

The Lord's Prayer – In Unison, Slowly and Thoughtfully

by Kathy Speas

I love to say the Lord's Prayer with all of you. It is the most personal, comforting part of the service for me, a very important touchstone in my week. Sometimes I let your prayers wash over me. Sometimes I focus on one or another individual voice that is familiar, and I am so grateful to join my prayer with someone I feel a special connection to. Sometimes I murmur along, glad to be part of a collective (to quote a 6th century monk) "dialog and union with God that has the effect of holding the world together." Sometimes I throw my prayer on out there with all my strength, hoping it will be a lifeline to someone, I visualize the Prayer going out the window and circling someone with comfort, someone who really needs it. I apologize to anyone sitting in front of me when I pray this way. But it's like Communion to me, different in significance every time I say it, and I am deeply grateful for this Prayer and for this group that sends its words into the universe every week.

The Lord's Prayer is also the little prayer I recite in secret, in the dark, when, as Thomas Merton puts it, "prayer has become impossible and my heart has turned to stone," which is when Merton says we really learn prayer and love. It was the first prayer I ever learned, the only one I memorized, it's all I know to say when the turbulence over Albuquerque gets really really bad, or when I wake up at 4:00 in the morning facing one stark thing or another.

Swedenborg says the Lord's Prayer is read daily in Heaven. He writes, "In the contents of this prayer, there are more things than the Universal Heaven is capable of comprehending" and describes how, as he read the Lord's Prayer, wonderful things flowed in from Heaven that varied from day to day.

I wanted to really understand the Lord's Prayer, and not just recite it over and over because it was the only prayer I knew besides the three traditional prayers that we all know: "Help me Help me Help me", "Thank you thank you thank you thank you" and "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." I wanted to get to the bottom of the "debt" / "trespass" question that has been troubling me since youth. You know, how some churches are "debt" churches and some churches are "trespass" churches, and you always run the risk of saying the wrong word when you worship in a new place. I learned a little Greek in High School and still have my trusty Liddell and Scott's Greek Dictionary, and figured I'd look up the Debt/Trespass word to figure

out what it REALLY meant. Then I translated the whole thing. And boy, is Swedenborg ever right about the complexity and beauty of this prayer.

A word about translations. Remember that the New Testament was written 100 or so years after Jesus lived, many people contributed to it, and there have been so many translations and interpretations that I could not even come up with a little timeline to share with you. You know how you say something, and a week later you are hearing back, "So and so said that you said blah blah blah" and you think "What? I never said anything of the sort" and this is one week, and all in one language. It's like The Telephone Game that kids play, where one clear sentence is whispered from child to child, and we all laugh at the end to hear the nonsense that the last child heard. Think hundreds of years, nobody could read or write, and we're talking Aramaic to Hebrew to Greek to Latin to German to English. It's no wonder I grew up wondering, "Is it worse to run up a big Visa bill, or go play on somebody else's lawn?"

OK, a minute of history here. The Lord's Prayer as we know it appears in Matthew. 6:9-13. Matthew wasn't actually written by Matthew. Scholars think it might have been written by a Jew around 70-80 AD for Christians of Jewish origin, as it refers to the Hebrew Scriptures, and focuses on Jesus as the Messiah, in fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. In Matthew, Jesus is born, gets baptized, does the 40 day Temptation Program, and then he really gets serious. He tells us the Kingdom is AT HAND (not reserved for a few, and way off in some far-away high vault). He starts tapping a few guys out fishing to join up, and once he heals all those lepers and lunatics, he really has everybody's attention. He gives us the Beatitudes, He tells us to turn the other cheek, pray for those who persecute you, and don't be going around praying out loud and long so everybody can hear you and giving alms so everybody can see you. Prayer is secret, he says, quiet, dark, the still small voice, pray like this, He says, and gives us the Lord's Prayer. He says it in Aramaic, but it was originally written down in Greek, and we do have pretty much the original words.

So what? Is this of spiritual importance, or just an academic word game? Well, it is important to be conscious about our prayers. Our lives are our prayers. Kathleen Norris says, "While prayer may originate in our own desires, it quickly moves beyond them, into our life with others, and toward the greater society." The Rosicrucians say, "Thoughts Have Wings." Ursula Groll, who wrote "Swedenborg and the New Paradigm Science" commenting on our (that would be yours and mine) contribution to the collective unconscious, says, "Every individual co-determines the

history of humankind in a negative or positive sense, either unconsciously or consciously, and every individual will collaborate further in history through his or her thoughts and level of individual consciousness. Our greatest responsibility for all living things and everyone who comes after us lies in this phenomenon.” Maybe the Lord's Prayer that we say together really does swirl around in the air, and descend to become (again from Merton), “a secret unknown stabilizer, and a compass too”. Again from Kathleen Norris, “Prayer is not asking for what you think you want, but asking to be changed in ways that you can't imagine.”

Worship is not what we say, or how much we understand about Greek or about Biblical correspondences, but how we live our prayers. Swedenborg says “essential divine worship consists in the life, and not in prayers.” God sent us not only the ability to pray, but sent us this particular prayer, which has somehow survived the wildest Telephone Game in history. Ours is to live it wisely, with love, and with great joy.

