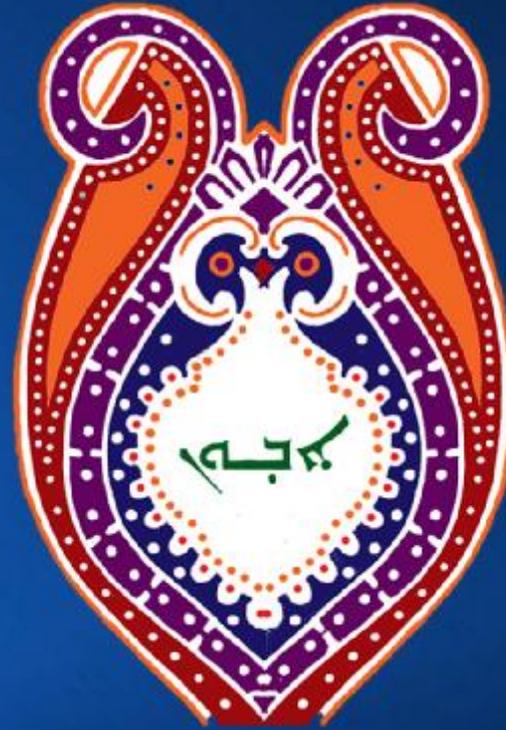


# Exploring the Lord's Prayer in the Aramaic



By Rev. Paul M. Shaffer  
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# Resources used for the presentation

- *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*, by Neil Douglas-Klotz
- *Original Prayer: Teachings and Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*, by Neil Douglas-Klotz
- *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography*  
*The Jewish Life and Teaching That Inspired Christianity*,  
by Bruce Chilton
- *Setting A Trap for God: The Aramaic Prayer of Jesus*  
by Rocco A. Errico
- *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*, by Aryeh Kaplan
- *Son of Man: The Mystical Path to Christ*, by Andrew Harvey

# The Lord's Prayer traditional English

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation ,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,  
and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.

# Introduction

- Aramaic
  - Jesus taught mostly in Aramaic—a rich, poetic language. . . whose grammar, sentence structure, and way of moving, like Arabic, in webs of constellated meanings, enshrines a fluid and holistic view of the cosmos. . . In Aramaic, sayings that have been translated “definitely” in Greek, Latin, or English reveal multiple richness of meaning. All of which would have been accessible to his audience. (SON OF MAN, page 56 – Andrew Harvey
    - “webs of constellated meanings” – refers to words and short phrases that hold whole concepts and multiple translations of the words
  - A tradition of both Middle Eastern and Hebraic mysticism says that each statement of sacred teaching must be examined from at least three points of view: the literal, the metaphorical and the universal.

From the first point of view, we consider the face value of the words in question—what so called modern people call the “literal” meaning. According to native Middle Eastern mysticism, however, each Aramaic word presents several possible “literal” translations. . . To understand how these relate to each other we must go further.

From the second viewpoint, we consider how a statement or story presents a metaphor for our lives—or the life of the community. Here we must awaken our poetic sensibility: we must participate in re-creating meaning from several possible literal translations.

- We are called to actively engage our imaginations and enter into dialogue and discussion (part of the focusing process) to catch the wind of meaning to carry our, or the community's boat further.
- Think classical rabbinical dialogues

From the third viewpoint, the universal or mystical, one comes to a truth of the experience pointed to by a particular statement. Here we must go beyond seeing a prayer as an affirmation or petition, or a parable as a mere metaphor. We must embrace the wordless experience to which the words. . . point.

(PRAYERS OF THE COSMOS, page 1 – Neil Douglas-Klotz)

- Note the statement—A truth—not, THE truth.
- Differing literal and metaphorical meanings lead to differing truths being revealed
- But any and all truths revealed are meant to be experienced in daily living and creativity, not held only as formal, intellectual understandings.

