

Musical Tools for Meditation

by Dudley Evenson
& Dean Evenson, M.S.

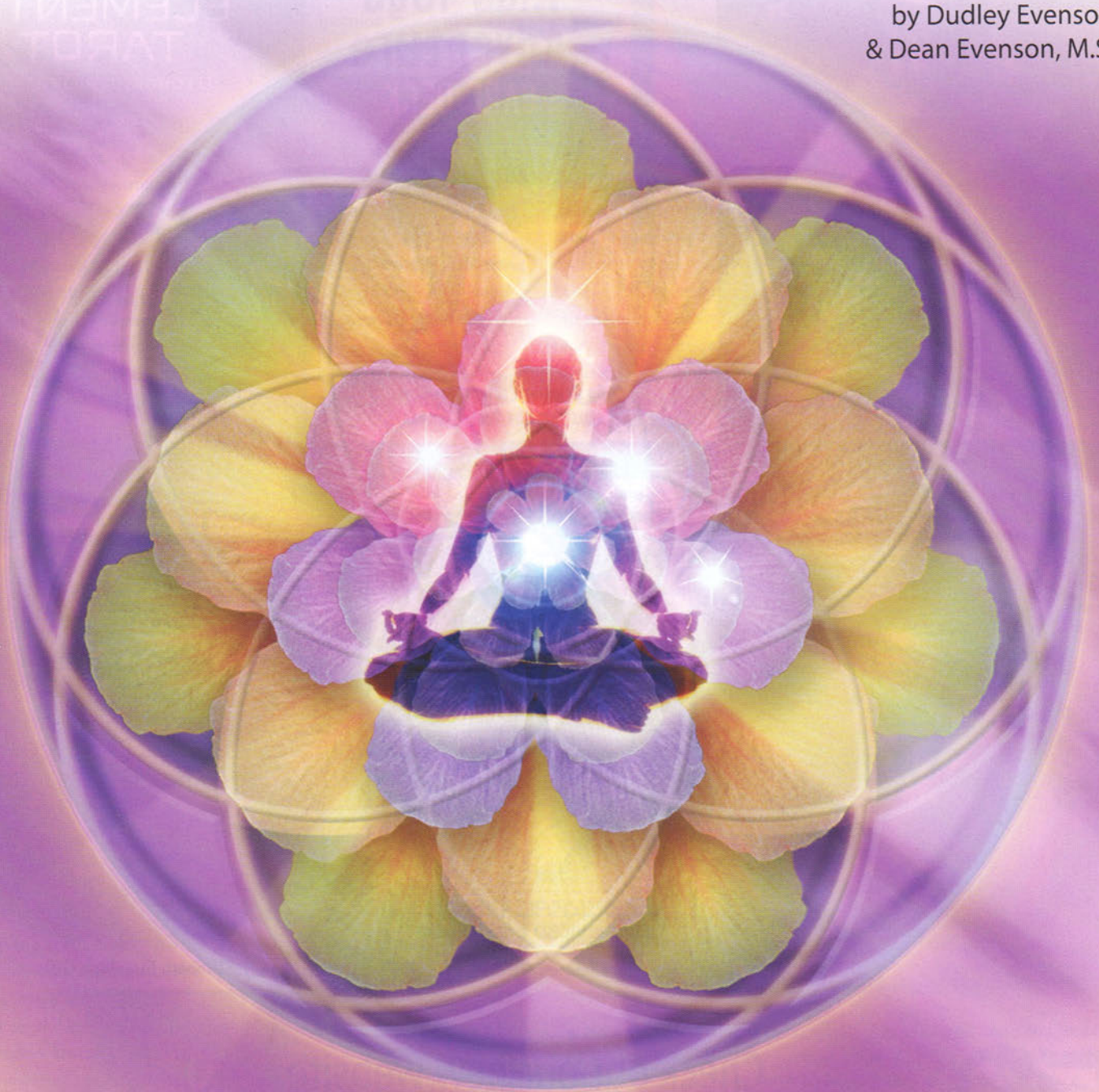


Illustration by Bob Paltrow

Meditation can have immense benefits for our spiritual and physical well-being. Today, many people are searching for a way to relax and calm their anxious minds and meditation is a perfect antidote to the high-stress world we live in. In addition to establishing sacred physical space, we, as musicians, have found great benefit using sonic tools to establish spiritual space. We find we can greatly enhance our meditation experience

by listening to certain recorded music as well as using self-generated sounds such as vocal toning, chanting, mantra, affirmations, and using simple instruments like drums and rattles.

