

# THE ANCIENT AND MODERN ESSENES

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**T**he author has been teaching regularly about Essene awareness in Northern California for more than seven years. In this essay she outlines some of the major sources for modern Essene work, and its modern manifestations.

A number of years ago, prominent Dead Sea Scrolls translator, Dr. Martin Abegg, as part of a class through the Biblical Archeology Society, posed an interesting question: "So you want to be an Essene?"

Perhaps his intention was to inspire a profound question-and-answer session, to encourage participants to open up the vaults of history, integrate information from ancient manuscripts, and allow the ways and wisdom of these ancients to come to life.

## The Dead Sea Scrolls

In the late 1940s a young Bedouin shepherd boy, Mohammed Ahmed el-Hamed (nicknamed *edh-Dhib*, the Wolf), known among his people for being keenly observant, threw a stone up into a mountain in the region of the Dead Sea. He then heard the sound of breaking potsherds, and climbed the mountain to investigate what was to become one of the great archeological finds of recent times.

More than nine hundred carefully preserved scrolls were eventually unearthed, including early books from the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures, providing texts more than a thousand years older than those which had been previously used to provide translations of Jewish Scriptural texts.

The version of the Book of Psalms found at the Dead Sea provided much clarification, as parts of those texts had been previously lost; and in addition other works

were found, including the Thanksgiving Psalms, and many devotional prayers. Twenty-two manuscripts with material from the Book of Isaiah were found there, along with twenty-five manuscripts with material from the Book of Enoch, which is not currently part of Biblical cannon accepted by official Judaism and Christianity, but which follows patterns also manifested in the Christian book of Revelation, and includes more than twenty sayings similar to those of Jesus recorded in the New Testament.

The rules of the community were found there, as well as some vessels and scrolls from Jerusalem, and some texts that differ from Essenian philosophy, lending further credence to the theory that the scrolls are not exclusively Essene writings, but rather, a varied library used for comparative teachings.

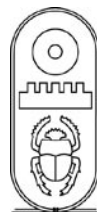
More than fifty members of the Dead Sea Scrolls translation and scholarship team over the past six decades have provided more than 150 volumes, have pieced together tiny fragments, and brought a diversified wealth of expertise to the Dead Sea Scrolls study and quest. Questions have been answered regarding Essene timekeeping and calendars, the Essene vision of purity, and definitions of their priesthood. Much in the way of visionary and prophetic literature has been brought forward, and life at this community from 350 BCE to 60 CE has been further chronicled.

## Ancient Authors on the Essenes

Throughout the centuries historians and theologians have been studying the extensive writings of ancient historians of the early Common Era regarding the Essenes. Writings of



*Qumran*, James Collins, F.R.C.



the Roman Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, and the historian and mystic philosopher, Philo (Judaeus) of Alexandria, described ancient Essenian life, character, and organizing patterns rather carefully. Both of these writers wrote extensively in antiquity, and the work of both historians agrees on most points regarding the Essenes. The work, *The Essenes by Josephus and his Contemporaries*, by Dr. Edmond Bordeaux Székely, is a helpful summary focusing on the Essene commentaries by these ancient authors.

It should also be noted, that the Essene and/or early Essenian Christian presence can be traced to the Lake Mareotis region of Alexandria, Egypt; the Amarna ruins of central Egypt; Jerusalem; the Mount Carmel School of the Prophets; and private homes throughout the Judean regions. The Qumran community at the Dead Sea essentially consisted of priestly males; however, the Essenes had communities for married couples, for example, which suggests that a search for clarity concerning these ancients should not be limited to information from the Dead Sea, where, as Dr Székely wrote, when it became time for the brothers to leave the desert and go to another place, “the scrolls stayed behind as buried sentinels, as forgotten guardians of eternal and living truth.... The Essene brothers hid their teachings in the minds of the few who could preserve them for their descendants, and the Scrolls of Healing, lay neglected beneath the shifting sands of the desert....”<sup>1</sup>

Josephus actually began studies to become an Essene (the word, “Essene” means “Healer” in Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew). Some of his descriptions include:

“...there were three sects, of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.... The doctrine of the Essenes tends to teach all that they confidently may trust their fate in the hands of God.... They say that the soul is immortal, and they aspire to lead a righteous and honest life.... Their ‘Yea’ and ‘Nay’ were with them as binding as a sacred oath...on account of the sense of justice that they ever show and the courage and

intrepidity that they manifest in ever defending truth and innocence.... They never keep servants.... Therefore they serve and assist each other.... They are very industrious and enterprising...the third class of philosophers among the Jews, and the class that is most esteemed for their just and moral life.... They willingly adopt the children of other people.... They show great kindness to such children, hold them dear, and teach them all forms of knowledge and science, morals, and religion.... none of them seem to live in abundance or need....among them are seen neither haughtiness nor slavish subjection.... Everybody having taken his place in supreme silence and stillness....”<sup>2</sup>

The Essenes described their spiritual experience as “Walking Between the Worlds,” indicating a high level of initiatic, mystical awareness. And there were various levels of unfoldment and responsibility within the order, and several levels of priesthood. Former Rosicrucian Emperor, H. Spencer Lewis, carefully tracked Essene patterns and connections to the life and ministry of Jesus in his books, *The Secret Doctrines of Jesus* and *The Mystical Life of Jesus*.

His studies, experiences, and research on the Essenes led him to the materials from the archives of the Great White Brotherhood in Tibet, India, and Egypt. He led an entourage to Egypt, including a visit to the ancient Essene community location at Lake Mareotis, near Alexandria. He pointed out that secret teachings were suggested in worldly parables, and that Jesus’ teachings were for both an inner circle and an outer circle.<sup>3</sup>

### **Modern Voices in the Essene Tradition**

Today, with the increase of work surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls, the research teams, the increase of studies concerning Judeo-Christian origins, Biblical Archeology, and the discovery in Egypt of the Gnostic writings in the Nag Hammadi Library in 1945, we may be living in a time when many of our Judeo-Christian perceptions could evolve in some areas and gradually change the lives of many.

Popular author, Gregg Braden, an Earth Sciences expert, works with Essene studies in the context of various spiritual traditions and sacred sites, in his books, *The Isaiah Effect*, *Beyond Zero Point*, *The God Code*, and *Secrets of the Lost Mode of Prayer* (and a *Dead Sea Scrolls* tape series with Deepak Chopra). He confirms the observation of Essene texts in a monastic library in Tibet.<sup>4</sup>

In 1917 Dr. Edmond Bordeaux Székely observed, copied, and later translated, *The Essene Gospel of Peace*, which he reportedly discovered in the Vatican Archives. This work, in four volumes, along with philosophical, practical, healing arts applications, and his poetic offerings, have inspired some extensive movements and activities around the world. More than ten million copies of *The Essene Gospel of Peace: Book 1* have been distributed.

Although this, and the other Tibetan manuscripts are not officially in the public view at this time, the latest research generally corroborates Dr. Székely's studies, writings, and approaches, and *The Essene Gospel of Peace* has been observed in Tibet.<sup>5</sup> Could this be the time for another expedition, perhaps including some members of the Dead Sea Scrolls research team, with modern equipment for copying and analysis?

The ancient Essenes were described as living to an average age of one hundred years, and not uncommonly to ages of 120 and beyond, by the historians of their day. In those times, the average life span was only thirty-five years. They were vegetarians, lived a nature-based lifestyle, and engaged in some practices which today we might describe as yogic. They further claimed to be carrying the fullness of the teachings of Moses, brought out of Egypt.

Gabriel Cousens, M.D., in his books, *Conscious Eating*, and *Spiritual Nutrition*, explains much about the Essene ways and lifestyle of healing, employing live (uncooked) foods and a plant-based diet, along with fasting and mineralization principles, toward the curing of many diseases, including mental disorders. His book, *Sevenfold Peace: World*

*Peace Through Body, Mind, Family, Community, Culture...*, which elaborates on the Sevenfold Peace of the Essenes that is mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, has been used by the United Nations Peacekeeping Council for studies on world peace.

