

Lord teach us to pray



We spent a lot of time walking when we were with Rabbi Jesus. We would walk from village to village around Galilee, skirting around the towns of Sepphoris and Tiberius. Rabbi Jesus said that people whose eyes could only see money and power and influence could not see God. I thought that he was a little harsh to condemn everyone who lived in the cities, but who was I to argue with the Rabbi. I had lived in a small fishing village on the shores of Lake Galilee all my life. The furthest I had been was Jerusalem. The city overawed me with the speed and the bustle of life. There was an almost palpable aura of power when a Sadducee and his retinue would sweep passed us in the streets. If they looked at us at all, all they would see would be a poor fisherman from Galilee, come to present a sacrifice to Yahweh at the appointed time. They did not see what we had inside of us, what Rabbi Jesus had brought out from us on the many long walks we took together.

Some days we would amble along and stop off at villages accidentally. Other days the Rabbi would set a fierce pace and we would be running to keep up with him. There was one day, that I remember distinctly, when I asked him a question that stopped him in his tracks. I had been thinking about what Rabbi Jesus had been teaching us about Yahweh, and it suddenly struck me that for all of the words that he was using, for all the formal prayers we used, and have been used by our people for time out of mind, he had not once used his own words to help us to pray to this new picture of Yahweh that he was presenting to us. So when he took a breath from what he was saying, I just said to his back,

‘Lord, teach us to pray as you do.’

He swung around and stared at me for a long time, until my face turned red with embarrassment, that I had asked such a question of the Rabbi. Then a huge smile lit his face and he stepped forward and enveloped me in a hug. He then stood back and looked into my face.

‘You are right,’ he said ‘I should teach you how to pray. Let me think now.’

So we continued walking, aimlessly now, while the Rabbi looked with an unfocussed gaze at his feet, looked up into the sky and looked into the far distant hills. Then he seemed to come to a conclusion. He looked around, and his gaze focussed on a large tree some distance away.

‘Come,’ he said. ‘Let us sit down, and I will teach you to pray.’

So he sat under the tree with his back against its trunk. We sat or sprawled on the ground around him, eager to hear what he had to say to us.

‘Look around you,’ he said. ‘What do you see?’

We all turned obediently.

‘I can see trees.’ ‘I can see rocks.’ ‘I can see hills.’ ‘I can see the sky.’

The answers came quickly and easily. This was a game that we had played before.

‘Look again,’ he said, ‘look harder, what now do you see?’ We obediently looked round again

‘Leaves and pebbles.’ ‘Changes in the undulation of the land.’ ‘Soil and sand beneath my feet’ ‘Clouds scudding overhead.’

The answers came slower this time, but they came.

‘Keep looking’ he said.

So we kept looking. Someone picked up a leaf, someone else began to let the dry earth we were sitting on run through his fingers. One of the women got up, picked up the jar she had next to her, and set off for the river to collect water for us to drink.

Rabbi Jesus picked up a fallen leaf, and began to stroke it. He looked at the veins and then up at all of the leaves still on the tree. He looked back at us.

‘Where does the book of Genesis begin?’ he asked.

We all sat back and relaxed a bit then turned to look at Nathaniel who was the scholar among us.

Nathaniel obediently cleared his throat,

‘The book of Genesis begins with the creation. Yahweh creates the heavens and the earth and all that is in them in six days, and on the seventh rests, so we also rest on the seventh day, the sabbath.’

‘What does Yahweh create from?’ questioned Jesus.

Nathaniel gathered his thoughts for a moment.

‘Genesis talks about chaos, and Yahweh creating order out of the chaos.’

‘So what do you see all around you?’ pressed Rabbi Jesus.

I thought for a moment.

‘What I see all around me is ordered, what Yahweh has made, the tree and its little leaves, the water in the jug and the big river, the dry earth and the big stones, and the hills beyond, and all that is up there beyond the clouds.’

Rabbi Jesus beamed at me.

‘What you see all around you is the works of Yahweh, the outpouring of Yahweh’s power, and the love Yahweh has for you which is the love of a parent for its child. Yahweh is both your heavenly parent and your spiritual parent, the parent of your heart and mind and soul. He is ‘Abwoon’. You can touch and feel the love all around. So when you pray you should first ask Yahweh for a blessing. You will feel that blessing leaving Yahweh and coming on the breath of the Holy Spirit. You will know that this is so because as you look all around you, you see the wonder of all that Yahweh has created, which is just a part of the wonder and glory that is Yahweh.’

He stopped for a moment to let us think about this and then continued.

‘But the presence of Yahweh that you call upon needs to find a home, a home within yourselves, you need to clear a space within yourselves for the ‘Shem’, the word of Yahweh to find a place to inhabit, a place where there is stillness and calm. Then when you have created a space within yourselves the ‘Shem’ can become ‘qadash’, holy, because you have allowed it to be so. Now you have asked the word of Yahweh to become Holy within you, you need to use that word, ‘teyten’ you need to desire, to bring to birth a new place that is full of potential. You need to say for yourself ‘Malkutuh’, I can, I can create a place that is at one with all this, with all that Yahweh has given me and all that Yahweh has created for me and I will make a new kingdom within myself for Yahweh.’

Rabbi Jesus paused again and looked around to satisfy himself that we were keeping up with him.

