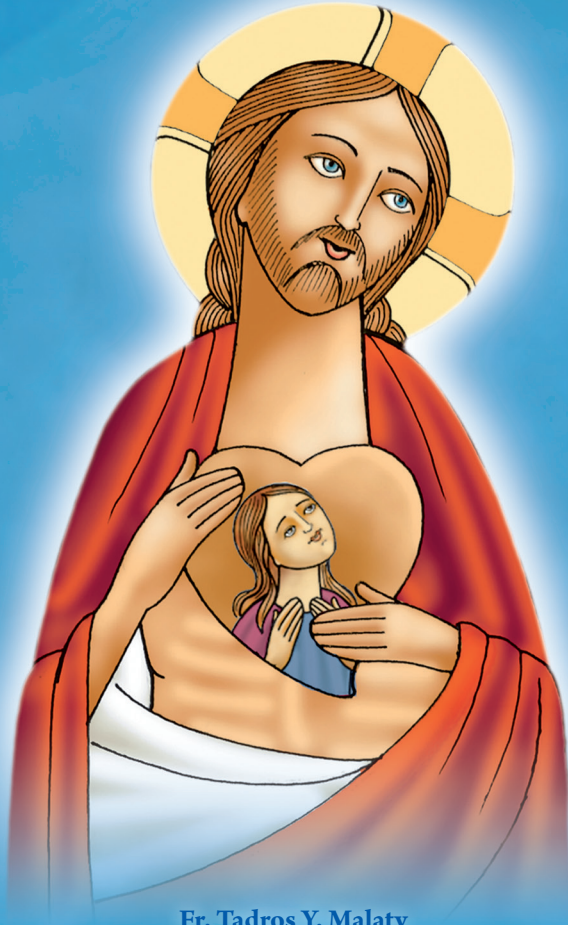




The Tongue's Dominion And Praising God

*According to
St. Jacob of Serugh
(Saint Mar Ya'coub El-Serouguy)*



Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
Translated by: G. Ishack

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2013



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**In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
One God
Amen**

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The Tongue's Dominion

According to
St. Jacob of Serugh

The legacy of St. Jacob of Serugh reveals his amazing personality:

1. He was a man of continual praise - like his teacher, St. Ephrem the Syrian. It was said that, rather than writing his poetry, he recited most of it spontaneously, thus revealing his mastery of this gift.

2. His legacy also reflected a joyous personality, perpetually rejoicing in the Lord.

3. He was an evangelic man of God, whose commentaries on the Old and New testaments give us a sense of his deep communion with God, and his friendship with the Holy Trinity.

4. He often speaks of one or more of the heavenly hosts as someone who is familiar, and lives, with them.

5. His legacy inflames the heart with a love for heaven - elevating thoughts, emotions and senses to enjoy heaven's deposit.

At this point, I pause wondering: Did this personality, with its marvellous attributes, induce his positive views of the tongue, and his appreciation of the tongue's dominion and extraordinary capabilities, or, did his realization of the realities of a holy tongue support his personality in the Lord, and accord him an astonishingly holy life? Alternatively, did the interaction of his personality in the Lord, with his views of the tongue, result in each reinforcing and elevating the other?

HIS VIEW REGARDING THE GIFT OF THE TONGUE

He believes that a holy tongue:

a- enables believers to participate in the celestials' lauds;



- b- is a dominion-wielding king;
- c- speaks in the name of the inner kingdom;
- d- is the Holy Spirit's lute;
- e- is driven by the wisdom of God;
- f- is a fertile mother
- g- is a divine treasure; and
- h- plays a role in a resurrected life

Furthermore:

- i- God cherishes the words of a holy tongue; and
- j- Constant praise projects Christ through us.

Finally, he explains the relationship between sanctifying the tongue and sanctifying our fasts, and gives practical guidance for sanctification of the tongue.



1

A Holy Tongue Enables Believers to Participate in the Celestials' Lauds

THE HUMAN TONGUE AS A CREATION DEDICATED TO PRAISE!

St. Jacob of Serugh makes frequent reference to the tongue's role, capabilities, and dominion, since man's creation. The reason is that the saint's heart, mind, writings and prayers were all fixated on a vision, namely, that all humans become God-fearing, and praise God continually. He constantly proclaims that God created man in His own image and likeness, so that man may capitalize on the heavenly life's deposit through unceasing lauds and thanksgiving.

The saint considers man to be a creation of praise. This perspective drove him to discuss in many instances, and particularly in his *Memers*'¹ introductions, the speech apparatus consisting of the mouth, lips, tongue and teeth. Man can thus, through a sanctified tongue, attain a sublime angelic level, sharing the celestials' task.

The earth's illumination does not constitute, in his view, the sole element of the sun's grandeur; rather, through its marvellous rays, the sun accentuates planets' splendour in the atmospheric envelope. Analogously, a person who praises at all times with his tongue as well as with his entire being, does not only become an inwardly shining star, but also instills light in the lives of many who, in their turn, become amazing shining stars! In this regard, the son of Sirach says: "***The Lord hath given me a tongue for my reward, and I will praise Him therewith.***" (Sirach 51:22).

¹ "*Memer*" is an Aramaic word which means "poem", "speech" or "discourse".



- ❖ Humans are created to praise frequently; **may they remember to praise abundantly each day!**

The sun neither shines nor traverses the heavens for its own benefit - rather it shines in order to give light to humans. Similarly, planets within the atmosphere's envelope are for humans' benefit day and night.

Humans were given the faculties of discernment, knowledge, speech, and voice, **in order to give praise to the Most High in His place.**

A human mouth is precise, as it were for praising the Lord; he who ceases to praise is an ingrate.

For this reason you were granted a mouth to use it in praise, thanksgiving, exultation and blessing.

Praise - since you are accorded the words of praise. Exult - since you were granted a voice filled with melodies. Give thanks - since you have a discerning mind. Bless - since you have become a communicating, not a mute vessel.

