

# DRUMMING FOR HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND FUN



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# Drumming for Health, Wellness and Fun

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- ◆ What is rhythm and how does it relate to me?
- ◆ How do we get access to rhythm and express our natural inbuilt rhythm that is part of everybody's heritage?
- ◆ Where and how did drum circles get started?
- ◆ Can sound heal?
- ◆ It is important to know the difference between healing and curing!
- ◆ What does drumming research tell us today?
- ◆ Drum circles and drum circle etiquette



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**Drumming for Health, Wellness and Fun**

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# Drumming for Health, Wellness and Fun

*By*  
**Dr. Alice Cash**

This book is for those who are interested, curious, amazed, or baffled about the sudden emergence of drumming as a way to connect with others, lower your blood pressure, melt away anxiety or even discharge some angry energy. Fads come and go and this could be a temporary phenomenon, but I don't really think so. Even the most cursory examination of musical and cultural history will tell you that drum circles have been around for a long, long time...thousands of years.

This ebook has been written in response to a recent request that I start some drum circles in my local community and teach people of all ages about the powerful effects of drumming. As a result, I have compiled some of the best information that I could find on the web and tried to acknowledge all the authors and give you links to their web sites and to any other articles they might have written. I do hope you enjoy this information as much as I have enjoyed compiling it for you.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with additions or corrections.  
Happy drumming!



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## CHAPTER 1: THE DRUM CIRCLE

### SONIC EXERCISE

Have you hear about drum circle? It is an ancient practice that is making a worldwide reappearance. Drum circles have been around since ancient times and were used for ceremonies of various types. Some of the ancient uses were:

- ◆ community building
- ◆ celebration of births
- ◆ celebration of marriages or other life events
- ◆ healing rituals
- ◆ communication with community or village
- ◆ warning of attack, storms, or serious illness
- ◆ grieving losses

In an age when life seems to be getting more and more complicated, people are searching for simple but powerful ways to connect with each other; ways that are non-threatening, ways that connect humans with each other and lead to greater trust, understanding and group healing. The drum circles seems to do just that. The drum circle can be created entirely of self-made, home-made instruments or you can buy beautiful and expensive drums and rattles, imported from around the world.

### WHAT IS RHYTHM AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO ME?

We all have rhythm, rhythm is within all of us, and it's around us all the time. Take a look – moon and stars constantly rise and fall in a universal rhythm, when we talk, walk, march and sing rhythm flows, in the kitchen - the washing machines makes noise in rhythm, in nature – birds sing and a stream flows, in rhythm. But most importantly within our very bodies a natural rhythm continually plays a orchestra of movement and song that makes up our bodies, our heart is constantly beating in rhythm Boom-boom.. Boom-boom.. In fact we had 9 months of rhythmic training in the womb.



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The mystics and philosophers say that everything in the Universe is in vibration, from the cells of our bodies to the wood in your desk; the only thing that distinguishes wood from metal is the frequency of the vibration.

### **WHY DON'T WE HAVE ACCESS TO RHYTHMS AND DRUMS LIKE OTHER NATIONS?**

There are many nations on the planet who know and use the power of rhythm for community building, healing, consciousness enhancement and expressing the joy's of being alive. For example: In Brazil once a year people gather on shrove Tuesday to enjoy the Carnival, a bonanza a colorful costumes, wild parties and powerful rhythms and music. These rhythms and music have a history; they are the culmination of a mixture of cultures when slaves from Africa mixed cultures with Portuguese and Local Indian Tribes fusing to create Samba. Africa has a very powerful tradition of rhythms and music which we call a Rhythm Culture. West African cultures use rhythm in nearly every part of their lives, rhythm is used during weddings, during births, at funerals, it signifies special occasions like the harvesting of crops or bringing in of a catch of fish from the sea, rhythm is also used to heal sickness or just for fun in weekly parties to celebrate life and strengthen the social bonds of community. Musicians don't learn from schools, but the music is handed down from generation to generation orally and by example. In the West we lost access to sharing rhythm when during the Inquisition, playing drums was considered part of witchcraft, the Church deemed playing drums too threatening, from the ideal of only finding access to spirit from their appointed go-betweens and all drumming was banned, on punishment of hanging or burning. Thereafter drumming survived only as a way to inspire armies to fight harder in marching bands.