Our contemporary understanding of meditation is built on forms and techniques developed over the ages by multiple cultures. Through focused concentration, we can attain a quality of mindfulness and compassion that enhances every aspect of our lives. Relaxation and concentration are the first steps, and once mastered, we can go beyond them and open ourselves to the elevation of our consciousness towards an experience of universal oneness.

How Do We Choose Music to Enhance Meditation?

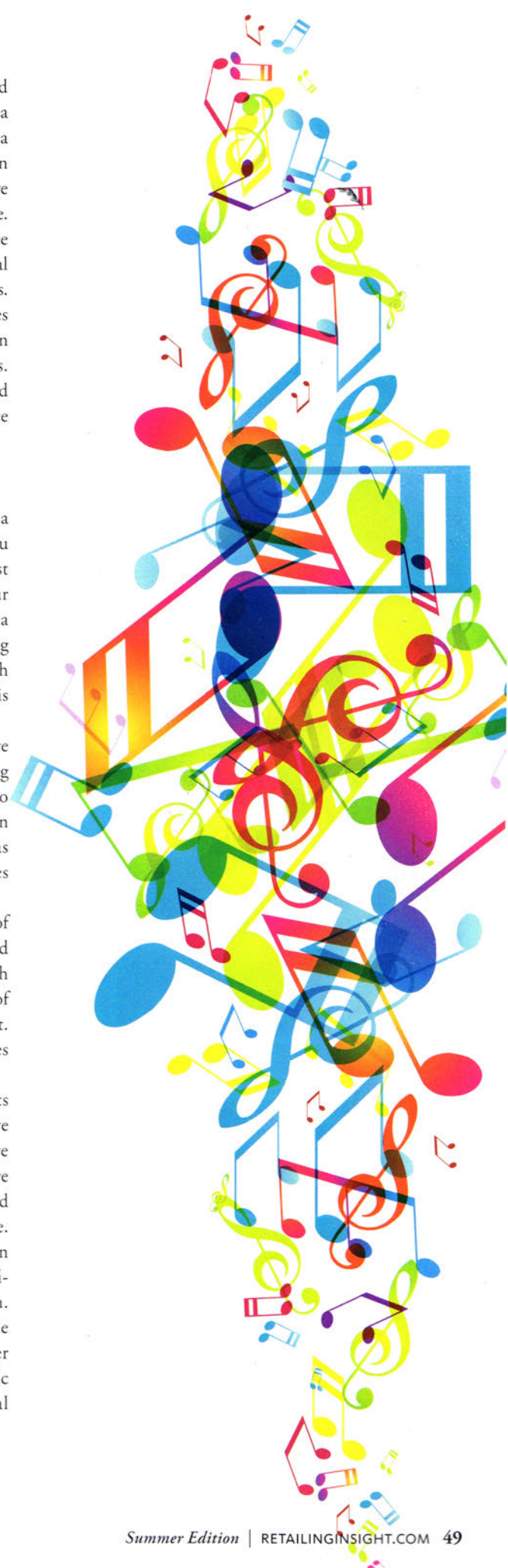
Listening to music can be a simple way to calm down the busy mind and settle into a meditative state. For instance, when you play peaceful music in the background, you can use the slow pace of the music to regulate your breathing. Initially, you will most likely notice a vast array of thoughts proceeding across the wide inner screen of your mind. What do you do with these thoughts? You can let their random interplay be a disturbing undercurrent of your life, or you can decide to clear them out by focusing on your breath and the music in order to give your busy mind a break from so much thinking. Through meditation, your goal is to slow down and gradually minimize this parade of thoughts.

Soon after beginning our record label, Soundings of the Planet, we began to receive considerable feedback from listeners about how the music had helped them in dealing with chronic pain or illness and even mental issues. We then became curious to understand exactly how the music was working to support the healing and relaxation that people were reporting. In our research over the years, one of the things that has become clear is that instrumental music without repeated refrains or familiar melodies is the most effective in helping a person let go of their thought processes.

