

The Spiritual Significance of Music – Simon Heather

"He who knows the secret of the sound knows the mystery of the whole universe" - Hazrat Inayat Khan

Scientists in Germany have recently found flutes dating back to 35,000 years ago. The flutes are the oldest musical instruments found to date (1). (See link below to hear one played).



The researchers say that music was widespread in pre-historic times. The scientists believe that music created a powerful bond between people as they moved northwards colonising new lands. This gave humans an edge over the Neanderthals who eventually disappeared.

For thousands of years people have sung and made music together. This created a feeling of connection between people and also connected them to the earth and the rhythms of nature.

Why are Sound and Music so Important to Us?

In his book 'The Destiny of Man' Charles Darwin wrote, "I conclude that musical notes and rhythm were first acquired by the male and female progenitors of mankind for the sake of charming the opposite sex. Thus musical tones became firmly associated with some of the strongest passions an animal is capable of feeling..."

In the Lokota Native American culture the young men carve 'love flutes' which they play to woo the young women of the tribe. The man who can play his flute the most beautifully gets the girl!

Carving a flute demands great dexterity and patience. Playing a flute well involves other skills. Studies have shown that women prefer creative men rather than wealthy men to be fathers of their children. From an evolutionary perspective creativity is a better skill to pass on to the next generation! (2).

Recent scientific research has shown how important sound and music have been to the development of the human race. Music evolved and continues to function as part of courtship rituals. Music making creates social cohesion amongst people; it promotes cognitive development and it strengthens the bonds between mother and child. (3)

Music contains the mathematical ratios that make up the whole cosmos. Listening to music puts us in harmony with creation. Music can make us feel happy or sad. Music can soothe us or energise us. Singing and making music is good for our soul. In Germany they have a saying –

“Where there’s singing join the throng, evil man thinks nought of song”.

Recent scientific research is proving how beneficial listening to music is for us. Music is increasingly being used to assist the healing process. (4)

Why are Sound and Music Healing for Us?

To answer this question we need to study the spiritual teachings of India. According to Vedic philosophy every word we speak has a power. When we speak or sing we are sending energy into the external world.

There are said to be five great elements that make up the world; earth (prithivi), water (apas), fire (tejas), air (vayu) and ether (akasha). Each element is linked to a different chakra. As we move up the chakras each element is subtler than the previous element. Each element has different qualities. The base chakra is linked to the element of earth; this element gives us strength and stability.

The element for the throat chakra is called ‘akasha’ in Sanskrit, ‘ether’ in English. Akasha is the subtlest of all the elements. According to Vedic philosophy it is the basis and essence of all things in the material world. It is the all-pervading ethereal substance, which is imperceptible to the five senses.

The main characteristic of akasha is ‘shabda’ (sound). Sound vibrates in the akasha element creating form. The word akasha can also be translated as space. It is the space in which all created forms manifest. The emptiness of space is necessary for the existence of all life.

When we think, speak or sing it creates patterns of energy in the akasha. If these vibrations are constantly reinforced through repetition they will eventually take on a material form.

To see this in action we need to study the work of Hans Jenny. Cymatics, the study of wave phenomena, is a science pioneered by Swiss medical doctor and natural scientist, Hans Jenny (1904-1972).



For 14 years he conducted experiments using sound to animate inert powders, pastes, and liquids into life-like, flowing forms, which mirror patterns found in nature, art and architecture.

All of these patterns were created using simple sine wave vibrations (pure tones) within the audible range. So what you see in his experiments is how sound manifests into form.



The Cymatic images are truly amazing (see above). They demonstrate clearly to us what the sages told us thousands of years ago and what scientists are telling us now, that the whole world is in vibration and was created by sound.

Lower frequency sounds produce simple patterns, higher frequency sounds produce more complex shapes.

John Stuart Reid has taken Hans Jenny's work further. John Stuart Reid is the inventor of the CymaScope.

The CymaScope is a scientific instrument that can give us a visual image of sound and vibration, a cymatic image, helping us to understand our world in ways previously hidden from view. See below (5).



As you watch the CymaScope screen you will see the patterns produced by each different sound. It is even possible to see the harmonics that are produced. (To see two You Tube videos of John Stuart Reid's work go the link below).

Thought

All actions begin with a thought; every project, every building begins as an idea. The Buddha said each of us are the result of our thoughts.

