



## Rowan Williams: how Buddhism helps me pray

The former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Williams has disclosed that he spends up to 40 minutes a day squatting and repeating an Eastern Orthodox prayer while performing breathing exercises as part of a routine influenced by Buddhism.

He also spends time pacing slowly and repeatedly prostrating himself as part of an intense early morning ritual of silent meditation and prayer.

The normally private former Archbishop has given a glimpse of his personal devotions in an article for the [New Statesman](#) explaining the power of religious ritual in an increasingly secular world.

Lord Williams has spoken in the past about how in his youth he contemplated becoming a monk as well as joining the Orthodox church.

He explained that he draws daily inspiration from the practice, common to both the Greek and Russian orthodox churches, of meditating while repeatedly reciting the “Jesus Prayer”, which says: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner”.

“Over the years increasing exposure to and engagement with the Buddhist world in particular has made me aware of practices not unlike the ‘Jesus Prayer’ and introduced me to disciplines that further enforce the stillness and physical focus that the prayer entails,” he explained

“Walking meditation, pacing very slowly and coordinating each step with an out-breath, is something I have found increasingly important as a preparation for a longer time of silence.



“So: the regular ritual to begin the day when I’m in the house is a matter of an early rise and a brief walking meditation or sometimes a few slow prostrations, before squatting for 30 or 40 minutes (a low stool to support the thighs and reduce the weight on the lower legs) with the ‘Jesus Prayer’: repeating (usually silently) the words as I breathe out, leaving a moment between repetitions to notice the beating of the heart, which will slow down steadily over the period.”

Far from it being like a “magical invocation”, he explained that the routine helps him detach himself from “distracted, wandering images and thoughts”, picturing the human body as like a ‘cave’ through which breath passes.

“If you want to speak theologically about it, it’s a time when you are aware of your body as simply a place where life happens and where, therefore, God ‘happens’: a life lived in you,” he added.

He went on to explain that those who perform such rituals regularly could reach “advanced states” and become aware of an “unbroken inner light”.