

The African-Egyptian Essene-Therapeutae Jews

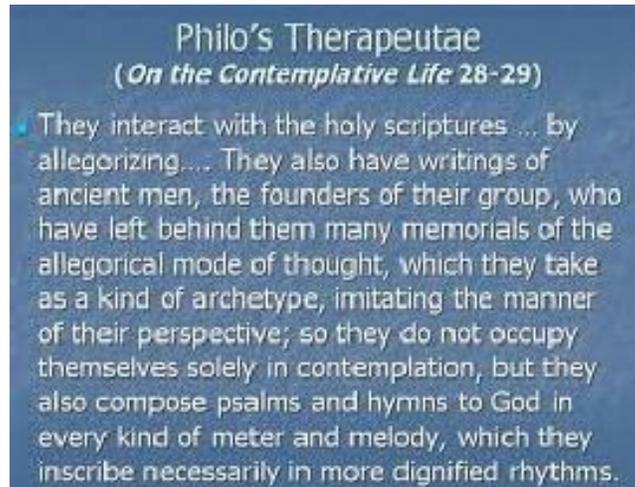
The word truly comes from the Egyptian word kashai, which means “secret.” And there is a Jewish word of similar sound, chsahi, meaning “secret” or “silent”; and this word would naturally be translated into essaioi or “Essene,” denoting “secret” or “mystic.” Even Josephus found that the Egyptian symbols of light and truth are represented by the word choshen, which transliterates into the Greek as essen. Historical references have been found also wherein the priests of the ancient temples of Ephesus bore the name of Essene. A branch of the organization established by the Greeks translated the word Essene as being derived from the Syrian word asaya, meaning “physician,” into the Greek word therapeutae, having the same meaning.

The Jewish historian, Josephus found that the Egyptian symbols for light and truth were represented in the word choshen, which in Greek also translates to Essen, leading to speculation that the Essenes may in fact be the chosen ones mentioned in The Bible.

The Essenes referred to themselves as essania, meaning ‘Sons of the Sun’. This may help to explain why one of the most important movers in the early formation of the Brotherhood, the so called heretic Pharaoh, Akhenaten (Tuthmose III Great, Great Grandson) abandoned the old Gods in favour of the Aten, as represented by the solar disc.

It is noteworthy that in his book, "The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls," A. Powell Davies says of the Essenes, "The Christian Church in its organization, its sacraments, its teaching and its literature is related to-and in its early stages may have been identical with-the New Covenanters, who were known as Essenes, some of whom wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls."

Likewise significant in the pre-Qumran traditions of the Essenes is the existence of certain Zoroastrian elements, a fact which I have previously maintained and which Arnold Toynbee has also pointed out in a recent writing. They bear a similar correlation to later teachings like those of the Kabala and Freemasonry. Their most unique element, which has apparently been developed independently, is their science of Angelology.



Philo Judaeus lived in Alexandria, Egypt, from 20 BC to 40 AD. He was a Jew in religion but a Greek in philosophy, and did much to promote this fusion of thought. This selection describes the pre-Christian ascetics of Egypt. It is important because it shows that asceticism was common in the deserts of Egypt even before the Christian monks.

“For completeness sake, one ought to also study Philo Judaeus’s ON CONTEMPLATION (On the Contemplative Life), a study of the sect of Therapeutae in Egypt of which the Essenes were an off-shoot. The Therapeutae (“Healers”) were established earlier than the Essenes and were more directly descended from the Temple teachings of Egypt, some say by way of Pythagoras who spent 22 years studying in three Egyptian temples. It is my opinion that Yahushua Ben Pandera - the only one who could possibly have been the historical Jesus - belonged to the order of the Therapeutae since he spent most of his life in Egypt. Indeed, the later Talmudists were in the habit of calling Yahushua/Jesus “that Egyptian sorcerer” as a way of discrediting him.” - Dr. Charles Finch

The Therapeutae; Pre-Christian Ascetics

The “Therapeutae”, described by Philo of Alexandria in his tract, De Vita Contemplativa (On the Contemplative Life), sought to deny the senses to find a pure spirituality. Ascetics like this, he said, could be found throughout the Greek world, but he says they abounded in Egypt.

