

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 They also have a free Centering Prayer mobile app you can download.

Open Mind, Open Heart: 20th 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 139 FROM THE ST. HELENA PSALTER

O God, you have searched me out and known me; *
 you know my sitting down and my rising up;
 you discern my thoughts from afar.

You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
 and are acquainted with all my ways.

Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
 but you, O God, know it altogether.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, *
 and the light around me turn to night,"

Darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day; *
 darkness and light to you are both alike.

For you yourself created my inmost parts; *
 you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I will thank you because I am marvelously made; *
 your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

My body was not hidden from you, *
 while I was being made in secret
 and woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb;
 all of them were written in your book; *
 they were fashioned day by day,
 when as yet there was none of them.

How deep I find your thoughts, O God; *
 how great is the sum of them!

Search me out, O God, and know my heart; *
 try me and know my restless thoughts.

Look well whether there be any wickedness in me *
 and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

SECOND READING

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbour as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question. *Mark 12:28-34*

Jesus said to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." In other words, the kingdom of God requires something more than to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. To love our neighbor from the perspective of the true self, as one possessing the image of God, is a great insight, but it still is not the fullness of the kingdom of God according to Jesus... It is to love one another as Jesus has loved us. This is much more difficult. This is to love others in their individuality... and in the things that drive us up the wall, to love our neighbor, in other words, just as they are with each one's... unbearable habits, unreasonable demands, and impossible characteristics. The new commandment is to accept others unconditionally; that is to say, without the least wish to change them. To love them in their individuality is the way Jesus has loved us.

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