

**Centering Prayer** - Guidelines from Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart*, p.139-141.

**1. "Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within".**

- a. the sacred word expresses our intention to be in God's presence and to yield to the divine action.
- b. the sacred word should be chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is especially suitable for us.  
- examples: Lord, Jesus, Abba, Father, Love, Peace, Shalom, Silence.
- c. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period, for that would be to start thinking again.

**2. "Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within."**

- a. By "sitting comfortably" is meant relatively comfortably; not so comfortably that we encourage sleep, but sitting comfortably enough to avoid thinking about the discomfort of our bodies during this time of prayer.
- b. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
- c. If we fall asleep, we continue the prayer for a few minutes upon awakening if we can spare the time.
- d. Praying in this way after a main meal encourages drowsiness. Better to wait an hour at least before centering prayer. Praying in this way just before retiring may disturb one's sleep pattern.
- e. We close our eyes to let go of what is going on around and within us.

**3. "When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word."**

- a. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, and commentaries.
- b. Thoughts are a normal part of centering prayer.
- c. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word", a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of centering prayer.
- d. During the course of our prayer, the sacred word may become vague or even disappear.

**4. "At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes."**

- b. The additional two or three minutes give the psyche time to readjust to the external senses and enable us to bring the atmosphere of silence into daily life.

**Some Practical Points**

- 1. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes.
- 2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer, provided it does not have an audible tick or loud sound when it goes off.
- 3. The principal effects of centering prayer are experienced in daily life, not in the period of centering prayer itself.
- 4. Physical symptoms:  
We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches of the body, or a generalized restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
  - b. We may also notice heaviness or lightness in the extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
  - c. In either case, we pay no attention, or we allow the mind to rest briefly in the sensation and then return to the sacred word.
- 5. Lectio divina provides the conceptual background for the development of centering prayer.