

Untangle the Knots

Matthew 6:7-15

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Rev. Dr. Anne Dilenschneider

Translation is always an art,
it is not an exact science,
for each language contains nuances, resonances that are often lost in translation.
And this is especially true when we are translating from Eastern languages
such as Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic
in which words are multivalent
and have multiple meanings
into a Western language such as Latin or Greek or English.

In Western mindsets,
we tend to think in terms of then and now,
or the past and the present and the future.
we do not link these as all being present
because we think in historical terms, in timelines.

Yet in Eastern thinking,
all time is now,
for God all time is present time.
The reign of God is not something far in the future,
“something remote and separate from us.
It is something we can experience every day” –
right here and now –
“if we learn to stop and listen and look for it.”
(Feigelson)

In Hebrew and Aramaic,
The universe is multivalent –
We are always living on multiple levels:
We are living here and now AND we are living in eternity
We live and act on multiple levels:
How we are in our souls
affects matter and the material world
How we treat matter and the material world
affects our souls.
Everything is connected.
So, it's no surprise that the language is multivalent as well:
The same root word (lamed-chet-mem)
is used for bread, wisdom, battle, and life.
Which is it? YES!
We must consider all four, and their interplay,

when we encounter them in a text.
For example, some of the great rabbis looked at the word this way:
“Every time we eat, a battle takes place between the holy and the unholy.
Our eating can become an act of sanctification,
reflection, and improvement;
or it can become an act of baseness, coarseness, and vulgarity.
If we take the time to prepare, to focus,
and to make our eating purposeful and intentional,
we can make the act into one of holiness.
But if we eat quickly, inhaling our food
and failing to acknowledge its significance,
then we are no more than animals satisfying our base desires.”
(Feigelson)

The here-and-now and the eternal are always connected
in a Middle Eastern world-view.
The spiritual, soul-full life and our “real” physical life are always connected!

So, today, I want to explore the Lord’s Prayer –
a prayer we know by heart –
a prayer that comes to us through Greek translations –
by looking at the Aramaic text,
written in Jesus’ own language,
and opening up the English words we know so well
to enrich our own understanding.

We are blessed because the Christian churches in the Middle East
still use the scriptures in Aramaic
(this Aramaic New Testament is called the *Peshitta*),
and they still pray the Lord’s Prayer in Aramaic.

So, what I am sharing with you today
comes from the written and oral traditions of those churches
and the work of scholars of Aramaic and Hebrew.

When Jesus’ disciples asked him how to pray, he said, “*beshemi.*”
Usually this is translated as “in my name,”
or – as we hear in Matthew today – “in this way,”
but a closer, more accurate sense of the word is
“with my method of experiencing”
or
“with the same light by which I have understood.”

This is how Jesus invites us into his experience
and into this prayer –
a prayer is based on the Amidah,
the daily prayer that Jews pray three times each day.

The prayer begins:

“Abwoon d’bwashmaya”

“Abwoon” – this is the phrase we translate as **“Our Father”** . . .

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

Abwoon

“Ab” = all fruit, all that grows from the Source of Unity

From “Ab” comes “abba” (father), but this form (“ab”) has no gender

And . . .

if we emphasize the “b” in Abwoon – it is spiritual;

if we emphasize the “w” in Abwoon – it is personal . . .

“Bwn” = the energy of the divine mother/fatherhood

that moves life from being potential to actual

Consider it this way:

A = The One Source of all

bw = birthing, creating, flowing of blessing

oo = the breath force that carries this flow – (imagine the Holy Spirit)

n = the vibration/echo in matter as it is touched by the creative breath –
that touch of breath causes change

So a possible translation could be . . .

“O Father-Mother of the Cosmos”

or

“O Thou from whom the breath of all life comes”

“d’bwashmaya” – This is the phrase we translate as **“who art in heaven”**

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“Shm” = name (Hebrew: Ha Shem = The Name = God)

and this also means light, sound, vibration, word

all of these rise and shine in space

“Aya” = this shining includes every center of activity, and every place we see

it also includes the potential for vibration and shining in all beings

Now it helps to know that an Aramaic understanding of heaven is this:

the vibration or word in which we recognize the great eternal Oneness –

this is God’s name, this is the universe, this is heaven

AND it is here and now . . . it very close! (Dt. 30:11-14)

So a possible translation could be . . .

“Source of all sound and light and action”

“Nethqadash shmakh” – This is the phrase we translate as **“hallowed be thy name”**

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“Shmakh” – the “shm” or “name” is repeated here as “shmakh”

and this “name”

light, sound, vibration, word

that is in all the universe

becomes “Nethqadash,”

the word we translate as “hallowed” or holy.

It becomes holy.

That means, “set apart” (qadash/kadosh/kosher) for a specific purpose
It evokes the sense of bending over and clearing space for a plant to grow,
it implies the devotion and perseverance it takes to do this.

