

We live in country that sometimes glorifies not forgiving. Witness some bumper stickers I have seen recently:

- Caution: I lack the forgiveness gene
  - To err is human, to forgive canine
  - We are anonymous, we are legion, we do not forgive, we do not forget, expect us.
- Why do we have trouble forgiving? Many times-- because we're not ready to move on. We're not willing to let go of the past.

But it's essential to forgive. We say it daily in our most beloved prayer: *"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."*

We need to think long and hard about that tiny word "as". What we are really saying is that we can never really feel forgiven by God until we learn to forgive others. And ourselves.

So: let's talk about forgiveness: the word and the actual *thing*. And let's get away from thinking the words of Jesus in what we know of as The Lord's Prayer were spoken in English. They weren't even spoken in Greek. Let's go back to the Aramaic. We're going to have a brief Aramaic 101.

- Like in English (and Greek) many Aramaic words have multiple meanings
- Unlike English (and Greek), even the syllables of words in Aramaic can have different meanings, or shadings, depending on the rest of the word.

Middle Eastern thought-- in general-- and Hebraic thought --specifically-- advises that all statements of sacred teaching must be examined from at least 3 points of view:

**Literal.** But-- according to native middle eastern mysticism, each Aramaic word presents several possible "literal" translations.

Each passage must next be examined **Metaphorically**. A metaphor is implied comparison: "All the world's a stage. "

And finally, each passage must be examined **Universally**:

- How do I act responsibly/ joyfully from this new understanding I've gained from this sacred teaching?
- Universally speaking: it is accepted that there is rarely a "right" or "wrong" answer.
- All sacred teachings challenge the listener to an individual response.

Jesus would have been familiar, and comfortable with, examining --and having his teachings examined-- with these three points of view in mind: literal, metaphorical, and universal.

Now, Aramaic speaking Hebrews had a

- Fluid and holistic view of universe
- Creation is “good”, not “perfect”
- Inner and outer words linked (“Kingdom of Heaven is within/among us”)

Aramaic was a

- Language is based on “root and pattern”— each word may have several meanings, at first glance unrelated, but in the sounds and syllables, many meanings are possible.

But Jesus’ original Aramaic words were finally, years after this death, translated into Greek.

Greek (as opposed to Aramaic):

- Builds in an unnatural division between God, Nature and Humanity that is absent in Aramaic.
- Perfection Oriented—Greeks strive not for “goodness”, but “perfection”.
- Inner self and outer self are disjointed
- Mind, Body and Spirit are seen as separate things always at war- Paul was very influenced by the Greek society that he lived in.

So let’s look at that prayer again, using the tenets of Aramaic thought: “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those...”

- (wa)shboqlan means “forgive”, in Aramaic, but it could also be translated as “return to its original state” or “reestablish slender ties to” or “embrace with emptiness”
- Khtahayn is the Greek word we translate into English as sin, but actually is closer to debt, or offenses.
- In Aramaic, that same word is translated as: “failures”, “mistakes”- both accidental and deliberate, “frustrated hopes” or “tangled threads”— that’s interesting. Sin as tangled threads.

So the phrase we are so familiar with: “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” sounds very obvious, straightforward. No one can argue with that.

But let me now read it again—and in a version a little closer to the original Aramaic. I'll give you three possibilities, since the multiple meanings of the words would all have been heard by a native speaker of Aramaic—

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us, could also be heard as--

“Lighten our load of secret debts as we relieve others of their need to pay.”

or

“Loose the cords of mistakes which bind us, as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.”

or

“Untangle the knots within us, so that we can mend our hearts' ties to others.”

Gives us all something to think about. The word for 'forgive' in Aramaic reaffirms that our original state is clear and unburdened, and that our slender ties to God and each other are based on our ability to mutually release the cords of mistakes and failures that can bind us to each other, hurting both of us.

Jesus obviously thought that forgiveness was so important that he put in the one prayer he gave us. He thought it was so important, that he told Peter that there was no limit to how many times we forgave people.

This doesn't mean that whatever wrongs we have experienced or have caused are not important. But it IS important to move through them, “release the cords of things that bind us, as we release the cords we hold of other's guilt”. And we do this so we are not caught in an endless cycle of hurt, caught in a net of old feelings, old grudges and old events.

Because if we are caught, we can't move forward.

Lack of forgiveness winds us in knots, tying us to the very people we dislike.

Forgiveness untangles us and lets us move freely again.

Forgiving others *and ourselves* is the single best thing we can do for our journey.

So how many times do we need to forgive, Lord? 7 whole times??

Jesus tells us:

“Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.” Amen.