

**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](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org) They also have a free Centering Prayer mobile app

*Open Mind, Open Heart: 20<sup>th</sup> 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

Teach me, O God, the way of your statutes, \*  
and I shall keep it to the end.

Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; \*  
I shall keep it with all my heart.

Make me go in the path of your commandments, \*  
for that is my desire.

Incline my heart to your decrees \*  
and not to unjust gain.

Turn my eyes from watching what is worthless; \*  
give me life in your ways.

Fulfill your promise to your servant, \*  
which you make to those who fear you.

Turn away the reproach which I dread, \*  
because your judgments are good.

Behold, I long for your commandments; \*  
in your righteousness preserve my life.

Let your loving-kindness come to me, O God, \*  
and your salvation, according to your promise.

I will walk at liberty, \*  
because I study your commandments.

I will tell of your decrees before rulers \*  
and will not be ashamed.

Remember your word to your servant, \*  
because you have given me hope.

This is my comfort in my trouble: \*  
that your promise gives me life.

Your statutes have been like songs to me \*  
wherever I have lived as a stranger.

I remember your Name in the night, O God, \*  
and dwell upon your law.

This is how it has been with me, \*  
because I have kept your commandments.

You only are my portion, O God; \*  
I have promised to keep your words.

Though the cords of the wicked entangle me, \*  
I do not forget your law.

The earth, O God, is full of your love; \*  
instruct me in your statutes.

Before I was afflicted I went astray, \*  
but now I keep your word.

The law of your mouth is dearer to me \*  
than thousands in gold and silver.

**SECOND READING**

Abba Antony said, “Having therefore made a beginning, and set out on the way to virtue, let us press forward to what lies ahead. And let none turn back as Lot’s wife did, especially since God said, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is fit for the Reign of Heaven.’ Now, ‘turning back’ is nothing except feeling regret and once more thinking about things of the world. But do not be afraid to hear about virtue, and do not be a stranger to the term. For it is not distant from us, nor does it stand external to us, but its realization lies within us, and the task is easy if only we shall will it.”

Antony struggled to let go of his attachment to the “things of the world” that interfered with his life with God. Exhausted from regrets, thoughts, temptations, and the discipline required for listening to God, “turning back” was an ever-present option. Often, when the disciplines of our life of prayer do not seem to be working or are taking too much time away from practical things, we are tempted to return to “the way things were.” In our frustration about lack of progress we can lose the trust we need to continue the journey. The “way to virtue” is a spiritual path that looks forward and must be chosen each new day. It “lies within us” and is always available whether we are hermits or not.

*from Desert Banquet by David G.R. Keller (January 14)*