna chakra, (also called the third eye) or the solar plexus chakra between the sternum and the navel.

For people who work intentionally with the chakras, with Reiki or hands-on-healing, and for people who are just open and sensitive, the singing bowls can be a big help in awakening and developing one's awareness of these energy centers. There is no one bowl that corresponds specifically to a certain chakra. A particular bowl might work on the solar plexus of one person, but not that of another person. As we are all different, so are our energies. Thus singing bowls have different effects on different people. It is a matter of experience to find out what the singing bowls you happen to have will do to other people or to yourself. As time goes by you will notice that during a particular time you will have a

preference for a certain bowl. This is the one you will need the most during that period. Later it can change, and the same bowl might even leave you indifferent, while another singing bowl catches your attention. This is due to the fact we are not static beings, we change over time, along with our needs and preferences. Because of this one needs to remind oneself to be aware of ever changing energies in oneself, in others and in one's environment. On the other hand, remember that your intentions in using the bowls can affect the results. A single bowl can be used in a meditation on all the chakras, coordinating attention, breathing and inner focus through all of the centers one by one. Experiment with what you have and see what works for you.

11. Charge It Up!

Joska Soos, the Hungarian shaman I visited in Belgium, once told me that the singing bowls he was selling (he got them from Tibetan lamas) were once filled with the bones of high ranking lamas. In Tibet it was tradition to keep the bones of a dead lama, especially when he had been highly spiritually evolved, to transfer this spiritual energy unto ritual objects, or to make ritual objects out of the bones themselves, like malas (string of beads) and bone trumpets.

You might not have such a specially charged singing bowl, but the bowl you do have you can use to charge up objects. Sound is a powerful force, the different metals have also an effect, and the tones definitely create positive vibrations. Most important is the intention you put into it. Sound is a carrier for energies and can thus be used to transfer your energy, a thought form, an emotion, a wish or any other special energy.

When putting an object into the bowl, put a small pad under the object to prevent rattling. Since the base of the bowl is a nodal (still) point placing an object there does not interfere with the sound. Crystals respond very well as they are piezo-electric, they create electric current when pressure is applied, and sound waves are pressure waves. I sometimes put a picture of a person in a bowl to send him/her healing energy. You could also write a wish on a piece of paper and put it in there to make you wish come true. Of course, always make sure you really know what you are wishing for. You always receive what you send out, including any negativity.

It is easy to charge up water. Just put some water in the bowl. Do not fill the bowl all the way, as water dampens the sound. The more you fill a bowl with water the more the sound will change. I do not recommend drinking the water, but you could use it to water your plants. You can put the whole glass of water, glass and all, in the bowl if you want to drink it. Just put an adequate pad underneath so it does not rattle. A piece of felt is good. Look and you will see the waves of sound making patterns in the water. You can play to your plants, and playing your bowl in the garden is a nice thing to do.



12. Singing Bowls Yoga

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.



13. Singing Bowls in Nature

Nature is teeming with them: spirits in the earth, in crystals, in water, in the air, in fire, clouds, trees; in everything that is present on this earth and in the cosmos. They are all around us, all the time, creating a beautiful world. Sound

creates not only physical pressure waves through the air, but also creates subtle waves in the spiritual realms. When singing bowls are played, their sounds resonate on the spiritual level for many miles around. Nature spirits hear this and are attracted by it. During one of my hour long group sessions a thunderstorm came over. As I could not avert this unexpected intrusion of sounds, I tuned into it and incorporated the thunder sounds in my playing. The thunder beings were aware of the singing bowls session as they came closer and closer, and we even got a lightning strike very close by. They must have been blessing the session because after the session the participants were delighted, and called it the best session they had ever had. So, you see it pays of to take the spirit beings into account and have respect for them.

