



The Practice of Chanting

From Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, Saturday, July 4, 2015 Meditation

Chanting as contemplative practice naturally draws our focus to the present and calms the dualistic mind. The very physical act of breathing and forming sounds brings body and mind together. Chant has a place in many sacred traditions, from Gregorian melodies to Native American drumming to the polyrhythmic chants of West Africa. There are as many ways to chant as there are bodies and vocal cords. You may enjoy exploring different kinds of chant, or even creating your own, as a way of meditating and strengthening the non-dual mind.

Perhaps the simplest, most familiar chant is “Om.” In the Hindu tradition, Om is the original and basic vibration of the created world, the sound that holds all other sounds. The mantra is also called *pranava* in Sanskrit, meaning it infuses all of life and fills our *prana*, breath. Om represents the fullness of reality and encompasses all things; it has no beginning and no end.

You might practice chanting this single syllable alone or in a group, from five minutes to more than twenty, followed by a time of silence. Begin by sitting tall and straight so you can breathe deeply. Inhale, and on your exhalation vocalize the three sounds of Om, AUM, on a single tone. Feel the sound moving upward with your breath: beginning in your belly—*aah*; moving to your chest—*ooh*; vibrating your lips and nasal cavity—*mm*. Take another deep breath, and sing AUM again, slowly shaping the vowels and closing your mouth to a hum.

Repeat the chant as many times as you wish, letting all other thoughts and sensations disappear. If you are distracted, return your focus to breath and sound and the way it feels in your body. When you are ready, let the chant subside into silence.

+++++

From Timeless Quaker Wisdom in Plainsong: Selected, set to music, and recorded by Paulette Meier

I discovered these quotations along my journey as a developing Quaker. Each one spoke to me, and I wanted to carry it in my heart and savor it. Putting words to melody helps me to memorize. Now these words of early Friends have become part of me, serving as reminders of what’s truly important in times of distraction and distress.

This Present Time

Ye have no time but this present time,
ye have no time but this present time,
ye have no time but this present time,
therefore prize your time for your soul’s sake.

-George Fox (1652)

From Songs and Prayers from Taize, page 37

Singing is one of the most important forms of prayer. A few words sung over and over again reinforce the meditative quality of the prayer. They express a basic reality of faith that can quickly be grasped by the intellect, and that gradually penetrates the heart and the whole being. These simple chants also provide a way of praying when one is alone, during the day or at night, or even in the silence of one's heart while one is working.

Some Simple Chants

Leave everything that you have
and come and follow Me.

If you hear the voice of the Lord today,
harden not your heart.

+++++

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be