- **Mishnah**

- A rabbi's *mishnah* was his "repetition," the words and actions that conveyed his teachings. His disciples soon learned the principle that "everyone who forgets one word of his mishnah, Scripture regards as indebted for his life!" (Agoth 3:8) (RABBI JESUS, page 49 – Bruce Chilton)
- . . . *mishnah* denoted a rabbi's public teaching, which a disciple learned in order to pass it on (RABBI JESUS, page 175 – Bruce Chilton)
  - Jesus' *mishnah* is primarily found in his teaching to the multitudes, but is also contained in the few times he taught directly to his disciples, or sent them out with instruction.
  - His regular use of community meals is a clear "active" part of his *mishnah*

- **Mamzer**

- The moment the flint cut Jesus' foreskin must have been particularly poignant to Mary. She probably knew her son would be considered a *mamzer*, an Israelite of suspect paternity. Such men and women lived in a caste apart, unable too live within the established bloodlines. . . Mary. . . knew that Jesus' circumcision assured him a place in Israel: the bond of blood united all Jews, even those of the *mamzer* caste. (RABBI JESUS, page 12 – Bruce Chilton)
- **What, in our Scriptures, tells us Jesus may have been considered a *mamzer* ?**

- New Testament references for *mamzer*
  - MATTHEW 1: 18-19, LUKE 1: 26-38 – The conception story of Jesus
  - MATTHEW 1: 1-17 – The lineage of Jesus from Abraham through Joseph
  - LUKE 3: 23-38 – the lineage of Jesus from Joseph through Adam
  - MARK 6: 1-4 – Jesus teaches at the Synagogue in Nazareth
  - MARK 1: 9-11, MATTHEW 3: 13-17, LUKE 3: 21-22 – The Baptism of Jesus
- What *mamzer* might have meant to Jesus
  - As part of a caste system, Jesus often drew into his followers, or at least addressed, those on the fringes and outcast
    - Samaritan
    - Those needing healing – blind, deaf, lame, those with severe skin conditions (leprosy)
    - Tax collectors
  - Jesus worked throughout his ministry to present a “kingdom” of inclusion rather than hierarchy, often turning the common understandings upside down.
    - The first will be last and the last first
    - Turn the other cheek – walk the extra mile
    - My kingdom is not of *this* world (said to Pontius Pilate)
  - The question of “identity” would have been especially important
    - What does it mean to be a full “Israelite?”
    - Jesus addressed God as *abba* (most often translated “dad”) instead of using one of the many other designations possible. He starts his prayer with this word.

# A Quick Look at Jewish Prayer

- Setting a Trap for God
  - This has never meant that we can “capture,” or bind, God and use God’s power by making bargains and deals, or telling God what to do.
  - The Aramaic word for prayer is *slotha*, which comes from the root word *sla* (to trap)
    - Refers to setting your mind and attention to catch the thoughts of God
    - Other meanings have to do with adjusting , focusing, or to incline
      - While it is common to use the image of the radio or television to illustrate this – adjusting the channel to find the right “program,” this makes no sense of how it would have been understood in Jesus’ time.
      - Think of sailing. It is the adjustment of the sail that “catches” the wind and moves the vessel. A boat also leans (inclines) when the wind is caught in her sails.
      - Jesus frequently used the imagery of the Holy Spirit as wind or breath. We are to catch the wind of God in the sails of our hearts and spirit.
      - Breathing is a second way of bringing the outside in. We breathe air around us all the time, but often don’t focus our attention on the act of breathing. When we focus, we slow down and relax and relate to the world differently. We can then, catch the breath of God.
      - Think of fishing with nets. In order to make a catch, the fishermen have to move and adjust the boat to be in the right place, and, lower the nets in the right manner.

