

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 know, O God, that your judgments are right *
and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Let your loving-kindness be my comfort, *
as you have promised to your servant.

Let your compassion come to me, that I may live, *
for your law is my delight.

My soul has longed for your salvation; *
I have put my hope in your word.

My eyes have failed from watching for your promise, *
and I say, "When will you comfort me?"

I have become like a leather flask in the smoke, *
but I have not forgotten your statutes.

The proud have dug pits for me; *
they do not keep your law.

All your commandments are true; *
help me, for they persecute me with lies.

In your loving-kindness, revive me, *
that I may keep the decrees of your mouth.

O God, your word is everlasting; *
it stands firm in the heavens.

If my delight had not been in your law, *
I should have perished in my affliction.

I will never forget your commandments, *
because by them you give me life.

I am yours; oh, that you would save me, *
for I study your commandments.

I see that all things come to an end, *
but your commandment has no bounds.

Oh, how I love your law; *
all the day long it is in my mind.

Your commandment has made me wiser than my enemies, *
and it is always with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, *
for your decrees are my study.

I am wiser than the elders, *
because I observe your commandments.

I restrain my feet from every evil way, *
that I may keep your word.

I do not shrink from your judgments, *
because you yourself have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste; *
they are sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Through your commandments I gain understanding; *
therefore I hate every lying way.

SECOND READING

Abba Evagrius said, "Restrain yourself from affection towards many people, for fear lest your spirit be distracted, so that your interior peace may not be disturbed."

Many of the desert elders were fleeing from the noise of Roman society. The noise of constant relationships, crowds, activities, and conversations scattered one's spirit and replaced its center with endless mid chatter. Abba Evagrius was a gifted scholar whose prayer was influenced by relationships and conversations with other abbats. He shared this wisdom in a remarkable book that has influenced Christian life and monastic prayer. Evagrius learned that the "noises" of life influence our life of prayer. He is advocating "restraint," not prohibition. Interior peace is not self-serving. It is the font of our words and actions and must be cared for. *"Snow can never emit flame... A thorn bush can never produce a fig. Just so, your heart can never be free from oppressive thoughts, words, and actions until it has been purified internally... watch your heart always."*

from Desert Banquet by David G.R. Keller (January 20)