

# **Harmonic Healing: The Influence of Sound Therapy on Cultivating Forgiveness**

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January 28th, 2025

**Abstract.**

This paper explores the fascinating intersection between sound therapy and the profound journey of forgiveness, emphasizing the transformative power that vibrational sound can have on our emotional landscape. Music and sound, timeless companions in the human experience, awaken the extraordinary within us, encouraging the release of repressed emotions that often hinder our capacity for forgiveness. By harnessing the therapeutic potential of sound, we can dismantle the barriers of anger, resentment, and trauma that cloud our hearts, allowing for a deeper connection to love and understanding. Through an integration of theoretical frameworks, neuroscientific insights, and cultural and spiritual perspectives, this study shed light on how sound therapy not only promotes emotional openness but also nurtures healing and personal growth. Ultimately, this investigation seeks to inspire individuals to embrace the harmonious potential of sound as a vital tool on their paths toward forgiveness, offering a holistic approach to transforming pain into peace and cultivating a more profound sense of emotional well-being.

*“After attempting to forgive we might wonder why we still feel angry or empty inside. If we are repressing anger and guilt, the forgiveness we extend can’t be rooted in our being because the repressed feelings become a barrier to our core experience. The body and psyche that hold too many restricting and repressed emotions have little room to embody love and joy with much consistency and depth. We may experience the joy and relief that forgiveness offers from time to time, but it will remain on the surface. It’s like trying to plant a magnificent flower garden with a very shallow root system. A brief drought or a passing wind can sweep it all away. But if we give our pain acceptance and, in a safe context, feel what may have been too unsafe and scary to feel in the past, then the pain can be released and transformed. The process of honoring our feelings is like tilling hardened or shallow topsoil so that it becomes rich and deep. Only then will our forgiveness and understanding have room to take root deep within us”.*

**Robin Casarjian**

*Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart*

## I. Introduction

*"Music has the power to heal wounds that cannot be reached by the surgeon's knife or the physician's drugs."  
- Rudolf Steiner*

Sound and music have been an essential part of human lives throughout history. In fact, making music or sounds with instruments is an ancient human characteristic that dates back approximately 35,000 years (Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, 2020). Every culture has its music or sound and uses for it: drums calling to war, conch shells horns to thank the gods in a ceremony, singing altogether in a feast, and songs to say goodbye to a loved one when they pass away. Even in poetry and mythology, music plays an important role. Many pieces of literature of diverse genres have a story, verse, legend, or belief that reflects the "magical" power that music has. Moreover, music and sound can unite masses when singing an anthem at a sporting event, singing a song in a concert, congregations singing prayers, or a group meditating while toning along with singing bowls or a harmonium.

Music and sounds are a profound experience that provokes all kinds of sensations and physical reactions. A person listening to music or certain sounds of nature, playing an instrument or singing a song can feel joyful, happy, sad, nostalgic, angry, or relaxed; sometimes, those emotions may be accompanied by tears or shivers running up and down the spine. Everybody has experienced all these reactions at least once in their life, and there is no need to be a scientist to figure out which music or sounds make them feel bad or boost their mood.

These psychological, emotional and physical responses to sound have been used since ancient times to cure diseases. For instance, the Greeks treated their patients using medications combined with music. Pythagoras was convinced that health could be improved by listening to music daily (as a prescription). Aristotle used Psychocatharsis to relieve emotions through music. Moreover, the first reports of how sound influences respiration, blood pressure, muscular activity, and digestion were created in the 16th century. Today, Sound Therapy or Sound Healing uses prescribed sound or music and its components to alleviate or treat diseases.

Psychological stress is a well-established risk factor for poor health, and recent studies suggest that forgiveness, as an emotion-focused coping strategy, may help reduce its impact. Forgiveness is a multifaceted psychological process that plays a crucial role in emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships. Defined as the conscious decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward someone who has caused harm, forgiveness can foster healing, emotional balance, and personal growth. However, achieving forgiveness usually involves overcoming significant emotional barriers, such as anger, resentment, and trauma. Addressing these barriers requires tools and interventions that promote emotional openness.

Sound therapy utilizes vibrational frequencies to elicit physiological and emotional responses conducive to healing. With roots in ancient traditions and modern science, sound therapy has been shown to reduce stress, improve focus, and facilitate emotional processing. This paper

explores the intersection of forgiveness and sound therapy, investigating how vibrational sound techniques can influence the psychological and physiological mechanisms underlying forgiveness. By combining theoretical frameworks, neuroscientific insights, and cultural and spiritual perspectives, this study aims to explore sound therapy's potential to foster emotional harmonization and promote forgiveness.

