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Peter Hess

SINGING BOWLS

My practical companion

Imprint

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Author: Peter Hess

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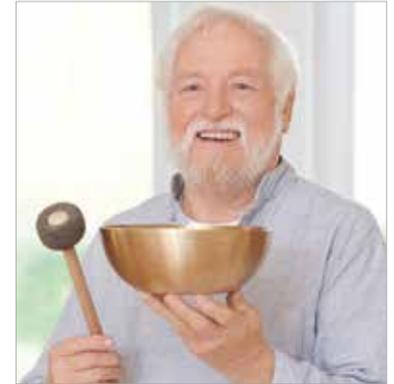
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Foreword

Your own experience is the key to the world of sounds. With this book I would like to invite you to find your own personal approach to the singing bowls and to get acquainted with sound exercises that can enrich your everyday life and improve your health.

In appearance alone, a singing bowl in all its golden splendor is enough to attract our attention. Its harmonious, enchanting sounds can be moving and fill us with a unique, familiar feeling. I got to know these wonderful instruments during my travels through Nepal and India in 1984 and developed the sound massage technique during the years that followed. My own experiences as well as those of all the seminar participants I was able to pass my knowledge on to still convince and fascinate me today, 35 years after my first encounter with the bronze bowls.

In this book, you will learn how to playfully explore the singing bowls with all your senses and how to play them for specific sound exercises. Step by step, you will embark on a journey into the fascinating world of sounds and learn a great deal about the background and effects of these

instruments. With the following sound exercises, you will experience firsthand just how alluring these sounds can be to your body, your mind, and your soul.

In the chapter "The small singing bowl ABC", I have put together some facts worth knowing about the singing bowls. In the last chapter, you will find further information about workshops and seminars at the Peter Hess® Institut (PHI)/Peter Hess® Academies and the quality singing bowls by Peter Hess, especially what we call "Peter Hess® Therapy Singing Bowl".

It is my hope that, with the help of this book, you will start off on your own personal sound journey and that the singing bowls will become a valuable, practical companion to you and enrich your life!

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Hess". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Peter" and "Hess" being larger and more prominent.

Peter Hess



Your first encounters and experiments

Your first encounters and experiments

Singing bowls appeal to our senses in many ways: their golden shine, their smooth, cool surface, their metallic smell, the harmonious sounds and their gentle vibration open up a plethora of sensations. In this chapter, I would like to invite you to playfully explore and experiment with these sensations. Of course, you can always go beyond the suggestions given here – let your imagination run wild and have fun experimenting!

Before you start...

The instructions give you the opportunity to experience the effects of a singing bowl for the first time. Please take your time! If you'd like, invite a friend to join you. By having a partner, you can share your experiences directly, which I have found to be particularly rewarding.

You can follow along with the instructions we have provided for the sound exercises with just about any singing bowl that you have available. Even if you're experimenting and exploring with just an average singing bowl, you will be able to feel the effects of these instruments to the fullest extent and make many observations.

Of course, how the targeted sound exercises presented later on in this book affect you largely depends on the quality of the singing bowl. Maybe you just found out about singing bowls or you already have one at home. For the following exercises, your singing bowl should fulfill two criteria:

- The sound should be harmonious and calm so you can fully relax.
- We recommend trying out playing the bowl on your palm first. The sound exercises on the rest of the body are based on the vibrational ability determined by this test, so you should make sure you can feel the vibrations clearly.

As for the size of the bowl, I recommend a "universal bowl" (see page 138) with a diameter of about 21–22 cm, a bowl height of about 8 cm and a weight between 900–1000 grams ideal. This is one of the bowls best suited for the sound exercises because it has a particularly wide frequency spectrum in combination with various mallets, so it is very effective on the entire body. I recommend the universal bowl in the "Peter Hess® Therapy Quality" or "HIMALAYA Quality", as the quality of these categories (see page 134) ensures that it will produce very harmonious and long-lasting vibrations.

A word of advice:

- Whether you do the exercises sitting, standing or lying down, always make sure you are in a comfortable position.
- Make sure that you are undisturbed while experimenting and practicing.
- Less is more – an important principle to remember before starting. Often in the beginning, people tend to play the singing bowl with too much force and too often. I would suggest that you start delicately and cautiously.
- Pay close attention to what you feel during the experimentation and the exercises, what is going on in your body, and also what thoughts and feelings you notice. Try to observe without judging whatever you may feel.
- Every sound experience is unique: the same exercise can be experienced very differently by different people or in different situations. There is no right or wrong.
- Take enough time for yourself after the sound exercise. Observe yourself over the next few days, because sometimes the effects of the sounds are delayed or may manifest itself in the form of dreams or a particularly good night's sleep.

