

Dance Directions and Music to the Aramaic Prayer of Yeshua

by Neil Douglas-Klotz

This is an updated and corrected version from the 1989 edition. The additional articles in the previously-published booklet “Dancing with the Aramaic Jesus: The Lord’s Prayer” are included after the Dance Directions.

Much more scholarly background, literal renderings of Aramaic roots, extensive translation and individual movement contemplations (“body prayer”) for the Lord’s Prayer, Beatitudes and selected other sayings of Jesus are given in my book *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*, published by Harper SanFrancisco in 1990 as well as in my subsequent books (see www.abwoon.com and the bibliography at the end of this paper).

Instead of printing booklets of movements and music, this write-up is provided as “creative shareware” to those working in community for healing, reconciliation and peace. If you find this work of benefit, please send a donation via the PayPal link at <http://www.abwoon.com/articles.html> or directly to payment@eial.org

May all we do return to praise the One!

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Leading the Dances

Teaching procedure: If only 5-20 minutes are available, it is best to simply lead the Dance for the first line, with or without counterpoint. This gives a very powerful experience of the prayer and is a manageable amount for most people to experience. One may end this line by chanting “Abwoon Abwoon Abwoon Hayy (O Life!). In order to dance the first half of the prayer or the whole prayer, one should really set aside at least an hour and a half. A whole evening allows the group time also to integrate the experience, which is essential. Do not try to do more than you have time for or rush this practice.

I usually begin with a short sensory practice, having people feel their own heart-beat, either standing, lying or walking and connect with both the pulse of the group and their own sense of “what moves them.” Then I talk for about five minutes on the first four lines, asking participants to say the phrases with me and giving a few alternate meanings of the roots (as below). How much I say varies according to the group; the best circumstance is one where everyone knows the prayer and we can proceed immediately to sharing another experience of it.

I usually mention that when Jesus was asked how to pray, he responded “beshemi,” which has usually be translated “in my name.” However, the phrase more accurately means “with my method of experiencing” or “with my light, sound, vibration or atmosphere.” So any translation is only an approximation and in this case a way to release preconceptions. The experience of the participant reveals the individual “meaning.”

Then I teach the music to the fourth line and allow people to feel the effects of this line as they learn and sing it together. Since this is the longest line of the first part, this method saves teaching it later once the dance has begun. The line also seems to prepare people for the rest [in the same way it prepared me—see the “history” at the end of this document].

At this point, we may begin with the first line, or I may teach the counterpoint that alternates with the first line. Since the movements to the first line are easy, we can begin immediately with any changes called out by the leader.

After that the movements for lines 2 and 3 are usually shown together. They are only shown briefly, since by that time people have already gone into an expanded state and don’t need to be “overtaught.” No instruction is needed for line 4, since the movements can be picked up by following the leader. Part of what I needed to learn to teach this was that the prayer did indeed have its own wisdom and that the more people experienced it, the less verbal direction was needed. We began dancing the prayer in 1982. By the first revision of this description (1989), I had also found it possible to lead lines 2 and 3 without previous verbal direction, simply by showing each step of the movement clearly while people are breathing the phrase or singing softly. At this point (2008), many people know the prayer and there are usually some in every group. Regardless of whether there are not, the prayer as a chanted and danced spiritual practice seems to be seeded in the unseen, the heavens themselves as it were, and it is much easier for even beginners to learn it.

Mostly participants need to be advised to keep their eyes open and their connection with the person on either side flexible and relaxed. This is not a

form of “trance-dancing,” where the surroundings are blocked out.

Part I:

Al-la-ha Al--lah El-- o--- him Al- lah--- Al-la-ha Al- lah El- o--him Al--lah

Al-la-ha Al--lah El-- o---him Al- lah--- Al-la-ha Al-lah El- o--himAl--lah

1. Abwoon d'bashmaya:

Movements: Holding hands in circle:

A. Abwoon: Bending from mid-chest more than the neck, head goes toward heart, as though blowing “bwoon” into it.

B. d'ba...: Head/upper body comes up.

C. shmaya: Head/upper body circles to the right, describing a crescent-shaped arc (“like a cup to be filled”), at the same time side-stepping to the right.

On the repeat of the phrase, one circles left and steps left instead. As the leader feels, at some point the circle continues only to the right, usually after people have become fluid in the movement.

1. (Counterpart for first line:) Allaha Allah Elohim Elat: This will have been taught earlier. It uses the names of God in Aramaic (Allaha), Arabic (Allah), Hebrew (Elohim) and Old Canaanite (Elat) together as a concentration on peace in the Mideast. These sacred names of native Islam, Christianity, Judaism and ancient Canaanite and Babylonian tradition all stem from the same root, EL or AL, meaning “the One” or “Thatness,” thereby pointing to the underlying divine unity of all creation as well as the ineffable mystery of its Source.

The leader may begin by singing this in the center, then have the circle join with him/her singing the “Abwoon...”. Or alternating men and women or other variations which allow the energy to build and be felt in various ways: slow-fast, loud-soft. One must become adept at feeling and noticing the inner expression of body prayer potential in the group. For instance if the group seems sluggish, it might be good to go even slower, then alternate by going faster. At some point the phrase itself takes over; then the leader should know when to stop making interventions and “let God do it.”

There are many options in this part. There may be a period of breathing the phrase followed by free chanting: each dancer could feel a sacred name in

the heart and chant it into the center as a prayer for peace. Or at the end of the first line, all may come back to “Abwoon...” and slow down before coming to silence.

Before ending, an optional movement is: participants turn individually once while moving to the right (on -shmaya), then join hands together for first part of phrase as usual.



2. Netqaddash shmakh: Same root in shmakh as in d'bashmaya: let the light/sound be experienced in my own “holy of holies,” that is, the part of oneself which is at home, at peace and which cannot be violated. This is often associated with the heart center.

Movements-- First phase:

1. Netqaddash: Holding hands in circle, step to the right as head and upper body turns to right. Let the heart lead and the head follow in this “letting go.”
2. shmakh: Left foot closes to meet right, as head/upper body turn left.