You were nothing and God's grace rendered you a great object; since this is now your reality, give thanks in amazement - why are you silent?

Enter within yourself and intimately examine your personality; **there you will find all the marvels of the creating Power¹.**

- ❖ My Lord, may the abject mouth which lauds You, and may the tongue which unworthily chants Your praise, exult in You.

My Lord, may both those who acclaim, and their audience, rejoice in You - since You have delighted them by Your birth; Yours are the lauds².

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memer 96 on the Beheading of John the Baptist.

² Memer 203 on the Nativity of Our Lord; Memer 11 on Our Lord's Incarnation (read before Matins' incense - Coptic).



2

A Holy Tongue is a Dominion-Wielding King

The question of the tongue's significance and its societal role, as well as its role in one's personal and family life, has been discussed, over the ages, by many ecclesiastics, thinkers and philosophers. St. Jacob of Serugh, however, followed the Holy Bible's viewpoint with respect to the tongue, namely, that the tongue is not only a significant, effective, member of the body, but it is also a dominion-wielding king.

The Book of Proverbs tells us: "*A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth, from the produce of his lips he shall be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*" (Proverbs 18:20-21 LXX) Through the tongue we can sow either love granting life, or strife and discord offering death. Even a simple word, uttered in passing, yields fruit. The son of Sirach emphasizes the tongue's sovereignty saying: "*Four manner of things appear: good and evil, life and death: but the tongue rules over them continually.*" (Sirach 37:18 LXX)

The tongue derives its sovereignty either by **fellowshipping with the Lord, the King of kings, or by associating with Satan, ruler of the kingdom of darkness.**

In his *Memer* discussing the sixth day of creation, St. Jacob of Serugh talks about the tongue immediately after addressing the mind (which resides in the brain); in that discussion, he asserts the tongue's amazing role in a person's life. The secret of the tongue's sovereignty is God the Creator's desire to be in the tongue's company - He thus tells Moses the prophet: "*And I will be with your mouth and with his [Aaron's] mouth, and I will teach you what*



you shall do." (Exodus 4:15) Satan's countermeasure is to concentrate his strikes against man, such that he replaces God as the tongue's companion - thus offering eternal death instead of eternal life.

A person has the right to choose his tongue's companion: either God or Satan - life or death.

The Divine promise given to Joshua the son of Nun was: "*...as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.*" (Joshua 1:5) "*This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.*" (Joshua 3:7) This promise corresponds to God's promise to Moses: "*I will be with your mouth...*" (Exodus 4:15) This is as though God's promise to be with his mouth is equivalent to saying that He will be with him fully; we infer that the mouth, the tongue's residence, fully controls man.

Let us struggle with God seeking fulfillment of His promise to be with us, and to accompany our mind, heart, mouth and tongue.

❖ Through his great beauty, Adam was glorified above a crown; none of the other creations could compete with him in beauty...

God perfected his brain to house the mind - it resides in the highest level like a god.

He crafted for him a mouth to examine foods, and placed in it taste buds to distinguish between sweet and sour...

All his thoughts are assembled in the heart, in his chest; the heart thus distributes, as it were, all the treasures from an eminent safe.

The word is in his mouth, and the discernment of sounds on his lips¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memer 8 on Adam's Return (Coptic); Memer 72 on Adam's Creation and Life of the Dead.



KING AHAB TREMBLES BEFORE ELIJAH'S TONGUE (1 KINGS 21:20)

Ahab, one of Israel's kings, had strayed into worshipping Baal, having been influenced by his evil wife Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, the Sidonian king. Ahab's preoccupation with his palaces and gardens led him to covet the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which bordered his Jezreel palace; he was prepared to pay him for it, or give him a better one in exchange.

When Naboth refused to sell his fathers' inheritance, Ahab returned to his palace, sullen and dejected. The evil Jezebel, however, plotted to have Naboth the Jezreelite murdered: she arranged for two scoundrels to bear witness against him falsely and publicly, saying that he had blasphemed God and the king. She therefore succeeded in having Naboth stoned to death, whereupon she joyfully brought the news to Ahab, and told him to proceed and take possession of the coveted vineyard. *"So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."* (1 Kings 21:16) Elijah then caught up with him, and told him that he and his house would be cursed. **The words of Elijah terrified Ahab;** he knew that none could stand against Elijah, since all creatures and even heaven responded to his words!

- ❖ The pagan heard the horrifying sentencing which Elijah pronounced; he was perplexed, he trembled, he humbled himself, and he was shocked.

He knew who had spoken: it was Elijah, the man **whose word had authority even over the elements.**



He experienced the man's mouth as it spoke - no creature could challenge his words.

He knew the extensive power of that tongue, and that the world could neither stand, nor say anything, against him.

Elijah issued the order - who can endure? Even nature itself fears him!

Winter and summer changed at his command; would not the house of Ahab fall - the house which declared its enmity with him?!

He pointed to the rain-laden clouds and halted the rain - would he not ruin Jezebel's abode when he curses it?

All creation feared him through the hunger which he imposed - how, then, can the pagan's house stand when he threatens it?

All creatures honoured this man's word; upon hearing it, Ahab feared it due to its truthfulness.

Great indeed and well-known was the person who spoke; the pagan was ill-prepared to hear and accept his word.

His heart trembled at Elijah - because he knew that worlds could not loose what he ties.

Upon hearing Elijah's lips sentencing him, Ahab tore his clothes and lay in sackcloth.

He fasted, humbled his hardened heart, walked barefoot, lay in sackcloth, and his repentance was sincere. (1 Kings 21:27)

The evil, which would have completely eradicated his house, was countered by sackcloth and, therefore, subsided and its execution stayed¹.