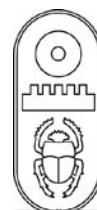
Dr. Cousens's work with meditation for world peace, for example, *Peace 21*, now in its twenty-first year, has been used by the UN General Assembly. He is also founder of the Tree of Life Rejuvenation Center in Patagonia, Arizona, and also at the Dead Sea itself. Also, his *Peace Everyday Initiative* is being practiced worldwide, and has been endorsed by key figures, including the Dalai Lama.

### **Connections between Qumran and Amarna**

One of the members of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Robert Feather, a researcher and metallurgist, assigned to investigate the Copper Scroll found at Qumran, has written two very interesting books on the manifold connections between the Qumran community at the Dead Sea and Akhenaten's Egypt: *The Copper Scroll* and *The Secret Initiation of Jesus at Qumran*. His writings have been corroborated by senior researchers on the team, including Jozef Milik.

Feather establishes extensive connections between the priestly garments and altar designs and coverings used by King David, King Solomon, and the Egyptians. He demonstrates similarities between Akhenaten's Temple at Amarna and the temple at Qumran, such as the use of four-part washing areas and ten ablution pools, three-to-one dimensions, and exact degrees of orientation.

Feather reveals that the Copper Scroll contains a sixty-four-part "treasure map," containing locations for what would have been about one-fourth of the world's gold (which creates a mystery as to why these simple-living monks would have such access). After fifty years of searching in Judea for the gold and artifacts without success, the search of the Amarna ruins yielded multiple finds of



gold bricks, in the locations described, with the Pharaoh's seal in the locations described. Feather also establishes plausible theories for a multitude of Hebrew-Egyptian and Essene connections over the centuries, as well as many Egyptian practices evidenced in Qumran excavations.

### **Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Essenianism**

Those involved with Rosicrucian Tradition have been fascinated with the Essenes throughout the modern period. In the eighteenth century, the founders of the Masonic Order of the Golden Rosy Cross of the Ancient System claimed descent from the Essenes through Ormus, a mysterious disciple of St. Mark, who is said to have combined the Essene and Egyptian Mystery traditions in 151 CE.<sup>6</sup> Whether this is taken literally or allegorically, it is a way of demonstrating the spiritual continuity of Essene and Rosicrucian tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Christian Rebis further documents the continuation of this search during the nineteenth century:

“Meanwhile, the dogmatism of the Church disheartened those who were in search of a true and original Christianity. This was the case with Abbé Ferdinand Chatel (1795-1857), the promoter of his ‘French Catholic Church,’ which was linked with the Neo-Templar Order of Fabr -Palaprat. Certain others, such as Pierre Leroux, believed Essenianism to be the true Christianity. His book *De l’Humanit , de son Principe et de son Avenir* (Regarding Humanity, Its Principle and Future; 1840) described Jesus as being an Essene in contact with Eastern traditions.

“Daniel Ram e followed the same line with *La Mort de J sus, R v lations historiques . . . d’apr s le manuscrit d’un Fr re de l’ordre sacr  des ess niens, contemporain de J sus* (The Death of Jesus, Historical Revelations; 1863). Thus,

Essenianism. . . continued to preoccupy those who were in search of the Primordial Tradition. It was combined with Egyptosophy, a passion for the wisdom of a people whose basis was being rediscovered.”<sup>8</sup>

### **The Modern Essene Movement**

In continuity with the continuing search for Essene Spirituality, the Modern Essene movement was greatly inspired by several spiritual works published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve* by Gideon Ouseley (1892), *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* by Levi H. Dowling (1908), *The Essene Gospel of Peace* by Edmond Bordeaux Sz kely (1928), and *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, by H. Spencer Lewis (1929).<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary Essenes, as they study to understand the ancients, are generally found to focus on health-related teachings for body, soul, and spirit. This generally includes

vegetarianism, with a focus on “live foods” (fresh fruits, nuts and legumes, baby greens and sprouts, and other vegetables); and perhaps veganism, peace meditations, and breathing exercises.

