

A Sound Bath Sequence and Script

Two scripts to read aloud. One goes straight to the sound after a short settling in. The other follows a full session in eleven parts.

The sequence is adapted from the manual of the Sound Practitioner Training (Hamid's own course), and the words from his own scripts.

The Sound-First Script

Most sound meditations run 60 to 90 minutes, and nearly all of that time is sound. This script keeps the words to a few minutes at the start: a short welcome, settling into the body, the breath, an intention, then the sound, and a few minutes at the end to come back.

Read the plain lines aloud, slowly, and leave a pause wherever a line ends. The lines in brackets are for you alone. The minutes beside each part are GongSpace's suggestion.

Introduction

3 to 5 minutes

*[Before anyone lies down, check that every phone is switched off, not set to silent. Dim the lights.
Welcome people and give your name.]*

Find a position that lets you feel relaxed and still awake, lying down or sitting up. If you would like a blanket or a bolster, raise a hand and one will be brought to you. Many people like support under the backs of the knees.

For the next [length of the session], you will hear [your instruments]. There will be a few minutes of guidance now, then a long stretch of sound with almost no words, and a few minutes at the end to come back.

All you have to do is listen. The sound gives your attention somewhere to rest. When your mind drifts into thought, come back to the sound. That is the whole practice.

Listen to the sounds rise and fall, and to the space and the silence between them.

If you are comfortable closing your eyes, close them. It lets the sound become the center of your attention.

You are free to move or change position at any time. Some sounds will grow intense, and each one changes, so a gentler sound may be only a moment away. If you need to leave the room, go quietly, and you are welcome to come back.

Settling Into the Body

2 to 3 minutes

Now bring your attention to your body. Notice every place it meets the floor or the chair beneath you, and let that support hold you.

Let your forehead and the muscles around your eyes soften. Let your jaw loosen. Let your shoulders drop.

Open your hands and let them rest. Let your belly soften. With each breath out, let the body grow a little heavier.

If anything is uncomfortable, change it now.

Breath

2 to 3 minutes

Now notice your breath, without changing it. Feel the belly rise as you breathe in, and soften as you breathe out.

Feel the air itself, a little cooler as it comes in at the nose, a little warmer as it leaves.

Listen for the sound of your breath.

There is nothing to fix here. Just breathing in, and breathing out.

[Leave a few breaths of quiet. Say "Breathing in. Breathing out." once or twice into the silence if the room needs an anchor.]

Intention

1 to 2 minutes

Bring to mind what you would like from this time. It might be rest, clarity, gratitude, or a word of your own.

Say it to yourself once, and let it go. It will still be there at the end.

[Tap a singing bowl three times while people hold their intention.]

Sound

35 to 70 minutes

Now give your attention to the sound. Follow each sound from its beginning to its end, and into the silence after it. There is nothing else to do.

[Begin softly, with one instrument. A low bowl, or a gong primed gently at its center, makes a quiet first sound.]

[Build and settle in waves, three or more across the session, changing instrument or technique between them. Leave a pause, the sandhyaya, at each change. Never let the gong climb into a crash or a wash of white noise.]

[The Sound Meditation part of the full session gives every playing cue in detail.]

[Close on the gong with the penultimate and ultimate strokes, or let your last bowl fade on its own. Then let the silence run for a minute or more, and say nothing into it.]

Coming Back

4 to 6 minutes

Rest a little longer in the stillness the sound leaves behind. Notice how you feel. Whatever is here, let it be.

Bring back to mind the intention you began with.

| *[Tap the singing bowl three times.]*

Begin to deepen your breath. Let small movements return to your fingers and toes, and turn your head gently from side to side. Take any stretch that feels good.

If you are lying down, roll onto one side. When you are ready, use your hands to press up to sitting. Stay inside the quiet a moment longer.

| *[If you like, close with one OM together over a quiet drone, as in the full session's Vocalization.]*

Thank you for being here. Take as long as you need before you get up.

| *[Bring the lights up slowly.]*

The Full Session, From the Welcome to the Way Back

Hamid's manual for his course sets out a full session in eleven parts, 45 to 90 minutes in all. Three of the parts are marked optional, and a shorter session leaves them out.

