



VOCAL FREEDOM

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A small Invitation before you begin

Before reading further, I would like to invite you to pause for a moment.

Take a slow breath.

And ask yourself a simple question.

What is my relationship with my voice?

For many people the answer appears quickly.

Perhaps you were told at some point that you could not sing.

Perhaps you learned to stay quiet in a room full of louder voices.

Perhaps you simply decided that your voice was not good enough to be heard.

These experiences are incredibly common. So common, in fact, that many people grow up believing the voice is something only a few gifted people are allowed to use freely.

But the truth is much simpler.

The voice is not a talent.
It is a natural function of being alive.

Every human being is born with the ability to make sound. Just like breathing, the voice is something the body naturally knows how to do.

The purpose of this book is not to turn you into a professional singer.

It is something much simpler.

It is an invitation to rediscover the voice that was never meant to be silent.

As you read, you may notice memories appearing.

Moments from childhood.

Experiences where the voice closed or became cautious.

You may also notice moments of curiosity returning.

Moments where sound feels playful again.

Move through the book slowly.

Try the practices.

Listen to your body.

And most importantly, allow your voice to surprise you.

Introduction

The Voice We Were Told to Silence

Most people believe something about their voice that is simply not true.

Somewhere along the way, often very early in life, a quiet conclusion forms inside us: *I cannot sing.*

Or perhaps: *My voice isn't good.*

Sometimes it appears as something softer but equally powerful: *I'm just not musical.*

These statements feel factual. They feel like observations about our natural ability. But more often than not, they are conclusions drawn in a moment when the body felt exposed, embarrassed, or judged.

A teacher asked us to sing in front of the class.

Someone laughed.

A parent winced.

A comment was made in passing.

A comparison was drawn.

The moment passed quickly, but the body remembered.

From that point on, something subtle begins to happen. When the possibility of singing appears — in a room full of people, at a celebration, in a workshop, sometimes even alone — the body responds before the mind has time to think. The breath shortens. The throat tightens. Heat rises in the face. Sound hesitates or disappears entirely.

It feels as though the voice itself is the problem.

But in almost every case, the voice is not what closed.

Safety closed.

The body learned that being heard might not be safe. And so it did what bodies do best: it adapted.

Over time, this adaptation becomes so familiar that it begins to look like identity.

“I’m shy.”

“I’m not musical.”

“I don’t sing.”

These statements are repeated often enough that they appear to describe who we are. But in truth they are describing something much simpler: a moment when the body learned to protect itself.

The remarkable thing is that beneath these protective patterns, the voice itself never disappeared.

It has been there the entire time.

You can hear evidence of this in the sounds that escape without permission. The laugh that bursts out before you can contain it. The sigh that arrives when tension releases. The hum that emerges when you are alone and relaxed. Even the small sounds we make when something surprises us – a gasp, a groan, a murmur.

These sounds were never taught.

They arise naturally because the voice is not a talent. It is a function of being alive.

Breath moves through the body.

Vibration is created.

Sound appears.

This process is as natural as walking.

Yet somewhere along the way, many of us stopped trusting it.

Instead of allowing sound to arise naturally, we began monitoring it. Judging it. Correcting it. Comparing it to others. Imagining listeners who were evaluating us even when no one was present.

In this way the voice became something we managed rather than something we inhabited.

For some people this simply means they rarely sing.

For others it means something deeper: a subtle disconnection from expression itself. The voice carries not only melody but emotion, feeling, truth, and presence. When it contracts, something in us contracts with it.

This is why rediscovering the voice can feel unexpectedly powerful. When sound begins to move again, it often carries more than tone. It carries relief. Memory. Joy. Sometimes grief. Sometimes laughter.

The voice is not just sound.

It is life moving through the body.

This book is not about becoming a singer.

It is not about technique, performance, or musical perfection. There are many excellent teachers who specialise in those things, and they serve an important role in the world of music.

This book serves a different purpose.

It is about rediscovering the voice as something that belongs to you before technique, before performance, before comparison.

It is about remembering that sound is not something reserved for the gifted. It is something the body already knows how to do.

And when the conditions of safety, curiosity, and attention are restored, the voice often begins to return on its own.

For some people this happens quietly — a gentle hum while cooking, a song in the car, a sound that appears while walking in nature.

For others it becomes something larger: singing with friends, joining a circle of voices, chanting together in rhythm and devotion.

Throughout human history, communities have gathered in this way. People have sung together in celebration, in mourning, in prayer, in ceremony. Long before music was something we consumed through headphones or concert halls, it was something we created together.

Sound was a shared experience.

In many traditions this shared sound takes the form of mantra or devotional singing. Repeated phrases, simple melodies, and steady rhythm allow the mind to soften while the body relaxes into vibration. The voice no longer needs to impress anyone. It simply participates.

Something extraordinary happens in these moments.

The individual voice begins to dissolve into a field of sound.

Self-consciousness loosens. Breath deepens. Time changes its texture. The experience becomes less about “how you sound” and more about the feeling of singing itself.

Many people who believed for years that they “cannot sing” discover in these environments that the voice returns almost effortlessly.

Not because they suddenly became more talented.

But because the conditions changed.

The work you will encounter in this book begins much earlier than group singing. It begins with something very simple: learning to listen again.

Not to music.

Not to recordings.

But to the quiet place in the body where sound is waiting.

The exercises and reflections throughout these pages are designed to help you rediscover this relationship gradually. There is nothing you need to achieve. There is nothing you need to prove. The voice does not respond well to pressure.

It responds to attention.

To curiosity.

To permission.

If you approach the practices with patience, you may notice something surprising: the voice that once felt distant or unavailable is closer than you imagined.

In fact, it may have been waiting for you all along.

Before we explore how sound is created in the body, I would like to invite you into a very simple experience.

Not a technique.

Just a moment of listening.

Because the voice does not begin with singing.

It begins with awareness.

Turn the page when you are ready.

Chapter One

Invitation – Before the Words

Before you read any further, pause.

If you can, go into your bathroom.

Close the door.

Stand or sit comfortably.

Close your eyes.

Listen.

Not for sound – but for silence.

Notice the quality of the silence.

Its texture.

Its depth.

Is it still?

Is it spacious?

Is it quiet, or does it contain tiny movements you normally overlook?

Stay here for a moment.

Now, very softly, say:

Hello.

I am your voice.

Pause.

Listen again.

Then say it once more:

Hello.

I am your voice.

And wait.

Not for a reply in words.

But for sensation.

Can you hear me?

Can you sense me?

Can you feel where the sound came from?

Did it begin in the throat?

The chest?

Somewhere deeper in the body?

There is nothing you need to analyse.

Nothing you need to understand.

Just notice.

For many people, this moment can feel strangely intimate.

We are accustomed to hearing our voice in conversation, in explanation, in response to others. But rarely do we pause and meet it directly, without purpose or performance.

Your voice may sound familiar.

Or unfamiliar.

It may feel small.

Or tentative.

Or perhaps completely ordinary.

All of this is welcome.

There is no correct experience here.

Simply notice what happens when sound appears in the quiet.

Take one gentle breath.

Then listen again.

Where is the voice?

Where does it come from?

What exists just before sound?

And what remains after it fades?

These questions are not meant to be answered with the mind.

They are invitations to notice something subtle.

Sound does not appear from nowhere.

It begins as breath.

Breath moves through the body.

Vibration forms.

The vibration becomes tone.

The tone travels through space and reaches the ear.

But before all of that, something else occurs.

A tiny moment of permission.

The body allows sound to happen.

For many people, this permission has been interrupted somewhere along the way.

Not deliberately.

Not consciously.

But gradually, through experiences that made expression feel uncertain or exposed.

When this happens, the voice can become something we monitor rather than something we inhabit.

We begin to wonder if we are doing it correctly.

If it sounds good enough.

If others might judge it.

But here, in this small experiment, none of that matters.

You are simply noticing that sound exists.

That it can appear.

And that it belongs to you.

If it feels comfortable, try one more small experiment.

Close your eyes again.

Take a slow breath in.

And as the breath leaves the body, allow a soft hum to appear.

Nothing forced.

Nothing impressive.

Just a gentle sound.

Feel the vibration in your chest.

In your lips.

In your face.

You may notice that the sound is not only heard — it is felt.

This is important.

The voice is not something that happens only outside the body.

It happens within it.

Sound is vibration moving through living tissue.

Bone.

Muscle.

Air.

Space.

This is why voice work can feel so direct.

It touches places that thinking alone cannot reach.

For now, there is nothing more to do.

Simply take one more breath.

And listen.

When you are ready, continue reading.

In the next chapter, I will share the moment when my own relationship with voice changed — a moment that quietly shaped the way I experienced sound for many years.

You may recognise something of your own story there.

And if you do, know that you are not alone.

The voice closes for many people.

But it can open again.

Often more easily than we imagine.

Pause here and try the exercise before continuing.

Chapter Two

The Moment the Voice Closed

I always wanted to sing.

As a little girl, I imagined myself standing in bright lights, singing freely, being seen. Not in a grand or dramatic way – just the simple feeling of letting sound move through me without hesitation.

But in my family there was an unspoken narrative: we were not musical.

Singing was not something we did.

My mother carried her own longing to sing. I could sense it even though she rarely spoke about it. There was a softness in the way she listened to music, a kind of quiet ache, as if something inside her recognised it but did not feel permitted to join in.

Without ever needing words, I absorbed the message.

Singing belonged somewhere else.

Somewhere outside our home.

For a long time this belief sat quietly in the background of my life, unnoticed. Like many childhood assumptions, it felt less like an idea and more like the way things simply were.

Then, when I was eleven years old, something happened that fixed the belief into place.

I had been given a lead role in the school Christmas play.

At the time it felt exciting. I remember the feeling of being chosen, the sense that perhaps I would finally get to sing the way I had imagined.

One day I was called to the music teacher's classroom to learn the song.

The room was full of other children.

They stood around the piano, watching.

The teacher struck the piano keys sharply and said,

"Sing."

I froze.

No sound came out.

The piano notes continued, waiting for me to join them.

"It's easy," the teacher said again.

“Sing.”

The room suddenly felt very small.

I could feel the other children staring.

Heat rushed into my face. My chest tightened. My throat felt as though it had closed.

Some kind of sound eventually left my mouth, but it didn't match the piano. It didn't match the expectation in the room. I could hear immediately that it was wrong.

Or at least, that was how it felt.

I remember very little after that moment.

Only the overwhelming sensation of humiliation.

And the certainty that followed it.

I cannot sing.

At eleven years old, that conclusion settled into my body with remarkable strength.

No one formally declared it.

There was no dramatic announcement.

But the message was clear enough.

From that moment forward, something inside me knew what to do whenever singing appeared.

Tighten.

Flush.

Freeze.

Disappear.

The response happened automatically.

I didn't choose it.

The body simply learned.

After the class ended, I ran home.

I went straight to my bedroom and hid.

Not just for a few minutes, but for hours.

I didn't want to see anyone. I didn't want to speak. I wanted the entire moment to vanish, as if it had never happened.

But experiences like this rarely disappear.

They settle quietly into the nervous system.

