Te Hā e Honoa Ai

The Vibration Underneath…Three Traditions of Prayer

Ruku I'Anson (October 2026)

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Whakarāpopototanga / Abstract

This paper examines a phenomenon noticed during development of the Whakapapa of Colonisation series, as somatic healing called for a return to wai-māori and to waiata creativity under Taha Auaha. Those methodologies resonated across other contemplative traditions: karakia, takutaku, and karanga in te Ao Māori; body prayer in the Aramaic Christian tradition as recovered by Neil Douglas-Klotz; and mantra repetition in Sanskrit-based contemplative practice. Each tradition, independently and without contact with the others at the point of origin, arrives at the same technology — sustained, rhythmic, vocalised breath at the throat — and each names that technology as doing something more than communication. This paper does not argue that the three traditions are the same. It argues that they are convergent: that the body imposes a shared physiological grammar on vocalised prayer regardless of the cosmology that surrounds it, and that the throat is not only the site of this shared mechanism but, observably, the site where suppression first registers and where its reversal is then practised. The paper returns this convergence to the founding question of Te Poutama Ora — whether indigenous knowledge and ancient wisdom can unlock identity and wellness — as one partial, embodied answer. A closing integrative note sets Douglas-Klotz's nine-movement reading of the Aramaic Lord's Prayer alongside TPO's nine-dimension architecture, distinguishing the one independent correspondence from patterns that originate within TPO itself. The comparative analysis is held separately from a personal reflection on the noticing that prompted it, in keeping with the practice of naming experience as a legitimate starting point for inquiry without collapsing the inquiry into experience alone.

1. Te Take / The Starting Observation

Three traditions. Three cosmologies. Three languages with no shared root, and yet, in each, the practitioner's voice does the same thing.

In karakia, takutaku, and karanga, the voice is shaped by breath that is deliberately extended, by tone that is sustained rather than spoken, and by a quality kaiārahi often describe as a vibration sitting underneath or alongside the words — felt in the body as much as heard in the air. In Aramaic body prayer, the same shape appears: chant, intoning, and breath awareness are treated as inseparable from the meaning of the words themselves, not as decoration around them. In Sanskrit mantra practice, repetition of sound — japa — is held as the technology of transformation, with the meaning of the words secondary to the act of sustained vocalisation itself.

This is not a claim that one tradition borrowed from another, or that they are secretly the same practice wearing different clothes. It is a claim that three traditions, working independently, found their way to the same place: the body, breathing in a particular way, making sound in a particular way, produces an effect that each tradition's practitioners recognised as significant enough to protect, formalise, and pass on.

That convergence is the subject of this paper.

2. Te Ara Tinana / The Somatic Mechanism

Before turning to what each tradition says about its own practice, it is worth establishing what is known about what the body is doing.

The clearest piece of evidence for cross-tradition convergence comes from a controlled study by Bernardi and colleagues, which compared two groups with no obvious connection to one another: people praying the Catholic rosary in Latin, and people reciting a Sanskrit yoga mantra. Both groups, independently, slowed their breathing to approximately six breaths per minute — almost identical to one another, and roughly half the resting respiratory rate. This shared rate is not arbitrary. It is close to the frequency that maximises baroreflex sensitivity, the body's moment-to-moment regulation of blood pressure through heart rate, and it produced a measurable increase

in heart rate variability, the standard marker of vagal — parasympathetic — tone in both groups.[1]

This finding matters for the present argument because it removes the explanation that the effect is simply “meditation” or “relaxation” in a generic sense. Two traditions, with entirely different theological content, entirely different languages, and no shared lineage, produced the same physiological signature when their practitioners vocalised in the traditional manner. The content of the prayer differed. The architecture of the breath did not.

The broader literature on chanting, toning, and mantra repetition is consistent with this finding, although it should be treated with some caution given variable study quality. Reviews of mantra and chanting research describe a repeated pattern: extended exhalation, slowed respiration, and increased heart rate variability across multiple traditions and chanting styles, with researchers increasingly locating the mechanism in the vagus nerve's proximity to the vocal cords, larynx, and pharynx.[2] Vocalisation itself — independent of the words used — appears to stimulate vagal afferents directly through internal vibration, in addition to whatever effect slowed breathing produces on its own.[3]

This gives the paper its working claim: sustained, breath-extended vocalisation is a physiological technology, available to and discoverable by any tradition that practises it seriously enough and for long enough, regardless of the cosmology layered on top of it.

