

**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 PSALMS 15 & 16** FROM THE ST. HELENA PSALTER

O God, who may dwell in your tabernacle; \*  
 who may abide upon your holy hill?  
 Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, \*  
 who speak truthfully from the heart.  
 There is no guile upon their tongues;  
 they do no evil to their friends; \*  
 they do not heap contempt upon their neighbors;  
 In their sight the wicked are rejected, \*  
 but they honor those who fear God.  
 They have sworn to do no wrong \*  
 and do not take back their word.  
 They do not give their money in hope of gain, \*  
 nor do they take a bribe against the innocent.  
 Whoever does these things \*  
 shall never be overthrown.  
 Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you; \*  
 I have said, "You are my Sovereign,  
 my good above all other."  
 All my delight is upon the godly that are in the land, \*  
 upon those who are noble among the people.

But those who run after other gods \*  
 shall have their troubles multiplied.  
 Their libations of blood I will not offer, \*  
 nor take the names of their gods upon my lips.  
 O God, you are my portion and my cup; \*  
 it is you who uphold my lot.  
 My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; \*  
 indeed, I have a goodly heritage.  
 I will bless you, O God, who gives me counsel; \*  
 my heart teaches me, night after night.  
 I have set you always before me; \*  
 because you are at my right hand I shall not fall.  
 My heart, therefore, is glad and my spirit rejoices; \*  
 my body also shall rest in hope.  
 For you will not abandon me to the grave, \*  
 nor let your faithful one see the Pit.  
 You will show me the path of life; \*  
 in your presence there is fullness of joy,  
 and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

**SECOND READING**

Amma Theodora said, "It is good to live in peace, for the wise person practices perpetual prayer. It is truly a great thing for a monastic to live in peace, especially the younger ones. However, you should realize that as soon as you intend to live in peace, at once, evil comes and weighs down your soul through accidie, faintheartedness, and evil thoughts. It also attacks your body through sickness, debility, weakening of the knees, and all the members. It dissipates the strength of soul and body, so that one believes one is ill and is no longer able to pray."

The desert elders sought transformation of their whole being: body, mind, and soul. Their desire to "live in peace" followed a path of listening to God through solitude and silence, "keeping watchful for God's Spirit" through constant vigils (day and night), and "feeding on God's Word" by limiting their diet and fasting. The peace they sought was called *purity of heart*, a state of complete openness to God's will, unattachment to material possessions, easily satisfied needs, and letting go of control of their life with God. This resting in God was the source of true charity and compassion. But it was not easy. Amma Theodora describes how purity of heart is endangered by faintheartedness of spirit and bodily weaknesses that the desert elders called accidie. It had to be faced honestly and with patience.

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