From that day on, whenever singing appeared — in school, with friends, in groups — the same response returned.

My body already knew the script.

This is not safe.

Stay quiet.

Many years later I would come to understand that this is how the nervous system protects us. When a moment feels overwhelming, the body learns quickly. It stores the experience and prepares to avoid it in the future.

What begins as a single event becomes a pattern.

What begins as a moment becomes an identity.

“I’m not musical.”

“I can’t sing.”

For years I believed this completely.

It felt like a simple fact about who I was.

And yet something interesting remained beneath the belief.

The longing never disappeared.

Even while I avoided singing, I still felt drawn to music. I still felt the pull of sound. Somewhere inside, a quieter part of me knew that the story might not be finished.

But it would take many years before I discovered that the voice I thought I had lost had never actually gone anywhere.

It had simply learned to hide.

Chapter Three

How Sound Is Made in the Body

Before we speak about fear, expression, freedom, or transformation, it helps to return to something very simple.

The voice is not an idea.

It is not a talent.

It is not a personality trait.

The voice is a physical event.

Sound begins when breath moves through the body and passes across two small folds of tissue inside the throat called the vocal folds. As breath flows across them, they vibrate.

That vibration becomes sound.

The sound then travels through the spaces of the body — the chest, the throat, the mouth, the sinuses, the skull. These spaces shape the sound, giving it colour and resonance.

Finally, the sound moves out into the air where it can be heard.

Nothing mystical needs to happen for this process to occur.

Nothing special needs to be added.

If you are breathing, you already have everything required to make sound.

This may seem obvious, but it is important.

Many people arrive at voice work believing something is wrong with them. They assume their voice is blocked, broken, missing, or insufficient.

But when we look at the body itself, we discover something quite different.

The body already knows how to sound.

You did not learn how to cry as a baby.

You did not practise laughter.

You were never taught how to sigh, gasp, or groan.

Sound simply arose in response to sensation, emotion, and need.

The voice was never something you had to earn.

It was something that appeared naturally as part of being alive.

Only later did sound become something we tried to control.

The Breath — The Carrier of Voice

Every sound begins with breath.

Breath is movement.

It is life moving through the body.

When breath flows freely, sound can follow with very little effort.

But when breath becomes restricted — held, controlled, or tightened — sound changes.

The voice may become strained, quiet, shaky, or disappear altogether.

Many people unconsciously hold their breath when they feel watched, judged, or uncertain.

Others continue breathing, but tighten the belly, chest, jaw, or throat. These small tensions may not be obvious at first, but over time they become familiar patterns in the body.

The voice simply reflects the state of the breath.

If breath is restricted, sound becomes restricted.

If breath is free, sound often becomes freer too.

Invitation — Noticing the Breath

Pause for a moment.

Place one hand gently on your chest and the other on your belly.

Take a slow breath in.

Notice where the breath moves.

Does the chest rise?

Does the belly expand?

Does the breath feel smooth or slightly held?

There is nothing to correct.

Just notice.

Now let the breath leave the body slowly.

As the breath leaves, allow a soft sigh to escape.

Nothing dramatic.

Just the sound that naturally follows the breath.

Try this two or three times.

Notice how little effort it takes for sound to appear when the breath is already moving.

Vibration — Sound as Sensation

Before sound becomes music or language, it is vibration.

You can feel this directly.

Place your hand on the centre of your chest.

Take a breath.

Now hum very gently.

Mmmmm.

Feel the vibration beneath your hand.

The sound is not only happening outside the body.

It is happening inside it.

This is one reason voice work can feel surprisingly intimate.

Sound travels through living tissue. It moves through muscle and bone. It touches places in the body that words alone rarely reach.

Sometimes this feels pleasant.

Sometimes it stirs unexpected emotion.

Neither experience is wrong.

The body simply responds honestly to vibration.

Invitation – Feeling Your Sound

Place one hand lightly on your chest.

Take a comfortable breath in.

Now hum softly again.

Mmmmm.

Notice where the vibration appears.

In the chest?

In the lips?

In the face?

Try slightly changing the pitch of the hum — a little higher, then a little lower.

There is no need to find the “right” note.

Just explore.

Notice how the vibration moves through different parts of the body.

Resonance — The Body as Instrument

The body does not simply produce sound.

It shapes it.

The chest, throat, mouth, sinuses, and skull all act as resonant chambers. The position of the jaw, the placement of the tongue, and the openness of the throat influence how sound travels.

Even the posture of the spine affects the voice.

This means something very important.

Your voice is not meant to sound like anyone else’s.

Your body is unique.

Its shape, its size, its structure, and its history all contribute to the sound it produces.

There is no universal “correct” voice.

There is only your voice.

Many people dislike the sound of their own voice because they have rarely listened to it with curiosity. Instead, they compare it to singers, recordings, or imagined standards of how a voice should sound.

In voice work, we are not trying to replace your sound.

We are learning to meet it.

Reflection

Take a moment to consider the following questions:

When did you first become aware of your voice as something that could be judged?

Was there a moment when singing or speaking suddenly felt self-conscious?

What messages did you receive growing up about singing?

There is no need to analyse the answers.

Simply notice what memories arise.

When the Body Feels Unsafe

If sound feels difficult, tight, emotional, or uncertain, it does not mean you are doing something wrong.

Often it simply means the body does not yet feel safe enough to express freely.

The voice is closely connected to the nervous system. When the body senses threat – whether physical, emotional, or social – it prepares to protect itself.

Muscles tighten.

Breath changes.

Expression narrows.

The throat may close slightly, the jaw may stiffen, the breath may shorten.

The voice responds immediately.

This can happen even when there is no danger in the present moment.

The body remembers.

Understanding this changes how we approach the voice.

Instead of forcing sound to appear, we begin by creating the conditions in which the body can relax.

Safety.

Curiosity.

Permission.

When those conditions are present, the voice often begins to emerge naturally.

It does not need to be pushed.

It needs to be allowed.

A Small Experiment

Take one slow breath.

Let it leave the body naturally.

Now allow a simple sound to follow the breath.

Ahhhhh.

Not singing.

Just sound.

Notice how the body responds.

Does anything soften?

Does anything resist?

Again, there is nothing to fix.

Just listen.

If you pause here for a moment, you may notice something subtle.

Sound is closer than you thought.

Story: April

April couldn't understand why her voice sounded flat.

She tried singing with more effort.

She tried focusing on pitch.

But no matter what she did, the sound remained dull and lifeless.

When I observed her singing, something became very clear.

Almost none of her body was involved.

Her jaw was rigid.

Her face barely moved.

Her posture was fixed and still.

And when the body is not engaged, the voice has very little space to resonate.

We began exploring something very simple.

Movement.

I invited her to loosen her posture and start making playful sounds.

Animal noises.

Exaggerated vowels.

Anything that allowed the body to move again.

At first it felt silly.

But slowly she began to relax.

Her shoulders moved.

Her face softened.

She started laughing.

Soon she was singing while moving her body freely – dancing, pulling funny faces, allowing the sound to travel through her whole body.

And suddenly the voice changed.

The sound filled out.

The tone brightened.

The flatness disappeared almost instantly.

Nothing complicated had happened.

She had simply brought her whole body to the singing party.

Once the body joined the voice, the sound naturally came alive.

Chapter Four

When the Nervous System Takes Over

If the voice is a natural function of the body – breath becoming vibration, vibration becoming sound – a simple question arises.

Why does it sometimes feel impossible to use?

Why does the throat tighten when we are asked to sing?

Why does the body freeze when attention turns toward us?

The answer often lies not in the voice itself, but in the nervous system.

The nervous system is constantly scanning for safety.

It is doing this quietly, beneath conscious awareness, assessing the environment and the people around us. When the body senses safety, breath flows easily, muscles soften, and expression feels natural.

But when the nervous system senses threat — even a very small social threat — the body prepares to protect itself.

This response is ancient.

It does not distinguish between physical danger and social exposure. Being watched, judged, or laughed at can activate the same protective systems that once helped our ancestors survive.

When this happens, the body moves into one of several familiar patterns.

Sometimes it prepares to fight.

Sometimes it prepares to run.

But very often, especially in social situations like singing, the body enters another response entirely.

It freezes.

The breath becomes shallow.

The throat tightens.

Muscles around the jaw and neck contract.

Sound struggles to emerge.

From the outside it may appear that the person simply cannot sing.

But internally, something very different is happening.

The body is protecting itself.

The Voice That Disappears

Over the years I have worked with many people who arrive convinced that their voice is terrible.

Often they say this immediately, almost before we begin.

Sometimes with humour.

Sometimes with embarrassment.

One phrase I hear often is:

“I sound like cats dying.”

It is usually said with a nervous laugh, but behind the joke is a deep certainty that their voice is somehow wrong.

When I hear this, I am rarely interested in correcting the statement.

Instead, I listen carefully to how the person is hearing themselves.

And something interesting becomes clear.

Many people are not actually hearing their voice at all.

They have become disconnected from it.

At some point earlier in life, something happened that made hearing their own sound uncomfortable. Perhaps they were laughed at. Perhaps they were corrected harshly. Perhaps the environment simply made expression feel unsafe.

In response, the nervous system created distance.

Instead of fully receiving the sound they produce, the person begins to pull away from it internally.

The voice still exists.

Sound still emerges.

But the relationship between the person and the sound becomes faint.

Almost like listening to oneself through a layer of fog.

Over time this disconnection becomes so familiar that people assume it is normal.

They believe they are hearing their voice clearly.

But what they are actually hearing is a version filtered through years of self-protection and criticism.

Reintroducing the Voice

Because of this, the first thing I do when working with someone is not to teach technique.

It is simply to help them hear themselves again.

To allow the person and their voice to become reacquainted.

This process is often surprisingly simple.

We begin with very small sounds.

A gentle hum.

A soft tone carried on the breath.

At first the mind may continue its commentary.

Too strange.

Too awkward.

Too much.

But if the person stays with the sound, something begins to change.

They start to feel the vibration in their chest.

They hear the tone more clearly.

The distance between themselves and their voice begins to close.

Sometimes this happens gradually.

And sometimes it happens almost instantly.

There are moments in sessions where it feels as if a switch has been flipped.

A person who arrived certain that they cannot sing suddenly hears their voice clearly for the first time.

Their posture shifts.

Their face changes.

Their sound becomes fuller, more relaxed.

Not because they have learned a new technique.

But because the nervous system has relaxed enough to allow the voice to appear.

In that moment their whole world can feel different.

They realise the voice they believed was missing has been there all along.

Reflection

Take a moment to consider the following questions:

Can you remember a time when your body froze while speaking or singing?

What did the body do in that moment?

Did the breath change?

Did the throat tighten?

Did sound become smaller or disappear?

Simply noticing these patterns is an important step.

The voice is not failing.

It is responding.

Safety and Sound

Understanding the nervous system changes the way we approach the voice.

Instead of forcing sound to appear, we begin by creating conditions of safety.

Breath softens.

The body relaxes.

Attention moves from judgment to curiosity.

When these conditions are present, the voice often returns naturally.

It does not need to be pushed.

It needs to feel safe enough to exist.