The name, “Therapeutae”, was a Greek cultic term for worshippers, particularly of an Hellenistic Egyptian god, Serapis. An association of this god, on an inscription in Delos, calls its members Therapeutae. Another sanctuary of Therapeutae to Serapis has been found in Magnesia. This will explain the emperor Hadrian’s odd remark: “The Christians and the worshippers of Serapis are the same.

Those devoted to Serapis call themselves the “bishops of Christ”. Eusebius, in the fourth century AD,

concurrent, regarding Philo's book as referring to a Christian order, and it certainly influenced Christianity. According to Moshe Weinfeld, the rules regulating the Essene community and its admission of new members are essentially those found in later Hellenistic and Roman religious groups.

Philo describes them as a wealthy people who gave up their property to relatives and lived, in a lonely country retreat outside Alexandria, a life of rigid asceticism. They refused to drink alcohol or eat flesh and, for six days a week, meditated upon God in solitary confinement, interpreted the scriptures and composed and read their own sectarian writings. Also "they composed songs and hymns to God".

Every seventh day they assembled together in worship for an hortation, men and women, most of whom were aged virgins, separated by a wall. They held the Jewish feast of Pentecost, not Passover, as their chief feast. Then they gathered together again for an hortation, to sing songs, old and new, and dance in worship.

Philo: On the Essenes of Egypt

I. The deliberate intention of the philosopher is at once displayed from the appellation given to them: for with strict regard to etymology, they are called therapeutae and therapeutrides, either because they profess an art of medicine more excellent than that in general use in cities (for that only heals bodies, but the other heals souls which are under the mastery of terrible and almost incurable diseases, which pleasures and appetites, fears and griefs, and covetousness, and follies, and injustice, and all the rest of the innumerable multitude of other passions and vices, have inflicted upon them), or else because they have been instructed by nature and the sacred laws to serve the living God, who is superior to the good, and more simple than the one, and more ancient than the unity with whom, however, who is there of those who profess piety that we can possibly compare?

Can we compare those who honor the elements, earth, water, air, and fire? to whom different nations have given names, calling fire Hephaestus, I imagine because of its kindling, and the air Hera, I imagine because of its being raised up, and raised aloft to a great height, and water Poseidon, probably because of its being drinkable, and the earth Demeter because it appears to be the mother of all plants and of all animals.

II. The therapeutic sect of mankind, being continually taught to see without interruption, may well aim at obtaining a sight of the living God, and may pass by the sun, which is visible to the outward sense, and never leave this order which conducts to perfect happiness. But they who apply themselves to this kind of worship, not because they are influenced to do so by custom, nor by the advice or recommendation of any particular persons, but because they are carried away by a certain heavenly love, give way to enthusiasm, behaving like so many revelers in bacchanalian or corybantian mysteries, until they see the object which they have been earnestly desiring.

Then, because of their anxious desire for an immortal and blessed existence, thinking that their mortal life has already come to an end, they leave their possessions to their sons or daughters, or perhaps to other relations, giving them up their inheritance with willing cheerfulness. Those with no relations give their property to their companions or friends, for it followed of necessity that those who have acquired the wealth which sees, as if ready prepared for them, should be willing to surrender that wealth which is blind to those who themselves also are still blind in their minds.

These men abandon their property without being influenced by any predominant attraction, and flee without even turning their heads back again, deserting their brethren, their children, their wives, their parents, their numerous families, their affectionate bands of companions, their native lands in which they

have been born and brought up, despite the strong allure and attraction of a long familiarity.

They depart, not to another city as those do who entreat to be purchased from those who at present possess them, being either unfortunate or worthless slaves seeking a change of masters rather than endeavoring to procure freedom (for every city, even that which is under the happiest laws, is full of indescribable tumults, and disorders, and calamities, which no one would submit to who had been even for a moment under the influence of wisdom).

They take up their abode outside of walls, or gardens, or solitary lands, seeking for a desert place, not because of any ill-natured misanthropy to which they have learned to devote themselves, but because of the associations with people of wholly dissimilar dispositions to which they would otherwise be compelled, and which they know to be unprofitable and mischievous.

III. Now this class of persons may be met with in many places, for both Greece and barbarian countries want to enjoy whatever is perfectly good. The greatest number of these men is in Egypt, in every one of the districts, or nomes, as they are called, and especially around Alexandria.

