Lord, Teach Us to Pray

DIG: What motivates the talmidim to ask about pray at this time? In Yeshua’s model prayer, what two concerns related to ADONAI come first? Why? What personal concerns then follow? How do prayer and forgiveness relate? In Jesus’ parable of the friend in need of bread, whom do the two friends represent? Why is persistence in prayer important? How do verses 9-10 relate to the parable? How might these verses be misunderstood? How do verses 11-13 clarify the intent of verses 9-10? What does this teach you about God’s Kingdom? His goodness?

REFLECT: In what way does this prayer serve as a model for us to follow? What are the dangers of reciting the same prayers over and over again? What steps can we take to keep our prayers honest and meaningful? In what circumstances is it tempting to give up praying? What can persistent prayer accomplish? In what ways does this passage change your attitude toward a long-term prayer request or need in your life?

The example that Daniel set by praying three times a day (Daniel 6:10) was religiously followed by the Pharisees. They used prayer as a means of demonstrating their piety before men (see II - The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector). The disciples of John the Immerser had evidently realized that such prayer was unacceptable and had asked him to teach them how to pray. Therefore, Yochanan had sought to correct the perverted Pharisaic practices in prayer. One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His talmidim said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John the Baptist taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).

In the days of the Messiah, each rabbi had his own unique style of praying. And if that rabbi had any followers or disciples, he would teach them to pray in the same manner. So that when praying in public, someone overhearing a disciple of a certain rabbi praying out loud, he or she would be able to identify their rabbi. Consequently, Yeshua’s apostles wanted Him to teach them His unique style of praying.

Then we are given a beautiful example of prayer known as “The Lord’s Prayer,” because the Lord Jesus taught it, but could more accurately be described as “The Disciples Prayer.” How ironic it is that some groups have used this model prayer in the very way that Messiah warns against - vain repetition! It is not meant to be a magical mantra, but rather, a model for how to pray. This version of the Lord’s prayer is briefer than Matthew’s, but it contains the same topics for prayer. I have included both for fuller understanding.
This, then, is how you should pray (Mattityahu 6:9a). All of its components may be found in the Judaism of Messiah's day, and is revered for its beauty and economy of words. This, then, is a model when we pray. It shows us the vital themes and principles desired for effective worship:

1. **Our Father in heaven** or **Avinu shebaShamayim** (Matthew 6:9b; Luke 11:2a), opens many Hebrew prayers. The concept of Adonai being a loving Father is not a new concept in Judaism. Isra’el was called His firstborn son in Exodus 4:22, and Isaiah proclaimed to his generation: You are our Father (Isaiah 63:16). In addition, numerous prayers in the Siddur also address God as Avinu. Consequently, our prayer should be addressed to the Father, through the ministry of the Son, by the power of the Ruach ha-Kodesh (Holy Spirit) (see Ephesians 2:18). Our Father, the God of Isra’el, is still to be the focus of our prayers. The next two lines in Matthew recall the first portion of the synagogue prayer known as the Kaddish.

2. **Hallowed be Your name** (Mattityahu 6:9c; Luke 11:2b). When reciting the well-known Kaddish in the synagogue, the leader begins with these words, “May His great name be magnified and sanctified” or yitgadal v’yitkadash. An entire tractate of the Talmud deals with the details of how to offer up prayers and blessings (Tractate Berakhot). The common formula continues today: Barukh Atah Adonai (Blessed are You, LORD), reminding us to bless HaShem before other prayers are offered. To honor God’s name is to honor Him. The Egyptians had many gods by many different names. Moses wanted to know His name so the Jewish people would know exactly who sent him to them (see my commentary on Exodus At – I AM Has Sent Me To You). Adonai called Himself I AM, a name describing His eternal power and unchangeable character. His name is like His signature guarantee of His promises. In a world where values, morals, and laws change constantly, we can find stability and security in our unchanging God. The Lord who appeared to Moshe is the same God who can live in us today. Hebrews 13:8 says: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Because HaShem’s nature is stable and trustworthy, we are free to follow and enjoy Him rather than spending our time trying to figure Him out.

3. **Your Kingdom come** (Luke 11:2c). Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). Jesus instructs His disciples to focus on the coming messianic Kingdom. We are to pray that this same Kingdom will be established on earth during our lifetime. Continuing the Great Kaddish, the leader continues and says, “... in the world that He will create anew, when He will raise the dead, and give them eternal life, will rebuild the city of Jerusalem, and establish His Temple in the middle of it; and will uproot all pagan worship from the earth, and restore the worship of the true God.” The liturgy of the Torah service also elaborates on this and quotes First Chronicles 29:11-12 when it says, “The Kingdom is Yours, Adonai.” All true believers desire for God’s messianic Kingdom to come to this earth because that means that Yeshua ha-Mashiach will have returned.
When He rules and reigns from Jerusalem (see my commentary on Isaiah Jg – In Righteousness You Will Be Established, Terror Will Be Far Removed), His desire will be done on earth as it currently is in heaven.