¹ *Memer 113 on Elijah the Prophet and Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kings 21); the University of Anthony, Lebanon 2003, Third Sermon, p. 110-112 (Arabic).*



❖ **A truth-uttering mouth fears no kings, leaders or dominions¹.**

St. Jacob of Serugh

A SINGLE, REGAL, TONGUE FOR EVERY BELIEVER

God granted man one tongue to maintain his peace and to disposition his life wisely; He did not give the rich two tongues - and none to the poor. Through each person's God-given tongue, eternal life is offered in the Lord, and shared by rich and poor.

❖ **He neither created three hands for the rich man's son, nor two tongues for the wise.**

A poor man's son does not have fewer body members, and the goldsmith has no extra fingers.

No one ever saw a three-eyed newborn because of his wealth, nor a tongueless one because of his poverty...

Despite his costly crown, a king has no bonuses and, by nature, is equal to the homeless: "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there.*" (Job 1:21)...

The commanding word proceeds from the tongue, and wisdom never multiplied a tongue's words.

Let the king bare himself and join the homeless in praise; examine both of them - you will find them equal in body members².

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE MIGHTY GOLIATH PERISHES FOLLOWING HIS BLASPHEMOUS WORDS

When the mighty Goliath defied and blasphemed the

¹ Memer 113 on Elijah the Prophet and Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kings 21); the University of Anthony, Lebanon 2003, Third Sermon, p. 131-132 (Arabic).

² Memer 64 on the Love of Boasting.



Lord, the young David came forward to confront him, armed with a sling and five smooth stones. *"Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."* (1 Samuel 17:45- 46)

- ❖ The mouth which blasphemed God was silenced by a stone, and its teeth decayed through the tongue which defied the Lord.

Goliath fell; David sprang and stood by his side - the corpse towered above the youth's head¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memer 34 on David, Goliath, and the Mystery of the Anointed (1 Samuel 17).



3

A Holy Tongue Speaks in the Name of the Inner Kingdom

THE TONGUE AND THE DIVINE THRONE

The heart is considered to be the centre of the kingdom of God, since our Lord Christ said: "*The kingdom of God is within you.*" (Luke 17:21) St. Jacob of Serugh does not consider the mouth, tongue, teeth and lips to be instruments intended merely for eating and speaking. Rather, through love and the fear of the Lord, those holy members can enable man to become as one of the jubilant celestials flitting around the Throne; man's mission as a praising creation would thus be realized, sharing celestials' work on earth and in heaven. Sanctifying the tongue is like elevating our appreciation of what God offered us, in order to live on a heavenly plane.

- ❖ He created for him two lips which speak as they flutter¹.
- ❖ The lips' fluttering enables strong voice movement between tongue and teeth.

The word's power resides in the soul's thought; the tongue releases and propels it.

The teeth and tongue combine to give the voice its fullness; as the tongue strikes the teeth, the words are carved.

The word parades itself as it emerges from obscurity, and is driven from the thought's domain to be manifested as external sound.

The word indwells the mind's bosom - with the mind it is pure and invisible; when uttered, it remains with, and in, the mind.

¹ *Memer 71 on the Sixth Day.*



When transmitted, the mind continues to have it - since it is never separated from the mind and is completely within it.

Our unique word defines everything and is boundless; through it all speech is uttered freely¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

THE TONGUE PREPARES OUR HOUSE FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD - POSITIVELY AND NEGATIVELY

The Holy Trinity works to establish the Divine kingdom in our house - our inner being thus becomes an abode for Him!

It is incumbent on us to capitalize on the power of the Divine grace and flee our sins and abominations, including the tongue's iniquities such as lying, gossip, and judging others, etc. In this regard, the son of Sirach says:

"Curse the whisperer and double-tongued: for such have destroyed many that were at peace. A backbiting tongue has disquieted many, and driven them from nation to nation: strong cities has it pulled down, and overthrown the houses of great men. A backbiting tongue has cast out virtuous women, and deprived them of their labours. Whoso hearkens unto it shall never find rest, and never dwell quietly. The stroke of the whip makes marks in the flesh: but the stroke of the tongue breaks the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword: but not so many as have fallen by the tongue. Well is he that is defended through the venom thereof; who has not drawn the yoke thereof, nor has been bound in her bands. For the yoke thereof is a yoke of iron, and the bands thereof are bands of brass. The death thereof is an evil death, the grave were better than it. It shall not have rule over them that fear

¹ Memer 38 on "In the beginning was the Word..." (John 1:1).



God, neither shall they be burned with the flame thereof. Such as forsake the Lord shall fall into it; and it shall burn in them, and not be quenched; it shall be sent upon them as a lion, and devour them as a leopard. Look that you hedge your possession about with thorns, and bind up your silver and gold, and weigh your words in a balance, and make a door and bar for your mouth. Beware you slide not by it, lest you fall before him that lies in wait."
(Sirach 28:13-30)

He also said: *"To slip upon a pavement is better than to slip with the tongue: so the fall of the wicked shall come speedily."* (Sirach 20:20)

- ❖ Since you have invited Him to come to you, prepare for Him a befitting camp, so that He may be honoured therein.

You call for His kingdom to come - prepare the place: a pure, immaculate house, filled with holiness.

Install on **the mouth, the house's door**, a veil decorated with "Yes" and "No."

In **the heart, the house's centre**, sprinkle purity and all thoughts desirous of daily righteousness.

In **the soul, the palatial abode of the coming King**, offer incense - which being all the good works.

Spread a carpet of pure love **on the house's floor**, since He desires to find love wherever He dwells.

In your prayers you invited the kingdom to come to you, and He will come in response to your invitation; therefore, prepare a place fit for His veneration.

Behold! The accursed has been vanquished and you will not fight him unaided; the King is coming to free you - where will He reside?

Beware! Be neither angry, perturbed, nor agitated; make sure that you are not harbouring any greed or gluttony!



Beware! Do not harbour the evil odour of lies, adultery or abominations, from which the King flees.

Beware! Do not harbour cunning, falsehoods, gossip, or **ears that are quick to believe allegations!**

Make sure you rid yourself of those shortcomings, because the King is coming; if He finds you harbouring any of them He will not reside within you.

