The Lord’s Prayer: Personal and Revolutionary

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Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Psalm 19:1-7

I recently listened to an Irish comedian named Dara O’Briain who said that, even though he doesn’t believe in God, he’s still a Catholic! Our culture is infused with references to the Christian church, such that even if people leave and say they don’t believe, basic things just stay with you.

One of these is the Lord’s Prayer. O’Briain says,

The Lord’s prayer, was written by the Lord himself; its major themes are “Bread” and “Trespassing.” Was there a lot of trespassing going on in Galilee at the time? Were people constantly vaulting over fences, hopping over walls, and taking shortcuts through other peoples’ property? Was Christ himself going, “If those kids don’t get out of my yard, that’s it, it’s going in the prayer! No more trespassing! In fact, it’s going in the prayer twice!”

Those early lessons and prayers stayed with me too, as probably most of us raised in the church, no matter the denomination. In my Presbyterian church, our Lord’s Prayer read, “forgive us our debts” instead of “forgive us our trespasses.” But as a child, I didn’t know what either of them meant.

It’s the kind of prayer that gets under your skin and into your unconscious on the one hand, but on the other hand, we can recite it without a lot of thought. It’s memorized, we could say it in our sleep.

This all changed for me about fifteen years ago, when I bought the book *Prayers of the Cosmos* by Neil Douglas-Klotz. Many of you know his name, and several of you went to our New Creation Mission Group class a few years ago, based on Klotz's book *The Hidden Gospel*.

Matthew Fox, who was a mentor to the author, says in his forward to the book: “Reader beware: though this book is brief, it contains the seeds of a revolution.”

And this is what I have experienced, a whole new and impassioned connection with the Lord’s Prayer and with Jesus. I learned that the key words, when, translated from the Aramaic, held many-layered meanings. I could see how Jews could practice “midrash”, which is a debate, basically, about the meanings of words and phrases in scripture.

Now I’m going to share some slides.

[At this point, I would recommend that you click on the following Zoom link and listen to Connie’s teaching as she narrates her slides. <https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/nHwEi_iGqCPwMbFMOVaVEjfwHguEkxs_OTTSIiqQ4Xx72sqZTMlOMLKT6Xx0rTq-.PXfD2yWdarJsTaSk?startTime=1642951829000> ]

[Show slide 1] I’ve put together these slides, because the Aramaic language is foreign to most of us. I’ve added some of my photos and drawings to add to the experience.

[Show Slide 2] This slide shows the two languages side by side. I wanted to stir you out of your comfort zone! Unconsciously, our culture thinks that “Christian” means English, Latin, or perhaps Greek. Yet here is Jesus’ own language! It’s much closer to Arabic! What can we learn from it and from the words and phrases he picked from his own Middle Eastern, agrarian language?

[Show Slide 3]

Klotz explains that Middle Eastern languages, including Hebrew (which was the temple language), Aramaic (the street language of Jews in Jesus’ time) and Arabic can have several literal meanings, and also have three points of view: intellectual, metaphorical, and mystical.

The format of this book goes through every line of the Lord’s Prayer.

[Show slide 4—Read the slide]

Klotz says: “this cleansing prayer helps us remember what is important in life and contains the central themes in Jesus’ sayings.”

[Show Slide 5]

The book is organized into three aspects:

First, each line is stated in the Kings James Version, which those of us of a certain age learned and memorized, the Aramaic, and then six or seven possible translations of each line, revealing several different points of view of each phrase.

Second, Klotz demonstrates his scholarship by revealing the roots of words and their connection to images and everyday things in people’s lives during Jesus’ time. And, the words also connect to cosmic themes which transcend time and culture. Thus, the possible translations start to make sense.

And third, Klotz suggests what he calls Body Prayers for each line. He says,

“These body prayers encourage one to participate in the sound and feeling of the words as well as their intellectual or metaphorical meanings. To come close to the experience that Jesus offered his hearers, we must extend our understanding beyond what we call the “mind” to the whole self. This is the mystical or universal level of interpretation [of the Prayer].”

