

**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. Sit 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

*The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living: Excerpts from the Works of Thomas Keating*, ed. Iachetta (2009)

*Contemplative Prayer* (1969) by Thomas Merton

*Eternal Echoes* (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 25 FROM THE ST. HELENA PSALTER

To you, O God, I lift up my soul;  
 my God, I put my trust in you; \*  
 let me not be humiliated,  
 nor let my enemies triumph over me.  
 Show me your ways, O God, \*  
 and teach me your paths.  
 Lead me in your truth and teach me, \*  
 for you are the God of my salvation;  
 in you have I trusted all the day long.  
 Remember, O God, your compassion and love, \*  
 for they are from everlasting.  
 Remember not the sins of my youth  
 and my transgressions; \*  
 remember me according to your love  
 and for the sake of your goodness, O God.  
 Gracious and upright are you; \*  
 therefore you teach sinners in your way.  
 You guide the humble in doing right \*  
 and teach your way to the lowly.

All your paths are love and faithfulness \*  
 to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.  
 For your Name's sake, O God, \*  
 forgive my sin, for it is great.  
 You are a friend to those who fear you \*  
 and will show them your covenant.  
 My eyes are ever looking to you, \*  
 for you shall pluck my feet out of the net.  
 Turn to me and have pity on me, \*  
 for I am left alone and in misery.  
 The sorrows of my heart have increased; \*  
 bring me out of my troubles.  
 Look upon my adversity and misery \*  
 and forgive me all my sin.  
 Look upon my enemies, for they are many, \*  
 and they bear a violent hatred against me.  
 Protect my life and deliver me; \*  
 let me not be put to shame, for I have trusted in you.  
 Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, \*  
 for my hope has been in you.

**SECOND READING**

“But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them. Even when they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, “This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt”, and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud that led them in the way did not leave them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night that gave them light on the way by which they should go. You gave your good spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and gave them water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness so that they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.” Nehemiah 9:17b-21

The biblical desert/wilderness symbolizes the confrontation with the false self and the interior purification. Jesus was tempted regarding each one of the instinctual needs. He did not consent to them while yet experiencing them in their utmost intensity – “He was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned.” (Hebrews 4:15)... Having rejected the exaggerated demands of each of the emotional programs for happiness he invites us to do the same, saying, “Repent.” This is as if he were to say, “Change the direction in which you are looking for happiness. You’ll never find it in your emotional programs for happiness. Let go of your childish motivation because it can’t possibly work in adult life.”

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