4. **Give us today our daily bread** (Mattityahu 6:11; Luke 11:3). While it is essential for us to **pray** for the bigger picture of the messianic Kingdom, **Christ** also reminds us that the **Father** is also concerned about our **daily** needs. This reminds us that for forty years the **Father** took care of the practical needs of His children. The manna, for example, was edible only on the very day it was given. The Israelites learned to thank the LORD for their **daily bread** without worrying too much about the future. When we **pray** before a meal, we need to be reminded that we are not blessing the food, but are blessing **Adonai** for providing our food!

5. **Forgive us what we have done wrong, as we too have forgiven those who have wronged us** (Matthew 6:12 CJB; Luke 11:4a). **Christ’s prayer** gives us a strong reason to seek forgiveness. Since we too have forgiven those who have wronged us, we can ask for the same kind of forgiveness. Sometimes it is necessary to **forgive** in order to be **forgiven**; sometimes it is necessary to **forgive** because we are already **forgiven**, and sometimes it is necessary to **forgive** as we are in the process of being **forgiven** by others. These principles of giving and receiving forgiveness are common in Judaism.

Each Shabbat, those who love the **God** of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob recite the sixth blessing of the Amidah, the Standing **Prayer**, which is the central **prayer** of the Jewish liturgy. It asks for forgiveness for all **sins** and praises **God** as being a **God** of forgiveness. This **prayer**, among others, is found in the Siddur for Messianic Jews (2009). As traditional Judaism’s central **prayer**, the Amidah is often designated simply as **tefila**, "prayer" in rabbinic literature.

The concept of forgiveness is the central theme of the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The **Avinu Malkeinu** prayer calls on us to **forgive** others as well as receiving forgiveness. We must remember that forgiveness is more than merely forgetting the things we have done wrong, or the fact that we have been wronged. The perfect example is **Yeshua**’s actions towards us. He does not forget our **sins**, but chooses not to dwell on them once we are adopted into His family (see Bw – What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith). In the same way, as His child, our forgiveness of others cannot be conditional. This is demonstrated in a special ceremony that takes place on Rosh Hashanah (the first day of the Jewish New Year). Traditional Jews go down to a lake or the ocean and throw bread crumbs or stones into it. This ceremony is called Tashlikh, or you will throw, based on Micah 7:19 CJB, where the prophet says: You will throw all their sins into the depths of the sea. If **God** has buried our **sins** in the depths of the sea, we would do well to let them stay there and not go fishing!
The L ORD forgives us instantly (Isaiah 55:7; First John 1:9). So how long should I feel guilty? Not very long! He forgives me repeatedly (Nehemiah 9:17; Hebrews 7:25). ADONAI forgives me freely (Romans 3:23-24; Ephesians 2:8-9). It is a gift. I can’t pay for it. God forgives me completely (Colossians 1:14, 2:13-14; Romans 3:25; Matthew 26:28). Psalm 51:1-19 was King David’s written confession to HaShem after an especially sinful episode in his life. David was truly sorry for his adultery with Bathsheba and for murdering her husband Uriah to cover it up (Second Samuel 11:1-27). He knew that his actions had hurt many people. But because David repented of those sins, ADONAI mercifully forgave him. No sin, except the rejection of God the Holy Spirit Himself for salvation, is too great to be forgiven! Do you feel that you could never come close to the LORD because you have done something terrible? He can and will forgive you of any sin.

6. And lead us not into temptation (Matthew 6:13a; Luke 11:4b). There is no definite article before the word temptation. Even though the article is not necessary in a prepositional phrase to make the noun definite, its omission here is significant. This indicates that this term is used in a more general sense to refer to inward seductions.1013 Jesus said: In this world you will have trouble (Yochanan 16:33b), and there are many twists and turns. There is no doubt that we will be tested, yet it is appropriate for us to pray that the Father would not lead us into hard testing (the Greek for temptation can also mean testing). ADONAI does not tempt anyone into sin (James 1:13). That would be entirely contrary to His nature. And our willpower is overrated. Our sin nature will take us further than we want to go and cost us more than we want to pay. Yet, we are told to pray that we might not endure hard testing no matter what the source.

The prayer spoken of by Jesus transcended any that Jewish rabbi ever conceived. Forgive us what we have done wrong, and lead us not into temptation find no real counterparts in the prayers of the rabbis. In the Temple, the people never responded to the prayers with an “Amen,” but always with this blessing, “Blessed be the Name of the glory of His Kingdom forever!” The rabbis teach that it was traced all the way back to the patriarch Jacob on his deathbed. In regard to the Kingdom, whatever the rabbis understood by it, the feeling was so strong that it was said by them: Any prayer that makes no mention of the Kingdom, is not a prayer at all.1014

7. But keep us safe from the Evil One (Mattityahu 6:13b CJB). Besides our own flesh, Yeshua mentions another source of tempting, which is the Evil One or the devil, who is alive and well, seeking to devour any unsuspecting soul (Job 1:6-7; Zechariah 3:1; First Peter 5:8). In the midst of this great spiritual battle for our souls, this part of the prayer reminds us to pray that the LORD would keep us safe. The Father has not left us as orphans to fend for ourselves, but has provided powerful spiritual armor for our protection. As we walk through this life, the battle rages all around us. As a result, we must keep on the helmet of salvation, wear the breastplate of righteousness, and wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). There is no
doubt that this battle is intense; however, we are promised victory because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (First John 4:4 CJB).

