

Our Father, Who Art in the Heavens
Michael Brewer

To whom am I speaking when I say, “Our father, who art in the heavens”? Many of us will have spoken these words often without spending much thought on whom we have been addressing. Perhaps a visual image may pass quickly by, such as Michelangelo’s representation of the Father God on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But again the image is not often followed through to its consequences.

The first aspect of this question that must be considered is the word “Our”. Whom do I include when I say “*Our* father”? Again, we face a question that we do not often ask. What happens if I simply say the words without thinking on whose behalf I am saying them?

There are several possible answers to this question, and each of them may be the correct one at different times. The first is that I may be speaking for myself only. If this is true, then I can only reach that spiritual being who is specifically related to me. In traditional nomenclature, this is my angel, or, which comes to the same thing with slightly different emphasis, my guardian angel. It is a good thing to meet and address one’s guardian angel, but in a prayer with the scope of the Lord’s Prayer there is a great risk to us if we cannot reach further than to our angel. At this level we remain isolated in our relationship with the spiritual world and may develop a self-centered spiritual life. To be thus cut off would lead us to become less than human beings. We can therefore recognize the great wisdom in the fact that the Lord’s Prayer begins with the words “*Our* father”, and not “*My* father”. At least to a large extent we are protected from the first danger.

The second possibility is that I include into the word “Our” not just myself but all of the people with whom I associate myself. How far I reach depends on how large I can make the circle. It could be as narrow as my family, or it could reach out to include all the people with whom I regularly associate, be it in my place of work, my home town, or my local church. It can extend to people I have never met, most commonly to people who share my religion or nationality. Out of such an attitude I will be addressing that spiritual being who stands in relationship to the group of people whom I have included in the circle with me. These spiritual beings are the archangels, who according to their stature take responsibility for smaller or larger groups of people. Here also there is a risk. I cannot fall into the egotism of “*My* father”, but there is the very real danger of sectarianism or nationalism. It can be even more significant whom I do not include into “Our” as whom I do include. And from such an exclusion it is only a short step into a war where both sides use the prayer against each other.

The third possibility is that I include all of humanity on earth as I say “Our father”. Now I am addressing the spiritual being who is responsible for the guidance of humanity in the present time. This is the being we know by the name of Michael, one of the time spirits or archai. When we reach this level we can come into a relationship with the spiritual world which is much less likely to cause harm in the world. There does remain a small risk that we will not be able to find a right relationship to what comes before or after us.

This is overcome in the next possibility, which is to include into one’s circle also those human beings who are in the spiritual world between death and a new birth. Now our prayer connects us beyond the spiritual beings of the third hierarchy to those of the second hierarchy, to begin with, with the exusiai or elohim. And a further step, including not only human beings but all of the created world when we say “Our father”, brings our prayer to the first hierarchy, to the thrones, cherubim and seraphim.

The image then is this: I speak the words “Our father who art in the heavens”. I speak from a point which I must imagine as the center of the world, but I include into the word “our” all of creation. I feel my kinship with all creation — we have the same father; we have come from the same creator. Through having thus overcome all egotism I can address the place where I may at last find my true I.