

*The Lord's Prayer and the Human Form*  
*Michael Brewer*

In his lectures on the structure of the Lord's Prayer Rudolf Steiner spoke above all about the nature of petitional prayers, and pointed out that the archetypal prayer consist of Christ's words "not my will but thy will be done." As these were introductory lectures, he recapitulated the description of the human being from the point of view of Anthroposophy: the physical body, the etheric or life body, the astral or soul body, and the ego; and the higher aspects of the human being which result from his work on the lower members: the spirit-self as transformed astral body, the life-spirit as transformed etheric body, and the spirit-man as transformed physical body. He then showed how the sentences of the Lord's Prayer each express the needs of one member of the human being:

- "Give us this day our daily bread" addresses the needs of the physical body;
- "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" addresses the needs of the etheric body;
- "Lead us not into temptation" addresses the needs of the astral body;
- "Deliver us from the evil" addresses the needs of the ego;
- The earlier three sentences "Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; the will be done" address the needs of those parts of the human being which will come to full expression in the future, and which Rudolf Steiner called the spirit-self, the life spirit, and the spirit-man.

We may also find insight into another aspect of the human being through the Lord's Prayer, and this is the mystery of the human form. Let us observe how the archetype of the human form comes to expression through the Lord's Prayer.

We begin with the words "Our father, who art in the heavens", and consider what form arises from these words. If we focus on that our father is in the heavens, we can imagine to begin with the sky arching over us. To this picture we can then add the sun by day, or imagine the stars shining at night. The overall shape is that of a dome filled with light. And this is an image which corresponds to the shape of the human head, which is also a dome. Rudolf Steiner has again and again pointed out how the head is formed as an image of the heavens. And we begin our embryological development as a sphere—we are "all head"; we are a copy of the universe. In this way we can see the human form begin to arise when we contemplate the opening of the Lord's Prayer.

Now we continue with the words, "hallowed be thy name." What, as Shakespeare asked, is in a name? I know that for me the first image that arises when I hear the name of a friend is the friend's face. I do not think of the friend's head—that is part of the friend's universal humanity. Through the form of the face I recognize my friend as an individual, as unlike any other. With the words "hallowed be thy name" we contemplate the countenance of the universal, archetypal human being, whose image we carry in ourselves. To look upon this image has not always been possible. When Moses asked to look on God's countenance, he was told, "No man can look upon my countenance and live." We can see this aspect of our father represented in the sun, which will make us blind if we look at it too long.

With the words, "Thy kingdom come", we approach the realm of the human rhythmic system, and to some extent, the metabolic system. Here is a kingdom with its provinces and its governing laws. The laws are ones that we fortunately do not have to administer consciously; when our consciousness does reach into this kingdom, it is usually because something is not quite right in it. Let us imagine how the harmony of our Father's kingdom is reflected in the orderly rhythmic movements of the planets. In a similar way our body's organs work in a harmonious relationship with each other, which can largely be expressed through laws of rhythm. As long as we live according to harmonious rhythms of day, week, month, and year, we can expect to live in good health. Illness is often the result of living "out of rhythm."

The words "Thy will be done" bring the form that we have been developing to a kind of culmination. In order that will can become deed, the human being needs limbs. By contrast to the round form of the head, the limbs radiate out into the world; and this is also the basis of the phenomenon of an act of will, which originates in a being and sends its effects outward. When we turn to the heavens, we can experience the radiating warmth and light of the sun, but we can also experience the forces that, radiating from the

moon bring about the tides. Closer to us but also bearing the radiating quality of will, are the phenomena of the weather: of wind, rain, and lightning.

Immediately following the sentence “Thy will be done” come the words “as above in the heavens, so also on the earth.” Most often they are simply taken as a continuation of the particular sentence; the King James translation renders the sentence: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In fact, the words can be appended to each of the sentences that we have considered so far. They form the basis for the prayer, which looks not for personal release from earth into heaven, but for the incarnating of heaven into the earth. The words relate to our addressing our Father, to his hallowed name, and to his approaching kingdom, as well as to his will, though we may feel them closest to our call upon the will. With the words “Thy will be done” we bring the archetypal human form to completion: with the words “as above in the heavens, so also on the earth” we begin the incarnation process.