When experimenting, the sky is the limit! However, you should not use hard or pointed materials that could damage the bowl, and please make sure that the bowl never falls on the ground, as the bowl could become damaged or even break. It is important to know that good singing bowls are made of very high quality bronze, a hard and brittle material that breaks easily. The casted ASSAM and ZEN singing bowls (see page 137) are particularly susceptible to breaking.

Curiously exploring the singing bowl through touch with closed eyes



Getting to know the singing bowl

First physical encounter with the singing bowl

First, explore the singing bowl playfully with your hands. Make use of all of your senses as you embark on this exciting journey of discovery!

Exercise

- *Make yourself comfortable and hold your singing bowl with both hands.*
- *You may want to close your eyes and start exploring with your hands first. Feel the singing bowl in your hands.*
- *How does the bowl feel resting in your hands, what shape does it have, and how heavy is it?*
- *Does the edge of the bowl have the same thickness all the way around?*
- *Is the surface completely smooth or is there any unevenness?*
- *Does the material have a unique smell?*
- *How do your observations change during the exercise and the longer you explore the bowl with your hands?*
- *Be fully engaged in your exploration and carefully observe what you feel.*

Now that you have started to experiment with the singing bowl, you have already received a wealth of information about the shape, size, weight, thickness, surface texture, and the harmonic interplay of all these different components. These factors along with the metal alloy used to make the bowl (see page 100) all determine the sound pattern of a singing bowl. After having your first experience, I would recommend that you try out the next exercise.



Playing with the heel of your hand, fingertips, and fingernails.

One singing bowl – infinite sounds

In the next step, you can try playing the singing bowl. At first, you should experiment without a mallet and explore the sound variety of your bowl with just your hands.

Exercise

- *Place the singing bowl on a pillow or on a flat palm and gently tap it with the tip of your thumb.*
- *What sound does it make when you touch the top edge? What sound does it make when you touch the bottom?*
- *Is there a difference when you play the bowl from the outside versus the inside?*
- *What does it sound like when you touch the bowl gently or when you play it a little harder?*
- *What happens when you tap the singing bowl with a fingertip or your knuckles instead of the heel of your hand?*
- *What sound do you hear when you flick it with your fingernail or gently scratch the surface?*
- *What happens when you hold the singing bowl differently?*
- *Try everything that comes to mind and immerse yourself fully in the exercise.*

Advanced exercise

- *Now add to the exercise by experimenting with different playing aids. Explore the bowl using different sized mallets, mallets of varying levels of hardness, a rubber mallet, or a wooden clapper.*
- *You can also use other things such as a fir branch, table tennis balls or plastic pencils to play the bowl.*
- *See how the different sounds affect you and find out which sounds you like and which ones you don't like.*

You may have noticed in this exercise that a single singing bowl can produce a variety of sounds. The sounds can be deeper, higher, quieter, and louder all depending on how, where, and at what point you strike the singing bowl.

Playing the singing bowl with intent

In the following chapter, I would like to show you how to best position the singing bowl and how to play it with the intent of producing sounds as gentle and harmonious as are required for the targeted sound exercises (p. 61 ff).

Positioning the singing bowl

Positioning the singing bowl correctly will ensure that sound and vibrations spread without interruption. Regardless of whether the singing bowl is played on a surface, on your hand, or on another part of the body, you should always make sure that the bowl vibrates freely and that the sound can form unhindered. And, of course, the singing bowl should be placed on a secure spot so that it cannot accidentally slip or tip over.

Positioning on a base

I encourage you to try this with different surfaces. Make sure the surface you choose is not too soft. Do not use things like down pillows, for example, as the singing bowl would sink into the surface and the sound would be dampened or "swallowed". However, the surface should not be too hard (for example, a stone floor), as this will cause the bowl to "jump" and clink from the vibrations.