If, after having invited Him, He leaves you, the monster will return and harm you through his wiles.

Let your soul be well-suited for the King's residence; so that He may come and indwell you upon your invitation.

You have thus learned to invite that kingdom to come to you, and reside in a place that you would have purified.

This is because as soon as He starts to approach, the enemy will flee, and you will boast and welcome Him in holiness¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

HOW GREAT IS THE TONGUE!

Celestials praise God in spirit language which needs no material tongue; terrestrials, on the other hand, were granted the ability to praise with their tongues, as well as with all their body members, energy, and spirit. Likely, that is why the saint refers in his *Memers* to celestials' welcoming, honouring, and admiring man, through the work of the Trinity in their salvation and eternal glory.

The underlying reason for the saint's awarding much respect and majesty to the tongue, to the extent that he unceasingly entreats the Holy Trinity to preserve and sanctify it, is that humans were created first and foremost to

¹ *Memer 10 on the Prayer which Our Lord Taught His Disciples: "Our Father Who art in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4).*



exult in our heavenly God, while the physical needs of all body members are coincidentally satisfied.

❖ He created a mouth for him to praise the Lord - his Lord; through that mouth he also feeds on various foods for his body's nourishment¹.

❖ Let **the mouth** utter His praise, through the word it owns - giving thanks on behalf of the entire body.

The mouth is undoubtedly compelled to praise - **representing the other body members**, since they are all speechless.

The tongue is also involved along with the teeth, since the praising voice rings through them with differing intonations.

My Lord - all the body must praise You. Behold! The mouth is open to praise on behalf of the entire body!

Help the mouth discharge all those tasks, representing all the silent senses which move the mouth in thanksgiving².

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Memer 71 on the Sixth Day.*

² *Memer 106 on Psalms 96:1; 149:1 "Praise the Lord..."*



4

A Holy Tongue Is the Holy Spirit's Lute

YOUR TONGUE IS A LUTE ON WHICH GOD'S SPIRIT PLAYS!

We often sense the extent to which a gifted musician cherishes his instrument, especially during long trips, travelling from one country to another: he protects it, holding it closely as though it were an integral part of his being!

Analogously, the saint regards the human tongue as a lute on which God's Spirit plays; pure lauds uplifting the human heart thus emanate from it, pleasing God as well as his servants, the celestials.

There is a huge difference between someone honouring his tongue by making it a lute in God's hands, and another person who occupies his tongue with dry, boring, debates, which can only corrupt not only his inner peace, but also that of his brethren. The saint thus demands that we commit ourselves to the love-filled Faith, as opposed to vain arguments which corrupt even our time.

❖ O Son of God, may my mouth be a lute of voices, chanting unto You pure lauds, wondrously...

The mouth must unquestionably glorify the tongueless body members.

St. Jacob of Serugh



5

A Holy Tongue Is Driven by the Wisdom of God

Once we enjoy fellowship with the Divine Word, He, in turn, grants us the spirit of wisdom and discernment, whether we speak or maintain our silence.

❖ The word is in his mouth, and his lips distinguish varying intonations!

St. Jacob of Serugh

St. Jacob of Serugh often wonders in his *Memers* whether it is preferable to speak or to remain silent. In raising his heart to heaven, he enjoys God's magnificence and love; this invokes within him the desire to be silent, as though he were saying with St. Peter on the transfiguration mount: "***Rabbi, it is good for us to be here...***" (Mark 9:5) At the same time, he yearns for the Lord's granting him the words to attract all humans, to share with him the joyous experience in the Lord.

Whether he speaks or maintains his silence, the spirit of wisdom and discernment drives him down the Lord's path for edification. On the other hand, both speech and silence lead to perdition in the absence of the spirit of wisdom and discernment. A clear example is given in the saint's comparison of the first Eve with St. Mary, the new Eve: the first Eve's discussion with the serpent, plus her evil silence, cleared the path of death for herself, as well as for her husband and children; as for the new Eve, her conversation with Archangel Gabriel and her acceptance of the annunciation opened the door, through the Divine incarnation, to the path of life - and when she bowed her head in submission saying, "***Let it be to me according to your word,***" (Luke 1:38) she confirmed through her silence what her words had indicated.



It behooves us, through God's Spirit, to appreciate the significance of the tongue, whether it be silent or not. Never underestimate your tongue's impact! It affects not only your life and eternal destiny, but also those of others and many future generations!

- ❖ Archangel Gabriel rebuilt that which the serpent had destroyed; Mary poured the foundations which Eve had demolished in the Garden of Eden.

Two celibates (Eve and St. Mary), received two messages from two messengers (the serpent and Archangel Gabriel); they were sent in two generations, one opposing the other.

Satan sent Eve a secret message through the serpent; God sent the glorious annunciation to Mary via the vigilant angel.

Gabriel presented a clever defence in Mary's ear against the evil one, because of what he had said in Eve's ear.

He renewed the conversation - but he refined the discussion with his words, since he spoke the truth, and eliminated all obscurities.

One virgin (Eve) was tricked by the evildoer in Eden; her ears listened to the great deceiver.

Another virgin (St. Mary) was chosen instead; she listened to the voice of truth with her ears through the Most High.

Life entered through the same door by which death had entered; the great bond, by which the wicked one had restrained us there, was loosed.

"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:21)



Eve never questioned the serpent as it led her astray; rather, she remained silent of her own free will, and she believed through the power of deceit.

The latter maiden heard the truth from the truthful angel; nevertheless, she sought to understand the matter's interpretation.

Although the former heard that she would become like God, she never asked, "How can this be?..."

Sin was introduced, and Eve's name was defiled because of her silence; Mary's words, on the other hand, led to life, light and victory.

St. Jacob of Serugh



6

A Holy Tongue Is a Fertile Mother

THE RIGHTEOUS' TONGUE IS A FERTILE MOTHER

Our Lord Christ calls to His bride, the Church, saying: *"Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing; every one bears twins, and none is barren among them."* (Song of Songs 6:6) It thus befits every soul not to be barren, rather, to give birth continually to twins.

