

Know Yourself Always – About Shlomo Kalo and His Writings

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In this issue's article on "The Coptic Gospel of Thomas and Early Christian Creeds," Aage Pilgaard brings an analysis of the Gospel of Thomas and compares it with the New Testament Gospels and main Pauline creedal statements. About half of the 114 sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas have parallels in the New Testament. This does not mean that half of the Gospel of Thomas should be accepted and the other half rejected; either we should accept all or reject all. The 114 sayings all appear in the same context and it is this context which gives them meaning. Using saying 3 in the Gospel of Thomas, Pilgaard shows that to find "the kingdom" is to know oneself, "to know one's true self and the divine origin of this self." According to Pilgaard's summary, the creed in the Gospel of Thomas has no foundation in New Testament salvation history: "Jesus is not the mediator of vicarious redemption."

Today, interest in the Gospel of Thomas is not limited to scholarly circles. In recent decades, non-theologians around the world have also taken an interest in the book. This is related to the renewed interest in spiritual matters at the "dawn of" the third millennium, and fits beautifully with the new ideology labeled *New Ageism*. In Jewish evangelism we have not taken this issue seriously enough – neither in Israel nor worldwide. However, groups within the Christian Church have seen this challenge and tried to map out New Ageism in order to be better equipped to bring the gospel to those who are drawn to this ideology.

In this article, we shall focus on one book written by the Israeli-Jewish author Shlomo Kalo. We shall begin with a poem and consider it in isolation from its context – similar to the way many people read the Gospel of Thomas.

A Poem from *The Day Is Coming*

The poem is found half way into Kalo's book *The Day Is Coming*.⁹² It is the second of two in the book (pp. 72-73); the first is about Zacchaeus.

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The introduction to the poem is as follows: "In Jericho He met that blind beggar (Luke, XVIII, 35-43) who entreated Him earnestly to open his eyes" (p. 72). References to the main character in the poem are capitalized: He and Him. This is done all through the book. Only in this poem and perhaps one more time is Jesus mentioned by name in the book—although it is clear from the many references to the New Testament that the main character is Jesus. Later on it says, "... He offered them His salvation. He called Himself 'Jesus,' meaning 'salvation'..." (p. 75). In the poem the "He" is identified as Jesus:

*Jesus the Anointed
Set out upon His way,
And He came to the gates of Jericho,
In the noon-time of the day.*

*Blind men there surrounded Him,
In a mighty, heaving throng,
And among them there was one,
Who to see did dearly long.*

*"Son of David" he cried,
"Have mercy on me!
I can no longer bear the darkness,
Open my eyes, that I may see!"*

*Jesus the Anointed,
Before the man did stand,
And on the beggar's sightless eyes,
He laid His healing hand.*

*Like a sudden flash of lightning,
That pierces the sky,
The blind man looked, and lo, behold -
Beheld the face of the Most High.*

*"Son of David!" cried the beggar,
As his voice with awe did quake,
"All my life I have dreamed only,
Now at last I am awake!"*

Jesus the Anointed,

⁹² Shlomo Kalo, *The Day Is Coming*, (Jaffa: D.A.T. Publications, 1997); quotes are taken from this version - Original Hebrew edition: *Ve'Hineh Hu Bah*, (Jaffa: D.A.T. Publications, January 1997).

*Then on His way did go,
As a gentle, balmy evening,
Came down on Jericho.*

*In the crowds about the city walls,
Some were glad with mirth and glee,
But of those who in their hearts were blind,
Not one desired to see.*

The poem is moving and beautiful. It is not difficult to imagine someone setting it to a nice Messianic tune, and that it could find its way into Messianic Jewish worship. And the message—out of context—is that Jesus is the Anointed, that He can help restore our sight and open our eyes to the spiritual reality, but that sadly so many do not desire to see!

Who is Shlomo Kalo?

On book covers,⁹³ on the publisher's website,⁹⁴ and in Amazon's presentation of the author,⁹⁵ Shlomo Kalo is introduced as follows:

Shlomo Kalo was born in 1928, in Sofia, Bulgaria. Aged 12, Kalo joined an anti-Fascist underground in Bulgaria. Aged 15, under Nazi occupation, he was imprisoned in a concentration camp in Somovit. Aged 18, he won a prize in a poetry competition and went to Prague, where he studied medicine and worked as a freelance journalist. Before immigrating to Israel, aged 21, he was sent to Holomotz to train as a pilot. In 1958 he was awarded M.Sc. in microbiology by the Tel Aviv Univ. For 26 years and until his retirement in 1988 he worked as the director of medical laboratories.

The perfect turnabout in his life which occurred in the first week of 1969, is reflected, among others, in his writings. More than 40 titles of his were published in Israel, some of which were translated into English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. His writings include: contemplative literature, fiction, belles-lettres, juvenile, a new genre – "The Documented Story," and spiritual guidance.

