

Tool: Prayer and Meditation

Prayer and meditation are at the heart of the Twelve Steps and play an important role in our COSA recovery. We come to COSA with backgrounds and experiences unique to each of us. Some of us are familiar with prayer and meditation from our religious or spiritual upbringings, and we may comfortably continue or even expand these practices. Those of us who have not had previous experience with prayer or meditation may feel uneasy or doubtful. Still others may have had negative experiences that turned us away from these practices. Or we may not practice meditation and prayer, simply for philosophical or other reasons.

Whatever our backgrounds, COSA offers us a place to safely explore our spirituality. In Steps Two and Three, we come to believe and build trust in a Power greater than ourselves. Because COSA is a program for our spiritual development and not a religious program, we are free to discover a Higher Power of our own understanding. We may call this power God, Higher Power, the Universe, the Source, Spirit, or by another name that we acknowledge as divinity. We may start by simply recognizing the grace of "good orderly direction" (G.O.D.). As we navigate this spiritual journey, we may seek support and guidance from our sponsors and other COSA members. COSA meetings are a safe haven where we may discuss our experiences with prayer, meditation, and our Higher Power without judgment.

We use prayer and meditation to seek our Higher Power's guidance and loving care as we work the Steps. We begin to surrender our will and our lives. Prayer and meditation help us experience loving compassion for ourselves as we review our histories and face our pain and defects of character. Even when tasked with making amends to those we've harmed, prayer and meditation help us gain clarity and cultivate willingness and courage. Step Ten teaches us how to seek our Higher Power's guidance on a daily basis. Step Eleven invites us to deepen our personal relationship with our Higher Power. Prayer and meditation are the tools we use to improve our conscious contact with the God of our understanding.

Prayer is a way for us to communicate with our Higher Power. We can safely express who we are, how we feel, and what and whom we love. We can say what we are grateful for and what we would like to receive, including God's guidance. Our approach might build upon our previous experiences, such as invoking traditional prayers or revisiting religious teachings with a new perspective. Or we may redefine old concepts, or even start from scratch, integrating new prayer and meditation practices into our developing spirituality.

Prayer may be considered a kind of deep connection—to ourselves, to our Higher Power, and to others. Meetings typically start and end with the Serenity Prayer or other prayers. Many of us find that when we pray together, we feel more open or experience a sense of belonging. Holding hands with other COSA members as we pray together can soften our hearts and gently remind us that we are not alone on our recovery journey.

We may also use prayer to center ourselves spiritually and experience our Higher Power's presence. In times of sadness, distress, or despair, we can find solace in our decision to turn

our lives over to God's care. We turn to our Higher Power with our pain, fear, and needs and express ourselves honestly through prayer. We surrender ourselves to our Higher Power's loving care. As we work the Steps, our prayers become less motivated by our desires and more aligned with the knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

Some commonly practiced methods of prayer include quiet invocation with heads bowed and reciting or singing prayers or religious chants aloud together. As we develop our personal relationship with God in COSA, all of us can open ourselves to new possibilities, allowing prayer to take many forms. We can light a candle and reflect on our wishes for ourselves and our loved ones. We may experience spiritual moments while listening to music or walking in nature. Writing in a gratitude journal, playing an instrument or singing, painting and creating—all of these may feel like prayerful expressions of our inner being. Even during everyday moments like laughing with our children, doing the dishes, or taking a break outside during the workday, we can feel spiritually connected.

If prayer is expressing ourselves to our Higher Power, meditation can be thought of as listening to our Higher Power. When we quiet ourselves and listen within our bodies, minds, and hearts, we open ourselves to receive insight and spiritual nurturing. Some of us experience our Higher Power's presence by taking a moment alone to become still, bringing our awareness fully to the present moment. In this way, we quiet our minds, focusing on our breath and sensory experience. Alternatively, we can try forms of moving meditation, such as walking a labyrinth or walking in nature, noticing and silently appreciating the details around us.

It may be helpful to meditate with others, in a recovery setting or other group, where we feel less alone and can more easily settle into ourselves. Some meetings incorporate group meditation time. Recovery conventions and retreats often provide a meditation room. In moments of group meditation, we may find a greater sense of connection to others and our Higher Power.

Or, we may focus internally by slowing our minds and becoming aware of how we feel, physically and emotionally, during a peaceful flow in yoga, while playing our favorite sport, or in a dance or exercise class. In these moments, we experience the spiritual bliss of letting go of fear and being one with body, mind, and spirit.

We may also experience our Higher Power's expressions to us through other means. Perhaps we feel moved by a heartfelt share in a meeting or enjoy connecting with a friend. The kindness of a stranger, a happy coincidence, or a peaceful moment with a family member can remind us we are not alone on our journeys.

In meditation, we learn to truly listen to ourselves: our hearts, our instincts and intuition, and even what our bodies are trying to tell us. We may have spent years ignoring and neglecting ourselves, shutting down our feelings and intuition, seeking our truths from other people rather than connecting to our own inner truths. Through prayer and meditation practices, we learn to reconnect to parts of ourselves that may have felt lost. We come home to ourselves.

Spiritual practices are not always easy and at times **may be unsettling**. Sitting quietly with ourselves and our Higher Power may take considerable effort and may feel counterintuitive when we lead such busy and demanding lives. When we quiet our minds and hearts, we may discover difficult feelings or wrestle with accepting our Higher Power's loving care and guidance for us. As with any spiritual endeavor, the more we practice prayer and meditation, the more easily we can relax into peace and serenity. From this place, we can reach a state of being in which we are open to our Higher Power's will for us. We remember that in COSA we are never alone, and that at any time in our spiritual journey, we can reach out to fellow COSA **members** to hear their experience, strength, and hope.

At first occasionally, and then more frequently, we notice gifts and miracles beginning to appear in our lives. We start to feel more grounded and centered. We notice a sense of stability and peace growing within us. Especially when we are struggling, our spiritual practices offer us a safe place to share our hearts and receive **help**, love, and guidance from our Higher Power. Whether in times of distress or joy or in our day-to-day routine, prayer and meditation help us experience moments of inspiration and hope. Through these practices, we come to feel a deep sense of love and connectedness with ourselves, others, and our Higher Power.