

The Lord's Prayer

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Christian ritual took nearly three centuries to develop. The earliest recorded use of the Lord's Prayer from Matthew ch. 6 in ritual was by Tertullian about the late 2nd or early 3rd century. There may be an earlier oral tradition, however, records are not available and Christians met in private homes.¹ While frequently repeated in ritual, few people today probably understand the meaning of the Lord's Prayer. The following general similarities or conformities of the Pater Noster (Our Father) and the Chaldean Kaddish, from Jean-Marie Ragon, may help us to gain a better understanding.² In the examples below, the first line has the Chaldean Kaddish, the second the 1844 French translation, and in the third line I have, for comparison, added a scholarly translation from the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed., 2018.

1. [Ch Kh] --- Our father who is in the heavens,
[French] --- Our father who is in the heavens;
[New Oxfd] --- Our Father in heaven,
 2. [Ch Kh] --- May the name of the Lord be exalted and sanctified;
[French] --- May your name be sanctified;
[New Oxfd] --- Hallowed be your name;
 3. [Ch Kh] --- May he govern the house of Israel soon and in the times to come;
[French] --- May your kingdom come;
[New Oxfd] --- Your kingdom come;
 4. [Ch Kh] --- May he govern, he who has made the heaven and the earth;
[French] --- May your will be done in heaven and upon the earth;
[New Oxfd] --- Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven;
 5. [Ch Kh] --- May life descend from the height of the heavens over us;
[French] --- Give us, today, our daily bread,
[New Oxfd] --- Give us this day our daily bread (or, our bread for tomorrow),
 6. [Ch Kh] --- May it please you to receive our prayers with mercy and the
welcome supplications of all Israel;
[French] --- And pardon us our offenses, as we give pardon to those who have
offended us;
[New Oxfd] --- And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
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7. [Ch Kh] --- My aid comes from the Eternal; maintain the peace among us and in all of Israel;
 [French] --- And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil;
 [New Oxf] --- And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.
8. [Ch Kh] --- May it be said; Amen!
 [French] --- So mote it be!
 [New Oxf] --- [no equivalent]
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Dating Chaldean wisdom is too complicated a subject for this article. We find “Chaldeans” used in the Hebrew book of Daniel, as a name for a caste of wise people. Pythagoras studied with them for a time and their wisdom was very influential on the Neoplatonists. Ragon adds: “To complete the proof of the similarity or conformity between these orisons, let us compare the verse of the offering and the harvest [French, *moisson*]: *paxdomini semper vobiscum*, ‘the peace of the Lord be always with you’.

At the end of the Kaddish: ‘O thou, who establish peace in the celestial countries, maintain the peace among us!’ Thus the Chaldeans, by Israelite intermediaries, have handed the *Dominical Orison* [meaning ‘Lord’s speech’] down to us.” There is also modern support for this idea.³

My understanding is that the story of Jesus ascending the mountain for the Sermon on the Mount is an allegorical one. The symbology of the elements or *tattvas* (Sanskrit) of earth, water, and air represent the planes or successive states of consciousness in Nature, the physical plane, the astral plane and the mental plane. His experience indicates an interior contemplative state touching the immortal part of soul consciousness on the mental plane.

Theosophical literature exploring evolution of the ancient mysteries, such as *Esoteric Christianity* by Annie Besant, suggests the significant events in the life of Jesus conform to the idea of five initiations leading to adeptship, and the final depletion of personal karma. Which explains why Jesus, in the allegory, then understood the seriousness of his karma to follow, further symbolised by the later humiliation, torture and crucifixion, and that he also understood that the Law which stimulates wisdom and growth could not be avoided by either God or human. In Matthew’s Gospel, while on the Mount, Jesus says [insertions and italics are mine]:

5:17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law [*karma*] or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. [*Pay all debts*] 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, *not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law [karma] until all is accomplished.* 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven [*a serious karmic offence*], but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness [*dharma*] exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees [*uninitiated*], you will never [*self-consciously*] enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴

Therefore, rather than an external petition to “God” the Father, who is not limited to Heaven as It is omnipresent (pan-, all and everywhere), the Lord’s Prayer represents a guide to the

inner “God” through meditation, the Father that is the immortal Higher Self or soul, whose child is the personality.