When asked to express an opinion regarding Kalo, journalist Yimna Seltzer said:⁹⁶

A few months ago I received a book as a present. It was Shlomo Kalo's "The Elect." I read this masterpiece just as slowly as I could, hoping I would never finish it.

⁹³ See Shlomo Kalo, *The Dollar and the Gun*, (Jaffa, D.A.T. Publications 1999).

⁹⁴ www.y-dat.co.il

⁹⁵ www.amazon.com

⁹⁶ The whole article with the title "The Only Love" (Hadashotovot, 13 April 1996) can be found on www.y-dat.co.il

The book which is based on the Biblical Book of Daniel deals with love: The love of a human being to another human being, of a man to a woman and mainly, the love of God which is Love. The truth that Kalo describes touches the soul, fills up the heart and sheds light upon the meaning of existence, along with sorrow for those who have not been acquainted with it yet.

In this period of a military and political whirl and days of confusion and perplexity, I asked Shlomo Kalo to clear things up from his unconventional point of view.

Seltzer asks Kalo the following question: "Who are you, Shlomo Kalo?" Kalo answers by saying: "An answer to this question you will find in 'D.A.T.' books."

Seltzer also asks why Kalo usually refuses to give interviews to the media. Kalo responds:

Rather than elevate those who are in need of it, and present to them true challenges for which they yearn so much, the media missed its purpose, and focused on a cheap stirring up of passions, and "scoop" chasing. There is no point in being interviewed by such a press.

In Seltzer's article with its 35 questions and answers, the name of Jesus is never mentioned. However, the conclusion of a smaller than pocket size book⁹⁷ titled *Mount of Happiness, Matthew 5, 6, 7* reveals that Kalo's "perfect turnabout" has to do with Jesus:

D.A.T. publications publishes all the writings of Shlomo Kalo, including the exceptional title: 'The Day Is Coming' which deals directly with Jesus Christ, is highly esteemed around the world and has been translated into many languages. The above also applies to: 'The King Whose Name Is Love' 'Moments Of Truth' and more.

We have here a Jewish, Israeli author, who not only writes about Jesus, but about *Jesus Christ* - and regards this Jesus Christ as God (see below).

Kalo differs from most non-believing Jews who write about Jesus in that he claims that he has met Jesus in one way or another. He writes in the language of revelation. Several of his books are dated not with a single date but two – an indication that they have been written under some kind of inspiration which occurred in the period between the two dates.

The following letter, dated February 8, 2001, was included in an order of Kalo's books received from the publisher:

As you requested, enclosed find the two books and an invoice.

When we talked I forgot to offer you Chesed Mufla (Amazing Grace), an audio CD, containing a beautiful, powerful and uplifting performance of songs written by Shlomo Kalo. The Singer is Rivka Zohar-Kalo, the best Israeli lady singer ever. The first song is the famous 'Amazing Grace' translated into Hebrew by Kalo. The others are original. All of them were

⁹⁷ Shlomo Kalo, *Mount of Happiness, Mathew 5, 6, 7*, (Jaffa, D.A.T. Publications), 96.

performed on national radio or TV. Clients who do not speak Hebrew and bought this CD were very, very deeply moved. I recommend it to you wholeheartedly.

I would be very grateful to you if you could contact me either by phone or by email as written hereunder. I hope through speaking with you to learn of potential readers of Kalo's titles among Christians who live in Israel and Christian institutes here, as well as Christian publishers in your country.

I trust that as a believing Christian you see the great importance of these books emerging from within the Jewish people and hope that you would like them to be distributed successfully.

Thank you in advance.

*With God's Blessing
Yigal Miller,
Co-Publisher*

The letter is well written and is similar to what some of us involved in Jewish evangelism might write if someone approached us about our material: "We have more to offer." It is worth noticing that the importance of these books is linked to the fact that they are *emerging from within the Jewish people*. Therefore: *I trust as a believing Christian you see the great importance of these books* ...

Here is a Jew who has written about Jesus not out of historical or academic interest, but because he has experienced something he wants to share with others – or should we say, preach to others?

Opinions about Kalo differ within the Messianic movement in Israel. In a short article in the Messianic magazine *Kivun* from 1997, Boaz Fastman asks the question: *Shlomo Kalo—Wolf or Lamb?* With reference to Matthew 7:15 he answers that Kalo is a wolf in sheep's clothing.⁹⁸ Fastman writes that a representative of Kalo has contacted several leaders of Messianic congregations, asking if they would be willing to recommend his book *Ve'Hinei Hu Bah*. Gershon Nerel sees Kalo as a person who "believes in syncretism." Concerning the relationship between Kalo and Messianic congregations, Nerel says,

*Kalo also disseminates his blended teaching among Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel. Unfortunately, Kalo even succeeded in convincing some prominent local leaders that he is an exclusive disciple of Yeshua and of the Canonical Scriptures.*⁹⁹

So how are we to evaluate Shlomo Kalo? In the following, we shall look at examples from the book *The Day Is Coming*.

