Drumming the hollow bone

Michael Drake

In nearly all cultures, both past and present, the drum has been used as an instrument of healing: from the Minianka of West Africa, to the shamans of Siberia, rhythm has been used for thousands of years to address any number of health issues.

Shamans based the principle that the spiritual world may be contacted through the inner senses in ecstatic trance. The drum, sometimes called the ‘shaman’s horse,’ provides the shaman a relatively easy means of controlled transcendence. Researchers have found that if a drum beat frequency of around three to four beats per second is sustained for at least fifteen minutes, it will induce significant trance states in most people, even on their first attempt.

AN ACTIVE MEDITATION
The first thing you might ask is how does a drum induced trance differ from a traditional meditation, such as those practiced by Buddhists? The two forms differ absolutely in their approach, because Buddhist-type sitting meditation is generally about emptying one of thought, while shamanic drumming is very active and filled with content. Just like a yogi or a monk, who exists in a spiritual state most of the time because of constant devotional practices, we can readily induce profound states of deep meditation and heightened awareness by using a drum as an aid to meditation. This ease of meditation with a drum contrasts significantly with the often long periods of isolation and practice required by many other meditative disciplines before significant effects are experienced.

THE WAY OF THE HOLLOW BONE
The hollow bone teaching is an ancient practice, found under different names in Buddhism, shamanism, and Native American spirituality. It is a way to shift your consciousness to become an empty vessel for spirit. The idea is to become a conduit for spirit. When we can move our ego and rational mind out of the way to channel the divine power of the universe through us, all healing is possible. The venerated, late Native American Holy Man Frank Fools Crow taught that you must become like a hollow bone to be a great healer. According to Fools Crow, “We are called to become hollow bones for our people, and anyone else we can help, and we are not supposed to seek power for our personal use and honour. What we bones really become is the pipeline that connects Wakan Tanka [whom we could call Great Mystery, God or the Tao], the Helpers and the community together.”

In his becoming a hollow bone, Fools Crow believed that he went through four stages: First, he called in Great Mystery to rid himself of anything that would impede him in any way, such as doubt, questions or reluctance. Then he recognised himself as a clean tube, ready to be filled with hope, possibilities, and anxious to be filled with power. He experienced the power as it came surging into him. Finally, giving the power away to others, knowing that as he is emptied out, the Higher Powers will keep filling him with even greater power to be given away.

REAPING THE BENEFITS
Meditative practice, of all kinds, is an important part of the ongoing
task of keeping our insides clean, but hollow bone meditation using a drum also facilitates a transcendent state of unity consciousness. True enlightenment means feeling and recognising our true oneness with everything else - reaching a state of 'unity consciousness.'

The benefits of this state of 'unity consciousness' include a deep sense of relaxation, healing, more personal energy, better memory, greater mental clarity, and enhanced creativity. Feelings of peacefulness, timelessness, and spiritual well-being are common, along with a oneness of feeling and purpose with the totality of a dynamic, interrelated universe.

When we feel that deep oneness we are ecstatic, ecstasy doesn’t necessarily mean joy or bliss, it’s the feeling of oneness. Becoming a hollow bone is a simple and effective way to induce this profound state of consciousness.

**BECOMING A HOLLOW BONE**

To become a hollow bone, try the exercise below. To perform the exercise, you will ideally need a drum, or at least a shamanic drumming recording.

If you do not have a drum, simply improvise one from available materials; try tapping on an overturned plastic container with a spoon - the larger the container: the deeper the sound. A five-gallon bucket, for example, makes an excellent improvised drum. Read through the exercise first to familiarise yourself with the process.

Dim the lights and sit comfortably erect in a chair or on the floor. Close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply seven times. Let your abdomen rise and fall as you breathe. Focus on the breath as it enters your nose and fills your lungs, and then gently exhale any tension of 'unity consciousness.'

As you drum, imagine the unifying spirit of the divine source flowing through you. Visualise a spiral of energy descending from the heavens above, entering your hollow bone and traveling down into the earth. You may feel it, sense it, or simply imagine it. As you focus on it, it will occur, for energy and life force follow thought. Allow spirit to flow into and embody you so that the speed and rhythm of your playing come under its control.

As the drum meditation evolves, you will become more ecstatic and spirit will perhaps create new rhythms. You are now moving into a higher state of universal consciousness and developing a new shamanic skill. At the higher levels, a healer becomes adept at detaching all sense of self, fully present in the moment, as a hollow bone or living conduit for healing energy to move through.

When it feels appropriate, gradually slow the tempo of your drumming to draw your consciousness back into your body. Do not rush the transformation. Visualise yourself fully grounded in your body, and then slowly open your eyes.

Once you have returned to ordinary reality, end your drum meditation with four strong beats to signal that the sacred time of focus is ended (If you are listening to a shamanic drumming recording, most recordings have a similar call back signal near the end of the track). Sit quietly for a few moments, and then open your eyes.

**NEW TRICKS - OLD WAYS**

In addition to drums and drumming recordings, there is now a new technology called 'binaural beats' that can easily induce transcendent states of awareness. German researcher H.W. Dove discovered that when two pure tones close in frequency are presented, one to each ear, the brain detects the difference between them as a third frequency.

The two hemispheres of the brain enthrain to this binaural beat rather than the audible tones. For example, a 90 Hz tone and 95 Hz tone will induce a 5 Hz theta brainwave cycle. Theta activity reflects the dream-like state between wakefulness and sleep. Theta rhythms are associated with meditation and shamanic states of consciousness. Theta increases creativity, enhances learning, reduces stress, and awakens intuition.

Binaural beats can induce profoundly deep altered states within minutes. All you need is a pair of stereo headphones and a comfortable chair. The sound technology does the rest. Rhythmic stimulation continues to offer today what it has offered for thousands of years: namely, a simple and effective technique of ecstasy.

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