“Give us this day our daily bread” seems petty to the solemnity of the experience. The Greek word for daily, which “Jerome translated *epiousios* in two different ways: by morphological analysis as 'supersubstantial' (*supersubstantialem*) in Matthew 6:11, but retaining 'daily' (*quotidianum*) in Luke 11:3”.⁵ “Origen testifies (de orat. 27) that the word was not in use in ordinary speech, and accordingly seems to have been coined by the Evangelists themselves.”⁵ The Chaldean Kaddish states: “May life descend from the height of the heavens over us”, and supports “supersubstantial”, but I think it would be more accurate in its intention to say “may the Higher Self become master of the lower”. As Devotion is to turn our attention to, and become, the Divine within, so then in becoming the object of our devotion we “consume” or reflect its nature, symbolised as spiritual bread. Turning wheat into bread has long been a symbol of spiritual transformation and the power of Will. Interestingly, the alternate New Oxford translation of “our bread for tomorrow” comes closer to this idea of a supersubstantial or spiritualised future.

There is a verse that then follows the Lord’s Prayer, Matthew 6:14-15, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” In it, “trespasses” refers to “*paráptōma* (from *parapíptō*, see there) – properly, fall away after being close-beside, i.e. a *lapse* (deviation) from the truth; an error, ‘slip up’; wrongdoing that can be (relatively) unconscious, ‘non-deliberate.’”⁴

However, that part of the recited prayer in Matthew 6:12, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” used in ritual, which the archaic English and High ritual give as “trespasses”, actually comes from “*opheílēma* (a neuter noun) – that which is owed, a debt, the *result* of having a debt, focusing on the after-effect of the obligation (note the *-ma* suffix).”⁴ This is a far more serious meaning than the translation of trespasses from *paráptōma*. Matthew 6:12 therefore relates to karma, and more specifically the balancing of final effects, whereas Matthew 6:14 immediately following the Lord’s Prayer is really saying that the greater the distance between yourself and your brother (all others in the gender-neutral sense), for even small slights, then just such a distance is there between your lower self, the personality, and the Higher Self within.

There is a negative sense given in the St Matthew Gospel that it is God who leads one to temptation and evil. Pope Francis favours the French and Spanish translations, “do not let us fall into temptation”, but this potentially changes Catholic Theology regarding the nature of evil.⁶ The Chaldean Kaddish phrase noted by Ragon, “My aid comes from the Eternal”, relates to other passages of the Chaldean Kaddish and refers especially to “Strength”, and importantly, the positive sense of divine Strength and relief.

As such, it has more in common with the Liberal Catholic First Ray Benediction, given at the end of the Eucharist, calling upon the Holy Ones to “show us the light we seek” and to “give us the strong aid of their compassion and their wisdom”. Perhaps this was the true intention if not expression of the ancient author of the Lord’s Prayer. As an afterthought, in its current form, the Lord’s Prayer requires considerable interpretation, and I wonder if it would benefit

from being reworded in ritual or if the Benediction would be a better substitute. This is only one view for consideration.

Endnotes:

(1) *The Oxford History Of Christian Worship*, edited by Geoffrey Wainright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, 2006, Chapter 2, "The Apostolic Tradition" by Maxwell E Johnson, p. 50.

(2) *The Mass and its Mysteries Compared to the Ancient Mysteries*, Ragon, Jean-Marie, 1844, translated by John Lenoir based on the 1882 third edition, p. 227-9.

(3) <wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord's_Prayer#Relation_to_Jewish_prayer>

(4) See Strong's Lexicon and the English Standard Version of St Matthew's Gospel at Biblehub.com

(5) See <wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiouosios> and Strong's Lexicon

(6) <wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_father>