⁹⁸ Boaz Fastman, "Shlomo Kalo - Wolf or Lamb?" in *Kivun*, vol. 5, 1997, p. 2 and 4.

⁹⁹ Gershon Nerel, "The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers", in *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. LXXIII, no.4, 2000, p. 19.

The Day Is Coming

The book begins with the statement “God who is love ...” (p. 9) and with reference to 1 Corinthians 13. About this God it is said: “God became man and descended among us as one of us, and our eyes beheld Him and many, many knew Him not, and turned their backs on Him” (p. 10). Under the chapter heading “Salvation is from the Jews (John IV, 22),” it says by way of introduction: “He was born among them. He was one of them. He adhered to their Scriptures, and everything that these ancient Scriptures commanded, which to this very day they aspire to uphold, was done to Him...” (p. 13) After this, His circumcision and “Bar-Mitzvah” are mentioned with reference to the New Testament.

And further on, “‘God-who-is-love,’ who was clad in flesh and became as one of us, God, devoid of name and of form, who for our sake put on a form and called Himself by a name and descended among us, addressed and spoke to His people in their own language...” (p. 15).

Then more is said about Jesus with reference to the Gospels. It is done without mentioning his name but with constant reference to the Gospels, and the main character is called God. Again a few examples:

And God goes down to an ancient valley, known as the “Valley of Jordan” and stands before John the Baptist. And he, seeing Him from afar, cries out to the host of his followers in a great voice: “This is the Lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

After mentioning that John refused to baptize Jesus, it says:

But God repeats His request with greater vigor and demands of the man kneeling at his feet to rise and do as he is bidden. For this is the essence of His mission: that men shall see God as one of themselves, and He shall not raise himself above them but on the contrary, abase himself before them, so they shall draw near to Him and believe in him, and be saved. And John the Baptist, his lean body wrapped in camel’s hair, stands and obeys the explicit command of his God. His trembling hand is laid on the illumined head, and he blesses, and baptizes. From this movement onward, all partition is removed from between God and mankind, between creator and created, and unity of the spirit become real and whole: man being an inseparable part of God, God being love (pp. 24-25).

With this “explanation” of what salvation is, one begins to realize what the author is driving at. He not only says that “God is love.” He can turn the sentence around and say, “Love, which is God.” (p. 52). Because of the biblical “wrapping” given to the words, one has to read very carefully in order to realize this. A good example is: “God clothed Himself in flesh and descended among those clothed in flesh, and He bore their suffering, and knew their affliction and the bitterness of their pain, as theirs so was His ...” (p. 74).

Explaining the second request in the Lord's Prayer ("May your kingdom come"), Kalo writes, "... His 'kingdom' shall light up your heart and you shall awaken, by His grace, to see and to know yourself as an inseparable part of Him, while you are still here, in the flesh" (p. 108). This also explains why so much importance is attached to the Jesus-word: "The Kingdom of God is in your midst (Luke, XVII, 21), from all time and to eternity, Amen" (p. 110).

In the conclusion, Kalo describes the crucifixion of Jesus:

He did not balance the heavy cross on His little finger. He remained steadfast in His mission. God-man. God of love. In godlike fashion He bore all the shame of mankind, the full weight of human pain and oppression and bitter misery. He did not spare Himself (p. 138).

In the last chapter entitled "My God, My God ..." Kalo writes:

The question may be asked – what makes the crucifixion of God so unique? The answer to this question is simple and unequivocal: His isolation. Total isolation, from all angles and perspectives. Absolute isolation ... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" With these words from the Holy Scriptures, God takes leave of the flesh, to become again what He was, is and ever shall be: Love, Freedom, the Infinite – as Reality. From whom all emanates, in whose hands is all. All is His and all is in Him (pp. 151-155).

The book ends in the following way:

'Salvation is from the Jews' (John, IV, 22) is the statement of God Himself, in person. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' - until the day when the children return to their land, until the day when those who reject God will return to Him with joy and with love in their hearts.

And that day is coming, is coming soon.

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Zurich, Switzerland" (p. 157)

What is it all about?