From all quarters those who are the best of these therapeutae proceed on their pilgrimage to some most suitable place as if it were their country, which is beyond the Maereotic lake, lying in a somewhat level plain a little raised above the rest, being suitable for their purpose because of its safety and the fine temperature of the air.

For the houses built in the fields and the villages which surround it on all sides give it safety. The admirable temperature of the air proceeds from the continual breezes which come from the lake which falls into the sea, and also from the sea itself in the neighborhood, the breezes from the sea being light, and those which proceed from the lake which falls into the sea being heavy, the mixture of which produces a most healthy atmosphere.

The houses of these men thus congregated together are plain, just giving shelter in respect of the two things most important to be provided against, the heat of the sun, and the cold from the open air. They do not live near to one another as men do in cities, for immediate neighborhood to others would be a troublesome and unpleasant thing to men who desire and intend to pursue solitude.

Neither do they live far from one another because of the fellowship which they desire to cultivate, and because of their wish to be able to assist one another if they should be attacked by robbers.

In every house there is a sacred shrine which is called the holy place, and the house in which they retire by themselves and perform all the mysteries of a holy life, bringing in nothing, neither meat, nor drink, nor anything else which is indispensable towards supplying the necessities of the body, but studying in that place the laws and the sacred oracles of God enunciated by the holy prophets, and hymns, and psalms, and all kinds of other things by reason of which knowledge and piety are increased and brought to perfection.

Therefore they always retain an imperishable recollection of God, so that not even in their dreams is any other subject ever presented to their eyes except the beauty of the divine virtues and of the divine powers. Therefore many persons speak in their sleep, divulging and publishing the celebrated doctrines of the sacred philosophy.

And they are accustomed to pray twice a day, at morning and at evening. When the sun is rising entreating God that the happiness of the coming day may be real happiness, so that their minds may be filled with heavenly light. And when the sun is setting they pray that their soul, being entirely lightened

and relieved of the burden of the outward senses, and of the appropriate object of these outward senses, may be able to trace out truth existing in its own consistory and council chamber.

The interval between morning and evening, they devote wholly to meditation on and to practice virtue, for they take up the sacred scriptures and philosophy concerning them, investigating the allegories as symbols of some secret meaning of nature, intended to be conveyed in those figurative expressions.

They have also writings of ancient men, who having been the founders of one sect or another, have left behind them many memorials of the allegorical system of writing and explanation, whom they take as a kind of model, and imitate the general fashion of their sect. They do not occupy themselves solely in contemplation, but they compose psalms and hymns to God in every kind of meter and melody imaginable, which they of necessity arrange in more dignified rhythm. Therefore, during six days, each of these individuals, retiring into solitude by himself, philosophizes by himself in one of the places called monasteries, never going outside the threshold of the outer court, and indeed never even looking out.

On the seventh day they all come together to meet in a sacred assembly, and sit according to their ages with a grave demeanour, keeping their hands inside their garments, having their right hand between their chest and their dress, and the left hand down by their side, close to their flank. Then the eldest of them who has the most profound learning in their doctrines comes forward and speaks with steadfast look and with steadfast voice, with great powers of reasoning, and great prudence, not making an exhibition of his oratorical powers like the rhetoricians of old, or the sophists of the present day, but investigating with great pains, and explaining with minute accuracy the precise meaning of the laws, which sits, not indeed at the tips of their ears, but penetrates through their hearing into the soul, and remains there lastingly. All listen in silence to the praises which he bestows upon the law, showing their assent only by nods of the head, or the eager look of the eyes.

This common holy place to which they all come together on the seventh day is a twofold circuit, being separated partly into the apartment of the men, and partly into a chamber for the women, for women also, in accordance with the usual fashion there, form a part of the audience, having the same feelings of admiration as the men, and having adopted the same sect with equal deliberation and decision.

The wall which is between the houses rises from the ground three or four cubits upwards, like a battlement, and the upper portion rises upwards to the roof without any opening, on two accounts. First so that the modesty which is so becoming to the female sex may be preserved, and second, that the women may be easily able to comprehend what is said, being seated within earshot, since there is then nothing which can possibly intercept the voice of him who is speaking.