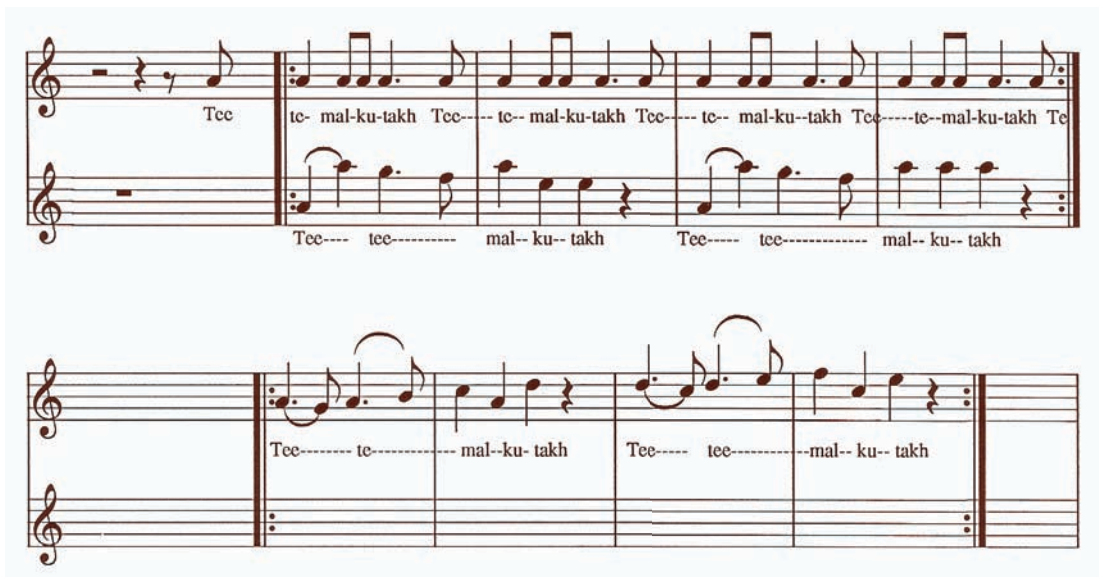
Second phase:

1. Netqa....: As though leading from the heart, upper body describes first part of what can best be called an “infinity loop”: as first the right (on Net) then the left foot (on ka-) makes a small step to the right.
2. ...dash shmakh. The loop is closed and small steps are taken back left with the left foot on (dash-), with the right on (-makh).

Third phase:

1. Netqaddash: From the waist upper body makes a gentle crescent from the heart to the right. Left foot raises slightly from the heel.
2. shmakh: Same as above but back to the left, with right heel raising.

As noted above, the three phases have three different melodies. The progression usually goes as follows (although there have been spontaneous variations): All begin together, then the men continue singing the melody to 1. while the women start the melody to 2. After awhile the men join the women and both do the movement for 2. together. Then the men move onto the melody to 3. After the women join them, both do the movement for 3. This “crossing-over” of parts can be done “follow the leader” style and need not be taught beforehand.



3. Teytey malkutakh: Let the ideals and counsel filled with light come to pass. If the previous line acted to purify the heart, this purifies the head. As the Buddhists believe, “I am what I think, having become what I thought.” It is in this sense that ideas are rulers of destiny (and the reason why malkutakh can be both “reigning idea” and “kingdom.”) The gender of the Aramaic word is actually feminine so if using this as a guide, then “queendom” would be more accurate. Please note that although the music above indicates the sound “teetee,” this is not an American double or long (ee), but a European long e (pronounced “teytey” or “taytay” for Americans).

First phase:

Same as first phase movement for Netqaddash shmakh, however moving feeling the head and heart together: teytey felt in the head, malkutakh in heart.

Second phase:

1. Teytey: Head to the right (on “Tey” [pronounced more like “Tey”] as circle steps right, then head to the left on “-tey” as left foot closes to right.
2. malkutakh: Head raised (on malku-) as another step right is taken, then coming down to heart (on “-takh”) as the left foot closes to right.

Third phase:

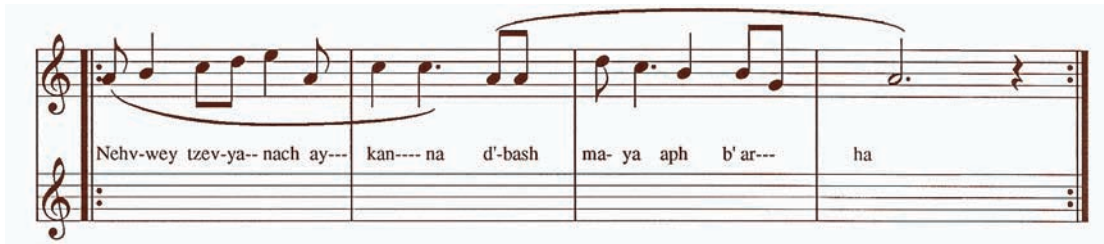
1. Tee:- Head to heart
2. -te: Head up
3. Malku:- right foot sidesteps right as upper body turns right
4. -takh: left foot raises and closes (a light stomp) as upper body faces center again.

On the repeat, the sidestep is to the left.

The three phases are similar to “Netqaddash...” and the melodies are similar: All together on 1, then men go ahead to the melody of 2. All join and do movement for 2. Then the women go onto 3 and afterwards the men join them, as all change to the movements to 3. together. It is best for the leader

to practice this, as the transition from 2. to 3. is rhythmically challenging.

Alternatively, one can do the original version of the end of this line: the pace usually quickens after all have joined on 2. and then all move to 3. together, slowing down very quickly. In both this line and the “Netqaddash...” the pace is usually determined by the music, but again the leader must be aware of variations depending on the group.



4. Nehvey sebyanach aykanna d'bashmaya aph b'ar'ah: In the most dense, in the most refined—it is all the same light and life (shem): let it be so (or “I affirm it in me”). Please note corrected pronunciation on “nehvey,” “sebyanach” and “b’ar’ah.”

Movements:

First phase: Releasing held hands, open and raise them receptively on “Nehvey sebyanach,” then bring hands in prayer position to heart on “aykanna” and finally come to kneeling and place forehead on earth for the remainder of the phrase, bringing “heaven” to “earth.” Or alternately, instead of a full prostration: bend toward the earth, placing hands on knees on “dashmaya aph bar’ar’ah.”

