

The Last Words of Jesus -

What Were They and What Did They Mean?

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Introduction

In this essay we will not discuss the provenance and meaning of the last words attributed to Jesus of Nazareth by the authors of the Gospels of Luke and John, let alone any of the non-canonical gospels. Luke (23:46) may have had Psalm 31:5 ("Into thy hands I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.") in mind when he has Jesus say "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." John (19:30) did not quote any Biblical verse when he has Jesus say "It is finished."

We will confine ourselves in this study to the gospel books whose names bear the names Mark and Matthew. It is alleged that Jesus recited the first verse of Psalm 22 (Psalm 21 in the Septuagint) as his final words, before dying on the cross. We will come back to those words in a moment. Prior to doing so, let us look at how that psalm was alluded to in the Gospels. In all three synoptic gospels (Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:35) there is a quote from the 7th verse: "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head". In the Gospel of Matthew (27:43) there is a quote from the 8th verse: "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him". In the Gospel of John (19:24) there is a quote from the 18th verse which is also alluded to in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34): "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture". All of these references are to the crucifixion and the death of Jesus and the immediate aftermath. None of these quotations or allusions are exact quotes that line up, word for word, with the Hebrew Masoretic or Greek Septuagint texts of the Psalms, nor with the Aramaic Targumim or the Syriac Peshitta. Perhaps we should not expect a perfect alignment of the "last words" then with any of these sources?

The words defined

In Hebrew one of the words that connotes the infinitive form “to forsake”, which is antique English for “to leave, to abandon” is [‘azav]¹. The ending [-Tany] means “you have in relation to me”. Hence [‘azavTany] means “you have forsaken/left/abandoned me”.

The word [lamah] means “why”. A contrasting word with a similar sound is [kamah] which means “how much/how many”.

In Syriac, which seems to be the language of the Psalm text cited in the gospels of Mark and Matthew, the infinitive form “to forsake” is [shabaq] and the passive participle is [shabaqTani], which is the verb with the ending [-Tany] which means in Syriac the same – you have in relation to me”. Consequently, the Syriac word for “you have forsaken me” is [shabaqTani]².

An infinitive that has some similarities to the Syriac [shabaq] is the Hebrew [shibakh] which means “to praise, to glorify”. Its passive participle is [shibakhTani], meaning “you have glorified me”³.

Analysis of the standard sources

To give us a frame of reference, we will cite the verse which the gospels of Mark and Matthew attribute to Jesus:

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי

Transliterated word for word, Psalm 22:1 reads:

Ely [אֱלֹהֵי] Ely [אֱלֹהֵי] lamah [לָמָּה] ‘azavTany [עֲזַבְתָּנִי]?

Translated it reads:

My God, my God, why have you left me?

Since it is possible that an Aramaic version [Targum] of the Psalm may have existed in the lifetime of Jesus and his followers, we next cite the Aramaic⁴:

אלי אלי מטול מה שבקתני

Transliterated this reads:

Ely [אלי] Ely [אלי] metul [מטול] mah [מה] shabaqTany [שבקתני]

Translated it reads:

My God, my God, because of what have you left me?

Next we will look at the West (Palestinian) Syriac translation of the same verse, from the Peshitta Psalter⁵:

ܐܠܗ ܐܠܗ ܠܡܢܐ ܫܒܩܬܢܝ

This is transliterated as:

Elah [ܐܠܗ] elah [ܐܠܗ] lemna [ܠܡܢܐ] shabaqTany [ܫܒܩܬܢܝ]

Translated it reads:

Elah, Elah, why have you left me?

Note that in the Syriac language, [ܐܠܗ] means “to him” or “to her” and not “My God”. In Aramaic, as found repeatedly in the book of Daniel and of Ezra, the word [ܐܠܗ] which has the same consonants as the Syriac [ܐܠܗ] means God. For details of this comparison, see Brown Driver Riggs.⁶

As we have just looked at the Syriac version of Psalm 22:1, we will now review the Syriac (Peshitta) versions of the references to this psalm in the gospels of Mark and Matthew:

Gospel of Mark (15:34) -- ܐܠܗ ܐܠܗ ܠܡܢܐ ܫܒܩܬܢܝ

As we can plainly see, apart from the two commas, which are not integral to the original text, the verses in Psalm 22:1 in the Syriac Psalter and Mark 15:34 **are identical**.

When we look at the Gospel of Matthew (27:46) in Syriac, it is another story

-- ܐܠܗ ܐܠܗ ܠܡܢܐ ܫܒܩܬܢܝ

This would be transliterated as:

`Eyl [ܐܠܗ] `Eyl [ܐܠܗ] lemna [ܠܡܢܐ] shabaqTani [ܫܒܩܬܢܝ]

And translated from the Syriac as:

God, God, why have you left me?

The Gospel of Mark cites the Aramaic word for “God” [ܐܠܗܐ] in Syriac transliteration as [ܐܠܗ] whereas the Gospel of Matthew cites the Syriac word for “God” [ܐܠܗܐ] which provides a Syriac translation of the original Aramaic word – two approaches to the same aim. It would be virtually impossible for a listener to hear the difference between the spoken [ܐܠܗ] and [ܐܠܗܐ] and as both are renderings in a dialect of Aramaic of the original Hebrew, they are both plausible and may both have been in use at the time.

