

POTENTIAL LAUGHING MEDITATIONS FROM SEVERAL TRADITIONS

Preface

Important Notes on Cultural Respect and My Intention

This is a respectful presentation of discoveries I have made in traditions outside my own faith in Jesus. If you are a practitioner of any of the included traditions and discover I have erred, please correct me. If you are not an adherent to any of these traditions, please engage this space with curiosity and the tentativeness appropriate to my confession as a novice outside observer.

Also, this is not an attempt to replicate traditional ceremonies, which are not mine to recreate. Rather, it attempts to understand and draw respectfully on principle sources found in traditional teachings about the laughter, the nature of the divine, human-divine connectedness, inter-human connectedness, human's connectedness to nature, and balance.

Respectfully,
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How Buddhists Might Practice a Laughing Meditation

Inspired by:

- Zen kōans and the spontaneous laughter of awakened masters
- The “crazy wisdom” of Vajrayana figures like Padmasambhava
- The Buddhist understanding that joy (pīti) is one of the seven factors of enlightenment

Possible Step-by-Step Practice

1. Buddhists might begin with Awareness of Breath and Body

Sitting in a comfortable meditation posture, breathing naturally, they settle their attention on the breath—not to control it, but to become present.

They may say silently with the breath: “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile.” — Thich Nhat Hanh, *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment*

They may smile a real smile, not forced. Even a subtle smile can shift the tone of their awareness.

2. They might engage a Zen Kōan or Buddhist joke

They may choose a kōan (a spiritual riddle or teaching story), often paradoxical or humorous, designed to break the grip of logical mind.

For example:

A monk asked Master Zhaozhou, “Does a dog have Buddha-nature?”

Zhaozhou said, “Mu!” (literally, “No,” but meaning: unask the question.)

Or a Buddhist joke:

“Don’t just do something—sit there!”

They may try to let the absurdity hit home, letting it crack open their seriousness. They may not laugh out loud, but they may smile inwardly as insight begins to dawn. If they do laugh—they may just let it come. The laughter is the teaching.

3. They might reflect on the ego's clumsiness

They may turn their gaze inward and find something silly about their own spiritual striving. Maybe how seriously they take their thoughts. Maybe how they try to "achieve enlightenment" like it's a trophy.

At that, they may say gently:

"How very human of me. Smile. Laugh with yourself, not at yourself."

This is not mockery—it's compassion. Buddhist laughter is tender awareness.

4. Buddhists might allow the laughter to emerge—even briefly

They may allow a light, audible laugh. Even if it's just a breathy chuckle.

Laugh at the effort of trying to control their thoughts.

Laugh at the thought of "finally becoming a peaceful person."

Laugh, gently, because they already are what they seek.

They let it be a release. They let it be freedom.

5. And they might close with loving-kindness (Metta) or joyful dedication

To complete the practice, they may send joy to others, silently saying:

"May all beings be free from suffering. May all beings know joy, ease, and laughter."

They may bow inwardly, and let the moment pass like a breeze.

Foundations in Buddhist Scripture and Lineage

- *The Pāli Canon* (Dīgha Nikāya 2) lists pīti (rapture or joy) as a factor of awakening
- Zen tradition emphasizes satori moments that erupt in laughter—like Hotei (the Laughing Buddha), who taught enlightenment through humor and irreverence
- Thich Nhat Hanh taught smiling as a form of meditation: “Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.” — *Peace Is Every Step* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), 15.

The Spirit Behind It

Laughter in Buddhism does not seem to be a distraction from mindfulness—it seems to be mindfulness breaking open. It is perhaps like the smile of their Bodhisattva who sees how absurd clinging is. Perhaps it is the soft, sweet laughter of someone who no longer needs to be anything other than awake.

How Hindus Might Practice a Laughing Meditation

Inspired by:

- The playful nature of Krishna (Lila as divine play)
- Yogic laughter practices (Hasya Yoga)
- The wisdom of joy in the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, and devotional poetry

Possible Step-by-Step Practice

1. Hindus might begin with a centering mantra or invocation

They might start by invoking divine joy through sound and breath. They could choose a mantra they associate with bliss:

Om Ananda Namaha — "I bow to divine joy," or

Om Sri Krishna Sharanam Mama — "I take refuge in Sri Krishna"

They may repeat the mantra slowly, with a gentle smile, feeling joy awaken within them, and letting their breath be easy and playful, not forced.

