

# WELCOMING PRAYER

Thomas Keating describes the Welcoming Prayer practice in *Open Mind, Open Heart* as “a method of consenting to God’s presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life.” It was developed by Mary Mrozowski, one of the founders of Contemplative Outreach.

The purpose of this practice is to deepen our relationship with God in the midst of our reactions to daily life. The real work happens as we shift out of the mental stories and dramas that rattle through our thoughts, and engage instead a bodily awareness of where the emotions live within us physically. In creating that shift, the practice helps untangle the emotional programs of our egos and heal the wounds of life-long patterns by addressing them where they are stored – in the body.

The three movements within this practice are:

- **Feel and sink into what you are experiencing in this moment in your body.** As stated above, this is a critical step. Spend some time focusing on the sensations in your body. Many people identify shortness of breath, a knot in their stomach, tightness in their throat, clenching around the jaw.
- **“Welcome” what you are experience this moment in your body as an opportunity to consent to the Divine Indwelling.** Rather than resisting or repressing negative emotions and experiences, this practice helps you process your reactions and remain centered on God’s presence in the midst of difficult emotions. Breathe deeply and say the word “welcome . . .” followed by whatever sensation you have identified. For example, “welcome anger” or “welcome jealousy.
- **“Let go by saying, “I let go of my desire for security, affection, control and embrace this moment as it is.”**

After going through the steps above, the following prayer brings closure to the practice:

*Welcome, welcome, welcome.*

*I welcome everything that comes to me today, because I know it is for my healing.*

*I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.*

*I let go of my desire for power and control.*

*I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval and pleasure.*

*I let go of my desire for survival and security.*

*I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself.*

*I open to the love and presence of God and God’s action within. Amen.*

Thomas Keating

# Breath Affirmations

by Tom Zanzig

In a breath affirmation, we attach an intention to the inhalation/exhalation of our breathing. We breathe in what we desire or need, and breathe out what we experience as distracting, disruptive, or disturbing. (Some find it more effective to start with the exhalation, breathing out what is perceived as negative in order to, if you will, open a heart space to accept what we desire or need.)

Here are some paired feelings or emotions that you might use to experiment with this prayer practice. As the practice becomes more routine and comfortable, you may notice other realities that catch your attention and invite you to pray. Consider creating word pairs that express those realities to add to your own practice.

<b>Breathe in . . .</b>	<b>Breathe out . . .</b>
stillness	restlessness
attentiveness	distraction
tranquility	tension
composure	distress
stability	insecurity
solitude	loneliness
forgiveness	resentment
acceptance	irritation
trust	suspicion
gratitude	envy
courage	fear

# SELF-REFLECTIVE WRITING: Journaling Prompts

Self-reflective writing is a spiritual practice that strengthens your capacity to listen inwardly. Writing down what you hear allows you to make your listening visible. Here are twenty questions for your reflection. These twenty questions are here for you to practice with. The process can be used for any question that you pose as well. The practice is to allow yourself to inwardly inquire into a question and record what arises. As you read the questions, select the question that in this moment rises to your attention. You can trust that the 'right' question will come to you.

## The Process

Begin your reflection with this prayer: "May I ask this question with presence, compassion and curiosity. If I lose track of any of these, may I remember and renew this stance."

- Select a question from this list OR write one of your own.
- Close your eyes and take three deep, gentle breaths. Open your eyes when ready.
- Open your notebook and write this question on a fresh page.
- Sit silently for a few minutes and then write what comes to you.
- Write without editing. Write in stream of consciousness. Take your time.
- **Simply inquire, listen, notice what arises, and write it down as it arrives.**

## Questions

- What scares me?
- What self-understanding is unfolding in the deepest part of me?
- What does my heart know it wants to turn toward?
- What is newly arriving in my life?
- When am I most deeply content?
- Who am I in my family?
- What happens to my spirit when I feel vulnerable?
- What led me to follow a call to ministry?
- What is my life about at its core?
- What do I notice is happening to my spirit as I age?
- What do I want to experience before I die?
- What dilemma arises repeatedly in my life?
- What am I just beginning to let go of?
- Who sustains me?
- What opens my heart?
- What un-grieved sorrow resides in me?
- What spiritual experience in nature is nudging me?
- What story is at the "bottom of the bottom" of me?
- Who am I longing for?