

Gong Bath™ — the sound of serenity

No religion, only "open heart" needed to receive and enjoy sacred vibrations

By Colleen Smith

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Richard Rudis, a Tibetan Buddhist, draws baths without water. Using Eastern instruments — gongs, Himalayan singing bowls and tingsha bells — Rudis orchestrates sacred sound healing rituals to engage not only senses but also soul.

"Sacred vibrational healing delves into the physics of what it is to be a sentient piece of matter in the universe," Rudis said in a phone interview from his home in California. Rudis brings his Gong Bath, (he trademarked the phrase) to Colorado June 15-26.

Rudis describes his cosmic sonic tonic as a "mind-altering, dynamic meditation experience designed to soothe, inspire, heal and awaken spirit."

Sound good? Rudis says anybody can access the esoteric therapy.

"The gift of sacred sound is a quick, easy and profound healing experience; and we're all attuned to it immediately. There are no prerequisites," he said.

"A Gong Bath doesn't require a belief structure or study or ability to find a yogic position. All you have to do is just be there and have an open heart and lie down."

Scores of gong-bathers lie down in Denver yoga studios, church halls and gymnasiums, converging for a sort of short, spiritual slumber party. One need not get naked for a Gong Bath, though participants from all walks of life must remove their shoes. A one-hour Gong Bath generally costs \$20; a 90-minute bath costs \$30.

I've attended three Gong Baths with my friend Joel Cooperman, an American Osteopathic Association trustee who has practiced medicine for 36 years, currently at Denver Osteopathic Center.

"For many years, sound waves have been used in Western medicine for diagnostic and therapeutic means," Cooperman said.

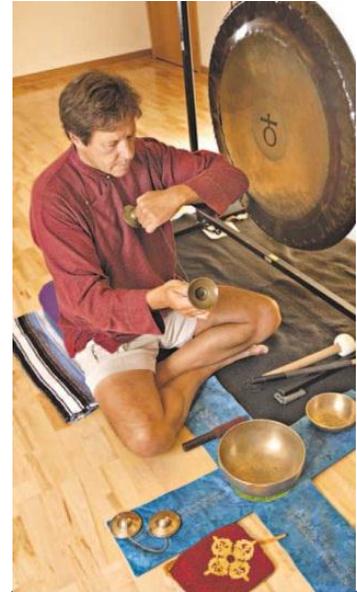
"A Gong Bath has therapeutic benefits, including a soothing effect on the nervous system. My experience has been both relaxing and rejuvenating. I've left sessions feeling calmer, more centered, at ease, and with a different sense of myself."

Dr. Gloria Oberbeck, a Harvard-educated M.D. who is in her 20th year of practicing family medicine, has attended Gong Baths since 2003. "I feel after a Gong Bath very renewed and refreshed. There's clarity — what athletes and artists call 'the zone,' " the Erie-based doctor said.

"A Gong Bath sounds strange," Oberbeck said, "but we know music can change the mood of a person, a group, a whole room. Being bathed in sound with intention puts people into a deep meditative state quickly because of sound, frequency and vibration. If you understand that we are made up of vibration and energy right down to our cells, it all resonates."

Oberbeck cites research demonstrating that meditative states ease discomfort. "Many studies show that meditation helps relieve high blood pressure, stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, chronic pain. Some docs are using sound for cancer patients," she said. "Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of the body are affected so much by a Gong Bath."

In her private practice, Home of the Healing Arts, based in Erie, Oberbeck suggests sound therapy for many of her patients, and suggests recordings by Rudis, and sound pioneers Jonathan Goldman and Steven Halpern. "It's easy to buy a \$20 or \$25



Richard Rudis plays a 38-inch alloy gong made by Paiste and tuned to the 136.1 Hertz vibration of Earth in an elliptical orbit of the sun. "The signature of 'Om,' the ancient seed syllable of creation, is also 136.1 Hertz," says Rudis. He uses Himalayan singing bowls and tingsha bells, as well, to orchestrate sacred sound-healing rituals. (Provided by Richard Rudis)

CD; and I have very good reports and see results when measuring blood pressure, sleep cycles, anxiety levels. And you won't have all the side effects you might get from prescription drugs."

Sacred sound waves soothe not only human beings. When Rudis performs Gong Baths outdoors, he said trees fill with birds. Rabbits and deer draw near. The muscles of horses visibly relax.

Finding an oasis

Rudis appears relaxed and serene, yet he was not always tranquil.

His path to sacred vibrational healing began in response to his own pain. Raised Roman Catholic, Rudis first encountered Buddhism's marvels while in Vietnam as a 19-year-old drafted soldier. War traumatized Rudis, but he used no drugs or alcohol during his tour of duty for fear of compromising his awareness in a constantly life-threatening environment.

One day, riding in an Army helicopter flying low over an apocalyptic landscape devastated by Napalm, Rudis spotted an unlikely oasis.

"For as far as the eye could see, it was like a moonscape. Then we came over a hill; and below us, I saw an untouched green area with lush trees and a temple on the crest of a hill," Rudis said.

"It was as though finding a polished jewel in a cesspool. I asked the pilot to explain why such a place could survive. The pilot simply said matter-of-factly that it was a Buddhist temple. That visual planted a kernel of understanding that there is sanity in chaos, a port of refuge in an otherwise insane world."

Rudis described himself as "damaged" after returning from Vietnam. He turned to religion and therapy, eventually finding solace in Vajrayana Buddhist philosophy.

Gongs were not limited to Eastern cultures. Ironically, given his military experience, Rudis learned that gongs were used in ancient Greece as part of warriors' return to civilization.

For all his ascendant spirituality, Rudis grounds himself in science rather than what he dubs "magical thinking." Initially trained as an engineer, Rudis said, "My more linear background serves me well. I like to understand why things work, how models of the universe explain mechanisms clicking away in the clockwork of the universe."

Human beings, Rudis said, possess an innate response to rhythm. "Patterns of rhythm are important to me because even in utero, we're exposed to rhythms of our mother's heartbeat and breath. We're rhythmic individuals even prior to birth," he said.

What to expect and how to prepare for a Gong Bath

- Register early: Events frequently sell out.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing. Shoes are removed.
- Bring a mat or blankets to lie on and cover up with.
- Some participants place objects — jewelry, crystals, photos of loved ones — near the gong.
- Gong Baths open with serene high notes from bells known as tingshas: "The tingshas' vibrational signature calms the savage. The monsters that exist within our mind are placated or put aside," said Gong Bath founder Richard Rudis. "The principal aspect is to awaken and find a space that will be more supportive."
- A Gong Bath concludes with dark-chocolate treats. "Chocolate with a high cocoa level — 70 percent or more — alters brain chemistry and causes a reaction in the bloodstream, a release of endorphins in the brain. Endorphins, as any athlete can tell you, are a pleasant experience," Rudis said.
- "A Gong Bath can leave a person physically and mentally rattled. Producing good feelings in the form of hormones surging through brains and bodies helps people get more in touch with positive qualities of who we are physically, and helps us get back to more grounded or more stable place."

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