

THE GESTURES

This sequence of movements is designed for practice in the Southern Hemisphere

Begin with the East, then the North, West and South.

1. Face the direction. Settle within yourself. Throughout the ritual, allow your breath to flow, inhaling and exhaling in harmony with the movements of the body.
2. Take a step forward with your right leg and extend your right hand and arm out in a receptive gesture. At the same time, slowly raise your left arm, rotating forward, up, and all the way around. Rotate the entire left side of the body in harmony with the arm movement. This opens your heart to the blessings of the natural world.
3. Step forward with your left leg and arm and repeat the first movement with your right arm. This opens your heart to the blessings of the world of human traditions.
4. Reach down with both hands and gather in the blessings of the Earth. Flex both knees keeping the back somewhat straight. Hold both hands and bring them up in front of the body, then face, and then straight up above the head. With arms extended, open hands and rotate out from each other to give the blessings of the Earth to the heavens.
Then reverse the process to gather in the blessings of the heavens and give to the Earth. You may also become attentive to the heavens and Earth being held in unity in our bodies.
5. Stepping forward with left foot, reach out with both hands in an embracing motion to gather in all the blessings of the direction. Holding the blessings to your body, twist around to the right to face the opposite direction. Keeping the flow of the motion give out the blessings to the universe by simply opening your hands and moving them out away from you in a sweeping motion.

6. Relax arms back to your sides as you twist a little to the left and you will be facing the next direction.

At the end of the prayer to the South, stand silently for a while.

Maintain silence as the group disperses.



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THE FOUR DIRECTIONS BODY PRAYER RITUAL



Drawing from many people and different ancient traditions around the world, Sr Miriam Macgillis (of Genesis Farm in New Jersey) designed a form of prayer or meditation involving movements of the body similar to Tai Chi or Qi gong.

This ritual is practiced each morning at Genesis Farm, a centre for education programs exploring the sacred unity of life, humanity and Earth in the context of the whole Universe.

Sr Miriam is a member of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, a community of Catholic religious women. However, her work, inspired by the cultural historian and author Thomas Berry, draws on all the ancient traditions and the wisdom of Earth's natural processes so that humans can understand the interconnectedness of all of life.

This ritual body prayer offers us an opportunity to experience a style of prayer very different to how we typically think of communal prayer in the Christian tradition. For many, prayer is experienced in spoken word often in a sitting or kneeling posture indoors.

The body prayer invites us to participate in a collective experience of being part of the 'sacred unity of life.' Through these movements, among other beings outdoors, we can be attentive to the elements. Noticing also our sensory experience; the gentle breath and movement of our bodies, the distinctive traits of a particular place and each other.

THE FOUR DIRECTIONS

The cycles of nature govern our lives and we can learn a great deal from their wisdom. We often forget that our bodies are part of the body of the universe and so when we pay attention to the movements of the cosmos within ourselves, our lives take on the same natural flow.

Seasonal, circadian, lunar and tidal forces influence our lives in profound ways, especially when we can trust their intelligence. Ancient traditions associated many of these forces with the four directions. Each of the directions offer us 'gifts' which we keep in mind during body prayer. These include:

East: Dawn, season of spring, element of fire, the colour red, power of illumination and wisdom.

North: Noon time, season of summer, element of earth, the colour yellow, power of growth and manifestation.

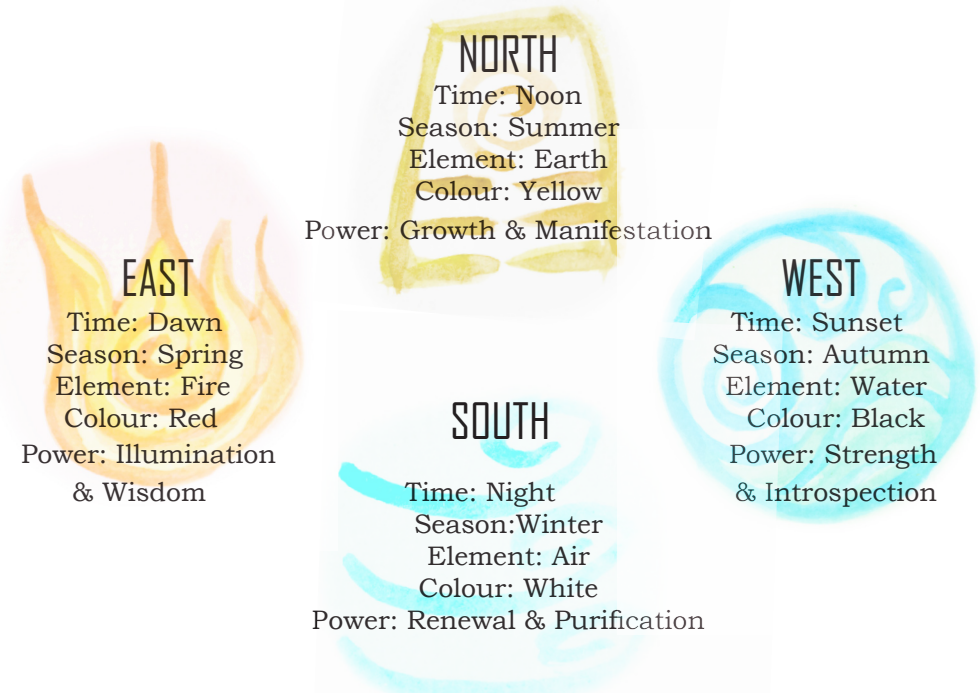
West: Sunset, Season of Autumn, element of water, colour black, power of strength and introspection.

South: Night time, season of winter, element of air, the colour white, power of renewal and purification.

**** These directions are designed for practice in the Southern Hemisphere ****

The movements of this body prayer ritual, honour these cycles and the four directions as archetypal processes, metaphors and symbolic influences. It also acknowledges the reality of opposites as we embrace the gifts of all directions and draw them into our bodies, integrating them like a bridge.

ARCHETYPES OF THE NATURAL WORLD



INTEGRATION PRAYER – BY MIRIAM MACGILLIS

****This prayer is placed in the intention of the mind and heart and carried silently in the gestures of the body.****

I open my heart to the blessings of the universe and welcome them into me; blessings of the Earth and the cosmos and blessings of my religious faith.

I acknowledge that the first revelation was in the earth and cosmos and I awaken that memory in my body. My body is a bridge between the universe and my tradition, all its beliefs and insights.

I embrace my faith and ground it through my body to the whole of creation so that I may become a blessing to the non-human world.

I acknowledge and accept the reality of opposites. I embrace the gifts of this direction, draw them into my heart and send them forth to their opposite and draw that back into my heart where I desire to make them one and whole.