2. They might reflect on the divine play (Lila) of Krishna

One of the most beloved images in Hinduism is of young Krishna, stealing butter, playing pranks, dancing with the gopis (cowherd girls of Vrindavan), and laughing with abandon. These stories are not trivial to Hindus—they reveal that the universe itself is God's playful dance.

They may read or recall a joyful Krishna story, such as:

Krishna stealing butter as a child, leaving footprints through the house, and feigning innocence when caught by Yashoda.

(See: Bhagavata Purana, Book 10)

And they would likely reflect on questions like: What if joy and mischief were also sacred? What does it mean to see God not only as creator and judge—but as divine trickster and friend?

3. They might engage in Hasya Yoga (yogic laughing exercise)

Yogic laughing meditation (Hasya Yoga) involves intentionally cultivating joyful, heart-opening laughter. It is rooted in the Ayurvedic understanding that laughter balances vata, clears sadhaka pitta, and elevates prana.

They might do something like this:

- Sit or stand comfortably.
- Begin with a deep inhale, then exhale while saying “Ha... Ha... Ha...” in an exaggerated way.
- Let the sound grow until it becomes real laughter.
- Try different tones: high, low, giggling, belly-laughing. Let it be ridiculous. Let it be free.
- If needed, recall something truly silly—a time you tripped over your own sandal at temple—or just how absurd the ego can be.

Laughter becomes a form of bhakti—devotion through joy.

4. Hindus might close with a prayer of gratitude

They might end their practice by returning to stillness, bringing their hands to their hearts and offering a quiet prayer, like:

“Anandoham, Anandoham, Anandam Brahmanandam,”
 (“I am joy, I am joy, I am the bliss of the Absolute”), or

“O Divine, thank you for the laughter that lifts illusion and leads me home to you.”

Key Scriptural & Philosophical Roots

- Bhagavad Gita 10:36 — “Of tricks I am the game of dice.” (Lila as divine mystery)
- Taittiriya Upanishad 2.7.1 — “From bliss all beings are born... into bliss they return.”
- Bhagavata Purana, Book 10 — Tales of Krishna's playful acts

- Yoga Vasistha — Describes laughter as arising when one sees the ego's illusions clearly
- “When laughter arises in one who knows the Self, it is not derision—it is liberation.” *Yoga Vasistha*, translated by Swami Venkatesananda (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 245.

The Spirit Behind It

In Hindu thought, it seems the cosmos itself is divine play (Lila)—not grim striving. Laughter is not escape; it is a return to your truest self, the sat-chit-ananda (being-consciousness-bliss) that they see as each soul's nature.

How Jewish Practitioners Might Engage in Laughing Meditation

Inspired by:

- Hasidic storytelling (especially Rebbe Nachman of Breslov)
- The joyful imperative of simcha (joy)
- The sacred function of laughter in Jewish mysticism and community life
- The humorous edge of rabbinic discourse and parables

Possible Step-by-Step Practice

1. Jewish practitioners might set the intention with a blessing of joy

They might begin with a simple Jewish blessing or psalm verse, intentionally inviting joy as a spiritual state:

Ivdu et Adonai b'simcha, bo'u l'fanav birnana!

“Serve the Lord with joy; come before Him with singing!”

—Psalm 100:2

They might take a deep breath and smile, even if faintly. This is not frivolous—it's avodah, spiritual work.

2. Jewish practitioners might read a Hasidic tale that ends in paradox or laughter

They might choose a humorous or ironic Hasidic story. For example:

Rebbe Nachman once said:

“It is a great mitzvah to always be joyful.”

A student asked, “Even when things are terrible?”

He replied, “Especially then. The Evil One flees from laughter like a thief from a torch.”

They might then reflect on how absurd and wise that is and let the contradiction invite a soft chuckle or grin. That might be the doorway in.