Our goal in meditation, or in any healing modality, is to release the constraints of mental tape loops and repeated thought patterns. The music we were creating flowed more like nature and it seemed to be just what people were wanting to help deal with the stresses in their lives. We also discovered that because sound is a carrier wave of consciousness, the intention of the musician who created the music is very important. At the same time, the intention of the person listening to the music also influences the effectiveness of the music.

For entertainment, we may choose music that is familiar, enjoyable, or that gets us up and moving, but when we want to select music to help deepen our meditative or healing experience, we are going to be looking for something different. Thus, we choose peaceful, ambient kinds of instrumental music that will be more supportive of healing and meditation. Music of flute and harp can be especially meditative, and the addition of high quality recorded sounds of nature can also create a sense of peace.

Other kinds of music do use repetition in a way that can be an aid to meditation as well. Devotional chanting, sacred music, or trance music are designed specifically to take one to a deeper place spiritually so there is a benefit to the repetition. Tuning into a mantra or the resonance of a chant can be helpful to relax the mind's attachment to mental tape loops, worry, and incessant thinking. Whether one chooses relaxing ambient music or more engaging vocal, chant, or rhythmic music, any can support the goal of clearing the mind and letting go of internal dialog and other mental chatter.



CHAKRAS

The following is a key to the organs, functions and affirmations of each Chakra:

CROWN

Sanskrit Name: Sahasrara.
Spirit, consciousness, oneness.
Brain, nerves, cerebral cortex,
pituitary gland.



I am one with the infinite all, my higher self, angelic guidance

THIRD EYE

Sanskrit Name: Ajna.
Insight, intuition, vision.
Brow, eyes, pineal gland.



My mind is clear and open to divine wisdom

THROAT

Sanskrit Name: Vissudha.
Communication, identity, clarity.
Mouth, vocal cords, ears,
thyroid gland.



I speak my truth kindly and clearly

HEART

Sanskrit Name: Anahata.
Love, compassion, giving-receiving.
Cardiac plexus, heart,
lungs, thymus gland.



I give and receive unconditional love

SOLAR PLEXUS

Sanskrit Name: Manipura.
Personal power, will power, action.
Stomach, liver, kidneys, pancreas,
digestion, adrenals.



I am one with the power of the universe

SACRAL

Sanskrit Name: Svadhishthana.
Emotions, relationships, creativity.
Reproductive system,
bladder, intestines, hips.



I am creative and connected

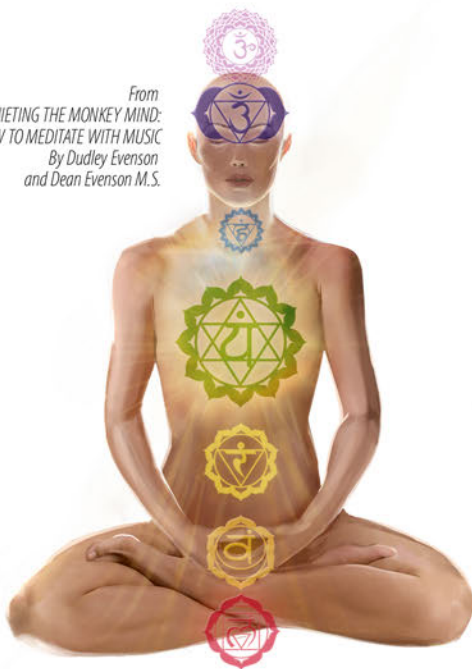
ROOT

Sanskrit Name: Muladhara.
Self-preservation, security, survival.
Base of spine, coccygeal plexus,
rectum, perineum.



I am grounded and supported

From
QUIETING THE MONKEY MIND:
HOW TO MEDITATE WITH MUSIC
By Dudley Evenson
and Dean Evenson M.S.



Creating Personal Sanctuary

Ultimately, the personal sanctuary we have the most intimate access to is within the confines of our own inner awareness, but because we live in a physical world, we can benefit by finding or creating an environment that will best support our meditation experience. When possible, select a quiet place where you will be undisturbed for a little while. If this is not available, any place will do. Experiment with what works for you. People have been known to even have meditative experiences in bathrooms, parks, subways, and just about anywhere.

