

One Meditation #4, April 2025: **“Noisy Meditating—Why Chant, Sing, or Hum?”** *(Apr. 10, 2025)*

Welcome to the fourth issue of One Meditation—one more meditation—and thank you for being part of it. Please consider sharing/forwarding it. Monthly subjects range from new to ancient, Western to Eastern, and scientific to spiritual. For more info, see below. – Richard

ONE MEDITATION #4, April 2025: NOISY MEDITATING—WHY CHANT, SING, OR HUM?

What’s up with all the noisy types of meditation? Isn’t it supposed to deliver a person into an increasingly deep cave of silence?

One way noise may help initially is that you can use it to reach quietness. Most people’s brains are so busy talking, remembering, and feeling emotions that they can’t find inner silence. And some types of directed “noise” may help people calm down, center, and clear their minds. I used to watch a friend with a chaotic life chant loudly for an hour or two each day. She told me she basically “shouts away” her inner turmoil. Another person told me he has created a habit of chanting at a subvocal level (hearing it in his mind only), gradually letting silence overtake him; then, if his mind wants to flip back into normal thinking, instead it begins chanting again, which helps him consciously return to inner quiet.

Breath also can be an important factor in achieving deeper calmness. And chanting, singing, or humming usually causes a longer, deeper, meditative breathing cycle. Researcher Teruhisa Komori reports in *Mental Illness Journal* that eight breaths per minute or fewer makes a person’s parasympathetic nerve system become more active. Science has nicknamed it, along with its 18-24” vagus nerve—the longest in the body—the “rest-and-digest” system. Together they provide a default system in a person, causing relaxation, calmness, a slower heartbeat, lower blood pressure—and, say meditation researchers, deeper self-awareness. Thus “noisy” meditation, practiced regularly, can provide a much stronger parasympathetic response.

Scientific research on simple humming confirms the benefits of humming, chanting, and singing. According to Goldman and Goldman in *The Humming Effect*, humming acts on the human body like an “inside-out body massage.” A five-minute or longer period of humming, they report, increases parasympathetic activation, as above. Those five-plus minutes also release positive hormones. One type includes feel-good, “runner’s-high” endorphins; another is the “love/trust” chemical oxytocin. Together, they may explain why studies also show humming sometimes reduces pain and increases feelings of meditative love.

The *International Journal of Yoga* also found, in a study, that chanting the Hindu and Buddhist word *Om* (“aum,” a word much like humming) deactivates the limbic system, which relaxes the brain’s responses to emotion and stress. Notably, the study also reported that chanting “sss” appears to have no effect on the limbic system. This suggests that

humming and chants with “mmm” may work better. Another advantage is that, physiologically, controlled sound helps relax the muscles of the jaw and throat, which can lead to decreased inner talk and greater mental quiet. And modern childbirth lessons often recommend practicing a low sound with an open throat, much like chanting Eastern monks use, to relax the pelvic floor and cervix during birth. This would suggest that such sounds relax other parts of the body, too.

How can you hum, chant, or sing for meditation? Breathe deeply. Feel the physical vibrations. Any tone works, says *The Humming Effect*, because each note creates harmonics—bundles of different tones—reverberating in your body. I use humming while exercising at home. It focuses me on deeper breathing, reduces tension headaches and pains, and leads me to greater inner quiet. And weekly, I attend a spiritual gathering that uses singing, which helps me more easily reach a meditative state.

Silence is golden. But “noisy” meditation can be a silver pathway to a core of calmness. Sufism, for example, teaches that when the heart begins to remember God, then the tongue may stop speaking God’s name. The ancient Hindu *Atharva Veda* declares that “Om,” so much like humming, is a raft that carries its chanter across life’s ocean to the Presence of God.

Next Month: NATURE BATHING—HANGING OUT WITH BIRDS, BEES, WATER, AND TREES

Peace, Strength, Joy

Richard Jewell

richard@jewell.net, www.RichardJewell.org

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Previous Issues

Jan. 2025, #1: **“What Is Meditation?”** Science says it is a conscious calming of body and mind. Practitioners define it as aware attention for inner growth. **Recommended Book:** Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson, *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*

Feb. '25, #2: **“What Are Four Main Focuses in Meditation?”** The first two are immanent or within, and transcendent or outer. Either of these can be paired with two others: open waiting, or one pointedness.

Recommended Book: *Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness*

March '25, #3: **"Why Breathe?"** Science says a breath cycle of 8+ seconds triggers parasympathetic-system calmness, which lowers pulse and blood pressure rates, decreases anxiety, and increases self-awareness.

Recommended Book: *James Nestor, Breath—The New Science of a Lost Art*
