

During the 1980's a group of Trappist monks, among them Thomas Keating, set out to recover the contemplative dimension of the Gospel. Drawing on the writings of the Desert Fathers, the Christian mystics, and - in particular - the anonymous 14th century English classic on prayer, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, they distilled a method of silent prayer suitable for the present day. It has become known as Centering Prayer. It can be used by itself, or alternatively many use it in association with other forms of prayer such as lectio divina.

Centering Prayer - unlike the concentrative method (based on the repetition of a mantra) developed by John Main - is a *receptive* method in which we consent, in ever-renewed interior silence, to the presence and transformative action of the Holy Spirit within us.

Resources and contacts

Keating, Thomas (1987) *Open Mind, Open Heart*.

Contemplative Outreach is the world-wide association established by Thomas Keating to teach and foster the practice of Centering Prayer: Contemplative Outreach International Office

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Centering Prayer



Silence is God's first language...

The Prayer Pack



This way of praying can centre us and ground us in God as we move into other prayers or prayer practices.

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

The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer to the Holy Spirit. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. Other possibilities include Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust.

The sacred word is not sacred because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention and consent.

Having chosen a sacred word we do not change it during the time of prayer as that would be to start reflecting.

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.

'Sitting comfortably' means relatively comfortable so as not to encourage sleep during the prayer time. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.

We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.

We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of cotton wool.

When you become aware that you are engaged with your thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.

'Thoughts' is an umbrella term for every perception, including bodily sensations, sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries and spiritual experiences.

Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.

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.

During the course of Centering Prayer the sacred word may disappear or become vague. This is itself also part of the practice of letting go of all our thoughts.

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

The additional 2 minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.