IV. These expounders of the law, having first of all laid down temperance as a sort of foundation for the soul to rest upon, proceed to build up other virtues on this foundation, and no one of them may take any meat or drink before the setting of the sun, since they judge that the work of philosophizing is one which is worthy of the light, but that the care of the necessities of the body is suitable only to darkness, on which account they appropriate the day to the one occupation, and a brief portion of the night to the other.

And some men, in whom there is implanted a more fervent desire of knowledge, can endure to cherish a recollection of their food for three days without even tasting it, and some men are so delighted, and enjoy themselves so exceedingly when regaled by wisdom which supplies them with her doctrines in all possible wealth and abundance, that they can even hold out twice as great a length of time, and will scarcely at the end of six days taste even necessary food, being accustomed, as they say that grasshoppers are, to feed on air, their song as I imagine, making their scarcity tolerable to them.

Looking upon the seventh day as one of perfect holiness and a most complete festival, they have thought

it worthy of a most special honor, and on it, after taking due care of their soul, they tend their bodies also, giving them, just as they do to their cattle, a complete rest from their continual labors. They eat nothing of a costly character, but plain bread and a seasoning of salt, which the more luxurious of them do further season with hyssop. Their drink is water from the spring for they oppose those feelings which nature has made mistresses of the human race, namely, hunger and thirst, giving them nothing to flatter or humor them, but only such useful things as it is not possible to exist without. On this account they eat only so far as not to be hungry, and they drink just enough to escape from thirst, avoiding all satiety, as an enemy of and a plotter against both soul and body.

There are two kinds of covering, one raiment and the other a house. Their houses are not decorated with any ornaments, but are run up in a hurry, being only made to answer such purposes as are absolutely necessary. Likewise, their raiment is of the most ordinary description, just stout enough to ward off cold and heat, being a cloak of some shaggy hide for winter, and a thin mantle or linen shawl in the summer. They practice entire simplicity, looking upon falsehood as the foundation of pride, but truth is the origin of simplicity, and upon truth and falsehood as standing in the light of fountains, for from falsehood proceeds every variety of evil and wickedness, and from truth there flows every imaginable abundance of good things both human and divine.

The Therapeutae (meaning "healers") and Therapeutridae (the female members of the sect) were an early pre-Christian Essenic order that the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria knew from personal experience, and were established on a low hill by the Lake Mareotis close to Alexandria, the capital of Ptolemaic Egypt.

Communities of Therapeutae were widely established in other regions, Philo understood, for "this class of persons may be met with in many places, for both Greece and barbarian countries want to enjoy whatever is perfectly good." (Philo, para.)

Philo described the Therapautae in the beginning of the 1st century AD in *De vita contemplativa* ("On the contemplative life"), written ca. AD 10. Philo explained the etymology of their name as meaning either physicians of souls or servants of God.

Philo employed the polarity in Hellenic philosophy between the active and the contemplative life, exemplifying the active life by the Essenes and the contemplative life by the desert-dwelling Therapeutae.

The Forerunners of the Monastic Orders

Philo writes, "They lived chastely with utter simplicity; they first of all laid down temperance as a sort of foundation for the soul to rest upon and proceed to build up other virtues on this foundation."

They were dedicated to the contemplative life, and their activities for six days of the week consisted of ascetic practices, fasting, solitary prayers and the study of the scriptures in their isolated cells, each with its separate holy sanctuary, and enclosed courtyard: "the entire interval from dawn to evening is given up by them to spiritual exercises."

They read the holy scriptures and draw out in thought and allegory their ancestral philosophy, since they regard the literal meanings as symbols of an inner and hidden nature revealing itself in covert ideas" (Philo, para. 28).

In addition to the Pentateuch, the Prophets and Psalms they possessed arcane writings of their own tradition, including formulae for numerological and allegorical interpretations.

They renounced property and followed severe discipline: "These men abandon their property without being influenced by any predominant attraction, and flee without even turning their heads back again". (Philo, para. 18)

They "professed an art of healing superior to that practiced in the cities" Philo notes, and the reader must be reminded of the reputation as a healer Saint Anthony possessed among his 4th-century contemporaries, who flocked out from Alexandria to reach him.