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### **HOW DO WE GET ACCESS TO RHYTHM AND EXPRESS OUR NATURAL IN-BUILT RHYTHM THAT IS PART OF EVERYBODY'S HERITAGE?**

A new culture is emerging in the west. A culture where expressing you natural rhythm for life and each other is not only allowed by widely accepted and encouraged as a fundamental basic human need and right. In



America the late Babatunde Olatunji arrived many years ago and brought the culture and rhythms of his home nation of Nigeria to the people, from then on the spirit and energy of this wonderful music spread, this great work was carried on by many others who arrived from their native Africa bringing with them their rhythms and music. African drumming is spreading worldwide and the Djembe drum has gained special significance as an instrument of choice for the now growing community of non-professional hand drummers. This community is being fuelled by the steady stream of master drummers making their home in Europe and the west, people like Famodou Konate and the best know drummer internationally, founder of drumming schools and subject of videos and books – Mamady Keita who now resides in Belgium.



Babatunde Olatunji  
[Listen to sample](#)

### A RHYTHMICALLY EMPOWERED COMMUNITY?

In the West not only are we taking to rhythms and music from other cultures by we are steadily creating our own. A new movement is starting a movement of people who just want to have fun playing rhythms and sharing community. These new enthusiasts don't only look to the drum for inspiration, but play a whole host of instruments like bells, wood and shakers collectively called percussion. They use voice and movement too, to complete the circle of drums, voice and dance. They are guided and directed by outstanding leaders who are called facilitators. A Facilitators job is to guide the circle until his job is redundant and the circle becomes a self-facilitating percussion orchestra. These drum circles are not performances (where you watch and appreciate on a mind level), they are not workshops (where you are taught and learn as a student), the are experiential empowerment rhythm circles, where everyone is regarded as equal, every one is welcome, there are no age limits, ability limits or discrimination of any sorts. This is the age of the Community Drum Circle.



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## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY DRUM CIRCLE?

As individuals we are born unique, there is no one on this planet that is exactly the same as anyone else, however it is only in the respect of our differences and the acknowledgment of our oneness that man ever finds true peace. The game we are taught to play in this world is the game of separation, from the time we are born we learn to find reasons and excuses for our separation, we learn to judge and divide by color, age, gender, nationality, what state you live in, income level, intellectual level, religion you believe in, and any other divisive instrument we can create or conjure to keep us separate from our fellow man. This part of the game has for far too long been given dominance, however we are also realizing that these disempowering beliefs and experiences no longer serve us and how we are going to grow in peace as a world consciousness is by finding ways to experience our Oneness while still respecting our unique individuality, cultures and beliefs. Can you imagine a world where everybody is able to celebrate their uniqueness while Experiencing the Spiritual Universal Truth of our Oneness with each other and the universe. Well in a Community Drum Circle that can be experienced within the space of a two hour event on a very deep and profound level. Not only can a Community Drum Circle be deeply gratifying on a Spiritual level but you can extract whatever level of appreciation and meaning from it that you care to choose at the time for example in a community drum circle one person may experience the Fun and enjoyment of being able to play like a youngster, another may find the event hugely stress relieving, and other may find that powerful emotions are brought to the surface and allowed expression in a safe and comforting environment, while another may have a deeply spiritual experience of freedom and communion with a personal deity or god. All experiences are valid and to be found in a Community Drum Circle, where the event is made up of the individual energies

*"The Drum Circle is a huge jam session. The ultimate goal is not precise rhythmic articulation or perfection of patterned structure, but the ability to entrain and reach the state of a group mind. It is built on cooperation in the groove, but with little reference to any classic styles. So this is a work in constant progress, a phenomenon of the new rhythm culture emerging here in the West."*

**Mickey Hart,  
drummer for the  
Grateful Dead**



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that each person brings to the circle. From the young girl of 7 years old enthralled by playing a stick on a colored drum, to grandmother finally finding expression in her 1 beat gift to the circle, to the advanced drummer and workshop enthusiast who displays his technical abilities on the Djembe drum to the enjoyment of the other participants. According to Mickey Hart, drummer for the Grateful Dead: “The Drum Circle is a huge jam session. The ultimate goal is not precise rhythmic articulation or perfection of patterned structure, but the ability to entrain and reach the state of a group mind. It is built on cooperation in the groove, but with little reference to any classic styles. So this is a work in constant progress, a phenomenon of the new rhythm culture emerging here in the West.”

