

# *Dancing with Monks and Mystics*

## Prayer Guide for the DVD offered by Betsey Beckman



*“David danced before the LORD with all his might. (...) So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.” 2 Sam 6:14-15*

*“Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing.” Exodus 15:19-21*



**Welcome:** Welcome to this video offering! Here we support you in joining monks and mystics such as King David and the Prophet Miriam in expressing the depths of your prayer through dancing. Movement can be a powerful gateway for connecting with the Divine. When words seem pale or insufficient to express your soul’s deeper story, this video resource offers you tools for exploring an alternative, embodied way to pray, and to be joined by holy mentors on the path of prayer.

**Prayer Guide:** We provide this printed guide to help you navigate the DVD and shape a safe time for exploring dance and prayer. As your entry point, please view the introduction section of the DVD for an overview of the project. **(10 minutes)**

**Practicalities:** Ready to dive in? Choose a DVD player (TV or computer) in a space where you have a bit of room to move. Make sure you are wearing clothing that does not restrict your flow of breath or movement. Have a journal and pen by your side. Feel free to safeguard this as a time of solo prayer, or join with a friend, family members, or interested group to explore the dances together.

The following suggestions are written for individual prayer, but could easily be adapted for group prayer as well.

**Choosing your Mentor:** To embark, we invite you to open to the wisdom of your imagination to help you enter into the journey. Each monk or mystic in this series has an invitation to prayer for you. Begin your prayer time by reviewing the list below. Notice which mentor (or theme) shimmers for you, connects with your personal intention for prayer, or intuitively calls to you.

## **Monks and Mystics and their Prayer Invitations:**

- 1) **Prophet Miriam:** “All of the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing.”
- 2) **King David:** “David danced before God with all of his might.”
- 3) **Mary, Mother of God:** “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.”
- 4) **Amma Syncletica:** “We must kindle the divine fire within ourselves.”
- 5) **Brigid of Kildare:** “Wellspring of wisdom, show me the way.”
- 6) **Benedict of Nursia:** “Welcome in the stranger through the door of your heart.”
- 7) **Brendan, the Navigator:** “Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown.”
- 8) **Hildegard of Bingen:** “Let my soul be greening.”
- 9) **Francis of Assisi:** “The world is my monastery.”
- 10) **Rainer Maria Rilke:** “May what I do flow from me like a river.”
- 11) **Dorothy Day:** “We must bring about a revolution of the heart.”
- 12) **Thomas Merton:** “Join in the joy of the cosmic dance.”

Choose one of the mentors to begin, and locate the button on your DVD. (For a longer schema, put aside a 12 day period of time and pray with a different monk each day in the order given on the DVD.)

**Getting to Know your Mentor:** When you are ready, watch the introduction to the monk or mystic on your DVD to learn a bit about their history and charism. Now pause the selection for a moment of quiet prayer (before learning the dance.) Invite the presence of this holy person to pray with you today. Picture them present with you. Perhaps you have a question or a need for this time of prayer. Is there some virtue or quality that you long for that your mentor can help you open to? Could this dance be on behalf of someone in your life that you carry in prayer? Feel free to take time to reflect on these questions in your journal and invite this monk or mystic to dance with you today.

**Warming up:** Prepare for your time of movement with a gentle warm-up. (Feel free to stand up or remain seated.) Take a deep breath and let it out with a sigh. Stretch one arm upwards and down, and then the other. Give a little shake to your arms, then your legs, and then your whole body. Become present to your body sensations. Take another deep breath. Do a little more stretching on your own and notice what movements feel good to your body. Give yourself a few moments to wiggle and squiggle and move intuitively while listening to your own body.

**Stepping into the Dance:** Resume the DVD and begin following the demonstration of the choreography for your chosen monk or mystic. Feel free to start simply, moving only your hands in a gesture prayer. (You can rewind as needed until you feel comfortable with that part of the prayer.) Then, if you desire, you can add the foot patterns (when applicable.) You can also feel free to follow your own body and modify the movements through space.

**Reflection:** Once you have become comfortable with the song and movement, take a moment to reflect. Pause the DVD again and review your written prayer intention for this dance. Perhaps new thoughts and prayers are surfacing. Feel free to write those down as well.

**Dance Along:** Now proceed to the “Dance Along” button on the DVD. The first time through, feel free to simply watch and receive the dance. Your mirror neurons will allow you to experience the dance prayer kinesthetically, even while simply viewing. Notice how God and/or the monk or mystic might be speaking to you through the prayer-dance.

When you are ready, play the selection a second time and join your mentor in the dance. Use your imagination to see your holy guide dancing with you in his or her own time- period and environment. Travel to the desert with Amma Syncletica or to the sea with Brendan. Notice what messages or images come alive for you through the dance. What message is the monk offering you in this moment?