Professor Sz kely interpreted seven aspects of Peace, based on his work and studies which are

necessary for full health on all levels: Peace with the Body, with the Mind, with the Family, with Humanity, with Culture, with the Kingdom of the Earthly Mother, and with the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the individual is in harmony within and without.

The forces of the world around and within the individual are conceived of as a vast Tree of Life, with many interactive polarities. There is a correspondence between all that is, above and below. Consciousness, Nature, and Experience can lead us to a realization of Truth, which is ever evolving,



Lake Moeris in the Fayum, locality of the Essene-Therapeutae school in Egypt. (Photograph from the archives of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC)

and must be discovered anew by each seeker. As seekers grow in knowledge and wisdom, their responsibility for shepherding and safeguarding the planet and the cosmos on all levels grows.

With new doors opening up daily for careful students in the area of the Essene Philosophy and world spirituality in general, many people today at least recognize the word “Essene,” so that this ancient and modern movement may continue to contribute and inspire peace in our world.

Recently in the worldwide press, it was noted that Pope Benedict XVI announced during the week before Easter that Jesus and his disciples followed the Essene calendar, and celebrated the Passover meal without a lamb, leading to the possibility that he was a vegetarian:

“In all likelihood, however, [Jesus] celebrated the Passover with his disciples in accordance with the Qumran calendar, hence, at least one day earlier; he celebrated it without a lamb, like the Qumran community which did not recognize Herod’s temple and was waiting for the new temple.”<sup>11</sup>

Even more clearly, the current Pope writes in his 2007 book, *Jesus of Nazareth*:

“The earnest religiosity of the Qumran writings is moving; it appears that not only John the Baptist, but possibly Jesus and his



*The Lord's Prayer in Aramaic*, by Victoria Franck Wetsch, S.R.C.  
Script by Shahan Shammas, F.R.C.

family as well, were close to the Qumran community. At any rate, there are numerous points of contact with the Christian message in the Qumran writings. It is a reasonable hypothesis that John the Baptist lived for some time in this community and received part of his religious formation from it.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet, apparently few people in this busy world took note. Although an active Essene / Gnostic awareness and dedication is taking place, and groups and teachers have been at work, both within and outside of the Rosicrucian Order, there is still a hush and a quiet about these Masters. And yet, at the same time, often modern awareness is moving toward the particular understanding and practices of the ancient Essenes concerning the Cosmic, healing, Nature, and regarding higher practice and devotion.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Edmond Bordeaux Székely, ed., trans., *The Essene Gospel of Peace: Book 1*, (Nelson, BC, Canada: International Biogenic Society, 1981), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Edmond Bordeaux Székely, *The Essenes by Josephus and his Contemporaries*, (Nelson, BC, Canada: International Biogenic Society, n.d.), 11-45.

<sup>3</sup> H. Spencer Lewis, *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, (San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, 1929), 21, 224.

<sup>4</sup> Gregg Braden, *Beyond Zero Point: The Secrets of the Lost Mode of Prayer*, VHS Video, (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc., 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Rebisse, *Rosicrucian History and Mysteries*, (San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, 2005), 104-105.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* (London: KPI, in association with Islamic Publications, 1986), 376-379.

<sup>8</sup> Rebisse, *Rosicrucian History*, 120-121.

<sup>9</sup> *The Essene Gospel of Peace and The Gospel of the Holy Twelve* are widespread in Essene work. *The Aquarian Gospel* and *The Mystical Life of Jesus* are suggested as inspirations for the modern Essene movement by J. Gordon Melton in *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, (Wilmington, NC: McGrath Publishing Co., 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Edmond Bordeaux Székely, *The Teachings of the Essenes from Enoch to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (Nelson, BC, Canada: International Biogenic Society, 1957). [http://www.thenazarenway.com/sevenfold\\_peace.htm](http://www.thenazarenway.com/sevenfold_peace.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), “Homily given at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper,” April 5, 2007, at the Basilica of St. John Lateran, Rome. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/homilies/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20070405\\_coenadomini\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20070405_coenadomini_en.html).

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).