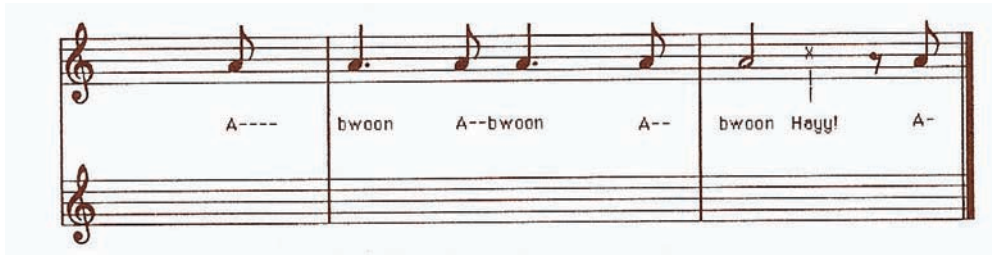
If doing full prostration: on subsequent repetitions, stay on knees, rise and open hands upward receptively on “Nehvey sebyanach aykanna,” then again allow head to rest on the ground on “d’bashmaya aph b’ar’ah.” The leader may simply demonstrate this movement without words or directions.

Second phase: Standing, all link elbows and sidestep to the right, holding the concentration of peace on earth. Tempo quickens.

Third phase: Releasing elbows, all step back and spin individually to the right (as though sending out what’s been created): first with arms upraised, then arms straight out, then arms down. The leader should keep watch and gauge the ability of the group to turn. Usually two repetitions with each arm position is enough, except for advanced Dance groups.

Fourth phase: All join hands again and slowly lean to the right, leading with the heart (on Nehvey-), then coming back to center bending knees (on sebyanach), leaning to left (on aykanna), back to center as above (on rest in the music), back to right on (d’bashmaya), back to center (on aph), back to left (on b’ar’ah), back to center (on rest).

If only the first half of the prayer is being done, there is an optional phase, which involves doing free movement with partners or alone, then coming back together.



The first half of the prayer closes with:

1. Abwoon: Holding hands in circle, sidestep to right, head/upper body turns right.
2. Abwoon: Head back to left, left foot closes to meet right.
3. Abwoon: Head up, right foot steps right.
4. Hayye (Life): Head to heart, left foot closes.

This is intoned together rhythmically on one note. The leader may at his/her discretion, invite free harmony. This section may also be extended at the leaders discretion and usually this ends up with arms around. With hands on back of hearts, all intone “Abwoon” three times together slowly, opening to the sound and feeling it going out (and in) to all beings.

Part II.

This concludes the first part of the prayer, which recapitulates the creation story of Genesis 1: the divine breath entering the darkness and coming fully into light and form.

Participants are invited simply to find a seat in the circle near where they are standing and breathe in the atmosphere that has been created jointly, at the same time feeling the support of the floor and earth underneath them.

During this phase of silence, participants naturally may go into a state of meditation. At some point, the leader may also read a saying from the Gospel of Thomas or other text which directs participants to look further into themselves. I have found the following two logia from Thomas helpful, but there are many others, including translations from the Beatitudes:

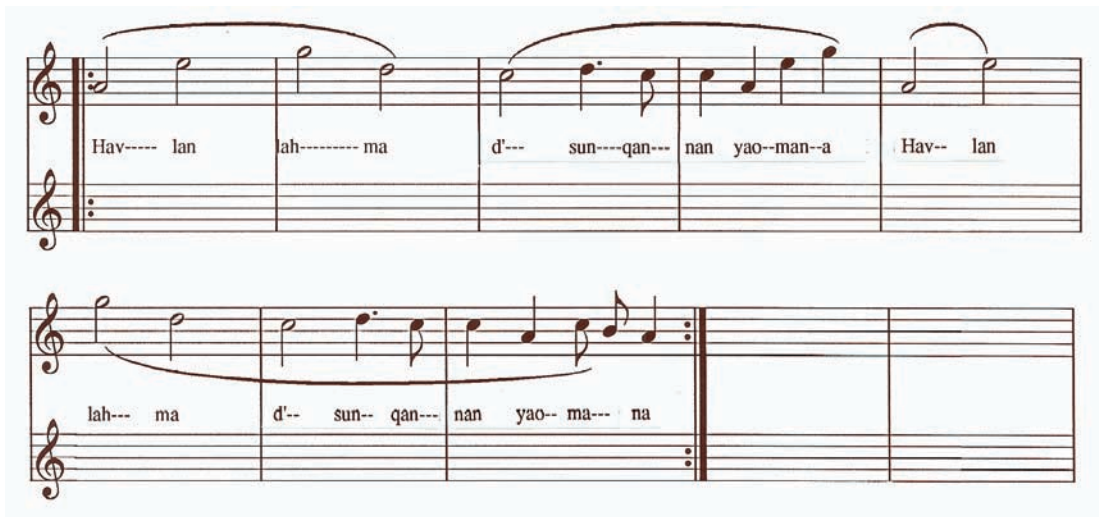
“Jesus said: I will give you what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard and what hand has not touched and what has not arisen in the heart of man.”(17)

“Jesus said: Cleave a piece of wood, I am there; lift up the stone and you will find me there.”(77)

I have often invited the group during this phase to feel the wordless experience of the prayer soaking into them, like rain into dry earth. And to feel this atmosphere, and its connection to Yeshua, being absorbed into the pores of our skin (air), into our blood (fire), then into our muscle, connective tissue and all of the water within us, and into our bone (earth).

The second part of the prayer is much less directed. There are almost no structured movements and little is needed besides some commentary to tie the lines and concentration together. In some groups that already know the prayer and ritual, even this is not necessary.

As a transition to the next line, all may be invited to allow their breath to lengthen and to feel a connection with their families, communities and the places on earth they call “home.” In the following lines, we find ourselves at the “table of Holy Wisdom,” where all are welcome. This is the other major theme (besides Genesis 1 creation) that centers Yeshua’s teaching and the prayer.