I recommend the following surfaces:

- Specially made singing bowl cushions
- Rubber rings (you can get these at the hardware store)
- Rubber pads/mats with circular cutouts
- Felt pads
- Cushions filled with polystyrene beads (bean bag filling)

Over the years, we have developed various surfaces to use in our sound work. These include singing bowl cushions, which consist of many handmade felt balls that are stitched together in elaborate handiwork, forming a circle. These "felt mats" are made in a fair trade women's project in Nepal and have the advantage of providing a point like surface for the bowl to rest on. This way, the singing bowls do not sink and sound is able to form properly.



Positioning on the hand

In some of the later sound exercises, you will be instructed to place the singing bowl on your hand. You can hold the singing bowl either with a flat palm or on your fingertips. Sometimes practitioners will position the bowl on the top of their fist, with the index finger and thumb forming a ring. However, I do not recommend this because the singing bowl can easily fall off.



For the sound to be able to form properly, your fingers cannot be curled up.

Positioning the singing bowl on a flat palm also gives the hand reflex points a soothing massage (see sound exercise p. 64). If you want to strike the singing bowl a bit harder, hold the palm of your hand at a slight angle and secure the bowl with your thumb so that it cannot fall off. Make sure, however, that your thumb touches only the lower edge of the bowl so that it does not hinder the sound.

When positioning small singing bowls which are often used for meditation, such as ZEN or ASSAM singing bowls (see page 137), the palm of the hand is less suitable because the hand is too large of a surface and dampens the sound. For these bowls, I recommend placing the bowl on your fingertips. But even larger singing bowls can easily produce sounds in this position (see sound exercise p. 72). To ensure that the vibration can spread unhindered, it is important that the fingertips only touch the bottom of the bowl. The further you move your fingers toward the top, the more the sound waves are slowed down.



Using your fingertips to hold very small bowls will produce the best sound results.

Positioning on the body

In some sound exercises, the singing bowl is placed directly on the body, such as on the abdomen or the back. Always make sure that the singing bowl is secure and that it is being played the right way to produce beneficial sounds and vibrations!

Positioning aids

It may be helpful to use positioning aids to create an ideal surface. Things you're your everyday pillows and blankets can be used as aids. Nursing pillows, cushions, or pillows filled with polystyrene beads are also very suitable. In the following picture, you can see a cotton coaster being used as a positioning aid. This coaster is available in different sizes. In addition to these items, a felt pad or what is known as a "singing bowl cone" also help keep the bowl steady and secure. These handmade cone-shaped cushions are very light so they are barely noticeable. There are also cushions and rolls filled with polypropylene



Positioning aids support optimal positioning of the singing bowl.



**Valuable sound exercises to use in
everyday life**

Valuable sound exercises to use in everyday life

*The sound of a singing bowl
touches our innermost being.
It allows your soul to feel free.
It releases tension, amplifies self-healing abilities
and encourages creative energy.*

Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to introduce you to concrete sound exercises that you can use in your everyday life. The individual exercises usually only take a few minutes and can easily be integrated into your normal routine. Whether at home or the office, singing bowls allow us to take small "breaks" which can help us find our balance. The more you enjoy the sounds, the faster you will begin to relax and feel well balanced. This allows you to prevent stress directly and improve your health.

When practicing, you will probably learn that you experience the same exercise differently on different days. Many factors will influence how you feel, from the quality of your sleep to what your schedule is for the day or upcoming events. This illustrates the uniqueness and individuality of each sound experience – something that is very important, especially if you want to use sound techniques on other people!

The many positive effects of implementing daily sound exercises have been confirmed by studies on "sound breaks" by Prof. Hella Erler and Prof. Luis Erler. The researchers define the term "sound break" as a small exercise lasting 2-5 minutes that is carried out regularly every day. During their first study, the researchers were particularly interested in the

effect of the sounds on children and adolescents. A subsequent study focused on the health of kindergarten teachers. In a later stage, the couple from Regensburg recorded how average adults with no previous experience with the sounds were affected versus how "sound professionals" were affected. All of the tests, which each took place over a period of four weeks, reached a similar conclusion: taking regular sound breaks has positive effects on relaxation, concentration, endurance, motivation, and creativity. Many people are inspired to act upon the ideas that arise from this creative pause!

Before you begin, I would like to mention that these exercises should be treated simply as guidelines. If you experience the sound exercises differently and the sound vibrations feel differently to you than described here, then that is perfectly fine. Do not let that irritate you. Trust your own intuition and do what you feel is good for you!