### WHERE WOULD YOU FIND A COMMUNITY DRUM CIRCLE?

Community Drumming is slowly gaining popularity in England. Already in the United States you will be able to find a community drum circle in nearly all cities and towns. Arthur Hull who is widely regarded as the Founder of the Worldwide Drum Circle Movement has been facilitating rhythm circles around the world for the last 30 years. From his home town of Santa Cruz, California he spreads his message of community. His time is now spent traveling the globe training an ever growing community of Drum Circle Facilitators – Enthusiastic leaders who are spreading the message of drumming and its ability to move and inspire. Arthur Hull has been visiting England for the last 10 years and in 2001 in conjunction with Somesh De Swardt founder of Drum Jam been running courses to train Facilitators in the skills of how to successfully facilitate groups of people using the tools of rhythm. He is the author of a hugely popular book – Drum Circle Spirit and Video – Drum Circle Facilitation both can be purchased by contacting Drum Jam. ([www.drumjam.co.uk](http://www.drumjam.co.uk)) “There are over 6800 different languages, dialects spoken in the world, but there is only one that is universally and implicitly understood, no matter where your passport resides. For centuries, community drumming has been an integral

*“Because of rhythm people are capable of reaching different, never before imagined places. No other instrument is so available for participation and pure unadulterated enjoyment.”*

**Arthur Hull**



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part of social, religious, and spiritual fabric of cultures throughout the world. Whether it's to communicate, mediate, celebrate or inspire, drumming has an unmistakable power to move. Because of rhythm people are capable of reaching different, never before imagined places. No other instrument is so available for participation and pure unadulterated enjoyment.”- Arthur Hull



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## CHAPTER 2: ONE TYPE OF SOUND HEALING

Sound healing is rapidly gaining recognition internationally as an integral part of the healing process for cancer patients. It has also been effective in relieving pain and in the treatment of stress related afflictions such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, insomnia, pain and depression. Mainstream medical teaching facilities like Duke University and the University of North Carolina have added programs that link body/mind and spirit to the treatment of cancer. Cancer Prevention centers are utilizing sound as a vital part of the healing process for patients with astounding results.

Like many healers I believe that illness is a manifestation of dis-harmony within the body; an imbalance in the cells or a given organ and that healing can be achieved by restoring the normal vibratory frequencies of the diseased, out-of-harmony parts of the body. Vibrational healing, especially with sound is a potent way of restoring the body to its' normal vibratory frequency.

*"... One reason sound heals on a physical level is because it so deeply touches and transforms us on the emotional and spiritual planes ..."*

**Dr. Mitchell Gaynor**  
**Director,**  
**Medical Oncology**  
**Cornell Cancer**  
**Prevention Center**



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All matter is energy vibrating at different rates and by altering the rate of vibration we can change the structure of matter. In this case the healing process is initiated by entraining our brainwaves and creating sympathetic resonance with the perfect vibrations of the bowls. When we add intention to the frequency, the healing potential is increased even more. That intention can be through prayer, chanting, and even silent focused attention, but declaring it in an audible manner is best.

Another way of saying that is the fundamental state of the universe is a state of absolute harmony. Our core state, because we are part of the natural universe is also one of harmony and great ease. When we disconnect from our core state through stress, distraction, illness and the challenges of daily



life, it creates disease: spiritual, physical and mental. Sound from the Tibetan bowls gently nudges us back to our natural state of blissful tranquility and alignment.

Dr. Mitchell Gaynor, director of Medical Oncology and Integrative Medicine at the Cornell Cancer Prevention Center in NY has been using sound, including Tibetan Bowls, Crystal bowls and Chanting in work with cancer patients for many years. “If we accept that sound is vibration and we know that vibration touches every part of our physical being, then we understand that sound is heard not only through our ears but through every cell in our bodies. One reason sound heals on a physical level is because it so deeply touches and transforms us on the emotional and spiritual planes. Sound can redress imbalances on every level of physiologic functioning and can play a positive role in the treatment of virtually any medical disorder.”

According to an article in Spirituality and Health magazine Dr. Gaynor’s research shows that the sound vibration of the bowls affects the disrhythmic motion found in cancer cells and cause a harmonious transformation. In a blind study he found that there was a 50% shorter recovery time from chemo patients for those who used the bowls regularly and that when bowls were used in the early stages of cancer, during consultations with patients, their level of anxiety and stress was greatly reduced.

Imagine how making a solid, well thought out decision about ones future would be improved in a context void of stress and anxiety. Imagine also how the ability to repeatedly connect with that sense of tranquility during the discomfort of chemotherapy increases the quality of life for cancer patients.

Research by Dr. David Simon, medical director of neurological services at Sharp Cabrillo Hospital in San Diego and medical director at the Chopra Center found that chants are chemically metabolized into ‘endogenous opiates’, that act on the body as internal painkillers and healing agents.



