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“O Good One, Open the Door of Your Mercy...”

Reflections on Divine Mercy in West Syriac Tradition

„O Dobry, otwórz bramę Twego miłosierdzia...”

Refleksje na temat Bożego Miłosierdzia w tradycji zachodniosyryjskiej

Abstract

This paper is a study of certain notions of ‘Divine Mercy’ in the West Syriac liturgical tradition in the light of Word of God and liturgical prayers. The author tries to explore the theme of ‘Mercy’ (*rahme*) in the liturgical prayers in West Syriac liturgical tradition using certain technical phrases coined with the word *rahme*. Some of the phrases are “Door of Mercy” (*tar’o drahme*), “Dew of Mercy” (*talā drahme*), “Sea of Mercy” (*yamā drahme*) and “Wings of Mercy” (*kenfe drahme*).

Keywords: *Rahme* (Mercy), Trisagion, Door of Mercy, Dew of Mercy, Sea of Mercy, Wings of Mercy.

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi studium niektórych pojęć związanych z Bożym Miłosierdziem w liturgicznej tradycji zachodniosyryjskiej w świetle Słowa Bożego i modlitw liturgicznych. Autor stara się zgłębić temat miłosierdzia (*rahme*) w modlitwach liturgicznych w rzezczonej tradycji, używając pewnych fraz technicznych osadzonych w terminie *rahme*. Cho-

dzi m.in. o takie zwroty, jak: „brama miłosierdzia” (*tar’o drahme*), „rosa miłosierdzia” (*talā drahme*), „morze miłosierdzia” (*yamā drahme*) i „skrzydła miłosierdzia” (*kenfe drahme*).

Słowa kluczowe: *Rahme* (miłosierdzie), Trishagion, brama miłosierdzia, rosa miłosierdzia, skrzydła miłosierdzia.

The quintessence of the Holy Gospel is mercy¹. The Church is called and commissioned to announce this ‘beating heart of Gospel.’ To contemplate the mystery of ‘Divine Mercy’, Holy Father Pope Francis proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* from 08 December 2015 to 20 November 2016 as a special time for the Church; this Extraordinary Holy Year was itself a gift of grace, “a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 3). The Jubilee Year was intended to proclaim the mercy which the humanity experience in and through the person of Jesus Christ, the *Evangelion*. Pope says, “In order to be capable of mercy therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves listen to the Word of God... In this way, it will be possible to contemplate God’s mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 13). This vignette is an attempt to retrace the certain notions of ‘Divine Mercy’ in the West Syriac liturgical tradition in the light of Word of God.

1. Mercy in the Old Testament

The concept of mercy in the Old Testament has got a long and rich history. The experience of Divine Mercy made Israelites the ‘People of God.’ Israel was a people of covenant, and they specially experienced the ‘Mercy of God.’ Through the covenant, God entered into a familial relationship with the people of Israel. God was faithful to the covenant promises and people in turn are requested to be faithful to covenant promises. But the Israelites many a times they broke their covenant with Yahweh because of their sins and worship of foreign gods. Whenever they became infidel and went astray, they were awakened to the awareness to ‘appeal for mercy’ by the prophets (John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 4). Thus, we can

¹ This paper is an edited version of a text published by the Author in: Paul Karamel Koyickal. 2020. “O Good One, Open the Door of Your Mercy. Reflections on Divine Mercy in West Syriac Tradition”. *The Harp* 36 : 343-366. Since that Indian periodical is almost not known in Europe the Editorial Board and the Scientific Council of the “*Liturgia Sacra*”, after receiving the positive reviews and the agreement with the Indian Editor from St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute in Kottayam, allowed the publication in the European context.

see that the judges and prophets became instruments in the hands of Yahweh to announce “Divine Mercy.”

The two technical terms used in the Old Testament to designate ‘Divine Mercy’ are *hesed* and *rah^amîm*.