‘That sounds daunting, doesn’t it? But know that you are never on your own, in your tasks inward and outward, ‘Tzevyanach’, your heart’s desire will become so much part of you, that you will live and breath it without even thinking about it. But it is not just about what we want in our relationship with Yahweh, it is also about what Yahweh wants in his relationship with us, in the space we have cleared for him. We do not need to look far for the answer as it is beneath our feet, in our longing sigh. ‘Arha’, the earth, reminds us that it is Yahweh’s, it is Yahweh, and in caring for it we are caring for Yahweh.’

Rabbi Jesus then looked up to the heavens, and back down to us.

‘Let me give you some words to frame this prayer we are building up.

“Abwoon d’bwashmaya

Nethqadash smakh

Teyten Malkuthakh

Nwywey tzevyanach aykanna d'bwashmaya aph b'arha."

When we had sat for a while thinking about what he had said he leapt to his feet.

'Come let us walk again. We have a people to talk to, and you have a prayer to think about. Think about the words and let them expand your mind as you come into the presence of Yahweh. When you have had time to think, and I have answered all your questions. We will think about how our prayer should continue.'

It was a few days later when we were sitting by a river dangling our feet in the cool water when Rabbi Jesus again turned to our prayer.

'Praying is a two way thing. Yahweh wants to give to us, freely and abundantly, but we need to be ready to receive. We talked about clearing a space within ourselves for Yahweh to inhabit, but there are other things we must do. We need to keep ourselves healthy, we need to eat of the bounty that Yahweh has given us, but it is not yours, it is not mine, it is Yahweh's and we need to care for the earth so that we can care for each other as Yahweh wants us to do. As well as asking for food, we also need to work for our food, and for the food we all need.

We need to think about our relationships with each other and with Yahweh. 'Washboqlan' is a really deep word, and we will use it in our prayer. It is a word that asks us not just to say that we forgive someone when they hurt us, but it asks that we will really deeply let go of the mistakes someone has made, a gift that we can give each other, an opportunity to let go of the mistakes that tie ourselves and one another in knots. We must want to return our relationships to their original state.

I want to use the word 'khaubayan' or maybe 'wakhtahayn' I can't quite make up my mind. The first means 'hidden past' or 'secret debts' something that affects the soul negatively. 'wakhtahayn' can mean 'failures', 'mistakes', 'frustrated hopes' or 'tangled threads', things that suggest that some restoration is needed. 'Aykanna' is another good word to use here to remind us that the releasing of sins must be done consistently and regularly, if our tangled relationships are to become whole and stable again.

This life of ours is not easy. There are many things which can seduce us away from Yahweh. There are things, like gold and silver, too much food, or even too many rules such as the Pharisees and Sadducees give us. We should not let ourselves be seduced by appearances, by things which divert us from the purposes of our lives. Before we act we should look deep within ourselves to see what effect our actions will have on us, on each other and on

Yahweh and his creation, to see whether what we are doing is appropriate. On the other hand we must not become so self-absorbed that we cannot act simply and humanly at the right time. Some times our ideals carry us into the future or looking too deeply at the past. We must not forget that it is difficult to live in the present and ask when help is needed now.

So, I need to give you some more words to say all this.

“Hawvlan lachma d’sunqanan yaomana.

*Washboqlan khaubayan (wakhtahayn) aykana daph khnan
shbwoqan l’khayyabayn.*

Wela tahlan l’nesyuna

Ela patzan min bisha”.

How should we end this new prayer of ours?

Nathaniel coughed. Perhaps a new prayer should have an old ending to keep it within the continuum of the prayers of our people.

Rabbi Jesus looked thoughtful.

What do you suggest then?

“Metol dilakhie malkutha wahayla wateshbukhta l’alam almin.

Ameyn” said Nathaniel.

Rabbi Jesus began to turn the meaning of these so familiar words over in his mind.

“Dilakhie’ is an image of creation, of abundance. ‘Malkutha’ we have already used as the cosmic ‘I can’ the royalty that permeates the universe. ‘Hayla’ refers to the life force or energy that produces and sustains. It is not ‘power over’, but ‘power with’ natural creation. Teshbukhta is a song, a glorious harmony returning divine light and sound to matter in equilibrium.’

‘Yes,’ he mused, ‘These words reiterate and sum up what we have been saying in the prayer. ‘L’ahlam almin’ ‘from age to age’ or ‘from gathering to gathering’. I can picture the cosmos slowly gathering and assembling to a central point, then slowly dispersing again. Marking the changes of the year the cycles of our lives. ‘Ameyn’ will seal this prayer with a solemn oath. We use it all the time, and it is a good powerful word.’

He looked at Nathaniel.

‘You are right. These words are so familiar to us, and yet if we really think about them they have so much to say to us. We will use them.’

‘So there we have it. A prayer for us to use when we pray together.

Abwoon d’bwashmaya

Nethqadash smakh

Teytey Malkuthakh

Nwywey tzevyanach aykanna d’bwashmaya aph b’arha.

*Hawvlan lachma d'sunqanan yaomana.
Washboqlan khaubayan (wakhtahayn) aykana daph khnan
shbwoqan l'khayyabayn.
Wela tahlán l'nesyuna
Ela patzan min bisha
Metol dilakhie malkutha wahayla wateshbukhta l'alam almin. Ameyn.*

Rabbi Jesus then leapt to his feet.

‘Let us practice it to remember it as we walk and live it as we talk to the people we meet. He turned and looked at me. A prayer for the people of Yahweh. That was a good idea of yours.’