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BIBLE STUDIES ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

I. THE BEATITUDES - PART I

The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew's gospel are vitally important and necessary to understand the message of Jesus because these chapters contain the basic teachings that are foundational to the Master's message.

We find the following key concepts in this section of Sacred Scripture:

God, the Infinite Creator Sovereign God of Heaven, gives us the right to call Him, "ABBA - Father"

The TANACH (Old Testament) is the foundation and preparation for the Christian Scriptures (New Testament); the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament just as Jesus (the greater) follows John (the lesser)

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law (TORAH - God's law, mind, wisdom, life, and light - enlightenment)

Jesus' message is the "gospel" (good new, SWARTA in Aramaic - a proclamation of announcement of the joyful hope of the Kingdom of Heaven)

Dr. Lamsa referred to this section of Scripture as, "the most precious and inspiring portion of the Scriptures" and, "the soul and the spirit of the sacred Word."

Knowledge of Aramaic idioms, metaphors, and language as well as the religious, political, and cultural context is necessary to understand much of Jesus' teachings. Jesus expresses distinct viewpoints and interpretation of the Torah (the written law) as He deviates from the empty traditions of the times (the oral law) while at the same time having the deepest respect for the Torah and being its very fulfillment through His life and being.

Jesus presents a living and powerful "Messianic Torah" with emphasis on true humility, compassion, meekness, justice, peace, love, mercy, and purity of heart that is as applicable for the 21st century as it was when He first uttered these teachings 2000 years ago. At the same time His message remains in perfect harmony with the spirit and the heart of the Law, Prophets, and Writings of the Hebrew Holy Scriptures. His dynamic teaching meets the needs of anyone who desires the kingdom of heaven. He is the living

MILTHA D' ALAHA (Word of God) whose compassionate presence and powerful words reached into the souls and hearts of His disciples.

As a "Torah Teacher," Jesus identifies more with the *teaching* of the Pharisees than with any other group. He *did not*, however, identify with their strict legalism, hypocrisy, or exclusivism. In these areas His life and teachings were opposite of theirs.

The following commentary on Matthew 5:3-6 will provide the Aramaic background as we study the actual words used by Jesus in instructing His disciples (TALMEEDAH - compare with "Talmud" -commentary writings for study by rabbinical students). This should greatly expand our understanding of this beautiful, profound, and powerful passage.

Aramaic Language¹

The Aramaic language does not draw sharp lines separating means from ends or between inner qualities and outer actions. Unlike the borders or the boundaries found in Greek and Western languages, in Aramaic both the inner quality and the outer action are always present in the meaning of a word. Like Hebrew and Arabic, Aramaic words can resonate many layers of meaning. Various meanings may at first seem unrelated but upon careful thought they reveal an inner connection. Aramaic is also rich in natural wonder being close to the earth with fluid images of sowing and reaping. Yet, there is no tendency to divide and over-literalize meanings as in much of the Greek scholarship that has shaped Christianity. Aramaic is also a heavenly language filled with creative spiritual power. Since Aramaic is rich in sound vibrations that have meaning one can feel the natural, and at times intimate, sensations of life, movement, directions, warmth, color, and relationship as sacred words resonate in one's being. The meaning of letter (alphabetical characters) in Hebrew and Aramaic is pulse or vibration. In addition to its poetic richness the Aramaic language is closer to the original thought forms of Jesus Christ than any other language. It is the language that He spoke.

Many of the ideas that Aramaic words convey did not and still do not exist in Western civilizations. As a result, Greek and English have no words for these ideas. With several thousand years passing in time, language, and cultural differences, many of the words of Christ have been misunderstood.

A word is a sound or symbol representing a defined meaning. To correctly understand the speech of another, the precise meaning intended by each word used must be triggered in the listeners' minds. The meanings of many key words in the language of Jesus' teachings represent meanings which simply do not exist in Western languages. As a result, His teachings can never be understood by western minds by mere substitutions of a western word for His Aramaic word.

¹ MacDougal and DeFrancisco, Character Education with Aramaic Insights (unpublished paper based on work of Yonan Codex Foundation and Laws of Living Institute) provides most of the material in this section

For example, the word “Blessed” appears in the beatitudes. Sometimes this word is translated with the word “happy” which is even weaker in meaning. “Blessed” in English suggests a divine favor or reward has been or is being received. The meaning of the Aramaic word translated “blessed” is far more complex and meaningful and involves more than a reward. The Aramaic word is “touveyhoun”. The morpheme suffix or sound, -houn, indicates that it is a possessive plural. This may be expressed by adding “is theirs” to the basic meaning preceding it, in this case one of the “touy” attitudes. The touy- sound designates a capacity, an attribute or capacity of mind in harmony with the divine intent for humankind. The addition of the -ey to make touvey- converts the divinely intended capacity to a present attitude, a state of readiness for particular activity.

Another key word is “rakhma”, translated as “love”. This represents the love we have for God and neighbor based on compassion, kinship, and friendship. Upon this love the entire law hangs and is based. “Rakhma” love reflects a condition of mind rather than a pleasing physical or emotional reaction to external stimuli. It is unconditional love, a love without demand or desire for reward, a love unaffected by external stimuli. The fact that “rakhma” love, like hate and fear, is a condition of the individual mind and not a reaction to an external stimuli was scientifically established by Dr. Robert Heath of Tulane University. Dr. Heath found that each of the primary emotions is associated with its own unique brain wave pattern. They therefore cannot coexist. A mind can have only one brain wave pattern at a time.

When the lawyer seeking to trap Jesus, asked, “Master, which is the great Commandment in the Law”, Jesus answered, “You shall love (Rakhma) the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul [being] (naphsha), and with all your mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself (naphsha). On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the prophets.”²

The Aramaic text had the word “naphsha” (pronounced “now-sha”) for “soul” or “being” in this Great Commandment and for “thysself” or “yourself” in the Second Commandment. “Soul” and “self”, while somewhat conflicting words in English, are the same word in Aramaic. “Naphsha” can also be translated “being”, “life”, and “selfhood.”