St. Jacob of Serugh sees a believer's holy tongue as a fertile mother:

1. It gives birth unceasingly to new lauds; this is not from the viewpoint of lyrics, rather, from the perspective of their being lauds of timeless and ageless love.

2. A holy tongue gives birth to rivers of living waters, like the rock which followed the people in the wilderness, inundating them with running, living water.

3. It is not proper for a believer's tongue to be like the lazy servant, who hid his master's talent in the ground and, failing to trade with it, did not make any money. (Matthew 25:14 - 30)

4. When the tongue halts its praise, God calls upon the stones to praise Him. This is what happened the day Christ was crucified: humanity ceased to praise, so the sun and moon did not give their light, and the earth, rocks and tombs praised Him - each in its own language.

❖ The rock gave birth to rivers, when struck by Your mystery; let Your Cross move the soul, spreading Your wondrous news. (Exodus 17:1 - 7)

A barren soul is like a barren rock; bring forth Your *Memers* as the rock brought forth rivers.



It is easy, even for stones, to express Your glory; how much more will it be for those souls that know You?... (Luke 19:40)

My Lord, my praising Your Divinity will not wane, lest my silence incite the stones to replace me.

It is written: your silence will lead the stones to cry out; I therefore cry out, lest the stones be required to praise, replacing me. (Luke 19:40)

My Lord, grant the stones silence; and grant me the honest word, enabling the discerning mouth to utter Your praise. (Psalm 51:17)

O discerners - God is in no need of our lauds - He is already splendid and praised, and filled with delight.

He who hastens to praise, benefits; let us, therefore, fill our mouths with lauds, to reap profits.

Although He needs no praise, He repays generously those who praise Him.

Having reaped benefits all their lives, God has furthermore granted the kingdom to those who praise Him, as their final reward.

He has promised Hell to those who reject praise; through this threat, they are redirected to a spiritual life.

The lazy person who retained his talent without trading was cast out to the chains and terrifying darkness. (Matthew 25:14-30)

He scares evildoers and sows terror in their hearts; they benefit from His wrath as they draw near unto Him.

In all tribulations He desires to procure everyone's life - in order to gather all worlds, in every occasion, unto His Father¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Memor 16 on the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).*



7

A Holy Tongue Is a Divine Treasure

Sanctification of the mouth and tongue extends beyond refraining from sins of the tongue; it also includes associating the tongue with the word of God, and the believer's enjoyment of an Authority moving his tongue. Sanctifying the tongue conveys to the believer feelings of enrichment from the treasures of Jesus Christ; he scoops from them to increase his, as well as others', wealth. In his *Memer* addressing the miracle of the five loaves and two fish (Matthew 14:14 - 21), St. Jacob of Serugh felt that he was with the disciples, receiving bread and fish from Christ's hand to give to the multitude, to eat and be filled, and to have enough leftovers to satiate others.

❖ O Lord, You are great and Your wealth is abundant; enrich me from Your overflowing treasure, so that I can distribute to the poor.

All Your Father's concealed wealth is Yours; **may the mouth, eager to describe You, be sated with this wealth.**

Yours is everything belonging to Your sublime Father; O Lord, bestow from Your riches upon the word which seeks to know You¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Memer 87 on the Five Loaves and Two Fish (Matthew 14:14-21; Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:11-17; John 6:1-15).*



8

God Cherishes the Words of a Holy Tongue

Abraham, our patriarch, spoke often with God about fathering a son who would be his heir; this continued for a few years, then stopped. Eventually, in Abraham's old age, God answered his petition. It is likely that he and Sarah were wondering: "Does God still remember what they had petitioned several decades earlier?" Not only does God remember His children's words, but He also cherishes them; they are preserved in their account both in this, and the coming age. Since we abide by conversations carried out during our limited earthly sojourn, it is incumbent on us to double our eternal account, offered by a holy tongue in prayer, praise, thanksgiving and adoration! Our tongue is an excellent source for supporting our quest for eternal life.

❖ He accepted Hannah's prayers in the holy temple, and sent her compassion from His Father's house.

He heard Jonah's prayer from the fish's belly, and transported it as a firstborn to His Father. (Jonah 2:1-10)

This is through mentioning all the specific sacrifices, the priests' incense, the peace burnt offerings, and the prayers, petitions, tithes, and pledges.

He accepts, hears, listens, sees, **and remembers the mouth's words, and the heart's thoughts.**

He listened to the prayers of both Pharisee and publican, as they stood in the holy temple.

As He listens to the universe's petitions, He never neglects to enumerate these matters as they occurred¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Memor 13 on the Pharisee and the Publican.*



9

The Holy Tongue's Role in a Resurrected Life

YOUR TONGUE AND THE BLOOD OF THE CRUCIFIED ONE!

James the apostle says: "*For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*" (James 3:7-8)

St. Augustine says:

[Man can tame wild beasts; as for his tongue, none can rein it in!]

Let us resort to God, Who can rein it in... Being humans, you are incapable of convincing your tongues... Let us, therefore, entreat God to tame us, saying, "O Lord, You are our refuge."

Man, whom God created after His own image, is able to tame lions; is God unable to tame His image?

We perfect our hope in this Tamer [*the person who tames*] by submitting to Him, seeking His mercy... Let us endure His taming, so we may attain perfection, since He often permits our chastisement. Given that we use whips to tame wild beasts, should we not expect God to use the same means to transform us from being His wild animals to becoming His children?¹]

In his dissertation regarding the tongue's sanctification, St. Jacob of Serugh recounts what happened to the Israelites during their exit from Egypt (Exodus 12).

The lamb's blood symbolized the blood of Jesus Christ, without which there is no salvation. In Book IV of his "Divine Institutes," **Fr. Lactantius** says: [...the Hebrews

¹ *Sermons on Selected New Testament Chapters.*



alone were saved by the sign of the blood: not that the blood of a sheep had such efficacy in itself as to the safety of men, but it was an image of things to come..."¹.]

