

A new name for God

By [Chris Brundage](#)

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I have a new name for God, at least new to me. The old three-letter word "God" is worn out. Words only last so long before they need to be retired for a season. The word "God" has too much freight on it and too many associations.

I have begun to use a Hebrew word for deity: el. It's pronounced like the English word ale. (This is an idea I borrowed from Madeleine L'Engle.) El is a simple word, found in the Bible, but it doesn't have any history for me, and I never use it in my work as a pastor. I walk on the trail in the mornings and talk to el, who hides in the trees. Actually, el is hidden deeply in all things.

I bought a new prayer book to help me talk with el at other times. My old prayer book was looking decrepit, and the cats gnawed off the ribbon markers. My prayer book is published by the Presbyterian Church and includes the psalms along with traditional prayers. It has a Celtic cross on the cover and readings from the daily lectionary in the back, which I read in the Good News Bible or the NRSV. A new prayer book goes well with a new name for God.

I have a new practice too: yoga. I took part in a great yoga group at church over the summer, and now I am taking formal yoga classes downtown from a woman who has studied in India and calls the poses by their Sanskrit names. Yoga is teaching me to befriend my body, which weighs 70 pounds less than it did last fall. Yoga also helps me find what my teacher calls 'spaciousness within.' Maybe that spacious place is where el lives in me. Yoga poses remind me of the different postures of prayer the psalms place us in.

A new name, a new book, and a new practice. These are new seeds taking root in me now.

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