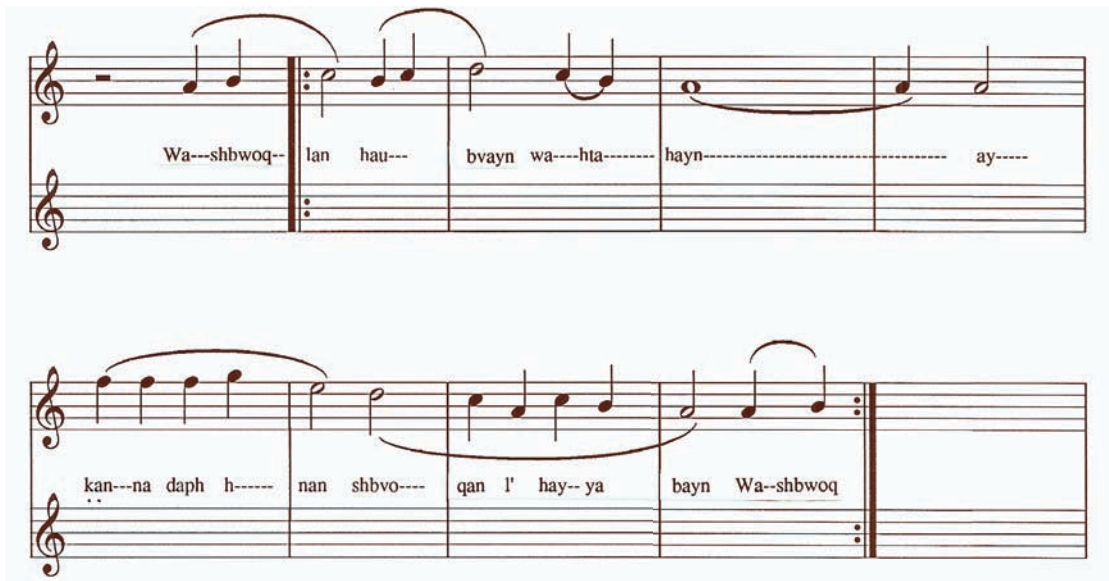
5. Havlan lachma d'sunqanan yaomana: Lachma means both bread and understanding; that which “stands under” is our support. This support is always there (in the form of the earth), but in small and large ways we can make that support more real by feeding each other. As mentioned, in the first half of the prayer, we remember the One; in the second we face each other and remember the Many. As we begin to sing the line, we may say the names of those who are absent whom we wish to remember or name a concern for a part of the world or our community. These words are shared into the center of the circle as though offering a gift.

When all who have offered a name (their own shem) have done so, bread and juice are brought into the center of the circle. Anyone may do this, but if a man has led the first part of the prayer, it should be a woman (and vice versa). This person, without pretentiousness or ceremony, simply breaks and blesses the bread (silently). Then she/he adds water to the juice and blesses it silently (by blowing “Hu” or any other blessing). The blessings are invocations of the divine breath (in Christian theology called the Holy Spirit). The lines of the prayer itself may be used as a silent blessing.

This is not an imitation of Christian eucharist or communion, rather a more ancient ritual of gathering around the table of Holy Wisdom (Hochmah in Hebrew), where all have a place, and there is food and drink for all.

At this point, we are reminded (by whomever is leading) that one of the most precious things we can give each other at Hochmah’s table is our complete understanding and support, each day and each moment as we are able, with all of our perceived limitations included. As we make this sort of simple contact with each other, we share our embodiment, and this is what Jesus probably meant when he said “This is my body” on the night before he died. He may also have been directing his disciples back to simple, human concerns: the need to feed someone who is hungry, to visit someone who is sick or in prison and so forth. For further commentary on this see *The Hidden Gospel* (1999).

Whoever has brought in the bread, then starts it going around the circle (or circles) in both directions. Each person feeds the friend next to him/her *in a very simple manner* (as in the Jewish celebration of *Shabbat*) until all have been fed. The remainder is brought back to the center. While the bread goes around, the “Havlan lachma...” may be sung again.



6. Wasbwoqlan haubvayn (wahtahayn), aykana daph hnan shbvoqan, l'hayyabayn: We are reminded that another gift we can give each other is to release ourselves and each other from the impressions we hold. We can, in a certain fashion, release anything unwanted in the same way that our blood carries away refuse from all parts of our body to be breathed out. When Jesus said "This is my blood" before passing wine, it probably carried some of this meaning.

Movements:

As the line is sung, the wine then goes around in the same fashion as the bread. Multiple cups should be used to make the process as simple and unceremonious as possible. We are all at Hokhmah's Table together, receiving the blessing of Holy Wisdom, rather than exchanging a personal blessing. The spontaneous and natural movement of each person becomes the most powerful natural ritual.



7. Wela tahlan l'nesyuna: Do not let us lose ourselves in materialism. Do not let us forget that there is more to life than the surface of things. There is no connotation of someone outside “leading us into temptation” as the usual translation goes. L’nesyuna carries the meaning of trials or temptation, but in the sense of a forgetfulness, a losing of oneself in materialism or outward appearance, a failure to look deeper when the situation calls for it. This indeed produces trials.

8. Ela patzan min bisha: Neither let us become so self-conscious and inward that we cannot be there for each other simply and humanly at the right time. Bisha means “unripeness” or “error.” It carries the sense of not being in the right place at the right time.

Movements:

The experience of the phrase and the music lends itself to walking, moving or dancing freely—separately, with each other, in groups, in whatever way feels entirely new and free.

It is just when one thinks that there is nothing more to be said, done or danced, that the fullest experience of authentic movement may arise. In a sense, everything else has prepared for this moment, but nothing can really prepare for it. As we get ready to end the ritual and walk back into the rest of our lives, this moment allows us to test how much of the expanded state produced by the Dance, how much of the support, the stillness, the forgiveness can be taken into our own movement and embodied.

The Sufis might call this an experience of baka, or how one’s personality, ego, character and sense of limitation is itself an expression of divinity. Even this does not accurately describe the feeling.

As we have included each other, in support and forgiveness, at the Table of Holy Wisdom, so in this part we can also include all of our “inner voices,” including those forgetful (nesyuna) and unripe (bisha).



9. Metul dilakhie malkuta, wahayla wateshbuhta, l'ahlam almin: For to you belongs the ruling principles, the power to accomplish and the song that adds glory to all, from ages to ages, from gathering to gathering.”