In the next chapter we will explore another reason many people believe their voice is not good enough.

A belief that has shaped how generations of people think about singing.

The belief that only some people are “musical.”

And the rest are not.

Once we begin to look closely at this idea, something surprising becomes clear.

The story is not as true as we were led to believe.

Chapter Five

Why So Many People Believe They Cannot Sing

If you ask a group of adults a simple question — “*Who here believes they cannot sing?*” — something interesting almost always happens.

A surprising number of hands go up.

Sometimes more than half the room.

Often accompanied by laughter, apologies, or embarrassed smiles.

People say things like:

“I’m tone deaf.”

“I was told to mouth the words at school.”

“I sound like cats dying.”

Or simply:

“I can’t sing.”

What is striking about these moments is not the number of people who believe this.

It is how certain they are.

The statement is rarely offered as a possibility.

It is offered as a fact.

Yet if you look closely, something curious appears.

Almost none of these people believed they could not sing when they were very young.

Children make sound constantly.

They sing while playing.

They sing while walking.

They sing without worrying about pitch, technique, or performance.

Sound is simply part of being alive.

At some point, however, something changes.

The voice that once moved freely becomes cautious.

The person who once sang without hesitation begins to hold back.

And gradually a conclusion forms:

I cannot sing.

The question is not whether this belief exists.

The question is how it formed.

School and the First Comparisons

For many people, the first comparisons around singing happen at school.

Children are asked to sing in groups.

Some voices stand out as particularly strong or accurate.

Teachers may focus attention on those voices.

Others receive less encouragement.

Sometimes a correction is delivered in front of the class.

Sometimes another child laughs.

Sometimes the message is subtle but clear.

Some people are good at singing.

Others are not.

Even when no one intends harm, these early experiences can shape how a child perceives their voice.

A single uncomfortable moment can stay with the body for years.

What was meant to be a simple music lesson becomes a memory of exposure.

And from that point forward, the nervous system begins to protect.

The Myth of Talent

Alongside these experiences, a powerful cultural idea reinforces the belief.

The idea that singing is a talent.

Something you either have or you do not.

We see this idea everywhere.

Television shows judge singers with harsh clarity.

Recordings present polished voices that sound effortless.

Professional performers appear on stages while audiences watch from a distance.

Slowly a story forms.

Singing belongs to those who are gifted.

Everyone else should listen.

But this story overlooks something important.

Singing did not begin as performance.

For most of human history, singing was something everyone did.

It happened in fields, in homes, in ceremonies, in gatherings.

People sang while working.

They sang while mourning.

They sang while celebrating.

The voice was not reserved for experts.

It belonged to the community.

When singing moved onto stages and into recordings, something subtle shifted.

The role of the singer became specialised.

And many people began to believe their own voice did not belong.

Comparison and the Inner Judge

Once comparison enters the picture, the mind begins to evaluate constantly.

People listen to their voice through the lens of what they believe singing should sound like.

They compare themselves to professional singers.

To recordings.

To others around them.

And almost inevitably, the comparison feels unfavourable.

The voice becomes something to criticise rather than something to explore.

Over time this criticism becomes internal.

The person no longer needs an outside judge.

The mind takes on the role itself.

Too high.

Too low.

Too strange.

Too much.

These thoughts can become so familiar that people stop questioning them.

They assume the voice itself is the problem.

But often the real issue is the expectation placed upon it.

Perfectionism and Silence

Perfectionism adds another layer.

If the voice cannot meet the imagined standard, it may feel safer not to sing at all.

Silence becomes a way to avoid embarrassment.

Many people stop singing gradually in this way.

First they become quieter in groups.

Then they stop joining in altogether.

Eventually the voice disappears from daily life.

Not because it is incapable.

But because it has been judged too harshly to be allowed.

Yet the body still carries the ability to make sound.

Breath still moves.

Vibration still exists.

The voice has not vanished.

It has simply been placed behind a wall of expectation.

Reflection

Take a moment to consider your own experience.

When did you first begin comparing your voice to others?

Did someone ever comment on your singing?

Were there moments when singing suddenly felt embarrassing or exposed?

What messages did you receive growing up about who was "allowed" to sing?

You do not need to analyse these memories deeply.

Simply noticing them can begin to loosen their hold.

Because once we see that these beliefs were learned, something important becomes possible.

They can also be unlearned.

The next step in reopening the voice does not begin with singing.

It begins with listening.

Before sound can move freely again, we first learn how to become present with breath, sensation, and quiet.

In the next chapter we will explore a very simple practice that begins this process.

Listening before sound.

Sometimes the voice begins to open the moment we stop trying to make it appear.

And instead, start paying attention to what is already there.

PART II

Reopening the Voice

Chapter Six

Listening Before Sound

When people want to improve their voice, their instinct is often to begin with sound.

They try to sing louder.

They try to reach higher notes.

They try to correct the way the voice behaves.

But something important is often overlooked.

Sound does not begin with singing.

It begins with listening.

Before the voice can open, the body must first become aware of what is already happening inside it.

Breath moving.

Muscles holding or softening.

Subtle vibrations appearing and fading.

For many people this kind of listening is unfamiliar.

Modern life rarely asks us to pause long enough to notice the quiet movements of the body. We move quickly from one task to the next, rarely paying attention to the subtle rhythms that support our voice every moment of the day.

Yet these rhythms are where the voice lives.

When attention returns to them, something begins to change.

The voice is no longer something we force into existence.

It becomes something we discover.

The Space Before Sound

If you watch closely, every sound begins with a small moment of stillness.

Breath gathers.

The body prepares.

Then vibration appears.

Most of the time this transition happens so quickly that we barely notice it.

But when we slow down and bring attention to the body, the moment becomes visible.

And in that moment, something important can happen.

The mind relaxes its grip.

Instead of trying to control the voice, we begin to observe the conditions that allow it to emerge.

This shift from doing to noticing is often the first step in reopening the voice.

Practice

Listening to the Breath

Find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably.

Close your eyes.

Allow your shoulders to soften.

Take a slow breath in through the nose.

Let the breath leave the body gently through the mouth.

Do not change the breath.

Simply observe it.

Notice where the breath moves.

Does the chest rise?

Does the belly expand?

Is the breath smooth or slightly held?

Stay with the breath for two minutes.

Nothing needs to happen.

Just listen.

Learning to Receive

Many people have spent years pushing their voice away through judgment and criticism.

Listening reverses this pattern.

When you listen to your breath without trying to change it, the body begins to feel acknowledged.

The nervous system receives a simple message:

It is safe to be here.

This small shift can have a surprising effect.

The jaw may soften.

The throat may release slightly.

Breath may deepen without effort.

And when this happens, the voice has more space to exist.

Not because we have improved it.

But because we have stopped interfering with it.

Reflection

Take a moment to consider:

How often do you listen to your breath during the day?

Do you notice your body while speaking or singing?

Or does sound usually happen without awareness?

There is no correct answer.

Simply noticing your relationship with breath is already part of the process.

Listening Inside the Body

The voice is not only heard with the ears.

It is felt through the body.

Vibration travels through the chest, the throat, the lips, and the face.

Many people discover that when they begin paying attention to these sensations, their voice feels more grounded and stable.

Instead of focusing only on how the sound might be judged from the outside, attention moves inward to the experience of sound itself.

This shift can change the entire relationship with the voice.

Practice

Feeling the Body From the Inside

Sit comfortably and close your eyes.

Place one hand lightly on the centre of your chest.

Take a slow breath.

Notice the gentle movement beneath your hand.

Take another breath.

Feel the chest rise and fall.

Now bring your attention to your throat.

Notice whether the muscles there feel relaxed or slightly held.

Then bring awareness to your jaw.

Is it soft?

Or gently clenched?

Do not try to change anything.

Just notice.

Spend a minute observing these sensations.

Then slowly open your eyes.

The Beginning of Sound

When we learn to listen in this way, something interesting begins to happen.

The body starts to organise itself naturally.

Breath becomes smoother.

Muscles soften.

The voice begins to feel closer.

Not as something distant or difficult, but as something waiting just beneath awareness.

At this point we are not yet trying to sing.

We are simply allowing the body to rediscover its own rhythms.

Once this awareness is established, the next step becomes very simple.

Allowing the first sound to appear.

In the next chapter we will explore how breath carries the voice – and how small, gentle sounds can begin to reopen the pathway between breath and expression.

Often the first honest sound is much simpler than people expect.

It does not need to be musical.

It only needs to be real.

Chapter Seven

Breath – The Carrier of Voice

Every sound begins with breath.

Before vibration.

Before tone.

Before any word or melody.

There is breath.

Breath moves through the body constantly, whether we are aware of it or not. It rises and falls quietly throughout the day, supporting speech, movement, and life itself.

Yet many people rarely notice it.

When someone begins exploring their voice, the first thing that often becomes clear is how closely sound follows the breath. If the breath is held or restricted, the voice struggles. If the breath moves easily, sound appears with much less effort.

In this way, breath acts as the carrier of the voice.

It is the current that allows vibration to travel.

When breath flows freely, the voice has somewhere to go.

Breath and the Nervous System

Breath also has another important role.

It communicates directly with the nervous system.

When we feel anxious or exposed, the breath tends to become shallow and tight. The body prepares itself for protection. Muscles around the throat and chest may contract, and the voice becomes smaller or strained.

But when breath slows and deepens, the body receives a different signal.

The nervous system begins to settle.

Muscles soften.

The throat opens.

Sound becomes easier.

This is why working with breath is such an important step in reopening the voice.

Instead of forcing sound to appear, we begin by restoring the movement that naturally carries it.

Practice

A Single Long Tone

Find a comfortable place to sit or stand.

Allow your shoulders to relax.

Take a slow breath in through the nose.

As the breath leaves the body, allow a simple sound to follow.

Ahhhhh.

Let the sound travel for as long as the breath naturally continues.

There is no need to push the breath or extend the sound artificially.

Simply allow the tone to ride the breath until it fades.

Pause.

Take another gentle breath.

Allow another long tone to appear.

Try this three or four times.

Notice how the sound feels when it is carried by the breath rather than forced by the throat.

Discovering the Sound That Is Already There

When people make their first long tone in this way, something interesting often happens.

They expect the sound to be weak or unstable.

But once the breath is allowed to carry it, the tone often appears naturally.

Not perfect.

Not controlled.

But present.

The purpose of this practice is not to produce a beautiful note.

It is simply to reconnect breath and sound.

To remind the body that voice can travel on the breath rather than being pushed from the throat.

When this relationship becomes clear, the voice often feels less effortful.

Reflection

As you explore the long tone, notice:

Where does the sound seem to begin?

Does it feel as though it starts in the throat, the chest, or somewhere deeper in the body?

Does the tone feel smooth or slightly hesitant?

Again, there is nothing to correct.

Curiosity is enough.

Exploring the Range of the Voice

Once breath and sound begin to reconnect, another simple exploration becomes possible.

Instead of staying on a single pitch, the voice can begin to move.

One of the easiest ways to explore this movement is through a sound sometimes called sirening.

The name comes from the way the voice glides smoothly up and down, much like the sound of a distant siren.

