

## Praying Yeshua's Way

<sup>5</sup>"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Amen, I tell you, they have their reward in full! <sup>6</sup>But you, when you pray, go into your inner room; and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you. <sup>7</sup>And when you are praying, do not babble on and on like the pagans; for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. <sup>9</sup>"Therefore, pray in this way..." (Matt. 6:5-9a)

Some of the most impacting instructions Yeshua gave his disciples are contained in the so-called *Sermon on the Mount*, Matthew Chapters 5-7. It is the most famous homily Yeshua ever gave, and probably the most famous discourse ever given by anyone. If we were to summarize this discourse in a single sentence, it would be something like this: *How to live a life that is dedicated to and pleasing to the Almighty, free from hypocrisy, full of love and grace, full of wisdom and discernment.* When it comes to anything dealing with Adonai we are immediately warned against hypocrisy or acting like pagans (hedonist, heathen or irreligious).

He warns against offering personal prayers and petitions in public. To do so would be to elevate oneself and draw attention to oneself. There is a fine line between piety and pretentiousness. For this reason, Jewish public prayer is always formulated in the first person plural "*Our Father, Our King; Our Lord, Our Savior etc.*" He also warns against *babbling on and on* who *think they will be heard because of their many words.* Some have used this charge of vain repetitions as an indictment against the liturgical prayers of the synagogue and Temple. This is a foolish argument because pagans did not participate in the liturgical prayers of the synagogue or Temple while Yeshua and his disciples did. Rather Yeshua is warning His disciples against the pagan customs of chanting mantras or repeating a particular liturgical refrain or chorus over and over and over to achieve a spiritual effect. The Greco-pagan worship systems of the First Century incorporated ecstatic utterances and nonsensical babbling (such as the temple oracles) along with the repetition of key prayer formulas. The Greek verb in this verse, however, refers not to a speech impediment but to the repetition of meaningless syllables.

Many writers have demonstrated the Lord's Prayer authentic Jewishness. Anyone familiar with the form and structure of Jewish liturgical prayer will immediately recognize numerous parallels and allusions to famous Jewish prayers. Particularly noteworthy are parallels to the *Kaddish and Amidah*. An important passage from the *Didache* (late First Century to early Second Century) indicates that disciples of Yeshua prayed this three times a day: at the three established hours of Jewish prayer (8a-9a, 11a-12p, 2p-3p). As such, it would appear that the Disciple's Prayer served as an abbreviated *Amidah* for the believing community. In content, it certainly reflects several of the sentiments expressed in that prayer.

<sup>9</sup>*...Our Father in heaven (Avinu shebasha-maim):* it is erroneous and ignorant (Christian arrogance?) to teach that addressing the Almighty as *Avinu Our Father* was a new innovation by Yeshua, and is otherwise unknown in Judaism. Jewish prayer is actually replete with intimate references to Adonai as *Our Father*. Adonai as Father appears in the Apocrypha and is used often in rabbinic sources. The plural form "*Our*" is a common characteristic of Jewish prayer, which emphasizes the strength of the community petition before Adonai. The *Amidah* prayer begins with the *Avot* Portion recalling the faithfulness of our forefathers in heaven. The great theme for *Yom Teruah* and the majority of the Fall High Holiday prayers is the phrase *Avinu Malkeinu – Our Father, Our King*. One of the most beautiful renditions of Jewish Prayer is Barbra Streisand's *Avinu Malkeinu* (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydxepZKCyvo>) done for Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Perez during his famous visit to the US. It was played during Perez's funeral in Israel.

*Sanctified be Your name (yit-kadesh shim'cha):* this phrase certainly echoes the third blessing of the *Amidah*, which declares: *You are Holy and your Name is holy and holy ones will bless you everyday. Blessed are you, Adonai, the Holy Elohim.* In the Lord's Prayer it is probably closer in form and function to the petition that begins *Kaddish: Yit'gadal v'yit'kadash sh'me raba (Magnified and hallowed be His great Name...)* The petition models the Jewish

concept *Kiddush Hashem* – the sanctification of the Sacred Name. It is a request that His Name be honored as Holy and is parallel to *Your will be done* – when His will is done on earth His name is honored as holy.