I’m not going to go into every translation but want to give you a taste of the **freedom** that is possible through this book. And I will share with you some of my process of choosing words for my own version of the Lord’s Prayer. That is something else that this book has given me: permission to create my own words of meaning that resonate with me today and can accompany me daily on my journey.

I will go through several key words in the Prayer, and Klotz’s translations, which are based on an extensive bibliography of sources. Then I will share with you my own version. And at the end, we will do a sung prayer together, on the main theme of the Lord’s Prayer.

[show slide 6—read the slide]

Klotz says:

The Prayer begins with an expression of the divine creation and the blessing that emanates from all parenting. Abwoon has the same root as Abba, but its roots do not specify a gender, and could be translated as “divine parent.”

[Show slide 7]

This slide shows you the first line of the prayer, in the King James Version (KJV), In Aramaic, and in 6 possible translations that Klotz offers. As you can read, they offer different nuances that we may not get if we just go by the KJV, which ostensibly was translated from the Greek and Hebrew into Latin by Jerome in the 4th century.

Our father which art in heaven

“Abwoon d’bwashmaya”

O birther, father-mother of the cosmos

O Thou breathing life of all, [creator of the shimmering sound that touches us.]

Source of sound: [in the roar and the whisper, in the breeze and the whirlwind, we hear your name.]

Radiant One: you shine within us, outside us—[even darkness shines—when we remember.]

Name of names: [our small identity unravels in you, and you give it back as a lesson.]

Wordless Action, Silent Potency—[where ears and eyes awaken, there heaven comes.]

\*\*This last line reminds me of our Psalm for this week, Psalm 19: The heavens are telling a story: there is no speech and there are no words.”

So, these 6 possible translations come from these 2 words: Abwoon d’Bashmaya”

Now, to go deeper into these words:

[Show slide 8]

Douglas-Klotz goes on to look at four parts of the word “Ah—Bww—ooo—nnn”, **because the first word of the prayer is the most important, and points to all the others**.

A: the Absolute, Oneness and Unity

Bw: birthing, creation, a flow of blessing (halfway between b and w)

oo: the breath or spirit that carries this flow

N: the vibration of the creative breath meets the earth, and touches, moves, and changes it and us.

Klotz says: “Abwoon, according to the mystical science of sounds and letters, common to both Aramaic and Hebrew, points beyond our concept of male and female to a cosmic birthing process.

[Show slide 9]

The second word, “d’bwashmaya”

The root is “shm,” which indicates light, sound, vibration, name, or word. Rises or shines in space. It is the word we translate as “heaven”—remember this! It is a very different concept than what we get of “heaven” in our Christianized, Americanized culture.

One’s name in many cultures is sacred, and you don’t tell just anyone your true name, for it holds your essence. So with this name: which includes sound, vibration and atmosphere.

One can recognize that God’s Name **is** the Universe, which is the Aramaic concept of heaven. It can co-exist with earth—it is not a separate place, but a different energy.

Each word and line of the Lord’s Prayer is given this kind of treatment in Klotz’s book. Totally mind-blowing for me.

I’m going to go quickly through the rest of the words, because I don’t want you to get overwhelmed. I’ll give David my written sermon and the slides to put on the website.

[show slide 10]

Line 2 of the Lord’s Prayer:

Hallowed is thy name:

In Aramaic, it is: Nethqadash shmakh”

Hallowed is the word “Nethqadash” —clearing the ground, clearing a space inside, bending to a special place where seeds are sown. Quadash—something holy, set apart, and creating a space within.

And the root of “shmakh” again is “shm”, in a more specific form. Again, the word “name” can also mean light, sound, vibration, word.

THIS IS IMPORTANT—our use of “name” is more limiting in our culture

“Hallowed is thy name” could become: “clear a space within our hearts for your shimmering potency to reside”

I’ve put my words at the bottom, but I’ll wait and say them at the end.

[show slide 11]

Line 3 of the Prayer:

Thy Kingdom Come: “Teytey Malkuthakh”

Teytey alludes to “come” but also to ‘mutual desire” or “marriage"

Malkuthakh is a rulership that guides our lives toward unity. It is actually also the root of “Great Mother”, used in the Middle east thousands of years before Jesus. So it could be said “Your Queendom come”

“Thy Kingdom Come” could be said as: “prepare us for the marriage of power and beauty, to birth a new creation”

[Show Slide 12]

Lline 4 of the Prayer:

Thy will be done Nehway Tzevyanach

The word “tzevyanach” is what we translate “will”—but it is not about willpower, but about “Heart’s desire.”