This movement allows the voice to travel through its natural range without forcing specific notes.

Rather than trying to reach higher or lower pitches deliberately, the voice simply follows the breath wherever it wants to go.

This exploration can reveal parts of the voice that have not been used for a long time.

Practice

Sirening Through the Voice

Take a slow breath.

As the breath leaves the body, allow a soft sound such as:

Ooooo

or

Ahhhh

Let the sound glide gently upward.

Then allow it to travel back down again.

There is no need to control the pitch.

Just let the voice move freely.

You might imagine the sound drawing a slow wave through the air.

Try this several times.

Notice where the voice feels comfortable.

Notice where it becomes tight or hesitant.

These places are not problems.

They are simply areas of the voice that have not yet been explored.

Curiosity Instead of Control

Exploring the voice in this way is very different from traditional ideas of vocal training.

Instead of aiming for perfect notes, the focus is on discovery.

What sounds exist in the body today?

Where does the voice move easily?

Where does it feel restricted?

Each exploration reveals something about the relationship between breath, body, and sound.

And slowly, through curiosity rather than pressure, the voice begins to expand.

Not because we force it.

But because the body remembers how.

Once breath and sound begin moving together, the next step becomes even simpler.

Allowing the first truly honest sound to appear.

A sound that is not carefully shaped or corrected.

Just a sound that follows the breath naturally.

In the next chapter we will explore this moment – the first honest sound.

Often it is quieter and simpler than people expect.

Yet it can change the way someone experiences their voice entirely.

Chapter Eight

The First Honest Sound

After listening to the breath and allowing the voice to travel on a long tone, something new often begins to appear.

A sound that feels different from the earlier ones.

Not because it is technically better.

But because it is more honest.

Until this point, many people are still trying, even slightly. They are attempting to produce the “correct” sound. They are monitoring themselves, adjusting the tone, wondering whether they are doing the exercise properly.

The mind is still quietly involved.

But eventually the effort softens.

The person stops trying quite so hard.

And when that happens, a different sound often emerges.

Sometimes it is a gentle hum.

Sometimes a sigh.

Sometimes a soft vowel carried on the breath.

And quite often, something else appears first.

Laughter.

It arrives suddenly, sometimes in the middle of a tone.

The person laughs at the sound they just made.

Or laughs at the realisation that the experience feels much simpler than they expected.

The laughter is rarely mocking.

It is usually relief.

The body is recognising that the situation is no longer dangerous.

The nervous system shifts.

The pressure disappears.

And in that moment, the voice often becomes more natural.

Permission Instead of Performance

One of the most important changes in voice work happens when people move from performance to permission.

Performance asks the voice to prove something.

Permission allows the voice to exist.

Many people have spent years believing that every sound they make must be evaluated.

Is it correct?

Is it musical?

Is it good enough?

These questions create tension.

The body tightens in response.

But when sound is approached with permission instead of expectation, something different happens.

The voice relaxes.

Breath moves naturally.

Expression becomes easier.

This is why the first honest sound is so important.

It is not impressive.

It is simply real.

And from that place, the voice can begin to grow naturally.

Practice

Allowing the First Honest Sound

Find a quiet place to sit or stand comfortably.

Take a slow breath in.

As the breath leaves the body, allow any sound to appear.

It might be a hum.

It might be a vowel.

It might even be laughter.

There is no need to choose the sound.

Simply allow the breath to carry whatever appears.

Try this for a few breaths.

Notice what happens when you stop trying to make the sound correct.

Notice whether the body relaxes when the sound is allowed to be imperfect.

The Simplicity of Sound

Many people expect voice work to involve complicated exercises.

But often the most important moments are very simple.

A breath.

A tone.

A sound that appears without being shaped by the mind.

These small sounds reconnect the body with its natural ability to express itself.

And once that connection is restored, the voice begins to feel less like something fragile and more like something alive.

It becomes something you can explore.

Something that can move, shift, and change.

Practice

Playful Sound

Take a breath and allow a gentle sound to appear.

Now try letting the sound change slightly.

Move it higher.

Then lower.

Let it wobble or stretch.

There is no need to control it.

Think of the sound as something playful rather than something to perfect.

You might even notice laughter appearing again.

If it does, allow it.

Laughter is simply another form of sound.

Rediscovering Curiosity

Perhaps the most important thing that appears at this stage is curiosity.

The person who arrived convinced their voice was terrible begins to wonder what else might be possible.

They listen differently.

They experiment.

They explore.

And slowly, the voice becomes something they are interested in rather than something they avoid.

This curiosity is the doorway to the next stage of the journey.

Because even when the voice begins to open, one challenge often remains.

The voice still carries an internal commentator.

A quiet voice in the mind that evaluates every sound.

In the next chapter we will meet this inner voice.

Not as an enemy.

But as something that can be understood and gently stepped beyond.

When the inner critic softens, the natural voice becomes much easier to hear.

Chapter Nine

Meeting the Inner Critic

Even after the voice begins to open, many people encounter another familiar presence.

A quiet voice in the mind that comments on everything they do.

This voice evaluates the sound.

It compares.

It corrects.

It judges.

Sometimes the thoughts are subtle.

That sounded strange.

Try again.

Other times they are much harsher.

That's terrible.

Everyone will laugh.

You shouldn't be making that sound.

These thoughts often appear so quickly that people assume they are simply part of reality.

But if you listen closely, something interesting becomes clear.

The inner critic is rarely trying to be cruel.

It is trying to protect.

The Fear of Being Heard

Human beings are social creatures.

For thousands of years our survival depended on belonging to a group. Being accepted meant safety. Being rejected could mean isolation or danger.

Because of this, the nervous system carries a deep sensitivity to how others perceive us.

This sensitivity becomes especially strong when our voice is involved.

Sound reveals us.

It makes us visible.

And the mind often responds by imagining how others might react.

Many people carry a quiet fear beneath their singing.

What if people laugh?

What if they think I sound terrible?

What if I embarrass myself?

These fears can feel very real in the body.

The throat tightens.

The breath shortens.

The voice becomes smaller.

And often, before anyone else has the chance to judge, the mind does something clever.

It criticises first.

The Protective Disclaimer

In my work I often notice a particular pattern.

People will apologise for their voice before making any sound at all.

“I’m really bad at this.”

“This is going to sound awful.”

“I sound like cats dying.”

It can look like humour.

But underneath it is often a kind of disclaimer.

If I say it first, no one else needs to.

The person is protecting themselves from possible embarrassment.

By criticising their own voice, they try to stay one step ahead of judgment.

It is an understandable strategy.

But unfortunately it keeps the voice locked inside the same cycle.

Because the moment the mind begins evaluating sound, the body responds with tension.

And tension makes expression harder.

The voice then sounds restricted, which appears to confirm the original belief.

The cycle continues.

The Imagined Audience

Another powerful influence on the inner critic is the imagined listener.

Many people are not actually hearing their voice as it exists in the moment.

Instead, they are hearing it through the ears of someone else.

A teacher from childhood.

A critical parent.

An audience they imagine judging every sound.

The mind places this listener into the room, even when the person is completely alone.

And the body responds as though the evaluation is real.

Suddenly the voice feels exposed.

Careful.

Watched.

In this environment, it becomes difficult for sound to move naturally.

Not because the voice is weak.

But because it is being monitored too closely.

Practice

Listening Without the Judge

Sit comfortably and close your eyes.

Take a slow breath.

Allow a gentle hum to appear.

Mmmmm.

Now notice what happens in the mind.

Do any thoughts appear about the sound?

If they do, simply notice them.

You do not need to push them away.

Let the thoughts pass like clouds moving across the sky.

Bring your attention back to the vibration of the sound.

Feel it in the chest.

In the lips.

In the face.

Continue for a few breaths.

Notice what happens when the sound is experienced directly rather than evaluated.

Stepping Out of the Critic's Leadership

The goal in voice work is not to eliminate the inner critic entirely.

The mind will always produce thoughts.

Instead, we gently step out of its leadership.

Sound begins to follow sensation rather than commentary.

Breath leads.

Vibration leads.

Expression leads.

The critic may still speak occasionally.

But it no longer controls the experience.

When this shift happens, the voice often becomes freer very quickly.

Because the body no longer feels the need to defend itself from imagined judgment.

The voice can simply move.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

When you make sound, what does the inner voice usually say?

Is it supportive, critical, or cautious?

Whose voice does it resemble?

A teacher?

A parent?

Your own?

Simply noticing these patterns is often enough to begin loosening them.

When the inner critic softens, something interesting often appears next.

Emotion.

Sometimes quietly.

Sometimes suddenly.

People may feel tears rising.

Or laughter.

Or a sense of relief they did not expect.

This is not a mistake in the process.

It is a sign that something deeper in the body is beginning to move.

In the next chapter we will explore what happens when sound unlocks emotion.

And why these moments can be one of the most important steps in rediscovering the voice.

Chapter Ten

When Sound Unlocks Emotion

When people begin reconnecting with their voice, something unexpected often happens.

They cry.

Not always immediately.

Sometimes the voice emerges quietly at first — a hum, a tone carried on the breath, a simple sound that feels tentative but present.

But when the person begins to truly hear themselves again, emotion often follows.

Tears are the most common response I see.

For many people this can feel confusing.

They may arrive expecting something technical — perhaps exercises or techniques to improve their voice — and instead find themselves sitting with tears quietly rolling down their face.

When this happens, I reassure them that nothing has gone wrong.

Something has simply begun to move.

The Body Releases What It Has Been Holding

For years, sometimes decades, the voice may have been held back.

The body learned early on that making sound could lead to embarrassment, judgment, or exposure.

So the nervous system adapted.

Expression became smaller.

More cautious.

Sometimes almost absent.

But when sound begins moving again, even in a gentle way, the body often releases what it has been holding.

The tears are not always about sadness.

Often they are about relief.

Relief that something long restricted is finally allowed to exist.

The voice begins to move.

And with it, the emotional energy that has been held in the body begins to move as well.

Holding Space for the Energy to Move

When this happens in my sessions, the most important thing is not to interrupt it.

There is nothing to fix.

Nothing to stop.

The body is simply completing a process that may have been paused long ago.

So I hold space for the energy to move.

For the tears to come if they need to.

For the body to release whatever it has been holding.

And something very interesting often happens next.

The tears begin to shift.

They soften.

And quite often, they turn into laughter.

The Cork Popping

It can look almost like a cork popping from a bottle.

The pressure that has been held inside suddenly releases.

At first there are tears.

Then the person begins laughing through them.

Not because anything is funny.

But because something inside has opened.

The nervous system recognises that the situation is no longer threatening.

The body relaxes.

Breath deepens.

The voice feels lighter.

And after this moment, another feeling often appears.

Joy.

Not dramatic joy.

Just a quiet sense of aliveness.

A feeling that something inside has begun to move again.

Curiosity Returns

Perhaps the most important shift that follows this release is curiosity.

The person who arrived convinced that their voice was terrible suddenly becomes interested in it.

They begin asking different questions.

What else can my voice do?

What happens if I keep exploring?

What does my voice actually sound like when I stop fighting it?