2.1 The Throat as Site of Suppression and Reclaiming

The mechanism described above is not generic to the whole body. It has a location. The vagus nerve runs near the larynx and pharynx, and it is vocalisation at the throat specifically — not vocalisation anywhere — that is doing the physiological work described in the studies above. This anatomical specificity matters clinically, because the throat is also, observably, where silencing registers in the body.

[1]Bernardi, L., Sleight, P., Bandinelli, G., Cencetti, S., Fattorini, L., Wdowczyc-Szulc, J., & Lagi, A. (2001). Effect of rosary prayer and yoga mantras on autonomic cardiovascular rhythms: comparative study. BMJ, 323(7327), 1446–1449.

[2]Acharya, K., Maity, K., Acharya, R. M., Pradhan, B., & Patra, S. (2025). Autonomic and Respiratory Modulations Induced by Different Styles of Mantra Chanting.

[3]National Center for Voice and Speech (2025). The Vagus Nerve and Voice: Vibratory Vagus Nerve Stimulation, drawing on Sing and Shout for Health: Scientific Insights and Future Directions for Vocology.

A person who has been silenced — whether by colonisation, by family structure, by institutional power, or by direct threat — frequently does not simply choose to speak less. The voice itself changes. It becomes quiet, thin, or strained; it loses range; others must ask the speaker to repeat themselves or stop asking and stop listening. This is not metaphorical language about “losing one's voice.” It is a description of what happens at the throat when a person has learned, over years or generations, that vocalising carries risk.

If the throat is where suppression is held, then the throat is also where its reversal must happen. This is the logic underneath the spiritual body cleansing practice (adopted under mahi-wairua training), in which chanted tone is moved deliberately through a sequence of body points, with the throat point (Puaki/Puoro) paired with a specific physical gesture: the kaiārahi releases both hands outward, then pulls them back toward the throat while reclaiming aloud what was given away — “I take back my mana.” The vibration is not incidental to this reclaiming. It is the reclaiming. Reactivating tone at the throat, on purpose, is a direct physiological answer to a suppression that was also physiological — not only psychological or social — in how it was first held in the body.

This reframes the convergence argument in section 4 below. The three traditions are not only converging on the same mechanism for calm or transcendence. At least one of them — and arguably all three, given how often contemplative traditions emerge from histories of constraint — is also using that mechanism as a deliberate technology of reclaiming a voice that was taken.

3. Ngā Ahurea Tuatoru / The Three Traditions

3.1 Karakia, Takutaku, Karanga

Within te Ao Māori, karakia is not casual speech. Mark and Lyons, researching traditional Māori healers' perceptions of karakia, found that its application in contemporary contexts produced beneficial wellbeing effects at both the individual and whānau level — effects healers themselves located in the practice, not merely in its

content.[4] Current research led by Associate Professor Pikihuia Pomare and Dr Nicole Lindsay, funded by the Health Research Council, is specifically investigating how karakia supports emotional, spiritual, and physiological wellbeing — a project framed explicitly around the claim that karakia's physiological dimension has been overlooked in clinical and scientific settings despite being well recognised within Mātauranga Māori.[5]

The mechanics of this are documented in the practice itself. Karakia and the chant forms mōteatea and pātere demand specific breath discipline: nose breathing, diaphragmatic engagement, and a steady, sustained airflow capable of carrying lengthy recitation without disrupting tempo or word delivery.[6] This is functionally identical to the breath architecture Bernardi identified in rosary and mantra practice — extended, controlled exhalation sustained over a long utterance — arrived at independently, through oral transmission across generations, without reference to cardiovascular physiology.

