

MORNING PRAYER IN FOUR DIRECTIONS

*“Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.”*—Psalm 85:11

This is an adaptation of Native American/Tai Chi morning meditation exercise (with Christian reflections at the end), in which one faces the four directions of the compass. East represents the childhood of life—and as such may be dedicated to the healing of childhood memories, or for children of the world; South represents vocational energies, relationships and family; West represents the afternoon of life, diminishment and letting go; North represents direction and discernment (the North Star*), death and also the “dark night of the soul”—and as such may be dedicated to others going through such times.*In the Northern hemisphere, or the Southern Cross in Southern Hemisphere.

Face first to East: Looking straight ahead, roll the eyes to the right, stretching your peripheral vision; then the same to the left; upward; downward; all the while keeping the head still, looking straight forward as if seeing in all directions at once! *Option:* You may then sing or recite a morning hymn, poem, or prayer, such as “Morning has broken.”

A. Facing *East*, say to yourself, “**Left wing as a bird in flight**”—Bend knees slightly (not stiff); gently lift left foot, standing on your right foot with knee gently bent, and left arm akimbo—placing left hand with forefingers facing front, thumb facing back, curved around the top of left hip—exhale; Say, “**Right wing as in flight**”—Gently lift right foot, standing on your left foot with knee gently bent, and right arm akimbo—right hand curved around the top of right hip, with forefingers facing front and thumb facing back—exhale; Say, “**Both wings as in flight**”—Stand on both feet with knees gently bent, both arms akimbo, and each hand curved around the top of each hip (as above)—exhale; Then fold hands in front of you in traditional prayer posture, gently lifting folded hands pointed skyward, above your head; Then, exhaling, slowly make a graceful bow toward the earth, hands still folded; then open palms toward the earth, kneel or squat, while saying, “**And father sky comes down to greet mother earth and nurture the earth with gifts of sun and rain, heat and light, air and moisture**”—Then place open palms down on the earth (or floor), perhaps even kissing the earth affectionately (or an “air kiss,” lips not touching earth), all breath now exhaled, hold; Then turn palms upward, as if to make a scoop for earth or water, begin to inhale, saying, “**And draw from the earth...**”—standing, bring the scooped hands up to the chest below the heart (hold breath); then exhale, thrusting fingertips straight forward, saying, “**...and give back to the world**”—Take a step slightly right and front, then with feet together, and hands still extended, scribe a big circle with your hands *from bottom to top*, simulating the sun (as if drawing simultaneously the two halves of the circle, one with each hand, on an imaginary blackboard!)—then with hands at the “top” of your circle, inhale, and say, “**Draw from the sky...**”—Pull hands down and in, fingers touching each other, palms placed on your chest, hold; Then exhale, saying, “**...and give back to the world**”—thrusting fingertips straight out; Then inhale, while bringing hands back to chest “**...And draw from the circle of your life, your self to your self...**” as you form an X shape as if to “hug yourself”—left hand embracing right shoulder, right hand embracing left shoulder, feeling God's blessing on your whole being, hold and say, “**...and be renewed**”—with an exhaled breath release hands from

shoulders to sides. (You might also hold a loved one in your heart with hands crossed on chest.)

B. Now position the right foot at a right angle, and take one large step to your right, turning to face *South*, and bring the left foot parallel, both facing South—then repeat motions as above: **“Left wing as in flight— Right wing as in flight— Both wings as in flight. And the sky comes down to nurture the earth with gifts of light and moisture— Draw from the earth— and give to the world— Draw from the sky— and give to the world— and be renewed.”** (Exhale when releasing each gesture; inhale when beginning the next gesture.)

C. Then position the right foot at a right angle, and take one step to your right, turning to face *West*, and bring the left foot parallel, both facing West—then repeat motions, as above. (As an Easterner, I often think of national environmental treasures—Grand Canyon, etc., when facing West: So I often pray for the healing of the environment, wildlife, and eco-systems.)

D. Then position the right foot at a right angle, and take one step to your right, turning to face *North*, and bring the left foot parallel, both facing North—then repeat motions, as above. (Often I pray for various nation-states in the four directions, or for someone who lives to the South, or West, etc., or for myself in the summer of my life, or for someone in the evening of her or his life, or—thinking of the North star, *for guidance* for myself or another person; or for appreciating *the depth of life* (only at night can we see the depth, mystery and beauty of the universe); or for *someone facing death*—or whatever associations come to mind. As to exact positions and movements, some I have borrowed, some are my own.)

E. At the end, still facing North with hands released from embracing yourself, take one big step back and you will have moved to the center of your "circle"—representing the whole cosmos. You will have made *the pattern of the cross with your feet*—a prayer for the Gospel of peace to go forth into all the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

Option: At this point you may make the sign of the cross, traditionally with the right hand, saying the words: **“In the name of the Father”**—touching the forehead, dedicating your *mind and intellect*; **“...and of the Son”**—touching lower stomach, dedicating your *passion and compassion*; **“...and of the Holy Spirit”**—bringing the hand up through the heart, then from one shoulder to the other crossing at the throat, dedicating your *breath and voice* **“...one God, Mother of us all!”***—bringing hand back to the center of chest, holding it a moment.

*These words preserve the traditional Trinitarian baptismal formula (Matthew 28:19), yet they add: **“...one God”**—(the *Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4), the true meaning of Trinity (trinity), also the scriptural phrase used by Julian of Norwich (see Psalm 131:2; Isaiah 49: 15; 66:13), **“mother of us all”**—creating a genuinely inclusive paradox.

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