We converted our laundry room into a meditation and yoga space. We call this our 'Sacred Laundry Room.' We also record a lot of our videos here for our Soundings of the Planet blog and YouTube channel. We want you to know that you can make any place into a holy sanctuary for your meditation.

Initially, it is ideal to set aside a specific place to meditate where you can put together a small altar, light a candle, and burn some incense if it agrees with you. If you don't have space to dedicate a whole room for your meditation practice (and most people don't), then designate a corner of your bedroom, another room, or even a closet where you can create a sacred sanctuary for your practice. By adding a few meaningful pictures, books, crystals or other elements, you help designate this as your special place for quiet contemplation. These visual images and special objects can also serve as a focus to gather your wandering mind and draw you back towards your spiritual center.

If you have a Tibetan singing bowl, a crystal bowl, or even a small bell, they can be used to set the tone for your process and their resonance can be a simple way to introduce music and sound into your practice. You can also play peaceful, recorded music during your meditation.

For meditation, you can either sit on a pillow on the floor or in a chair or stool, depending on your flexibility and comfort. It is preferable to sit upright, but lying down is okay if a physical condition requires it. Otherwise, sitting up will yield better results and keep you from the tendency to fall asleep. Meditation involves relaxation of the body, but that is not its only goal.

Through the meditation process, one is aiming to attain an acute clarity of mind. Obviously, falling asleep doesn't support this

aim. A man at a recent workshop complained that he was continually falling asleep during his meditation. It turned out that he was meditating while lying down, and he became so relaxed that he would naturally fall asleep. We gave him some helpful and wakeful tools to use involving breath awareness, mantra, toning, and using a mala or prayer beads.

Meditating in Nature

Meditating in nature is also a good idea. Creating a small shrine in your yard, or sitting in a quiet area like a public park can support your practice. If you can't find any particular place to meditate, you can do a 'walking meditation' or walk a labyrinth. We don't, however, recommend meditating in the car if you are driving! But if your car is parked, then meditating in the car can give you some quiet privacy. We often sit in our car for a few minutes when we come home from a busy trip to town and there we enjoy a quiet moment before having to get out, unload the groceries, and go into the house where all sorts of things are waiting to be done!

Setting an Altar of Intention

We like to create altars in many places, especially so that we can use our daily tasks, like washing the dishes or doing the laundry, as opportunities to be mindful and focus on our spiritual essence. We have an altar on the windowsill by our kitchen sink which provides a nice focal point to elevate the energy of our daily chores. Setting an intention for your meditation practice or for your upcoming day can also be a beneficial habit to get into. This intention can take the form of a thought or prayer that you want to focus on and develop through your attention and awareness. It can be a virtue or affirmation.

What you will no doubt discover is that the vibration of your meditation session will carry throughout your day. Your intentions will accompany you as you go about your daily routines and will help bring good results. You will find your relationships improve because you are coming from a place of compassion. You will notice yourself being more mindful of others and the world around you, and you will probably not stumble or lose your keys quite as often. You may also find that doing your chores and necessary tasks is more pleasant and acceptable when done with a meditative frame of mind. On top of that, you will begin to feel a greater sense of joy

as your spirit expands into awareness of the infinite realm of existence.

Singing while you wash your dishes can lift your spirit and make your task more pleasant. Humming along with the vacuum cleaner or clothes dryer adds a fun and musical element to ordinary chores and makes them much more enjoyable. As we learn to calm and focus our restless mind, we activate our greater consciousness and open up the channels of our intuition. In our daily lives, we will carry that still center point within us and we can solve our problems more easily. As we become more mindful, we have a greater awareness of our experiences, and are better able to take responsibility for our mental states as well as the physical condition of our lives.

Breath and Vocal Toning

We can live without food and water for days or even weeks, but we cannot live without breath for more than a few minutes. The spiritual science of pranayama is about learning how to control the breath. In Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, the word "prana" means

breath or energy and the word "yama" means control. By understanding how to control the breath/energy, we learn how to relax the body and control the subtle nuances of our minds.