Love for God was not a factor in the development of Greek or Roman law in the first century nor is it in our modern law today in Western nations. All of worldly law hangs on the authority, customs, and social values of the people, created from the mind of human beings. The law described by Jesus which hung on love for God and neighbor is complete, unchanging, and eternal; not a jot or tittle is to pass from the law until all is fulfilled.³

Another key word is translated “neighbor.” In English, physical closeness is the essence of this word’s meaning. In Aramaic, every word includes not only its physical meaning but also the equivalent mental meaning. Thus, anyone physically near or mentally near is a neighbor. This is expressed by the Aramaic word, “kareb”, meaning anyone close or in

² Matthew 22:36-40

³ Matthew 5:18

proximity physically or mentally. The commandment to love your neighbor includes anyone mentally near, anyone in mind as well as those physically near. With this condition active in a mind under control, there has to be love for self and others. Without its activity, there cannot be love for either. In Aramaic, a cause and its effect are included together in the same word. Thus, neighbor includes what the neighbor has caused, his goods and products, which we are not to “covet”. Accordingly, we should not covet that which is our neighbors, anyone we think about.

A major key word is the Aramaic word for “forgive” which is “Shbaq,” the essence of which is to cancel. Jesus gives this emphasis throughout the gospels and reinforces it in His teaching on prayer.⁴

Forgiveness (cancellation of a debt) is not merely a favor to the wrongdoer. It is a great and wonderful benefit to the forgiver as it opens up receptivity of the forgiveness of God. This does not cancel what happened or trivialize the event because that would be a lie. It does not cancel the wrongdoer because that would be murder. It does cancel that which separates one from love for God and neighbor and makes God’s forgiveness available. What is cancelled is the way we wanted it as we accept what really is. This relieves us from the stress of fear and hostility. When fear and hostility are activated in our mind they eliminate love and perception of what is good or liked. We deactivate fear or hostility by canceling the way we wanted it which allows us to restore the condition of love.

What are some important steps in resolving conflict?

Jesus describes the steps in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. The Two Great Commandments are the important foundation in resolving conflict and achieving unity. General steps are 1) Obedience to God’s law; 2) Submission to God and one another; 3) A desire for oneness with God and His people. Let’s see what Jesus taught us about this.

BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes are presented in two sets of four each. The first set expresses the condition of the poor in spirit (such as those who wept during the Babylonian exile) who are consoled by the Messiah who shows that their hopes are fulfilled at last. The last four express the attitude of the prophets (mercy, pity, champions of justice, and purity/sincerity) who enjoy God's friendship and fellowship and share in His joy.

Please note that I am indebted to Dr. George Lamsa, Dr. Rocco Errico, and Neil Douglas-Klotz for much of the background material in this article.

⁴ Matthew 6:12, 14-15

"BLESSED"

The word, TOOWAYHON, means happy, content, delighted, fortunate, blissful, and happy. This suggests abundance and prosperity in happiness and goodness. The actual word for "blessed" in Aramaic is BAREKH. The Aramaic word, TOOWAYHON, comes from the root word TOOB meaning the best that a person or place has to offer in every aspect of well-being, success, beauty, and joy.

"POOR IN SPIRIT" or "POOR IN PRIDE" (Lamsa)

TOOWAYHON L'MESKANEH BROOHK D'DILHOUNHEE MALKOOTH DASHMAYA

The word, MESKANEH, denotes the image of a solid resting point, of a fluid and round enclosure, and of holding fast to something with devotion (being "poor" for lack of it). The word, ROOHK, "spirit," "breath," "soul," means whatever moves, stirs, animates, and connects us to life. The entire universe is filled with one cosmic breath of life known as the ROOHKA D' QOODSHA or Holy Breath (or Holy Spirit). Greek translators seemed to have totally missed the basic meanings of these words while entering into Theological polemics. Healing, wholeness, and integration are the fruit (blessings) that Jesus' teachings produce. These blessings are manifested within the inner self of each disciple as well as in the interrelationships between the disciple and everyone else that is encountered, i.e. the disciple is at peace with self as well as with God and all of God's creation.

The phrase, MESKANEH BROOHK, means literally, "poor in spirit" and is an Aramaic idiom meaning to let God guide one in everything; being humble and totally relying on God rather than on mere material objects for security. It could also be translated as being surrendered (to God). The poor in spirit are unassuming and gentle. They are able to transcend all racial, religious, political, cultural prejudice. They are not seeking worldly honors, pride, or glory. They are pious and saintly.

Unlike many religious teachers, Jesus did not equate poverty with blessing but desired for His followers to have life in abundance (John 10:10). Poverty is a curse that can be overcome through wisdom and hard work. Prosperity is a blessing showered from God upon those who have wisely used their creative talents to provide goods and services for others. Rather than condemning material prosperity, Jesus was really calling for repentance from false racial and religious pride.

Greatness is a lasting blessing from God while pride is fleeting like a shadow that comes suddenly and then just as suddenly passes away. Those who are called by God as "the salt of the earth" are simple, humble, unselfish and willing servants who live by their beliefs and thereby penetrate the depths of their Father's wisdom and allow their light to shine upon others. As nature declares the glory of God rather than boasting of its own beauty and wisdom, so the truly humble are natural and loving separating themselves

from arrogance, resentment, and strife. This humility is the key to the inner spiritual life and energy through which one is able to see God and gain true wisdom and understanding. In a practical way, this humility applied with wisdom and understanding, gives us the blessing of fruitful interdependence with others in our family relationships, our neighborhood interdependence, our transactions in industry and commerce, and our acceptance of other people in all nations throughout the world.

The word, MALKOOTH, translated "kingdom" comes from the root word MALKH which means counsel or advice. The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is a reverent substitute for the phrase "kingdom of God" since the religious authorities during the time this gospel was written avoided using the name of God in speech because of its sacredness and substituted the word "heaven." This kingdom is a universal kingdom of the Anointed One establishing the reign of God in the hearts and minds of His people. Because it is a "heavenly" kingdom, it has no boundaries.

