

Prayer Course: Week 3

Short repeated prayers: The Jesus prayer

Introduction:

The 'Jesus prayer' is a short repeated prayer that is said with each breath, and it comes in a long tradition of short prayers that are repeated continuously.

Background:

The 'Jesus Prayer' is a key part of Eastern Orthodox spirituality and in that tradition is practised by all levels of the Church. It is a very short prayer that is said continuously, silently in the mind, in a pattern using the breath as a guide. Many Orthodox Christian sources tell us that eventually this prayer becomes automatic and then is said even when the devotee is asleep.

This short repetitive prayer as a form is very ancient and the early church practised a form of this prayer known as the 'Maranatha' prayer which prays for Jesus's return in glory. This form is one way of addressing the command of St Paul to 'Pray continuously'.

In the Jesus prayer form we will be using, we will use the words: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us" which are silently 'said' in our hearts and minds in rhythm with our breathing.

Purpose:

The purpose of the Jesus prayer is to notice and to bring Jesus's mercy and grace to all that we do and all that we meet.

Process:

- While doing some simple and safe task, like walking, or the washing up.
- On the in breath silently pray: 'Lord Jesus Christ'
- On the out breath pray: 'Have mercy on us', (traditionally this is: 'have mercy on us poor sinners' but I find that a bit too long in English)
- At the end of the session and for the rest of the day, let the prayer keep bubbling up, or start it again if you find yourself detaching from God's presence.

Further reading and resources:

'The Way of a Pilgrim', Anonymous 19th Century Russian Peasant
World Community for Christian Meditation