

## FRIDAY NIGHT LECTURE SERIES, C. G. JUNG SOCIETY OF NORTH TEXAS

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### The Gospel of Judas © (Abbreviated Version)

The story of the finding of the *Gospel of Judas* codex begins near the Nile in central Egypt. One day in the late 1970s a passing farmer happened to come across a previously unknown cave not far from his village. Looking inside the cave the farmer saw a casket and several skeletons lying on the cave floor. The cave turned out to be a tomb from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. There was also a white limestone box on the floor of the cave. Removing the lid the old man saw what appeared to be some very old books made of papyrus. The leather bound books or codices turned out to be the Gospel of Judas and three Gnostic documents already extant.<sup>1</sup>

The story of what happened to the Judas codex after its discovery is complicated. It was bought by a dealer in Cairo, but he had it only briefly because it was stolen from his apartment and then spirited out of the country into Switzerland. The year was 1982. Then it crossed the Atlantic and ended up in the possession of an American dealer, a Bruce Ferrini. Ferrini sold off some of the pages separately to private collectors, and the remainder of the codex he placed in his home freezer for a time which about was the worst thing he could have done in terms of its preservation. Then he placed it for safe keeping in a bank vault in Long Island where it languished for sixteen years. By now It was beginning to seriously deteriorate. At the turn of this century, however, it was purchased by the National Geographic Society which restored and published it in 2006. The Society will return it to the Coptic Museum in Egypt in 2009.

We know little about Judas personally. The name "Iscairiot" probably comes from the word *sicarious*, which means "dagger wielder" or "assassin", though it could also be translated as meaning "liar". Actually neither of these name dissections would necessarily apply to Judas since it is also his father's name. The Gospel of John says that his father was called "Simon Iscairiot".

The Judas gospel disappeared after gnosticism was suppressed by orthodox bishops. It had been considered lost until recently, that is, the 1970s. Previously, most of what scholars had known about it came from the writings of those who opposed gnosticism, especially a bishop named Irenaeus who lived in Lyon in France around 180 A.D. He labeled the Gospel of Judas an heretical gnostic book.

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<sup>1</sup> The Letter of Peter to Philip, the 1<sup>st</sup> Apocalypse of James, a fragment called the Book of Allo'genes, which seems to be alternative ending to the Judas text, all found at Nag Hammadi .

The word “gnosis” from which gnosticism is derived, means, “knowledge”. It is a Greek word and it doesn’t mean just any knowledge, but “secret knowledge”.<sup>2</sup> In Greek philosophy and in early religious literature of the Common Era, it was this kind of “Knowledge” which gave human beings power to transcend the corruption, pain, and suffering of this life. Gnosis is the seed of one’s personal transcendence, sometimes referred to as the spark of divinity within that longs to return to its origin in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

When the Hebrew scriptures- the Old Testament- was translated into Greek it was the Hebrew word, *yadha*’, that was used for the word, “*gnosis*”. “*Yadha*”, “being able to hear”, is used in the Hebrew scriptures rather than the word for “seeing” which we would ordinarily expect as being closer in meaning to “knowledge”.<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament writings this word “gnosis” nearly always refers to one’s understanding of divine love and the response to that love in faith and obedience.<sup>5</sup>

Is Judas really the necessary person in the drama of the crucifixion? He is according to the canonical Gospel of John. At the Last Supper Jesus tells the disciples that the person who will betray him is the one to whom he hands a morsel of food. He then gives the morsel to Judas, and then leans over to Judas and says to him, “*What you are going to do, do quickly.*”<sup>6</sup> Judas then leaves the room and goes to the authorities to betray him. There is no avoiding what is obvious here: Jesus already knew what Judas was going to do and even seems to encourage him to follow through on a pre-conceived plan.

After Judas betrays Jesus the Gospel of Judas ends abruptly. That’s it. We are left with this sense of justice unfulfilled for Jesus, but at least we know why, for the Gnostics did not believe in the reality of Christ’s death on the cross or its significance. To them it was kind of a “make-believe” execution.

Would Judas have betrayed someone he had followed for three years? Surely not for the paltry sum he received from the high priests! After all, Judas was the treasurer of the entourage, some of whom were wealthy women. He could have pilfered from the common fund, but there were never any accusations recorded regarding theft.

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<sup>2</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, *Gnosis, Bible Key Words*. 1952. The idea that Jesus imparted an esoteric teaching to his disciples in addition to that given to the masses has always been a problem with the traditional churches as it is seen as undermining their authority.

<sup>3</sup> p. 48ff., Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*,

<sup>4</sup> (The word “*yadha*” was popularized in the television show, “Friends”, as the phrase, “*Yadayadya*”, which would be roughly translated as “so on, and so on, and so on”!)