Kalo's book is all about Jesus—a Jewish Jesus who is called God and clad in flesh, as the message is clad in biblical language. Perhaps the best way to describe it is to call it a modern Jewish version of the Gospel of Thomas. This is, to a certain extent, confirmed by the fact that Kalo is responsible for a Hebrew translation of the Gospel of Thomas.¹⁰⁰

For example, the death of Jesus and the *bodily* resurrection seem to have no significance for Kalo – contrary to what it had for the apostle Paul. In the Gospel of Thomas, the role of Jesus is basically different from the one we know from the writings of the New Testament. According to the Gospel of Thomas and, as far as I can see, also to Kalo,⁶⁰ the role of Jesus is to lead people to a recognition of their true being through his words. Kalo can write a continued story about Jesus – contrary to the Gospel of Thomas, which is made up of

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Gershon Nerel, "The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers", 19.

individual sayings. But this does not change the message of Kalo, which is: Know yourself.

Kalo's writings are published by D.A.T. Publications. In Hebrew D.A.T. simply means knowledge. But in the letterhead of the publisher, the initials are explained: *Da' Atzmecha Tamid*, meaning *Know yourself always*. This reinforces the message: You have the divine within you! Christ gives you this secret saving knowledge. He came into the world. However, it does not seem that this is the divine Christ who died, but rather a Jesus who left the body before the crucifixion—something which can be found in Christian Gnosticism from the second and third centuries. There is nothing about the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus – nor is there anything about our future *bodily* resurrection. Furthermore, Kalo seems to be related to the Gnostics from the second and third centuries, who also legitimized themselves as people who had the full knowledge of faith, something they can claim because of direct divine revelation and because of a secretly kept tradition.

How different is the message preached by the Jewish believer Paul. A reference to First Corinthians chapter 15 should suffice here.

A Comparison

The writings of Kalo may have only little influence on Israeli society, but the fact that his book *The Day Is Coming* can be purchased in a New Age bookstore in Jerusalem reveals that the book is considered consistent with the rest of the store's stock. The following is an example of how some of Kalo's thought can easily be made to fit the beliefs of the Jewish New Age movement. Using kabalistic principles, people reinterpret the traditional Jewish understanding of the Messiah and reach conclusions similar to those found in Kalo's writings.

The example is from a new English-language journal published in Israel. The first issue is dated Oct./Nov. 2000.¹⁰¹ It is presented as "the two-monthly Magazine on Art, Healing and Spirituality in Israel" (p. 2). In an article titled "Messianic Madness - thoughts on redemption" (pp. 8-11) David Friedman writes about the worries many people had concerning Messianic Madness when we entered the year 2000. He says, "Now I'm not against people believing in the Messiah. As an observant Jew, I believe it to be an important tenant of faith. But is there an understanding of the Messiah in Judaism that is grounded and healthy? Are all messianic visions fanatical and exclusive member-only affairs?" Friedman responds to his own question:

The kabalistic writings of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto present Messiah not as one enlightened being who will lead us into salvation, but as a higher, Messianic consciousness that gradually pervades humanity more and more as we evolve and learn (p. 8-9).

¹⁰¹ *The Twelfth House*, ed. Malka Lasarow, Jerusalem 2000.

For Friedman, “Messiah is the Divine Inspiration. Ruach Hakodesh, a higher consciousness, wise, compassionate and revering of life, that we humans are gradually realizing more and more” (p. 9).

Messiah is not one fantastic event that happens in only one moment of time ... but one great evolutionary learning-process that is constantly in every moment of time. In this way, every moment of time is a fantastic event! There is no crystal-clear blast of trumpets that will herald this great event to everyone all at once. It is up to us to see the current Messianic Spirit as they flow through each and every moment of time! (p. 10).

For Reflection

The examples from Kalo can be used to reflect on several issues:

1) The reading of Kalo’s book raises the question for preachers of finding the focal point in the gospel: Should that point be found in what happened *outside* of us, that is in Jesus, his life, his death and resurrection, or should it be found in what happened *in* us? Let us not deny that something happens in us when we receive the gospel, but if the *emphasis* is here, then the balance is changed compared to the New Testament. Personal happiness is secondary to the salvation which is given because of what Jesus has done. We need to ask ourselves if we always keep this balance.

2) Kalo’s books show that just because the author is Jewish and talks about Jesus, we cannot conclude that he gives a true picture of the Jewish Jesus. This seems like a trivial observation. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to note.

3) Perhaps Kalo’s book is more dangerous than academic Jewish books about Jesus. His books are so close to the gospel and at the same time very far away from the Jesus of the gospels.

4) I am convinced that we who are involved in Jewish evangelism have not been sufficiently aware of the influence which this new Gnosticism—dressed in both New Testament and New Age garments and vocabulary, together with Eastern religions, have on Jews today. Perhaps other Christians and their evangelism could be of help to us here. That is, if we who are involved in Jewish evangelism will let them.

*Jesus the Anointed
Set out upon His way,
And He came to the gates of Jericho,
In the noon-time of the day.*

Or is it to Goa he comes?