Sebastian Brock ([The Luminous Eye - The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem](#), Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1985) explains the ancient Aramaic and Middle Eastern mindset of the early church in his wonderful exposition of Saint Ephrem, an early church father who was respected by both the Eastern and Western churches. Saint Ephrem wrote in the fourth century before the Eastern Church was greatly Hellenized by Greek philosophy. Brock states that, "Saint Ephrem's approach serves as a much needed antidote to that tradition of theologizing which seeks to provide theological definitions, Greek *horoi*, or boundaries. To Ephrem, theological definitions are not only potentially dangerous, but they can also be blasphemous. They can be dangerous because, by providing 'boundaries,' they are likely to have a deadening and fossilizing effect on people's conceptions of the subject of enquiry, which is, after all, none other than the human experience of God. Dogmatic 'definitions' can moreover, in Ephrem's eyes, be actually blasphemous when these definitions touch upon some aspect of God's being; for by trying to 'define' God one is in effect attempting to contain the Uncontainable, to limit the Limitless."

"THEY WHO MOURN"

TOOWAYHON L'AWELEH D'HINNON NETHBAYOON

The word, AWELEH, "mourners," "wailing ones," signifies those who were so deeply grieved by their social and political conditions that they were crying out and longing for the establishment of God's kingdom. They knew that only God could bring comfort and consolation to them with the true justice of his order, counsel, power, authority, and love. They long for something deeply, are troubled or in emotional turmoil, and are weak and in want from their longing.

NETHBAYOON means "comforted" signifying a return from wandering, an internal unity through love, a feeling of inner continuity, and seeing the arrival of (literally, "the face of") what or who is longed for. Mourners are comforted in understanding that the

prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3 is fulfilled. Jesus proclaimed a wonderful and universal message of deliverance not only to the Jews who were heirs of the promise, but to all of humanity as the entire world is conquered through meekness and love. The light of Truth would now shine from Palestine throughout the entire world. See Luke 4:14-21 and Acts, Chapter 1.

"THE MEEK"

TOOWAYHON L'MAKEEKHEH D'HINNON NERTOON ARHA

Some believe in force relying on weapons and strict adherence to laws of retribution. Jesus spoke out against this hard line approach. Force is always met with force and has to be reinforced. Anything that has to be reinforced is actually weak in itself.

Some people then and now mistake meekness and gentleness for weakness. However, the Aramaic word for "meek" should never be confused with weakness. The word, MAKEEKHEH, "meek," "lowly," "humble," signifies those who possess the characteristics of gentleness, kindness, forgiveness, pliability, and flexibility, and who are yielding and unassuming. Like the bending willow tree that survives the storm and unlike the mighty oak that stands rigid and breaks, the meek are free of anger which often leads to disputes and violence and ultimately to death when fighting for land. Yet, they are the ones who inherit the land in peace after others are killed off in conflict and battle. The ancient root meaning is that of softening that which is unnaturally hardened within us, submitting or surrendering to God, or liquefying rigidities and heaviness (especially moral heaviness) and the inner pain of repressed desires. Softening these rigid places within us leaves us more open to the real source of life and power - ALAHA (God). Jesus blessed this rare quality of meekness to awaken it and encourage its growth.

NERTOON, "inherit," means receiving from the universal source of strength, supply, and reciprocity - God acting through all of His creation.

ARHA – "land" or "earth." This is not the whole earth but the land of Israel (see Psalm 37:11).

"THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS" or "JUSTICE" (Lamsa)

TOOWAYHON LAYLEYN D'KAPNEEN WATZHEHN L'KENOOTHAN D'HINNON NESBOON

The word, DKAPNEEN, "hunger" (literally, "the hungering") may also be translated, "to turn the mouth toward something," or to long for strengthening of the physical being. ZHAIN, "thirst," signifies an image of being parched inside or dried out ("burnt out" in our contemporary culture and time). The purpose of this hunger and thirst is realized

after we long for and finally receive a sense of inner justice and when harmony is reestablished.

The word, NESBHOON, conveys a planting image in Aramaic meaning "satisfied" or "surrounded by fruit," "encircled by birthing," and "embraced by generation." The language is full of life and nourishment leading to satisfaction and fulfillment.

The word, KENOOTHA, "justice," "righteousness," "devoutness," and "godliness" denotes ethics and justice based on the Law (Torah). Justice also means truth and is unchangeable and eternal. It refers to both an inner and an outer sense of justice, the foundation upon which things can rest, and the perfection of natural stability. A just person is one who has reverence for God and follows the commandments (Torah). Jesus demonstrated perfect justice that came from the loving bond with His Father as He faithfully fulfilled His Father's wishes and will. This father/son relationship is extremely important and precious in the Near Eastern culture. With Jesus, this relationship was focused on faith and trust. This true justice, godliness, or goodness is universal and must be planted and grow in the enlightened hearts and minds of people everywhere before there can truly be "justice for all."

Satisfaction relates to Isaiah 66:11-12.

"THE MERCIFUL SHALL OBTAIN MERCY"

TOOWAYHON LAMRAKHMONEY DALAYHOON NEHWOON RAKHMAY

The people of the Middle East believe in mercy and extend hospitality to everyone - neighbors, strangers, and even their enemies - because, as they say, "Today we have plenty, but no one knows what tomorrow may bring." Just as the leaves and roots of a tree depend upon one another, people need one another.

One of the highest desires of a Middle Easterner is to have an abundance of food to share with the poor and needy and to have loaves of bread stacked high on his table when his enemy visits him. They believe that all things come from God for His children to use. Everything comes from God and belongs to God - the Father of us all who gives to all. They believe that good deeds are rewarded with abundant blessings and evil with evil because as Dr. George Lamsa stated, "The universe functions by the law of giving and receiving" (The Kingdom On Earth).

Mercy and loving-kindness are especially needed during times of oppression and injustice. Middle Easterners remember mercy and kindness more than injustice and persecution. "Mercy and kindness are the signs of piety" (Lamsa).

The key words in this phrase, LAMRAKHMONEY and RAKHMAY both come from a root word that was later translated "mercy" from the Greek texts. The ancient Aramaic root actually meant "womb" or an inner motion extending from the center or depths of

the body and radiating warmth, devotion, passion, and zeal. The root could also be translated "pity," "love," "compassion," a "long breath extending grace," or an "answer to prayer." The association of womb and compassion leads to the image of "birthing mercy." Those who extend grace find their prayers answered as they receive grace in return. They are tuned in to the source of love, compassion, mercy, and grace from the deepest place in their inner being.