- **Imaging**

- “Imaging” is the process of holding one thing in the mind to the exclusion of all others. In the Jewish tradition of prayer this is also known as “engraving.”
  - The engraved image is held in the heart through sustained attentiveness
  - From there its energy radiates throughout the body and consciousness
  - The purpose was to let the image disclose its meaning to you
  - This was often done with letters of the alphabet and words in order to “see” the meaning rather than intellectually understand it – a form of visio divina
  - In our case, we will use the word “ABWOON” here it is in the Aramaic:



- Focus on the image and try placing it in your heart and holding it there

# The Lord's Prayer: Core to Jesus' *Mishnah*

- Jesus gives the prayer twice
  - Luke 11:1-4 The disciples ask Jesus, "Teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."
    - This is a clear example of a disciple asking a rabbi about his *mishnah*
  - Matthew 6: 5-14 Jesus teaches the prayer to the multitude
    - Jesus is giving "his public teaching"
    - Jesus wanted everyone to understand their relationship with God, each other (and their whole world), and themselves in this simple direct manner.
  - Like the Aramaic language does with words, this prayer embodies and conflates many of the understandings and relationships Jesus gave in his public life. It is poetic while simple and many of its words have a variety of meanings. It is metaphorical and we need to expand and understand the stories of each line. It is universal, applicable for body, mind, emotion and spirit.
  - Exploring it, one can find the Beatitudes, Jesus' relationship to nature, healing, exorcism and the cutting away of evil; his non-hierarchical, inclusive world view; the forgiveness of God, and his intimate relational understanding with God.

# The First Word: *Abwoon*

- Remembering some things about Aramaic
  - It is a poetic, metaphorical language
  - Many words have layers of meaning, or are conflated thoughts, giving the listener several levels of interpretation.
- **Abwoon** (transliterated phonetic spelling)
  - This is the first word of the prayer.
  - This word contains the whole of the rest of the prayer. It is a whole concept all of its own.
  - It is composed of several parts, each of which has its own meaning:
    - Ab – shortened form of *abba*
    - Bw – a buzzing sound of the lips as air is pushed through
    - Oo – the opening sound
    - N – the close
- **AB** – short for *abba*
  - *Abba* is the name Jesus used regularly for God
    - It is an intimate, personal address and is most often translated as “Dad” (not even the more formal “father”)

- Jesus could have called God one of the following:
  - Al (Alaha) in Aramaic or El (Elohim) in Hebrew – meaning “diety”
    - Elohim also refers to God as the One with Many Faces
  - Ithea – the Self-Existent One
  - Or any of the 72 other names (titles) given to God
- Ab also has several alternate meanings than the personal. It is a non-gendered word.
  - Source
  - Parent
  - Generative Power
  - Initiator
  - First cause
  - Unity
- BW is the sound of buzzing lips as air is blown through them
  - It was understood to be one of the sounds of Creation
  - The creative vibration
  - It is one of the first sounds made by children
- OO is the sound of opening a space
  - Creating a spaciousness – a canopy or openness around one in which something can happen
- N is a closing sound
  - It brings what is created or in process into form or manifestation
- Hearing *abwoon* is hearing the movement of Creation – God (ab) creates/d (bw) by stretching out the firmament (oo) and making all things appear (n)

- Modern cosmology talks about the “Big Bang” as a vibrational expansion that quickly began to resolve into the first “forms” and finally elements.
  - The simplest element, Hydrogen, that was formed in initial cooling is the hydrogen with which we are created.
- This understanding fits completely with the Aramaic reading of *abwoon*.
- Jesus reminds all of his listeners that God comes first. It is God that creates, who stretches life out and makes space for new realities to develop and become firm.
  - No matter what the circumstance, God can create new opportunities (openings), nesting and sustaining us with his Spirit while making pathways straight or choosing new ones as is needed.
  - We are meant to connect to and open ourselves and our lives to God’s creativity in order to manifest what is needed.
- Jesus uses this understanding in a variety of ways in his life and ministry
  - Nicodemus – “Born from the 1<sup>st</sup> (or born from the Source)” – refers to going back to the moments of Creation and the relationship we had with God.
  - He brought the Creation power into his relationships with the people he met
    - To help change their direction in life
    - To heal
    - To forgive
    - To raise the dead to life
- Practice using the word as a meditation this week.
- Next week we look at the whole first line of the prayer