<sup>5</sup> p. 48, *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> John 13

Over the centuries there has also been much speculation about a mysterious reference in The Gospel of John, Chapter 18, in which an unnamed disciple accompanies Peter to the place where the soldiers were holding Jesus. His name has been disguised, and he (or she) is referred to as just “another disciple”.

We are told this unnamed disciple was known to the high priest and that it was this same person who was able to smuggle Peter into such privileged quarters. That doesn't sound like either the disciples John or Mary. John Sanford writes, “*It is quite apparent that this secret disciple “was familiar with the inner workings of Jerusalem and was known to important people.”*”<sup>7</sup> The only disciple who might have had this kind of access as far as we know is Judas Iscariot. Could it have been Judas who instead of killing himself was still participating as one of the Twelve?

Judas may have believed that in betraying Jesus he could force God's hand, so to speak, and bring on the whole end-time event. In this sense, Judas is the fiery patriot, who, disappointed in Jesus' rejection of being a political savior, has to get rid of him, because he obstructs the plan for the physical liberation of Palestine from the Romans.

Whether or not Judas is essential to the doctrine of redemption, we need to consider the role Judas has played and continues to play in the European and American collective psyche. C. G. Jung refers to Judas in Volume 18 of the CW, calling him the Lord's “dark brother” who might easily have become a hero.<sup>8</sup>

As an example of his psychological importance, in Dante's Inferno Judas is described as being in the lowest hell with his head being eaten away by a gigantic devil. In this image Judas is subsumed or swallowed into the remotest part of the personal and collective unconscious. He has become the embodiment of the deepest and darkest aspect of the shadow, which is denied expression in organized societies.

At the same time, I suggest that nothing will do away with public interest in Judas. Fairy tales and mystery novels need their scoundrels. Judas becomes the necessary villain as we watch in fearful anticipation of his surrogates' appearances in movies and television.

Yet Judas has a light side and is far from being the evil one we are accustomed to if the Gospel of Judas is to be believed. The shadow is neither id nor just the repository for the totally unacceptable, as we know. Jung is very conscious of the need of the psyche to balance the Christ image. And so Judas must come out of

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<sup>7</sup> p. 307, *Mystical Christianity, A Psychological Commentary on the Gospel of John*, John A. Sanford

<sup>8</sup> Carl Jung, p. 777, 778, The Symbolic Life, vol. 18, CW

the shadows (or the shadow) and retake his place among the Twelve. Jungians can also approach the dreams of a great temple related in the Gospel of Judas as being part of the collective dream of the early church. The sacred city of Jerusalem and temples are dream images of the Self, the centering principle of the psyche. The early Christians were Jews and with the destruction of the Temple the center was shattered. It was then that Jesus became more than a teacher of wisdom or a symbol of the atonement. He had begun to carry the projections of his followers as the Temple now incarnated in a person.

Most importantly, however, Judas is the representation of the trickster archetype in Christian history, even as he carries the projections of the Western World as being the personification of evil. The trickster reveals an important deeper truth about ourselves. He is the one who sabotages our best laid ego directed plans, but he does so in the long term interest of the individuation process.

If Judas is the Christian trickster we need to rehabilitate him and crown our own disowned qualities that he represents. The shadow wants to be recognized, for if it is not, we cannot proceed towards individuation. So, to treat the Gospel of Judas and its dark and mysterious protagonist as just another passing cultural obsession is to thwart attempts by depth psychology to bring greater understanding of the psyche to the wider world.

Robert Johnson writes that the total exclusion of the dark side of the human condition *“keeps us in a constant warfare of opposites from international politics to our own private neurotic behavior. It is clear that mankind cannot survive much longer in this [state] but the solution requires so radical an alteration in basic attitudes it is questionable whether mankind can ... avert an apocalyptic crash. One possible solution, he says, “would be to reinstate Judas from villain to hero. This is exactly what the Judas Codex prescribes!”*<sup>9</sup>

In sum, then, the Gospel of Judas supplements and fills in the story of the betrayal of Christ, even if is somewhat whimsical. Of course, the story of Judas Iscariot is still incomplete. Still, it is my hope that the current sudden interest in it is not a minor diversion but a leap forward on the continuous journey into knowledge of the ancient world and of the inner world we call the psyche.

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<sup>9</sup> Excerpts from an e-mail received from Robert A. Johnson, courtesy of John Ranello. Also, Johan Shelby Spong makes a compelling argument that Judas was still among the disciples after the Resurrection of Jesus in his book, *Liberating the Gospels*.

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