Thus, Jesus is here teaching a form of the golden rule in that no one can live unto himself and there is a spiritual law that whatever we project we receive in return. Thus, if we project love, compassion, kindness, and hospitality we will also receive these in return. He is teaching His disciples to actually do these loving acts rather than merely teach and talk about them.

The golden rule of giving and receiving is a spiritual law that was established by our Heavenly Father in His infinite wisdom. When this law is applied all life is blessed in balance and harmony but when it is disturbed, the balance of all life is disturbed.

See Psalm 18:26; II Samuel 22:26.

"THE PURE IN HEART SHALL SEE GOD"

TOOWAYHON LAYLAIN DADKEYN B'LEBHON D'HINNON NEHZUN L'ALAHA

DADKEYN refers to those "consistent" in love or sympathy, those who have both a natural sense of influence and abundance and a fixed, electrifying purpose. The ancient roots call up an image of a flower blossoming because that is its nature.

The word LEBHON (heart) carries the sense of a center from which life radiates - a sense of expansion plus generated power: vitality, desire, affection, courage, and boldness all rolled into one. NEHZUN could be translated "see," but also points to illumination, inner vision or contemplation. The ancient root evokes an image of a flash of lightning that appears suddenly in the sky and the insight that comes suddenly like that. Interestingly, the root of the word, ALAHA points to the force and passionate movement of the universe through the soul of every living being - in which God's creative Spirit can be identified to the furthest extent of God's abundant work and purpose - everywhere.

The expression "pure in heart" means being "pure (or clear) in the mind" in the Aramaic language. Because the mind is the mirror of the body, when the mind is clouded with evil thoughts, such as revenge and hatred, it becomes like polluted water which is unsuitable for drinking or bathing. Any and all impurity is sin and sin separates people from their Creator. Disease and disharmony are the results of evil thoughts. "When the mind is clear, the whole body is well' (Lamsa). Since God is purity it is only possible to see Him through a pure heart which is free from all the unrealities and evil thoughts of materialism and sin. Only a pure mind can visualize and comprehend God's divine attributes, love, and goodness. This attribute provides the ability to transcend personal

wants and resentments that cloud our minds from seeing God and gives us the ability to know God and understand His true nature.

See Psalm 24:4; 51:10; 73:11.

"THE PEACEMAKERS SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD"

TOOWAYHON LAWVDAY SHLAMA DAWNAWHIE D'ALAHA NITQARUN

According to Dr. George M. Lamsa ([The Kingdom On Earth](#)), in the Middle East "peacemakers" were those who had found peace in themselves and were able to share it with everyone by helping to resolve conflicts. They sat at the city gates and acted as judges to reconcile and unite the people in working and praying for a common cause. They didn't quarrel, seek vengeance, or hate others. They were hospitable and fair. According to Lamsa, they ". . . had surrendered themselves to God and entrusted everything to His divine care, always looking forward to the fulfillment of His promises. . . . "They prayed, repented, and sought forgiveness to find inner peace, freedom and overall peace of mind and should. They were referred to as "sons of God" because they had the nature of God having transcended self-interest. They were citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven - with its righteousness, peace, and joy.

LAWVDAY refers to those who not only make or perform an action but also are committed to it. The old root calls up an image of planting, tilling the ground, laboring regularly, bringing forth fruit, and celebrating. The emphasis is on that which is done periodically and regularly regardless of opposition.

The word for peace is SHLAMA which has remained essentially the same throughout the Middle East for thousands of years as a greeting meaning "peace to you" and "I surrender to you." It comes from the root word SHLM which means to submit, surrender, finish, or come to an end. It also means alignment, integration, health, safety, security, mutual agreement and reconciliation, a joyful assembly, or a something that unites all parties in sympathy. It is a synonym for God. LAWVDAY SHLAMA means literally, "peace-doers."

The word DAWNAWHIE (children) refers to any essence, embodiment, emanation, or active production from that which was only potential before. The root of "shall be called" (NITQARUN) present the beautiful image of digging a channel or well that allows water to flow. In the sense that we "plant peace" we become channels or fountains for hastening the fulfillment of the divine will. DAWNAWHIE D'ALAHA means literally "sons of God" but means "like-God" or "children of peace."

"BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE: FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

***TOOWAYHON LAYLAIN DETRDEP METOL KHENUTA DILHONHEE
MALKOOTH A DASHMAYA***

DETRDEP can be translated driven, dominated, dislocated, disunited, or moved by scandal or shame. KHENUTA is the foundational base of inner justice and stability. MALKOOTH A DASHMAYA refers to the royalty and power of the universe, as well as its unlimited potential. Its SHEM - or light - is evident everywhere.

Jesus knew that His new gospel would be opposed by those mighty, proud, and greedy people who believe in force because His teaching would destroy their human concepts of religion, law, and order. Those in power would oppose any change and persecute, imprison, and slay His followers simply because their creed and religion was not of this world and their light would expose the evil deeds of those living in darkness and ignorance. Therefore, true followers of Jesus must pay a costly price for preaching to a pagan world. Jesus here reminds His disciples that since society does not tolerate the prophetic spirit they would encounter opposition. He doesn't direct His disciples to seek suffering but rather to consider adversity as an incitement to take the next step beyond the self imposed or traditional boundaries that need no longer limit us since our home is the universe and God is everywhere. God is Spirit.

Truth and justice are purchased at a great price. Those in power would hate and reproach Jesus' followers even more than they did the Master Himself. Jesus knew this and warned His followers not to be disheartened. His disciples would receive immediate opposition and His teachings would not receive ready acceptance. But, this opposition would actually help to spread the gospel because it would strengthen His disciples and demonstrate their commitment to everyone they encountered and to each other.

See Isaiah 66:10.

II. NOTES ON MATTHEW CHAPTER FIVE -Beyond the Beatitudes - An Ancient Aramaic Perspective

In previous studies I have commented in depth on the Beatitudes. The purpose of This brief paper is to provide commentary from an Aramaic perspective on the balance of Matthew, Chapter Five from the Peshitta text (ancient Syriac).

Verse 1 - "mountain" – This compares with Moses giving the law on Mount Sinai

Verse 2 - "he opened his mouth" – Semitic idiom meaning “to speak”

Verse 13 - "The salt of the earth" - earth salt is of inferior quality and more perishable than sea salt. This is an idiom meaning the flavoring of the world through good conduct.