This curiosity marks an important turning point.

Instead of avoiding the voice, the person begins to explore it.

And from that place, the voice can grow naturally.

Not through pressure.

But through relationship.

Practice

Allowing Emotion to Move

Find a comfortable place to sit.

Take a slow breath in.

As the breath leaves the body, allow a gentle sound to follow.

Ahhhhh.

Let the sound travel naturally with the breath.

If emotion appears, simply allow it.

There is no need to control the experience.

Take another breath.

Allow another sound.

Notice whatever sensations arise in the body.

You might feel calm.

You might feel emotion.

You might feel nothing at all.

All of these experiences are welcome.

The voice does not need to perform.

It only needs permission to exist.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

Have you ever felt emotion while singing or making sound?

Did you allow it to move, or did you try to stop it?

What happens in the body when expression is no longer held back?

Simply noticing these responses can deepen your understanding of the voice.

When sound begins to move freely again, another discovery often follows.

People begin hearing their voice differently.

The sound that once felt wrong begins to reveal something new.

Texture.

Colour.

Expression.

And slowly, the voice begins to feel less like a problem and more like something unique.

In the next part of the book we will explore what happens when the natural voice begins to emerge.

Because once the mind softens and the body relaxes, the voice often reveals something people did not expect.

It already has its own character.

Its own tone.

Its own way of expressing life.

And it was never meant to sound like anyone else.

Client Story – Ben

Ben arrived carrying a familiar frustration.

Like many people, he had strong expectations about how his voice should sound. He listened to himself critically and constantly tried to correct the sound before it even had time to appear.

Instead of listening to his voice, he was trying to control it.

During our session we began with simple toning exercises.

At one point I invited him into a small visualisation.

I asked him to imagine a baby in front of him and to sing gently to soothe the child.

As he softened into the exercise, his voice changed immediately.

The tone became warmer.

Softer.

More caring.

I then began singing a Lakota lullaby that is traditionally sung to baby boys and invited him to join me.

As the chant continued, I asked him to keep imagining the child and gently suggested something else.

What if the baby was him?

What if he was the one soothing his own younger self?

As he continued singing, the shift was profound.

Tears began to appear.

The voice continued.

The man and the child inside him were meeting through the sound.

He sang while crying, allowing the voice to simply exist without the usual pressure to be good enough.

The sound became truthful.

Unforced.

Afterward, his relationship with his voice had changed.

He became less critical.

More playful.

More curious.

Instead of seeing his voice as something that needed to be perfected, he began seeing it simply as an instrument – something that could express whatever was alive in that moment.

PART III

Finding Your Natural Voice

Chapter Eleven

Your Voice Is Not Supposed to Sound Like Anyone Else

One of the most liberating discoveries people make in voice work is also one of the simplest.

Your voice is not supposed to sound like anyone else's.

This may seem obvious at first, yet many people approach their voice as if it must match a particular standard.

They compare it to singers they admire.

They measure it against recordings.

They listen for what they believe a "good voice" should sound like.

And without realising it, they begin trying to shape their sound into something it was never meant to be.

The mind becomes very busy during this process.

It adjusts.

It corrects.

It evaluates.

But when the mind takes control in this way, the voice often becomes smaller rather than larger.

Careful rather than expressive.

The sound becomes restricted by the effort to make it right.

When the Trying Stops

Occasionally in voice sessions, a moment arrives when the person simply stops trying.

Sometimes they become tired of the effort.

Sometimes they forget the exercise for a moment.

Or sometimes the laughter and emotional release we explored in the previous chapter soften the grip of the mind just enough for something to change.

And when that happens, the voice often shifts immediately.

The sound becomes more open.

More expressive.

More alive.

It can be subtle, but unmistakable.

Where the earlier sound felt tight or controlled, the new sound carries something different.

Colour.

Texture.

Movement.

It feels less like a voice being produced and more like something flowing through the person.

Not the stunted energy of the mind's demands.

But the energy that exists underneath the mind.

Breath moving.

Feeling moving.

Life moving.

The Voice Becomes Colourful

When people begin allowing this natural sound to emerge, their voice often becomes richer.

Not necessarily louder.

But more complex.

It carries emotional energy.

The tone becomes less flat and more dimensional.

Almost like colour appearing in something that once felt grey.

This is not something that needs to be trained into the voice.

It is already there.

It simply becomes audible when the mind stops trying to control how the voice should behave.

A Shift in the Whole Person

The change does not happen only in the voice.

It appears in the whole person.

The posture softens.

The face relaxes.

The tension around the eyes and jaw eases.

People become more present.

More here.

I often notice a playful quality emerging.

As though the person has rediscovered something they once knew as a child.

They experiment with sound.

They explore.

They laugh.

The voice becomes something they are curious about rather than something they are defending.

This playfulness is a very good sign.

It means the nervous system has moved out of protection and into exploration.

And when that happens, the voice can expand naturally.

Practice

Exploring Your Natural Tone

Find a comfortable place where you can make sound freely.

Take a slow breath in.

Allow a simple tone to appear as the breath leaves the body.

Ahhhhh.

Let the sound be relaxed.

Now allow the tone to change slightly.

Move it higher.

Then lower.

Do not try to control the pitch precisely.

Simply explore.

Notice how the sound shifts as the body moves.

Let the voice wander gently for a few breaths.

Then pause.

Notice how it feels to explore the voice rather than trying to perfect it.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

When you hear your own voice, do you compare it to other voices?

What would it feel like to allow your voice to be completely unique?

What changes when you approach your voice with curiosity rather than judgment?

The natural voice is not something we create.

It is something we uncover.

When the mind relaxes its constant evaluation, the voice that remains is often far more interesting than the one we tried to produce.

It carries individuality.

Emotion.

Presence.

And once this voice begins to appear, another step becomes possible.

Learning how to use it without performing.

Because many people discover that even when their voice feels freer, the old habit of performing for an imagined audience still lingers.

In the next chapter we will explore the difference between singing as performance and singing as expression.

And why the voice becomes much more powerful when it is no longer trying to impress anyone.

Client Story — Emma

Emma came to me because she wanted to sing and lead Kirtan.

She loved mantra, loved yoga, and deeply wanted to share that devotion with others. Yet whenever she tried to sing, something strange happened. The sound that came out of her mouth never matched what she imagined in her mind.

She would feel embarrassed.

Then critical.

Eventually she started wondering if perhaps singing simply wasn't for her.

But the desire to sing was stronger than the fear, so she decided to lean in and discover what was happening.

Very quickly I noticed something important.

Emma wasn't really hearing her own voice.

She was singing toward an imagined version of the song she held in her head. Instead of responding to the sound actually coming from her body, she was trying to recreate a fantasy of how she thought the song *should* sound.

During our session we slowed everything down and began exploring what was happening moment by moment.

Eventually something clicked for her.

She suddenly laughed and said,

"I'm trying to create a fantasy into reality."

Once she saw it, the shift was immediate.

We brought her attention back to the present moment – to the breath, the mantra, and the sound actually emerging from her body.

And suddenly she was no longer trapped in her head.

She was in the room.

In her body.

In the chant.

Her voice opened in a way she had never experienced before.

She laughed, shook, and sang all at once.

The moment she stopped trying to recreate the song in her imagination and allowed the moment to exist as it was, the voice appeared naturally.

Emma went on to lead Kirtan and continues sharing mantra with others today.

Chapter Twelve

Singing Without Performing

Many people believe that singing and performing are the same thing.

But they are not.

Performance often carries a particular kind of energy.

The singer is trying to achieve something.

Trying to sound impressive.

Trying to be admired.

Trying to prove that the voice is good.

None of these intentions are wrong. Performance has its place in music and art. But when someone approaches their voice primarily through performance, something subtle begins to happen in the body.

The mind becomes very active.

The voice is monitored.

The sound is shaped carefully.

Attention moves outward toward the imagined listener.

How do I sound?

Do they like this?

Am I doing it well enough?

All of this effort creates tension.

The voice begins to feel like something that must succeed.

And when the body senses that pressure, expression often becomes restricted.

The voice tightens.

Breath shortens.

The natural flow of sound becomes interrupted.

The Shift From Taking to Giving

There is another way the voice can exist.

Not as performance.

But as expression.

In this way of singing, the energy of the voice changes direction.

Instead of trying to take something from the listener — approval, admiration, validation — the voice simply offers something.

It gives.

It shares.

It expresses what is moving through the body in that moment.

When this shift happens, the sound changes immediately.

The voice becomes more open.

More relaxed.

More alive.

And the effect on the person singing is just as noticeable.

I often see the face soften.

The body becomes more present.

And something almost luminous appears in the person.

They become radiant.

Not because they are trying to shine.

But because their energy is no longer being held in tension.

It is flowing outward freely.

The voice becomes less about how it is received and more about what it is expressing.

Presence Instead of Performance

When someone sings from this place, the experience changes for everyone in the room.

The listener no longer feels they are watching a performance.

Instead, they feel they are witnessing something real.

There is a sense of presence.

The sound carries honesty.

And often it carries emotion in a way that feels natural rather than dramatic.

This is one reason why a technically perfect voice can sometimes feel less moving than a simple voice that is fully present.

The human body recognises authenticity.

It recognises when sound is being forced.

And it recognises when sound is simply being allowed.

Practice

Giving Sound Instead of Performing

Find a quiet place where you can make sound comfortably.

Take a slow breath in.

As the breath leaves the body, allow a tone to appear.

Ahhhhh.

Imagine that the sound is not something you are producing for yourself.

Instead, imagine it gently filling the space around you.

You are offering the sound to the room.

Not pushing it.

Not performing it.

Simply letting it move outward.

Try this for a few breaths.

Notice how the body feels when the sound is given rather than judged.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

When you sing or speak, do you feel as though you are trying to impress others?

What would it feel like to offer your voice instead of performing it?

Does the idea of giving sound change how the voice feels in your body?

When the voice moves from performance into expression, something else becomes possible.

Play.

The voice becomes lighter.

More experimental.

More curious.

Many people rediscover a playful quality they have not felt since childhood.

In the next chapter we will explore how play can reopen parts of the voice that have been quiet for many years.

Because sometimes the most powerful way to free the voice is simply to stop taking it so seriously.

Chapter Thirteen

Sound as Play

For many people, the voice became serious far too early.

At some point along the way, singing stopped being something playful and began to feel like something that needed to be done correctly.

The mind stepped in.

Standards appeared.

Comparison followed.

And gradually the voice lost the lightness it once had.

But if you watch young children, you see something very different.

Children make sound constantly.

They hum.

They shout.

They invent songs.

They experiment with strange noises simply to see what happens.

There is no concern about whether the sound is good or bad.

Sound is play.

And because of that, the voice moves freely.

The body explores without hesitation.

The voice expands naturally.

One of the most powerful ways to reopen the voice is to rediscover this playful relationship with sound.

The Room Comes Alive

When people begin allowing themselves to play with sound again, something noticeable happens in the room.

The atmosphere changes.

At first there may be hesitation.

People glance around to see what others are doing.

The inner critic may still whisper that the sounds are silly or strange.

But slowly the energy begins to shift.