## **II. Theoretical Framework**

### **Understanding Forgiveness**

Interpersonal hurts are common and can result from physical or emotional abuse, as well as conflicts involving feelings of neglect or rejection. Individuals who have been hurt may experience persistent feelings of anger or hostility, potentially leading to physical and mental health issues. A qualitative study has shown that unforgiveness has a negative effect on mental health: Affectively (how they felt), in their cognitive skills and forming obstacles to social and psychological growth (Akhtar et al., 2016). Often, people who are wronged experience anxiety, depression, stress, guilt, anger, fear, lack of energy, insomnia, negative thoughts (suicidal or harming others), inability to think constructively or positively, incapacity to move on to form new relationships, and frozen minds.

Therefore, forgiveness involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Cognitively, it requires a shift in perspective, reframing a transgression in a way that reduces its emotional impact. Emotionally, forgiveness entails letting go of negative feelings such as anger and resentment, often replaced by empathy and compassion. Behaviorally, forgiveness may manifest in reconciliatory actions or the ending of revengeful behaviors.

Barriers to forgiveness are often rooted in unresolved emotional pain, making it difficult for individuals to engage in the process. Stress and trauma can amplify these barriers, leading to persistent negative emotional states. Thus, effective interventions must address these underlying emotional and physiological factors to enable individuals to move toward forgiveness.

### **Mechanisms of Sound Therapy**

Sound therapy is based on the principle that vibrational frequencies can influence the human body and mind. Techniques such as the use of tuning forks, singing bowls, or binaural beats aim to create resonance—a state in which external vibrations align with the body's natural frequencies. This alignment is believed to promote relaxation, emotional release, and balance. The immune system, the brain, and all the systems in the body work much better if a person is in a peaceful state. This state may help to overcome any mental, emotional or physical affliction.

Many healing frequencies have been identified through the experiential work of various experts in the field, while others have been discovered through intuition, science, formulae, and numerology. For instance, Joseph Poleo created de Solfeggio frequencies based on Bible's passages and

using numerology. He built six original solfeggio frequencies: 396 Hz, 417 Hz, 528 Hz, 639 Hz, 741 Hz, and 852 Hz. In the original scale, these frequencies correspond to the notes Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, and La. Each frequency is thought to influence the mind, balance energy, and foster healing in harmony with the Universe.

The solfeggio frequency Re - 417 Hz is associated with the sacral chakra and is believed to aid in undoing challenging situations and promoting transformation. It helps release the burden of negative past experiences, empowering individuals to embrace change. Similarly, Ut - 396 Hz is linked to the root chakra and is known for transforming grief into joy and freeing one from guilt and fear. It is energizing and revitalizing, fostering a sense of stability and strength. Any of these frequencies may create a supportive environment for emotional healing and facilitate the shifts necessary for forgiveness.

### III. Neuroscientific Insights

#### Impact of Sound on the Brain

Neuroscience provides valuable insights into how sound therapy may influence forgiveness. Forgiveness is associated with activity in brain regions such as the prefrontal cortex, which governs decision-making and empathy, and the limbic system, which processes emotions. Negative emotions such as anger and resentment activate the amygdala, heightening stress responses and inhibiting cognitive flexibility.

Sound therapy has been shown to reduce activity in the amygdala, promoting a sense of calm and reducing stress. Simultaneously, it can enhance activity in the prefrontal cortex, fostering empathy and perspective-taking—key components of forgiveness. Studies using neuroimaging have demonstrated that exposure to specific frequencies can alter brainwave patterns. For instance, brainwaves—measurable with an EEG (electroencephalograph)—operate at different frequencies, naturally cycling throughout the day. These frequencies can be entrained to specific tempos (cycles per second = beats per second), each associated with unique properties and effects: **Delta (0.5–3.5 Hz)**: Promotes deep relaxation, calmness, and restorative sleep. **Theta (4–7 Hz)**: Encourages creativity, relaxation, and a meditative state. **Alpha (7–13 Hz)**: Enhances focus, presence, learning, and athletic performance. **Beta (13–30 Hz)**: Facilitates active thinking, problem-solving, and cognitive processing. (Gibson, 2022). This entrainment can help align the brain's natural rhythms with desired states, supporting both mental and physical well-being.