The oldest and most reliable manuscripts do not include the words, “for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever,” so I have not included them here. The plural phrasing . . . give us . . . forgive us . . . lead us . . . keep us . . . is characteristically Jewish, focusing on the group rather than the isolated individual. What kind of protection does He offer us? King David said: ADONAI is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (Psalm 18:2). The LORD’s protection of His people is limitless and can take many forms. He characterized God’s care with five military words. HaShem is like (1) a rock that can’t be moved by any who would harm us; (2) a fortress or place of safety where the enemy can’t follow us; (3) a shield that comes between us so that no one can destroy us; (4) a horn of salvation, or a symbol of might and power; and (5) a stronghold high above our enemies. If you need protection, look to Jesus Christ.

Then Jesus said to them: Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight (Luke 11:5a). The need to travel by night because of the excessive heat in the Near East is common knowledge. But in Palestine it is not necessary because there is a breeze from the sea along the coast. Therefore, the arrival of the guest at midnight would be unexpected. And say: Friend, lend me three loaves of bread (Luke 11:5b). During the meal, everyone has their own loaf of bread. They break off bite-sized pieces and dip it into the common dish, which is never defiled because they begin each bite with a fresh piece of bread.

It is important to understand that the guest is a guest of the whole community, not just of the individual. The guest must leave with a good feeling about the hospitality of the entire village. A friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him (Luke 11:6). Which really means, “I have nothing adequate to serve my guest so that the honor of the village will be upheld.” With this in mind, the next verse becomes quite clear. Verses 5 through 7 are together the extended question that expects an emphatic negative answer in the original Greek text. This understanding is crucial to the interpretation of this parable.

And suppose the one inside answers, “Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything” (Luke 11:7). It is as if Yeshua was asking, “Can you imagine going to a neighbor with the sacred request to help you entertain a friend and then he offers ridiculous excuses about sleeping children and a locked door?” The Oriental listener (or reader) would understand the communal responsibility for the guest and would respond, “No, I can’t imagine it.”
I tell you, even though the friend will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your chutzpah, meaning shameless audacity, boldness, gall, brazen nerve, persistence and just plain guts, and to keep from being shamed, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need (Luke 11:8). So [the borrower] keeps knocking on the door with chutzpah until the friend opens it. The friend knows that [the borrower] must gather up all the essentials for the meal from his various neighbors. If the friend refused the request of anything so humble as a loaf of bread [the borrower] would continue on his rounds looking for bread and cursing the stinginess of the friend who would not get up even to fulfill his duty to the village. The story would be all over the village by morning. The friend would be met with cries of "shame" everywhere he went. Because of his desire for "avoidance of shame" he will get up and give [the borrower] anything he wants.\textsuperscript{1016}

The one main point of the parable of the Friend at Midnight is that to protect his honor, the friend will grant [the borrowers] request and much more. Thus, believers before ADONAI have much more reason to trust that their requests will be granted.

Christ then turned from parable to precept and applied the narrative. Jesus concluded His lesson on prayer with a threefold exhortation, a threefold promise, and a threefold illustration based upon experience. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. And He coupled this exhortation with a threefold promise. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened (Luke 11:9-10).

Then a threefold illustration based upon experience. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? Messiah said that since a human father readily responds to the needs of his children, God the Father would respond to the needs of believers who present their prayers to Him. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:11-13)

Ephesians 5:18 commands Yeshua’s followers to keep on being filled with the Spirit. The Ruach HaKodesh first came upon believers after they had been praying persistently (Acts 1:4-5 and 2:4), in response to Christ’s own promise (here, Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8). Those filled with (the Greek word ἐν has a wide semantic range and can be translated with, in, or by) the Holy Spirit may expect to receive gifts (Romans 12:6-8; First Corinthians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11-12), display fruits of righteousness (Galatians 5:22-23), and have the desire, love and power to communicate effectively the Good News of Yeshua by word and deed to those who have not yet believed (the entire book of Acts centers on this theme). Moreover, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Messiah doesn’t belong to Him (Romans 8:9 CJB).\textsuperscript{1017}
**Father**, forgive us for giving up on **prayer** so easily. Forgive our insincerity and lack of interest. We thank you for remaining faithful to us, even when we are unfaithful. Teach us how to pray honestly, persistently, and faithfully. Most importantly, **Father**, help us to follow in the footsteps of your perfect **Son, Jesus Christ**.