So, because in the Aramaic/Hebrew understanding,

this happens inside us as well as outside us,
when we hold/attend to something with this kind of devotion,
we create a holy place for it within ourselves as well.

To help the Abwoon/Source of all sound and light and action/Source of all Blessing
become actual and useful in both the spiritual and material world

we need to create a space for that Oneness to live inside us
then the light of Shm/the Name becomes visible every day – like a light in a lamp

So a possible translation could be . . .

“May Your light fill our souls.
Help us clear space for Your Name inside us . . .”

“Teytey malkuthakh” – This is the phrase we translate as **“Thy kingdom come”**

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“Teytey” = this word means “come,”

and it’s more than “come” in the sense of just happening

“teytey” has a sense of mutual desire –

like lovers coming to a marriage bed –

where desire is fulfilled,

and something new begins to come to life.

“malkuthakh” = these are the ruling principles that guide all of creation towards unity

Thousands of years before Jesus,

the root of this word was the name of the Great Mother!

This word carries the sense of the divine quality within us

that takes responsibility for desire

and says “I can!”

It’s that divine quality that is willing,

even against insurmountable odds,

to take a step in a new direction

for love of creation.

People who are willing to step into the world in this way are leaders . . .

In the old days, we would call them our kings & queens,

so that’s how the hope for the manifestation of this great love

became to be expressed as kingdom or queendom

or realm or reign of God.

So a possible translation adds the desire for life and movement to the prior phrase . . .

And it becomes:

“May Your light fill our souls.

Help us clear space for Your Name inside us

so it comes to life, and moves us.”

The sense of desire in this line increases and moves to action in the next line:

“Nehwey tzevyanach – This is the phrase we translate as **“Thy will be done”**

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“tzevyanach” – we usually translate this word as “will”

and by that we tend to mean “willpower” with its sense of effort and trying hard
or “willfulness” with its sense of unrestrained force

In Aramaic this word carries a very different meaning –

This word means “heart’s desire.”

It has a sense of great love and longing that has moved from the heart
(which is where decisions are made – not the mind!)
to action –

It is about moving toward the beloved with certainty.

We often ask: “what is God’s will for me?”

Notice how different it is to ask: “what is God’s heart’s desire for me?”

So a possible translation could be . . .

“May your one heart’s desire be ours”

“aykanna d’bwashmaya aph b’arha” – This is the phrase we translate as

“on earth as it is in heaven”

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“arha” = “earth,” and here, the desiring is towards all of nature

and in all of the natural forms
including human beings.

The sense of this is the desiring the Universal Power & Source has
towards taking form and being present in our lives

“aykanna” = this word means “just as”

and it carries a sense of consistent, determined desire
that connects “arha”/earth and “bwashmaya”/light and sound and action

So a possible translation could be . . .

“throughout all creation,
so that heaven and earth are united now.”

“Hawvlan lachma d’sunqanan yaomana” – This is the phrase we translate as

“Give us this day our daily bread”

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“hawvlan” = this word has a sense of giving, connecting life and soul, animating

“lachma” (Hebrew: lechem) = bread, and understanding/wisdom, life, and struggle
related to all that encourages vigor, growth, warmth, passion, possibility
even in the midst of struggle.

And “ma” in Aramaic, like English,

is connected to the mother’s life-encouraging energy and breath!

“sunqanan” is our word “daily” = it carries the sense of being held safely
in a circle of possession, like a nest

This part of the prayer reminds us that sometimes we need not only the grand vision,
but the homely, ordinary, next step of sustenance for our next moment.

And this is, fundamentally, related to justice

and extending this giving to meet the needs of those among us.

So a possible translation could be . . .

“Give us the food we need to grow;
grant us both bread and insight.”

Washboqlan khaubayn (wakhtahayn)

aykana daph khnan shbwoqan l'khayyabayn.

- This is the phrase we translate as **and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us**

Let's look into its layers of meaning:

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“washboqlan” = forgive, return to its original state, re-establish ties to, embrace

“khaubayn” (Mt: “debts/offenses” Lk: sins/trespasses) =

hidden past, failures, mistakes, accidental offenses, frustrated hopes, tangled threads –
some mending or restoration is needed

“aykanna” = just as

again here -- a sense of consistent, determined desire

fundamentally, this is related to compassion

So a possible translation could be . . .

“Untangle the knots within us
so we can mend our hearts' ties to each other.”

“Wela tahlān l'nesyuna” – This is the phrase we translate as **“And lead us not into temptation”**

Let's look into its layers of meaning:

In English, we have this image of being lured by devilish creatures or delights.

We even think that God tempts us to test us.

In the Aramaic worldview, no one leads us into temptation, least of all God!