St. Gregory of Nyssa observes that sprinkling of the blood on the door posts and lintel refers to sanctification of the soul's three sides: intellectual, emotional and spiritual²; put differently, it refers to man's full sanctification, which encompasses all his intellect, desires, sentiments, emotions and innermost feelings.

St. Jacob of Serugh sees that the blood symbolizes the tongue's sanctification.

- ❖ Through the lamb's blood which he sprinkled on the doors, Moses taught you that you should moisten your lips with the Son's blood every day.

This is because the mouth is the tongue's door, through which emerge lauds and words, glorification and insults, of different kinds.

David asked that a guard be set over his mouth; who can be that Guard, when asked, except the Crucified One?

David entreated the Lord saying, "***Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth;***" (Psalm 141:3) It is the Cross that guards the mouth's door against Satan.

The Cross, raised at the gates of the congregation's children, protected them from the firstborns' murderer on earth.

Now, also, you take the blood of the Son of God and, with your fingers, sign your lips with the cross.

Make it your mouth's guard and, rest assured, its effectiveness is certain; when the destroyer sees it, he will not approach you.

¹ Fr. Lactantius: *Divine Institutes* - Book 4:26.

² *Vita Mose*. 2:96.



If His symbol was able to stand guard at the gate and protect them, then how much more is He able to guard those who seek Him?

Accept the blood on your lips, from the divine chalice; it will prove to you that He is the guaranteed Guard of the door.

The congregation's doors were sealed with the lamb's blood; seal your door with the blood of the side of the Son of God.

Imbue your tongue, lips and mind with your Lord's blood; He will guard you against evil.

Seek unceasingly that guard for your mouth and lips; acquire Him tearfully - He will protect you sleeplessly.

The blood of the slaughtered Christ is sprinkled on the congregation's mouths; Moses saw this, and represented it in the lamb's blood¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

SANCTIFICATION OF THE MOUTH - THE RESURRECTION

In his *Memer* discussing the raising of Jairus' young daughter, St. Jacob of Serugh contemplates the dead maiden - it is impossible for her to praise Him. She needs the Granter of life and the resurrection to raise her - so that she might praise and glorify Him!

We read in the Second Book of Kings that, "*...as they were burying a man,.. they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet...*" (2 Kings 13:21) If by touching the bones of Elisha, the man stood on his feet; how much more then would we enjoy life, if we adhered to Elisha's Lord, the Resurrection Himself.

Sanctifying the tongue and mouth are essentially

¹ *Memer 79 on the Veil of Moses (Exodus 34:33-35).*



enjoying the resurrected life that is filled with praise and joy in the Lord.

We crush our despair, enlighten our depths with the spirit of hope, and exult in heaven's deposit, by adhering to the One Who rose from the dead!

❖ O Son of God Who came to our place, You are the Resurrection; may our mouth arise in You and persist in praising You.

My Lord, a sinner is essentially a dead person - unworthy of praising You, or of speaking about You.

With You, O Lord, it is easy for a dead person to speak like a living one - he will obey Your commands.

A dead person close to Your resurrection becomes as a living person - O Son of God, You are the Resurrection; raise me up, so that I might live through You.

When dead, I am next to life; whispering Your Name revives me to contemplate You.

I was dead; if they cast me atop Elisha, my peer, he will raise me up - although he was just a prophet.

Behold, I lean against Your body - the body of my God; O Lord of the prophet, raise up the dead person who entreats You.

The corpse acquired life through Elisha without seeking it; how much more will You give me when I ask You?!

My Lord, You are the Resurrection and the comfort; beside You, I do not live in the shadow of death.

Help the concealed dead to proclaim Your praise; so that Your approaching flock may drink from Your spring.

Oh that my mouth were never silenced from praise because of my iniquities! Rather, let Your praise abound even from the dead of the entire world!



Speak, O sinner! Speak despite your unworthiness!
Your Lord is worthy of praise, even by stones!

Do not maintain your silence - rocks, stones, corpses,
discerning and undiscerning people, all praise with you.

My Lord, You are worthy of being praised by all
Your creation; since worlds of all forms owe You praise.

May the deserving and undeserving chant Your
praise; and may You accept their praise although You
are in no need of praise¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Memer 91 on the Daughter of Jairus, Ruler of the Synagogue (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 9:40-56).*



10

Constant Praise Projects Christ through Us

God the Father granted that His co-essential, eternally-born, Son, be incarnate from the virgin; He was thus born of her, in the fullness of time, in order to accord us the Spirit of sonship through baptism, and to in-dwell us with the icon of the Son Who is formed in us (Galatians 4:19) through His Holy Spirit, Who works unceasingly in us. St. Jacob of Serugh sees that this Divine work is proclaimed within us, where the kingdom of God resides (Luke 17:21); this is the kingdom of joy, which is transfigured through continual praise, with all our might. For this reason he entreats our Lord Christ saying, "*Help the mouth give birth to You through hymns.*" He also considers that, for a believer living in the Spirit, all components of his speech mechanism should interact together, as in a marital relationship, to bring forth spiritual joy through praise. He calls on believers, one more time, to listen to what was said to Moses the prophet: "*I will be with your mouth...*" (Exodus 4:15)

❖ O Son of God - You do not have only one birth; let Him Who spoke of Your birth, speak.

The Father begat You eternally and before all ages; the virgin also gave birth to You incomprehensibly.

Help the mouth beget You also through hymns; since it is easy for You to come to this birth, as You are already born.

The Father begat You and granted that You be for us; since He gave to the world all that was the concealed Father's.

The Father, with all His inherent grace and love, sent us His Son to become, in the end, our Son also.



Since it is easy for all who are born to become someone's child, He will not conceal Him from us until we beget Him in the flesh¹.

- ❖ The voice moves and emerges from the mouth and teeth through the tongue that sends it.

