

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 you can download.

Open Mind, Open Heart: 20th Anniversary Edition (2006) by Thomas Keating
Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self (2013) by Richard Rohr
The Cloud of Unknowing (14th century) by an anonymous English monk
Essential Writings by David Steindl-Rast (selected by Clare Hallward)

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 PSALM 62 FROM THE ST. HELENA PSALTER

For God alone my soul in silence waits; *
 from God comes my salvation.
 God alone is my rock and my salvation, *
 my stronghold, so that I shall not be greatly shaken.
 How long will you assail me to crush me,
 all of you together, *
 as if you were a leaning fence, a toppling wall?
 They seek only to bring me down
 from my place of honor; *
 lies are their chief delight.
 They bless with their lips, *
 but in their hearts they curse.
 For God alone my soul in silence waits; *
 truly, there is my hope.
 God alone is my rock and my salvation, *
 my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.

In God is my safety and my honor; *
 God is my strong rock and my refuge.
 Put your trust in God always, O people, *
 pour out your hearts before the One who is our refuge.
 Those of high degree are but a fleeting breath, *
 even those of low estate cannot be trusted.
 On the scales they are lighter than a breath; *
 all of them together.
 Put no trust in extortion;
 in robbery take no empty pride; *
 though wealth increase, set not your heart upon it.
 God has spoken once, twice have I heard it, *
 that power belongs to God.
 Steadfast love is yours, O God, *
 for you repay everyone according to their deeds.

SECOND READING

When you begin to quiet down and enjoy a certain peace, you don't usually want to think of anything. You just want to be quiet. Then a third kind of thought emerges. It could be some bright light about the spiritual journey or some great psychological insight into your past life. Or you have a problem with a member of your family and suddenly see how it can be resolved. Or you discover the perfect argument for converting your friends. Of course, when you come out of prayer, you see that your brilliant ideas were utterly ridiculous. They looked wonderful in the darkness of the deep waters of silence, but in the light of day you realize that they were bait to lure you out of interior peace and quiet.

Again, you may feel an overwhelming urge to pray for someone. It is important to pray for others, but this is not the time to do it. Any effort you make at this point is counterproductive. This is God's opportunity to talk to you. It would be like interrupting someone who wants to confide something special to you. You know how it is when you are trying to tell a friend something important and he keeps interrupting you with issues of his own. In this prayer you are listening to God, listening to silence, which is God's first language. Your only activity is the general attentiveness that you are offering to God either implicitly by letting go of all thoughts, or explicitly by returning to the sacred word.

Preachers and theologians who are trying to practice contemplative prayer have a special problem with devout thoughts. Just when they are quiet, they get some incredible inspiration. There is a tendency to think, "I must reflect about this for just a second so I won't forget it after my prayer is over." That is the end of their interior silence... when one is in deep quiet, one is very susceptible to brilliant intellectual lights. Most of the time they are just illusions. Human nature does not like to be empty before God... It may be hard to convince yourself of the value of interior silence. But if you are going to practice centering prayer, the only way to do it is to ignore every thought. Let it be a time of interior silence and nothing else... A kind of anointing takes place. The fruits of that anointing will appear later in ways that are indirect: in your gentleness, peace, and willingness to surrender to God in everything that happens. That is why interior silence is greater than any insight.

from Open Heart, Open Mind by Thomas Keating (pgs. 79-81)