On the seventh day the Therapeutae met in a meeting house, the men on one side of an open partition, the women on the other, to hear discourses.

Once in seven weeks they meet for a night-long vigil after a banquet where they served one another, for "they are not waited on by slaves, because they deem any possession of servants whatever to be contrary to nature. For she has begotten all men alike free" (Philo, para.70) and sing antiphonal hymns until dawn.

The practices described by Philo were considered as early as Eusebius of Caesarea as one of the first models of Christian monastic life. Eusebius was so sure of his identification of Therapeutae with Christians that he deduced that Philo, who admired them so, must have been Christian himself, not knowing the date of Philo's essay, and Christian readers still believed that this must have been so until the end of the 18th century.

Like the first Christian hermits of the Egyptian desert, they were hermits, or anchorites, rather than living communally, as later Christian monastic communities would do. "The semianchoritic character of the Therapeutae community, the renunciation of property, the solitude during the six days of the week and the gathering together on Saturday for the common prayer and the common meal, the severe fasting, the keeping alive of the memory of God, the continuous prayer, the meditation and study of Holy Scripture were also practices of the Christian anchorites of the Alexandrian desert" (Scouteris).

Formative Influences

Various formative influences on the Therapeutae have been conjectured. The Book of Enoch and Jubilees exemplify the Hebrew tradition for the mystic values of numbers and for allegorical interpretations, without having to reach to Zoroaster or Pythagoreans.

In particular, the similarities between the Therapeutae and Buddhist monasticism, a tradition earlier by several centuries, combined with Indian evidence of Buddhist missionary activity to the Mediterranean around 250 BC (the Edicts of Ashoka), have often been pointed out.

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The Miracles of Jesus

According to the canonical Gospels, Jesus worked many miracles in the course of his ministry. The bulk of His miracles were healings or various cures. There are also a large number of exorcisms, three raisings

of dead persons to life, and various other miracles that all include the healing of either the mind, the body or the soul. They include:

Healing of a woodcutter's foot; Infancy Gospel of Thomas
Playmate killed and raised from dead; Infancy Narrative of James
Cure of centurion's son (servant) Mt 8:5–13 Lk 7:1–10 Jn 4:46–54
Cure of a demoniac Mk 1:23–28 Lk 4:33–37
Cure of Peter's mother-in-law's fever Mt 8:14–15 Mk 1:29–31 Lk 4:38
Cure of a leper Mt 8:1–4 Mk 1:40–45 Lk 5:12–19
Cure of a paralytic at Capharnaum Mt 9:1–8 Mk 1:40–45 Lk 4:12–19
Cure of a sick man at Bethesda Jn 5:1–15
Healing of a man's withered hand Mt 12:9–13 Mk 3:1–6 Lk 6:6–11
Raising of the son of the widow of Nain Lk 7:11–17
Healing of a blind and dumb demoniac Mt 12:22
Expulsion of demons in Gadara Mt 8:29–34 Mk 4:35–41 Lk 8:26–39
Raising (curing) of Jairus' daughter Mt 9:18–26 Mk 5:21–43 Lk 8:40
Healing of a woman with a hemorrhage Mt 9:20–22 Mk 5:24–34 Lk 8:43
Restoration of two men's sight Mt 9:27–31
Healing of a mute demoniac Mt 9:32–34
Exorcism of a Canaanite (Syro-Phoenecian) woman Mt 15:21–28 Mk 7:24
Healing of a deaf-mute Mk 7:31–37
Restoration of a man's sight at Bethsaida Mk 8:22
Exorcism of a possessed boy Mt 17:14–21 Mk 9:13–28 Lk 9:37–43
Healing of the blind man Bartimaeus Jn 9:1–38
Healing of large numbers of crippled, blind and mute Mt 15:29
Healing of a woman on the Sabbath Lk 13:10–17
Raising of Lazarus from the dead Jn 11:1–44
Healing of a man with dropsy Lk 14:1–6
Healing of ten lepers Lk 17:11–19
Healing of two blind men at Jericho Mt 20:29–34 Mk 10:46–52 Lk 18:35
Healing of High Priest's servant's ear

Of all the miracles Jesus performed, only five do not include a healing or cure.