I would like to encourage you to record your experiences in a "sound diary" (a period of four weeks has proven to be ideal). It has been shown that you are often only aware of any changes taking place when you keep a daily record of the experiences you have had. This can be especially exciting in retrospect as you can see your progress over a longer period of time.

In order to make it as easy as possible for you to take daily notes on your experiences and observations, I have created a "sound diary" template for you, modeled after the methods used in Prof. Erler's research (p. 56).

A sound diary can be downloaded free of charge from the website of the European Association for Sound Massage Therapy e.V.

So, start right away, take advantage of the soothing effects of the sounds, and take the first step of your own personal journey with sound!

My sound diary

Write down the sound exercise that you have done and everything you have noticed while doing so. Also see if you feel any changes after completing an exercise and in the days that follow, as the effect is sometimes delayed.

How do I feel today

How do I feel today on a scale of 1-10 (10 meaning "I feel very good" and 1 meaning "I am not feeling well")?

I do not feel good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	I feel very good
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	------------------

I did the following sound exercises today (also note the time of day):

1. sound exercise: _____
2. sound exercise: _____
3. sound exercise: _____

During the sound exercises, I perceived the following (physical sensations, thoughts, feelings, ...):

Further observations (e.g. I sleep better, I feel more energetic,...) or feedback from my environment (family, friends, colleagues,...):

Preparation for the sound exercises

My feel-good space

The sound exercises can be performed anytime and anywhere. Of course, it would be ideal for you to choose a place at home (or at work) where you are most comfortable and will be undisturbed. Perhaps you are also able to practice the sound exercises at your workplace; I often have students tell me that they keep a singing bowl on their desk. In stressful situations or during short breaks, they treat themselves to a small sound break. Just one or two minutes is enough to center yourself, collect your thoughts, and be able to carry out the rest of your tasks for the day feeling strengthened and refreshed.

To encourage daily practice, it can be very helpful to put your singing bowl in a fixed spot that you see and pass by frequently. By doing this, you can play it for a brief moment and benefit from the relaxing and harmonizing power of the sounds whenever you want.



Tips for implementation

Think of sound exercises as your own personal break from everyday life. In order to help you receive the full benefit of their effects, we recommend designing a framework for your practice.

- Choose a location that is beautiful to you for your "sound break".
- Make sure that unnecessary interruptions are kept to a minimum, i.e. turn off your phone or hang a sign on the door that says "Do not disturb".
- If there are any unexpected noises or disturbances during the exercise, just let them happen, as the sound helps you deal with these interruptions with a relaxed mindset. If necessary, stop the exercise and remember that you can continue your sound meditation at a later time.
- Depending on the exercise, you can either sit or lie down. Always choose a position that is most comfortable for you, as this is necessary to enable your body to fully relax.
- If you like the feel of a warm singing bowl, you can put it on a hot water bottle or heating pad before doing any exercise.
- If necessary, make sure to have positioning aids ready to safely position the singing bowl.
- Because seeing what is happening around you can often distract you from listening, it is helpful to close your eyes during most of the exercises. With closed eyes, you are able to focus your attention on yourself and the sounds.
- Feeling mild pain can be a good sign. Sometimes the sensation of tension being released as you relax can be uncomfortable. Think of it like someone who is out of shape going for a long run. Their muscles become sore more quickly due to lack of exercise even though getting out and being active is ultimately benefiting them. This same principle applies during a sound session. So if you do encounter pain, remove the bowl from your body. It usually fades away quickly and the area feels much more relaxed afterwards.

- Give yourself enough time to observe how you feel both mentally and physically after each exercise, as a period of silence following a sound session is an integral part of any exercise.
- In your personal "sound diary", take notes on your perceptions, thoughts, sensations, etc., shortly after the exercise or in the evening.
- After a sound exercise, drink a glass of water. This supports the "cleansing" effect of the sounds and gets the circulation going, so you will feel refreshed when you return to the present.



