

## 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 you can download.

*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  
*The Cloud of Unknowing* (14<sup>th</sup> 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 PSALMS 3 AND 4** FROM THE ST. HELENA PSALTER

O God, how many adversaries I have; \*  
 how many there are who rise up against me!  
 How many there are who say of me, \*  
 there is no help for me in my God.  
 But you, O God, are a shield about me; \*  
 you are my glory, the one who lifts up my head.  
 I call aloud to you, O God, \*  
 and you answer me from your holy hill;  
 I lie down and go to sleep; \*  
 I wake again, because you sustain me.  
 I do not fear the multitudes of people \*  
 who set themselves against me all around.  
 Rise up, O God; set me free, O my God; \*  
 surely, you will strike all my enemies across the face;  
 you will break the teeth of the wicked.  
 Deliverance belongs to you, O Most High. \*  
 Your blessing be upon your people!

Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause; \*  
 you set me free when I am hard-pressed;  
 have mercy on me and hear my prayer.  
 “You mortals, how long will you dishonor my glory; \*  
 how long will you worship dumb idols  
 and run after false gods?”  
 Know that God does wonders for the faithful; \*  
 when I call, God will hear me.  
 Tremble, then, and do not sin; \*  
 speak to your heart in silence upon your bed.  
 Offer the appointed sacrifices \*  
 and put your trust in the Most High.  
 Many are saying, “Oh, that we might see better times!” \*  
 Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O God.  
 You have put gladness in my heart, \*  
 more than when grain and wine and oil increase.  
 I lie down in peace; at once I fall asleep; \*  
 for only you, God, make me dwell in safety.

**SECOND READING**

I agree with French anthropologist and philosopher Rene Girard when he says that Jesus came to end sacrificial religion itself. Sacrifice and asceticism are usually indicators of False Self religion, as the Buddha himself eventually discovered. Jesus was criticized because he was not ascetic like John the Baptist (Mark 2:18) and it is amazing that this has been part of our selective forgetfulness. Ascetic practices have far too much social and ego payoff, which is why Jesus advised against anything pious or generous being done publicly (Matthew 6:1-18). External religion is also dangerous religion.

Jesus, along with Buddha, had a much more foundational death to walk us through than mere personal heroics or public grandstanding. They point to an eventual and essential “renouncing” of the False Self, which will always be the essential death. It is at the heart of the spiritual journey... Many of us have learned in contemplative practice that it all starts with dying to our own addictive, compulsive, and negative ways or processing reality. That is the biggest and hardest death of all, and it has no social payoff or immediate satisfaction whatsoever. There is no full recover from addiction, Bill Wilson said, until we have achieved actual emotional sobriety. Contemplation is the ultimate recovery, because it is from the universal addiction to our own preferred way of thinking. This is much harder than any single moral battle with any single moral issue.

*from Immortal Diamond by Richard Rohr (pgs 41-42)*