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Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.

We often forget that Jesus didn't speak English. Or Greek, for that matter, even though all the records we have of his work and witness are in that language. Instead, his working language was Aramaic. Sufi teacher Neil Douglas-Klotz takes us on a journey through a different world of language, images, and metaphors that opens up the meanings of the Lord's Prayer and other key sayings of Jesus in a provocative way. I'll try and give you a taste of the Aramaic Jesus, as Douglas-Klotz reads him. I find it illuminating, especially for reading the witness of the gospels and the epistles as invitations into a forgiven and reconciled relationship of belonging with the Holy Trinity for the blessing of all the creation.

Aramaic, Douglas-Klotz points out, is an indigenous language in the Middle East that has its roots further back than Hebrew and Arabic in the mystical traditions of the region. His understanding of 'mystical' does not involve mystifying, but rather returning to a better relationship with the cosmos, just as our own North American indigenous traditions do. This is a language that invites its speakers and hearers into many levels of meaning and provokes them to draw the interconnections. It is suggestive rather than definitive, promissory rather than prescriptive, inclusive rather than exclusive, loving rather than fearful. When you think of the tensions between Jesus and the religious authorities of his day, with their emphasis on purity and control, you can begin to sense the linguistic dimensions of that dynamic. Jesus, for Douglas-Klotz, was a mystic and a prophet whose words connected deep within the souls of his neighbours' dilemmas and questions. They formed and expressed a union with the Creator of the universe that transformed their lives. The depth and breadth of that transformation is seen most powerfully in an examination of the Lord's Prayer in its original language.

Here's Douglas-Klotz's translation from Aramaic:

O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos,

Focus your light within us – make it useful:

Your one desire then acts with ours, as in all light, so in all forms.

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

Loose the cords of mistakes binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others' guilt.

Don't let surface things delude us,

But free us from what holds us back.

From you is born all ruling will, the power and the life to do, the song that beautifies all,
from age to age it renews.

Truly – power to these statements – may they be the ground from which all my actions grow:

Amen

I'll take you through some of his comments on each phrase in the King James Version.

Our Father which art in heaven

In the Aramaic worldview, this is an expression of divine creativity and blessing that emanates from all parenting. It is a generative energy that moves from potential to actuality through the vibrations of God's intent.

Hallowed be thy name

The hallowed energy of the divine is the underlaying unity in which all lives and from which light shines into everyday basics.

Thy kingdom come

In Aramaic, 'kingdom' has the connotation of a marriage chamber where desire is fulfilled and birthing begins. We pray to be aligned with the ruling principles of this creative energy.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven

God's steadfast desire is harmony. The Energy that gave us birth nurtures us into acts of compassionate cooperation.

Give us this day our daily bread

The Aramaic word for 'bread' also means 'understanding' and is rooted in the divine feminine. So, its connotations have to do with vigor, verdancy, warmth, passion, and possibility.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors

There is a sense in the Aramaic here of tangled and torn fibres in a cloth needing repair and restoration.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

The Aramaic points to vacillation, diversion from a purpose, and delays in producing good fruits. We pray that the Spirit will carry us into God's future bearing the fruits of the seeds God has sown within and among us – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-composure.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

There is a return in the last phrase to the creative birthing and cultivating by God of the divine intent that the whole of creation flourishes.

Douglas-Klotz translates and comments on a number of other short passages from Jesus' teachings as well. Throughout, three themes worth considering more deeply are prominent:

1. Aramaic is a relational rather than a logical language, arising from ancient indigenous cultures and very different from the Greek of Jesus' times.
2. Aramaic is a poetic rather than a philosophical language, suggestive and story-based rather than systematic.
3. We miss much of the mystic and prophetic power of Jesus' conversations if we don't take their original language seriously.

Douglas-Klotz is intrigued by, but does not identify with, Christianity. His doctoral studies blended religious studies, spirituality, and psychology. He is a practitioner and teacher of Sufism, a mystical tradition within Islam. He lives in Scotland and works in a number of schools and organizations that advocate for creation spirituality from an interfaith perspective. His research and writing have uncovered a rich vein of spirituality embraced by Jesus that is often overlooked or ignored within Western Christianity.

Whether you agree with Douglas-Klotz's assertions and analyses, and many don't, he has opened up for me a new dimension of the way in which the Creator/Energizer chose to take flesh in Jesus of Nazareth and dwell among us, full of the grace and truth of forgiveness and reconciliation (John 1:14). I resonate deeply with the sense of God's pervasive and transforming peace that flows through these pages. I hope you do as well.