Dance along as many times as feels good in your body or that you have time for. Begin by following Betsey in the choreography and entering into the movement forms you are viewing. As you continue, feel free to embellish the basic choreography and follow your own movements. Let the dance become your own as a dialogue with God. (Remember, there is no right or wrong as you allow the dance to be a doorway to the Divine presence.)

When you are ready, close your time with a prayer of thanksgiving (in word or movement), expressing gratitude for the inspiration of your mentor, and for the Spirit moving through you. Take a moment to notice and breathe in any gifts that are stirring.

Return to your journal and reflect about any new insights that came from this time of prayer. Our culture often encourages judgment and perfectionism with regards to our body-selves. Practice receiving all of yourself - humility, awkwardness, exuberance, fears, tears or laughter. Let yourself open to a loving embrace of all that your prayer has awakened in you this day.

**Ongoing Practices:** Once you have become familiar with the offerings, you may notice that on any given day, a particular dance or mentor may be calling to you. Perhaps you need to be energized by dancing with David, or you need the

refreshment of Hildegard's viriditas. Perhaps you need guidance and want to join Brigid in asking God to "show you the way." Each mentor and their dance can become like an old friend that you visit when you need their gift.

If you are longing for a good dance "work-out" consider starting at the top and dancing through all 12 pieces, allowing your body to receive the gift of a whole "wave" of movement modalities and prayers. Drink water and reflect in your journal as you complete.

### **Alternative possibilities:**

**Motio Divina** – You may be familiar with Lectio Divina, an ancient Christian practice of praying through a scripture passage three times, noticing what word or phrase is calling to you. Consider adapting this for movement prayer. Choose a dance, and for the first time, follow the choreography for the Dance Along prayer. As you dance, notice one movement that intrigues you (either delights you or perhaps is challenging to your body) and make a note of that movement. For the second time through, move however your body leads in response to the music; again, notice one movement that feels particularly good or challenging. For your third time through the prayer, create a dialogue between the two movements you previously identified, allowing a new synthesis to emerge. Complete your prayer by reflecting in your journal about what the dance revealed to you.

**Hand Dance** - Simply allow one hand to dance any way it wants to for the duration of the music. Notice any insights.

**Character Dance** - Name a character trait of the monk or mystic that inspires, comforts or challenges you, and allow your body to fully embody that trait in your own way. Notice how this trait enlivens or stretches you. (For example – boldness for Miriam, or surrender for Rilke.)

**Intercessory Prayer** – As you dance, offer your movement as a prayer of intercession for someone who may need the special grace that a particular monk or mystic embodies.

### **Group Suggestions:**

**Prayer Groups** - As mentioned initially, feel free to gather a group to explore the dances with you, or feel free to teach one of the dances as an opening or closing prayer for an existing prayer group or meeting.

**Class Settings** – if you are a teacher, notice where the message of a particular monk or mystic might be helpful and engaging. Learn the choreography yourself and teach it, or play the DVD and invite the group to dance along. After dancing, you may want to invite people to have partners to reflect with. Some dances

demonstrate alternate choices for choreography if you are working with a group. Explore the gift of being the communal Body of Christ.

**Liturgy Settings** – For certain liturgical settings, one or more of the songs/dances might be offered by an individual or group as an embodied prayer.

**Further Support:**

**Book** - *Praying with Monks and Mystics* by Christine Valters Paintner  
This resource includes colorful icons and original poems for praying with all 12 Monks and Mystics, as well as song sheets for all 12 songs.

**CD** - *Singing with Monks and Mystics* – with music by Laura and David Ash, Betsey Beckman, Carmel Boyle and Richard Bruxvoort Colligan. Sing along with all 12 song (plus bonus song!) while driving, reflecting or even cleaning house. (St. Benedict's Rule includes the guideline of *ora et labora* – pray and work. Why not do both at once? Get your heart singing and toes tapping as you dance through your day!)

To order, click on - [AbbeyoftheArts.com](http://AbbeyoftheArts.com).

## Become a Dancing Monk



Are you eager for more? Please visit [AbbeyoftheArts.com](http://AbbeyoftheArts.com) and join our online group, *The Holy Disorder of Dancing Monks*, a worldwide community of spirited members embracing practices that integrate body and soul. Or consider signing up for one of our online retreats exploring special themes with movement prayers woven throughout.

Also explore a host of resources at [TheDancingWord.com](http://TheDancingWord.com), for embodying the sacred in liturgy and life.

Blessings to you and happy dancing! -Betsey Beckman



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