

The Power of Sounds

On Responsible Practice during Healing Therapy with Voice and Song.

Much has been written on the healing effects of singing (See for example my own article “Die Heilende Kraft der Stimme” in the periodical “Sein”, October 2006 issue).

Voice and song can cause the immediate activation of inner psychological processes, due to the intensity of the medium. The strong vibrations caused by singing, especially those resulting from the chanting of spiritual songs, can trigger intense emotions, feelings, and moods. It is certainly true that each participant of a seminar is responsible for monitoring their own mental state. At the same time, however, it is my responsibility as a therapist and leader of the seminar to keep an eye on all participants, and to observe their sensitivities, emotions, and feelings during the entirety of the process.

Vibrations rich with overtones tend to promote sensations of happiness, change, and healing. However, they can also have an ego-dissolving effect. As healing songs are a powerful medium, they should be employed tactfully and must be sensibly supervised. The person supervising the process should be prepared for the remobilisation of latent traumatic experiences. It is their responsibility to proceed responsibly and not to force participants should any unexpected reactions occur. Through my previous work experience as a medical practitioner in the field of psychiatric care, I am used to such states of exception. The following two examples from my seminars will serve to illustrate what a sensible handling of strong reactions to singing therapy looks like.

Healing Voice

The seminar in which these examples occurred had 22 participants, and focused on the concept of „Healing Voice“. Seven participants lay in the centre of a circle. The other 15 participants sang the chant “I am a circle” to them for roughly ten minutes. I played the KoTaMo Tampura Saiten as musical accompaniment. This instrument, which is similar to the monochord, heightens and strengthens the effects of the vibrations caused by the chanting. The participants lying in the middle of the singing circle experienced this session in different ways. Five of them reported that it had pleasant effects, describing sensations of floating in happiness, being surrounded by light, feeling as if they were carried and lovingly caressed by the sounds. Two women reported strong interior psychological stirrings.

Of these two, one participant reported a sense of a vertical division of the self, feeling as if her body had been split into two. I asked her if she had felt this sensation before, which she affirmed. However, she had now experienced this feeling of being divided much stronger than usual, and described it as profoundly unpleasant. During a break, I asked her if she had any clues as to what might have triggered this emotion. She immediately affirmed, stating “My mother is an alcoholic, which has affected me greatly. I often experience this sensation of being torn or divided. I have not yet dared to try and mend this. I’ve only been in therapy for three years.”

The second of these participants was initially non-responsive after we had stopped singing, which is why I sought her out to talk to her afterwards. She spoke with difficulty and in a hoarse voice, and told me that at first her hands had started itching, followed by the rest of her body. During our conversation she felt as if she were floating above her body – a sensation she had not experienced previously. The participant required some time to return to her normal self. I asked another woman from the group to hold her feet. The participant, who had lain down on the ground, started crying after this. As we were scheduled to break for lunch, the participant could take her time to recover. She was helped up by two women from the group, and had difficulty walking. These two women also kept an eye on her during the break. I saw the participant again two hours later when the seminar resumed.

I purposely started off the afternoon session with disco and drum music. We danced for half an hour, stomping loudly and with relish. After this, the participant reported feeling much better. In my experience, such dissociative episodes typically last around two hours. At such moments, one should proceed cautiously, taking care not to either force the patient or becoming panicked yourself. Staying calm, retaining control, and exuding confidence is key. These episodes should be treated as transitional processes, an attempt at self-healing by the soul. I know through repeated experience that such processes are important to the individual members of a group. Even emotions of anger or grief, should they arise, are important and beneficiary, as they are just as much a part of life as joy or gladness. From these examples we can take away the effect toning and singing can have on a person. As with any cure, the dosage and correct application are important with singing too. Singing and being sung to bring blocked energies into higher states of vibration. Emotions start to flow freely, bodily discomforts dissolve. A powerful energy field is built, healing can occur.

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