Someone laughs.

Another person tries a playful tone.

A rhythm emerges.

Voices begin experimenting freely.

And suddenly the whole room feels different.

The tension that once filled the space disappears.

The room becomes alive with possibility.

Bodies begin moving more naturally.

People relax into the experience.

Self-consciousness fades.

Sound becomes exploration rather than performance.

In these moments the voice often reveals abilities people did not realise they had.

Not because they were trained into the voice.

But because play removed the restrictions that were holding it back.

Why Play Works

Play changes the relationship between the mind and the voice.

When the mind is focused on doing something correctly, it becomes controlling.

But when the mind enters play, it becomes curious.

Curiosity invites experimentation.

Experimentation allows the voice to move in new ways.

The breath deepens.

The throat relaxes.

The voice travels into areas that may have felt inaccessible before.

Without pressure, the voice begins rediscovering its full range of movement.

Play reminds the body that sound does not need to be perfect in order to exist.

It only needs to be allowed.

Practice

Playful Sound Exploration

Find a space where you can make sound freely.

Take a breath.

Allow a simple tone to appear.

Now change the sound slightly.

Let it move up.

Then down.

Try exaggerating the sound.

Stretch it.

Let it wobble.

You might try different vowels:

Ah

Oo

Ee

Allow the sound to become playful.

You might notice laughter appearing.

If it does, welcome it.

Laughter is simply another form of sound.

Continue exploring for a few minutes.

Then pause.

Notice how your body feels after allowing the voice to play.

Practice

Sound and Movement

Take a breath and allow a tone to appear.

Now let your body move slightly with the sound.

Perhaps a gentle sway.

Perhaps a small movement of the shoulders.

Allow the movement to guide the voice.

Notice how sound changes when the body is no longer still.

Often the voice becomes more fluid when movement is included.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

When was the last time you allowed yourself to play with your voice?

What happens in the body when sound becomes playful rather than serious?

Does curiosity change how the voice feels?

Play is not the opposite of depth.

In many ways, it is the doorway to it.

When the voice becomes free enough to explore without judgment, something deeper begins to appear.

The voice starts carrying truth.

Emotion.

Presence.

And eventually, the courage to be heard.

Because even when the voice becomes playful and expressive, one question often remains beneath the surface.

Am I willing to let others hear me?

In the next chapter we will explore the courage that emerges when the voice begins to move fully into the world.

Chapter Fourteen

The Courage to Be Heard

At some point in the journey of reopening the voice, a deeper question appears.

Am I willing to be heard?

Until now, much of the work in this book has focused on reconnecting with sound inside the body — listening to breath, allowing tone to move, exploring expression without judgment.

But the voice does not exist only in private.

It lives in relationship.

When we speak or sing, we are allowing something within us to enter the world.

And that can feel vulnerable.

For many people, the voice became restricted not because they lacked ability, but because they once felt unsafe being heard.

A moment of embarrassment.

A critical comment.

A room full of watching eyes.

The body remembers these experiences.

So when the voice begins to open again, the nervous system sometimes asks a quiet question.

Is it safe now?

This is where courage appears.

Not the dramatic courage of performing on a stage.

But the quieter courage of allowing your voice to exist without apology.

The Voice and Visibility

Sound naturally brings visibility.

When we make sound, people notice.

Even a gentle voice occupies space.

For someone who has spent years keeping their voice small, this can feel unfamiliar.

The body may instinctively try to reduce the sound again.

To soften it.

To hide it.

But when a person allows their voice to be heard fully,
something interesting begins to change.

The body adjusts.

The breath expands.

Posture shifts.

The voice begins to feel less like something fragile and
more like something stable.

It becomes part of how the person inhabits the world.

Becoming More Real

One of the most beautiful things I observe when people
begin allowing their voice to be heard is a shift in how
they relate to themselves.

They become more real.

Not louder in a dramatic way.

Not more performative.

But more present.

The grip of the mind loosens.

The constant self-evaluation softens.

And the person sits more comfortably in their own presence.

Why?

Because the sound that emerged was authentic.

It was not manufactured.

It was not forced.

It arose from the body in that moment and was given freely.

When expression comes from that place, something important becomes clear.

There is nothing to judge.

The voice that appeared belonged completely to that moment.

It was unique.

Alive.

Unrepeatable.

And because it was given freely, it did not need to achieve anything.

It did not need approval.

It did not need applause.

It was simply an offering.

And when a person recognises this, something inside them relaxes.

The voice no longer feels like something that must prove its worth.

It becomes something that can move through life naturally.

Practice

Allowing the Voice to Be Heard

Find a place where you feel comfortable making sound.

Take a breath.

Allow a tone to appear.

Let it travel fully through the space around you.

Notice if the mind tries to reduce the sound.

Notice if the body hesitates.

Now take another breath.

Allow the voice to exist fully for the length of the breath.

Not louder than necessary.

But not smaller than it naturally wants to be.

Let the sound occupy space.

Then pause.

Notice how it feels to allow the voice to exist without apology.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

When you make sound, do you allow your voice to take up space?

Or do you try to make it smaller?

What would it feel like to offer your voice freely without needing approval?

How does the body respond when expression is allowed rather than controlled?

When the voice becomes authentic in this way, something else begins to appear.

Connection.

Not just connection with oneself, but connection with others.

Because when sound is given freely, it invites others to do the same.

Voices begin to meet.

Sound begins to move between people.

And very quickly the voice becomes something shared.

Across cultures and throughout history, human beings have gathered in this way.

Not simply to sing.

But to connect with something larger than themselves.

In the next part of the book we will explore this deeper dimension of the voice.

A dimension where sound becomes more than expression.

It becomes sacred.

PART IV

The Sacred Dimension of Voice

Chapter Fifteen

Why Humans Have Always Sung to the Divine

Across cultures and throughout history, human beings have used their voices in ways that reach far beyond entertainment.

Long before music was something performed on stages or recorded through technology, people gathered to sing together in moments that were considered sacred.

Voices rose during prayer.

During ceremonies.

During celebrations and times of grief.

In temples.

In forests.

Around fires.

Wherever human beings sought connection with something larger than themselves, sound was often present.

This pattern appears again and again across different traditions.

In the Bhakti traditions of India, voices gather in devotional song to express love for the Divine.

In Sufi communities, sacred poetry and song become a way of dissolving the boundaries of the self.

In monasteries across Europe, Gregorian chant has echoed through stone halls for centuries, voices blending into a single flowing tone.

In many indigenous cultures, ceremonial singing carries prayers, stories, and connection with the living world.

Although the melodies and languages may differ, the underlying impulse is remarkably similar.

Human beings instinctively turn to sound when they wish to connect with something sacred.

The Voice as Prayer

Why does the voice hold this role so consistently across cultures?

Part of the answer lies in the nature of sound itself.

Sound moves through the body directly.

It vibrates through the chest and throat.

It resonates in bone and muscle.

When many voices join together, these vibrations multiply, filling the space around them.

The experience becomes physical as well as emotional.

Breath synchronises.

Rhythm stabilises.

Attention gathers.

The mind begins to quiet.

In this environment, singing becomes more than music.

It becomes a form of prayer.

Not always through words.

Sometimes through tone alone.

A sustained note.

A repeated phrase.

A sound that rises and falls like breath itself.

The voice becomes a bridge between the inner world and the unseen.

Love Moving Through the Voice

For some people, devotional singing feels like offering something to the Divine.

For others, it feels like receiving something.

And sometimes the experience goes even deeper.

The sense of a separate self begins to soften.

The usual boundary between singer and song fades.

Sound continues, but the feeling of “I am doing this” becomes less important.

Instead there is immersion.

Presence.

Love moving through the voice.

When I sing devotionally, this is often what I experience.

The idea of myself as a separate individual fades into the background.

The voice continues, the breath continues, the song continues.

But the sense of “I” is no longer at the centre.

There is simply immersion in God’s love.

The sound moves through the body, but it no longer feels as though it belongs to me alone.

It feels shared.

Given.

Held by something much larger.

These moments cannot be forced.

They arise naturally when sound, breath, and attention come into alignment.

The Simplicity of Devotional Sound

One of the remarkable things about devotional singing is how simple it often is.

The melodies are usually easy to follow.

The phrases repeat again and again.

This repetition is not accidental.

It allows the mind to relax.

Instead of concentrating on complex musical structures, the body settles into rhythm.

Breath becomes steady.

Sound becomes continuous.

And gradually attention shifts away from thinking and into feeling.

This is why people who believe they cannot sing often feel comfortable joining devotional singing.

The focus is not on individual performance.

It is on shared presence.

Every voice contributes.

No voice needs to stand alone.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

Have you ever experienced a moment where music or singing felt sacred?

Did the experience feel different from ordinary listening?

What changed in your body or awareness during that moment?

Simply noticing these memories can help reconnect you with the deeper dimension of sound.

Throughout human history, devotional singing has taken many forms.

In some traditions it appears as chant.

In others as sacred song.

In others as call-and-response gatherings where voices move together rhythmically.

One of the most beautiful expressions of this shared devotional sound is a practice known as mantra.

In the next chapter we will explore how simple repeated phrases can shape consciousness, calm the mind, and create powerful experiences of connection.

Through mantra, the voice becomes something more than expression.

It becomes a pathway.

Chapter Sixteen

Mantra – Sound That Shapes Consciousness

When people hear the word *mantra*, they sometimes imagine something complicated or mysterious.

In reality, mantra is very simple.

A mantra is a sound, word, or phrase that is repeated rhythmically.

That is all.

Yet through this simplicity, something remarkable can happen.

The repetition of sound begins to influence the mind, the body, and the emotional state of the person singing.

The breath finds a rhythm.

The voice settles into a pattern.

And gradually the mind begins to soften.

Instead of constantly producing new thoughts, attention begins resting inside the repetition.

The mantra continues.

The breath continues.

Sound flows.

And the mind begins to quiet.

Repetition and the Mind

The thinking mind thrives on novelty.

It constantly searches for something new to analyse, compare, or solve.

But repetition gently interrupts this habit.

When the same sound or phrase repeats again and again, the mind has less material to work with.

The analytical part of the mind slowly relaxes.

Attention shifts from thinking to feeling.

Breath becomes steady.

The body begins to settle into the rhythm of the sound.

This is one reason mantra has been used in spiritual traditions for thousands of years.

It gives the mind something simple to rest upon while allowing the deeper layers of awareness to emerge.

Vibration and the Body

Mantra also works through vibration.

When a sound is repeated many times, the vibration moves through the body continuously.

The chest resonates.

The throat opens.

The breath moves in steady cycles.

Over time, this vibration can influence the nervous system.

The body begins to feel calmer.

More grounded.

More connected.

Many people notice that their breathing slows naturally while chanting.

The rhythm of the mantra guides the breath.

And the breath, in turn, signals safety to the nervous system.

The voice becomes a tool for regulating the body.

The Softening of the Self

Something else often happens when mantra continues for a while.

People stop thinking about themselves.

At first the mind may still be evaluating the sound.

Am I singing correctly?

What do others hear?

But as the mantra repeats, these thoughts lose their importance.