The term *hesed* indicates a profound attitude of “goodness” and can be understood only in the context of covenant that Yahweh established with Israel. From God’s part the covenant was a gift and grace for Israel. In the Old Testament we can see the noun *hesed* very frequently and it occurs approximately 250 times and is used in singular. The exact English translation is difficult but some of the Bible versions use the terms “kindness” or “loving kindness.” Modern scholars see *hesed* as a gift rather than as a right. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) has employed four categories of meaning for *hesed*:

- I. “Kindness” in reference to a particular act of one person towards another.
- II. “Deal loyally” in reference to the continuing behavior of one person to another.
- III. “Steadfast love” or “love” in reference to God’s consistent behavior toward individuals or Israel as a whole.
- IV. “Love”, “devotion”, “faithfulness”, in reference to Israel or individuals in relation to Yahweh.²

When *hesed* is established between two individuals, they are faithful to each other by the virtue of an internal commitment, this occurs because of fidelity. When Israel broke the covenant, the juridical commitment ceased to oblige, but here *hesed* revealed its deeper love. This made them go on hoping and trusting *hesed* since God of covenant is really “responsible for his love.” *Hesed* thus highlights the marks of fidelity to the self and ‘responsibility for one’s love.’

The second term which serves to define mercy in the Old Testament is *rah^amîm* and its nuance is entirely different from *hesed*. *Rah^amîm* denotes the love of a mother, and this is completely gratuitous and not merited. The term has got a wide range of feelings of goodness and tenderness, patience and understanding. Isaiah attributes these features to Yahweh. We read: “Can a woman forget her nursing child of her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?” (Is. 49:15). Despite human infidelity, Yahweh will have compassion towards his people. “I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely” (Hos. 14:5).

The Old Testament affirms that mercy was a basic characteristic of God. Israel’s earliest understanding of Yahweh was that of “A God merciful and gracious,

² P. G. Thomas Paniker. 1998–1999. “Significance of the Word *Rachme* in the Context of History of Salvation”. The Harp 11-12 : 1.

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation...” (Exo. 34:6, 7). The theological significance of the term *rahme* can be understood only in reference to the covenantal relationship of Yahweh with the people of Israel. The mercy of God is integrally related to His steadfast love (*hesed*). The Psalmist says, “Our God is merciful” (Ps. 116:5; Prov. 12:10). The Psalms frequently relate God’s mercy and steadfast love. It is because of God’s mercy that the sinners are able to appeal to Him in hope. Daniel appealed to God on the ground of His great mercy.³ “We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies” (Dan. 9:18).

1.1. Etymological Observations

The term “merciful” (רחום) *rahûm* is from the same root as a noun that means womb. Thus it conveys God’s motherly compassion (Pss. 25:6; 40:11; 51:1; 69:16; 79:8; 106:45; 111:4). The word gracious *hanun* is regularly paired with “merciful” and another form of the root indicates that God’s grace is the basis for appeals to God for help. (Pss. 4:1; 6:2). The words “faithfulness” and “steadfast love” (*hesed*) are paired frequently in the Psalms as in Exodus 34:6. “All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness...” (Ps. 25:10).

The Hebrew word employed for mercy is *raham*. The Hebrew word for “mercy” or “compassion” is derived from the root *rh* which means “womb,” and its original meaning was brotherly or motherly feeling, i.e., the feeling of those born from the same womb or the love of a mother for her child.⁴ The noun *rahmo* in Syriac refers to “womb.” Thus the term *raham* has got some implication in relation to the “womb love” the love of mother towards her child. We read “But the woman whose son was alive said to the king – because compassion for her son burned within her” (1 Kgs 3:26). From this etymological notion we can understand Yahweh’s mercy in term of a kind of familial love.

The term ἔλεος (*eleos*) designate to the Hebrew term *hesed* (kindness) which is conduct demanded by God to person to person. Ἐλεος (*eleos*) means mercy, compassion.

³ David E. Garland. 1987. Mercy; Merciful. In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Vol. III. Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 322. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁴ Elizabeth Rice Achtemeir. 1985. Mercy; Merciful; Compassion; Pity. In *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of Bible*. Vol. III. Ed. George Arthur Buttrick, 352. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

1.2. Instruments of Divine Mercy in the Old Testament

Whenever the Israelites became infidel and went astray, they were awakened to ‘appeal for mercy’ by the prophets. In the sacred scripture we see that the prophets and others constantly recommended the people to implore mercy from the Merciful One (*mrahmôno*). In this regard the Old Testament give us examples. The important events and texts include the beginning of the history of Judges (Jud. 3:7-9), the prayer of Solomon at the inauguration of Temple (1 Kgs. 8:22-53), the prophetic work of Micah (Mic. 7:18-20), the assurances given by Isaiah (Is. 1:18; 51:4-16), the cry of Jews in exile (Bar. 2:11–3:8) and the renewal of covenant after the return from exile (Neh. 9).⁵