The manual gives the overall length but no time for each part. The minutes beside each part are GongSpace's suggestion, adding up to 46 minutes at the shortest and 90 at the longest.

  5 to 8 minutes

Introduction

Welcome everyone, say how the session will run, help each person into a position they can stay in, and explain how to listen.

  2 to 4 minutes

Intention

Guide each person to set an intention, a word or a phrase to hold lightly for the rest of the session.

  3 to 5 minutes

Breath

Lead slow, deep breathing into the belly. The manual calls this part pranayama, breathing from the diaphragm.

  Optional, up to 5 minutes

Movement

A few gentle movements before the stillness. The manual suggests neck rolls, the cat and cow stretch on all fours, or Sufi grinds, which are slow circles of the upper body while seated.

  5 to 7 minutes

Body Scan

Move everyone's attention slowly through the body, from the top of the head to the feet, letting go of tension on the way.

  Optional, up to 8 minutes

Visualization

A run of named pictures, or a journey, for people to follow with their eyes closed.

●  22 to 30 minutes

Sound Meditation

The long stretch of sound, on instruments rich in overtones such as gongs, singing bowls and a shruti box, with little talking or none.

○  3 to 5 minutes

Vocalization

The room makes sound together, such as a long OM or a mantra, over a quiet drone.

○  1 to 2 minutes

Olfactory Stimulation

A scent comes into the room, from an essential oil or from sage or palo santo burned.

○  Optional, up to 8 minutes

Meditation

A stretch of silent meditation before anyone moves, with no guidance and little sound.

○  5 to 8 minutes

Integration

Guide people back into their bodies and up to sitting, return to the intention from the start, and close.

The Full Session Script, Part by Part

Read the plain lines aloud, slowly, and leave a pause wherever a line ends. The lines in brackets are for you alone: what to play, and when.

Put your own name and instruments where the brackets ask for them. The gong strokes carry the names Hamid's manual uses, each explained where it first appears.

The introduction spends its longest stretch on how to listen, since the listening belongs to the people on the mats.

Introduction

5 to 8 minutes

[Before anyone lies down, check that every phone is switched off, not set to silent. Dim the lights. Welcome people and give your name.]

Let your body begin to settle while you hear a few words about how this session will run.

For the next [length of the session], there will be a little guidance at the start, then a long stretch of [your instruments] with very few words, and a few minutes at the end to come back.

There is no right way to do this. Nothing needs changing or fixing, and there is nothing to get right. By arriving and setting the day aside, you have already done the hardest part.

Find a position you can stay in for a while, lying down or sitting up. A bolster under the knees helps many people. Keep a blanket over you or close by, since the body often cools as it relaxes.

Closing your eyes will help you turn inward. If you are tired, or new to this, you can keep them open instead, resting softly on one spot that does not move, so that you stay awake.

Your part in this is to listen. When the sound begins, follow each one from the moment it starts until it fades completely, and on into the silence after it. Notice the sound in your ears, and any vibration you can feel in your body.

If you want something more to hold on to, count the sounds as they come. If you lose count, pick up wherever you think you left off. Whether the number is right does not matter.

Listen, too, for the higher tones inside each sound, its overtones, and for the small spaces between them.

Your mind will wander. It may drift into thoughts and feelings, or toward sleep. That is what minds do. Each time you notice it has gone, let the thought go without judging it. Come back to your breath or the sound, or to this voice. Sounds from outside the room are part of the practice too. Notice them, and come back.

Some of the sounds will grow loud, and each of them softens again. You are free to change position, or to sit up, at any point. Anyone who needs to step out can do so quietly, and come back in the same way.

In a moment you will choose an intention. Three taps on a bowl will then open the session, and three more will close it at the end.

Intention

2 to 4 minutes

An intention gives this time a purpose. If you came with one, bring it to mind now.

If you did not, ask yourself what you need from this session, and let the answer be your intention. It might be rest, clarity, gratitude, letting go, or a word of your own.

Say it to yourself quietly, once. Then set it down. It will still be there at the end.