Verse 14 - "The light of the world" - light - NOOHRA - is used metaphorically to mean brilliance, enlightenment, intelligence, or teaching. Light also represents the presence of God - the SHEKINAH. God made the people of Israel the candle to shine beyond themselves to bring the knowledge of God to the pagan world that surrounded them. Although the Jews were the lamp of God, they jealously and pridefully guarded their faith and prevented their light from shining on their neighbors. The Gentiles were their pagan neighbors who had no oil (spiritually) to fuel their lamps (to see God). See Isaiah 49:6.

Verse 17 - "fulfill" - to put into action or practice. See Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32.

Verse 18 - "Yodh" - the smallest letter of the Aramaic and Hebrew alphabet ("Yodh or stroke of the pen"). This verse denotes the importance of the Torah in that not a stroke, mark, or even the smallest letter should be neglected.

Verse 19 - "Break," "change," or "merely analyze" - NISHREY - from the root (SHRA) meaning literally to untie, to loose, to unbind, or to analyze. An admonition to those who teach the law (TORAH) without actually practicing what they teach. They would be least *in the Kingdom*. Those who break the law would *not even enter into the Kingdom*. Jesus put the TORAH into practice to realize its deepest purpose.

Verse 20 - "Righteousness" - KENOOTHKHON - meaning goodness, uprightness, devoutness, genuine piety based on the TORAH (God's law). The disciples are taught to practice the inner meaning as well as the outward observance of Torah.

Verse 21 - "You have heard" - "You have received a tradition." This phrase is often used in reference to an oral tradition and may mean that Israel has reduced TORAH to the level of oral tradition rather than the Word of God.

Verse 22 - "Raca" and "Thou fool" - RACA (literally, "you are spit" or "to spit") and LILLA (literally, "a nurse maid" which is a way of calling a man effeminate in the sense of being like a woman or doing womanly things). These are words of extreme contempt in the Middle Eastern culture. It also implied great stupidity and is an extremely offensive remark. Obviously, both Greek and English translators had extreme difficulty translating these phrases because they have little or no meaning in the "more refined" Western world - especially in the contemporary world of "Mr. Mom."

Verse 22 - "Hell fire" - L' GEHENNA D' NOORA - An Aramaic

phrase metaphorically meaning mental suffering, torment, anguish, deep regret, or destruction. It is derived from the Valley of Hinnom, southwest of the city of Jerusalem. Because of the idol worship and the atrocities of human sacrifices made there during the wicked reign of Ahaz, it became a Hebrew synonym for hell. During the New Testament period it was a garbage pit used to burn rubbish and the bodies of plague victims. Metaphorically and literally, it was the "Lake of Fire." See Jeremiah 19:2 and II Chronicles 28. Jesus repeatedly used the expression in Matthew 5:22, 29-30.

Verse 25 - "prison" - Literally, "house of captives" (BEIT ASIRA).

Verses 28-30 - "Looking with lustful desire," "an evil eye," and "an offensive hand"
- These are expressions of sinfulness. The lustful and evil eye is a symbol of inner envy, stinginess, lust, and evil desire. The hand is the symbol of work and action. All of these three verses are admonitions to control evil desires and stop sinning. Verses 29 and 30 both begin with Aramaic idioms meaning to stop sinning i.e. stop evil desire (the eye) and stop evil action (the hand). They are not to be taken literally in the sense of dismemberment. Jesus' counsel is to cut out the "eye" of envy, lust, greed, and evil desire and to cut off the sinful actions because it is better to give up these things than to acquire a lifestyle that will ultimately destroy one's whole life. They mean to stop habits that lead to destruction.

Verses 31, 32 - "Put away . . . divorced" - Divorces among Semitic Christians are more rare than in the West because of the sacredness of the marriage covenant. Unfortunately, women were treated as property at the time of Christ's ministry on earth. Divorce and remarriage became a very complex issue. The Rabbi's debated the issue over the centuries and Christians still continue the debate today. Traditional Judaism interpreted the commandment against adultery in a manner that adultery could be committed only by a married woman. The husband was free to do as he wished with any woman unless it was specifically prohibited in the Torah. This led to the severe mistreatment of women and was complicated further when the law was interpreted to allow a husband to divorce his wife for any reason. The Aramaic Peshitta text uses two different words, D'SHARAY - to legally divorce, and SHWIQTA - to be separated. Here Jesus is teaching that a husband who sends his wife away will cause her to commit adultery unless she has done so already. Further, he is teaching that no man should take advantage of or attempt to marry a woman who has been put away without legal divorce. Jesus affirmed and strengthened the TORAH by allowing the provision for divorce and remarriage on the grounds of adultery but He condemned the arbitrary abandonment of wives which would have caused them to commit adultery.

Verse 33 – See Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:3; Deuteronomy 23:22.

Verse 34 - "swear" – This refers to Near Eastern expressions such as "Let God be my witness to the truth of my words" in vain attempts to add authority to one's words. It also implied trivializing oaths in everyday speech.

Verse 35 – See Isaiah 66:1; Psalm 48:2.

Verse 38 - See Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21.

Verse 39 - "Turn the other cheek" - This is an Aramaic idiom meaning to not argue or escalate the problem, to avoid fighting, and to be humble (Compare with Proverbs 15:1). This is not a prohibition against self-defense but rather encouragement to replace strife and vengeance with peace and harmony. The word BEESHA means a doer of wrong, a troublemaker. The word comes from the root BISH meaning to displease, to harm, to be evil, to seem bad, to err, to be worse, to afflict, to be mistaken, to be unripe, to be unfortunate. Nuances include bad, ugly, error, cruel, mistake, malignant, rotten, unripe, immature, unfortunate, unlucky, wicked, wrong, diseased, incorrect, the evil one (a satan, one who misleads), culprit, deceiver, troublemaker, etc. EX. – unripe (evil) figs in Jeremiah 24:1-2 and bad trees in Matthew 7:17.

Verses 40, 41 - "Give him also your cloak . . . go with him two" - Admonitions that it is better to lose something insignificant and have peace than to resist and lose something of greater value.

