Sound massage vs meditation in stress relief.
by Alex Andrzejewski

Stress is a well known problem of today’s world. It has been proven to cause a variety of disorders and diseases, both physical and mental, and it affects people from all walks of life. Everyone experiences stress in its various forms, and some of us even suffer the consequences of a long term stressful environment in our lives.

It is said that the individual response to stress varies due to a person’s own resources (of coping with stress). “Some theorists now refer to the healthy state as one of stability in the face of change. Multiple causes of stress add to what is called allostatic loading, which can be pathologic if not relieved.”\(^1\)

Once the individual is subjected to long term stress, his or her resources are depleted, and the response to stressful stimuli may be disproportionately pronounced. It is also said that various relaxation techniques play a large role in regeneration of our resources; and relaxation techniques, as a remedy for stress, are one of the most researched subjects. Two of the most commonly recommended relaxation techniques are yoga and meditation. Also, various techniques using sound are starting to play bigger role in stress relief - in particular, sound massage.

What is sound massage?
The phrase was coined by the German engineering graduate Peter Hess, in the eighties, after he discovered and further developed this technique.\(^2\)

Sound massage consists of placing the sound (singing) bowls on (or around) the body and gently striking them to create the sound and vibration. Multi-tonal sound envelops the client and practitioner, creating relaxing and safe environment. At the same time, the gentle vibrations of the sound bowl extend to all parts of the body, consequently massaging every cell, tissue and organ on the deepest level.

The client is a passive receiver of this treatment; however, the effect is profound in all aspects of both body and mind. Due to the soft nature of sound vibrations, the body receives them as a gentle, balmy breeze. All body tissues vibrate, making detoxification, tissue repair and healing easier. \(^3\)

“This [vibration] causes a tone regulation of () muscle, slightly promoting blood circulation, thus enhancing the metabolism.”\(^4\)

The effects of this treatment on the mind are even more pronounced. To explain those, I need to throw a little light on the nature of sound emitted by the sound (singing) bowls.

---

\(^1\) Sound Therapy Induced Relaxation: Down Regulating Stress Processes and Pathologies, Elliott Salamon, and Minsun Kim, John Beaulieu, and George B. Stefano. http://www.biosonics.com


\(^3\) Cell and sound. M. Pabst Journal of European Association for Sound Massage Therapy 9/2010

\(^4\) Beneficial Sound Massage. Ch. Koller PhD, Journal of European Association for Sound Massage Therapy © Maranta Sound Academy 2014
Meditation, in comparison, is an active relaxation. Even though the object of meditation is to be silent and find your inner peace and stillness, it requires a certain amount of training to achieve such states. “Meditation is a practice in which an individual trains the mind or induces a mode of consciousness, either to bring about some benefit or as and end in itself.”

Although there is no doubt that meditation is an exceptional remedy to stress, it also requires a certain level of ability to practice. And although it is available to all people, there are those who claim for one reason or another to be unable to meditate. Those are often people who are so stressed, that their mind is in constant activity. They find it very difficult to concentrate their thoughts on one subject, and every time they try to meditate, they either fall asleep or start thinking about their daily problems. These individuals have a feeling of failure after the attempted meditation session, may try few times, then unfortunately never come back to the practice.

Use of sound with meditation has been known for many centuries and used in various settings, where chanting, singing and sound of instruments helped to induce meditative states. Sound massage is a modern version of this ancient knowledge.

So, to bring those who are unable to meditate right away to the practice of meditation, it could help to start with the practice of sound massage, with the purpose of relieving the most severe aspects of stress. After several sessions, depending on the severity of the stress reactions, it would be easier for the individual to relax and in consequence, attempt to learn meditation.

According to researchers, “...the singing bowls emit complex non-harmonic multi-tonal sounds with components gathering in the characteristic groups producing binaural beats at frequencies placed mainly below the acoustic zone of [the] mechanical resonance band of the human organs as well as alpha and theta brain frequencies.” Which means that the sound (singing) bowls produce a combination of sounds with some below human hearing range, matching brain waves in relaxation and sleep modes (alpha and theta waves) thus physically producing a relaxation effect. And as a research study by K. Gommel showed, the effects of relaxation (prevalence of alpha waves in the ECG scans) are long lasting. This effect is produced automatically on the physical level, and the receiver does not need to learn the process or a technique to take full advantage of this relaxing influence. Better still, because the sound of the bowls so quickly and inadvertently creates the states of relaxation, a person living with stress can experience and learn a stress free condition during a sound massage.

Meditation is to be silent and find your inner peace and stillness, it requires a

---


6 The neural effects of Peter Hess ® sound massage, Dr Kerstin Gommel PhD

7 Wikipedia

© Maranta Sound Academy 2014
And so in the best traditions of holistic healing we connect all aspects of body and mind through sound and meditation.
And so in the best traditions of holistic healing we connect all aspects of body and mind through sound and meditation.