"Our present thoughts create our future life. Our life is created by our mind. If a person speaks or acts with a mind grounded in fear suffering will follow him as surely as summer follows spring. If a person speaks or acts with a mind grounded in love happiness will follow him as surely as his shadow never leaves him." (Dhammapada)

There is now scientific evidence from a number of studies that people with a positive attitude to life live longer, get fewer infections and feel less pain. They recover more quickly from surgery, they are less likely to develop cancer, suffer a stroke, die from heart disease, or suffer from depression.

Researchers at Yale University who investigated longevity found that those people who had positive attitudes about ageing lived more than seven years longer than those with a less positive attitude. "Our study carries two messages. The discouraging one is that negative self-perceptions can diminish life expectancy; the encouraging one is that positive self-perceptions can prolong life expectancy," says Dr Becca Levy, who led the study. (6)

The Voice

The human voice is more flexible than any instrument. It can transmit a healing intention to another person far better than any instrument.

"Vocal music is considered to be the highest, for it is natural; the effect produced by an instrument, which is merely a machine, cannot be compared with that of the human

voice. However perfect strings may be, they cannot make the same impression on the listener as the voice which comes direct from the soul.” - Hazrat Inayat Khan (7)

When we listen to someone speak we can tell a lot about them. A person’s voice can tell us how healthy they are. It can tell us if they are tense or relaxed, if they are happy or sad. Small children and animals respond to the tone of our voice more than the words we use.

Our voices contain an amazing power within them to transmit positive energy to another person.

- When a mother sings to her baby she uses the softness of her voice and a loving intention to soothe her child.
- When a teacher encourages a pupil he/she uses positive words and tone of voice to give the student confidence in their abilities.
- When a football crowd urges their team on with chants their team generally plays better. Teams generally get better results when playing at home.

A sound healer uses the same principal when giving a sound healing treatment. They will use toning, healing songs, chants, mantras or positive affirmations to transmit a healing energy to their client. Gongs, drums, Tibetan bowls or tuning forks may also be used in a sound healing session.

Since all vibration produces sound, and since all matter is in motion or vibration, it follows that whenever there is matter or substance there must also be sound. Hence every object will be continually producing a sound even though our ears may not be sufficiently sensitive to hear it. The world is a vast orchestra of pulsing vibration; Pythagoras called this the "Music of the Spheres".

Physicists tell us that the human body is essentially energy vibrating at different frequencies. Through the principles of resonance, entrainment and intention sound healing can help the body come back into balance without the need for drugs or surgery. For more information on these principles see my article ‘What is Sound Healing’ (8).

Music

“The soul feels buried in the outer, material world, and the soul feels satisfied and living when it is touched with fine vibrations. The finest matter is spirit, and the grosser spirit is matter. Music, being the finest of the arts, helps the soul to rise above differences. It unites souls, because even words are not necessary. Music is beyond words.” - Hazrat Inayat Khan (9)

Each sound that we hear carries an energy, a vibration that effects us in different ways. Some sounds are uplifting; some are calming, while others may have a negative effect on us.

Music can be compared to medicine for our minds and our bodies. Each piece of music has a different effect on us. Each person involved with a piece of music adds their energy to a performance or recording.

The same song sung by different people can have a completely different effect on us. Listening to the voice of someone who is in pain emotionally or physically may lead us to feel that person's pain. A speaker or singer who is in a very peaceful state will impart their peace to us through their voice.

Mystics over the centuries have stated that sound has two aspects, a gross physical aspect and a subtle aspect. The gross aspect is the sound we hear with our ears, the subtle aspect is the energy or intention that lies behind the words/sound.

In India a distinction is made between an 'inert mantra' and a 'spiritually charged mantra'. An inert mantra can be found in a book. An enlightened teacher gives us a spiritually charged mantra. The power of the teacher's realisation is held in the mantra. This power is transmitted to us when we are ready. When I was travelling in India three different spiritual teachers gave me the same mantra!

The Purpose of Music

"The basic purpose of music is to be therapeutic, to raise the life energy of the listener. This simple yet profound truth seems to have been forgotten in this era which acclaims virtuosity and sophisticated musicology. The function of music since its beginning has been the spiritual uplifting of the listener so his life energy is enhanced by the experience." Dr John Diamond (10)

Dr Diamond says that there is something incredibly therapeutic in music. By the age of seventy, 50% of American men are dead, while 80% of orchestral conductors are still working.