Verse 43 - "Neighbor" - QAREEWA - A kinsman, relative, neighbor. See Leviticus 19:18.

Verse 44 - "Love" - AHIW - imperative form of - HOOBA - from the root, HAV having wide shades of meaning: to warm, to kindle, to set on fire, white hot (passion). Here it means to warm in a kindly and amicable manner ("to be well-disposed toward a friend") and not mere sentimentality or passionate ardent affection or devotion (compare with Proverbs 25:21). This attitude turns an enemy into a friend through genuine love and concern resulting in peace and reconciliation.

Verse 44 - "Cursing" - Cursing means to pronounce curses by invoking evil, misfortune, or calamities on someone. This Eastern mannerism implies that one's enemies are also God's enemies (compare with Psalm 109:5-20). This is a perverted application of the blood covenant. Jesus encouraged His disciples to bless those who cursed them.

Verse 45 - An ancient belief that has prevailed for millennia is that God blesses only the just and that the righteous prosper but the wicked do not. Jesus taught that His Father Blesses the good and the evil, the unjust as well as the just. The fact that God desires mercy and compassion above all religious sacrifices and ordinances is central to Jesus' teaching. Yahweh is compassionate and calls upon His children to act justly with compassion and humility (Micah 6:8).

Verse 47 - "greet" – Literally, "ask peace" (ASHAL SHLAMA).

Verse 48 - "Perfect" - GMEERA - This word means complete, whole, mature, perfect, comprehensive, all-inclusive, or thorough. Here, it refers to verse 45 meaning all inclusive, i.e. accept and treat everyone with justice, compassion, and humility.

III. NOTES ON MATTHEW CHAPTER SIX -Beyond the Beatitudes - An Ancient Aramaic Perspective

In previous studies I have commented in depth on the Beatitudes and Chapter 5 of the Gospel of Matthew. The purpose of this brief paper is to provide commentary from an Aramaic perspective on Matthew, Chapter Six from the Peshitta text (ancient Syriac).

Verse 1 - "acts of righteousness" - ZEDQUATHA - refers to acts of goodness involving financial giving (charity). Literally, a right, law, rule; a just or righteous act.

Verse 2 - "trumpet(s)" - horn or animal horn - QUARNA - The horn or shofar was used as an offering container. Verse 17 - "fulfill" - to put into action or practice.

Verse 2 - "hypocrites" - NASBAY BAHPAY - an actor, or literally, a receiver or taker of faces.

Verse 5 - "standing in the synagogues and on the street corners" - Standing was the required position when reciting the AMIDAH prayer (literally, "the prayer recited while standing"). Although communal prayer was done in the synagogues, prayers were recited out in the open on fast days and wherever one happened to be when the time of prayer came.

Verse 6 - "your room" - TAWAHNAAH - meaning a room without windows, a closet, or a storeroom, inner chamber, or metaphorically, "one's heart."

Verse 9 - "prayer" - SLOTHA - The Aramaic word for prayer SLOTHA has special significance. It is derived from the ancient root word - SLA, meaning to incline, to turn towards, to lay a snare, or (literally) "to set a trap." The meaning is to set your mind as a trap to capture the thoughts of God as you patiently wait on Him. This is a mind set of total attentiveness and sensitivity while one's mind is calm and thoughts are still. No attempt is made in this state of mind to project anything outwardly. It is being "tuned-in" to God and His thoughts rather than our own. The "Lord's Prayer" is a perfect example of this concept. It is short, simple, and clear yet it is a dynamic and powerful petition to Almighty God. It provides the whole of Jesus' teaching in condensed form. It came from the heart of Jesus Christ with a deep inner understanding of God as the Father who infinitely loves and cares for His children. It surpasses religious formulas and theologies and is based on an understanding of both the human and divine natures.

From the words, "Our Father who is in heaven" -AWOON DWASHMAYA - we gain the insight that our God is also our Father who is present everywhere and is approachable by us as His sons. The practical application of this insight is demonstrated when we approach God as our "Dad" because we are His beloved children. The basic word - ABBA -is the Aramaic word for personal father when pronounced with the *b* sound as in ABBA and spiritual father when pronounced with a *w* sound as in AWOON (which with

the } - n - NOON - ending means "Our Father"). The letters used to form this word are the first two letters of the Aramaic alphabet and are symbolic of God and Family. This denotes creative power and fruitfulness. The first letter -) - ALAP - represents God and has the numeric value of One (1) as in one God. The second letter - b - BETH - represents the family and has the numeric value of two as in husband and wife forming a home or family. The word for "heaven" - SHMAYA - or universe comes from the root - SHM - from which is also derived the word *SHEM* which means light, sound, vibration, name, word, hear, ask, sky, universe, or heaven. It also is the name of the father of the line of the Semitic people. This root word is combined with the abbreviated personal name for God - YAH. Thus, heaven means "Name of God" or figuratively that the Universe operates "in God's Name," i.e. in harmony with His will and control.

From the words, "*Holy is Your name*" or "*(Let) Your name be holy*" -NITKADASH SHMAKH, we learn that God's name is set aside for a specific purpose (dedicated, distinct, and separate). We apply this insight when we keep our Father's name holy and speak it only in goodness and truth. In this second phrase of the Lord's Prayer, the root *SHM* appears in a very specific form. In the first phrase this root was used to denote the entire universe as a part of the underlying life and unity in which everything derives being. Here we affirm the sacredness, holiness, separateness, "otherness" of God's name and the blessed privilege that we have in invoking it. In Aramaic and Hebrew holiness is derived from setting something or someone apart in separation for a specific purpose. The root word images a beautiful picture of one bending over a special place where seeds are sown symbolizing devotion and perseverance. This also denotes letting go and releasing our concerns in faith while listening to the still, small voice inside" while intimately communing with God from our heart - entering into one's prayer closet (Matthew 6:6).

Verse 10 - From the words, "*(Let) Your Kingdom Come*" - TAYTHEY MALCOOTHAKH, we learn that God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that rules from within us when God's counsel guides and directs us. We apply this by letting ourselves open fully to God's counsel and when we live within His wisdom. *TAYTHEY* means "let come" in the image of mutual desire. *MALCOOTHAKH* refers to leadership and ruling principles or royal counsel that guide our lives. This phrase is a request for God's kingdom to begin within us as we clarify our personal and collective desires and ideas to be in alignment with our Father - in unity, love, and creativity.

