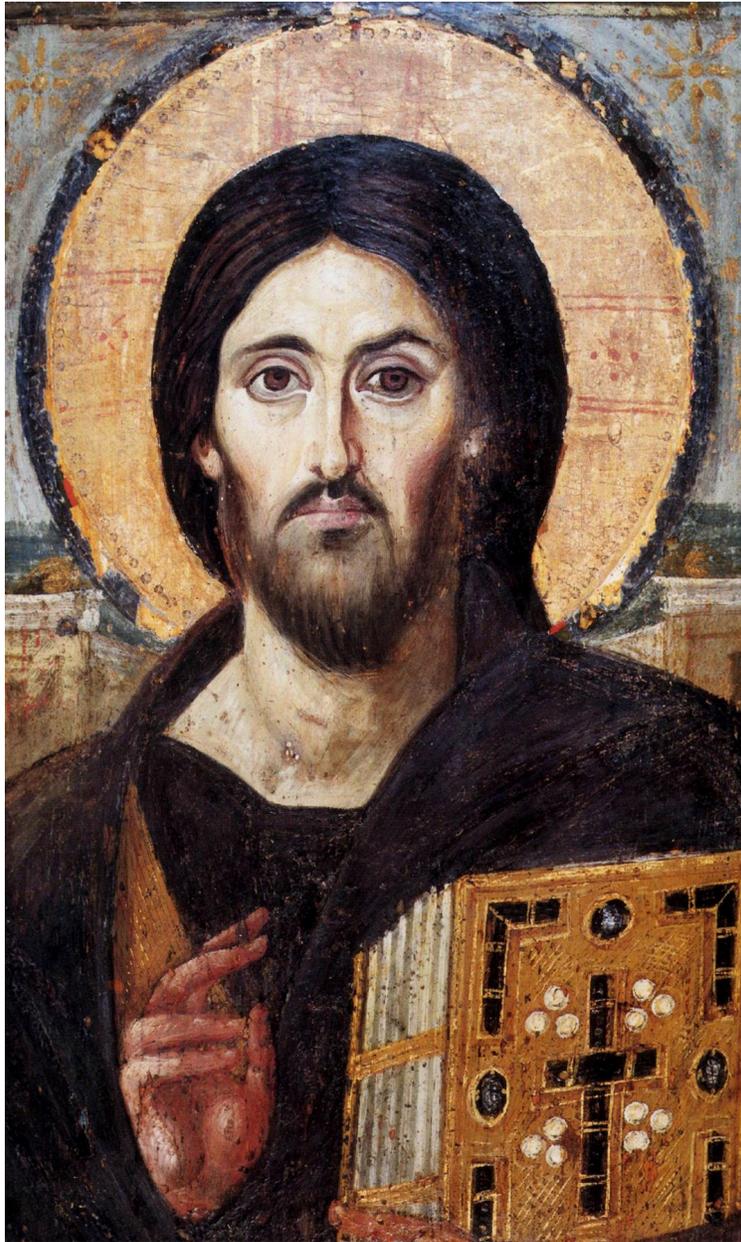


## The Jesus Prayer, Mantras, and Meditation by Richard Murray

Original Post: <https://scripturefinds.wordpress.com/2016/11/10/the-jesus-prayer-mantras-and-meditation/comment-page-1/#comment-534>



Yourself, Peaceful, and, Effective

Part II

## The Jesus Prayer, Mantras, and Meditation

Repetition, rhythm, harmony, and beauty are the creative base of music, poetry, and other kinds of art. We are attracted to goodness, beauty, and truth. We are attracted to music and poetry.

A mantra is connected to this reality.

### The Mantra

A mantra is a word or phrase that holds special meaning for us. Mantras have been made from all of the cherished Scriptures of the globe.

These words, or verses, from our various Scriptures carry immense significance for us, and give us healing and integration at many levels of our being. They communicate the Divine life and knowledge to us. Although we never finish understanding the words of our Scriptures, mantras allow us to understand some parts of our Scriptures at profound depth. We dwell deeply with particular Sacred words. We get to know them better. The Scripture begins to merge with us.