While we find that the specific repeated word referring to God differs between the two Peshitta gospel accounts, it does as well between the Hebrew, the Aramaic and the Syriac Psalter versions of Psalm 22:1. On the other hand, in the Syriac Psalter and the two Peshitta gospel versions, the last two words **are identical**.

From this point onwards the divergences will multiply – in the transliterations found in Mark and Matthew; in the translations in the two gospels and compared with the Septuagint.

The Gospel of Mark (15:43) transliterates the original unidentified Semitic words into Greek:

Ἐλωὶ Ἐλωὶ λαμὰ σαβαχθανεὶ

The Greek has in turn been transliterated into English:

Eloi [Ἐλωὶ] Eloi [Ἐλωὶ] lama [λαμὰ] sabakhthanei [σαβαχθανεὶ]

The Gospel of Matthew (27:46) transliterates the original unidentified Semitic words into Greek:

Ἡλεὶ Ἡλεὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθανεὶ

Eli [Ἡλεὶ] Eli [Ἡλεὶ] lema [λεμὰ] sabakhthanei [σαβαχθανεὶ]

*We note on the transliteration from Aramaic or Syriac **shabaqTany** into Greek - **σαβαχθανεὶ** – that the Greek alphabet has no letter for ܫ [shin], and the closest to this letter is the **σ/ς** [sigma]; Greek also has no letter for ܩ [qop], and apparently the chi was chosen to take its place; finally, in Greek transliterations from Semitic languages, it seems that T (tau) was used for ܬ [tet], while Θ/θ (theta) was used*

for ת [tav or taw]. This practice was continued by English translators of the Bible, as they rendered many Hebrew words ending with [tav], such as תְּמוּתָּהּ and תְּשֻׁבָּה with the English equivalent of (theta) which is (th).

Now we will compare the Greek versions of Psalm 22:1 and the gospels of Mark and Matthew, the diversions multiply.

When we compare the Greek of the Septuagint version of Psalm 21:1 (which is the same psalm as found in Hebrew Masoretic and Syriac Peshitta)⁷...

Ο ΘΕΟΣ, ὁ Θεός μου, πρόσχες μοι ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με

...with the standard Greek recension⁸ of the gospels of Mark and Matthew we find that Mark (15:34) has...

Ὁ Θεός μου ὁ Θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με

...and Matthew (27:46) has...

Θεέ μου θεέ μου, ἵνα τί με ἐγκατέλιπες

Mark reproduces the wording of the Septuagint in its opening invocation to God while omitting πρόσχες μοι and exchanging εἰς τί for ἵνα τί; while Matthew modifies the opening invocation, also omits πρόσχες μοι and inserts με right after ἵνα τί instead of after ἐγκατέλιπες. Clearly the gospels in Greek did not closely follow the Septuagint, were not harmonized with each other, and were not harmonized either with the Hebrew, Aramaic or Syriac versions of either Psalm 22:1 or its citation in the Peshitta gospels.

An alternative interpretation

This appears to be an open and shut case. On the surface, it seems that the exact correspondence between the Syriac versions of Psalm 22:1 and the Gospel of Mark 15:43 would mitigate against any other understanding of these last words attributed to Jesus. However, there is an alternative interpretation, and it begins with the Gospel of John.

In the Gospel of John are cited certain words of Jesus at the last supper, not just prior to his death:

Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. (13:31-32)

Jesus returns to this theme several times in the Gospel of John, in eschatological verses:

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. (15:26)

It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you... (16:7)

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself: but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. (16:13-14)

And in verses that are not apparently eschatological:

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) (7:38-39)

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. (11:3-4)

Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him. (12:15-16)

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. (12:23)

Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. (12:28)

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14:13)

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (15:8)

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee... (17:1)

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the earth was. (17:4-5)

And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. (17:10)

There is no gnostic gospel that has been discovered to date that refers to this theme of the glorification of God, of the Son and of the followers of the Son; nor is it developed in the mainstream “orthodox” theology of the Church...it seems to drop into thin air.

Until James Ralston Skinner⁹, that is. Skinner’s views were initially published in 1875¹⁰, and were adopted¹¹ soon after by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky¹², one of the founders of the Theosophical Society¹³, and published in two of her books, in 1888. Two years later and a year before her death, Blavatsky met Annie Besant¹⁴, who assumed leadership of the Theosophical Society in 1907. Subsequently, the same idea was taken up by Rudolf Steiner¹⁵, who met Annie Besant in July 1902¹⁶, and was closely associated with the Theosophical Society until 1912/1913¹⁷.