As incarnated beings we come into a relationship with the world which we can recognize in a threefold form at the physical level. The relationship of which we are most conscious is through our senses. Through our senses we become conscious in the first place that we are in the world. But our senses to a large extent keep the world at a distance. We can be particularly aware of this in our sense of sight, which is the one that most characterizes our waking consciousness. When we have pondered our sense relation to the world, we may become aware of a more intimate relation to the world through our breathing. We do not notice the process so closely; except under extreme conditions we become conscious of breathing only by decision. And we do not notice the finer aspects of the exchange of air which is constantly going on when we inhale and exhale. Even more intimate but also less conscious is our third point of contact with the world: we take the world into ourselves and make it part of us through the process of digestion. Beyond the fact that we know that we need to eat, we are unaware of the processes through which matter in the world is transformed into matter in our body. But we can know that we interact with the world in three ways: we sense the world, we breathe the world, we digest the world.

It is the third of these interactions that is addressed in the words “Give us this day our daily bread.” When we repeat the words, we become more and more aware of how dependent we are on grace that we have what we need to eat. The acts of grace may be veiled from us when it becomes simply a routine of going to the store to buy what we need and like. It is clearer when we ourselves are the ones who toil in the fields to raise the food that we or other people will eat. Certainly the sweat of our brow is involved, but we are also completely dependent on factors beyond our control. Planting seeds is an act of faith—once the seeds are sown, they are at the mercy, not only of our faithful care for them, but also of all that may or may not come in the way of drought, flood, wind, frost, and all of the other caprices of the weather. We are truly dependent on the grace of God for our daily bread.

With the words “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” we may ponder the consequences of the fact that we breathe. First of all, we realize that we have no choice in the matter—we simply have to breathe. Second, there is no separation between the air that we breathe and the air that everyone else is breathing. Finally, each time we inhale we take oxygen out of the air, and each time we exhale we poison it somewhat by adding carbon dioxide to it. But so do all other human beings, and through this we are all constantly trespassing against each other. Normally we are not made aware of the fact that we are thus constantly in need of forgiveness and just as constantly called upon to forgive others. We also forget the divine forgiveness expressed through the plant world, which takes up the air we have poisoned and restores it to health.

The words “lead us not into temptation” can help us understand our relationship with the world of the senses. When Adam and Eve yielded to temptation, it is said, “and their eyes were opened.” Since that time our senses have again and again been the source of temptation. Every sense impression can lead our desires either towards or away from a right deed. The senses can lead us to an acceptance of the sense world as an end in itself; then we are being led into temptation, but by whom? Not by our Father, who is in the heavens. We may experience temptation in the sense world, but we may also experience in it the revelation of the divine. Then we accept the leadership of our Father who is in the heavens, and we are led away from temptation.

At last we reach the words “deliver us from the evil”, and we realize that we are related in a fourth way to the world around us. Not only do we digest, breathe and sense the world, but we also have a direct link to the world through our ego being. We act upon the world, we feel about the world, and we think the world.

In our thoughts, feelings, and deeds evil is present simply through the fact that we are on the earth. We can put our best effort into overcoming the evil, but ultimately we must acknowledge that we need help in the face of the evil which besets us. Our acceptance of the fact is the first step towards receiving and accepting the help that is available from the divine world.

Through the first part of the Lord's Prayer we have seen the image of the archetypal human being arise before us. Through the second part we have followed the human being into incarnation on the earth. We may read in *Genesis* how God said: "Let us make man in our image." As human beings we are then images of the divine archetype, which can arise for us. If we imagine the human being who in incarnation receives daily bread as a gift from God, who has perfected the capacity for offering and receiving forgiveness, who sees in the sense world the revelation of God, and who accepts the help of God against the power of evil in thinking, feeling and will, then we have before us the essence of what Paul expressed in the words "not I but Christ in me." The Lord's Prayer, if we take it up in earnestness, takes us on the way that will transform us into Christ-bearers.