

A DIFFERENT JESUS MESSAGE

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In this article, Arthur Telling, FRC, presents a different message from Jesus, one based on self-knowledge, as recorded in the ancient text, *The Gospel of Thomas*, discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945.



Jesus said, “Those who know all, but are lacking in themselves, are utterly lacking,” Gospel of Thomas, saying 67.

The Gospel of Thomas, its full text uncovered in the desert sands of Egypt in the middle of the last century, may be one of the oldest recorded gospels of Jesus, according to some experts on history. Attributed to Didymos Judas Thomas—the doubting Thomas—and called the secret sayings of the living Jesus, this gospel in many ways reflects the four familiar canonical New Testament gospels. But important differences can be found, purportedly revealing the more

closely guarded secrets given by Jesus to his inner circle.

This new gospel contains 114 separate sayings of Jesus, some of which offer a strikingly different picture of Jesus’ message, such as this from saying 22 of the Gospel. Jesus said: “When you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter.” Departing from the canonical orthodox teaching of salvation through a belief that Jesus is Lord, saying 22 moves into heretofore uncharted territory, something more like the Eastern religions, and yet germane to our action-fixated Western society. Others, such as saying 50, are yet more abstract and intense: “If they ask you, ‘What is the evidence of your Father in you?’ say to them, ‘it is motion and rest.’”

In this saying, Jesus describes the Father to be motion and rest. More conventionally, we understand the Father to be *life*, and *all*



The Coptic Museum in Old Cairo, Egypt, houses 1,200 Nag Hammadi manuscripts, including The Gospel of Thomas. Photo by Olga Deulofeu, SRC.

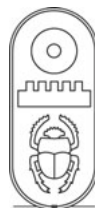
things created. Saying 50 can be construed as saying that life is motion and its requisite, rest. Thus, without motion there is no life, and without rest there is no reflection on life. With motion and rest, with life and reflection, a story develops as events take shape, becoming activities, as a series of motions are flawlessly executed so that a thing is accomplished; that “thing” being perhaps the placing of one foot before the next, taking a step. Consider doing this now, to stand and take a step with your foot. This is “motion,” and to reflect on it and to begin contemplating upon where that foot will land is “rest.” It is “making a foot in place of a foot”—the imagined foot landing where the foot is to land.

This territory, called self-awareness, is not unfamiliar to a Hindu, Buddhist, or Chinese Taoist. It is unfamiliar to the West. For the West has taken step after step, moving foot after foot, putting little thought into the exercise, instead contemplating only upon the end destination. “I’m going to build a patio,” a person might say. But that person does not put thought into the totality of each of the separate movements that will combine for achieving it. The person ends up with a patio, but has traded self-awareness for it. This is okay, for a patio is of great value. But the patio would be more enjoyable had the person gained, or at least avoided losing, self-awareness.

Such is the way of Western humanity; creating exceptional fine forms yet losing our essence. And the Eastern mystic? He or she has self-awareness, but may not have a patio. To “make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand,” is to contemplate on your every movement. To make “an image in place of an image” is to reverse the order of Divine Power; to make the image with your mind, so that your mind is no longer enslaved by the images and sensations that perpetually surround you in your waking life. The building blocks for this task are motion and

rest. All of the gospels and other texts of Jesus, even those bound into the New Testament, were written after the ministry of Jesus had ended. Historians generally give greater credibility to those written earliest, because they are less influenced by pagan Roman, Greek, and other beliefs. Marvin Meyer, a professor of religion at Chapman University in Southern California, is a foremost recognized expert on historical Gnostic and orthodox Christian written doctrines. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, edited by Meyer contains his translation of the Gospel of Thomas from the original manuscript, as well as his commentary. Based on evidence from earlier-found page fragments of the Thomas Gospel, this gospel may be from a very early date, according to Meyer who cites the work of leading papyrologist Soren Giversen. Meyer concludes that it may rival “that of any of the New Testament gospels,” in regard to how soon the gospel was recorded in writing after the ministry of Jesus was done. And “in literary genre and content” the gospel is consistent with some earliest known texts, says Meyer. Gospel of Thomas sayings appear to be transmitted in an earlier form than the canonical, orthodox gospels. Thomas parables of Jesus appear simply as stories, yet New Testament gospels often have “allegorical interpretations” appended to them that appear to reflect “new situations” experienced by Jesus followers. The early written Thomas Gospel may be more reliably closer to what Jesus thought.

Second-century church officials spoke of the Thomas Gospel, among others in use at the time by the various largely unorganized Christian churches, but key Church leaders declared these other gospels to be heretical, and condemned them. Meyer notes that they seem to have intended to limit the number of valid gospels to four, and this was without a scientific basis. The subjective nature on which some books were bound into the New Testament and which others



were called false teachings and discarded, is reason to seriously consider that the message of Jesus may be more comprehensive than what the New Testament gospels—Luke, Mark, Matthew, and John—convey. Their focus of good deeds and right behavior is crowned by a mandatory worship of the one Divinity and of “I, the Son.” But did Jesus intend for this “I, the Son” to be *himself*, or as this new message hints of, was he referring to *the Self*, not a physical human? “When your eye is clear, then your whole body is filled with light,” said Jesus, from Luke 11:34. This canonical orthodox phrase, closely worded like the Thomas Gospel to put “eyes in place of an eye,” is construed by church teachings to mean making oneself pure or clean. But if Jesus is speaking of cleansing the body through eyes that are pure, why does he say “eye” in singular when we know that we have two eyes? The Thomas Gospel explains it. The eye is that part of the mind where images form, such as in a dream. The two “eyes” are external, a mere lens for interfacing with the world through the “eye” which makes the two physical eyes.

Saying 39 of Thomas warns against the scholarly classroom approach: The scholars have taken and hidden “the keys of knowledge,” having not entered nor allowed

others who want to enter to do so. New Testament phrases such as Matthew 23:13 repeat the very same idea: “A plague on you, scholars and Prushim, hypocrites! You lock people out of the kingdom of the skies. You do not enter, nor let others go in.” There is another hint found in even orthodox gospels that the true teaching of Jesus, the teaching of eternal life beyond this world, cannot be a mere belief, but is rather a profound experience grounded on knowledge that will be snuffed out and never revealed in an authoritative classroom structure.

If the knowledge spoken by Jesus is of self-awareness, how can a modern world comprehend it in logical terms, and how may it be obtained by Western people who have little time for the Eastern practice of meditating for long hours? Making “a hand in place of a hand and a foot in place of a foot” is a daily exercise that will bring a person’s waking and dreaming selves together into one body: “When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer, and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower,” also from Thomas saying 22. When the body dies and turns to dust, the mind will have created and recreated an image of the body. And the person, whose mind recreates the body, will live, as Jesus promised.