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In my own research with sound using biofeedback equipment I found that the harmonics produced by the Himalayan (Tibetan) Singing Bowls have transformative abilities (brain activity, heart rate and body temperature have diminished during sessions) creating a deeply peaceful state of being while energizing the brain.

Biofeedback is a scientifically valid measurement device used to help individuals gain voluntary control over several different Autonomic Nervous System functions. Research has shown that when breathing and heart rate are in

synch this produces a resonant frequency in the body (similar to the resonance being produced by the Tibetan bowls). This is extremely beneficial for the heart and the entire body. Stress related disorders, pain, and many other disorders are predicted by whether or not a person is achieving cardio-respiratory synchrony. During sessions of Tibetan bowl sound therapy, cardio-respiratory synchrony increased dramatically as measured by J&J Engineered Biofeedback equipment. Data showed that during the sound therapy sessions there was an increase in Parasympathetic Nervous System activity and decrease in Sympathetic Nervous System drive. The relaxation response was initiated and the stress response was inhibited. This means the Autonomic Nervous System was balanced for the majority of the session. The resonance of the bowls produced slow breathing of approximately six breaths per minute which produced beneficial effects on the heart and whole body.

These results are promising in that Tibetan bowl sound therapy increases cardio-respiratory synchrony and resonance within the body. Therefore, there are many disorders that can greatly benefit from the use of Ti-

These instruments are used within meditations and physical vibrational healing techniques. Their harmonic resonance is used to:

- ◆ reduce stress and pain
- ◆ balance energy
- ◆ create vitality synchronization and spontaneous healing.  
- effectively alter consciousness into a peaceful and expansive meditative state. (trance induction)
- ◆ meditation



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betan bowl sound therapy.

My clients have supported the scientific findings with reports of everything from relief from pain and discomfort, clearing of sinuses, shifting out of depression, ability to sleep (for those with insomnia), re-vitalization and clarity, feeling of well being, great connectedness and deep personal transformation. Clients report a fundamental shift in their view of phenomenon space, accentuated clarity of mind and body, enhanced creativity, vigor, joy and sense of peace.

It is important to look at what healing really is and what the difference is between healing and curing. A cure is the "complete biological resolution of a diseased state", according to Dr Gaynor in his book "The Healing Power of Sound". Healing, however has more far reaching

**It is important to look at what healing really is and what the difference is between healing and curing.**

implications that occur on emotional, spiritual and physical levels. It is a regenerative process married to a spiritual awakening that can have profound consequences on illness, disease and all aspects of our lives.

Himalayan or Tibetan Singing bowls have been traced to the shamanistic Bon tradition which predates Buddhism by thousands of years. Dr. Gaynor mentions in an article in Shamans Drum magazine that the reason sound (and chanting) are still used in shamanistic cultures is that the sound induces trance states of consciousness conducive to healing. The ancient Himalayan Bowls are made from a consecrated seven metal alloy which, when skillfully stimulated, produce five individual and simultaneous tones, each at its own consistent frequency, which vibrational-ly dance with each other. The raw materials were collected, smelted and purified, cast, reheated and hammered into shape and tone. Mantras or sacred chants were sung and infused intent into the bowls. Their sound synchronizes sentient brain waves and creates a therapeutic effect upon the mind/body realization.

Singing Bowls, produce the primordial sound of 'AUM': The funda-



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mental utterance of energy metamorphosing into matter. They alter space, mind and time; awakening cellular memory and healing the energy body. The act of listening to their captivating overtones effectively stops one's internal dialog, the 'Monkey Mind'. The individual is transported into a space of tranquility and balance where the 'Universal Chord', found within each self, is touched, joined with and understood. The Universal Chord if you will, that is the primordial substance from which our whole reality is made and from which our Universe originated. Although the vibrational energy of the bowls can be directed to a specific area for healing purposes, they work more on a fundamental level.