In one of the prayers, we see that God out of his Mercy sends his chosen ones to cure the humanity. We recite:

The mercy (*mrahmonûto*) of God which is spread over the creation sends to every man a remedy according his disease; for the grievous disease of the Egyptians it sent Joseph; for the greed of the house of Ahab, Elijah the prophet; for the great city of Nineveh it sent Jonah the preacher; and when he saw that the world had rebelled against the yoke of repentance, he sent his only Son and redeemed by his cross.⁶

« مَسْحُوكُنَّهُمْ وَرَأَى الْوَيْسُفَ مَعَهُ كَمَا قَدَّمَ لَهُ. كَمَا أَنَّهُ أَمَرَ جَدَّاهُ أَيْسَهُ الْهَبْرَا. كَمَا أَنَّهُ كَفَّاهُ وَجَرَّؤُتَا
 كَتَمَهُ هَبْرَا هَذَا. وَرَأَى الْوَيْسُفَ مَعَهُ كَمَا قَدَّمَ لَهُ. كَمَا أَنَّهُ كَفَّاهُ وَجَرَّؤُتَا. هَذَا
 وَرَأَى الْوَيْسُفَ مَعَهُ كَمَا قَدَّمَ لَهُ. كَمَا أَنَّهُ كَفَّاهُ وَجَرَّؤُتَا. هَذَا »

2. Notion of Divine Mercy in West Syriac Tradition

In the West Syriac tradition the words employed for mercy are رَحْمَة *rahme*, مَرَحْمُونُوتَا *mrahmonûto*, رَحْمُونُوتَا *hnôno* and تَائِبُوتَا *taibûto*. But the frequently used words in liturgy are رَحْمَة *rahme* and رَحْمُونُوتَا *hnôno*. Into Malayalam the words are translated as *karuna* and *daya* respectively. In response to all the introductory prayers we say; “And upon us the weak and sinful ones may mercy and compassion (*rahme wah-nôno*) be shed in both worlds forever. Amin.”

« مَحْحُوتَا مَسْحُوكُنَّهُمْ وَرَأَى الْوَيْسُفَ مَعَهُ كَمَا قَدَّمَ لَهُ. كَمَا أَنَّهُ كَفَّاهُ وَجَرَّؤُتَا. هَذَا »

⁵ John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 4.

⁶ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*: Vol. I. Kottayam: SEERI, 491.

2.1. *Rahme* (ܪܗܡܐ)

The noun *rahme* derives from the root ܪܗܡ; *rhm* which means “to love, delight in, desire”.⁷ The ‘paal’ form of *rhm* is ܪܗܡܐ *h^em* and which is taken as the root of word *rahme*. The noun has got the meanings ‘tenderness, mercy, compassion, affection, favour.’⁸ The verb is usually used with the proposition ‘al. The word is normally used in plural form. Then the word has the meaning “to have mercy upon, feel pity to” etc. The terms such as ܡܪܗܡܐܢܐ *mrahmôno* (merciful one), ܡܠܐ ܪܗܡܐ *mlê rahme* (full of mercy), ܡܪܗܡܐܢܐ *mrahmônoit* (mercifully) are derived from the same root. In the Old Testament we can see many references for this. But it would be a mistake to define God’s mercy simply in terms of familial love. Like his faithfulness, his steadfast love, his righteousness, his judgments (Hos. 2:19), God’s mercy refers to his continual regard for the covenant established with his chosen people, Israel.

2.2. *Hnôno* (ܗܢܐܢܐ)

The noun *hnôno* has got the meaning ‘pity, mercy, compassion, favour, grace.’⁹ It is derived from the root *hn* which means ‘to have pity or compassion, to pity, to be gracious.’¹⁰ According to Saint Jacob of Serugh “Divine Mercy” is the source of divine economy of creation, redemption and salvation. The divine mercy (*hnôno*) is the part of the divine essence. As God is hidden, his mercy is also hidden.