Tips for partner exercises

You can always turn the sound exercises we have shown here into partner exercises. One person plays the singing bowl, while the other acts as the receiver. The nice thing about practicing with a partner is that you can talk about the experiences you had during the exercise afterwards. There are a few things you should consider while practicing together to make the sound exercises an enriching experience:

- When playing a singing bowl for another person, be especially careful and gentle (less is more!).
- It may be helpful if the sound "giver" touches the part of the body they are going to place the singing bowl on with their hand, so that the "receiver" is not startled when you set it down.
- In a state of relaxation, your body temperature usually drops. With that in mind, it might be good for the "receiver" to have a light blanket they can use to stay warm with. Don't worry, sound vibrations spread through blankets and clothing too.
- It is important to discuss beforehand that you should alert your partner if something feels uncomfortable. That way no one ends up feeling like they have to grin and bear it when they are experiencing unpleasant feelings.
- If you are pregnant, please do not perform any sound exercises directly on the body. This should be reserved for experienced sound massage practitioners and professionals.
- If you are sick or have chronic physical ailments (serious back problems, for example), do not perform any sound exercises on the body. Once again, please only allow a professional to conduct the exercise for these individuals.



Targeted sound exercises

Listening and Observing

With this sound exercise we invite you to settle in with the sounds and listen to yourself for a while. Through hearing, we are able to listen, but hearing the silence is much more than that; it is observing sounds in every part of the body. Engage yourself in the sounds, body sensations, thoughts, and feelings that arise. Listening to the sounds directs your attention inward and leads to a soothing silence – whatever is happening outside of yourself recedes into the background.

Practical tip

This exercise has shown to be especially beneficial during the work day. It's best to put the singing bowl on your desk where you can see it and have it ready to use at any time. Whenever your mind is weighed down by too much work or stress, or you have a challenging situation coming up, take a minute to enjoy the sounds. You will be amazed by how refreshed you can feel in just a short time.

Exercise

- Make yourself comfortable. Put the singing bowl right in front of you on a pillow or some other soft surface.
- Now gently play the bowl and pay attention to what it sounds like.
- You can close your eyes to immerse yourself in the sounds.
- Do you hear the different nuances of each sound? All the different high and low tones combined create a wonderful overtone-rich sound pattern.
- Listen to the sound with your whole body. All of your attention should be focused on the sound. You become one with it, so to speak. You may notice how your body is affected by the vibrations and how you start to feel them more noticeably.

- After a while, play the bowl again.
- Listening to the rise and fall of the sounds makes your breath calmer, deeper, and more relaxed.
- Take a few mindful, deep breaths if you'd like.
- The silence following each sound creates a comforting stillness inside yourself.
- Take the time to enjoy the sounds as long as you want.
- Feel their relaxing, harmonizing effect.
- Now set the bowl and mallet aside, close your eyes, and search for sensations in your body.
- You might still feel the sounds. Even though they have already faded away, they continue to resonate within you.
- Be completely focused on yourself – how you feel, what is going on inside you, how you perceive your body. Take your time and make space for the here and now without attaching thoughts to it – just observe.
- Finally, take a few more deep breaths, have a good stretch, and return to everyday life at your own pace.

Conscientious hearing leads to listening, and listening leads to sharpened observational skills.



From practice:

In counseling and therapeutic work, sounds provide a wonderful opportunity to establish non-verbal contact and facilitate developing a relationship. Therapist Bärbel Kirst appreciates this in her therapeutic work (see "Sound Massages in Music Therapy at Psychosomatic Specialty Clinic Medical Park Chiemseeblick, journal Klang-Massage-Therapie 11/2016).

Many people in my seminars report after this little exercise that the sounds elicited a unique, familiar feeling from them. They are amazed by how quickly they are put into a deep state of soothing relaxation with the help of sounds. In India, knowledge of the harmonizing effect of sounds has been commonplace for millennia. In the Upanishads, a collection of philosophical texts of Hinduism and part of the Veda, it is described how the entire universe emerged from the eternal sound.

The German music journalist Joachim Ernst Berendt talks about this in the well-known radio show "Nada Brahma – the world is sound". He has inspired enthusiasm in thousands of listeners, as well as readers of his books, for the world of the audible and the magnetic, electrostatic, and other physical vibrations. According to this idea, the world and all of humanity originally emerged from sound; consequently, sounds remind us of our origin, of the "cosmic" sound from which we came. This is the place where we first experienced what it was like to feel safe and secure and where our basic sense of trust was created – regardless of later, external conditions.

The sounds embody these experiences and the feeling of harmony. They help us to re-connect and come into resonance with this original order, and they awaken feelings of well-being and trust. There are various therapeutic approaches used to achieve this state, but we can benefit from the positive effects of sounds every day with the help of singing bowls!