Then, to this word or phrase, we add the elements of time and repetition. A form of musical rhythm, and powerful repetition, takes the Sacred word to different places in our soul. We repeat the mantra many times. It begins to operate in us in manifold new ways.

These mantras can have many powerful good effects in our life. They calm us, as does music and poetry that we choose for that purpose. They enlighten us. They comfort us in times of difficulty, trial, and emotional extremes. Mantras lead us into prayer, or can also be the entirety of our prayer. They become very familiar to us, like our favorite gloves on a cold day.

Mantras are in all religions, and various verses from all Scriptures have been used to form mantras.

Mantras are connected with our breath, and all traditions know the importance of our breathing —how spiritual our breathing, our breath, is. The words of the mantra are in two phrases; the first phrase is said on the inbreath (inhale), the second phrase is said on the outbreath (exhale). The prayer is meant to be said silently, not aloud. (Notice that we can only physically speak or sing when we are exhaling.)

We repeat the mantra in intentional times of prayer, or, at informal times. Such informal use of the mantra can be extremely helpful. When we are riding the bus or subway, waiting in line,

placed on hold during a phone call, we can instantly convert otherwise wasted moments into spiritual fruitfulness.

Teachings about mantras vary from religion to religion, from community to community.

### The Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is a specifically Christian form of prayer. It is like a mantra (although technically, it's not a mantra, but it's own category of prayer). It involves the name of Jesus and a plea for God's mercy, which is God's own love that sustains the universe from one moment to the next.

Although we don't know precisely when the Jesus Prayer started, some think it began with the great desert monks of Egypt, those wonderful Ammas and Abbas, about 300 years after the time of Christ. From there it spread through the entire Eastern Mediterranean region, invigorating Eastern Christianity. For centuries it has been the central spiritual practice for great numbers of people, most dynamically in the Greek and Russian churches, and in many other communities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Northern Africa, Western Asia, and Eastern Europe. While it has been long known and practiced in western monastic circles, in the last century it became much more popular throughout the larger western world also. Today, it is prayed around the globe. A friend who is a Christian monk recently wrote a book in Chinese about the Jesus Prayer.

It has been very important for Orthodox Christian spirituality, and has been a staple of monastic life in Egypt, Ethiopia, North Africa, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, Russia, Iran, Iraq, India, Eastern Europe, and many more places, for centuries or millennia. For example, in Mount Athos, a peninsula in Greece that is and has been home to dozens of monasteries and hermitages for more than 1,200 years, has always practiced the Jesus Prayer. For some of the monks of Mount Athos, the Jesus Prayer is almost the entirety of their spiritual life—these holy monks pray the prayer without ceasing. Many of these monks find the prayer waking them up for their vigils in the middle of the night. When they are sleeping in light sleep, they feel the prayer praying itself in their heart. Likewise, the prayer has been central in the Russian Orthodox Church. A famous anonymous story about the Jesus Prayer, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, has been frequently read around the globe.

Typically, the Jesus Prayer is said with these words:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, (inbreath)

Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner. (outbreath)

However, modification of the prayer, and personal tailoring, is certainly allowed.

People today have wider psyches, and many more things to integrate in our life. In today's world, many individuals cannot identify in their own prayer with the notion of being a "sinner"; it is simply too much for them. This is especially true for victims of abuse and people who have suffered much. Therefore, today many people like this formula:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God (inbreath)

Have Mercy on Me, Your Sister (or Brother) (outbreath)

We say this. And then we repeat it. That's it. We repeat it as much as we want. That is the whole prayer. We say it once a day, or repeat it many times at dozens of opportunities during the day, or whatever we like. It's that easy and flexible. If we're walking down the street and we see a beautiful tree, we might remember to say the prayer in thanksgiving for the amazing tree. But what if a friend suddenly rounds the corner? Well, drop the prayer and respond fully to your friend. The Jesus Prayer does not need formal beginnings or endings. It is meant to be very flexible and easy for us to use. When we are done talking with our friend, we are free to begin saying it again. But we don't have to.