Karanga carries a related but distinct character. Held on a single sustained breath, delivered at the body's edge of capacity, karanga is understood by kaikaranga not as performance but as something closer to a spiritual rope — a call that draws the living and the dead onto the marae together.[7] Kaikaranga describe its function in terms that exceed communication: one long-practising kaikaranga has described the karanga as designed to reach and move grief held inside the body, naming this as its actual purpose rather than an incidental effect.[8] Here the somatic and the spiritual are not separable — the held breath is the technology by which the call does what it is understood to do.

3.2 Aramaic Body Prayer

Neil Douglas-Klotz's recovery of Aramaic prayer practice rests on a related premise: that the Jesus of the Gospels, speaking Aramaic rather than the Greek the texts were

[4]Mark, G. T., & Lyons, A. C. (2010). Maori healers' views on wellbeing: The importance of mind, body, spirit, family and land. Social Science & Medicine, 70(11), 1756–1764.

[5]Massey University (2025). Karakia as rongóa: Elevating mātauranga Māori to create positive health outcomes. HRC-funded project led by A/Prof Pikihuia Pomare and Dr Nicole Lindsay.

[6]Nohotima, cited in Tīhei mauriora: the history and tikanga of our breath. The Spinoff, 4 November 2021.

[7]Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. Karanga: A call from the heart. TE KARAKA.

[8]Ferris, T. R. Karanga is the voice that resides in your womb. E-Tangata, 16 March 2023.

later written in, taught and prayed within a Middle Eastern contemplative tradition built on body awareness, breath, chant, and what Douglas-Klotz calls “body prayer” — meditations that engage the body and breath as inseparable from the meaning of the sacred text, not as an aid to understanding it intellectually.[9]

In this framework, the Aramaic words themselves are treated as carrying layered, embodied meaning that is partially lost when scripture is read silently in translation. Recitation — chanting, intoning, sustained breath around a phrase — is presented as the original and intended method of engaging the text, recovering an oral, breath-based spirituality that predates and underlies the literate, doctrinal Christianity that followed.[10] The claim is not metaphorical: breath itself is treated in this tradition as a Middle Eastern conception of soul (ruh, ruha), continuous with the body and with the divine, rather than as a separate, immaterial thing breath merely sustains.[11]

3.3 Sanskrit Mantra

Within Sanskrit-based contemplative practice, mantra repetition (japa) is held as a vehicle — the literal meaning of the root “tra” — for stilling and crossing beyond ordinary mental activity, with the Sanskrit root “man”, mind, built into the word itself.[12] Multiple controlled studies on mantra and Om chanting report consistent increases in heart rate variability and vagal tone during and following practice, alongside reduced markers of sympathetic arousal, although the overall evidence base is uneven in quality and some studies note no significant change in particular populations or chanting styles.[13] As with karakia, the repetition itself — sustained, breath-paced, vocalised — is treated within the tradition as doing the work, with the specific syllables understood as vehicles for that sustained vocal and respiratory state rather than as instructions to be cognitively processed.

[9]Douglas-Klotz, N. The Healing Breath: Body-Based Meditations on the Aramaic Beatitudes. Sounds True.

[10]Douglas-Klotz, N. Original Prayer: Teachings and Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus.

[11]Douglas-Klotz, N. (2021). Breathing life into words, prayers, and scriptures. Awakin Call.

[12]Dutta, A. (2025). Mantras and the Mind: The Neuroscience of Sacred Sound.

[13]Acharya et al. (2025), as above; Bhoot, A., Chowdhury, A. B., Shah, H., & Vaishnav, B. (2025). Effect of OM Chanting of 528Hz Frequency on Heart Rate Variability, Psychological Wellbeing, and Quality of Sleep in Patients of Hypertension. Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine.

4. Te Whakarapopototanga / What the Convergence Suggests

None of this establishes that karakia, Aramaic body prayer, and Sanskrit mantra are the same practice, or that one explains the others. Each carries a cosmology, a whakapapa, and a set of relationships — to tūpuna, to the divine, to the guru-disciple lineage — that cannot be reduced to a breathing technique without doing real violence to what each tradition holds the practice to mean. This paper is not an argument for that reduction.

