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On Sound Therapy

17 February 2014

excerpted from *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness* by Peter Levine, pp. 125-127:

In states of immobilization and shutdown, the sensations in our guts are so dreadful that we routinely block them from consciousness. But this strategy of “absence” only maintains the status quo at best, keeping both brain and body hopelessly stuck in an information traffic jam. It is a recipe for trauma and a diminished life, a cardboard existence. The following is another simple exit strategy for undoing the brain/gut knot.

An Effective Sound: “Voo”

The first seat of our primal consciousness is the solar plexus, the great nerve-centre situated behind the stomach. From this centre we are first dynamically conscious.

—D. H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*

Along with multitudes of other people, I have experienced various chanting and ancient “sounding” practices that facilitate healing and help open the “doors of perception.” Singing and chanting are used in religious and spiritual ceremonies among every culture for “lightening the load” of earthly existence. When you open up to chant or sing in deep, resonant lower belly tones, you also open up your chest (heart and lungs), mouth and throat, pleasurable

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(lungs), mouth and throat, pleasurable

stimulating the many serpentine branches of the vagus nerve.

Certain Tibetan chants have been used successfully for thousands of years. In my practice, I use a sound borrowed (with certain modifications) from some of these chants. This sound opens, expands and vibrates the viscera in a way that provides new signals to a shut-down or overstimulated nervous system. The practice is quite simple: make an extended “voooo...” (soft *o*, like *ou* in *you*) sound, focusing on the vibrations stimulated in the belly as you complete a full expiration of breath.

In introducing the “voo” sound to my clients, I often ask them to imagine a foghorn in a foggy bay sounding through the murk to alert ship captains that they are nearing land, and to guide them *safely home*. This image works on different levels. First of all, the image of the fog represents the fog of numbness and dissociation. The foghorn represents the beacon that guides the lost boat (soul) back to safe harbor, to home in breath and belly. This image also inspires the client to take on the hero role of protecting sailors and passengers from imminent danger, as well as giving him or her permission to be silly and thereby play. Most important are the image’s physiological effects. The sound vibrations of “voo” enliven sensations from the viscera, while the full expiration of the breath produces the optimal balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide. [77]

Begin the exercise by finding a comfortable place to sit. Then slowly inhale, pause momentarily, and then, on the out breath, gently utter “voo,” sustaining the sound throughout the entire exhalation. Vibrate the sound as though it were coming from your belly.

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At the end of the breath, pause briefly and *allow* the next breath to slowly fill your belly and chest. When the in breath feels complete, pause, and again make the “voo” sound on the exhalation until *it* feels complete. It is important to let sound and breath *expire fully*, and then to pause and *wait* for the next breath to enter (be taken) *on its own*, when *it* is ready. Repeat this exercise several times and then rest. Next, focus your attention on your body, primarily on your abdomen, the internal cavity that holds your organs.

This “sounding,” with its emphasis on both waiting and allowing, has multiple functions. First of all, directing the sound into the belly evokes a particular type of sensation while keeping the observing ego “online.” People often report various qualities of vibration and tinging, as well as changes in temperature – generally from cold (or hot) to cool and warm. These sensations are generally pleasant (with a little practice, at least). Most important, they *contradict* the twisted, agonizing, nauseating, deadening, numbing sensations associated with the immobility state. It seems likely that the change in the *afferent* messages (from organs to brain) allows the 90% of the sensory (ascending) vagus nerve to powerfully influence the 10% going from brain to organs so as to restore balance. Porges concurs on this key regulatory system: “The afferent feedback from the viscera provides a major mediator of the accessibility of prosocial circuits associated with social engagement behaviors.” [78]

77. Lowry, T. (1967). *Hyperventilation and Hysteria*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
Robert Whitehouse, PhD, personal

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

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communication, 2008.

78. Porges, S. W. (2009). The Polyvagal Theory: New Insights into Adaptive Reactions of the Autonomic Nervous System. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*, 76 (suppl. 2).

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sound therapy	chanting	toning
trauma	releasing trauma	
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