The key words are "Jesus" and "Mercy." Remember, God's own Mercy is not a bit of pity or a small token of kindness. Rather, God's Mercy is the Love that sustains the universe from one moment to the next.

Another version of the prayer is:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, (inbreath)

Have Mercy on Us, Your People (outbreath)

Another version:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, (inbreath)

Have Mercy on Me (outbreath)

Or:

Lord Jesus, (inbreath)

Have Mercy (outbreath)

Once we have a formula that works well with us, it is good to stick with it for a while. This allows for the Prayer to grow roots in our heart.

Variations of this prayer have been popular all over the world. In the 20th Century, many people would instantly pray, "My Jesus Mercy!" upon hearing some difficult news concerning themselves or others.

There are prayer ropes that are made specifically for the Jesus Prayer, and many forms of beads as well.

### Benefits of the Jesus Prayer

The prayer gathers us. It unifies and focuses us.

When we are praying it, negative thoughts are kept away (this is important for all people, especially the young members of the community, as negative forces can prey upon young minds that have nothing good to occupy them). Today, many people are susceptible to fear. But the Jesus Prayer drives away fear and gives us confidence. The word "confidence" means "with-faith-ness," from the Latin word for "faith," fides.

Additionally, having divine names, and words from Scripture, constantly circulating through our mind and psyche, does immeasurable good for us.

There are two main ways we can say the prayer:

One is the formal way: We intentionally sit in prayer time for 2, 10, or 20 minutes, or whatever we choose. We say the prayer interiorly. When (if) we move into the silence, we are free to continue saying the prayer, or we can stop saying the prayer and simply be in pure silence.

Another way is the informal way: We say the prayer when we are walking, standing in line, riding the bus, and at many other times. This converts otherwise wasted moments into awesome prayer time. Turn your bus ride into a cathedral or zendo. We can begin and end the prayer at any moment, and, as mentioned above, we do not need clear 'beginnings' and 'ends' for the informal prayer. The next time that we have an open moment on our hands, we simply start praying again.

This 'informal' way of the prayer is extremely powerful and centering.

Another note on our breathing. 'Ruach' in the Hebrew and 'Pneuma' in the Greek both mean Spirit, breath, and wind. That's a remarkable fact.

The prayer is woven into our breathing. All religious traditions celebrate the importance of our breath.

### The Jesus Prayer, and Meditation

A brief note about the 'formal' practice of the prayer (or any form of meditation): As soon as we sit to meditate, a bunch of thoughts surge into our consciousness. These are regrets/anger/shame about the past, or worries about the future. It is completely normal for these thoughts to arise. They need to come up, and it is good and healthy that they appear. Each time we become consciously aware of them, we turn our consciousness back to the prayer. Gently. We don't get frustrated, we don't get angry with ourselves. We simply return to the prayer. Just doing this is great prayer.

We'll notice our prayer deepening with time. This also has the benefit of letting issues surface. If/As issues arise, it is good to talk to one of our advisors/spiritual directors/counselors about them.

Prayer likes consistency. Same time each day, if possible. If we cannot do that, ok. A practice of the 'informal' prayer will suffice until we can get meditation back on the plan. (The 'informal' prayer needs no schedule.)

Also, a superb discussion of the theology of the Jesus Prayer can be found in *The Power of the Name*, by Kallistos Ware. Bishop Kallistos is a Metropolitan Archbishop of the Eastern Orthodox Church, a monk of the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Patmos, which is the legendary place of the vision and writing of the Book of Revelation, and, he is a professor at Oxford. This holy booklet of 29 pages delves into many wonderful facets of the Jesus Prayer.

(The icon at the beginning of the essay is Christ Pantocrator (6th Century), which was discovered mere decades ago at the Monastery of St. Catherine, at Mount Sinai in Egypt.)