3. Liturgical usage & some prayers of Mercy

I think the Syriac liturgical tradition (both East & West Syriac traditions) very much upholds the theme of “Divine Mercy.” In the West Syriac liturgical tradition one may see the persistent usage of the term *rahme* especially in its liturgical prayers and Divine Liturgy (*Qurbôno Qadîšo*). It is often unobserved that the very beginning of the *Qaumo* prayer starts with begging mercy (*rahme*) and compassion (*hnôno*). But this essential and key terminological expressions are left out in Malayalam translation.

⁷ Cf. J. Payne Smith. 1903. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 537.

⁸ Cf. Payne Smith. 1903. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 537.

⁹ Cf. Payne Smith. 1903. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 149.

¹⁰ Cf. Payne Smith. 1903. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 148.

3.1. Some Petitions for Mercy

The West Syriac liturgical prayers are replete with begging God’s Mercy. Here I would like to mention the importance of some of familiar prayers extant in our liturgy.

a. *Trisagion* (ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ)

We are very much acquainted with the *trisagion*, the prayer which is recited in most of our prayers and in the Divine Liturgy. *Trisagion* is the central prayer of the *qaumo* prayer. “Holy art Thou, Almighty. Holy art Thou, Immortal. Crucified for us, have mercy upon us”

«ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ. ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ. ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ. ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ. ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ. ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ. ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ. ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ.»

(*Qādeeshat Āloho. qādeeshat haylthono. qādeeshat lo mōyūtho. deştlebt hlofayn ethraḥam’alayn*).

Trisagion or ‘Thrice Holy’ recalls the vision of Prophet Isaiah of the Lord’s throne and the proclamation of the six-winged seraphim (Isaiah 6:1-3). Its liturgical use dates to the apostolic church. In the West Syriac tradition, the *Trisagion* is addressed only to our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Mor Severus Mooshé Bar Kepho (c. 813–903), bishop of Mosul, comments that it was handed down from Ignatius the Fiery, the third Patriarch of Antioch.

Both Bar Kepho and Mor Dionysius Bar Şalibi († 1171), bishop of Amid (Diyarbakir, Turkey), record the mystical tradition that when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus brought down the body of Christ from the cross, they witnessed three angelic choirs singing the first three verses of the Thrice Holy. In response to the singing of the angels, they cried out; “He Who was crucified for us have mercy upon us” (ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ, *deştlebt hlofayn ethraḥam’alayn*). Mor Dionysius Bar Şalibi also cites Patriarch Mor Severus of Antioch’s last cathedral homily which suggests that the last verse may have been added after the excommunication of Nestorius and that perhaps Patriarch Peter the Fuller (d. 488) introduced it into the singing of the *Trisagion*.

b. *Mōran ethraḥam’alayn* / *Qurie eleison* (Gr.) ܩܘܪܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ

ܩܘܪܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ is perfectly a Biblical prayer. This is the prayer of two blind men who followed Jesus. They cried loudly and said; “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” (Mat. 9: 27). The blind men did not make request to regain their eyesight,

After having discussions on some prayers pleading God’s Mercy, now we can see a number of technical phrases coined with the word *rahme* in the West Syriac liturgical tradition. Some of the phrases are “Door of Mercy” (*tar ’o d rahme*), “Dew of Mercy” (*tālo drahme*), “Sea of Mercy” (*yāmo drahme*) and “Wings of Mercy” (*kenfe drahme*). The phrases such as “Door of Mercy” (*tar ’o drahme*) and “Sea of Mercy” (*yāmo drahme*) are directly attributed to Jesus Christ. Here I would like to make some terminological clarifications of these technical usages.

3.2. “Door of Mercy” (ܐܘܪܗܡܐ, ܕܘܪܗܡܐ)

In many prayers we can see that “open to us the door of your mercy.” In the concluding prayer of evening prayers we recite the familiar prayer

ܡܢܐ ܡܥܡܐ ܡܥܡܐ ܡܥܡܐ ܐܘܪܗܡܐ ܕܘܪܗܡܐ ܐܠܐ ܐܘܪܗܡܐ ܕܘܪܗܡܐ ܡܢܐ

moran eešu mšiho.... Here the ‘mercy’ of God is compared to a house. The Aramaic term referring to door is *ʿra*. This can mean ‘gate or door.’ In ancient times the city gate was the seat of administration where the king pronounces his judgment.¹³ One of the Hebrew term referring to ‘gate’ is שַׁר *sha’ar*. This may refer to the city gate. Depending upon the size of the city, the city had many gates, but one main gate consists of inner and outer gate. The city gate has got special significance in the life of Israel. The social, administrative, and business interactions took place at the city gate. It is also the place where the kings as well as the elders sat to administer justice.¹⁴ The original meaning of word *deleth* is ‘door.’ The *deleth* primarily offers protection from dangers and also from disturbances. The opening of one’s door to a stranger indicates hospitality (Job 31:32)¹⁵.

