

The Art of Judicious Listening
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As I sat down to finish this paper tonight, I had worked a full day at my busy job, swung by the post office, heated up left overs, opened my computer while grabbing a few bites and decided to listen to a podcast while I was getting settled, eating and beginning to write! My earbuds, though connected, would not play the audio of the podcast so I tested the audio on my playlist called “chants.” The audio worked fine with my chants and immediately, I stopped the crazy multi-tasking I was not born to do. I closed the computer, listened to the chants and ate my food. I slowed down, feeling the descending speed of chewing, tasting my food, noticing my digestive system saying, “thank you!.” When my mind started to re-discuss past conversations of the day or what I wanted to add to this paper, I was able to hear the chatter and make a choice to listen to the sounds of the chants and accompanying music. While not singularly immersed in the the sound meditation since I was eating too, this is a personal example of the power of sound and the impact it can have on our consciousness and subsequent health.

It is fairly well established that meditation is a powerful tool for accessing our sub-conscious and that healing can happen in this realm. I have been in school for 4 months finding out why sound is a helpful element. Sound is not only helpful it seems, sound is invaluable and it is omnipresent.

Let us take a step back to take a peek at consciousness. Alexandre Tannous (soundmeditation.com), an ethnomusicologist, frequently discusses the idea of gnosis. He states:

Gnosis is conscious knowledge, intuitive, imaginative and inner knowledge. It is knowledge of the heart, the knowledge we acquire through our own experience as opposed to knowledge that we are told to believe in. Gnosis is conscious, and not merely intellectual or conceptual knowledge, belief, or theory. Gnosis is not an intellectual wisdom but rather a knowledge experienced through feeling, through an embodiment, and knowledge from the unconscious. It is the tradition that gave birth to our most respected philosophies, sciences, arts and religions.

Sound provides the opportunity to experience that realm of imagination, intuition and inner knowledge. We can be told how it works on the quantum level, physiological level or religious level, but deep down, what we personally experience matters most. What we experience and believe may always be what matters most. I was grateful for my aforementioned experience so that I could write from my intellect about an experience I embodied.

Bruce Lipton, a cellular biologist and author of many books including *The Biology of Belief*, discusses the importance of our conscious thoughts, sub-conscious thoughts and the impact on our internal environment. His premise and conclusive studies show that culture medium impacts our cells more than our inherited DNA. Culture medium is the environment that our cells live in (blood and interstitial fluid). What impacts our culture medium is our internal body chemistry. Our chemistry is directed by our nervous system. Therefore, when we are experiencing a state of love, our nervous system excretes chemicals such as dopamine, oxytocin, vasopressin and growth hormone. When we experience states of fear and all the sub-categories of fear, our nervous and endocrine system excretes a chemical cocktail of epinephrine, cortisol and more. These chemicals enter the blood stream and feed the cells. It has been shown that cells die under fear chemicals and thrive under love chemicals. That is what we know today through the lens of science; how we experience our life impacts our internal environment which impacts our health tremendously. Accessing states of love consistently may require getting underneath the conscious mind to the sub-conscious level where many of our habitual patterns reside. Sound has an incredible ability to help us reach past our thinking mind into this hypnotic state. As Bruce has said, "we listen not only with ears, but with every cell in our body." Choice, belief and intentionality all play an important part.

Back to Alexandre and his studies on sound and consciousness and the importance of facilitating a space (as sound meditation facilitators) where participants can reach a hypnagogic state:

The purpose of the sound meditation is thus not to teach us anything new, but to help us to remember to reclaim something very, very old. The manner in which it does this is really very simple: by providing an anchor for our conscious awareness, one that is non-verbal and non-rational and yet highly patterned and complex, the sound provides a means of circumventing the chatter of the monkey mind; it seizes our attention away from the map and demands that we engage with the Universe, with the territory, as it is, here and now, without the distancing, alienating effects of judgement and rational analysis. Of course, the sound itself has no agency; it can provide an anchor and a means but it cannot coerce us to accept them or to use them. This is why the active participation of the sound meditator is of paramount importance: for what is the sound of a gong ringing if there is no one there to hear it?

He adds to the above understanding what he calls, "The Art of Judicious Listening," the title of which I chose to borrow for this paper. Judicious listening meaning that bringing one's full attention and awareness as a receiver is as important as the intention and understanding of the carefully curated sound experience being brought forth through the facilitator. Adding to the co-creation of a sound experience, Alexandre also beautifully states, "...a kind of mental, emotional and spiritual resonance between the musician and his/her audience, mediated on both sides by an active, conscious

engagement with the sound that unifies, and ultimately enables each to transcend, their shared experience of the music while it is being played.”

When I bring the two perspectives together, Bruce the scientist who creates experiments and Alexandre the researcher who studies cultural traditions and sound, both are finding a similar importance. Reaching beyond/beneath our frontal lobe conscious mind of doing to the sub-conscious state of being can be immensely valuable toward our experience of knowing. If we subscribe to the idea that feeling is an energy and that the story we choose to tell impacts our consciousness, then we can subscribe to the idea that we can choose our story. Understanding that the sub-conscious brings forth the habitual story to our conscious mind, helps us to understand why reaching an altered state of consciousness can help us “listen” thus ultimately changing our narrative (if and when helpful). If we don’t actively listen with intention, we will continue passively hearing what is presented to and already ingrained in us.

The moral of my story is, listen judiciously, as a sound practitioner and as a sound participant. Physicists, Physiologists, Philosophers can explain the math, the science, the religious world views, as they know them today! This information is helpful as a guiding point and stimulates our intellectual curiosity. What makes the ultimate difference in our lives is what we “know” and that knowledge comes from within. Invoke the wisdom of Carl Jung as he is quoted, “I know! I don’t need to believe.” Listen.