Movements:

The movements for this phrase reprise those for the first line of the prayer. It is felt naturally in the body where the rhythm falls and these movements need only be shown, not taught.

Metul: head to heart.

dila-: head raised.

hie malkuka: stepping to the right, upper body sweeps right describing a crescent, leading with the heart.

Wahayla: movement cycle repeats—head to heart.

Watesh-: head raised.

-buhta: sweeping to right, lead with heart.

L'ahlam: cycle repeats—head to heart.

almin: head up.

Ameyn: sweeping to right.

The “L’ahlam almin Ameyn” is repeated a total of four times, as the music indicates, with the same movement.

10. Ameyn or Amen: More than just saying “the end,” this phrase literally means “may this be the ground from which my actions grow.” It is a way of saying, “I affirm this with my whole being.”

At the end, I usually say:

*May the song renew itself,
from ages to ages,
from gathering to gathering,
and may this be the earth from which
our new growth will spring.*

Go in peace, and greet each other in love!

The Aramaic Prayer Cycle and The Dances of Universal Peace as Therapeutic Movement

The conflict between the ideal of God and the reality of sin derives from a catastrophe which turned the godly into the devilish. Man derives from paradise and he keeps longing for paradise. Man has somehow emerged from the universe and he yearns to return to it. These are factual realities if we learn to read the language of his emotional expressions. Man is basically good, but he is also a brute. The change from good to "brutish" actually happens in every single child. God is, therefore, INSIDE man, and not to be sought for outside alone. The Kingdom of Heaven is the Kingdom of the inner grace and goodness, and not the mystical "beyond" with angels and devils into which the brute in the human animal has turned its lost paradise....

In the distinction between the "body" and the "flesh" in early Christianity, our present organomic distinction between the "primary," naturally inborn drives ("God"), and the "secondary," perverted, evil drives ("Devil," "Sin") was anticipated. Thus mankind was always aware of its crucial biological plight, of its natural endowment as well as of its biological degeneration. In the Christian ideology, the sharp antithesis of "God" (spiritualized body) and "Devil" (body degenerated to flesh), this tragedy is plainly known and expressed.

—Wilhelm Reich, *The Murder of Christ: The Emotional Plague of Mankind*, 1952 (9)

Jesus said: If those who lead you say to you: "See, the Kingdom is in heaven," then the birds of heaven will precede you. If they say to you: "It is in the sea," then the fish will precede you. But the Kingdom is within you and it is without you. If you will know yourselves, then you will be known and you will know that you are the sons of the Living [Abwoon]. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty and you are poverty.

—The Gospel of Thomas (part of the Nag Hammadi Library discovered in 1945, Nag Hammadi, Egypt)

The Lord's Prayer in Aramaic, as movement, dance and ritual, began in 1981 as a sacred inquiry into the experience of chanting the original words of Jesus and how this experience, if it were perceptible, could come out in a group Dance of Universal Peace. The key elements of the experiment were the sound of the sacred phrase, the feeling it engendered and the movement which arose from it. From my experience, I have found that long Dances like this one may generate very intense effects. Those who wish to lead them should be aware of this. First, for those who may not be aware of it, I have included as short history of the Dances of Universal Peace.

The Dances of Universal Peace: The Dances were first developed by an American mystic, Samuel L. Lewis (1896-1971), who studied and taught mystical Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and, principally, Sufism. Lewis was initially schooled in a branch of the Chisti Sufi order which was brought to Europe and America from India in 1910 by the Sufi Pir-O-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927). Lewis himself also studied in India, Pakistan and Egypt with a number of Sufi orders, including the Chisti, Naqshibandi, Kalandari, Qadri and Rufai. The Dances of Universal Peace

use forms of movements derived from the practices of these orders as well as from a synthesis of spiritual dance movements which Lewis developed from his study with American dance pioneer Ruth St. Denis.

Toward the end of his life, Lewis began to develop the form of circle dancing with awareness of breath, sound and movement which he felt could be presented to the public as both a means to an altered sense of self and as a form of “world peace through the arts.” In the later capacity, the Dances use sacred phrases from most of the world’s spiritual traditions and one is encouraged to feel the traditions uniting within oneself, in peace rather than at war. Some of these traditions include the Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Native American, Sikh, African, Hebrew, Christian, Islamic, Nature Spirit and Goddess.

Since Samuel Lewis’s death in 1971, the Dances have spread around the world and are used in a variety of settings, including peace studies, transpersonal counseling, holistic health education, ecumenical conferences and cross-cultural arts celebrations. Today there are more than 300 Dances of Universal Peace in published form used by teachers in 40 states and 10 countries abroad. The primary Dances of Universal Peace are deeply transformational; some Dances, especially longer ones like the Aramaic Prayer Cycle, can evoke the “shadow” or unintegrated parts of the subconscious. However, there are yet many fewer teachers who are skilled enough to use the Dances in a therapeutic setting than there are those who can do them in a celebrative atmosphere.

Sound and Sacred Phrases: Mantras (Sanskrit) and wazifas (Arabic) have been used for centuries, mainly associated with the “Eastern” religions. They are commonly understood as “words of power” which communicate as much through the feeling of the person saying them as through literal meaning. From my investigations, this “feeling” has mainly to do with the way certain words can resonate in the body and either create or arise from a new responsiveness somatically—that is, in the body/feelings. As such, there is nothing “mysterious” in the mysticism of sound as originally found in many spiritual traditions, including the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Native American, Hebrew, Christian, Islamic and others.

As a student of the value of sound, music and evocative words in transformation, I had previously researched and investigated mantras and “lost words” in Old Persian, Arabic, Gujarati, Hindi, Hebrew, Greek and other languages. These phrases became the bases for various Dances of Universal Peace, based on their somatically-felt meanings. Such research included both a scholarly and experiential component. The scholarly research included comparing variant texts and transliterations (for those languages I did not speak) as well as researching the actual use of such phrases in life, as opposed to the superstition which may have arisen around them.

The experiential component included years of practice and experiment with the voice and sound, mainly using exercises from the Sufi tradition, which aim at enabling the body to resonate as fully as possible with a pure-tone sound either heard or produced. Done with devotion—deep feeling, sincerity and self-honesty—such practices involve uncovering the layers of conditioning which have inhibited full expression (and hearing) as well as created a voice which is not one’s own.

