

EASTER

THE MYSTERY AND THE MOCKERY

PART THEOLOGICAL

Christ is Risen is the declaration of billions of Christians, for nearly 2000 years.

Why?

For millennia before Yeshua ben Yosef min Natserat lived on earth, people believed in the miracle of power over death, possessed by a few, and the resurrection from the grave that would occur on the day of judgment, the good. people would ascend to the pearly gates of heavenly light and the bad people would descend into the depths of hellish flames.

So when Yeshua predicted that He would arisen from the tomb three days after His death, it was understood By His followers that this would happen bodily. Thus when there were sightings of prophets and saints who had risen from their graves after the death of Yeshua it was understood to be a bodily resurrection. When Yeshua was not found in His tomb on the third day after He died and was buried it was assumed that He had been raised bodily from the tomb. That was a miracle that only God could accomplish. Then there were sightings of Yeshua raised bodily from the dead, by Mary Magdalen outside the tomb, by two disciples on the road to Emmaus, by eleven disciples in the Galilee, by unnumbered disciples while fishing in the Sea of Galilee, and other places. In all of these sightings the stories were told that Yeshua had arisen bodily from His grave and that He would later ascend to heaven.

Christ is risen was not a spiritual resurrection of the immaterial soul to its eternal spiritual dwelling place...the Christians of His time did not believe in such a resurrection. It was not a natural phenomenon. It was a miracle wrought by God.

This is how Jews understood the resurrections of Enoch, of Elijah, of Elisha. It was assumed that God wrought that miracle and only for certain holy souls.

But is this what happened?

Yeshua said He would return the same way as He came the first time. Did He come down from heaven bodily in His first appearance? No, He was born to a woman and assumed to be the son of her betrothed, named Yosef.

Yeshua said to various people that He would return to them from the heavens, that all would see Him, during the generation that was living contemporaneously with Him. They understood this to mean that He would return in the flesh and be physically visible to everyone. But reported sightings of Yeshua after His ascension, by Stephen and Saul, were spiritual visions, not physical appearances. Saul heard Him speak and Peter heard the angel speak but it was understood that divine speech was not necessarily discerned by physical ears. When the patriarchs, Moses, the Hebrew prophets, the supposed parents of Yeshua – Joseph and Mary, the prophetess Anna heard God or His angel speak it was not necessarily by means of their ears, of physical hearing. But since the authors of the Biblical accounts believed in physical resurrection from the grave, they may have assumed that all of these sightings and hearings were bodily, were perceptions of by the physical senses.

What this tells us is that most of the people living in the lifetime of Yeshua were materialists and believed only what their senses experienced. Not just the polytheistic and pantheistic pagans, heathens and worshippers of other gods and goddesses believed in the physicality of the divine...the Jewish people believed this as well.

But there were exceptions to this general consensus. There were people who had experienced divine messages in dreams and visions and they were not invalidated. Their dreams and visions were interpreted, by God in His revelations, by the authors of the Gospels.

Some of the Jewish and Christian independents wrote of a spiritual resurrection, FROM the grave or FROM the dead body TO the spiritual realms. Some of them, called gnostics and branded as heretics, believed in and wrote about their experiences of the spiritual realms. These are the authors of the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha and gnostic texts, which may well have been considerably more numerous at one time, inasmuch as the Jewish and Christian leaders of the Jews and Christians of the 1st and 2nd centuries of the common era believed such texts and the beliefs they espoused to be dangerous and better destroyed.

As an aside this is what happened to the early Babis and Baha'is. While many Babis during the ministry of the Bab, and Baha'is during the ministries of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha dreamed spiritual dreams, and these dreams were interpreted by these Central Figures of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi may have been granted this gift and consequently this practice fell out of favor.

To return to our study of early Christian beliefs.

Did Yeshua intend that His prophecies be interpreted to refer to physical or spiritual phenomena?

A key to the answer is what He said in the Gospel of John 3:6, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians 12:3 in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians 2:12, throughout the Book of Revelation, and in the explanations Yeshua gave His apostles of many of His parables.

In all of these passages Yeshua (and His spiritual disciples) explained that enduring realities are spiritual while physical realities have only a temporary existence. He said that we should store up treasures in heaven where they will not be corrupted and ultimately perish.

With the clues provided throughout His sayings, why did His followers persist in understanding His words in a literal sense? Why did they still believe that they must have a material meaning and a temporal significance? Because they were spiritually immature. Because they lacked faith and the spiritual perception with its spiritual senses -- spiritual sight, spiritual hearing, spiritual touch, spiritual smell. And because it wasn't timely.

God does things in His time, and according to our capacity. In the Gospel of John 16:12-13 Yeshua said:

"I have yet many things to tell you but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He Who is the Spirit of truth is come He shall guide you into all truth".

