

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 VERSES FROM PSALM 147 FROM THE ST. HELENA PSALTER

Alleluia! How good it is to sing praises to you, O God; *
how pleasant it is to honor you with praise!

For you rebuild Jerusalem *
and gather the exiles of Israel.

You heal the brokenhearted *
and bind up their wounds.

You count the number of the stars *
and call them all by their names.

Great are you and mighty in power; *
there is no limit to your wisdom.

You lift up the lowly, *
but cast the wicked to the ground.

We sing to you, Most High, with thanksgiving; *
we make music to you upon the harp,

For you cover the heavens with clouds *
and prepare rain for the earth;

You make grass to grow upon the mountains *
and green plants to serve humankind.

You provide food for flocks and herds *
and for the young ravens when they cry.

You are not impressed by the might of a horse; *
you have no pleasure in human strength;

But you have pleasure in those who fear you, *
in those who await your gracious favor.

Jerusalem will worship you, O God, *
and Zion will praise your name.

For you have strengthened the bars of our gates *
and have blest our children within them.

You have established peace on our borders *
and satisfied us with the finest wheat.

You send out your command to the earth, *
and your word runs very swiftly.

You give snow like wool *
and scatter hoarfrost like ashes.

You scatter your hail like bread crumbs; *
who can stand against your cold?

You send forth your word and melt them; *
you blow with the wind, and the waters flow.

You declare your word to Jacob, *
your statutes and judgments to Israel.

SECOND READING

Each one of us is alone in the world. It takes great courage to meet the full force of your aloneness. Most of the activity in society is subconsciously designed to quell the voice crying in the wilderness within you. The mystic Thomas a Kempis said that when you go out into the world, you return having lost some of yourself. Until you learn to inhabit your aloneness, the lonely distraction and noise of society will seduce you into false belonging, with which you will only become empty and weary. When you face your aloneness, something begins to happen. Gradually, the sense of bleakness changes into a sense of true belonging. This is a slow and open-ended transition but it is utterly vital in order to come into rhythm with your own individuality. In a sense this is the endless task of finding your true home within your life. It is not narcissistic, for as soon as you rest in the house of your own heart, doors and windows begin to open outwards to the world. No longer on the run from your aloneness, your connections with others become real and creative. You no longer need to covertly scrape affirmation from others or from projects outside yourself. This is slow work; it takes years to bring your mind home.

The human mind is an amazing gift. It delights in the activity of exploring, gathering, and relating things. Whereas stones or trees never seem to be bothered by their particular uniqueness, each human mind is powerfully conscious of its own difference; it has an intimate and unbreakable relationship with its own difference. This is what makes human individuality journey outside of itself to explore and engage others; but it is also what makes each of us so deeply aware of our aloneness. In contrast to the rest of Nature, the human mind makes us feel alone, aware of the distances we will never be able to cross. The mind cannot resist exploration, because it always sees the world mirrored in itself. The huge longing of the human mind is to discover ever larger shelters of belonging.

from Eternal Echoes by John O'Donohue (pgs 93-94)