The ironic truth of mantra is that it was originally intended to uncover

each person's natural voice, not to make people sound, feel or think alike. The entrainment in sound that can happen in group mantric practice is an important and necessary experience, but certainly not the end or goal. Trance-induction or narcotizing the personality have been perversions of this particular method. Spiritual practice is not intended to dull one's awareness of problems, but to allow more scope for the life-energy (Native Middle Eastern word hayy) to solve them.

The possibilities of the work with sound for growth and development of one's own natural voice are alluded to in the following short passage from Hazrat Inayat Khan:

For those on the spiritual path, thinkers, students and meditative souls, it is of the greatest importance to know the condition their spirit from time to time by consulting their voice. It is the barometer. From morning till evening, one can watch the weather created by oneself, whether it is warm or cold, or whether it is spring or winter. One's voice is the instrument, the barometer which shows us what is coming; because what will come is the reaction, the result of what is created, and the voice is indicative of it. (Hazrat Inayat Khan, "Music")

The first experiences of genuine body resonance through the use of mantra and the uncovering of one's natural voice can produce what are commonly called "altered states." Such altered states are the functional equivalent of a dramatic shift in the perception of who one thinks one is. That is, as the layers of impressions and conditioning that have covered the natural voice are released, one begins to discover a wider scope for the personality—one has finds that one has both more resources and more limitations than one previously believed.

If one has uncovered this natural voice and has, over time, come to grips with those parts of oneself that have been ignored, then the dramatic shifts of the "altered states" may lessen or disappear. After doing this type of work for over 14 years, I find that I do not get very "high" anymore, I am simply reminded of more of who I already am. When I experience a block or limitation in my feeling during a mantra or dance, I consider it a new opportunity to uncover more of myself.

For instance, if I find myself distracted, impatient or angry while leading a Dance, that can become a opportunity to embrace something in myself and see what prompted it. At the moment of acceptance and breaking through, an altered state occurs. One becomes used to such states, however, and does not search for them. It is only in the initial stages, from my experience, that the student of sound and mantra experiences the "high." If this does not become grounded in work with the emotions and personality, however, a purposeless "search for the high" can ensue.

Movement: In the tradition of the Dances of Universal Peace, the movements that go with a sacred phrase are not choreographed in the usual sense. They arise out of the inner movement of the sacred phrase in one who has deeply internalized it on a feeling level and integrated enough subconscious elements of personality so that these elements do not interfere and conflict with the expression of the movement.

Here a paradox arises: at any given moment, one may experience the resonance of a sound-phrase with as much of his/her body as is responsive and begin to move in a particular way that is unique to that moment.

However, if the direction/feeling of the phrase itself is given more reality than the personality, then an entrained group movement can be discovered which, if not the only movement, is one of very few which communicates the feeling of the mantra in unity (as opposed to individuality). The aspect of individuality comes back later in a new way, as I will note.

The usual progression of the creation of a Dance for this person has been 1) internalization and devotional practice with the phrase, 2) music which arises from that experience and 3) movement which arises from both. This creation happens in an altered state, because the mantra uncovers new layers of personality which have never been touched; that is, if one has the courage to let the mantra have its way.

At the time that music and movements for the phrase “come through,” they do not seem to be coming from one’s own personality in the usual sense of creation. And perhaps, indeed, they do not. It is so difficult for the word “God” not to become a thought-form, idea or symbol. The Sufis try to point toward this with words like “the Only Being” and “the Spirit of Guidance” behind all creativity, prophets, religions and traditions. The Buddhists, instead of talking about an “only being,” speak of beingness and countless sentient beings; they emphasize phrases like “universal loving-kindness and compassion” (which comes in fierce and benign faces). I go back and forth between the two, but there are experiences, such as the above, that make sense in either schema, or a Reichian one (as in the sidebar) or is simply part of the cosmic mystery.

The combined effects of the sound, music and movement in a group can be powerful. Following are a few of the potentials of this form for education and therapy (taken from a short paper written for a conference on consciousness and substance abuse). While these potentials are still being explored by those working in prisons, substance abuse support groups and growth groups, the effects mentioned have been experienced and reported by many people over the 22 year history of the Dances:

1. Access to expanded states of awareness: The use of body resonance through chanting, breath awareness and entrained movement, together with a sense of feeling or devotion, can significantly alter one’s point of view, not only of one’s own limitations and view of the self, but of one’s sense of another person. This shift of point of view is most immediately felt as a sense of joy and freedom initially: one feels that one has the ability to change. According to some cognitive learning researchers, this may be the most important factor in producing change.

2. Access to one’s own somatic processes or body awareness: The skilled teacher of the Dances will not only have mastered the states of freedom, joy, love or peace that the Dances can elicit, but will also direct participants in a therapeutic setting back to their own body awareness in order to ground the experience in the here-and-now. This is essential, not only for the full experience of the Dances, but to prevent the “high” from becoming another form of enabling avoidance or denial of the abusive, angry or shadow sides of the personality which must be contacted in therapy.

Often this grounding happens at the end of Dance, in the silence. Teachers can encourage awareness of the breath, of emotional feeling or the quality of somatic contact with another or with the earth. This can also happen in the middle of some Dances which allow sensory exploration

between cycles or repetitions. Or it may happen between Dances through the use of various walking practices or experiments which advanced teachers have mastered. In all cases, it is better to ask a question that elicits an open-ended response from dancers, rather than say “feel joy.” Let dancers have their own experience—it may exceed your own!

In a gentle, questioning way, participants can then begin to open the side of themselves which feels limited or defensive to that which feels Unlimited and Infinitely Expansive. As the pioneer somatic therapist Moshe Feldenkrais might have said: by opening up the awareness of the proprioceptive sense [a level of the sensory nervous system], the side which knows can teach the one that doesn’t and change happens.

