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Nada Brahma (Sound of God)

By Lorelei Laird

Nada yoga uses sound, chanting and asanas to expand the consciousness



Experienced yogis know that practicing with intention and care can be transformative. Experienced singers know the same can be true of sound. Practitioners may not realize it, but yogi and voice coach Heather Lyle of Vocal Yoga in Santa Monica says voice work is energy work—just like yoga—and that her students are sometimes surprised by the intense emotions that can be released when the two are combined.

“There’s a rush of energy into the head that can be quite overwhelming,” she says. “Usually, when they start playing with sound, [students] have a strong release of emotion. Singing teachers are used to everybody crying in our studios. They won’t even know why they’re crying, but they move energy that’s been stuck.”

Sound work and yoga come together in the practice of nada yoga, a form that is not well known in the West, where we tend to practice the more physical hatha yoga. Practitioners use music, sound and mantras, as well as poses and breathing exercises, to open chakras and ease into meditation. In nada yoga, sound is used as a bridge to spiritual transference—union with the world as well as one’s self.

“By singing a pure sound, we’re connecting to the inner sound current,” says Shanti Shivani, a teacher, singer and tambor player who relocated from Santa Barbara to Eugene, Oregon. “And the inner sound current is the direct connection to the Divine.”

Used properly, nada yoga can also support emotional and physical healing. The practice might appeal to the musically inclined, those with physical limitations or those who seek a greater emphasis on the spiritual. It is closely connected with meditation and kriyas, as well as Indian classical music.

Dhrupal, a devotional form of Indian classical music, was Shivani’s path to nada yoga. Unlike Western classical music, she says, dhrupal focuses specifically on raising the singer’s energy to a level more in harmony with the Divine.

That's also the goal of Heather Lyle's practice. Lyle's father was a sadhak (student) at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India, so the connection between yoga and singing became apparent early in life.

"Anyone who's seriously explored singing discovers that singing is energy work, so you can't help but get involved," she explains. "Many of the breathing exercises are pranayamas; many singing exercises are like kriyas."

Lyle, who has written a book on the practice, teaches through Santa Monica College Extension, Bhakti Yoga Shala in Santa Monica, and privately. She says she uses asanas and pranayama to start her students by opening the breath, and from there, moves into aums, tones and chants. She sometimes sings or plays the guitar or harmonium as well.

LA musician and yoga teacher Fariba Rofougaran, an Ayurvedic educator and a Sufi, offers kundalini yoga, nada yoga and other classes through her business, Mey Yoga. She also performs on the tanbour, a Kurdish string instrument a bit like a lute, and recently released a new album.

Rofougaran leads yoga classes that apply asanas, kriyas and music to the goals of kundalini yoga. She says she's very selective about the music she uses, noting that it should be vibrationally in harmony with the energy of the class.

"Music helps with centering, being present and quieting the mind. It's an invitation to use that feminine in us," she says, "There's less emphasis on the physical."

Although she also uses her work for healing, she cautions that it's not a substitute for conventional medical care, but can strongly support that work through meditation, mantras and kriyas tailored to the problem.

Even though nada yoga deemphasizes physically demanding asanas, students should still expect it to be emotionally challenging.

"If [students] do a longer workshop, you're going to get into a lot of repressed emotions," says Shivani. "Probably everybody in the room at some point is going to cry [as they] get in touch with grief, anger, repressed sexuality."

But for people who haven't connected with their spiritual sides through hatha yoga or meditation, sound offers another bridge.

"I started doing meditation when I was 20," says Shivani. "My thoughts were just in the way, and when I connected with the music, I realized that it got me out of my mind."

Lyle urges potential yogis not to let concerns about singing well hold them back.

"[Some people believe] singing is reserved for people who were lucky to be born with an amazing voice, and that's not the case," says Lyle. "Everybody has a beautiful, resonant voice within."

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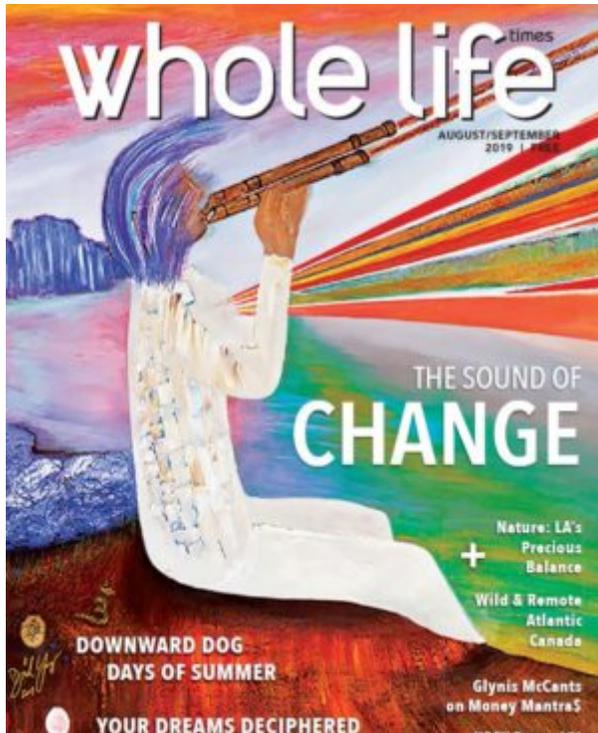
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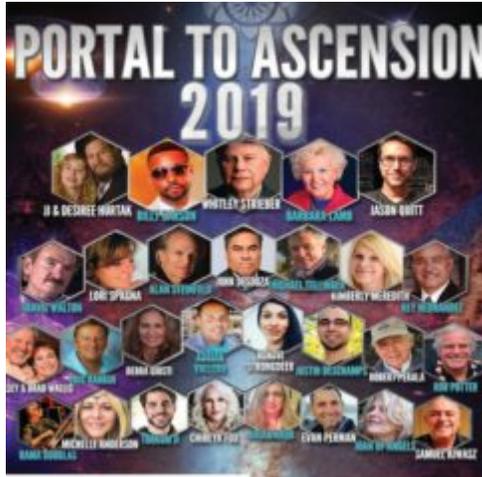
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