What can be said is narrower and, for present purposes, more useful: independently, across traditions with no plausible historical contact at the point each technology was developed, human beings arrived at the same physiological architecture — sustained, controlled, vocalised breath, often built around repetition — and each tradition recognised that architecture as significant enough to protect across generations, even as the surrounding cosmology differed entirely. The convergence is the evidence. It suggests the body has a grammar that contemplative traditions discover rather than invent, and that this grammar is available as a clinical resource independent of which tradition a person approaches it through.

Within healing work that spans multiple worldviews — as Te Poutama Ora does — this matters practically. It means that introducing karakia into practices is not introducing an exotic or culturally specific add-on whose effects are unverifiable outside their own tradition. It is introducing one well-documented instance of a cross-cultural human technology, with its own additional layer of whakapapa, wairua, and tikanga that other instances of the same technology do not carry and should not be asked to substitute for.

It also reframes what is being offered when a client is invited to chant, tone, or recite aloud rather than simply talk. If the throat is where suppression is held in the body, then asking a client to use their voice on purpose, at volume, with breath behind it, is not a relaxation technique borrowed from elsewhere. It is a direct intervention at the site where silencing first did its work — regardless of which tradition's words are placed around the practice.

This also speaks to the question Te Poutama Ora began with in its founding article (November 2025): whether indigenous knowledge and ancient wisdom can unlock

identity and wellness. The convergence described here offers one partial, embodied answer. Karakia, takutaku, and karanga, alongside two ancient contemplative lineages, do not unlock wellness by transmitting a shared set of beliefs. They do so, at least in part, by returning the body to a practice it already knows: breath and voice, used on purpose, at the site where silencing was held.

5. He Wāhanga Whaiwhakaaro / A Reflective Note

The noticing started with the vibration itself — that the quality of sensation underneath karakia, takutaku, and karanga is recognisable as the same vibration met in Aramaic meditation practice and in Sanskrit toning, including the work of learning the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic. Three doors, the same room. This is not a private or exotic observation. Vibration as the recognisable technology of contemplative practice is encountered across cultures far beyond these three — in Tibetan singing bowls, in Sufi dhikr, in the didgeridoo traditions of First Nations Australians, in the Gregorian chant of medieval Christianity. The body, it seems, knows this before the theology explains it. When vocalisation drops into its lower register and breath extends behind it, something shifts that every tradition with ears to hear has noticed and chosen to protect.

What sharpens this further is the throat. When we have been silenced — and colonisation silences, as does family, as does fear — the voice often does not just go unused. It changes. It becomes squeaky, or so quiet that others cannot hear it, as if the throat itself remembers what it cost to speak. To reclaim that voice is not a metaphor. It is reactivating the vibration at the exact site where it was suppressed. This is what is happening in the spiritual body cleansing, at Puaki — the hands releasing outward and pulling back to the throat, the words "I take back my mana" spoken at the point where the mana was first taken. The gesture and the tone are doing the same work from two directions at once.

One thread remained genuinely open when this paper was first drafted: a podcast on the Aramaic Lord's Prayer broke it into nine steps on the way to God, a structure that was unexpected to encounter and felt worth writing down — without the podcast ever explaining why nine, or what nine meant. It sits alongside the separate recognition of seven as the number of God, of completion, of the ariki year. Whether the nine-step

journey and the seven of completion relate to each other, or simply both happened to surface during this work, is not yet settled, and did not need to be forced into settling. That thread is taken up immediately below.

6. He Tuhinga Hono / An Integrative Note: The Nine Steps

Sourcing the podcast led to an article on Neil Douglas-Klotz's Aramaic Lord's Prayer scholarship, which confirmed that the nine-step framework is a deliberate interpretive structure in his work and the teaching platform jesusspokearamaic.com. The prayer is described there as "a complete spiritual map" and "a nine-step journey that transforms whoever prays it."

This is not a numerological claim. It is a structural one, and it belongs to Douglas-Klotz's reading of the prayer: nine movements, each understood as a transformation stage rather than a petition. The practitioner is moved, through the sequence, from identity through consecration, direction, alignment, nourishment, release, discernment, protection, and doxology. The nine is an interpretive structure, but it is not arbitrary. It follows the prayer's own lines.