Contact addresses in Germany

Peter Hess® Institut (PHI)

Training and further education in Peter Hess® Sound Massage and the Peter Hess® Sound Methods

Ortheide 29 · D-27305 Bruchhausen-Vilsen

Telephone: +49 (0) 42 52 - 93 89 114 · E-mail: info@peter-hess-institut.de

www.peter-hess-institut.de



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www.verlag-peter-hess.de



European Association for Sound Massage Therapy e.V.

Representatives for Peter Hess® Sound Training Methods professionals

Ortheide 29 · D-27305 Bruchhausen-Vilsen

Telephone: +49 (0) 42 52 - 93 89 140 · E-mail: info@fachverband-klang.de

www.fachverband-klang.de



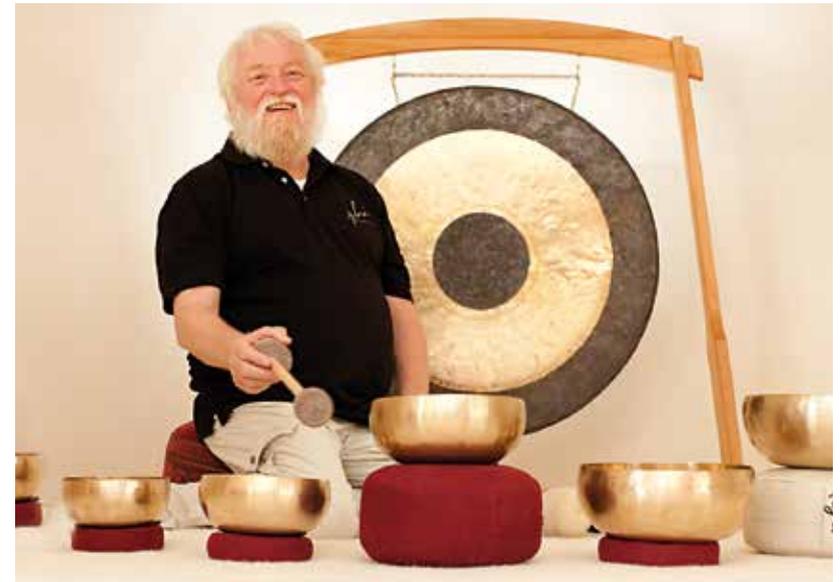
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Uenzer Dorfstrasse 71 · D-27305 Bruchhausen-Vilsen

Telephone: +49 (0) 42 52 - 24 11 · E-mail: info@hess-klangkonzepte.de

www.hess-klangkonzepte.de · www.hess-soundconcepts.com

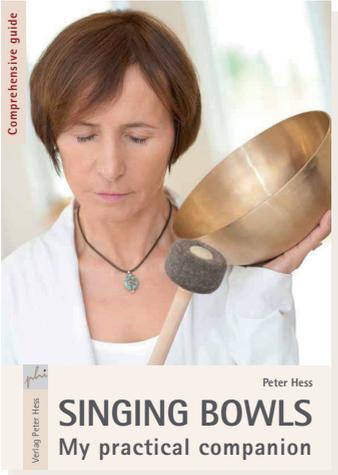


Peter Hess

is considered a pioneer in working with singing bowls. In 1984, the Dr.-Ing. for Physical Technology and Vocational School Teacher for Physics and Politics developed the eponymous Peter Hess® Sound Massage, a holistic relaxation method that can contribute to improved health. Today, the sound massage is a synthesis of numerous Peter Hess® Sound Methods, which represent a specialized use of singing bowls and sound massage in the areas of wellness, prevention, pedagogy, counseling, coaching, therapy, and healing.

Peter Hess is head of the Peter Hess® Institute (PHI) in Germany, which also hosts Peter Hess® Academies in more than 20 countries. He is the 1st Chairman of the European Association for Sound Therapy e.V. and author of numerous books. He works worldwide as a speaker and seminar leader.

Unsaleable reading sample



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My singing bowl – a valuable companion to everyday life

Just two to five minutes of practice a day is all you need to relax your body, mind and soul with sounds and improve your own health regularly. Peter Hess, the pioneer in working with singing bowls, has compiled the most popular sound exercises for you in this book. Step by step, he accompanies you into the fascinating world of sounds and gives you insight into his extensive knowledge. With the detailed descriptions, practical advice, and information that this book holds in store for you, you too can make singing bowls a valuable and practical companion to your everyday life!