3. Access to slower, deeper rhythms of awareness, often called meditation. Years of experience have shown that many people find it much easier to move into a still meditative state after experiencing concentration and contemplation (the two usual precursors to meditation) through movement in the Dances. As one become more adept and confident in finding this “energy-filled, energy-less” state of silence, one can apply it to stressful situations in daily life which ordinarily bring on maladaptive behavior or substance abuse of various kinds. As such, these meditative states can help one to stop and choose a different behavior at the moment when a habit pattern is about to be triggered.

Each of the mainstream, mantric Dances represent an herb which may be given under certain conditions to re-establish wholeness. In the 25 years since the inception of the Dances, we have only begun to scratch the surface of their therapeutic potential for bringing unity to a troubled body or body politic.

A Short History of the Aramaic Prayer Dances

In 1981, the Aramaic Prayer presented the most challenges of any work with sacred phrases or the Dances that I had undertaken. Only after the Dances were completed did I learn how to read Aramaic fully and begin to do the scholarly translations that are in *Prayers of the Cosmos*. The story of the Dance process is much more mysterious.

For one thing, the sheer length and unfamiliarity of the language was imposing. While the Sufis traditionally in the East held long sessions of group music and movement called *zikr* (meaning “remembrance”), the phrases used were never so varied or so many.

Second, gaining a reliable transliteration of the Aramaic was no easy matter. I later became aware of the Peshitta version of the New Testament, the Syriac text used by the Church of the East upon which Dr. George Lamsa based his translations. The Peshitta (meaning “clear” or “pure”) may be the oldest version of the words of Jesus, according to the Church of the East. It is this version which also became the basis for my own translations based on the mystical interpretation of the roots and which generated the transliteration into English characters we now use in the Dances.

Third, if there were to be movements and music to all the prayer, transmitting it to a group would be difficult and might take many weeks of practice. At the time I began (1980), however, I had no idea that such a thing might actually happen.

What got me started and kept me going were references in some of the papers and letters of Samuel Lewis, especially just before his death, that he believed such a project to be necessary and possible. He felt that the Western spiritual traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) potentially had as many and as powerful sacred phrases as the Eastern, but that they had fallen into disuse or been lost. By losing or refusing to use the mantric sacred phrases, the essence of the traditions had been covered over with superstition and fear (much as happens when the individual loses his natural voice and movement).

Lewis indicated (and I knew from experience with other sacred phrases) that the essence of such a practice could be found in a central phrase and that the central phrase would in turn contain a “seed” word or syllable (much as in the kabbalistic study of letters, gematria).

The version I began with had been verified as the “most likely” by several Aramaic and Hebrew scholars (among them the Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi at Temple University). This was later corrected and largely confirmed by my own transliteration from the Peshitta.

I concentrated on the first four lines in the beginning, simply feeling their pronunciation without paying any attention to prior literal meanings. In this I was helped by having studied Arabic at UC Berkeley a year before, since the pronunciation and root-and-pattern system of Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew are similar and in many cases identical.

I did not feel any urgency about the project, so I simply took up the phrases whenever I felt to at the end of my 15-20 minute morning sound practices.

After about three months, music came to the fourth line: Nehwey

sebyanach aykanna d'bashmaya aph b'ar'ah. This was surprising, since I had never worked with a phrase where the creative process started in the middle. After a number of years, this began to make sense, since the line has to do with bringing light into matter; it prepared the way for the rest in the Hermetic fashion of "as above, so below."

With music to work with, both the rhythm and feeling of this line began to open up. An opening around the heart, a feeling of gradual expansion but also penetration of the sound into very solid places. There were both patience and strength involved, but a certain lightness as well. I hummed, sang, walked to and otherwise played with this phrase for another two months, although keeping it to myself. I had a feeling that there might be more.

At the end of December 1981, I went on a solo five-day retreat in Santa Cruz. Without describing in full what is involved in such a retreat, I ate lightly, walked and did sound or breathing practice with movement most of the time, 18 hours a day. During that retreat, the rest of music, as well as the movements to the first four lines of the prayer came.

There was a sense of timelessness as well as inevitability and quiet calm. The space was prepared both internally (through my retreat practices) as well as externally (a secluded indoor space, my harmonium, room to move). As mentioned earlier, the inspiration seemed to come both from outside as well as deep inside. It seems foolish to talk about disembodied spirits at such times, yet there was a real sense of "breathing in and receiving" something in the original meaning of the word inspiration.

The Sufis would call this a state of "vision," It has nothing to do with a trance-like limiting of awareness; instead one's awareness is more expanded and sensitized, both to surroundings as well as to the source of inspiration. In addition, nothing received in vision seems cast in stone; it must be worked out and proven in life as part of making the gift human, so to speak.

This distinguishes it from forms of so-called "channeling" in which the psychic component often predominates over both common sense and human compassion and leads to a lot of misinformation. As Bryn Beorse, an Norwegian Sufi who was a solar engineer, once told me, "There are probably as many misinformed or lying souls on the other side as there are here. Why think that they have any special knowledge?" So in the case of vision, the "proof of the pudding" is found in the effect and benefit of the creation on others, over time. And one is counseled to keep such visions to him/herself until it is ready to be born. It was only eight years later (1989) that I felt the time was right to make some of the story known, in that it may be useful to those also leading the Dances.

Over the next three years, the first four lines of the prayer were done in groups at several workshops and seminars I do in the Dances of Universal Peace. Before that could happen, however, there had to be another instance of inspiration to determine how best to teach it. This is part of what I mean by the "working out" of the vision.

I have had many people tell me, "Aramaic seems so foreign, but after I began, it was like I had always known it." When done in churches, some people have responded with tears of joy. Letters come in: one person reports listening to a tape of it while driving across a desert in Utah, then stopping and receiving a clear inspiration about their life's direction. Another reports

listening to a tape while going in for chemotherapy and not having the usual intense reaction afterward. The reader again will have to judge. Studies show that the body's own ability to regulate pain is 56% as effective as morphine. Jesus reportedly said, "Your faith has made you whole."

Why do things like this, I often ask myself? Archaic, foreign. Obviously no one speaks Aramaic today. What is the relevance? Obviously, there is value in the sound, music and movement in general, as mentioned in the first part of this paper.

