

GUIDELINES

The most important thing to remember is that this is a practice. And the reason we practice is so that we can continue to deepen our relationship with God, not so we can perfect the prayer form itself.

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within, perhaps from the reading or another word that connects you to God.
2. Sitting comfortably with straight back and feet on the floor to allow for easy breathing. Then, settle in and silently introduce the sacred word.
3. When the bell sounds, follow the sound into the silence.
4. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. If you fall asleep, simply return to prayer when you awaken.
5. When the bell sounds again to end the silence, allow yourself to come slowly back to the space. Remain in silence until the leader invites reflection.
6. Our reflection is a time is for you to notice the fruits of this prayer – what has moved within you and your own experience of opening to God.

RESOURCES

www.contemplativeoutreach.org They also have a free Centering Prayer mobile app

Open Mind, Open Heart: 20th Anniversary Edition (2006) by Thomas Keating

Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self (2013) by Richard Rohr

Desert Banquet: A Year of Wisdom from the Desert Mothers and Fathers (2011) by David G.R. Keller

Essential Writings by David Steindl-Rast (selected by Clare Hallward)

Eternal Echoes: Celtic Reflections on Our Yearning to Belong (1999) by John O’Donohue

CLOSING PRAYER

May we find peace with those we love,
growing together over time.

May we be at peace with ourselves
and with the labors that fill our days.

May we fashion peace in our world
with wisdom and gentle patience.

Blessed are you, God, who blesses us with peace.

Mishkan T’filah, pg 97

FIRST READING VERSES FROM PSALM 119 FROM THE ST. HELENA PSALTER

I call with my whole heart; *
 answer me, O God, that I may keep your statutes.

I call to you; oh, that you would save me! *
 I will keep your decrees.

Early in the morning I cry out to you, *
 for in your word is my trust.

My eyes are open in the night watches, *
 that I may meditate upon your promise.

Hear my voice, O God,
 according to your loving-kindness; *
 according to your judgments, give me life.

You, O God, are near at hand, *
 and all your commandments are true.

Long have I known from your decrees *
 that you have established them for ever.

Behold my affliction and deliver me, *
 for I do not forget your law.

Plead my cause and redeem me; *
 according to your promise, give me life.

Great is your compassion, O God; *
 preserve my life, according to your judgments.

See how I love your commandments! *
 O God, in your mercy, preserve me.

The heart of your word is truth; *
 all your righteous judgments endure for evermore.

Seven times a day do I praise you, *
 because of your righteous judgments.

Great peace have they who love your law; *
 for them there is no stumbling block.

I have hoped for your salvation, O God, *
 and I have fulfilled your commandments.

Let my cry come before you, O God; *
 give me understanding, according to your word.

Let my supplication come before you; *
 deliver me, according to your promise.

My lips shall pour forth your praise, *
 when you teach me your statutes.

My tongue shall sing of your promise, *
 for all your commandments are righteous.

Let your hand be ready to help me, *
 for I have chosen your commandments.

I long for your salvation, O God, *
 and your law is my delight.

Let me live, and I will praise you, *
 and let your judgments help me.

I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; *
 search for your servant,
 for I do not forget your commandments.

Search me out, O God, and know my heart; *
 try me and know my restless thoughts.

SECOND READING

Abba Evagrius said, “When you are praying do not fancy the Divinity like some image formed within yourself. Avoid also allowing your spirit to be impressed with the seal of some particular shape, but rather, free from all matter, draw near the immaterial Being and you will attain understanding.”

Evagrius, like Isaac, is speaking of prayer without an agenda: “the contemplation of God alone.” He gives advice for going beyond the limitations of words or thoughts that so often determine our expectations for prayer. We can avoid imagining “the Divinity like some image” or “the seal of some particular shape.” The challenge of imageless contemplative prayer is to be “free from all matter” and trust that there is a way of knowing God that does not depend on rational and physical activity. Without denying the integrity of our bodies and minds, we can release control of our prayer and “draw near the immaterial Being” and “attain understanding.” This is knowledge of the heart based on relationship. It is resting in God. Evagrius was a scholar who valued rational knowing and yet recognized that drawing “near the immaterial Being” is also valid knowledge.

from Desert Banquet by David G.R. Keller (Mar 25)