From the phrase, "*(Let) Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*" or ". . . throughout the Universe." - NEHWEH SEVIANAKH AICANNA DWASHMAYA OP BARAH, we receive insight that the will (desire, delight, wish, pleasure) of God is His good desire for His children and is expressed through balance, peace, and harmony. The desire that is meant by *SEVIANAKH* is the "heart's desire" that is a goal or purpose that is developed beyond the intellectual or ideal stage. It has become assimilated so much as part of oneself that there is no longer any need to consciously think about it. One's entire being moves toward it with certainty of fulfillment. *AICANNA* implies that a sense of determination with desire will ensure consistency and stability. Our prayer is for God's heart-desire to be done consistently in our lives. We apply this insight by entering into

God's will and harmony. *ARAH* means "earth" carrying the meaning of the natural blending of mass and form with movement and power in all nature.

Verse 11 - "Provide us bread from day to day" - HAVLAN LAKHMA DSONKANAN YOMANA, reveals insight that our Father provides what we need from day to day in material sustenance, understanding, and truth. The practical application is the recognition that God has already provided for all of our needs. HAVLAN means "give," "humanly generate," or to "produce with life." The word translated "bread" (*LAKHMA*), also means "understanding" or food for all forms of growth and for basic life in general. It is derived from the root word, *HMA* which denotes vigor, warmth, passion, possibility, and the means of generative power. It is related to the word HOKHMA which is used in the book of Proverbs to mean "Holy Wisdom." *SONKANAN* is a word that refers to needs which may also mean "a nest" or "a circle of possession." This part of the prayer originates from the earth upward to the Father, Creator, and King of the Universe addressed at the beginning of the prayer. It reminds us that we are made from the earth and are nourished by it and within it.

Verse 12 - From the words, "Forgive us our offenses just as we forgive those who offend us" - WASHBOKLAN HKOBEN: AICANNA DOP KHNAN SHBAKN LKHAYAVEN, we learn that we will be freed (released, loosened) from our offenses as we also free our offenders and forgive them. The roots of the word *WASHBOKLAN* could be translated "forgive," "reestablish ties to," "humbly embrace," or "return/restore to original state." The word *HKOBEN* refers to mistakes, wrongs, errors, liabilities, "secret debts," "sins of the past" (chiefly of omission), or "any inner element that effects the mind and life in a negative way." The word *AICANNA* ("just as") reminds us that forgiving and releasing must be done consistently and regularly to restore relationships and remain whole. From a practical standpoint, forgiveness restores broken relationships, revitalizes our souls, and releases inner bondages and tensions.

Verse 13 - The words, "And do not let us enter into temptation but set us free from evil." - OOLA TALAN LNISUNA, ELLA PAHSSAN MIN BISHA, indicate that God will prevent us from entering into temptation, trials, and the seduction of materialism while delivering us (separating us, parting us, setting us free from) evil (error or mistakes or the false captivation of the temptation - see Jesus' instructions to His disciples in Luke 22:40). We are warned to be alert and to not be forgetful, losing ourselves in appearances and failing to look deeply enough into situations to avoid error. This teaches us that, in a practical way, we can avoid being ensnared by materialism and also avoid damaging and painful mistakes and serious errors or deep trouble. These two phrases balance each other reminding us that our ideals of holiness, peace, and harmony must be balanced by alert attention to our situations in the present.

The word "*power*" - HYLAH - implies power in the sense of energy, force, might, and strength. This includes the ability to perform miracles and work wonders. The expression translated "*glory*" - TISHBOKHTA - means glory, song, and praise as a conclusion to this model prayer. Traditionally, this section of Holy Scripture is used as a liturgical prayer and closed with the word "*Amen*" - AMANE - Although this word is

not actually found in the text itself, it is added as a formal ending of this model prayer to indicate that the prayer is sealed in faith, trust, and in truth. Note that *AMEN* is similar to the word for *faith* -)twnmyh - HAYMANOOTHА - for it forms the root of that word. *HAYMAN -OOTHА* also means firmness, truth, faithfulness, as well as *religious* creed, faith, or *specific* doctrinal beliefs and convictions.

Verse 21 - "offenses" – SAKHWATHА – This word means folly, offence, mistake, and evil doing.

Verse 20 - "Treasures in heaven" – Good deeds which never perish.

Verse 21 - "There is your heart" – Buried treasure produces worry that someone may find it and steal or claim it. Treasure in the heart is secure as one puts aside worry about material things.

Verse 22 - "simple" or "single" - PESHITTA - This word means simple, basic, pure, single, straightforward, literal, guileless, righteous, original, normal. It is the name of the Aramaic version of the Holy Scriptures. This version is vitally important because it is written in the language of Christ and the Apostles and has been continuously used by Christians in the Middle East since the earliest times in Christian history. The word is here used in the text to indicate a person who is pure and single in purpose and has no ulterior motives or evil intentions.

Verse 25 - "soul" or "being" - NOWSHA - This word is often translated soul. Since the word soul has many connotations coming from Greek philosophy a better and purer Semitic translation (see note on PESHITTA above) would be the word being, life, or *self*. These words are commonly used by Jewish and Christian scholars because they more accurately portray the original meaning in the text.

FOCAL POINT: FORGIVENESS

The Aramaic word, SWBAQ, means to cancel or let go. On the following two pages there is a forgiveness worksheet to be used repeatedly to forgive and let go of any fear or hostility toward anyone who has ever hurt offended us or our loved ones. It may be helpful to supplement it with small pieces of paper and literally drop (let go) of images drawn relative to each situation into a trash can . . . and let them stay there – or burn them. Forgetting is not the same as forgiveness. The memories may return but let the fear or hostility go. Learn from the memories. Reconciliation is not the same as forgiveness. Reconcile if you can but regardless of the quality of the relationship, let the fear and hostility go. Don't excuse or marginalize the wrong itself. You don't need to make excuses for the offender to forgive. Cancel your original expectation and accept the reality of the situation. Let the garbage go. Be free! For – give!