We 'tone up' the body through exercise and muscle building. We can also 'tone up' the mind, and 'tune up' the spirit using our breath and voice to release tension. In the process, we can regain balance and equilibrium, and experience the peaceful Alpha or Theta brainwave states. Vocal toning is an especially accessible way to do this because it doesn't require musical instruments or high-tech equipment, just the human voice.

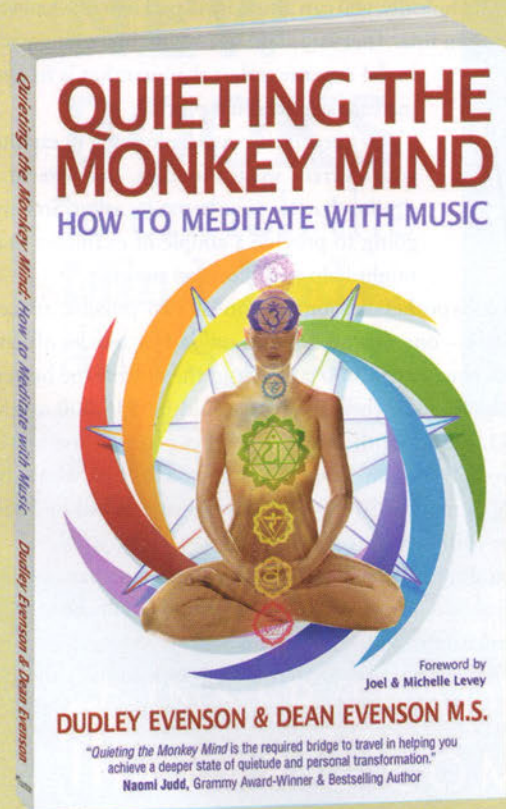
The beauty of toning is that it isn't about words or melodies; it is simply a neutral sound and requires no special training. A good way to begin toning is by taking a deep breath and exhaling as you let out a nice long ahh sound, sort of like a long sigh. This is the vowel tone for the heart chakra. Along with each tone, you can imagine that you are sending out love, and with each inhalation, imagine you are receiving love. Do this several times and feel the resonance in your heart chakra.

Power of Mantra & Affirmation

The word mantra means 'mind protection' in Sanskrit. A mantra is a short sacred sound or phrase which carries a vibration and frequency that extends beyond the simple meaning of its words. In the highest sense, mantras carry thought waves that can energize the life force, or prana. Through constant repetition, mantras can reach deep into the subconscious mind to access the collective consciousness. More simply, using mantra can help overcome mental chatter, and prepare the way for an expansion of consciousness.

We are constantly affirming in our mind what we believe. When we look honestly at the content of our thoughts, we may be shocked to realize what we have been telling ourselves on a regular basis. We can tell the quality of our subconscious mind by looking at the quality of our life. If we are not pleased with our life, we might wish to look at the content of our thoughts to discover how we have been programming our existence to coincide with our belief structure.

Dudley & Dean Evenson invite you to join them in celebrating four decades of Peace Through Music!

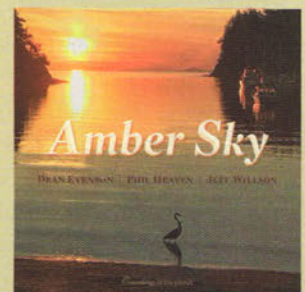
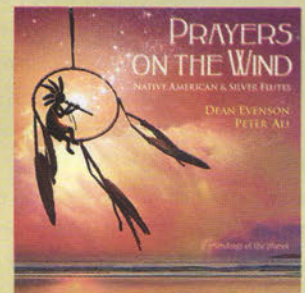


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Through the use of a repeated phrase, prayer, or affirmation, we can overcome the rampant thoughts and tape loops that tend to guide our behavior. By repeating a phrase over and over again, it becomes embedded in our subconscious mind, and then the creative forces of the universe rally support in order to make it happen. Repetition increases the effectiveness of affirmations.

Mala, Rosary or Prayer Beads

A helpful tool in meditation is the chanting of mantra or saying affirmations using prayer beads to count the recitations. Many cultures and religions have used beads to help maintain a focus on their prayers. Catholics use a rosary to repeat their "Hail Mary" prayer. Hindus use beads to count their mantra. Tibetans use a mala or prayer beads to stay focused on the mantra.