Diane Mandle is a Certified Sound Healer based in Southern California. She maintains an integrated Body/Mind private practice and conducts presentations and concerts nation wide on healing using the Himalayan bowls. She can be reached at [info@soundenergyhealing.com](mailto:info@soundenergyhealing.com). Her CD "Return to OM" is available on her website at [www.soundenergyhealing.com](http://www.soundenergyhealing.com)

Diane Mandle is French/American who has lived and traveled worldwide. She has a background in performing arts from Stephens College where she graduated in 1972. It was there that she was introduced to Buddhism, and her interest in this has taken her to Nepal and Sikkim several times where she was able to deepen her understanding of the cultures where the Sacred Sound instruments were created and utilized. She has been working in the healing profession for over 6 years with an integrated body/mind practice that includes focused dialog, energy balancing and Sound Healing. She is the only State Certified Tibetan Bowl Sound Healer in the country. In addition to her private practice, she conducts concerts, workshops and educational programs nationally, is a regular presenter at the Chopra Center and is a featured performer on a new CD, "Turning Pain into Serenity" by Clinical Psychologist Michael Samko, Ph.D. Diane's own CD "Return to Om" received critical acclaim in the San Diego based "Light Connection" magazine. Article Source: [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Diane\\_Mandle](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Diane_Mandle)



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## CHAPTER 3: A LOOK AT THE RESEARCH

Composite effects of group drumming music therapy on modulation of neuroendocrine-immune parameters in normal subjects.

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[Bittman BB,](#)  
[Berk LS,](#)  
[Felten DL,](#)  
[Westengard J,](#)  
[Simonton OC,](#)  
[Pappas J,](#)  
[Ninehouser M.](#)

**CONTEXT:** Drum circles have been part of healing rituals in many cultures throughout the world since antiquity. Although drum circles are gaining increased interest as a complementary therapeutic strategy in the traditional medical arena, limited scientific data documenting biological benefits associated with percussion activities exist.

**OBJECTIVE:** To determine the role of group-drumming music therapy as a composite activity with potential for alteration of stress-related hormones and enhancement of specific immunologic measures associated with natural killer cell activity and cell-mediated immunity.

**DESIGN:** A single trial experimental intervention with control groups.

**SETTING:** The Mind-Body Wellness Center, an outpatient medical facility in Meadville, Pa. **PARTICIPANTS:** A total of 111 age- and sex-matched volunteer subjects (55 men and 56 women, with a mean age of 30.4 years) were recruited.

**INTERVENTION:** Six preliminary supervised groups were studied using various control and experimental paradigms designed to separate drumming components for the ultimate determination of a single experimental model, including 2 control groups (resting and listening) as well as 4 group-



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drumming experimental models (basic, impact, shamanic, and composite). The composite drumming group using a music therapy protocol was selected based on preliminary statistical analysis, which demonstrated immune modulation in a direction opposite to that expected with the classical stress response. The final experimental design included the original composite drumming group plus 50 additional age- and sex-matched volunteer subjects who were randomly assigned to participate in group drumming or control sessions.

**MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES:** Pre- and postintervention measurements of plasma cortisol, plasma dehydroepiandrosterone, plasma dehydroepiandrosterone-to-cortisol ratio, natural killer cell activity, lymphokine-activated killer cell activity, plasma interleukin-2, plasma interferon-gamma, the Beck Anxiety Inventory, and the Beck Depression Inventory II.

**RESULTS:** Group drumming resulted in increased dehydroepiandrosterone-to-cortisol ratios, increased natural killer cell activity, and increased lymphokine-activated killer cell activity without alteration in plasma interleukin 2 or interferon-gamma, or in the Beck Anxiety Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory II.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Drumming is a complex composite intervention with the potential to modulate specific neuroendocrine and neuroimmune parameters in a direction opposite to that expected with the classic stress response.



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## CHAPTER 4: GROUP DRUMMING RESEARCH

The first controlled scientific investigation of its kind to document specific immune system effects of group drumming in normal subjects was published in January 2001 in the prestigious international Journal of Alternative Medicine an article entitled "The Genetic Mystery of Music" says this about Bittman's research: Therapies. The study's principal investigator was Barry Bittman, MD, Neurologist. In the August 2001 Discover Magazine

Music can mitigate stress. In one recent study, neurologist Barry Bittman of the Mind-Body Wellness Center in Meadville, Pennsylvania gathered a group of 10 people and had them beat hand drums for an hour while a music "facilitator" conducted. Afterward, Bittman took blood samples. The drummers, he found, had heightened levels of immune cells called natural killer cells that seek out and destroy both cancer cells and cells infected by viruses. A control group that read in silence experienced no such upsurge.

Bittman believes that group drumming, through it's camaraderie, support, exercise, and music making signals the brain to counter the production of cortisol, a stress hormone secreted by the adrenal glands. Less cortisol has been associated with a heightened immune response and may help the body fight off infection. "I'm not saying it's a cure for cancer," Bittman cautions, "but what I am saying is that we have a very important step in understanding a delightful, and fun way for people to reverse the stress responses in a manner that leads us to positive biological changes."