FORGIVENESS WORKSHEET
Canceling (Aramaic - *Shwbak*) Active Fear or Hostility
With Love (Aramaic – *Hooba* and *Rakhma*)

Steps to Forgiveness from a New Covenant (Aramaic) Perspective

1. I locate the unsatisfied “way I wanted it” just before my fear or hostility was triggered into activity. I acknowledge my reality is formed from my own thoughts and words. My pain is the result of desiring for myself alone rather than being willing to forgive and share my life with others. I don’t trivialize or condone sin/wrong behavior by canceling my expectations.
 2. I cancel my unsatisfied “way I wanted it” to temporarily end the conflict between the desired reality and the perceived reality, which triggered my fear or hostility into activity.
 3. I establish *Hooba* (the mind-set of Unconditional and Passionately Committed Love) so that I will see something loved in the reality which triggered my upset feelings.
 4. I establish *Rakhma* (the activated Compassionate and Merciful Love) over my intentions and goals so that all fear and hostility systems are shut down and all of my active intentions and goals for the person or situation which triggered my upset are loving in nature.
 5. I check the restoration of love by identifying a loving intention or goal for what triggered my upset feelings.
 6. I affirm a heart’s desire of restoration and reconciliation! I consciously affirm and work out an action plan toward my *goals* and pray (Aramaic – *Slothā*) for my *desires* related to this situation.
-

Complete the Forgiveness Exercise below focusing on what upset you and triggered hostility or fear into activity in your mind. Begin with drawing your feelings, then go on to A, B, etc.

BEFORE FORGIVING, DRAW YOUR FEELINGS

- A. The trigger for my upset was: _____

- B. This is the way I saw it just after my upset was triggered: _____

C. My error (sin – *Huhta*) was: FEAR HOSTILITY (Circle your error)

D. This is the way I wanted it to be just before I became upset: _____

E. I now *SHWBAK* (cancel and let go of) the way I wanted it (D) and set Hooba love for what triggered my upset (A). YES! _____ (Check it affirming your decision and proceed)

F. Having restored *HOOPA* love, I now see what is good or true in what triggered my upset. (If you see nothing good or true, forgive again until you do see something good or true.) This is what I now see that is good or true: _____

G. I now restore *RAKHMA* love to activity in my mind so that my intentions and goals are loving.
 YES! _____ (SELF TEST)

With both loves in place, I have a loving intention/goal for what triggered my upset.

 YES! _____ (B – R – E – A – T – H – E)

H. To my own decision I add empowerment through the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the Name Blood of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. I will honor my commitment and avoid or overcome the temptation to do otherwise.

This is my loving intention/goal for what triggered my upset: _____

I. I affirm that my heart's desire is restoration and reconciliation and prayerfully trust the outcomes to my Heavenly Father - The LORD God!

AFTER FORGIVING, DRAW YOUR FEELINGS

Practice forgiveness using this sheet as often as necessary (7x7x7 . . . into infinity)!

III. NOTES ON MATTHEW CHAPTER SEVEN

- Solid Foundation – Solid Teachings from an Ancient Aramaic Perspective

Verse 1 and 2 - "judging" and "measuring" - Don't judge the habits, weaknesses, and actions of others. Use a standard measure when evaluating. Use a bountiful measure.

Verse 2 - "judge" and "measure" - Repeated forms of judge and measure.

Verse 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 - Repeated questions to ponder.

Verse 3 - "faultfinding" - Fix your own faults rather than finding fault with others.

Verse 6 - "holy to dogs" and "pearls to pigs" - Proverb or maxim with A – B – B – A chiasmatic structure. Dogs and pigs are unclean and despised in the Near East. Avoid discussing theology and philosophy – "precious wisdom or teaching" - with people who are not capable of understanding. The Aramaic word "throw" – TARMON – is similar to the word TRAA which means to instruct, guide, and teach.

Verse 7 - "Ask . . . seek . . . knock" and "given . . . find . . . opened" - Climatic progression of actions. The Aramaic word SHALOW (ask) and the Hebrew word SHA'AL is an expression for prayer.

Verse 9 - "flat loaf of bread" and "stone" - In the culture a flat loaf of bread looks very similar to a stone. Parents need to be careful in feeding their children.

Verse 10 - "serpent" - Snakes are drawn into the house when they seek food and comfort. A father must be careful what he gives his children. It is possible to reach for food and find a serpent.

*Verse 11 - "evil" - The Aramaic word BEESHA has many meanings including *evil, bad, error, rotten, cruel, unreal, imperfect, immature, misfortune, and envy*. Here it means *imperfect* or *immature*.*

Verse 12 - "The Golden Rule" - This is the core of the law and the teaching of the prophets. Laws will be unnecessary when this basic law is practiced.

Verse 13 - "bread" and "road" - Wordplay in Aramaic: bread – AWRAYKHA and road – AWURKHA

*Verse 14 - "wide" and "narrow" – Figure of speech (antithetical parallelism). *Wide and narrow, broad and straight. Straight* can be translated "constricted, enclosed." The Aramaic indicates a "door" and not a "gate." The doors were very narrow and low causing it to be necessary to bend over to pass through just as we must bend to*

enter God's kingdom. Two roads are given throughout the Holy Scripture, one leading to life and the other to death and destruction.

Verse 15 - In the culture wearing a sheepskin garment was the distinctive outward mark of a prophet. See Zech. 13:4; II Kings 1:8. The word for prophet is NABIA which comes from the root, NBA, meaning "to bubble up, pour forth, spring forth with a flow of words under excitement of inspiration, to foretell, to announce the news."

Verse 16 - "*by their fruit*" – meaning "*by the fruit of their deeds*" - see James 3:13.

Verse 18 – "*healthy*" and "*diseased*" - Literally good and bad. A - B - B - A structure.

Verse 21 - "*I do not know you*" - The ancient priests and teachers learned magic, soothsaying, and divination. False wonder workers confused the people. Jesus warned against those who would use His name but not represent his true teachings or practices. Jesus stresses "works" in the form of acts of justice, mercy, love, and not just words.

Verse 22- "*in your name*" – An Aramaic expression meaning "to be authorized."

Verses 24-29 - "*rock*" - The work of Christ must be built on a solid foundation of truth (Jesus' teaching). The teachings in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 go back to the essential and original teachings of Jesus Christ.