My wife Carol often goes out into the meadow and sends out the sound of the singing bowls to the environment. She does this regularly, and the birds in the neighborhood love it. The more you do it, the more a resonance in the area is established, bringing peace and harmony there. It is nice to take your bowl out and play it on special times, times set aside for worldwide peace meditations, times of stress and fear, times of celebration and joy. Your intentions count, think of all the other people around the world who need love and healing, and think of all the others who are collectively contributing their energy to helping.



14. Singing Bowl Spirits

After I had bought several singing bowls I discovered that each bowl had unique qualities, and the more I paid attention to it the more I felt that there was a spirit attached to each bowl. A sound spirit that resonated with the bowl and that wanted to express itself into the physical realm by the sounds of the singing bowl. In my next visit to Joska Soos, the Hungarian shaman, I relayed him my feeling about this, and he confirmed that each singing bowl had its own special sound spirit attached to it.

The idea that in the spiritual realms there are spirits that are associated with sound and music is not new. It is an important idea I want to talk a little bit more about it, so you might get a better understanding. Geoffrey Hodson, a renowned clairvoyant from the beginning 1900's, says about the angels of music: "...for the Angels of Music are but the embodiments of the creative Word of God, the expression of His Voice. When He speaks, a mighty burst of songs springs from their hearts and pours its resonance throughout the graded order of their race. They sing in myriads in answer to the Word of God. Their sounds is as of a million harps touched by immortal hands, their voice is like the surging of the sea. From the center of the Universe, like a mighty tidal flood, their song goes forth in wave on wave of glory, as order after order answers to the Word; they send the chorus forth, outwards, to the confines of the Universe...They are in need of human ears and human hearts, that through them they may bring our world in tune, that men may answer ever more and more to the sound and rhythm of their song. To them, all men and all angels are instruments, every faculty of mind and heart is a string." In ancient Greece music was the highest of all sciences. Music was considered to come from the divine realms and was always healing.

I once met a remarkable man from Holland, a clairvoyant with poetic talents who had memories from very ancient times. He speaks of sound spirits and dance spirits who are extremely sensitive to vibrations. Disharmony in sound and movement can upset these beings severely and even make them angry. They should not be underestimated as they can emanate strong vibrations that are related to the fate of man. In general one can say that he who is a boor in sound and movement should not count on cosmic luck, because his behavior is disturbing his aura, so good vibrations have ever more difficulty to reach him. At the same time he makes himself vulnerable to sound and dance spirits, while being a willing receptacle of negative energies. If you want to be in harmony with yourself and the cosmos you should think about this.

The same applies to singing bowls. They are connected to sound spirits who can help you on your life path and with the work you are doing. If you want to accomplish positive results, you should acknowledge their existence and have the utmost respect for them. You can help them to express themselves through playing the singing bowls, and they can help you to fulfill your destiny. The worst thing you can do is leave your singing bowl on the shelf without ever playing it!



15. Ceremonies with Singing Bowls

Singing bowls are sometimes used in ceremonies. As most people have never seen or heard one before it is often an exotic experience for them. The nature of their sounds demands moments of silence, reverence and respect, often necessary for the kind of ceremony they are used in. They can be used to open or close a ceremony, or played at a significant moment.

As sound is a carrier of energies, singing bowls can be used in magic. Formulate clearly what you want and send it out on the sound waves of your singing bowl. Know what you are sending out, as any negative intent, or badly formulated wish, comes back at you. What you send out, you receive, thus you must know what it is you want to deal with. Never impose something on another person as we must not interfere with another person's life. If you really want to send healing energies to somebody, you always need to add "on the condition that the higher self of that person is ready to accept this healing energy". Sometimes people do not want to heal (even if they claim they do), as their illness has certain benefits for them that they are not willing to give up.

Playing a singing bowl with an intention can make the playing much better. You can play to the birds, they love it, to the whole earth, or for world peace. Create your own rituals and ceremonies, they don't have to be complicated or take a long time. Just having a singing bowl with you and using it can make an ordinary situation into a magical one.