<sup>10</sup>*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (*Tavo malchutecha yeaseh r'tzon-cha, ba-aretz ka'asher na'asah bashamaim*): the petition for the advent of God's kingdom may seem contradictory to the message *The Kingdom of Heaven is already here*. However the Gospel proclamation of the advent of the Kingdom is only the beginning of His Kingdom on earth. His Kingdom will not be fully established on earth until His will is done here as it is in heaven. A clear implication of this petition is that His will is not, as of yet, done on earth.

<sup>11</sup>*Give us this day our daily bread* (*ten lanu hayom lechem chukeinu*): is a petition for daily sustenance. Many teachers have chosen to interpret *daily bread* in symbolic terms. Hence the bread refers to the Gospel, the Scriptures, or the rites of Christian Communion. Although bread is sometimes a metaphor for the *Torah* in Rabbinic literature, most often bread is bread. The very real day-to-day need for food was a thought never far from the minds of *Yeshua*, the disciples, or the Sages. Consider the following passages: *Where there is no bread, there is no Torah*, (*Pirkei Avot 3:17*) and *He who has bread in his basket today but worries, "What will I eat tomorrow?" -that man is of little faith.* (*Sotah 48b*). The prayer for daily bread is best understood as an allusion to the manna of the wilderness that appeared daily but could not be stockpiled. It may also be an allusion to: *"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread"* (*Proverbs 30:8*). Here the petitioner asks *Adonai* to provide sufficient means for him, not in excess lest he becomes rich nor too little lest he be poor, but an adequate amount for his current need.

<sup>12</sup>*And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors* (*U'selach lanu et ashmateinu, ka'asher solechim anachnu la'asher ashemu lanu*): we are commanded to pray in this manner, *Forgive us our debts, in the same manner we have also forgiven our debtors*. He went on to solemnly warn that if we do not forgive men when they sin against us, *Adonai* will not forgive us. For the disciples of *Yeshua*, forgiveness is not optional. We do not have the luxury of holding grudges, nursing bitterness, retaining our anger or repaying evil for evil. The principle the Master teaches us here is the well-attested Biblical concept of measure for measure. He illustrates the point in Matthew 18 with the parable of the indebted servant. With the same measure we use, it will be measured to us: just as the indebted servant was unwilling to forgive the small debt of his fellow servant, so too the King was unwilling to forgive his great debt. Measure for measure is a frequent motif in rabbinic literature: *"Whoever refrains from exacting his measure, the heavenly court forgives his sins, as it is written, 'He pardons sin and forgives the transgression.' Whose sin does he forgive? One who passes over sins"* (*Rosh Hashanah 17a, Micah 7:18*).

<sup>13</sup>*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one* (*ve'al-tevieinu lidei massah, ki'im hatzileinu min-hara*): the petition to be led away from temptation is similar to a formulation from the morning blessings found in the *Siddur*. The *Siddur* version of the prayer also requests deliverance from the power of sin and for deliverance from the evil inclination. It is interesting that in some Greek manuscripts of the Lord's Prayer the request is to *deliver us from evil*, and in some it is *deliver us from the Evil One*. Without the definite article, this should be understood as a prayer for deliverance from the *Yetzer HaRa*, the evil inclination that resides in each of us. With the definite article (the Evil One) it is a prayer for deliverance from Satan. Which is correct? Both ideas are theologically correct. We are tempted and led into sin by our own evil inclinations (James 1:13-14) and we are tempted by the adversary. In Rabbinic thought, a person's evil inclination and the adversary are not always distinct. Judaism's theology later developed to regard the devil only as a literary personification of our own evil inclinations. But in blessings of the *Siddur* both the concept of our personal evil inclinations and the concept of an evil independent entity are fully expressed. It is appropriate to pray that *Adonai* would lead us away from temptation, even as the Master teaches us, but it is inappropriate to imagine that *Adonai* is the one who tempts us to sin. Please note the similarity to the Prayer of *Yavez*: *"that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"* (*1 Chr. 4:10b, KJV*)

Several years ago (1996) I developed adult and children's prayer guides based on the Lord's Prayer from original work by Pastor Larry Lea. I published these in the KS website for your use and benefit.