That structure also speaks to the seven named in Section 5. The Western church has long counted the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13) as seven petitions, a count found in Augustine and carried into Luther's catechisms.[14][15] Douglas-Klotz's nine movements contain those same seven petitions, opened by the address (*Abwoon*, belonging) and closed by the doxology (return to source).[16] The prayer holds seven inside nine. Read this way, seven and nine are not competing numbers. Seven is the fullness asked for; nine is the whole journey that carries it, from belonging to return. One is the arrival; the other is the path. Whether this relationship maps onto the ariki framework is not settled here. It is held as a noticing, not a claim.

Te Poutama Ora also operates across nine dimensions, structured as 5+3+1: five foundation dimensions (Whakapapa, Tinana, Tuakiri, Wairua, Hinengaro) with Tuakiri as the Poutokomanawa, three bridge dimensions (Taha Matihiko, Taha Pūtea, Taha

[14]Augustine. Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love, ch. 115–116.

[15]Luther, M. (1529). The Small Catechism. Part III: The Lord's Prayer.

[16]Douglas-Klotz, N. (1990). Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus. HarperSanFrancisco.

Kai), and Taha Auaha at the apex. A retrospective review of TPO's founding articles traces how that nine was reached: the five from the Life Realignment model, the three bridges from asking what Te Whare Tapa Whā leaves unaddressed in contemporary life, and Taha Auaha rising as the ninth Pou. The nine was not chosen in advance. It is where the inquiry led.

This matters for how the Aramaic correspondence is weighed. It is tempting to name the Maramataka and the ariki cycle as further witnesses to nine. They are not independent ones. TPO's nine-day cycles are mapped onto the Maramataka rather than native to it, and the ariki cycle belongs to the author's own numerological practice. Both are part of how TPO holds nine, not evidence from outside it. Douglas-Klotz's reading is different. It comes from a separate language, cosmology, and lineage, with no knowledge of TPO. That makes it a single witness, and an honest one.

Not every movement maps cleanly onto a TPO dimension, and forcing a one-to-one table would overclaim. Three correspondences hold without forcing.

- Step 1 (*Abwoon* — you are not an orphan, you belong) holds the same ground as Taha Whakapapa: identity rooted in lineage, belonging as the precondition for everything that follows.
- Step 6 (*Washboqlan khaubayn* — release the binding cords, let go of others' guilt as we release our own) corresponds directly to Te Wetekina, the loosing. Douglas-Klotz translates this line as returning to "original slender ties" — language that sits almost identically with the clinical framework for loosing strongholds.
- Step 9 (*Metol dilakhie* — from you is born all ruling will, the song that beautifies all) corresponds to Taha Auaha, the apex of the framework, and echoes Te Ao Mārama, the ninth step of the TPO pathway. The prayer closes in song and creative power returned to source; TPO closes in creative wellbeing as the divine aperture. In a paper about the voice, it is fitting that both journeys end in song.

The remaining movements (consecration, the birthing of a new image, embodied alignment, nourishment, discernment, and deliverance) resonate with Taha Wairua,

Tuakiri, Taha Tinana, Taha Kai, Taha Hinengaro, and the bridge dimensions respectively. They are offered as resonances, not correspondences.

The most striking correspondence is Step 6 and Te Wetekina. The phrase “release the binding cords” and “return to original slender ties” is not a loose metaphor — it is clinical language for the same mechanism TPO names as loosing strongholds. That Douglas-Klotz arrived at this from the Aramaic grammar of a first-century prayer, and TPO arrived at it from kaupapa Māori clinical practice, across two thousand years and two entirely unrelated traditions, is the kind of convergence that does not require forcing into a single explanation. It simply asks to be named.

This convergence sits most naturally within Taha Wairua as a Whakapapa Map companion note. It is not proposed as a structural change to TPO. It offers one answer to a question practitioners may fairly ask: why nine? TPO arrived at nine through its own inquiry. An ancient Semitic contemplative lineage, in another language and cosmology, arrived at nine movements for a complete transformative journey. One independent witness is not proof. It is a convergence worth recording.

Some convergences are worth naming honestly as unexplained. This one is worth naming honestly as witnessed.

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