

SPiRIT & DESTiNY

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20 PAGES OF MIND, BODY & SPIRIT

FIRST PERSON

Going for a gong

Tuning in to the sounds of the universe can have startling spiritual results. Erica Longdon rings the changes

When it was suggested that my stressed-out psyche might be in need of a gong bath, I had visions of being immersed in soothing warm water perfumed with aromatherapy oils to soothe body and mind.

In truth, a gong bath doesn't involve water at all – but the end result should be the same. This ancient sound-healing technique, performed by gong master Mark Swan, will enable me to relax completely, as well as heal any mental or spiritual problems.

The therapy is based around the theory that each of the major planets (plus the sun and the moon) has its own individual sound that can be used for healing. There are 11 planet gongs, one for each of these celestial bodies, and when Mark sounds a gong for each planet, I'll be immersed in its attributes – for instance, Mercury's communication qualities, or Venus's balance and beauty.

Kneeling on a mat with my eyes shielded by a sleep mask, I join my fellow 'gongers' to begin a process that is apparently the equivalent of a lifetime of therapy – without the tears. This all makes me a little nervous.

Mark, who is also a reiki master and Kundalini yoga teacher, tries to put us at ease. 'The ancient Tibetans believed that if you were gonged non-stop for 10 days, you could be cured of anything. Nowadays, sound is becoming an ever more valuable tool in the treatment of many conditions.

'The pure penetrating sound waves of the healing gongs will

enable you to break free of old patterns. They will help you reconnect with lost or broken parts of yourself, heal and link with your higher self, cleanse and rebuild. It's also a wonderful way to stress-bust and relax.'

Mark stands in front of 11 gongs of various sizes, which hang from purpose-built steel frames. Some, like the moon gong, are relatively small – the size of a large tea tray – while others, such as the sun, earth and Pluto, are heavyweights at about 3ft across.

Mark will strike the gongs in turn, starting with Pluto, the outermost planet in our solar system, all the way through to the sun at the centre. Each gong has been tuned to the exact pitch of the planet it represents. These frequencies were formulated by Hans Cousto, the 20th-century Swiss scientist whose book *The Cosmic Octave* is the basis for sound healers all over the world.

'Each gong works on a different part of you,' Mark says. 'For example, the Neptune tones, in the key of G sharp, help access intuition, inspiration and artistic creativity, while Mars is in the key of D to help you accomplish earthly and spiritual goals.'

To start the session, we create a sacred space by smudging with sage smoke and shaking Native American rattles. Then Mark starts banging the gong for Pluto, which represents transformation through death. He speaks: 'It is cold. You are alone. Let yourself fall into the abyss. Pluto will break you down into compact bits, allowing you to experience death.' Blimey, I think. If I'd known this session started with my demise,



The Mars gong has a powerful masculine energy

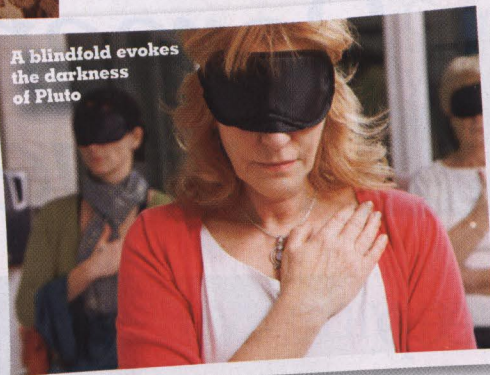


Sage smoke is used to create a sacred space



The tools of the trade

A blindfold evokes the darkness of Pluto



man's gong. It sounds like an ancient tribal war dance. To my surprise, I enjoy it. It brings up my drive and enthusiasm for life. I feel I can go out and conquer.

Attuned to C sharp, the earth gong is pure joy. As its sound rings out, I feel a connection to the beauty of our nurturing home planet, tempered by compassion and shame for the way we treat her. I want to send out love and healing.

Venus comes next, the ruler of my own sun sign, Libra. This gong holds the divine feminine within its light tones. I feel alive, vibrant and full of passion and harmony. And as Mercury is struck, it feels as though the chakra on top of my head is wide open and I've been plugged into a celestial download of cosmic information. Wow!

This is the perfect preparation for arriving at our solar centre, the mighty sun gong. The sun stands for the life-giving, creative power within us all, and its gong's sound helps us realise how powerful we are. I feel the sun's vibrations pouring right through me.

From rebirth at Pluto, through all the planet transformations, I feel the vibration of the gongs has helped me connect to my true self and open up to spiritual guidance.

I finish the day at peace – clear-headed and stunned into stillness. I have run the gamut of emotions, and I feel deeply grateful for it. Mark tells us that the effects will continue for a few days, as our physical and etheric bodies get used to being clear of negative emotions like fear, anger or blame.

Over the following week, issues I've been mulling over start to seem less scary, and I find it easier to focus on decisions. Later, I return for a few full moon gong meditations with Mark – every one is different, depending on the position of the planets at the time. Gonging may be an ancient art, but it's relevant to the way we live today, helping us to be flexible yet strong in the face of change. **SPIRIT&DESTINY**

• Mark Swan runs intensive one-day gong sessions and gong baths at Mardon Healing Centre in Kent. Email appointments@gong-healing.com to book, or visit www.gong-healing.com for more information about his work.

• Mark has released two gonging CDs, *Aquarian Transition* and *Sacred Solar Sounds*, £12 each. Visit www.gong-healing.com/shop

I might not have shown up.

As the Pluto gong reverberates throughout the room, I start to feel like an abandoned soul. Tears well up behind my mask and I think the only thing to do is surrender. But when I reach the lowest point, I suddenly feel better, like I'm reborn into the light. The gong has taken me down but also lifted me back up. I have woken up as a younger, freer version of myself.

Between each of the planetary meditations, Mark sounds the soothing tones of the moon gong to consolidate our inner work and ground our energy. Removing my eye mask, I glance round the room and see that everyone looks shocked. Clearly, I'm not the only one surprised by the depth and intensity of this first experience.

Now, as we lie on yoga mats covered by blankets, Mark moves further through the solar system, striking the gongs for another two difficult planets, Neptune and Uranus. Neptune brings up doubts and cracks in our self-belief, while Uranus teaches us to be free from limitations and the need for approval. The effects I feel from these gongs are challenging, but not as tough as Pluto.

Next comes Saturn. This planet is about inner knowledge and healthy boundaries. I have never been good at saying no to people or drawing a line in the sand, but I find myself sitting up on my mat and feeling empowered to deal with my weaknesses, which is a relief after the revelations of the outer planets. I'm amazed how each gong evokes a completely different reaction.

By lunchtime, we've arrived at Jupiter, the harbinger of jollity, thank goodness. We're over the worst, and when we share lunch, it is a jovial affair. But there are still more planets to come.

Mark is in his element for Mars. He's an Aries, the sign that's ruled by this planet, and this is the



Feeling newly empowered

Lying down to listen to the gongs



Mark explains how each gong has its own resonance