

traditional form, we join a community of blessers. Our words are strengthened by the fact that they have been said for so long in so many places.

1. Study the traditional blessings, memorize as many as possible, and carry them with you. (They can be found in any Siddur, and in the books in the “Blessings” section of the Resources list.)
2. Where appropriate, recite them with *kavvanah*.

PRACTICE 10

Blessings Walk

To get the best out of both worlds, I like to combine personal and traditional blessings to start the day in a Blessings Walk.

1. Alternate the traditional morning blessings, found at the beginning of the morning service, with spontaneous blessings over what you are seeing, touching, and hearing in the moment.
2. For example, after reciting the traditional Hebrew morning blessing “Praised be You, God, Sovereign of the universe, who enables the blind to see,” you might follow with, “Blessed be You, the Source of blessing, who in her wisdom places droplets of dew on pink-petaled roses.”
3. You might continue with the next traditional blessing, this time phrased in the feminine: “Blessed be You, the *Shechinah* filling the universe, who dresses the naked,” followed by, “Blessed be You, the Spirit of the universe, for clean clothes and warm socks.”

Cultivating a Personal Prayer Voice

Cultivating a personal prayer voice is critical to developing a prayer practice. It allows us to connect directly to our hearts, and we learn the skills that make prayer effective in communal settings, as well. For many, the practices in this section ask us to take a risk, to try something out of our comfort zone, to

do things that might not conform to the way we are used to thinking about God and prayer. Perhaps we’re not so sure if this is a good idea. But like any body of practical skills and knowledge, we cannot know the benefit without actually doing it. Since we are not causing harm to ourselves or others, there isn’t much actual risk, other than some minor embarrassment or uncertainty.

PRACTICE 11

Personal Prayer

This is the “just do it” exercise for cultivating your personal prayer voice. It is the easiest of exercises but perhaps the practice for which the most internal resistance must be overcome. If you are not ready to try it now, it would be wise to return in the future.

1. Find a private place where no one will make you feel self-conscious. A place in nature works best for many. Others prefer a chapel, but any quiet place will do.
2. Use practices 4–6 above or any other meditative practice you know (such as yoga) to get grounded in your body. Quiet your mind and enter receptive mode. Spend a moment listening to your heart. (Sometimes, you know what you need without practicing a specific mindfulness exercise, but in general, it’s helpful.)
3. Compose your own prayer to God. The simplest way is to begin a sentence with, “Please, God ...” or “May it be ...” or “May I receive your help/wisdom/care ...” and let the rest follow. In praying for others, you might begin, “Please, God, may you be ...”
4. Be as honest as possible. What do you really need? (It isn’t a Jaguar.) What do others really need? What are your best hopes for the world, for yourself? In prayer, simplicity is a virtue. The idea is to say words that, as much as possible, come directly from your emotional center. When prayer is heartfelt, it carries an emotional charge.

5. You might end with a traditional blessing, such as this:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה.

Baruch ata Adonai, shomea tefillah.

Blessed be You, Adonai, who hears prayer.

Just as spiritual practice benefits from the setting of intentions, it also benefits from the emotional discharge and formal letting go—the closure—a blessing can provide.

PRACTICE 12

Talking to God—Rabbi Nachman's *Hitbodedut*

With some latitude, I translate *hitbodedut* as “alone time for spiritual purpose.” This is the version of the practice that Rabbi Nachman of Breslov made famous. While you can do *hitbodedut* anywhere, Rabbi Nachman, aware of the supportive flow of *chiut* in natural settings, preferred the natural world. For many people, this is not an easy place to start. Don't be put off if it is difficult the first time around. You can return to it later. It is a very deep practice for those who take to it.

This practice is particularly useful in the work of *teshuvah*.

1. Find a place of solitude.
2. Talk out loud to God for a set period of time, and don't stop. A stopwatch or alarm is helpful so that you won't think about the time. Try starting with twenty minutes. Rabbi Nachman is said to have devoted an hour.
3. Speak, ask, figure things out, pray for guidance—whatever comes up, share it with God. Don't stop to think; just speak and do not quit.
4. Alternatively, do this exercise by writing in a journal. I don't know if Julia Cameron heard of Rabbi Nachman when she made this a core exercise in her program *The Artist's Way*, but it is the same idea. Open your journal and begin to write. Before you begin, set the number of journal pages that you will fill. Cameron recommends three 8½-by-11 ruled pages.

This practice can be difficult at first, but getting over the inhibition of talking out loud to God is not particularly hard. Rather, the problem is that you will quickly run out of what to say. But you must keep speaking. (See Dr. Linda Thal's comment on p. 111.) This is where it gets interesting. You will find yourself saying things that you had no idea were in you. In psychological terms, you have cleared room for your subconscious to send whatever it needs you to know into the light of day.

PRACTICE 13

Write a Letter to God

In this journal practice popularized by Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz, we address God directly. And we give God a chance to respond. Like practice 12, this practice is particularly useful in the work of *teshuvah*.

1. Find a place of solitude and take a moment to quiet down.
2. When you are ready, open your journal. Write the most honest thing you can to God. You might describe your wishes for yourself, or for your family and friends. You might write about the things you need most. You might ask for guidance.
3. When you are finished, sit for a moment or two in silence, perhaps in meditation. Listen, in contemplative silence (see practice 15).
4. Using your imagination, write yourself a response from God's perspective. At the very least, you will access the God of your mind's eye. And if your theology allows for God to be found within, perhaps this is much more.
5. You might conclude with a prayer for what you need and gratitude for what you have.

PRACTICE 14

God Says

This practice, from Rabbi Nadya Gross, takes seriously the mystics' view that God can be found inside all of us, and when we still ourselves from mental clutter and our ego-driven desires, we can listen to what God might be telling us. This exercise in