“wela tahlān” = this phrase is a request, and it has the sense of:

don't let us enter into false appearances,
don't let us be seduced by false appearances and illusions,
AND don't let us heap up for ourselves the things that are false
or invest ourselves in things that are superficial.

“nesyuna” = this is the word we usually translate as “temptation”

In Aramaic it has the sense of anything that leads to inner vacillation or agitation,
anything that diverts us from the purpose of our lives
or causes us to forget who we are,
or lose ourself in appearances.

It's a reminder to look at and acknowledge our limitations
and the pain we cause ourselves and the rest of creation
when we lose ourselves this way.

So a possible translation could be . . .

“Keep us from being deluded by superficial things”

“Ela patzan min bisha” – This is the phrase we translate as **“but deliver us from evil”**

Let's look into its layers of meaning:

“patzan” = this word means to loosen the hold something has on us,

to free us from what enslave us,
to break the seals that binds us.

“bisha” = we translate this as “evil” and imagine it, again, related to devilry.

But it actually carries a very different, and more subtle, meaning:

it connotes a sense of unripeness or inappropriate action
or a sense of something that delays or diverts us
from our origin and purpose.

So a possible translation could be . . .

“and free us from anything that holds us back
from our true purpose.”

“Metol dilakhie malkutha” – This is the phrase we translate as “**For thine is the kingdom**”

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“dilakhie” = this word means more than possession,

it carries the sense of planting, of instilling within,
of animating (which means to breathe into and liven a body with soul!)

“malkutha” = again, this is the great desire that permeates the universe
and joins all things together

So a possible translation could be . . .

“From You comes all hearts’ desire,

“wahayla wateshbukhta” – This is the phrase we translate as “**and the power and the glory**”

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“hayla” = this is the life force or energy,

the fire and the strength,
that produces and sustains all beings
in union with all creation

“teshbukhta” = this word carries a sense of glory and song,

the glorious harmony of divine light and sound in all of creation.

So a possible translation adds to the prior phrase and could be . . .

“From You comes all hearts’ desire,
the astonishing fire,
the strength to create,
and the song that beautifies all”

“I’ahlam alimn” – This is the phrase we translate as “**now and forever.**”

Let’s look into its layers of meaning:

“I’ahlam almin” = this phrase can be understood as, from gathering to gathering

in the sense of the entire cosmos slowly gathering & assembling to a central point
and then dispersing again,
and then gathering again –
it’s a cycle of the ages.

So a possible translation could be . . .

“and renews itself from age to age”

“Ameyn” – This is the phrase we translate as “**Amen.**”

Let's look into its layers of meaning:

“ameyn” = this is the word that seals agreements in the Middle East
it is a solemn oath.

This word has a sense of giving power to the words that preceded it.

It establishes the ground from which the promised growth will appear.

So it has a sense of

“Truly, may these statements of power
be the ground from which all our actions grow.”

Which is what we are saying whenever we say,

“Amen.”

Later in worship today, we'll use an English version of the Lord's Prayer
that follows this translation from the Aramaic.

It's printed in the bulletin so you'll have it,

and hopefully it will provide a way

to be with and pray this familiar prayer in a new way!

Amen.

Sources:

Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus by Neil Douglas-Klotz

The Hidden Gospel by Neil Douglas-Klotz

Peshitta (Aramaic New Testament)

Peshitta Aramaic/English Interlinear New Testament at <http://www.peshitta.org>

“Beshallach 5772: War and Bread,” from *Thoughts on Torah, Higher Education, and Society* by
Rabbi Josh Feigelson, www.RabbiJosh.com

Texts:

Matthew 6:7-15

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The Lord's Prayer

Traditional Aramaic text:

Abwoon d'bwashmaya
Nethqadash shmakh
Teytey malkuthakh
Nehwey tzevyanach aykanna d'bwashmaya aph b'arha.
Hawvlan lachma d'sunqanan yaomana.
Washboqlan khaubayn (wakhtahayn)
 aykana daph khnan shbwoqan l'khayyabayn.
Wela tahlan l'nesyuna
Ela patzan min bisha.
Metol dilakhie malkutha wahayla wateshbukhta l'ahlam alimn.
Ameyn.

An English translation from the Aramaic:

O Thou from whom the breath of all life comes,
Source of all sound and light and action,
May Your light fill our souls.
Help us clear space for Your Name inside us
so it comes to life, and moves us.
May Your one heart's desire be our heart's desire,
throughout all creation,
so that heaven and earth are united now.
Give us the wisdom and food we need to grow.
Untangle the knots within us
so we can mend our hearts' ties to each other.
Keep us from being deluded by superficial things,
and free us from anything that holds us back
from our true purpose.
From You comes all hearts' desire,
the astonishing fire,
the strength to create,
and the song that beautifies all,
and renews itself from age to age.
Amen.