The rhythm carries attention forward.

The voice becomes part of the flow.

And gradually the sense of a separate self can begin to soften.

The voice continues.

But the experience becomes less about the individual and more about the sound itself.

For many people this can feel deeply peaceful.

Almost like floating within the music.

Rediscovering Joy

In gatherings where mantra is sung together, I often see something beautiful happen.

At first people may appear slightly cautious.

They are learning the melody.

Listening carefully.

Finding the rhythm.

But as the mantra continues, something begins to change.

The room relaxes.

Breath deepens.

Faces soften.

People close their eyes.

Bodies begin swaying gently with the rhythm.

And gradually something else appears.

Joy.

Not dramatic excitement.

But a simple, quiet joy.

The kind that feels familiar.

Almost as if it has always been there.

Many people later describe this experience in similar ways.

They feel lighter.

More peaceful.

More connected to themselves and to the people around them.

In truth, nothing new was added.

The joy was already present.

The mantra simply helped them reconnect with it.

Practice

A Simple Mantra

Find a comfortable place to sit.

Take a slow breath.

Begin repeating the phrase softly:

Om Nanah Shivaya

Allow the words to move gently with the breath.

Repeat the phrase slowly several times.

Let the rhythm become natural.

Notice how the mind responds to the repetition.

After a minute or two, allow the sound to fade.

Pause and notice the feeling in the body.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

How did repetition affect your mind while chanting?

Did the sound change your breathing or body sensations?

Did the experience feel different from ordinary singing?

There are no right or wrong answers.

Simply observing the experience is enough.

Mantra is often practised individually.

But something even more powerful can happen when mantra is sung together.

When voices gather in rhythm, repetition takes on a new dimension.

The sound becomes collective.

Breath synchronises across many bodies.

And the experience of singing becomes shared.

This form of devotional singing is known as Kirtan.

In the next chapter we will explore how call-and-response chanting allows people to relax into shared sound, dissolving self-consciousness and opening the heart.

Chapter Seventeen

Kirtan – Singing Together

While mantra can be practised alone, something extraordinary happens when it is sung together.

This shared form of devotional chanting is known as Kirtan.

In Kirtan, one voice begins a phrase and the group responds.

The melody is usually simple.

The words repeat again and again.

The rhythm settles into a steady pulse.

Anyone can join.

There is no need for musical training.

The structure itself carries the experience.

At first people may simply listen.

They learn the melody.

They feel the rhythm.

Then gradually their voice joins the group.

Not standing apart.

Not performing.

Just becoming part of the sound.

The Power of Call and Response

The call-and-response structure of Kirtan removes much of the pressure people feel around singing.

No one needs to lead constantly.

No one needs to remember long lyrics.

The leader sings a line.

The group answers.

This simple exchange creates a natural flow.

The voice can relax into the rhythm rather than worrying about what comes next.

And because the melody repeats, people quickly feel comfortable joining in.

Even those who once believed they could not sing often find themselves participating easily.

The structure gently dissolves self-consciousness.

The Moment the Room Drops In

In many Kirtan gatherings there is a moment when something shifts.

At first the room may feel slightly tentative.

People are finding their voice.

Listening carefully.

Following the rhythm.

But gradually the repetition begins to settle the mind.

Breath becomes steady.

The sound grows fuller.

And then suddenly something changes.

Everyone drops in.

Not perfectly at the same moment, but close enough that the feeling becomes unmistakable.

It is as if the whole room has entered the same current.

The voices merge.

The rhythm carries everyone together.

Time begins to feel different.

I sometimes describe this moment as if we are all in one giant boat, rowing together across a vast cosmic ocean of bliss.

Each voice is like an oar in the water.

Moving in rhythm.

Moving together.

No one needs to force the movement.

The current carries us.

The sound carries us.

And suddenly the experience becomes less about singing and more about being inside the music.

The Dissolving of the Individual Voice

When this moment arrives, something interesting happens to the sense of self.

The individual voice is still present.

But it is no longer separate.

It blends with the voices around it.

The group becomes a single field of sound.

People often close their eyes.

Bodies sway gently with the rhythm.

Some smile.

Some become very still.

The earlier concerns about how the voice sounds disappear.

There is no longer a need to evaluate anything.

The music continues.

The breath continues.

And the sound carries everyone forward together.

Reflection

Consider this for a moment.

Imagine sitting in a room where many voices are chanting the same phrase.

The rhythm is steady.

The melody repeats.

Gradually your own voice joins the sound.

At first you hear yourself clearly.

But as the chant continues, your voice blends with the others.

The sound becomes one flowing current.

What would it feel like to be part of that shared sound?

Would the voice feel different than when you sing alone?

Sound as Shared Devotion

Kirtan is not simply a musical gathering.

It is an act of shared devotion.

Each voice contributes something to the collective sound.

No voice needs to be perfect.

No voice needs to dominate.

The beauty comes from the blending.

The shared intention.

The willingness to sing together.

In this way, Kirtan becomes more than a musical practice.

It becomes a community experience.

A reminder that the voice does not belong only to the individual.

It belongs to the field we create together.

When chanting continues for long enough, another experience sometimes begins to emerge.

The repetition deepens.

The rhythm settles further.

The mind grows quiet.

And the singing begins to feel almost trance-like.

In the next chapter we will explore this experience more closely.

Because when sound continues long enough, it can carry the mind into a state of deep presence.

A state where singing becomes meditation.

Or prayer.

Or something even deeper.

Chapter Eighteen

Devotional Trance

When chanting continues for a while, something subtle begins to change.

At first people are still thinking.

They follow the melody.

They remember the words.

They notice their own voice within the group.

But as the repetition continues, the mind begins to relax.

The rhythm settles into the body.

Breath moves naturally with the chant.

The same phrase repeats again and again.

Gradually the mind stops trying to organise the experience.

Instead, attention sinks into the sound itself.

And when this happens, the quality of the room often shifts.

The chant deepens.

The voices become more unified.

The music carries everyone forward together.

What began as singing starts to feel more like meditation.

The Rhythm of the Nervous System

One reason this experience emerges is the effect of rhythm on the nervous system.

Human bodies naturally synchronise with repeating patterns.

When a steady rhythm continues long enough, breathing begins to align with it.

The heart rate slows.

Muscles soften.

The body settles into a calmer state.

The repetition of the chant supports this process.

Instead of constantly shifting attention, the mind begins to rest within the sound.

The body and the rhythm become linked.

And as the nervous system settles, the sense of effort disappears.

Singing continues.

But it feels effortless.

When Time Slows

During these moments of devotional chanting, many people notice something curious.

Time begins to feel different.

Minutes pass without being counted.

The mind stops measuring the experience.

There is simply the rhythm.

The breath.

The sound moving through the room.

In my own experience, it often feels as though time has slowed.

Everything becomes very present.

Very immediate.

The chant continues, yet it no longer feels as though I am creating it.

It is simply happening.

The voice moves.

The music flows.

But the sense of "I am doing this" fades.

Instead, there is just witnessing.

Being present inside the sound.

Immersed in Love

In these moments, the feeling that remains is often love.

Not a personal emotion directed at something specific.

But a spacious, quiet sense of love that seems to fill the experience itself.

The voice continues.

But the sense of a separate self softens.

There is only presence.

Sound moving through breath.

Voices moving together.

And the feeling of being immersed in something much larger than oneself.

These moments cannot be forced.

They arrive naturally when the conditions are right.

When repetition, rhythm, and devotion align.

When the mind loosens its grip.

And when the voice is allowed to move freely without needing to control the experience.

Reflection

Consider the following question:

Have you ever experienced a moment where music carried you so deeply that you lost track of time?

Perhaps while singing.

Perhaps while listening.

What changed in your awareness during that moment?

Simply remembering such experiences can reveal how naturally the human mind moves toward states of deep presence through sound.

Devotional trance is not something reserved for experts or advanced practitioners.

It is a natural state that can arise whenever the voice, breath, and rhythm move together long enough.

For thousands of years, people have used chanting, singing, and rhythm to access this state.

Not as an escape from life.

But as a way of reconnecting with what is most alive within it.

When the chant ends, the sound fades.

But something often remains.

A feeling of openness.

A sense of calm.

A quiet joy that continues long after the music has stopped.

In the next part of this book, we will explore how the voice that has been rediscovered through sound and devotion can begin to move naturally through everyday life.

Because the purpose of freeing the voice is not only to sing.

It is to live more fully.

PART V

Living With an Open Voice

Chapter Nineteen

Your Voice in Daily Life

When people begin reconnecting with their voice, the change rarely stays inside the singing room.

Something shifts in the way they move through everyday life.

At first the change may be subtle.

A little more breath before speaking.

A slightly more relaxed posture.

A willingness to let words come more naturally.

But over time the shift becomes clearer.

People speak more honestly.

They express themselves with less hesitation.

They feel more comfortable allowing their presence to exist in the room.

The voice that was once held tightly begins to move more freely through daily life.

Speaking From Presence

One of the most noticeable changes is the way people speak.

Before reconnecting with their voice, many people speak cautiously.

They measure their words.

They edit themselves quickly.

Sometimes they even reduce the volume of their voice without realising it.

But when the voice becomes more open, speech begins to feel different.

The breath supports the words.

The voice carries naturally.

The person does not need to push or shrink their sound.

Instead, they speak from presence.

The words arise more directly from what they actually feel or think in that moment.

This often creates a sense of authenticity that others can immediately recognise.

The voice becomes more trustworthy because it is less filtered through self-protection.

Confidence Without Force

Another change people often notice is an increase in confidence.

Not the kind of confidence that comes from trying to appear strong.

But a quieter form of confidence that comes from being comfortable with oneself.

The person no longer feels the need to defend their voice.

They have experienced what it feels like when their sound is authentic and free.

Because of this, the voice begins to carry more stability.

Even simple statements can feel clearer and more grounded.

This confidence does not come from technique.

It comes from familiarity.

The person has reconnected with something natural inside themselves.

More Space Inside the Moment

Perhaps the most important change is the sense of spaciousness that begins to appear.

When the mind loosens its grip on constant self-evaluation, something else becomes available.

Space.

Space to breathe.

Space to listen.

Space to respond rather than react.

People often describe feeling more present in conversations.

They are not as busy analysing how they are being perceived.

Instead they can simply participate.

The voice flows more easily when the mind is not constantly monitoring it.

And when this happens, the experience of communication becomes lighter.

More natural.

More real.

Practice

Speaking From Breath

Choose a moment during the day when you are speaking with someone.

Before responding, take one gentle breath.

Allow the breath to settle in the body.

Then speak.

Notice how the voice feels when it follows the breath rather than racing ahead of it.

You may find that your words become calmer and clearer.

This simple practice can gradually transform the way the voice moves through daily conversations.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

Do you allow your voice to exist fully in everyday conversations?

Or do you sometimes reduce or edit what you say?

What changes when you speak from a place of presence rather than self-monitoring?

Simply observing your voice in daily life can reveal how much space already exists within it.

When the voice begins moving freely through everyday life, something else often emerges.

People feel drawn to continue exploring their voice.

Not only in conversation, but in sound.