There seems to be more. The realization that Jesus spoke Aramaic and that one could say the same words seems to have the ability to take even entrenched Christians outside the realm of their creeds and beliefs to a search for their genuine experience of who this person is, or could be. In addition, if one believes Austrian psychologist Wilhelm Reich (and I do), Jesus' experience was nothing but the total liberation of life energy-orgone (called in Aramaic *hayye*) through and in the body, an acceptance of all the orgasmic pulses of life. It was for this that he was murdered, says Reich, and society continues to do this to each child that learns to distrust inspiration.

The experience of chanting and moving the prayer confirms this: participants are not only more energized, but softer, as though for an short while all the armor was dissolved, the kingdom within glimpsed. In addition, many of those who have continued to work with the prayer over time have found that all of their religious and other childhood conditioning begins to come up and need to be dealt with.

By January 1985, I thought that the Prayer/Dance was complete. It seemed that the rest of the prayer was much too long and cumbersome to ever do in a group. Nor did I see how it fit in. As indicated in the prayer directions, the first half invokes remembrance of the life force within in various ways. Beyond remembering and experiencing that Unity, what was there?

At the same time, I was reading *The Gnostic Gospels* by Dr. Elaine Pagels, a book about the Nag Hammadi scrolls found in Egypt in 1945. This find contained books from a Coptic library with documents that have been dated back to the 2nd Century A.D. This was as old or older than any surviving texts on which the New Testament books were based. I had been familiar with the find through an early publication of The Gospel of Thomas, one of the first books to be translated. As the excerpt in the first part of this booklet indicates, this Gospel contains logia, or sayings of Jesus, many new and some different versions of ones in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus sounds very much like a Zen master in his refusal to give his disciples easy answers.

For instance, in response to their question about what diet to observe, how to fast or whether to give to the poor, Jesus simply responds:

"Do not lie; and do not do what you hate, for all things are manifest before Heaven. For there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed and there is nothing covered that shall remain without being uncovered" (Gospel, et al., 1959).

Pagels was one of the few women to participate in translating the Egyptian find, called the Nag Hammadi Library (after the town near the discovery site). She surveyed all the books found, which as in any library are of various quality and identified several important threads which for various reasons had been purged from the canonical gospels. Among these were: the inclusion of

a “God the Mother” along with the personification of “God the Father;” an emphasis on individual spiritual experience over against doctrinal concepts; an approach to worship that was non-hierarchical (the positions of priest, deacon and bishop were often rotated or cast by lot in gnostic churches); an appreciation and acknowledgement of the body as important rather than something to be thrown away in martyrdom in return for a “promised reward.”

For instance, Pagels quotes one of the texts (called Thunder, Perfect Mind) as containing the following revelation spoken by the feminine counterpart of the male deity of the Old Testament:

“I am the first and the last. I am the honored one and the scorned one. I am the whore, and the holy one. I am the wife and the virgin. I am {the mother} and the daughter.... I am she whose wedding is great, and I have not taken a husband.... I am knowledge, and ignorance.... I am shameless; I am ashamed. I am strength, and I am fear.... I am foolish and I am wise.... I am godless, and I am one whose God is great.” (Pagels, 1979). Later I did my own rendering of this text in my book *Desert Wisdom* (1995).

Having worked with the prayer-dance, I had felt that these things must have been true. Yet here was an historical scholar saying the same thing.

As I looked back at the prayer, I began to see how if the first half promoted an experience of the One, the second half dealt with the Many: the everyday needs, the ability to face and forgive each other, a remembrance that everything, including our idealistic concepts of unity, could be a pitfall and a block to the ever-new expression of life.

If the second half of the prayer were to be shared in a group, it would have to be entirely different than an entrained group movement that I would lead. As I looked at the fifth line, I saw the word lachma: bread, understanding, support. It was the first thing that one human could offer another. It is also based on the root that came to mean the Divine Wisdom, later called the Sophia in Christian mysticism.

The way that the music came was completely different and unexpected from the first part. I made no special preparations; in fact, since I was getting up early to go to school, I had not even been setting aside time for my sound practice. Yet for about a week in January, every day as I awoke I was moved to look at the transliteration and a melody immediately came for one line, almost as I was throwing on my coat to go out the door. The sense I got was, “ready or not, here it comes.”

As had happened before, the melody helped reveal the feeling of the phrases. Yet no movements came. As the time for the retreat in February (referred to above) approached, I realized that I was again expecting what had happened in the past. It would have to be that the movements would be worked out in the group, almost on the spot, as an experience of the words. That was, in fact, what happened, and over the past year the rest of the ritual process was refined. Even now, different things happen each time and that too has become part of the completion.

It was somewhat miraculous to me that the entire prayer did not take longer to do than the first half. About an hour and a half seemed to be the limit to most people’s concentration, and after the refining that happened this year, that is still the length.

What makes it possible is that in the second half people minister to each other. They remember their support for each other by sharing bread, the

substance and sustenance of the body. They share juice (in Aramaic dami, a word also meaning wine, essence or blood, see *The Hidden Gospel*, 1999, for more on this). As they do so, they release the impressions they have of themselves and each other so that their blood can again flow freely and purified. They celebrate the conscious release of all concepts (including “holy” ones) of who they are or can be through completely free movement done individually and/or with another or others. Finally the whole group becomes aware of itself moving individually yet together and the prayer is concluded by remembering (in the last line) that the “song” renews itself, with each person the trustee of a unique note in it.

The next phase of this work happened when I learned to read Aramaic and began my own translations of the Lord’s Prayer, Beatitudes and other sayings. The first fruits of this phase are collected in *Prayers of the Cosmos* (1990). This also involved a process of inspiration with scholarship that continues to this day. Other Aramaic Dances have also come through, and other teachers of the Dances of Universal Peace have begun to focus on sayings in Aramaic from Jesus.

To all this, one can only say “praise God.” Truly, the Song continues, renewing itself, from age to age, from gathering to gathering. If this has merit, may it benefit all sentient beings!

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A pronunciation CD of the Aramaic Lord's Prayer and Beatitudes along with music suitable for meditation, chanting and individual body prayer is available from the Abwoon Resource Center, online at www.abwoon.com or: **Abwoon Resource Center**, c/o The Shalem Center, 881 High Street, Suite 206, Worthington, OH 43085. (614) 441.9773 (phone).(209) 755.5766 (eFax)