In the liturgical texts we frequently see the expression “Door of Mercy (*ta’ro drahme*). Syriac Fathers very meticulously explained this expression of “Door of Mercy” in connection with repentance and absolution of sins. According to the Fathers absolution for sins is received from the “Door of Mercy.” Sinners are now and then told to knock at this ‘door’ and obtain ‘mercy.’ We recite: “Behold, I knock

¹³ Cf. Robert Laird Harris. Ed. 1980. ʿra. In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Vol. II. Edd. Robert Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waldke, 086. Chicago: Moody Press.

¹⁴ Cf. Hermann J. Austel. 1980. Sha’ar. In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Vol. II. Edd. Harris, Archer, Jr., Waldke, 945–946.

¹⁵ B. Otzen. 1980. tal. In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. V. Edd. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, 328. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

at the door of your mercy, that I may receive forgiveness; for the evil one by his craft has kept me from the path of life...¹⁶ (*Ramšo* on Tuesday).

As far as the Syriac Churches are concerned, the phrase ‘Door of Mercy’ is very familiar one. The monumental inscriptions written in Syriac (or Garshuni) on the top of doors/gates to shed light to this fact. The gates of the churches at north and south and main gate has got the inscriptions:

«ܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ»

- a. “This door is the door of mercy, inside which there is mercy. O sinner, Go in and ask mercy from the Lord who is full of Mercy.”
- b. “Your door is the door of mercy, Jesus full of mercy. The one who enters (it) carries sins but one who leaves it carries mercy. But if he carries sins does not shed tears, he would not find mercy and forgiveness of sins.”¹⁷

The first part of the inscription derives from the *bo’utho* attributed to Balai:

«ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ»

“Your Door is door of mercy, Jesus full of mercy; he who enters burdened with sins, goes out loaded with grace”¹⁸ (*Bo’utho* of Balai, Lilyo on Monday, III *qaumo*).

3.3. “Dew of Mercy” (ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ)

In the prayers we may see the phrase “Dew of Mercy” (*tālo drahme*). In the prayer of absolution (*hūsōyo*) we read: “O Lord, grant rest to their souls, spirits and bodies and sprinkle the dew of your mercy (*rus tālo drahme*) and compassion on their bones...”¹⁹

«ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ»

In one of the liturgical petitions written by *Môr* Balai we see the phrase ܕܘܥܒܘ (dew of gladness). He writes, “*Sprinkle, Lord, the dew of gladness on the faces of our fathers and brothers, who have rested in your hope.*”

«ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ ܕܘܥܒܘ»

¹⁶ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 345, 347.

¹⁷ Amir Harrak. 2008. “The Liturgical Dimension of Syriac Epigraphy”. *The Harp* 13 : 11–28.

¹⁸ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 250–251.

¹⁹ Athanasius Yeshue Samuel. Ed. 1991. *Anaphoras. The Book of the Divine Liturgies*, 46.

(Common *b'outo* of *mor* Balai recited during the Noon Prayer)²⁰.

The word *tal* is found in the West and South Semitic languages. It has got the meaning “dew” or “light rain.” The root *tll* means “be moist,” “moisten,” “cause dew to fall,” etc. in Palestine it is only the dew which provides a certain amount of moisture for plants during the long, dry summer. The summer dew is necessary for life as the winter rain. Dew comes from heaven and it usually falls on night (Nu. 11:9; Jgs. 6:36-40) and vanishes quickly in the morning.

According to the Old Testament understanding, the Jews believed that dew is a gift of Yahweh. In the Ugaritic religion they believed dew as the gift of Ba'al. Yahweh is the giver of fertility and without dew there is no fertility; i.e., dew is linked indissolubly with creation, with fertility and God's blessings.²¹ In figurative language of the Old Testament, dew has got two different usages namely; i) it serve as meteorological phenomenon, ii) as a metaphor to express Yahweh's blessings. In the former sense the imagery is negative, while in the latter it is positive. Prophet Hosea makes frequent use of dew in his imagery both positively and negatively. He describes the covenant love of is similar to 'dew.' “Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early” (Hos. 6:4). “Therefore they shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes away early” (Hos. 13:3). Hosea again says if the people will return to him, Yahweh will be a dew to Israel. “I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily...” (Hos. 16:4, 5).