They sing while cooking.

Hum while walking.

Or return to simple practices that reconnect them with breath and vibration.

In the next chapter we will explore a simple daily practice that can keep the voice open and connected.

A practice that takes only a few minutes but can have a powerful effect over time.

Chapter Twenty

A Simple Daily Voice Practice

Reopening the voice does not require hours of training each day.

In fact, consistency matters far more than duration.

A few minutes of gentle attention to breath and sound can gradually reshape the relationship you have with your voice.

The purpose of a daily voice practice is not to improve your voice through effort or discipline.

It is simply to maintain the connection between breath, body, and sound.

When this connection is revisited regularly, the voice remains open.

The nervous system remembers that sound is safe.

Expression continues to feel natural.

Even ten minutes a day can support this process.

The practice below is designed to be simple, flexible, and easy to return to whenever you wish.

A Ten-Minute Voice Practice

This practice moves gradually from listening to sound, allowing the voice to open gently rather than forcing it.

If you have more time, you may extend any part of the practice.

If you have less time, even a few minutes can still be valuable.

The important thing is not perfection.

It is presence.

1 Minute – Listening

Begin by sitting comfortably.

Close your eyes if that feels natural.

Bring your attention to your breath.

Notice the gentle movement of the inhale and the exhale.

There is nothing to change.

Simply allow the breath to move naturally.

Let the body settle.

This minute of listening prepares the nervous system for sound.

3 Minutes – Humming

Take a slow breath in.

As the breath leaves the body, allow a gentle hum to appear.

Mmmmm.

Let the sound be soft and relaxed.

Notice the vibration in the lips, face, and chest.

Take another breath.

Hum again.

Continue this gentle humming for a few minutes.

Humming is one of the easiest ways to reconnect the voice with vibration without strain.

3 Minutes – Long Tones

Now allow the hum to open into a vowel sound.

Ahhhhh

Ooooo

Eeeee

Take a breath and allow the sound to travel naturally for the length of the breath.

Do not push the sound.

Let the breath carry the tone.

You may explore different vowels or allow the pitch to move slightly if it feels natural.

The purpose here is simply to let sound flow.

3 Minutes – Mantra

To complete the practice, repeat a simple mantra.

You might choose:

Om Namo Narayanaya
Om Namah Shivaya
Radhe Radhe Govinda

Allow the words to follow your breath.

Repeat the mantra gently, letting the rhythm settle into the body.

Feel the vibration of the sound.

Notice how repetition gradually quiets the mind.

After a few minutes, allow the sound to fade into silence.

Sit quietly for a moment and notice how your body feels.

Keeping the Voice Alive

The purpose of this practice is not to perfect the voice.

It is simply to keep the relationship with sound alive.

Some days the voice may feel open and expressive.

Other days it may feel quieter or more tentative.

Both experiences are natural.

By returning regularly to breath and sound, the voice remains familiar.

It remains something you can inhabit comfortably.

And over time, this familiarity allows the voice to appear more easily in every part of life.

Reflection

After practising for a few days, consider:

How does your body feel after making sound regularly?

Does your voice feel more relaxed in everyday conversations?

What changes when you begin your day with breath and sound?

These small observations help you recognise how naturally the voice responds to attention.

The voice often becomes even more powerful when it is shared with others.

When people gather and make sound together, the experience changes.

Individual voices blend into a shared field.

Confidence grows.

Self-consciousness dissolves more quickly.

In the next chapter we will explore the power of singing with others and why community can be such a powerful environment for rediscovering the voice.

Chapter Twenty One

Singing With Others

Although many people begin reconnecting with their voice in private, something very powerful happens when sound is shared with others.

The experience changes.

When we sing alone, the voice is heard clearly by the mind. Every tone can feel exposed. The inner critic can easily appear, analysing the sound and asking whether it is good enough.

But when voices gather together, the relationship with sound begins to shift.

Instead of one voice standing apart, many voices move together.

The sound becomes shared.

Attention moves away from the question *How do I sound?* and toward something much simpler.

What is happening here?

And very quickly the voice begins to feel different.

The Safety of Shared Sound

One of the reasons group singing is so powerful is that it creates a sense of safety.

No single voice carries the whole room.

No one person must be perfect.

The sound becomes collective.

Each voice contributes to a larger field of vibration.

The body recognises this safety quickly.

Breath deepens.

The throat relaxes.

People who once believed they could not sing often find themselves joining the sound naturally.

Not because they suddenly became confident performers.

But because the pressure to perform disappears.

A Shift in Relationship

As the singing continues, something deeper begins to change.

The person who was quietly evaluating themselves begins to relax.

They listen to the voices around them.

They feel the rhythm moving through the room.

And gradually their attention shifts.

Instead of asking:

How do I sound?

A different question begins to arise.

How can my voice support this moment?

This is a profound shift.

The voice is no longer trying to stand apart.

It is offering itself to the shared experience.

The person begins listening more deeply.

Feeling the rhythm of the group.

Allowing their voice to blend rather than dominate.

Sound becomes something given.

Listening and Giving

In group singing there is a natural balance between listening and offering.

You listen to the voices around you.

You feel the rhythm of the chant or song.

And you allow your voice to join the movement that is already happening.

The voice becomes part of a living current.

It is not separate.

It is not competing.

It is participating.

When people discover this way of singing, something beautiful often happens.

The self-consciousness disappears.

The mind stops measuring every sound.

The voice relaxes into the shared rhythm of the group.

And the experience becomes deeply nourishing.

Because the voice is no longer trying to take something from the moment.

It is giving something to it.

Supporting the Moment

When a group of people sing together in this way, the sound becomes more than music.

It becomes a field of presence.

Each person listens.

Each person gives their voice.

Each voice supports the others.

The music becomes a shared act of participation.

This is why group singing and chanting can feel so powerful.

Not because of technical perfection.

But because of the collective willingness to show up and contribute.

To support the moment.

To let sound move through the room.

Together.

Practice

Giving Your Voice to the Moment

The next time you sing with others, notice what happens in your mind.

Do you find yourself evaluating how you sound?

If so, gently shift your attention.

Listen to the voices around you.

Feel the rhythm of the group.

Then allow your voice to join the sound with a simple intention:

How can my voice support this moment?

Let your sound blend with the others.

Notice how the experience changes when the voice is offered rather than performed.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

What changes when your voice moves from performance into participation?

How does it feel when your voice blends with others rather than standing alone?

What happens when the intention becomes supporting the moment rather than sounding good?

When voices gather in this way, something remarkable often happens.

The sound becomes larger than any single person.

The room fills with rhythm and tone.

And the experience begins to feel less like singing and more like connection.

Connection with others.

Connection with the present moment.

Connection with the simple joy of shared sound.

Chapter Twenty Two

An Invitation to Continue

If you have followed the journey through this book, you may have discovered something surprising.

Your voice was never really the problem.

What was difficult was the story surrounding it.

The belief that your voice had to sound a certain way.

The idea that singing belonged only to the talented.

The fear that making sound might lead to judgment or embarrassment.

These beliefs are learned early, often without us realising it. Over time they quietly shape how we relate not only to singing, but to expression itself.

But when we begin listening again – to breath, to vibration, to sound – something simple becomes clear.

The voice has always been there.

Waiting patiently beneath the noise of self-criticism.

Waiting for permission to move again.

The Voice Is Alive

Your voice is not an object that needs to be perfected.

It is a living expression of your presence in the world.

It changes from day to day.

From moment to moment.

Sometimes it is soft.

Sometimes strong.

Sometimes joyful.

Sometimes quiet and reflective.

Like breath, it moves with life itself.

When we stop trying to control it so tightly, the voice begins to reveal something natural and beautiful – its ability to respond to the moment.

Giving Your Voice to Life

As your relationship with your voice softens, the question slowly changes.

Instead of asking:

How do I sound?

A new question appears.

How can my voice serve this moment?

Sometimes the answer may be silence.

Sometimes it may be a song.

Sometimes it may simply be speaking honestly.

Or offering a tone that fills the room gently.

When the voice is given in this way, something very simple happens.

Life becomes more participatory.

Instead of observing the moment from a distance, you become part of it.

Breath moves.

Sound moves.

Presence moves.

And the voice becomes a way of contributing to the world around you.

The Simplicity of Devotional Sound

Throughout history people have gathered together to sing.

Not because they were trained musicians.

But because the human voice naturally longs to express connection.

Connection with one another.

Connection with the earth.

Connection with the mystery of existence itself.

When voices gather in rhythm and repetition, something very simple yet profound happens.

The mind quiets.

The heart opens.

And the moment becomes shared.

For me, devotional singing has been one of the most beautiful ways to experience this.

In those moments when voices join together in chant, the usual sense of separation softens.

The music continues.

The breath continues.

And the experience becomes one of presence and love moving through sound.

Continuing the Exploration

The journey with the voice is not something that ends with reading a book.

It continues every time breath becomes sound again.

When you hum while walking.

When you sing quietly while cooking.

When you chant with others.

Or when you simply allow your voice to speak truthfully in a conversation.

Each moment is another opportunity to rediscover the voice.

Not as something that must perform.

But as something that participates.

An Open Invitation

If this exploration has awakened curiosity in you, I warmly invite you to continue the journey in community.

Each week I host gatherings of devotional singing where voices come together in simple call-and-response chant.

These gatherings are open to everyone, whether you consider yourself a singer or not.

The purpose is not performance.

It is participation.

To sit together.

To breathe together.

To allow sound to move through the room and through our lives.

There are also opportunities to explore the voice more deeply through workshops, retreats, and individual sessions dedicated to rediscovering vocal freedom.

Wherever your journey leads, the most important thing is simply to keep listening.

To your breath.

To your body.

To the quiet impulse to make sound when the moment invites it.

Continue the Journey

If something in this guide has resonated with you, you are warmly invited to continue exploring your voice.

The journey of vocal freedom does not end with reading a book. It deepens each time breath becomes sound — when you hum quietly to yourself, sing with others, or allow your voice to express what is alive in the present moment.

If you would like to explore this work more deeply, there are several ways we can connect.

Join the Weekly Kirtan

Each week I share devotional chanting and mantra through my YouTube channel. These gatherings are an open invitation to sing, listen, and reconnect with the joy of shared sound.

You can join here:

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@ahishamusic>

Simply subscribe and join the weekly Kirtan gatherings.

Work With Me

If you feel called to explore your voice more personally, I offer sessions and gatherings dedicated to rediscovering vocal freedom.

This work may include:

- Voice activation and vocal freedom sessions
- Sacred singing and devotional chant

- Kirtan gatherings
- Retreats and workshops

You can learn more here:

<https://ahisha.co.uk>

Get in Touch

If you would like to ask a question, explore working together, or simply share your experience with this guide, you are very welcome to reach out.

Email

ahisha.music@gmail.com

A Final Invitation

Your voice was never meant to be hidden.

It was meant to move, to express, and to connect.

Whether you sing quietly to yourself, chant with others, or simply allow your voice to speak more honestly in everyday life, every sound is a step toward freedom.

If our paths cross in song one day, I look forward to
hearing your voice.

Ahīshā Dāsī