

SOMATIC PRAYER

This is such a valuable practice for me, being one who finds it easy to overdose on the left brain, “in my head” thing. Somatic prayer helps me get my spiritual practice rooted in my body. It’s simple and kind of obvious, so I don’t know why it took me 20 years to figure out. Maybe it will inspire you as well.

It’s pretty easy - add some movement to the words of your prayer. Or dispense with the words and pray with movement alone. Do it improv. Or craft a beautiful prayer sequence with eloquent words and graceful movement that feels like a special offering for the spirits/gods/ancestors. Do it every day for a cycle of the moon. Get together with your community and co-create a prayer of gratitude for your watershed that you all sing and dance together.

Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- You could start by doing a study of mudras and sacred gestures - I was really interested in this, so I built a small collection (a picture or sketch of the physical position and its given meaning) using google searches and some books. This is very loose because what a gesture or mudra feels like in my body may or may not agree with its classical interpretation.
- You could put on a playlist of slower music that expresses different emotions and see how your body wants to move with it. Sometimes, moving in front of a mirror is helpful, sometimes counterproductive.
- I have also started on the other end, having the words to a prayer written out and looking for the movements or gestures that express the words. That’s usually what works best for me.
- Sometimes I will start saying the words of a devotion or prayer or gratitude practice - maybe repeating them over and over. See what gestures or movements come to me naturally. If nothing comes instinctively for a given phrase or line, then I might search for traditional gestures or mudras that mesh with the words.

My daily practice often includes some form of somatic prayer or devotion. It changes over time, sometimes flowing with the lunar cycle, or the seasons. Sometimes the same prayer will stick with me for a long time (I call these

the thousand-time lessons). Somatic prayer is a good way for me to anchor in the repetitive friction of a daily practice.

On the days when I'm just NOT feeling it - which definitely happens - having something fixed and already written will make it easier for me to get my ass to the altar in the morning. AND, having a somatic movement component to the words helps turn those daily practices from a joyless, doing it by rote thing, into a living, breathing practice.

I also have special somatic devotional pieces for the main spirit beings that I work with. The more I repeat them, the more effective they are at triggering certain emotional states and levels of dropping in with spirit. The physical gestures are key for me.

Here is an example of a daily prayer I created in 2023 when I was intent on moving Her to the center (because things had gotten a little too focused on my own ego). This was also a time when I was exploring being an animist first and a "particular-deity-worshipper" second.

Mother of all Beings (there's a weird kind of dramatic flourish with my arms and hands here)

You are my axis, my structural support (hands straight and vertical, one on top of the other, thumbs against my body, stretching from low abdomen to throat - I can't remember the name of the mudra)

I move You to the center (bring the left vertical hand, thumb toward body, about a foot from my chest)

and organize my Self around You (right hand makes graceful flowing circles around the stationary left hand)

To you mother, I surrender (both hands held in front of my body, palms up and open)

This agitated mind (both hands brush my head)

And this fierce egoic control (arms bent at elbow, fists held up in front of my face)

I, who have never knelt before anyone, fall to my knees in reverence to You (fall to my knees, head back and arms spread wide)

Face to the earth and palms upturned, I honor you as Adi Ma Shakti, creator of the cosmos (go into some version of full pranam)

My heart pressed against your skin Mother, I honor you as Gaia, this living, breathing, animate earth (pull my legs up into child's pose and really press my heart against the ground)

I honor you as Cascadia, Goddess spirit of these woods, these mountains, these rivers (come to goddess squatting pose)

And I honor you as Brigid, Goddess of my ancestors (making the complex devotional gesture I have for Brigid)

I sing to you, humming animacy, the source from which I flow (making graceful gestures like the flowing waters of a river)

I offer you the fullness of this inhale and the surrender of this exhale (deep breath in and out, hands mirroring the breath by expanding out and contracting in)

I offer you, primordial mother power, the actions of this day (bring hands to the heart and bow head)