

## Music Therapy

Music is the universal language of humanity, the ubiquitous source of entertainment, the agency that transforms our moods, the catapult that raises us to higher emotions and experiences, the medium that influences all levels of human existence – physical, psychological and spiritual. Leo Tolstoy succinctly stated, “Music is the shorthand of emotion.”

Music entertains us, but can it heal us? In the West, the idea of music as a healing influence on health and behavior is at least as old as the writings of the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato. Medical interest in music therapy was revived after the two World Wars when thousands of war veterans suffering both physical and emotional trauma found remarkable relief through the hospital performances of community musicians. Subsequently, scientific research into music therapy has been increasing and its benefits have been documented by organizations like the American Musical Therapy Association in journals like the *Journal of Music Therapy* and *Music Therapy Perspective*. Presently, music therapy is known to benefit those with mental health needs; developmental and learning disabilities; Alzheimer's disease and other aging related conditions; substance abuse problems; brain injuries; physical disabilities and labor-related pains.

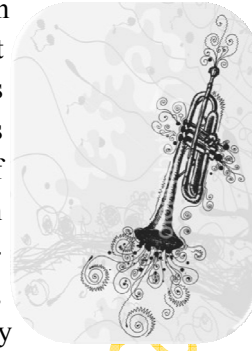
In India, music has been an integral part of Vedic culture since time immemorial. The ‘Samveda’ is full of melodious music. Music therapy is mentioned in Ayurveda as one of the ways to restore the balance of *vata* (air), *pitta* (bile) and *kapha* (mucus), whose imbalance is considered the root cause of all diseases. Great composers of Indian classical music administered music therapy especially for the mind through *ragas* and mantras. The



concept of *raga*, which is unique to Indian music, blends musical notes with specific time periods, to achieve intensification or pacification of emotions. *Ragas*, when sung properly, have therapeutic value. Similarly, mantras like the Gayatri have been demonstrated to cure ailments otherwise considered chronic or terminal.

The Vedic scriptures harness music therapy for a


spiritual purpose far loftier than physical rejuvenation or mental pacification. Indeed, the Vedas assert that humans who preoccupy themselves with their bodies and minds miss out on their spiritual potentials. As spiritual beings, we are the eternal beloved children of God, the supreme spiritual being and are entitled to an eternal, enlightened and ecstatic existence (sat-cit-anand). However, being afflicted by spiritual amnesia, we are frantically searching for that fullness of life by



manipulating matter in newer and newer ways, but to no avail. The modern world, especially the West, is witnessing the alarming consequences of this unfortunate imbalance of material and spiritual values. Individually there is an increase in dissatisfaction, stress, depression, addiction and suicide and globally there is an increase in unrest, criminality, violence and terrorism. Hence spiritual amnesia is the origin of all our mental, physical and social disorders and spiritual music therapy addresses this root malaise.

Renowned composer Van Beethoven puts it well, "Music is the mediator between the spiritual and sensual life." Divine music – music used to glorify the divine – is simultaneously appealing to the senses and awakening to the spirit. No wonder then that all religious traditions have sacred sound and music as an integral part of their hymns, prayers, songs and chants - all ultimately meant to cure the soul.

In the Vedic tradition, music is central to the recommended spiritual therapy of harinaam sankirtana, congregational chanting of holy names. The names of God, being divine power encased in sound, comprise the most powerful mantras. Musical singing of mantras like the Hare Krishna maha mantra is the easiest and best means to spiritually uplift both the singer and the listener. Spiritual music therapy, being holistic, offers mental and physical benefits too. Our minds experience the deepest peace and joy through divine music. And our bodies become cleansed of all undesirable, unhealthy urges like smoking, alcoholism and drug addiction. Eminent scholar Professor Stillson Judah, Professor, Graduate Theological Union Library, Berkeley University, noted the

extraordinary potency of spiritual music in “turning drug-addicted hippies into devotees of Krishna (God) and servants of mankind.” 

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