And the Gospel of John 14:26 likewise promises that the Spirit of Truth:

"...shall teach you all things."

Is the Spirit of Truth independent or is He dependent upon God like Yeshua Who speaks only as God speaks to Him? The Gospel of John 16:13 answers this question:

"...he shall not speak of himself, but whatever he shall hear shall he speak".

Most Christians have believed that the Spirit of Truth manifested Himself on the day of Pentecost, of Shavuot, when spiritual gifts were bestowed upon many believers. But all but Pentecostal Christians are certain that these gifts of the spirit were bestowed only during this special period of early Christianity and ceased thereafter. If that were the case then Yeshua lied or misled His followers because He promised that the Spirit of Truth would be with His followers forever, in the Gospel of John 14:16-17:

16And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, **that he may abide with you forever; 17**Even **the Spirit of truth...**

What if the Spirit of Truth that Yeshua promised was not either a one time or recurrent torrent of spiritual gifts as has been generally understood by Christians? What if His return as the "Son of man coming in the Glory of the Father and His angels" is the same as the coming of the Spirit of Truth? What if He is the promised King who will execute justice in the world? What if He is Mashiah ben David, Who will establish and sit upon the throne of God?

What if the promises of the Tanach, of the synoptic gospels, of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation are correlated and refer to one sequence of divinely designated persons? What if this correlation was not explicitly explained by Yeshua because "ye cannot bear them now" but have been correlated and explained by the very Spirit of Truth whom Yeshua assured would guide us to "all truth"?

Yeshua described the resurrection of the human spirit using different words and parables. His resurrection was of the spirit not the flesh. It was also called the second birth. The revolutionary teaching of Yeshua was not that He or His followers were to be physically resurrected from their tombs on the judgment day. It was that death is of the flesh not the spirit, that the spirit lives on forever. He did not appear in the flesh to His followers. They perceived Him as fleshly because He could mercifully manifest Himself in whatever way that would accomplish His purpose. If He had appeared in the flesh this would have been a confirmation of the beliefs of the people, and the religious leaders, and of the primacy of the material world.

Why was His teaching revolutionary? Because it assured believers of eternal life, whereas in the past they had been uncertain about whether they would outlive one life cycle, whether they would return to live on earth, whether their bodies would come out of the graves and take on life again...so many questions! And He taught the simple truth.

"Christ is risen" meant that His promise was fulfilled. He had promised to appear alive after three days of concealment and He did so. He showed His followers that He was alive. He assured them of eternal life, teaching by example. He promised to appear to the other people in His generation and apart from Stephen and Saul there were no reported sightings...why is that? This is because that generation, having rejected Yeshua in the flesh saw Him in the spirit after this life, when they expected to be dead! And because they did not return to this world

they left no testimonies of having met Him. He promised to see them soon, and He fulfilled that promise...they saw Him in a few reported cases during their lives, and most after death.

He promised to return as “the Son of man coming in the glory of the Father”. He fulfilled that promise in Muhammad, in Siyyid ‘Ali Muhammad the Bab, and to the utmost degree in Baha'u'llah. This is what Baha'u'llah teaches.

PART HISTORICAL

The **first month of the Hebrew year**, which is reported in the Book of Exodus/Shmot, is the month of Aviv [חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב]:

12:1 And the LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן, בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לֵאמֹר.

12:2 'This month shall be unto you the **beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.**

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם, רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים: רֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה, לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה.

12:14 And **this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.**

וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן, וְחֻגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חֵג לַיהוָה: לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם, חֻקַּת עוֹלָם תִּחְגְּלוּ.

12:15 **Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; howbeit the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses; for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.**

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים, מִצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ--אֶךְ בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, תִּשְׁבִּיתוּ שָׂאֵר מִבְּתֵיכֶם: כִּי כָל-אֹכֵל חֻמֵץ, וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל--מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, עַד-יּוֹם הַשִּׁבְעִי.

12:16 **And in the first day there shall be to you a holy convocation, and in the seventh day a holy convocation; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done by you.**

וביום הראשון, מקרא-קדש, וביום השביעי, מקרא-קדש יהיה לכם: כל-מלאכה,
לא-יעשה בהם-- אך אשר יאכל לכל-נפש, הוא לבדו יעשה לכם.

12:17 And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore shall ye observe this day throughout your generations by an ordinance for ever.

ושמרתם, את-המצות, פי בעצם היום הזה, הוצאתי את-עבאֹתיכם מארץ מצרים;
ושמרתם את-היום הזה, לדורתִיכם-- חקת עולם.

12:18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.

