

## Effects of Centering Prayer

CENTERING PRAYER PUTS us in a place to find peace, healing, and change.

ON THAT INWARD journey, however, we may find ourselves getting in touch with feelings of discouragement, anger, grief, pain, lust, fear, maybe even remembering feelings or events we forgot about long ago. This kind of “emotional dumping” is a sign that the process is working, so stick with it!

SOMETIMES THE EFFECTS of centering prayer are barely seen. Remember that we and others have taken many years to shape our lives to this point and change probably won't happen right away. Eventually a sense of peace will begin to come. We will achieve better control of our emotions and reactions. We will learn how to let go and let others be themselves and accept ourselves and others for who they are and as they are.

SOON WE WILL BEGIN to sense changes in the ordinary activities we do every day.

That means we will be different. Our outlooks, attitudes, and reactions can become more like the ones we would prefer. The changes through this practice can become permanent and bring lasting peace in everyday life.

EVERYONE MOVES AT their own pace in centering prayer, finding that “closer communication” and peace that comes from letting go. The growth that occurs can't be set by any time table. There is no way to change or repair the damage of a lifetime EASILY OR QUICKLY, but the results will encourage us to keep going. Remember, our own best thinking and planning ended us up in prison. Centering prayer could be the practice needed to bring change.

THE KEY TO CHANGE is remaining “open” to our true self!

THROUGHOUT THE AGES, countless truth seekers have found peace, serenity, and spiritual enlightenment by exploring the silence within. In this practice, we can truly become “Locked Up and Free”.

### How to Do Centering Prayer

1. Set aside 20 minutes for your practice, twice a day if possible. One time is better than none. (It helps to have a timer to avoid having to wonder how much time has passed.) Times prior to count or chow work well.
2. Sit comfortably on a chair, bunk, or on the floor with your back against the wall or even facing the wall.
3. Close your eyes and begin to settle down into the deepest center of your being. A few deep, slow breaths can help you to relax, stay loose. Silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent and surrender to the Presence within you.
4. As thoughts and feelings rush in, silently and gently repeat your sacred word until they go by. Remember, this is not a forced or pushy process. Thoughts are normal. Let them come, accept them and let them go. Do this every time thoughts come to grab your attention. Don't give up if this is hard at first. It will get easier with practice.

This is centering prayer; silently releasing yourself into the Presence deep within you and allowing the changes that are needed to happen. Remember, it is doing this meditation, not how well you think you have succeeded, that is important.

# LOCKED UP AND FREE

THIS LITTLE BOOKLET was put together to help those incarcerated find strength and purpose during a time of trial and tribulation. Many sincere and experienced people in Texas and California prisons, as well as in the rest of the country and free world provided input and suggestions for this booklet. A lot of those who have added their input are Life Term and Long Term prisoners who are doing or have done hard time in prison. This pamphlet has roots in the writings of wise and holy people from the earliest time to today. Its wisdom speaks to all faith traditions.

IF YOU START to think this booklet is useless or not for you, please don't throw it out. Instead, put it away to read another time or give it to someone else. There may come a time when you may wish to take another look into what it offers. It can mean the difference between living in pain and fear, or with peace, strength, and happiness. It's your choice.

## STARTING OVER

WHETHER YOU HAVE been in prison for a long time or are just entering, you may have a lot of angry, frustrated feelings about people and about life. It is understandable and natural to have those feelings. But it is not good to continue to live with them.

### **This little booklet can help.**

IT IS ABOUT an ancient type of meditation that can help us to change the anger, pain, and frustration that are locked deep inside us into something more useful and liberating. This form of meditation – called *centering prayer*– can make things much easier. It can help change the way we see life and perhaps improve our health and peace of mind. It can also be useful as the eleventh step in the Twelve-Step program.

WE SHOULDN'T LET the term “centering prayer” fool us. It doesn't matter what religious beliefs we have or if we've never been religious at all. This method of meditation can work in our life and help us change.

### **Why should I meditate?**

MAYBE YOU ARE thinking, “How can sitting around, with my eyes closed and looking foolish, help me survive this prison life?”

AFTER DECADES of being tossed up in the mix of prison hustles, or getting into conflicts with Correctional Officers, and being constantly tested by the predatory nature of prison, we have found that by practicing meditation daily, we have gained the ability to stay focused and relaxed when the place gets hectic. Instead of rising to the bait and winding up in the hole, we now have the ability to slow down our natural reactions in any situation and choose our actions according to what is in our best interest. So, in this practice, we not only survive but we flourish.

### **Why this booklet?**

THE PURPOSE OF this little is to help us understand how we can become the person we were meant to be, by showing us how to do a simple, easy meditation that has been taught for hundreds of years.

IF WE THINK back over our lives, we may find that there was one event or a combination of events that led us to where we are today. This booklet could become one of those events, one that brings positive change to our lives. The process can bring meaning and strength to us during our time locked up. It can also change our lives when we are released. It can help us to change from within. It is not too late for change as long as we are willing to try.

NO MATTER WHAT we have done or who we are now, we have the opportunity and the capacity to change. We might think that we have sunk so low that nothing we do now can help or change us. But that is not true! Through this simple process, we can learn to let go of the problems in our lives, find peace and happiness and a closer communication with the ultimate source of life, love, and goodness. That is true whether we call that source God, Allah, Grandfather, Brahman, another name or no name.

THIS PROCESS WORKS for anyone who is willing to put forth the effort to practice it. Those who don't

believe in a supreme being may simply go into the silence. The intent is to let go, free ourselves from thoughts and feelings and simply *BE*.

EVERY SYSTEM OF belief in the world, including eastern beliefs as well as western religions, know this simple and powerful practice by some name. It is recognized and supported by the Torah, the Koran, the Bible and in the teachings of the Buddha and the enlightened Ones of ancient India; it is a part of the common ground of our being.

### **What is Centering Prayer?**

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN doing centering prayer for hundreds of years, but it is different from what you may think of as a prayer. It is not the type of prayer we are used to, like praying out loud or asking for something or even giving thanks. It is moving deep within ourselves, in silence, saying nothing, asking nothing, just intending to be in the Presence of the ultimate sacred being and allowing it to be with us.

### **In Silence, How Do I Do That?**

IN CENTERING PRAYER our goal is to let go and just *BE* in the silence, way deep within us—not only not saying anything, but also not actively thinking about anything. When we close our eyes to meditate, it is natural for all kinds of thoughts and feelings to fill our minds. Expect this – it's natural. Let them come and let them go.

Pretend they are like cars passing by; just don't stop them and get in! We have thoughts, but we are not our thoughts. Remember that we are trying to let go all thoughts, not think about them or analyze them.

HERE IS THE secret to being able to do this: Before we begin, we choose a word, a simple word of one or two syllables. This becomes our sacred word, not in a religious way, but sacred in its meaning to us. Words like *peace, love, joy, trust, and listen* are good; or one might prefer *breath, life, yes, mercy*, or any word that helps us to let go of our thoughts. Then when thoughts begin to come we just repeat our sacred word silently a few times and let them go by.