Dew is considered as a phenomenon which provides refreshment in the burning heat. “A mist quickly heals all things; the falling dew gives refreshment from the heat” (Sir. 43:22). In the book of Daniel we see that when Azariah and his companions were put into fire, the angel of Lord came down and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace as though a moist wind were whistling through it (Cf. Dan: 3:49). The present prayer, the dew refers to something that provide refreshment. In the prayer we recite, “Be to me a haven and by you I shall be delivered from the pit of fire; let not the flames attack me and burn my limbs; with that dew of furnace of Hananiah and his companions sprinkle my face and have mercy upon me.”²²

Prophet Isaiah speaks about the resurrection of the dead. He says, “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will gave birth to those long dead” (Is.

²⁰ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 169.

²¹ Cf. A. Baumann. 1980. Deleth. In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. III. Edd. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, 232. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

²² *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 339.

26:19). This verse try to explain that Yahweh by his miracle working dew brings the long dead ones to life. He brings to life those who are sleeping in the shades of the underworld. From the above discussions we can see that the ‘dew of mercy’ of Lord enlivens and refreshes the dead ones.

3.4. “Sea of Mercy” (ܫܘܡܢܐ ܕܡܪܥܘܬܐ)

The Syriac word stands for sea is *yāmo*. Sea can be considered as a place where one can wash his/her debts. Sea stands for the broadness. In one of the hymns attributed to sun in ancient Mesopotamia we see, “Your divinity is like distant heavens, awesome as the broad sea.” The sea plays a crucial role in the narratives describing the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. In the narrative of ‘Song of the Sea’ (Ex. 15:1-18), sea appears as an instrument in the hands of Yahweh.²³

We can see that Saint Ephrem²⁴ the Syrian clearly asserts that Christ is the ‘Sea of Mercy.’ In his liturgical supplication we see that; “*You are the Sea of Mercy and our inequity is a drop of mud; one drop cannot disturb a great sea.*”²⁵

«ܐܝܬܐ ܫܘܡܢܐ ܕܡܪܥܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ. ܘܗܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܪܥܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ. ܘܗܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܪܥܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ»

Saint Jacob of Serugh²⁶ calls Jesus Christ, “the Sea.” He depicts Christ as Sea out of the conviction that Christ is the source, meaning, efficacy and the final goal of all salvific symbols of both Nature and the Scripture.²⁷ He calls Jesus, “the Great Sea” (*yāmo rābo*) in his homily ‘on the Resurrection of our Lord’ we read: “O Great Sea, pour out into me the homily of your kindness (*rahme*)”²⁸ (*Homily on the Resurrection of Our Lord*, 3).

²³ Cf. Helmer Ringgren. 1980. Yām. In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. VI. Edd. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, 89, 94. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

²⁴ St. Ephrem the Syrian (*Mor Ephrem Suryōyo*) who is known as the ‘Harp of the Holy Spirit’ (*kênōro drūho qādīšo*) was a native of Nisibis (today’s Nusaybin) in Turkey. He was born c. 306, probably of Christian parents. He spent most of his life in Nisibis where he was ordained a deacon before 338. Famous for both learning and holiness he died in 373. St. Ephrem is called as ‘the prince of monks.’ He remained a deacon, a servant in his liturgical ministry of the Church throughout his life.

²⁵ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 493.

²⁶ Jacob of Serugh (450–521) the finest Syriac poet after Saint Ephrem the Syrian († 373), was born in Kurtam (now known as ‘Kurtak’), a town near Mesopotamia around 451 AD.

²⁷ Thomas Kollampampil. 2001. *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 418.

²⁸ Thomas Kollampampil. 1997. *Jacob of Serugh Select Festal Homilies*. Rome – Bangalore: CIIS & Dharmaram Publications, 307.

