

## Spiritual Practice:: Centering (or breath) Prayer

Many spiritual traditions use some means of centering so that one is attentive to God. Here are several suggestions for Centering (or breath) Prayer:

Put yourself in a posture of prayer. Most find sitting is the best posture, but others choose to kneel or walk. Make sure it is comfortable with the spine erect. Some choose to put their hands on their laps or on a table or outstretched, palms up and open as a gesture of openness.

Writer Nancy Roth suggests: "Attention to the breath may be all you need as a focus. You may simply pay attention to the movement of your body as you breath, or to the sensation of the breath as it enters and the leaves the nostrils. Or you may imagine you can watch the breath as it enters and leaves the body. Whatever (approach) you use, your focus is on the rhythm of God's life moving in you and through you."

Many traditions use a phrase or mantra for centering. The phrase can be divided between the in-breath and the out-breath or just repeated silently over and over again. Such phrases might be "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me," "Be still and know that I am God," "Fear not, God is with me," "God's faithfulness endures forever."

Others may choose to use an image as their focus such as an icon, which is a religious work of art, most commonly a painting. It is generally a flat panel painting depicting a holy being or object such as Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Saints, Angels or the Cross. Icons are said to be "holy doors" -- they form a door into the divine realm, a meeting point of divine grace and human need where we may enter more deeply into our own interior life. They are not intended to force an emotional response. Be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you spend time with the icon.

You may choose walking a labyrinth - a tool for prayer, meditation and reflection. It has been in existence for some 4,000 years and has become a symbol of life and wholeness. The labyrinth is often confused with a maze, which requires the solving of a problem or puzzle. In contrast, a labyrinth is a path into the center of the design and back out again. To enter a labyrinth is to embark on a journey that represents one's spiritual journey. It may be a joyous or somber walk; it might be thoughtful or prayerful; it can be done alone or with others. The walk needs to be a focused and purposeful event that is given your full attention - it touches our sorrows and releases our joys -- as you

enter release distractions, open the heart, allow the mind to quiet, find your natural pace. When you reach the center stay as long as you like - sit or stand in this place of prayer -- receive what is there for you. When you leave the center follow the same path out -- strengthening can occurs -- take back out into the world that which you have received.