



Breath & Sound Inhale and Hummmmm

By Arden Wilken

Two experiences changed the course of my life. One made me aware of how important breathing is to be relaxed and centered - in order to create what is desired in the moment. The other helped me understand the effect that our own sound creates for us - both inside and outside - and for those listening to it.

I was ready to go on stage to present a relaxation and healing concert in a lovely old church in the 'Gracia' district in Barcelona. It was 1992 and my children, then ages eight and eleven, were at my side. My husband, Jack, was making all the final sound checks. I suddenly realized that I was a nervous wreck. Not only was I stressed, but so were my children and Jack, as well. I was so driven to 'heal' everyone around me with music and sound that I was putting an incredible amount of pressure on our daily lives. I was very scattered and disorganized, and, although I was eventually able to make order out of the chaos with a lot of help and support - it became crystal clear to me in that moment that the cost was way too high.

The concert went beautifully. People cried, were touched, and approached me afterwards to tell me how much it meant to them. Instead of basking in the energy, as I usually did, I began to hear a little voice inside me saying, "*You have to learn how to breathe, really breathe.*" I had heard it before, but had not wanted to pay attention. Luckily I did this time.

Several years later, also in Barcelona, a friend invited me to attend the final concert of a famous opera contest that is held every year in that city. All the winners of the various categories - soprano, tenor, mezzo-soprano and bass, performed well-

known scenes from the operas of Mozart, Faust, Bizet, Verdi, Puccini and Wagner. I found it really enchanting and exquisitely beautiful. As I normally did at concerts, I was listening and watching the movement of the energy of the singers, while also observing what was happening in the audience, mostly with my eyes closed. It had become second nature to me to do so and it always brought me great pleasure.

Then, the grand prize winner, a Russian tenor, whose name I unfortunately do not remember, stepped onto the stage and began to sing. I sat bolt upright and gaped at him. What startled me so much was the quality, the three-dimensionality of his sound. We were seated behind and to the side of the singers. Every other performer's sound had been projected to the audience in front of them, and it sounded that way to us behind them. We heard the sound, but it was directed away from us. However, this tenor's sound came to us as strongly and clearly as if we were in front of him. I had never experienced a singer's energy pulse and radiate in the way his did - having a marked effect on the audience. For that matter I had never heard such a sound. From that moment I wanted to know why it was happening, how he did it, how I could do it and how others could learn to do it as well.

I have spent the years since these two experiences refocusing my attention on basic elements in life such as breathing and experimenting with different exercises and visualizations to become relaxed and centered. Through this work and learning to free my own sound and expression, trying to emulate the Russian singer, I realized how important it is for each person to find a way to do that even if they feel they cannot sing or make sound. The ability to breathe easily and create our own sound

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are intertwined. They are essential to the well-being of each of us, to everyone no matter the belief system or path walked. Many pieces of information about breathing and making sound are basic and known, and so perhaps not as interesting as separate facts. However, when this information is blended with the focus of using it to create change or healing in any aspect of our lives - from the chakras and subtle energy fields to the physical body and through our mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions - it becomes fascinating.

Let me explain --

Audible sound, the sound we hear, travels through the body via connective tissue- after it enters through the ears and bones of the head. Connective tissue surrounds every muscle fiber and muscle group found in bones, tendons, cartilage, and every organ - basically everywhere in the body except the blood. Therefore, sound travels all the way to the cellular level where it connects to our DNA.

Within seconds, depending on whether the sound is high pitched or low pitched and what quality or timbre it has, it will arrive at the exact area of body where its characteristics create vibration. (Just think about what happens when you hear a piece of music and you suddenly feel what is known as 'musical thrills' which travel through the body instantaneously!) Tension or blockages from whatever cause or source that are physically stored in the connective tissue are mirrored in the chakras (energy centers) and subtle energy fields. There is debate as to which occurs first, the energetic tension or the physical. If we work from both directions at once and include sound which is the bridge between the two, it does not matter whether one is the chicken or the other the egg.

With regard to our breath - although there are many muscles involved in it, for example, the muscles between each rib, the muscles under the arms and in the upper back - the diaphragm, located in the area of the 3rd Chakra, is the primary muscle of respiration. It is unique in both its design and function. Its broad, umbrella-like shape separates the upper and lower thoracic cavities (chest and abdominal).

The diaphragm's muscle fibers (made of connective tissue) attach to the inner surface of the ribs (also made of connective tissue) and the lumbar vertebrae ribs (also made of connective tissue) and converge at the central tendon, the heart-shaped tendonous center of the diaphragm. The diaphragm creates inhalation when its muscle fibers contract and pull the central tendon downward. Because the central tendon is attached to the connective tissue that surrounds the lungs, a vacuum is created in the upper thoracic cavity pulling air into the lungs. On exhalation, the muscle fibers of the diaphragm relax, releasing the central tendon and allowing the lungs to deflate. (Biel, 2005 Third Edition, p 219)

On an energy level, the significance to the above description of the anatomy and function of the diaphragm is that - if we want the chakras, particularly the 4th Chakra to be open and fluid, creating the connection between our higher and lower energy centers - we can accelerate that process if we focus not only on an energy level, but also, on a physical one. If we can actually release any tension in the connective tissue making up the diaphragm, particularly the central tendon with our own sound, then we affect the functioning of the heart itself, as well as, its energetic counterpart. (It is possible to release the connective tissue by direct touch or manipulation such as in body work, but that is not the discussion of this article.) Doing this will also free the 3rd and 5th Chakras and have an effect on all of them.