Pain gives birth to it and the lips conceive it, through marriage of the teeth with the tongue.

When these external body members inter-marry, they give birth to the human voice, to communicate the word to its destination. The word is revealed and proclaimed through the voice begat by the fluttering lips².

- ❖ The womb housed You; how can a mouth contain the Word (Logos) Who is greater than the world, yet is unheard?

Two knees bore You - O great One, bearer of all creation; You instil awe, terror and perplexity in anyone attempting to speak.

As a child You were petted on Mary's breast; Your mouth was smaller than the word which spread Your news. O Provider, the maiden fed You earthly milk - and Your right hand which held her breast raised the heavens.

The two arms held You - yet You cause the Cherubim's chariot to tremble as it praises Your blessings. Who can understand You? When matters pertaining to You are uttered, they are more sublime than nature and transcend anything normal³.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memer 197 on the Annunciation of the Mother of God (Luke 1:26-38).

² Memer 198 on the Visit of Mary the Holy Mother of God to Elizabeth, to witness the truth that Gabriel had mentioned to her - also Memer 16 on Mary's Visit to Elizabeth (Coptic).

³ Memer 203 on Nativity of Our Lord.



11

Sanctifying the Tongue and Sanctifying Our Fasts

Fasting periods have their sanctity; it befits believers who sanctify their fasts by maintaining empty stomachs and alert souls, to weigh their words, so that the tongue also retains its sanctity.

Let us not belittle the uttered word: a single word can expose a believer to hellfire; how much more will it be if he treats his words lightly during his fast?

Maintaining an empty stomach and an alert soul for spiritual growth should go hand-in-hand with a vigilant mouth over each word which proceeds from it. A single word opened the gates of Paradise to the thief on the right; one word caused Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, to become leprous; one word resulted in the Lord's anger descending on Moses, the greatest among prophets.

A holy fast supports the believer in ensuring that the mouth discharges its mission, namely, both lauds and hymns to God, or maintaining a holy silence.

❖ **During that day, when the stomach is empty and the soul is alert, speak, O mouth, and benefit your listeners...**

Words proceeding from a human are not all equal; also, a speaker would not simply say nothing.

Lauds, thanksgiving, spiritual hymns and prophecies are all words.

Such words are full of life - for those who speak them; abstainers will never stop from saying them.

Do not speak any words of transgression, envy, jealousy, enmity or strife.

Let the mouth abstain from scoffing, from uttering insults, and from any solitary word walking in the darkness. (Psalm 91:6)



One word is capable of shutting out a fasting believer - the Divine ordinance then bypasses him.

One word can thrust its speaker in hell, and cast its utterer in eternal fire. (Matthew 5:22)

Moses, the prophecy's treasure, angered the Lord by one word proceeding from his mouth; he was, however, beautiful in his deeds. (Deuteronomy 3:26)

Miriam the prophetess, sister of the eminent Aaron, became leprous because of a word that her mouth uttered. (Numbers 12:1 - 6)

And what can I say about the right hand thief, who said a word which led him to inherit the Paradise of beatitudes? (Luke 23:39 - 44)

Given that each word uttered by the mouth enters the Judgment Court, who does not fear superfluous words? (Matthew 5:37)

Since a man is justified or condemned by his words, who then, would not weigh his words in awe, prior to uttering them?

Since words defile a man even when fasting, why then does he not fear saying an unbecoming word?

Moses angered the Lord, Miriam became leprous, and the thief entered Paradise; defilements and beauties, solely in words - no actions...

O abstainer, tremble now, before the word - lest your mouth succumb to sin during your fast...

O abstainer, be fearful of uttering words, since they lead those who fall therein to death and great evil.

A mouth has the authority to praise, chant hymns, exult, or maintain a pure silence¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Memor 23 on Holy Lent.*



12

Practical Guidance for Sanctification of the Tongue

The Holy Bible, as well as our forefathers, offer us practical guidelines to help believers sanctify their tongues. We mention below what St. Jerome said in this regard:

[Beware of the babbling tongue, and of ears eager to listen to news. Do not be contemptible of others, and do not listen to those who mock others.]

[An old boisterous woman, an elder speaking gibberish, and a sophist, hoard the Holy Bibles and tear them apart; they might teach their contents without learning them.]

Joshua the Son of Sirach invites us to savour the sweet tongue: "Sweet language will multiply friends: and a fair-speaking tongue will increase kind greetings." (Sirach 6:5) "The pipe and the psaltery make sweet melody: but a pleasant tongue is above them both." (Sirach 40:21)

He also warns us against babbling, even in parties, saying: "Pour not out words where there is a musician and show not forth wisdom out of time. A concert of music in a banquet of wine is as a signet of carbuncle set in gold. As a signet of an emerald set in a work of gold, so is the melody of music with pleasant wine. Speak, young man, if there be need of you: and yet scarcely when you are twice asked. Let your speech be short, comprehending much in few words; be as one that knows and yet holds his tongue. If you be among great men, make not yourself equal with them; and when ancient men are in place, use not many words." (Sirach 32:4 - 9)

Sanctification of the tongue is also realized through sanctification of our silence. We read in "The Fathers' Paradise" that our forefather Abba Poemen likened Abba Nestorius unto the brass serpent which Moses lifted up to



heal the congregation, and that he possessed all virtues - healing everyone without speaking.

St. Jacob of Serugh offers the following guidelines:

1. We must realize that **God, in granting us a tongue, has granted us the freedom** to control it and to formulate the words in any direction we choose; we are even free to move our entire beings either towards fellowshiping with God, or to slide into the abyss. It befits man to ask the Holy Spirit, of his own free will, to lead his tongue, moving it to edify the soul, and the assembly as a whole, in a direction that pleases God.