In an experiment using Applied Kinesiology Dr Diamond played different kinds of music to people through headphones. (Applied Kinesiology is a muscle testing technique whereby the person being tested holds an arm straight out to the side of the body at shoulder height and is asked to resist lowering the arm when gentle downward pressure is applied to the wrist by another person).

The anapaestic beat is used in most heavy metal music; it consists of two rapid beats followed by a long beat as in Tahta tara, Tahta tara, Tahta tara. When the anapaestic beat was played to volunteers through headphones they would immediately lose muscle strength and have to lower their arms. Dr Diamond believes that the anapaestic beat stresses the body by disturbing the natural rhythm of the heart.

Dr Diamond found that all natural sounds raise our life energy. This includes the sounds of nature, musical instruments and the biological sounds of the body. All noise, regardless of its volume, will have a negative effect on our life energy.

He found that we have two separate systems of hearing, the ear and the acupuncture system of the body. The acupuncture system is affected by low frequencies (up to approximately 1,000Hz). The body also responds to sounds up to 50,000 Hz, well above the audible threshold of 20,000Hz. This means that we are affected by sounds well above our normal hearing range.

Dr Diamond says that music is primarily a property of the right hemisphere of the brain. When an individual becomes stressed an imbalance occurs between the two hemispheres of the brain; one becomes dominant, generally the left, causing a loss of our creativity. Listening to music rebalances the two hemispheres of the brain.

He believes that the beginnings of music are to be found in the mother's communication with her baby. All music is derived from this relationship. (11)

Negative Power of Music

In a study of students Dr. James Johnson of the University of North Carolina found that listening to rap music increased predisposition to violence and reduced interest in academic study and long term success. (12)

A common experience observed in therapy groups and clinics is that drug users don't recover if they continue to listen to heavy metal music. A one-year follow-up of inpatient and outpatient cocaine addicts from Sedona Villa, a branch of Camelback Hospital of Phoenix, Arizona found that no drug users who continued to listen to heavy metal music recovered from their addiction." (reported in the Arizona Republic, July 4, 1994). (13)

Laughter

Recent medical research is showing how laughter is beneficial for our health. Dr. Lee Berk, is a researcher at Loma Linda University's School of Medicine in the USA. His studies indicate that laughter boosts the body's immune system by releasing beneficial hormones and decreases stress hormones that can lead to disease. His research also suggests laughing can lower blood pressure and be good for the heart. (14)

Norman Cousins the American publisher healed himself through an intensive programme of watching funny films and reading joke books. He laughed so much that his cancer went into remission. (15)

The key sound in the English language for laughing is the 'H' sound. The sounds that we use to laugh with, 'Ha Ha', 'Ho Ho', 'He He', all use our diaphragm muscles. When we laugh it makes us breathe deeply, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, the part of the nervous system that calms us down.

The most efficient absorption of oxygen takes place at the bottom of the lungs because there are more blood vessels there. When we laugh we breathe more deeply and absorb more oxygen.

Laughter Yoga

Laughter Yoga is a simple and profound idea that is sweeping the world. It is the brainchild of Dr. Madan Kataria, an Indian physician from Mumbai who started the first laughter club in a park on 13th March 1995, with just 5 people.

In India there are now thousands of laughter clubs. Today, it has become a world-wide phenomenon with more than 6000 social laughter clubs in 60 countries.

Laughter Yoga combines unconditional laughter with yogic breathing (Pranayama). Anyone can laugh for no reason, without relying on humour, jokes or comedy. Laughter is simulated as a body exercise in a group but with eye contact and childlike playfulness, it soon turns into real and contagious laughter. The concept of Laughter Yoga is based on a scientific fact that the body cannot differentiate between fake and real laughter. One gets the same physiological and psychological benefits. (16)

Laughter really is the best medicine!

Simon Heather

Simon is an internationally known workshop leader, healer and author. Simon is one of the leading teachers of sound healing in the UK.

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College of Sound Healing

Simon is the Principal of the College of Sound Healing. The College of Sound Healing is a non-profitmaking organisation that brings together some of the leading teachers of sound healing in the UK. As well as training sound healers the College takes sound healing into schools, hospitals, old peoples homes etc.

Web site - www.collegeofsoundhealing.co.uk

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