The strings of beads in the East often have 108 beads. With each repetition of the mantra, one uses the thumb and first finger to move from one bead to the next. The goal certainly isn't just to count the prayers, but it does help one to stay focused on the chant and keep moving on without becoming distracted by random thoughts.

People can also use mantra as they go about their day to help them stay connected with their center. The goal of meditation is not just to have a nice experience for a few minutes or an hour, but rather to carry the energy of that experience throughout your day. By carrying a string of prayer beads around, you can use it to count your prayers, taking advantage of time normally spent waiting in line or doing another activity that doesn't require your focus.

Singing Bowls and Bells

Tibetan singing bowls are an ancient tool used to assist in the meditation process. The origin of Tibetan bowls is shrouded in mystery, but it is certain that monks used them as an aid in their meditation practice. Ancient bowls were made of an alloy composed of as many

as twelve different metals that were pounded and shaped into bowls.

When a wooden mallet strikes a bowl, a rich blend of harmonic overtones is created. Because of the multiple harmonics, the sound can have the effect of bringing both hemispheres of the brain into synchronization. One can also use the wooden mallet to rub the edge of the bowl to create a pleasing tone. By focusing on the sound of the bowl tone as it lingers, one can experience a sort of transcendent state. By slowly playing several bowls, bells, chimes, or cymbals, the experience can be expanded. Some people may prefer to use crystal bowls of varying sizes tuned to the chakras. All can have a beneficial effect.

Whether used in meditation or simply to create a calm, serene state, the clear tones of the bowls can evoke a sense of harmony and balance. In this way, sound can be the medium that transports a person to an elevated state of consciousness.

Drums, Rattles, Flutes, and Shakers

Another form of musical meditation uses drums, rattles, flutes, shakers, and the human voice to help a person go into a trance state. This process may involve a guide, shaman, or medicine person who is trained in leading and transforming energy. It may also be self-created. Indigenous people from all over the world have used sacred ceremonies to assist in the elevation of consciousness, and in this day and age, many are revisiting these ancient practices and modernizing them to reflect current needs. Thus, depending on the practitioners, a ceremony may involve elaborate traditional rituals or it may be expressed in meaningful, modern ways.

A number of years ago, we interviewed the Peruvian musician, Tito La Rosa for our *Sonic Healing: Meet the Masters Video Course*. Tito La Rosa is a musical shaman who has very direct and personal relationships with his instruments. He uses drums, rattles,

shakers, flutes, whistles, and water vessels to create a sound healing environment that helps people reach a deeply meditative state. His relationships with his instruments and their functions are deeply connected with, and reflective of, the elements of Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Sound. In ancient Peru, the instruments themselves were considered to be alive and to have a unique spirit of their own related to their form and function. For instance, blowing on the conch shell calls forth or invokes energies. A flute made from the bone of the condor may be used to call in the spirits. The whistle jar is an instrument used for going within. Feathered panpipes may be used to cleanse and purify, and so on. Each instrument has its own energy and use.

Native Americans beat on round drums or hand drums, and they chant together. From ancient times to this day, both women and men have played frame drums and participated in religious rites. Tribal people of all nations dance to the rhythm of rattles and drums, and they are able to lose themselves as their movement entrains with the rhythm. Tibetan monks may blow into long temple trumpets and crash cymbals together in order to shake up and cleanse the current vibrational field. All these practices and chanting help to calm our busy minds and prepare the way for more elevated meditation experiences. When all is said and done, what we are aiming for is ultimate stillness, the purity of a quiet mind.

■ **DUDLEY AND DEAN EVENSON** are business and life partners who met in 1968 and have been on a spiritual journey ever since. As sound healing pioneers, they have been producing their award-winning music since 1979 through their record label Soundings of the Planet, collaborating with outstanding musicians from around the world. They have now released their first book *Quieting the Monkey Mind: How to Meditate with Music* which draws from their five decades of practicing yoga, meditation, and making music. To learn more, visit their blog and music site www.soundings.com. You can search for their names or Soundings of the Planet on YouTube and social media channels.

