



**Prayers of the Cosmos**  
**Matthew 5:1-12**  
**January 29, 2023**

Admit it: Sometimes you buy a wine just because of its colorful label. And sometimes you buy a book just because of its intriguing title. This is what prompted me long ago to pick up a little book called “Prayers of the Cosmos.”<sup>1</sup> I brought it

home, stuck it on a shelf and there it sat for years until something finally compelled me open it up – and I discovered it’s not at all what I expected.

I thought it was going to be a collection of spiritual poems drawn from wide-ranging sources. But everything was from one source – Jesus. The catch was that these were among Jesus’ most famous sayings translated as closely as possible from the original Aramaic.

What is Aramaic and why should we care?

In my first class in my first semester of seminary, our Greek professor started us off with a question. What is the most important language you should be learning in seminary, he asked? Someone put their hand up sheepishly – it was obvious, right? Greek. No. Someone else ventured: Hebrew. No. We were stumped. Finally he said, “The answer is Aramaic. Except that we don’t teach it.” Why is it so important? Because this was the language Jesus spoke, just as most people did in that region at the time.

Learning a language involves much more than the meanings of words. It is an entry into a culture and a mindset: French, florid and evocative; German, regimented, highly organized and graphically descriptive. Aramaic catapults us into the prophetic and mystical tradition that Jesus embodied. “Heaven” is not a place or a metaphysical concept but “light and sound shining through all creation.” There is no division between God, creation, and humankind. Everything in the universe is an expression of Holy Breath. There is no distinction between an inner quality and an outer action. Distinctions between mind, body and spirit fall away.

All creation is cosmic breath, the breath of God at the birth of creation and the breath, that single breath, that continues to enliven all things, from the tiniest new sprouts to the racing of the galaxies at the farthest reaches of the universe.

From myriad literal translations possible for each Aramaic word, the reader must therefore create, or re-create, meaning that has the power to transform, to break down the unnatural divisions between God, nature and humankind that hold us captive.

In so doing we find ourselves confronting those rigid places in our lives that keep us from being open to the mystical power that flows through the universe, which, in the Aramaic, runs like a

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus* (1990).

mighty river through all of Jesus' teachings. This gives us an experience of the living truth toward which Jesus' words point, an experience that is at once personal and universal.

Instead of a more conventional approach to the Beatitudes, in which we might say that "blessed" means "happy" – and then we get stuck trying to figure out how anyone could be truly happy with all the world's troubles – let's see where an Aramaic translation might take us.

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Happy are those who are aligned with the cosmic breath of life. When one is attuned through the breath of God, one does not put oneself forward inappropriately.

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

Blessed are those in emotional turmoil for they will be united inside by love; tuned to the source are those feeling deeply confused by life; they shall be returned from their wandering.

**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

Healthy are those who have softened what is rigid within—those who have surrendered their hard edges to God. That softening opens us to the real source of power, which is God acting through all of nature. Aligned with the One are the humble, those submitted to God's will; they shall be open to receive the splendor of earth's fruits.

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

Aligned with the Universal One are those who wait up at night, weakened and dried out inside—or, burned out—by the unnatural state of the world, with its strife and imbalances of justice. This thirst brings radiance and inner clarity.

Or: Integrated are those who long clearly for a foundation of peace between the warring parts of themselves; they shall find all around them the materials to build this.

**Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.**

Tuned to the Source are those who shine from the deepest place in their bodies; upon them shall fall the rays of universal love.

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Aligned with the Universal One are those whose lives radiate outward from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere.

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

Integrated are those who joyfully knit themselves together within; they shall be stamped with the seal of cosmic identity – with “peace” understood as a mutual agreement that saves a difficult situation.

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Blessings to those who are dislocated, or driven from home, because they pursued justice, Their new home is the province of the universe. (A reminder that society does not easily tolerate the prophetic spirit; one is likely to run into opposition.)

**Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

When you are covered with insults like a sticky web, pulled apart at the seams and wrongly labelled immature, for my sake, then do everything with extreme joy, including letting your ego disappear, for this is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the universe!

I suppose if you wanted to find a translation from the Aramaic of everything Jesus is recorded as having said, that book is out there somewhere. But this encounter with the Beatitudes reminds us that it is not book learning but our direct experience of the living Christ that changes us, because he is the one in whom the healing, restoring force of the universe is focused. Whenever you come face to face with God’s Word, a channel immediately opens through which God’s infinite love is breathed into us through the Holy Spirit. So as you read, sit with words or phrases, let them blossom in your imagination, and see where the journey takes you.

Amen.