So, let me share with you what I found as I looked into the Greek words of the Lord's Prayer. Let's start at the beginning and go through it.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

“Father” is pretty much translated as just that. But the Greek word for “Heaven” (ouranos) implies not just the Angels and Harps-Cloud Nine Heaven, but the infinite, absolute, and eternal nature of the Firmament itself, “on which the sun performs his course and the stars are fixed upon it.” Meditate on that, It's beyond words, the Firmament itself, Infinite, Absolute Eternal.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

The name of God is holy, sacred, dedicated. In the Hebrew Scriptures, people aren't even supposed to mention the name of God. Swedenborg says “Scarcely anyone in the Christian world knows what is meant by the name of God.” According to Swedenborg, names in Heaven (that is in the infinite, absolute, eternal firmament of all that is) are the essence of the thing itself. The name of God is all things of love and faith. As Divine Human, Jesus IS the “Name of Jehovah.” The naming of God is a holy thing. This is why we're not supposed to say it real loud when our cars break down.

THY KINGDOM COME

Kingdom – that's pretty much literal from the Greek, kingdom meaning "a dominion, all over which a king rules." But in this case it is God's Kingdom, the infinite, absolute, eternal Firmament. The verb means more than just arrive. It means "to come within a little bit of, to be near" and also "to return or come back." I like that. It's more than just "OK Heaven, get yourself down here; Let's go." There's a longing to be nearer to something we can hardly understand, a sense that there is a returning to what is God's dominion

THY WILL BE DONE

Will – that's a pretty clear cut translation too. God's Will. But the "Be Done" word is not the Greek "agon" which means to act, or "eime" which means "to be", or any of the Homeric words that mean action and doing. The Greek word is "genetheto", from the same root as "geneogy" or "genesis", meaning "to be born, to happen, to become, to grow to fruition." Isn't that wonderful? To think of God's will being born, becoming, growing to fruition. That's exciting.

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

You know what? The Greek text mentions heaven first. It literally says "as in Heaven, so on Earth." The human-centered consciousness that has put Earth before Heaven in every translation ever recorded is another sermon in itself.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

The interesting Greek word in this phrase is "daily." It means "sufficient for the day" or "for the coming day." Not "every day" or "I am entitled to this every morning." But kind of the Manna concept. Enough for that day and no more, no less. And it comes today, for today. And when Jesus says in John "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world..." "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven, if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" I thought of times something unexpected has diverted my spirit from a mindset which, to quote Anne Lamott "would make Jesus want to drink gin out of the cat dish." Next time you are in a bad humor, discouraged, anguished in spirit, watch carefully around you. Someone on the bus will

make you laugh, you'll see an act of touching kindness that restores your faith, nature will amaze you -- at least until tomorrow, and sometimes that's all you need.

AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

It's "debts." The Greek word "opheilemata" means "debt, what we owe, what we are bound by, what we are obligated to do, what is binding upon us." Bigger than that \$20 you owe your brother in law, eh? And I understand this to mean the obligations and debts that we do not choose, the strings we get ourselves tangled in, the debts we incur from getting something and thinking we'll pay later. As in "I'm doing this ON ACCOUNT OF something or someone." Not the obligations we choose to love and work. Forgive? The Greek word "aphes" means "release, let go, discharge, send away, set free." All that stuff you're tangled up in, put it in a balloon and let it go. All that old resentment, anger, disappointment tied to others? Put that in another balloon and let it go.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

The phrase describes a leading, a bringing forward, but the Greek word "peirasmon" for "temptation" implies a trial, an ordeal, being put to the test. And I thought I was just a wimp for praying that I not have to go through an ordeal – but it's right there in the Lord's Prayer. Even our word "temptation" is related to the word "attempt" not to the word "fun." Swedenborg's concept of temptation includes all that would take us away from, rather than closer to, God. Anxiety, anguish, distress, self-centeredness, fear. We're not just praying that they don't come by with the dessert tray, here, we're asking God to guide us away from the kind of consciousness that keeps us separated from Love.

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Deliver us. What comes to mind is delivering a baby, or delivering a letter. The Greek word "rhusai" means "draw us out of harm's way, rescue us, free us, redeem us, protect us, and defend us." It can also mean "to draw down the scale, to outweigh, or counterbalance." I hope for that every day, that the Divine forces will outweigh the things that keep me separated from Love.

“Evil” - Man, that’s one of the most loaded words there is. The Greek “ponerou” doesn’t conjure up some outside force of diabolical satanic Evil that is coming at us headlong. The word implies pain, distress, anguish, a sorry plight, exhaustion from toil, hardship. Keep us from just being worn out by the horrible things that can happen in life.

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER AMEN

This is not part of the Greek text. But it reminds us whose is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever amen. God’s. God’s is the Kingdom, this is not our kingdom. God’s is the power, not ours. God’s is the Glory, ours is not the glory. But Jesus tells us “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say Here it is! or There it is!, for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.” He tells us in the Gospel of Thomas, “Split open a log, and there I am” not, “Lo, I am off in some other world that is inaccessible to the likes of you”

So, I offer a translation of the Lord’s Prayer that we can think about beyond words, by meditating on the concepts behind these words, by taking the prayer to heart:

Our Father of the Infinite, Absolute, Eternal Firmament

All that your name implies is Sacred

May we return to be near all that is your dominion

May your will be born, become, and happen in us

As in Heaven, so on Earth

Give us today bread sufficient for the day

Free us from that which has bound us

As we release those whom we have bound

And do not bring us into trial and test

But let your Divine Love outweigh Anguish and Distress

*For The Kingdom is Yours, The Power is Yours, The Glory is Yours, God.
Amen.*