3. Jewish practitioners might recite or recall a joke with a deeper meaning

Jewish humor often seems to hide truth in absurdity. Here's a classic example:

A man goes to his rabbi and says, "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?"

The rabbi says, "Bring your goat into the room."

A week later the man returns, more desperate than before. The rabbi says, "Now take out the goat."

The man returns once more, radiant: "Life is beautiful! There's only nine of us and no goat!"

**What's the goat in your life?*

They might reflect on a burden they've been living with—and what joy arises when it's released—and let the laughter come honestly, as sacred recognition.

4. Jewish practitioners might laugh—out loud, on purpose, with intention

They may start out forcing it, then let it open up. Laughter can be cultivated. The goal is not entertainment—it's healing, softening, letting go.

As Rebbe Nachman taught: "There is no despair in the world at all."

They may let that be their mantra as they laugh—even briefly.

5. Jewish practitioners might close with a simple prayer or intention

Something like:

Ribbono Shel Olam, thank You for the laughter that unbinds my heart.
May joy strengthen me, even in the shadows. Amen.

Or in Hebrew:

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, she'hasimcha me'le'et et libi (Blessed are You, Lord our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who fills my heart with joy).

A Few Foundational Sources

- Psalm 126:2: “Then our mouths were filled with laughter, and our tongues with shouts of joy...”
- Rebbe Nachman of Breslov: “It is a great mitzvah to always be joyful.” — Green, Arthur, *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (University of Alabama Press, 1992), 238.
- Midrash Tanchuma (Tzav 13): “The Shekhinah does not dwell in a place of sadness, but in a place of joy.”

How Native American Traditions Might Practice Laughing Meditations

There does not seem to be one single “laughing meditation” practice universally recognized across all Native American traditions, as Indigenous cultures across North America are richly diverse, with over 500 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. alone—each with distinct languages, ceremonies, and spiritual frameworks.

However, what I think we can say is that laughter holds sacred meaning in many Native communities, and is often a core part of healing, ceremony, and community life—not separate from spirituality, but central to it.

As I explore what this might look like and how one might thoughtfully engage in a Native-informed “laughing meditation” practice, keep this in mind along with my novice understanding and always with cultural humility and acknowledgment.

The Spirit of Laughter in Indigenous Healing

Across many Indigenous cultures:

- Laughter is medicine—a way to restore balance, release grief, and honor paradox.
- Ceremonies include laughter as a sacred act, not a breach of reverence.
- Healers (often called medicine people or holy people) sometimes use humor to disarm ego, soothe pain, or bridge the seen and unseen worlds.
- Clowns or contraries (such as the Heyoka in Lakota tradition) may deliberately act absurdly to reverse expectations and open spiritual insight through humor.
- “Laughter was not just about joy—it was about truth, even in sorrow.”
— Joseph Bruchac, *Our Stories Remember: American Indian History, Culture, and Values Through Storytelling* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 45.

How Some Native Americans Might Practice a Laughing Meditation

Possible Step-by-Step Practice

1. Some Native Americans might begin in silence and offer respect

They may step outside if possible and offer a simple prayer or intention to the land and ancestors. This could be as simple as:

“Thank you for the breath, the sky, and the life I’ve been given.”

They may stand or sit facing the sun, trees, or open air, placing their hands on their hearts.

2. They might recall a time they laughed so hard it broke something open

They may let the memory come. Maybe it was in grief. Maybe it was unexpected. Maybe it was sacred.

They might allow themselves to feel it rise—not for entertainment, but as a release—letting their bellies shake, their shoulders loosen. This is their spirit medicine.

3. Some Native Americans might notice the laughter in the natural world

They may hear birds cackle, rivers giggle, coyotes howl with a raspy joy—allowing themselves to see the natural world not as stoic—but as playful, relational, and alive.

They may ask and answer a reflective question: What is the Earth laughing at right now? Maybe it’s you. Maybe it’s beautiful. And maybe you could smile back.

4. Some Native Americans might speak to the spirits like a fool, not a sage

With humility, they may say something deliberately silly to the Creator, acknowledge how little they know, or laugh at their own seriousness.