בראשון בארבעה עשר יום לחדש, בערב, תאכלו, מצת: עד יום האחד ועשרים,
לחדש-- בערב.

13:3 And Moses said unto the people: 'Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place; there shall no leavened bread be eaten.

ויאמר משה אל-העם, זכור את-היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים מבית עבדים, פי בחזק
יד, הוציא יהוה אתכם מזה; ולא יאכל, חמץ.

13:4 This day ye go forth in the month Abib.

היום, אתם יצאים, בחדש, האביב.

23:14 Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto Me in the year.

שלוש רגלים, תחג לי בשנה.

23:15 The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep; seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, **at the time appointed in the month Abib--for in it thou camest out from Egypt**; and none shall appear before Me empty;

את-חג המצות, תשמר--שבועת ימים תאכל מצות כאשר צויתך למועד חג האביב, כי-בו יצאת ממצרים; ולא-יראו פני, ריקם.

34:18 The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, **at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib thou camest out from Egypt.**

את-חג המצות, תשמר--שבועת ימים תאכל מצות אשר צויתך, למועד חג האביב: כי בחג האביב, יצאת ממצרים.

Also, in the Book of Deuteronomy/Devarim it is written:

16:1 Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the LORD thy God; for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night.

שמור, את-חג האביב, ועשית פסח, ליהוה אלהיך: כי בחג האביב, הוציאתך יהוה אלהיך ממצרים--לילה.

What is the first day of the first month? According to the Babylonian calendar, which was adopted by the Jewish people when they resided in Babylonia, and which is cited in the Book of Nehemiah and the Book of Esther, the first month of the year was called Nisan [ניסן], and the first day of the month of Nisan was the first day of spring, the vernal equinox, when the sun enters Aries, when day and night are of the same duration. The season of spring was called Tekufah Nisan [תקופה ניסן]. Nisan was the Babylonian equivalent of Aviv in Israel. Hence, the first day of the first month of the year was the vernal equinox. Sound familiar?

According to these facts, the first day of the year in the Hebrew calendar, called Aviv in Israel and Nisan in the Babylonian captivity was the vernal equinox, called Naw-Ruz by

the Persians, and first day of which begins the Babi-Baha'i year as set forth in the Badi' calendar.

The liberation of the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt occurred on the first day of Aviv (Exodus 12:2), on the vernal equinox. The celebration of this occurrence was to take place on the first day and the seventh day, with work forbidden (Exodus 12:16). From the first through the seventh day of this first month of the year no leavened bread was to be eaten (Exodus 12:15) and according to another verse, it is from the fourteenth to the twenty-first that no leavened bread was to be eaten (Exodus 12:18).

The name of this commemoration is derived from a singular ritual, which took place originally on the fourteenth day of Aviv, called Pesach in Hebrew and Passover in English:

3Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: **4**And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. **5**Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: **6**And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. **7**And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. **8**And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. **9**Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. **10**And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. **11**And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover [. **12**For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. **13**And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. **14**And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. (Exodus, chapter 12; Numbers 9:1-14)

The Persian celebration of Naw-Ruz lasted twelve days, and featured a unique diet; the Jewish celebration of Pesach lasted fourteen (or days, and also featured a unique diet – unleavened bread and nothing that causes fermentation (chamets).

Yeshua mi Natserat ben Yosef commemorated Pesach at his so-called “last supper”, during which he instituted the ceremony of the eucharist, the consumption of wine and bread as symbols of the sacrifice of Yeshua’s blood and body to redeem the world. In the Christian calendar this “last supper” is commemorated in the evening of “good Friday”, that is, the beginning of the seventh day of the week. Inasmuch as the first day of Aviv was commemorated as the beginning of the festival of the unleavened bread, it would likely have occurred on the first day of the week, as the conclusion of this festival took place on the seventh day of the week. If the fourteenth day had been according to the Jewish calendar, then Pesach would have begun on Friday night. According to three of the canonical Gospels (Mark 15:42, Luke 23:52-54, John 19:31), Yeshua was crucified on Shabbat. If Yeshua died the night of the “last supper”, which seems highly unlikely and irregular, considering that it immediately preceded a holy day observed by all Jews and during which a judgment of death and a crucifixion seems preposterous, and His resurrection occurred three days later, it happened on Monday night. If He was crucified the next day, whether that occurred on the first, the seventh or the fourteenth day of Aviv, His resurrection would have occurred on Tuesday. We don’t know what year Yeshua was crucified, and we don’t know on what day He was crucified and what day He was resurrected. Yeshua informed His disciples that they could not know the day of His return, that nobody knew this but His Father in heaven. Apparently nobody knew the day of His crucifixion either!