[Show slide 13]

Line 5 of the prayer:

On earth, as it is in heaven

Aykanna d’bwashmaya aph b’arha

How Heaven and earth interact. Heaven is not a “place” but an energy, whereas earth is solid, matter, what we see.

It could be translated as: Let your heart’s desire become mine, as the swirling stars meet the ground on which we stand.”

{Show Slide 14]—Bread can be metaphorical. And I had to include this slide because of what Dara O’Briain said—his child self could only remember “bread” and “trespassing”

[Show Slide 15] And, here is the one on trespassing!

[Show Slide 16]

And these two words from Aramaic are intriguing: (read the slide)

Don’t let these many details get you confused — there are so many amazing concepts— just take hold of a few that have moved you. I wanted to show you how powerful these words are, and how they can refer to many subtle layers of meaning. And, I hope some of you are inspired to read this book.

The freedom of being able to personalize the Lord’s Prayer has revolutionized my own prayer. It took a while to fashion each line to something that was true to the original meaning and yet revealed my own heart. I let the words of each line wash over me for a while before going on to the next one.

12-step programs that I’m a part of are brilliant, in that they ask people to have their own connection to and belief in a Higher Power. You don’t have to tell anyone else what that looks, sounds or feels like. I think that combining the freedom to form a heart connection to Higher Power that the 12 steps encourage, with the scholarship behind these translations in Klotz’s book, gives permission to think of multiple meanings of these words, and to do our own “midrash.”

About 10 years ago, I was attending 12-step programs, and I felt a disconnection from God. I felt that I was reverting to the God of my past, who was either judgmental and shaming, or indifferent. Working through this book has given me a lively, vibrant way of staying connected to the Higher power of my understanding.

[Show slide 17]

So, here is my version of the Lord’s Prayer. Sometimes I say it in the first person, but here it is in the “we” version:

O Birther of vibrant sound/ and radiant light,

We feel you breathing us./

Clear a space within our sacred hearts/ for you, and your shimmering potency, to reside.

Prepare for us the marriage of power and beauty/, to birth a new creation.

Let your heart’s desire become ours, as the swirling stars meet the ground on which we stand.

Let us give to one another what the earth freely gives us.

Give us the chance to let go/ of the mistakes/ that tie us/ and one another/ in knots.

Don’t let us dwell on surface things/, but free us/ from what holds us back from our true purpose.

For to You/ belongs the astonishing fire/, the life force power/ and the glorious harmony/ that beautifies all/, throughout each cosmic cycle.

Ameyn.

And now, let’s do a “body prayer”, which is basically singing and feeling the vibration of words, based on the first line of the Aramaic Lord’s Prayer, Abwoon d’Bwashmaya.” Neil Douglas-Klotz wrote the simple tune to this chant. And Then I added the words to my version of this phrase.

[Show slide 15]

“Abwoon d’bwashmaya”

Say it witih me: Abwoon (2 or 3 times)

d’bwashmaya (2 or 3 times)

Remember, this line invites is into an intimate connection with the divine (for Abwoon is similar to Abba, divine parent) as well as a mystical connection to the whole universe, through sound and light and vibration.

I invite you to sing along with me. Chanting is a way to get in touch with sound in the body, and is also a way to connect to the author of the Prayer, Jesus, through his own words in his own language. This is an ancient way of learning from a teacher, reciting his own words.

**Am Dm Am Am Dm E**

**Abwoon d’bashmaya, Abwoon d’bashmaya (2x)**

**Am Dm Am Am Dm E Am**

**Abwoon d’bashmaya, Abwoon d’bashmaya**

**Am Am Dm Am Am Dm**

**O Birther of Sound and Radiant Light, We feel you breathing**

**E**

**us**

**Am Am Dm Am Am Dm E**

**O Birther of Sound and Radiant Light, We feel you breathing**

**Am**

**us**