

Hitting the Right Note

Lull your students into deeper relaxation by integrating singing bowls to your teaching.

By Sara Avant Stover

I sank into Savasana, wholeheartedly melting into stillness. Eyes closed, the once-distinct boundaries of my skin dissolved while thoughts evaporated into a sleepy haze. Post-asana energy hummed and whirled through my limbs. My teacher sat in the front of the room, quiet, erect, cross-legged. With a singing bowl in hand, he circled the wooden wand around the bowl's rim, radiating a lullaby to the blissful yoginis in the room.

Those moments always felt like magic to me. Somehow the all-pervading sound of the bowl, like the mysterious embrace of a whale's song, never failed to seduce me into deeper surrender.

Now, as a yoga teacher myself, I too look for ways to help deepen my students' engagement with yoga. Sometimes I do this by playing calming music during Savasana, leading a full-body relaxation technique, or simply letting students rest in the silence of meditation. But what they love most are the times when I pick up my Tibetan singing bowl, rest it in the palm of my left hand, and serenade them into vibrant

stillness.

The Lure of Resonance

Traditionally used throughout Asia to enhance Buddhist and shamanic rituals, today singing bowls are ubiquitous. Around the world, many use these healing instruments to enhance meditation, relaxation, or religious practices.

Jeannine Dietz, a yoga instructor, Reiki practitioner, and vibrational healer of Om on the Bay in Annapolis, Maryland, specializes in incorporating crystal singing bowls into her work. Like many, her inspiration arose from experiencing their power for herself.

"I first was introduced to singing bowls during a yoga teacher training," Dietz remembers. "One evening we did a chakra meditation accompanied by a frosted crystal singing bowl. The first sounding of the bowl had me hooked. It resonated with the deepest part of me, and I immediately knew my path."

Since then, Dietz has researched the interrelationships between yoga, singing bowls, chakras, chanting, and affirmations. As a result, she developed a workshop that incorporates all of these components into a full-spectrum therapeutic experience.

The Healing Power of Sound

"We are all vibrational beings," Dietz declares. "The vibration [of singing bowls] heals not only on a physical level but also on mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. The sound they

produce is ethereal, haunting, and magical—probably like nothing you have ever heard before."

Frank Perry sounds the same note. Based in the United Kingdom, Perry, an accomplished musician with more than 30 years of experience working with singing bowls, now owns nearly 250 of them.

"Sound transcends words and can allow us to enter our higher mind and receive spiritual teaching," he maintains. "As we listen to the bowl, we can more easily enter the world of stillness and silence deep within."

Giving the Gift of Sound

During your classes, there are several ways that you can incorporate singing bowls into your usual repertoire. The simplest way is to simply strike the bowl with the mallet, as you would an ordinary bell or chime, to signal the start or end of class.

Dietz plays the bowls during the invocation of Om at the beginning and end of her classes and while her students rest in Savasana (Corpse Pose).

Perry suggests using a bowl before discussing the philosophical aspects of yoga as "a way of attuning us to the inner worlds."

"Producing one single sound allows us to withdraw from all the challenges of the modern, busy world and to focus on one simple thing that needn't be demanding at all," he says.

Jo Griffith, an Anusara-inspired teacher and the yoga

director at Chicago's Ruby Room, plays the studio's seven crystal singing bowls (each one a different size and said to tune a specific chakra) at the end of her classes.

"They are great for drawing people inside," Griffith says. "I think they enable you to internalize the practice to a greater degree and to keep the effects with you longer."

Don't Overdo It

Like all good things, singing bowls generate more impact when used sparingly and deliberately.

"The bowls are like nothing you have ever heard before and can be very intense, confrontational, and even invasive," Dietz warns. "Be aware of students' reactions. Tone it down if you need to, and reassure any agitated students."

She also points out that students with metal pins or stainless steel ball joints may experience pain or discomfort when hearing the bowls.

Perry agrees that not everyone enjoys the sounds of a singing bowl. "Some people may dislike a high tone, while others may be afraid of low tones. Modern machine-made bowls will sound 'tinny' compared to older antique bowls, and this could make some participants edgy."

It's also important to be mindful that the instrument has the potential to become a distraction if it is overused, Perry says. To avoid this, he advises beginning by practicing alone to acquaint yourself with your bowl, and to discern how it would be of most service to your students.

"The act of playing a bowl requires considerable concentration in order to avoid unpleasant sounds," he advises. "Therefore, playing a bowl improves one's concentration [by cutting] through the mind-chatter and pointing toward meditative states."

Griffith adds that using the bowls while students are engaged in the more active portion of class could be a mistake. "I definitely would not use them during a time that [the students] would need to hear instruction from me," she says.

Don't let these warnings be too daunting, though. Read on to find out how to masterfully integrate singing bowls into your teaching.

Tips for Fine-Tuning

1. Do your research. There are lots of bowls on the market. Take the time to find one that meets your needs and is of good quality. Determine the material that you would like the bowl to be made out of, the size, and the pitch (be sure to choose a pitch that you find soothing). Consider how you will use this bowl. You will need a louder bowl if you are teaching to large groups, for instance. If you need to transport it to and from classes, you'll need a smaller bowl that is not too heavy.
2. Place them with care. In the case of crystal bowls, know that they may shatter if several are playing in a small room. Place the bowls at least 12 inches apart.
3. Experiment. Practice on your own at first, and then

- take the plunge by bringing the bowls into class. Experiment to see how playing them can best enhance your students' experiences.
4. Let students know what to expect. Tell students that you will be playing singing bowls and that the sounds may create sensations in their bodies. Advise students to be aware of and to receive the effects. Then, let them experience for themselves the magical realm of healing sounds.

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