In one of the *qōle* we see the penitent is gazing to Christ, the Sea of mercies. We recite: “On the sea of your mercies I gaze, God, the only Son, because my offences are many and my faults have gained strength...”²⁹

«...حَمَلًا وَتَمَعًا سَا; اِنَّا نَسْتَسْبِيحُكَ اَللّهُمَّ. بِمَعِيَّةِ سَعَدِكَ وَحَمِيَّةِ حُرْمَتِكَ»

(*Soutoro* on Monday). In contrast to Jesus, the ‘Sea of Mercy’ the faithful’s sin is compared to ‘sea.’ We recite the prayer: “I sink in the multitude of sins as in a sea...”³⁰ (*Sapro* on Thursday, *eniono*).

3.5. “Wings of Mercy” (صَفَا وَتَمَعَا)

The Syriac term referring to wing is *kenfo*. The word is used metaphorically in the sense of ‘covering, overshadowing, protection.’³¹ Most of the references of wings are figuratively used to denote God. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is twice described in terms of God bearing the people upon eagle’s wing. In Exodus 19:4 we read, “You have seen that what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself.” God’s sheltering under his wings is often compared as a hen does her chicks. “May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel under whose wings you have come for refuge” (Ruth 2:12).

In Psalms we can see statement in which God’s steadfast love is related to the statement of an intent to seek shelter under wings. “How precious is your steadfast love (*hesed*), O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings” (Ps. 36:7). ‘To take refuge in the shadow of God’s wing’ and ‘to abide in the shadow of the Almighty’ (Ps. 91:1) refers to assurance of God’s protection. In Malachi 3:20, we read “But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings.” The winged sun-disk was a common conception in the ancient near east world and was used as a manifestation of deity’s protection.³² “Sun of Righteousness” is considered as a prediction of Christ. He alone is the true manifestation of God’s benevolence and he comes to heal those who cast away their pride through fear of God. Thus we can see that wings offer deliverance and security.

²⁹ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 211.

³⁰ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 659.

³¹ Payne Smith. 1903. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 218.

³² Cf. W. Dommershausen. 1980. Kānāp. In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol. VII. Edd. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, 231. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; John N. Oswalt. 1980. Kānāp. In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Vol. II. Edd. Harris, Archer, Jr., Waldke, 447.

The Hebrew term ‘*kānāp*’ refers to the corners of typical rectangular biblical garment. The Israelites are to wear bluish-white tassels on the four corners of their outer garment. “Speak to the Israelites and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner” (Num. 15:38). The interpretation of these fringes are to remind Israel about Yahweh’s commandments. “You have fringe so that, when you see it you will remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them” (Num. 15:39). From this we can also infer that ‘wings of mercy’ *kenfe drahme* can also mean ‘the garment of mercy.’ In the evening prayers on Tuesday, we beseech: “Protect us, Lord beneath the wings of your mercy from all harm that we may not be mocked by Satan and that the evil one may not deride us; we are your image and likeness, protect us, Lord of all, by night and by day”³³ (*Ramšo* on Tuesday, II *qōlo* of repentance).

3.6. God – the one ‘Full of Mercy’ (مَلَأَ وَتَمَلَأَ)

God – the one ‘Full of Mercy’ is a dominant theme running in all our prayers. In the common *b’outo* of Mor Balai at ninth hour we recite “Renew, Full of Mercy (*mle rahme*), your creatures by the resurrection.”³⁴

« سَبِّحْهُ مَلَأَ وَتَمَلَأَ دِينَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ مَلَأَ. لِحَدِيثِهِمْ هُوَ يَمْلَأُ كُلَّ هَدِيمِهِ »

In some prayers we see God the one “Rich in Mercy.” “Our God, rich in mercy, answer sinners, who call upon you, because we know, Lord, that we have sinned; we knock at the door of mercy, bring forth pardon of offences for us from your rich treasure-house.”³⁵

« اللَّهُ هُوَ وَتَمَلَأَ. حَسْبُ حَتْمَتَا وَتَمَلَأَ كِبَرُ. وَبُرْحَتِي حُنْدُ. وَسُكْرَتِي. حَلَاوُكُلَا وَتَتَحَبُّ نَصِيحَتِي. أَهْنَبُ »
« كَيْ مَعْجَمُ مَعْتَا. مَعِ حَلَاوُكُلَا حَلَاوُكُلَا »

(Sapro on Thursday, II *qōlo* of repentance).

³³ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 347.

³⁴ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 175.

³⁵ *Awsâr Slâwoto*. 2006. *The Book of Common Prayer*, 682–683.

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