

Finding Voice In Aotearoa

Whether pleasant or unpleasant, conscious or unconscious, sound is for most of us, simply a fact of life, or at best, a fascinating natural phenomenon. First sensed in the womb, its omnipresence in our lives is accepted and we tend not to give it a second thought. However, two remarkable teachers working in New Zealand in the fields of healing and empowerment, testify that in its very essence, sound, has the power to heal, empower and transform our lives. Indeed, it is said that the sacred significance of sound was understood by ancient cultures who lived in harmony with nature. Gradually, this wisdom is coming to light as we reinterpret ancient traditions and unravel the symbology encoded in oral traditions, mythologies and languages of indigenous cultures.

I met with voice / sound healer Karina Schelde and Maori researcher, writer and New Zealand peace ambassador Makuini Ruth Tai, to discuss the use of sound as a healing, transformative power and to identify parallels within Maori culture and wisdom traditions. Originally from Denmark, Karina has a professional background in the healing arts that spans some 20 years, through which she has evolved her own unique approach to the use of voice and sound as a healing modality. Ruth is one of New Zealand's foremost proponents of the wisdom inherent in Maori culture. Her pioneering work is making accessible to the world, hidden knowledge and wisdom teachings embodied within old time Maori traditions and within the Maori language itself.

In terms of the direct application of sound in healing and empowerment, Karina utilises and teaches the practice of sounding, also known as toning. In practical terms, sounding is a spontaneous, non linear vocal expression of sound that bypasses the conditioned linear aspects of language, like words, rhythm, melody and pitch. Karina explains that, "with my sound-work, I work very intensely with people on a psychological level. Sound has this ability to penetrate, permeate and release blockages. If we contact a place deep inside ourselves, we can awake a remembrance that can reveal insights into our life's purpose. Sound is so direct, it's a step by step process for me to get people to work at a cellular energy level, to bring them into a new light".

The idea of remembrance finds resonance with many indigenous cultural perspectives. In many respects accessing one's true nature is akin to being in tune with nature. In her work with Maori language Ruth explains, "there's been a coding of nature and nature sounds and cosmic sounds into our language and into the manner in which those sounds have been combined. This has been very carefully designed around a language of unity and higher vibration. We are actually working to bring back into consciousness, an awareness of language at this level and an understanding, that as a people, as a nation and as a global population called humanity, we are absolutely requiring to transition into the higher ground."

Karina suggests that one of the difficulties in the western world today is that many people are emotionally restricted or boxed in, afraid of opening up to their natural, innate spontaneity and that this suppression is less prevalent in indigenous cultures. Karina explains, "I'm teaching people how to sing, how to sound, how to express themselves, how to be free, like what I see in the Maori culture. There's an

aliveness, a naturalness to expression, to singing and that's something I retrain people to access."

One of the specific voice techniques that Karina utilises, is the deliberate sounding of off-key, discordant tones. Karina says that the sounding of sustained discordant tones really activates the emotional body penetrating beyond the masks we wear. In working with one's voice there is a natural tendency to want to produce harmonious notes. Indeed people who believe they can't sing are often very embarrassed by this and refrain from further attempts to express themselves vocally. This limits their self expression and contributes to further boxing in of emotions.

Ruth concurs that powerful emotional releases can be experienced through discordant sounding and points out that this serves a distinct purpose in traditional Maori culture. Ruth explains, "We grew up with the off key sound in our Tangi. When we have a funeral, the sounding of discordant tones is a natural expression of grief." Whilst the sounding of off-key notes may not be deliberate in a conscious sense, it serves a distinctly beneficial purpose. Discordant cries of grief have the effect of stirring the emotions of those that hear them, evoking similar emotional responses and releases. Encouraging this shared purging of distressful emotional energy makes way for the necessary healing process that follows. Ruth comments, "It is strange for us to go to a non Maori funeral because everybody is clammed up. Before I first experienced this, I didn't know that you could cry without making a sound."

In this day and age science has proven that matter is merely energy condensed to a slow vibration. If we scroll back to the beginning we find subtle confirmation, "God said, Let there be light.", suggesting that the phenomenon of light was spoken into being through the agency of sound. Ruth confirms, "Our very first genealogy or Whakapapa are about the emergence of sound and from sound came the form. Without sound, no form will happen. In our creation story it is said the world was sung into being. The seed sits within the Wai, Wai is song, Wai is water, Wai is spirit, waiting to become manifest into whatever form, it is the sound that calls the light, the sound that awakens the seed."

It is clear through my discussion with Karina and Ruth that volumes could be written on the subject of sound in this context. Certainly we can be sure that Karina and Ruth will continue to help many New Zealanders heal themselves and access new levels of empowerment. Should you wish to find out more about Karina Schelde and Makuini Ruth Tai and their work please visit www.soundandvoice.com and www.hakaforlife.com.