The actual making of our sound is a complex body function that begins with breathing as described above. When the body is in natural alignment, the trunk is erect, allowing the thorax - the chest and home of the 4th Chakra - to remain open. The larynx, where the 5th Chakra is located in the throat, moves along the cervical vertebrae, easily resonating and vibrating those that touch it. The diaphragm and esophagus move downward, also opening the thoracic cavity. Finally, the spinal column is free to vibrate along its entire length, transmitting vibration into the body's cavities. This phenomenon of free vibration of the spinal column is an aspect known as 'bone conduction', the transmission of sound through the bones of the body that in turn vibrate the different cavities containing the organs and other less dense systems.

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What has always been important to me is making the above information useful. It does not give us much benefit if we cannot take the facts about how sound and breath intertwine and work in the body using practical applications. It will certainly not be helpful if it is taken in only at a mental level. I invite you, then, to try some simple exercises. Try them now. You can also share them with clients. You can use the exercises before you start a session (of any modality) to help each of you center and relax or you can teach your clients after a session and encourage them to practice at home.

1. Sit or lie down with legs uncrossed and with your head and body as straight and parallel as possible. (When prone have a pillow under the knees for support if needed. It is better, if possible, for the head to be flat, without a pillow.) Take a few deep breaths. Then hum for the entire exhalation. (Try a note in your mid- range rather than a high or low one. This puts less strain on the vocal chords.) Allow yourself to feel the resonance in your throat. Do this several times, then, let that resonance travel straight back to the cervical vertebrae and allow it to move down the spine to the base, where the Root or 1st Chakra is located. If you feel it go down your legs or up into you head from the cervical vertebrae, great.
2. When you can really feel the movement down the spine, then stop humming (the movement will continue to go down the spine for a while), and allow the movement, vibration or pulse you feel at the base of your spine to move up your torso, surrounding and filling all the organs, muscles, bones, etc. Fill with your own vibration and resonance from the 1st Chakra at the base of the spine all the way to the 5th Chakra in the throat, including all the chakras and corresponding areas of the body.
3. With your next breath activate your vocal chords and let your sound come to the outside, not as a hum but as whatever it is in this moment. Maybe it is a sustained tone. Maybe it is a sigh, a grunt, or a warble. Allow it to be what it is. Do not judge it. Continue for several breath cycles. If the sound changes, let it. Stop when you feel ready to do so.

If you do not feel anything at first, keep practicing the three exercises as a cycle. You can also focus on the one that attracts you the most or try these before you sing to enhance the resonance of your own sound through your body before you project the sound.

The feedback from these exercises has been quite revealing: *"I feel bigger, more expanded." "I occupy more space." "I had trouble. I could only feel a little movement from the humming in my throat but nowhere else." "My feet feel really warm! They are always cold." "I feel my energy pulsing through my body. I've never felt it so strongly before." "I feel more tangible." "I saw these incredible colors. Wow!"*

What the opera singer of long ago demonstrated in the phenomenal expression of his art, is nothing more than a very graphic example of bone conduction. It is more complex than what I have written in this article, however, the basics are here. The above exercises will help you to move towards that three-dimensional sound. It does not matter if you feel you can sing, like to sing or want to sing. These exercises are fundamental to making sound, spoken or sung, in a way that will vibrate the entire body, the chakras and subtle energy fields - helping create relaxation and well-being and setting the stage for whatever creation you would like to make.

References and Recommended reading:

Biel, Andrew (2005 Third Edition). *Trail Guide to the Body: How to Locate Muscles, Bones and More*. Boulder, CO: Books of Discovery.

Myers, Thomas W. (2003). *Anatomy Trains-Myofascial Meridians for Manual and Movement Therapists*. London: Churchill Livingstone.

Tomatis, Alfred A. (1991). *The Conscious Ear*. Phoenix: Station Hill Press.

Wilken, Arden & Jack. (2007). *Our Sonic Pathways*. Journal of Subtle Energy & Energy Medicine Vol 16 No 3 , 271-282.

*****If you are interested in more information and exercises, register for Arden's Experiential Teleseminar -- *Sound and Breath Tools to Use for Yourself and With your Clients* -- [click here](#).**

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About the author:



Arden is an American musician, composer and sound therapist. She is co-creator of INNER SOUND (1978), an original system of

sound therapy and therapeutic music for the integration and expression of the emotions. She has created 28 CDs, each having a specific theme or focus, in order to help the individual achieve his/her healing or transformational goals by unblocking the

connective tissue through sound and music. In August 2011 she created A Healing Journey Through Sound: Healing Music for Healing Touch Level 1. She is also trained in bodywork. Arden and her husband, Jack, have founded schools of sound therapy in the USA, Spain, the UK and the Netherlands and are now based in Seattle, WA after living in the Far East, North Africa and Europe for many years.