This shows that sound therapy utilizes specific frequencies to influence neural and physiological processes, shifting individuals from states of heightened alertness (beta waves) to deeper relaxation and introspection (alpha and theta waves).

## **Sound Therapy and Emotional States**

Sound can help address negative emotions such as anger, guilt, shame, fear, and anxiety by activating the brain's reward systems and reducing the release of stress hormones. It may also benefit those with an inability to experience joy or pleasure (anhedonia) by reactivating neural pathways to emotions that were previously suppressed as a result of trauma.

Millions of people commonly use tranquilizing drugs to reduce stress and anxiety. However, both can be treated with sound therapy because it can influence the activity in the brain regions involved with emotional processes. Studies indicate that its effect is almost the same as medications.

The effects of sound frequencies on emotional states are well-documented. Frequencies such as 432 Hz and 528 Hz have been associated with relaxation, stress reduction, and emotional clarity. These frequencies are thought to resonate with the body's natural vibrations, facilitating emotional release and creating an internal environment conducive to forgiveness.

Furthermore, sound therapy's ability to induce states of mindfulness and deep relaxation enhances individuals' capacity for emotional regulation. By reducing physiological stress markers such as cortisol levels and heart rate variability, sound therapy supports the emotional resilience necessary to confront and process feelings of hurt and betrayal.

## **Case Studies and Experiments**

Preliminary studies and anecdotal evidence highlight the potential of sound therapy in facilitating forgiveness. For instance, structured sound therapy sessions using Tibetan singing bowls have been reported to reduce anger and promote feelings of compassion among participants. In addition, an observational study revealed that individuals who participated in Tibetan singing bowl sound meditation experienced notable decreases in tension, anxiety, and depressed mood, along with a significant reduction in physical pain levels.

The didgeridoo, an ancient instrument traditionally used by the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, has become increasingly popular worldwide due to its powerful vibrations, which have shown potential in alleviating stress. A study by Lee et al. demonstrated that playing the didgeridoo was associated with reductions in blood pressure and salivary amylase levels, a biomarker for stress. Additionally, another study reported improvements in self-reported anxiety, along with higher levels of relaxation and enjoyment following the treatment (Goldsby, 2020).

Binaural beats can synchronize the brain's two hemispheres by playing two different frequencies, each in the left and right ear, individually. The brain resolves these frequency differences and produces the result in the body. The effect is complete relaxation, compared to the meditation state or the intermediate state of consciousness that happens between being awake and falling asleep (Gibson, 2022). In a study, researchers measured psychological data assessing symptoms of depression, mood, and quality of life. Participants were provided with CDs containing alternating binaural beats ranging from 10 Hz to 2.5 Hz, with delta frequencies played for 40 out

of the 60 minutes. They were instructed to listen to the CDs daily for 30 to 60 minutes over 60 days. The results showed a decrease in anxiety and an increase in quality of life and mood (Petrovich, 2018).

This suggests that individuals exposed to specific sound frequencies exhibit greater emotional openness, which may reduce psychological resistance to forgiving others.

## **IV. Cultural and Spiritual Perspectives**

### **Traditional Uses of Sound Practices**

Sound has long been a central element in cultural and spiritual practices that emphasize forgiveness and reconciliation. Indigenous cultures, for example, have used drumming and chanting to create communal spaces for healing and emotional release. Similarly, Buddhist traditions incorporate the use of gongs, singing bowls and chanting mantras in meditative practices designed to foster compassion and detachment from negative emotions.

According to a study of the frequencies of the Buddhist six-syllable chant, Om Mani Padme Hum (in the bodhisattva -Avalokiteshvara, the most important mantra), which literally means "Behold the jewel in the lotus." It is a chant that evokes a profound inner experience. The sound of "Om" quiets the mind, dissolving thoughts, dreams, and expectations, creating a state of harmony, joy, and bliss. The true essence of the chant lies in the gaps between syllables, where silence becomes a form of inner music. This mantra produces vibrations that resonate at a cellular level, synchronizing the body and mind. Repeated chanting deepens this connection, allowing the mind to attune to its frequencies, transforming the experience into something deeper. As explained by some Tibetan Buddhist scholars, the syllables help in these ways: OM to achieve the practice of generosity, MA relates to pure ethics; Ni to achieve perfection in the practice of tolerance and patience; PAD to achieve perfection of perseverance; ME to practice concentration; HUM to practice wisdom. Researchers measured the frequencies when chanting this mantra and found that they correspond with the six fundamental Solfeggio frequencies, known to bring positive physical, emotional, and biological changes. As His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama emphasizes, simply reciting the mantra is insufficient; chanting each syllable with precise notes and frequencies is necessary to achieve meaningful results (Pereira, 2015). Chanting the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum can foster a sense of calm and receptiveness, paving the way for healing and forgiveness.