In effect Bittman and his team of researchers proved that group drumming boosts production of natural killer cells that seek out and destroy cancer and virus cells.... and increases cytokines, interluekin II and gamma interferon proteins essential for cellular defense mechanisms. Though Bittman is careful not to suggest he's found a cure for cancer, he's certainly proved group drumming brings beneficial health effects to participants. (This research was originally reported by Janet Planet.)



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## CHAPTER 5: DRUM CIRCLES & DRUM CIRCLE ETIQUETTE

From our earliest ancestors and throughout history there is ample evidence that in every society and culture, drumming has been an important and frequently sacred communal activity. Our first experience of rhythm, the rushing of blood and heartbeat heard in our mothers' wombs, predisposes us to respond to the beat.

Drumming enhances focused meditation, balance, healing, team-building, interaction, endurance, timing, co-operation, concentration, and sharing. Drumming can increase your health: group drumming has recently been proven to heighten levels of immune cells called natural killer cells that seek out and destroy both cancer cells and cells infected by viruses. Drumming can access spirituality and power but most importantly drumming is FUN! Enjoy your place in the unbroken chain of those who drum with the spirit of cooperation, consideration, and respect.

### RESPECT YOUR DRUMS

Treat drums with respect. Drums can access and channel tremendous energy. They are not a substitute for a table or stool. Place nothing but a protective cover (called a drum hat) on the head. Do not lean your elbows on the head when not playing. Rubbing the skin in circles gently with your palm generates friction that warms the skin for playing and establishes a bond between drummer and drum.

NEVER PLAY A HAND DRUM OR SHAKERE WHILE WEARING RINGS, WATCHES OR OTHER HAND/WRIST JEWELRY.

Any sort of jewelry can easily cut through a drum skin or crack a gourd with one stroke. They can also hurt the wearer.



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## RESPECT OTHER DRUMMERS

Treat other drummers with respect. A drum circle is not the place to show off your best licks regardless of the group rhythm. It is a communal activity that does not require high levels of expertise. Beginners are welcome and can contribute as much as experienced drummers. Sensitivity to others in the group is essential to both beneficial vibrations and unified sound. Never consider smoking while in a drum circle.

Place instruments to share in the center of the circle unless another place is obviously designated. Keep instruments you do not wish to share out of it.

Always ask Permission Before:

- ◆ Smudging or burning incense.  
Some people are sensitive or allergic.
- ◆ Playing an instrument other than hand drums, percussion, flute, recorder, or digeridoo.
- ◆ Playing any drum that is not in the center of the circle or one that is covered or turned on its side regardless of whether it is being used at the moment. Most people have a special relationship with one or more of their drums. Some are happy to share. NEVER play someone's drum or percussion without first asking permission.



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## KEEPING TIME

Bells, shakers, and hand percussion are tremendously important. In many societies apprentice drummers may not touch a drum until they have fully mastered the bells.

Listen to the bell for the cadence and phrasing. If you don't know a pattern, listen, then ask. Someone will be happy to help.



- ◆ Drum circles are a place for hand drums and percussion: drum kits, timbales, etc., will be too loud and will dominate the circle. Instruments such as those are not recommended.
- ◆ The group needs a strong bass line or bottom, usually requiring several drummers. Others carry the accompanying parts while usually one person at a time solos. Occasionally soloists will converse with one another. If you are new to a circle it is suggested that you watch, listen and/or dance until you become a bit accustomed to the style of the particular group. Most often the bottom drums will be placed in, or close to, the center of the circle so that everyone can watch and hear them, this helps to keep a strong groove on the beat.
- ◆ In most ethnic-specific drumcircles there is a hierarchy of skill and experience. Generally less experienced drummers solo only when invited. Musically sound and spiritually moving solos require years of practice. Hand percussion and consistent bass and middle parts are all integral to the group sound. Try to key your strokes to others'. Watch their hands. It is more important to play fewer strokes CLEARLY than to play fast. Practice playing each part. They must fit together properly to become a whole. Be patient. Your time to solo will come. (It is a good idea to bring a small tape recorder so that you can record to practice the parts at home.)
- ◆ Bring ALL volume down when flutes, recorders, digeridoos, or other melodic instruments play.
- ◆ Congas have a softer voice than djembes. Bring the volume of djembes down when congas solo.



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## ALWAYS LISTEN

If you are participating in a drum circle for the first time the best way to approach the circle is with an attitude of service and humility. Before you touch an instrument LISTEN. Listen for the basic pulse of the circle, once you feel comfortable join in softly so you can still hear the drummers around you.