But wait? When did Christians settle on the current timing of Easter? Well, at the Council of Nicea, in 325 CE...nearly three centuries after the resurrection of Yeshua...a formula was agreed upon for calculating the appearance of Easter. The calendar in use at that time amongst Christians was that put into place by Julius Caesar, in 45 BCE, which is known as the Julian calendar. It consisted of twelve months based on a solar year, with the first day of the calendar designated as January 1. The formula agreed upon in the 4th century was not adopted widely until the 8th century. It was not until 1582 CE that the Roman Catholic Pope Gregory introduced a reformed calendar, which replaced the Julian calendar...in the West. Over five hundred years earlier, in 1054 CE, the Church had split into two halves, when the Pope of Rome and the Pope of Constantinople excommunicated each other and all of the Christians in their respective realms. Since both the Eastern and the Western churches were using the Julian calendar until 1582 CE, their observance of Easter was probably similar. The Coptic Egyptian and Ethiopian calendars had variations of their own, and there may

well have been many other differences among the calendars of Christian communities. Of course the Western Christians don't really care about not being in sync with other Christians, and so their determination of the date of Easter, which migrated based upon calculations of the vernal equinox, was their only concern. Western Protestant churches opted to calculate Easter according to the calendar and adjustments of the Roman Catholic Church, between 1753 CE and 1845 CE. Consequently, Easter was commemorated by most Christians (who were Roman Catholics) according to the same calculations from 1583 CE, and by most Christians (who are Roman Catholic or Protestant) from between 1753 CE and 1845 CE. So the majority got their act together after 1585 CE and 1845 CE? Yes, that appears to be the truth.

How is it possible to trust the calculations of calendar smiths with regard to the timing of events that occurred more than 1500 years earlier? When no consensus existed during those 1500 years? And what of the smaller churches, who continue to commemorate Easter at different times than the majority...who knows, maybe they are closer to the truth.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the resurrection of Yeshua, three days after His crucifixion, occurred shortly after Pesach, during or immediately after the festival of the unleavened bread. Yeshua appropriated and repurposed two symbols of communion and reconciliation with God that were part of the weekly Shabbat ceremony, and part of the observance of Pesach as well. These two symbols are called Kiddush, and they involve praying over wine and bread, consecrating them to God, and then distributing them to the celebrants. When Yeshua commemorated the Shabbat of Pesach, He called upon His disciples to drink the wine as if it were His blood and eat the bread as if it were His body. The symbolism of Shabbat was that He was consecrating His blood and body to God; the symbolism of Pesach was that He was sacrificing His blood and body for the redemption of humanity, even as the Jewish observers of Pesach sacrificed the lamb on the fourteenth day to commemorate their liberation from slavery in Egypt. In both cases, the purpose of this sacrifice was to celebrate liberation, and in His ritual it meant liberation from sin, from carnality, from estrangement from God. Only the soul that was redeemed through sacrifice could attain to the new birth, the new covenant, the new life that Yeshua promised.

The rituals associated in our time with Easter – decoration of eggs, Easter egg hunt, rabbits – are without Biblical origin. The word “Easter” may derive from the German (Saxon) spring festival called “Ēostre” which may have been named after a goddess of spring, who was however only mentioned in the writings of the Venerable Bede, a British monk who lived in the late seventh and early eighth century. This festival and its corresponding goddess would be a celebration of fertility, as this is what occurs in spring. The egg and the rabbit are likewise symbols of fertility – the former because they are proof of the fertility of birds, and the latter because rabbits are famous for their fecundity.

While this may seem far-fetched, the name of this holiday may also have derived, or supported, by the similarity between it and the name of King Ahashverosh’s wife, Esther. Esther saved her people, the Jews, from being eliminated by Haman. In a sense she is a symbol of fertility, not in having many progeny or resurrecting souls from the grave, but something similar that is just as much a guarantee of procreation – she saved her people from certain death. Also, the festival of Purim during which the heroism of Queen Esther is celebrated takes place every year a short interval before Pesach.

Perhaps Queen Esther was a guest invited to the Pesach seder, and stayed on? Furthermore, Queen Esther and King Ahashverosh were living in what is today Iran, and her banquet, described in the Book of Esther (2:8; 9:17-22), and recapitulated by Jews annually on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar (or Adar II in leap years) could be compared to the Naw-Ruz haft sin table (with seven symbolic food items), to the Pesach seder (with its seven symbolic food items), and to the Easter feast (with its traditional edibles only eaten on Easter).

As more and more intermarriages between Jews and Christians are taking place every year, it seems likely that a compromise solution will be found, which combines characteristics of Purim and Pesach with Easter, so that both spouses and their children can participate together, as Jews say, “Beyachad” [בְּיַחַד].