Another example is the ragas in Indian classical music, in which tonic interval combinations may be able to elicit diverse, specific emotions. The word 'raga' is derived from Sanskrit, meaning 'the act of coloring or dyeing,' specifically concerning the mind, emotions, or mood. Figuratively, it encompasses a range of emotions and passions, including love, affection, sympathy, desire, interest, motivation, joy, and delight. Ancient Indian scripts dating centuries ago have registered the emotions related to ragas: love, laughter, anger, compassion, disgust, horror, heroism, wonder, peace, and spiritual devotion. A study showed that all ragas induced a calming effect,



and anger had the lowest rate, highlighting the possibility of utilizing various ragas as powerful tools for mood induction, making them highly relevant for emotional studies (Mathur, 2015)

These traditional practices emphasize the intrinsic connection between sound and emotional healing. They imply that sound therapy's ability to facilitate forgiveness is not a novel concept but rather a rediscovery of ancient wisdom.

## **Meditation and Sound Practices**

Traumatic experiences, whether isolated or repeated, can deeply affect mental health and may lead to conditions like PTSD. Meditation offers a supportive practice for anyone who has endured trauma, regardless of a formal diagnosis. By fostering nonjudgmental awareness of thoughts and sensations, meditation helps alleviate the emotional distress tied to traumatic memories. It also provides a safe space to release tension, fear, and pain. Regular meditation can empower individuals to regain a sense of control, reduce trauma-related symptoms, and encourage healing and personal growth.

There are many different kinds of meditation practices, all of which may be helpful in trauma treatment. For example, guided meditation is a technique often referred to as guided imagery or visualization, where a guide or teacher may assist in leading you through the process. Guided meditation involves creating mental images of calming places or objects to promote relaxation. The practice encourages engaging multiple senses, such as smell, sight, sound, and touch, to enhance the experience.

In one study, singing bowls were incorporated into emotional healing for high-risk youth (who have experienced poverty, survived sexual and physical abuse, and/or are currently at risk of perpetrating abuse) as part of a method called the "best self-visualization" approach. The bowls were used within a psychotherapy framework alongside deep breathing, visualization, and loving-kindness meditation. The researchers found that this combination of healing techniques could serve as a motivation for emotional and psychological recovery during counselling sessions (Goldsby et al., 2017).

Thus, meditation and sound could be an effective tool for overcoming emotional, mental and physical symptoms of trauma that may unlock the door to forgiveness.

## **V. Implications**

Exploring sound therapy as a facilitator of forgiveness offers a different perspective on emotional healing. This research investigates the ability of sound therapy to encourage emotional harmonization and forgiveness by drawing on theoretical models, neuroscientific findings, and cultural and spiritual viewpoints.

Being harmed and disappointed comes with an immense physical burden, and forgiveness can be seen just as a spiritual practice or good behavior; moreover, it is good mental and physical health: it aids, in the immediate and distant future, in decreasing depression, anxiety, anger, fear, etc., and increasing hope, tranquillity, and the ability to find new perspectives of life. It also helps improve the physical symptoms that correlate with these emotional states, such as high blood pressure, elevated heart rate, and deficient immune response, among others.

The universality of sound as a medium for emotional healing serves as a bridge between the internal and external, helping individuals process complex emotions and find a pathway to reconciliation. Thus, sound therapy is a promising tool for addressing forgiveness in both individual and collective contexts. Understanding the connection between forgiveness and well-being is essential for healthcare professionals, researchers, and policymakers working to improve public health.

As the field evolves, future research should focus on quantifying sound therapy's effects on forgiveness processes and exploring its applications in clinical and community settings.

This work does not pretend to minimize the procedures used by mental health professionals or the heavy process people go through for their mental well-being and maybe toward forgiveness. On the contrary, the intention is to promote sound therapy as a tool for use in therapeutic work or the individual daily tasks suggested by the therapist since, as we addressed before, sound therapy or healing can help us change our emotions in a soft, subtle, and subconscious way.

I hope this paper can motivate people to have more sound (or music) and forgiveness in their lives; it will not empty their pockets, and they will gain many blessings. After all, who does not want to be at peace, healthier, and happier?

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