- ◆ The single most important activity in a drum circle is to LISTEN. Listen before you begin to play; listen as you play. It is not important or even desirable to play many notes. By listening to what's going on in the circle as you play, you will have a better sense of how you can fit into the groove that is being created. Listen for that fundamental groove ...and strive to support it.
- ◆ At any time during the circle if you find that you can only hear yourself playing then you are playing too loud.
- ◆ Keep your head up and attentive to the circle, don't focus on watching your hands.
- ◆ If you're unsure of what or where to play keep your eyes on the reactions of the more experienced players.
- ◆ If you have any questions, don't be afraid to ask. Every rhythm event is different, and has its own particular variations of drum circle etiquette. If you're not sure what's appropriate, just ask.



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As Arthur Hull says, "In most drum circle events there is a basic, often unspoken, agreement that each person in the circle is there to share their rhythmical spirit and personal energy with the community that is present. With this kind of group conciseness, even a large drum circle can be a very powerful, yet intimate experience for everybody as they create unity in their community by drumming together. The musical part of any drum circle will



take care of itself if every player is there to share their spirit and have fun."

If you treat the drum circle as a living, breathing entity and remember the Golden Rule-Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You- you will ensure your own enjoyment and that of everyone else.



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## CHAPTER 6: YOUR OWN DRUM

It's time. You're ready. Maybe you've been borrowing from friends, borrowing from strangers, playing them at the store or wherever you see them, but now the time has come for you to get your own drum! Here's some tips on how to choose a drum, what questions to ask yourself and what to look for in a drum.

These are some general things for you to consider when choosing a drum:

### ◆ Condition of the body

Check for cracks if the drum has a wood body. You'll often find cracks in the drums imported from Africa. The cracks are usually filled with glue and sawdust and rarely impact the sound. Cracks that extend to where the skin meets the wood, however, assure the drum a short life span. Basically, if the drum sounds good despite a disfigured body, then you're good to go.

### ◆ Condition of the head

The head of the drum should be completely intact so check for holes and splits. Very importantly, check for dryness. A really dried out head is untunable, as the pressure of tuning will cause the head to crack or split. Check for warps and dips and make sure the head is even.

### ◆ Sound

Your drum is an extension of yourself, so the choice you make is entirely personal. Do you like low earthy tones, or higher pitched sounds? Try out different types and sizes of drums. Try both natural skin heads and synthetic heads. Tap each drum and listen with your entire body. Listen for wholeness in the sound. There are small variations of sound within each type of drum so, if for instance, you're looking at djembes, it's best to try several of them. Sometimes it's helpful to ask someone to play the drum for you so you can really hear it, but you still need to hold the drum and play a little yourself. There will be one that sings to you.



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◆ Your needs

What you need to look for in your potential drum is compatibility.

Do you need a mobile drum? Will you be carrying it a lot, maybe taking it to the park or a friend's house?

Think about what your typical playing situation is going to be. Consider a small, lightweight drum, such as a doumbek, if you will be transporting the drum often or walking with it to the park. I have a set of congas that are restricted from foot travel due to my small frame, but a lightweight talking drum often accompanies me on sunny neighborhood walks.

### WHAT TYPES OF MUSIC ARE YOU ATTRACTED TO?

It really helps to listen to a lot of music that uses the type of drum you want to play. This helps you to get the feel for the rhythms and begin to really hear. Listen to a lot of West African music if you find the sound of djembe drumming inspiring. Doumbek players will get ideas and inspiration from listening to Middle Eastern music. Hand drums are being used in many types of music today so you are not limited to listening to traditional rhythms, but it is helpful to hear the instrument in its original cultural context and hey, you might discover something new or make a soul connection.

### WHAT FEELS GOOD TO YOU?

Is the playing position of the drum comfortable for you? Some drums are played between your legs, some on your lap, some strap onto your body, some can rest in a stand, you can play some sitting and others while standing. Find out what is comfortable for you.

### HANDMADE OR FACTORY MADE?

You have a choice to make here, since both natural hand made and factory made synthetic drums are available. The two types feel different so



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try them out and see what resonates with you. Some people prefer wood drums with natural skin heads for their superior sound quality. What I like about a natural drum is that its sound changes with fluctuations in humidity and temperature so I get to know it better because I have to tune it so often. Also, I feel like my drums are living, breathing entities because they're constructed from wood and animal skin and that gives them a certain energy. Some players prefer synthetic drums because they require little or no tuning (natural heads need frequent tuning) and they're generally lighterweight. Remo makes some synthetic drums that have a good quality sound. Another consideration is that they are not sensitive to the weather and, while I don't recommend playing in the shower, they are reported to be waterproof. Combined with their lightness and low maintenance that makes them very popular drums.