Then they might say: “Thank you for laughing me back to life.”

5. Some Native Americans might close by giving thanks with laughter still in their chest

They might stand, stretch, and say thank you—to the trees, sky, ancestors, their bodies.

They may let one more laugh come, even quietly, and let it seal the prayer.

Core Teachings & References

- Heyoka (Sacred Clown) — In Lakota and other Plains traditions, the Heyoka teaches through reversal, humor, and contradiction, offering spiritual insight by upending expectations.
- Laughter as Healing — Many Native elders affirm that laughter clears negative energy and connects us to the Creator. It’s considered a form of balance-restoration.
- Joseph Bruchac’s Writings — A rich source of Native stories where laughter and spiritual truth walk hand in hand.
- “To laugh is to acknowledge that you don’t have the whole answer—and that’s the beginning of learning.” — Joseph Bruchac, *Our Stories Remember*, 56.

How Muslims Might Practice a Laughing Meditation

Inspired by:

- The Prophet Muhammad’s affectionate humor
- Sufi storytelling (e.g., Rumi, Nasruddin tales)
- The emphasis in Islam on balance (wasatiyya), moderation, and a heart at peace (qalb salim)

Possible Step-by-Step Practice

1. Muslims might begin with dhikr (remembrance of God)

They might start by reciting a short phrase of remembrance, slowly and intentionally. This anchors the practice in divine awareness:

Subhan Allah (Glory be to God)
Alhamdulillah (All praise is due to God)
Allahu Akbar (God is Greater)

They may smile as they say these—not out of disrespect, but in reverence for the joy of being alive, connected, and conscious.

2. A Muslim might reflect on a moment of Prophetic humor

I have read that the Prophet Muhammad was known for gentle jokes that never mocked, only uplifted. Consider this authentic hadith (a narrative record of Muhammad’s sayings):

A man once asked the Prophet for a camel. The Prophet said, “I will give you the child of a she-camel.”

The man replied, “But what can I do with a baby camel?”

The Prophet smiled and said, “Is there any camel that is not the child of a she-camel?”

Muslims may let this playful exchange disarm their seriousness. They may also reflect on a related question, like, “What assumptions am I carrying that need to be gently undone?”

3. Muslims might read a Sufi teaching story (e.g., Nasruddin)

Nasruddin (or Mullah Nasreddin) tales are humorous, paradoxical, and spiritually pointed. For example:

Nasruddin searched the ground under a streetlamp.

“What are you looking for?” someone asked.

“My key.”

“Did you drop it here?”

“No, I lost it inside my house.”

“Then why are you looking here?”

“Because the light is better.”

Muslims may then ask themselves reflective questions, like: “Where are you searching for joy or meaning? Is it where the light is—or where you actually lost it?”

They may then let their smiles rise—not in mockery, but in surrender.

4. Muslims might allow laughter to flow as worshipful humility

I have read that, in Islam, excessive laughter is cautioned against—but smiling and light laughter are affirmed. The Prophet himself laughed often, “such that his molars were visible,” according to Hadith.

Muslims may take a moment to breathe and allow themselves to chuckle gently—at the story, at their own illusions, at the mercy of God who embraces even human ridiculousness.

5. Muslims might close with a du'a (supplication)

Muslims might end the practice with a prayer that roots their joy in gratitude and humility:

Allahumma aj'alni min al-muttaqīn wa aj'alni min as-sa'īdīn (O Allah, make me among the God-conscious and among the joyful). Or

“O Allah, thank You for the laughter that lightens my heart and reminds me of Your mercy.”

A Few Key Sources

- Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 78, Hadith 694 – Prophet prolongs prostration for grandchildren climbing on his back
- Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Vol. 4, Hadith 1990 – “The Prophet used to joke with us, but he never said anything except the truth.”
- Rumi, Jalal al-Din. *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1995) – full of humor-infused mystical teaching
- Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983)

The Spirit Behind It

Laughter in Islam is not aimless. It restores balance, dissolves arrogance, and softens the ego. It reminds the soul that it is small before God—but joyfully held.