[Leave a short silence. Tap a singing bowl three times while people hold their intention. Then begin a soft drone on the shruti box, or let a low bowl hum.]

Breath

3 to 5 minutes

[No scent before or during this part.]

Close your lips gently. Breathe in and out through your nose, and bring your attention to your belly.

Draw the belly in firmly, as if fastening a pair of jeans that are a little too tight. Keep it held in, and notice how the breath has to move up into your chest. Stay with that for a few breaths.

Now go the other way. Push the belly out and keep it there as you breathe. Notice the breath moving lower, into the bottom of the lungs, their largest part.

Now let the belly go completely, neither pulled in nor pushed out. It rises a little as you breathe in and falls as you breathe out. Keep this soft, free belly for the rest of the session.

Breathe in for a count of three. Breathe out for a count of five.

[Lead five or six rounds. If the room is settled, lengthen both counts, keeping the breath out two counts longer than the breath in.]

Now stop counting, and let the breath find its own pace. There is no need to steer it any more.

Movement

Optional, up to 5 minutes

[Lead the hands and feet below for people lying down. With people seated, neck rolls or slow circles of the upper body work as well, and on mats the cat and cow stretch suits a whole room.]

On your next breath in, close your hands into tight fists. Hold the breath for a moment at the top. As you breathe out, open your hands slowly, spreading the fingers wide like a flower opening.

Again. Breathe in as you close the fists, and hold. Breathe out as you open and stretch. Keep going at the pace of your own breath.

[About thirty seconds.]

Now, for a few seconds, close and open your hands as fast as you can, without minding the breath. Keep going. Then take one last breath in with the fists tight. Hold for three, two, one. Let go.

Do the same with your feet and legs. Breathe in as you curl your toes and tighten your legs. Hold. Then let go as you breathe out, spreading your toes apart.

[About thirty seconds, then a few fast rounds, as with the hands.]

Last, the whole body at once. Breathe in and tighten every muscle you can find, from your face down to your feet. Hold for three, two, one. Breathe out and let it all go.

[Twice more.]

Now rest, and feel the sensations moving through your body. Notice how it wants to settle.

Body Scan

5 to 7 minutes

[Leave a breath or two of quiet after each line.]

Now look through the body for any tension that is left. Begin with your forehead and the small muscles around your eyes. Let them soften.

Let your jaw loosen. Move it a little if that helps it find an easier place. Notice your tongue. If it is pressed against the roof of your mouth, let it rest lower.

Let your shoulders drop and your shoulder blades widen. Your hands hold on to things all day. Here there is nothing to hold. Let your hands go completely, down to the fingertips.

Let your lower body grow heavy, down to your feet. Use each breath out as a reminder to let go of whatever you find.

Last, let your belly soften, so that each breath can move easily.

[For a longer scan, name each place slowly, without asking anyone to move.]

The top of your head. Your forehead. Your eyes. Your cheeks. Your lips and jaw. Your throat. The center of your chest. Your right arm and hand. Your left arm and hand. Your belly. Your hips. Your thighs, your knees, your shins. The tops of your feet. Your toes. The soles of your feet, and your heels. Your calves. The backs of your thighs. Your lower back, your middle back, your upper back. Your shoulder blades. The back of your neck. The back of your head. The top of your head again.

Now feel the whole body at once, from head to feet, resting here.

Visualization

Optional, up to 8 minutes

[Name each picture slowly, with a breath between them. Vary the pace. Let the drone carry on underneath.]

Next comes a series of pictures, one after another. There is no need to see any of them clearly or to hold on to one. Let your mind touch each picture as it is named, and move on to the next. Some will come quickly and some slowly, and some will come back more than once. If you miss a few, simply join in again.

A hummingbird. A winding country road. Leaves falling to the floor of an old forest. A stormy sea. The taste of salt. The smell of rain on dry ground. Clouds gathering, yellow, then orange, then red, then gray. A dark night. Wind moving through the trees. A sky full of stars. A full moon. A hammock between two trees. A fire burning.

Keep following your breath, and this voice.