### WHAT KIND OF DRUM DO I GET?

Walking into a well-stocked drum store is thrilling and may sometimes over stimulate the brain's drum center. So many drums to choose from, but remember, you're looking for only one. The most commonly used drums, the ones we'll now discuss, are djembes, doumbeks, and congas.



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### Djembes



The djembe (pronounced gem-bay) is a wooden goblet shaped drum. Djembe traditions originate in Mali and Guinea, Africa, where they are used to guide a variety of events such as rites of passage into adulthood, marriage, planting and harvest. Each rhythm has a specific meaning and purpose. Djembe drumming in

Guinea is not like pop music, it's not for passive listening, in fact, recorded djembe music won't be found there. Fortunately (or unfortunately, according



to your viewpoint), the worldwide popularity of djembe drumming has expanded the drum's traditional context and recordings are now widely available.

You can find handmade African and non-African factory made djembes. African djembes are hand carved out of a single piece of wood. If you happen to be looking at African made djembes, inspect the body very carefully. Sometimes what you are looking at is actually a decorative piece that only looks like a drum. The shell will be much lighter and the overall construction might look less sturdy. I advise you to check for this if the drum is somewhere other than in a music store.

### **Doumbeks**



The doumbek is also a goblet shaped drum but smaller than a djembe. You'll hear the doumbek in Middle Eastern, Arabic and Turkish music. Doumbeks accompany belly dancing in their original cultural context. Arabic doumbeks are usually made from clay. Turkish doumbeks have metal bodies that are often ornately stamped and engraved. Both have goatskin heads but you can also find them with synthetic heads. A local music store carries a Turkish style doumbek that has a little tambourine attached underneath the head. The tambourine chimes along as the head is struck which is a nice accompaniment if you're playing alone.

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### **Congas**

Conga drums are barrel shaped wooden drums. They were brought to Cuba, where they are known as tumbadoras, from their West African homeland. They come in three sizes; the largest is the tumba which has a low tone, next is the mid-sized conga, and the smallest is the quinto, usually used



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for soloing because of its high pitch. Congas are used in sacred ritual music but can be heard in all types of Latino music and in just about any genre of music common in the US. If you consider buying some congas, you can choose from a wide variety of models

and prices. Again, both natural and synthetic are available. I would advise starting with a beginner model like the ones put out by CP (Cosmic Percussion). When you have outgrown them, you can always upgrade. Also, you don't have to buy two to start with if money is an obstacle, start with the middle-sized conga.

Understand that any drum you choose to play is an extension of yourself. Whether you play in a thunderdrum circle, organized groups, take classes, or enjoy your drum privately in your living room, the relationship between you and your drum is an intimate one. There must be compatibility, attraction and reflection for the relationship to bloom. Armed with this knowledge, go forth grasshopper, find your drum mate and the rhythm will come.

Hint: If money is an obstacle, start with the middle-sized conga.

Understand that any drum you choose to play is an extension of yourself. Whether you play in a thunderdrum circle, organized groups, take classes, or enjoy your drum privately in your living room, the relationship between you and your drum is an intimate one. There must be compatibility, attraction and reflection for the relationship to bloom. Armed with this knowledge, go forth grasshopper, find your drum mate and the rhythm will come.



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For two decades, Dr. Alice Cash has devoted her professional life to the promotion of music for healing. Dr. Cash combines her Masters in Social Work with her PhD in Musicology to educate people in the art and science of music's unique properties.

In 1996, Dr. Cash launched Healing Music Enterprises as a vehicle to offer her expertise to health care professionals, educators, students, organizations and people at large. Her services are in high demand across North America and more recently, at an international level.

Dr. Cash grounds her seminars, workshops, clinical and private practice work in well-established research and theory.

An accomplished musician herself, she is wonderfully skilled in both the demonstration and application of the most current musicology and music therapy concepts and principles. Her warm and dynamic nature helps make her workshops informative, timely and enjoyable for participants at large.

Healing Music Enterprises offers services and products for individuals, couples, families, groups, communities and organizations. Virtually everyone can benefit from the knowledge and experience that Dr. Cash offers. Music is a non-invasive tool that anyone can learn to use to help to energize, relax and heal themselves.

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