❖ God created a moving, changing, tongue, which manipulates the words¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

2. **The need for heavenly guardianship:** Given that God's love is such that He desires to accompany man throughout his journey in this world, Satan exercises all his wiles and deceits in order to be man's companion; for this reason, believers cry out to the Lord each morning saying: "*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.*" (Psalm 141:3) The son of Sirach also cries out saying, "*Who shall set a watch before my mouth, and a seal of wisdom upon my lips, that I fall not suddenly by them, and that my tongue destroy me not?*" (Sirach 22:27) St. Jacob of Serugh demands that we adorn our house's door (the mouth) with the veil of divine grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

❖ At the house's door, which is the mouth, God created a veil, adorned and decorated with grace and blessings.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ *Memer 71 on the Sixth Day.*



3. Taking care to control the tongue and refrain from babbling: The Holy Bible warns us against babbling or unhelpful conversations. In this regard, Joshua the son of Sirach tells us: *"He that can rule his tongue shall live without strife; and he that hates babbling shall have less evil. Rehearse not unto another that which is told unto you, and you shalt fare never the worse. Whether it be to friend or foe, talk not of other men's lives; and if you can without offence, reveal them not. For he heard and observed you, and when time comes he will hate you. If you have heard a word, let it die with you; and be bold, it will not burst you. A fool travails with a word, as a woman in labour of a child. As an arrow that sticks in a man's thigh, so is a word within a fool's belly."* (Sirach 19:6 - 12)

In St. Jacob of Serugh's depiction of the world, Satan offers all his means of corruption in order to destroy our life; one of Satan's gifts is vain, useless, babbling. perspective is that babbling's creeping into his life leads to loss of his inner peace and life's purity.

Once again, he cautions us to be vigilant, even during worship: we must take care not to follow the Pharisee's example who, even when giving thanks, fell, because he babbled and judged his brother, the publican. His prayer lost its essence.

St. Jacob of Serugh warns women and men against chatter inside the holy church.

❖ The world accosted me, to hand out to me the woes it bore. My Lord, I do not partake of that harm-filled offer.

In the world, I was met with babbling, rowdiness and insults; let me find peace in the company of Your word.

It is a second sea, troubling me with its storms; O Harbour of Life, give me rest in Your pure place.

Those who descend into the world's possessiveness are engulfed in decadence; O Lord, cleanse me through



Your teachings, since the world has defiled me¹.

- ❖ The Pharisee who was righteous, according to the Law, was pleasing in his own eyes - and there he stood, listing his virtues.

He looked over at the publican, who had also gone up to pray, and despised him; he dismissed him with contempt.

He thanked the Lord with a babble-filled spirit and, comparing himself to the publican, concluded that he was greater.

Forgetting that he was praying, he said: "***God, I thank You that I am not like other men... even as this tax collector.***" (Luke 18:11)²

- ❖ Women sit in the holy church with their mouths fully occupied by chatter.

While the prophets cry out to teach us the ways of righteousness, they babble about vain, distasteful, news.

Satan blinds humans' eyes; he tries to murder them whenever an opportunity presents itself.

The monster came into being because everyone whispered their prayers quietly to the Lord.

Instead of a procession of prayers, he planted the murmurs of repugnant news in women's mouths.

O naughty woman! Whisper your prayers, and reveal your wound to the Invisible Physician - He will bandage your wound without exposing it...

Through babbling, the evildoer obscures the work which swathes all sinners' wounds.

He induces man to chatter with his neighbour in the holy sanctuary, thus propagating vain and distasteful news.

¹ Memer 68 on the End of the World and the Awesome Judgment.

² Memer 13 on the Pharisee and the Tax-collector; Memer 11 on the Pharisee and the Tax-collector who ascended to the Temple to pray (Coptic).



He calls on Satan, and attracts some of the words left over from wallowing in men.

He reminds you of those words which you had forgotten before entering, so that you might utter them during prayer.

Prayer is then distanced from the mind, because of those words; listening to the prophetic readings thus ceases.

Consequently, each person starts chattering with his neighbour; prophetic readings then remain unheeded¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

4. Enjoyment of daily, new, lauds: How dangerous it is for man to boast of having sanctified his tongue and entire being, as though he no longer needs constant renewal through the work of God's Holy Spirit! In Christ we acquire a new heart and mind, new behavioural traits, a new life, and a new tongue, as though we live in a new celestial creation.

A true believer enjoys constant internal renewal, such that he sees everything in a new light; looking through Christ's eyes, he sees a new ageless, timeless, creation, both within himself as well as in his surroundings.

❖ As David the king taught you, praise the Lord with a new and different praise every day. He said: "*Sing to the Lord a new song.*" (Psalm 149:1) Watch! Praise with a new song!

I praised yesterday, and yesterday is gone home... today, give new lauds - why are you silent?

Depend not on the lauds you gave yesterday; today you are required to praise anew.

This is because you, also, expect continued progression from other creations.

¹ *Memer 182 on Guidance; Memer 5 on Preaching (Coptic).*



The sun which served you yesterday, cannot remain still, as though its path yesterday were sufficient.

Rather, just as the sun illuminated your way for your enjoyment only today,

The Lord asks you to draw nearer to Him through new daily praise.

Your debt to praise Him today with a new praise is not paid by your having praised Him numerous times in the past.

Each day's morning opens the door before you. You are indebted countless times to praise; this is analogous to most creations' daily expectation of light and respiration.

Do not say, "Since the sun shone yesterday, let it rest; I do not need its light today."

Rather, today is dearer to you than yesterday; you regard it as though its shining light lasts only for the day.

Consider, in the same vein, your new lauds which David taught you, saying, "*Sing to the Lord a new song.*" (Psalm 149:1)

Today you will see clearly a new creation, never seen before.

You have only seen the present day - today; offer your new praise now, during the new day.

The new day is also waning, giving way to a new one; tomorrow is also new.

Today requires a new praise; since it is not fitting for the mouth to cease praising¹.

St. Jacob of Serugh

¹ Memer 106 on "*Sing to the Lord a new song.*" (Psalm 96:1; 149:1)



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