A cabin in the woods. A rocking chair. Snow on the peaks of a tall mountain. The evening sky, without end. A field of wildflowers. The smell of incense. Thunder far away. A cactus in flower. A hummingbird again.

Now follow the sound. Follow your breath.

The smell of rain. A rainbow. The deep sea. The deep sea. The deep sea.

[Let the last picture hang in the quiet as the sound meditation begins. To make your own list, use plain things people know well. Repeat a few of them. End on a picture still and deep enough to hand over to the instruments.]

Sound Meditation

22 to 30 minutes

From here there will be very few words. Let the sound be the center of your attention. Follow each sound from its start to its end, and into the silence after it. When your attention wanders, come back to whatever you can hear now.

[For an evening or a restful session, keep a drone going under everything, leave little silence, and let each sound flow into the next. For a morning session, leave more silence between the sounds, so that people stay alert.]

*[Let the drone fade. **Prime the gong**, the manual's term for greeting it before you play: strike it gently at its center and hum along with its lowest note.]*

*[**Build the wave**: strike near the edge of the gong again and again, lightly, so that it rises little by little. Keep the level comfortable for the person nearest the gong.]*

*[Play in waves. Let the first wave crest, then ease off and change your stroke or your mallet while it settles. Build a second wave in a different way, and then a third. Never let the gong climb into a crash or a wash of white noise. Listen for its overtones and bring those out instead. If it climbs too far, **muffle** it by holding the head of a mallet against its face.]*

*[**Sandhyaya**, the manual's word for the pause between sections: let the sound thin out or stop for a moment before you change to another instrument or technique.]*

[Bring in your other instruments one at a time, such as singing bowls, a flute or your own voice. On bowls, keep one low bowl humming softly under the others, and finish on it where you began. Keep returning to one pattern of notes, so that the mind has something to settle on. Leave a sandhyaya between each change.]

[Return to the gong to close. Bring it down slowly. Make the strokes softer and the gaps between them longer.]

*[**The penultimate stroke**: one single strike with the flat side of your largest mallet, the next to last of the session. Let it ring.]*

*[**The ultimate stroke**: the final single strike, made the same way, which tells the room the gong playing is over.]*

*[**Shunyata**, the silence at the end of the sound meditation: let it run for a minute or more, and say nothing into it.]*

Vocalization

3 to 5 minutes

[Begin a soft drone again, on the shruti box or a harmonium, and find a note in it that is easy to sing. You can also save this part for the very end, once everyone is sitting up.]

Stay where you are. In a moment, the whole room will make one sound together.

Breathe in. On the breath out, sing a long OM. Open the mouth on Ah, round it into Oo, and close the lips to hum Mm.

Again, breathing in. And sing.

[Three rounds is plenty. After the last one, leave a long silence.]

Listen to the quiet the sound leaves after it.

Olfactory Stimulation

1 to 2 minutes

[Only if you told people at the start. Pass an essential oil on a cotton ball, or let a little sage or palo santo smoke drift through the room.]

A scent is coming into the room now. Breathe it in slowly, and notice it.

Meditation

Optional, up to 8 minutes

[Say nothing more here, or hold one quiet drone.]

Rest here in the stillness for a few minutes, listening. Notice whatever you are feeling, and let it be as it is.

Integration

5 to 8 minutes

| *[Speak quietly, close to the level of the last sound.]*

Feel your breath. Feel your body, resting here. Notice how you are feeling.

Bring back to mind the intention you chose at the start. Notice whether anything about it has changed.

Give yourself credit for taking this time. Whatever stillness you found here goes with you. A few slow breaths, anywhere, are a way back to it.

| *[Tap the singing bowl three times, and say nothing for a moment.]*

Begin to deepen your breath. Let small movements come back into your fingers and toes. Stretch in any way that feels good.

When you are ready, roll onto one side and rest there for a breath or two. Then press up slowly with your hands until you are sitting. There is no hurry, and your eyes can stay closed.

| *[Bring the lights up slowly.]*

Thank you for being here. Take as long as you need before you get up.

| *[Leave a few minutes before anyone talks at a normal volume.]*