We will now cite Skinner’s original statement¹⁸, followed by the restatements of a similar nature by Blavatsky and Steiner:

Attention is called to part of the 46th verse of the 27th chapter of Matthew, as follows: “Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani? – that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Of course, our versions are taken from the original *Greek* manuscripts (the reason why we have no original Hebrew manuscripts concerning these occurrences being because the enigmas in Hebrew would betray themselves on comparison with the sources of their derivation, the Old Testament). The Greek manuscripts, without exception, give these words as –

Ἡλι Ἡλι λαμὰ σαβαχθάνι

They are *Hebrew words*, rendered into the *Greek*, and in Hebrew are as follows:

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה שְׁבַקְתָּנִי

The Scripture of these words says, “that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” as their proper translation. Here then are the words, beyond all dispute; and beyond all question, such is the interpretation given of them by Scripture. Now the words will not bear this interpretation, and it is a false rendering. The true meaning is *just the opposite of the one given*, and is –

My God, my God, how thou dost glorify me!

But even more, for while *lama* is *why*, or *how*, as a verbal it connects the idea of to *dazzle*, or adverbially, it could run “*how dazzlingly*,” and so on. To the unwary reader this interpretation is enforced and made to answer, as it were, to the fulfillment of the prophetic utterance, by a marginal reference to the *first* verse of the *twenty-second* Psalm, which reads:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

The Hebrew of this verse for these words is –

נִי אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּ

as to which the reference is correct, and the interpretation sound and good, but with an utterly different word. The words are –

Eli, Eli, lamah azabvthani?

No wit of man, however scholarly, can save the passage from falseness of rendering on its face; and as so, it becomes a most terrible blow upon the proper first-face sacredness of the recital. There is but one, and there is one escape, and that is by having resort to the mystical intent.

H.P. Blavatsky quoted this passage from Skinner verbatim in *The Secret Doctrine*¹⁹, published in 1888, followed by this comment²⁰:

For ten years or more, sat the revisers (?) of the *Bible*, a most imposing and solemn array of the learned of the land, the greatest Hebrew and Greek scholars of England, purporting to correct the mistakes and blunders, the sins of omission and of commission of their less learned predecessors, the translators of the Bible. Are we going to be told that none of them saw the glaring difference between the Hebrew words in *Psalm xxii.*, *Azabvtha-ni* , and *sabachthani* in *Matthew*; that they were not aware of the deliberate falsification?

For “falsification” it was. And if we are asked the reason why the early Church Fathers resorted to it, the answer is plain: Because the *Sacramental* words belonged in

their true rendering to Pagan temple rites. They were pronounced after the terrible trials of Initiation, and were still fresh in the memory of some of the "Fathers" when the *Gospel of Matthew* was edited into the Greek language. Because, finally, many of the Hierophants of the Mysteries, and many more of the Initiates were still living in those days, and the sentence rendered in its true words would class Jesus directly with the simple Initiates. The words "My God, my Sun, thou hast poured thy radiance upon me?" were the final words that concluded the thanksgiving prayer of the Initiate, "the Son and the glorified Elect of the Sun." In Egypt we find to this day carvings and paintings that represent the rite. The candidate is between two divine sponsors; one "Osiris-Sun" with the head of a hawk, representing life, the other Mercury - the ibis-headed, psychopompic genius, who guides the Souls after death to their new abode, Hades - standing for the death of the physical body, figuratively. Both are shown pouring the "stream of life," the water of purification, on the head of the Initiate, the two streams of which, interlacing, form a cross. The better to conceal the truth, this *basso-relievo* has also been explained as a "Pagan presentment of a Christian truth."

She cited the same passage from Skinner in *The Crucifixion of Man*, also published in 1888, with an introduction in her own words²¹:

The now dogmatically accepted words, so dramatic for being uttered at the crucial hour, are of a later date than generally supposed. Verse 46 in the xxviii chapter of Matthew stands now distorted by the unscrupulous editors of the Greek texts of the Evangel. Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani -- never meant "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" but meant, indeed, originally, the reverse. They are the Sacramental words used at the final initiation in old Egypt, as elsewhere, during the Mystery of the putting to death of Chrêstos in the mortal body with its animal passions, and the resurrection of the Spiritual Man as an enlightened Christos in a frame now purified (the "second birth" of Paul, the "twice-born" or the Initiates of the Brahmans, etc., etc.). These words were addressed to the Initiate's "Higher Self," the Divine Spirit in him (let it be called Christ, Buddha, Chrishna, or by whatever name), at the moment when the rays of the morning Sun poured forth on the entranced body of the candidate and were supposed to recall him to life, or his new rebirth. They were addressed to the Spiritual Sun within, not to a Sun without, and ought to read, had they not been distorted for dogmatic purposes: "MY GOD, MY GOD, HOW THOU DOST GLORIFY ME!"

In his prolific lectures, Rudolf Steiner made copious references to the very same interpretation of the last words, in particular between 1906 and 1910. During this time Steiner was a Theosophist, with a twist - "By 1904, Steiner was appointed by Annie Besant to be leader of the Theosophical *Esoteric Society* for Germany and Austria. In contrast to mainstream Theosophy, Steiner sought to build a Western approach to spirituality based on the philosophical and mystical traditions of European culture. The German Section of the Theosophical Society grew rapidly under Steiner's leadership as he lectured throughout much of Europe on his spiritual science. During

this period, Steiner maintained an original approach, replacing Madame Blavatsky's terminology with his own, and basing his spiritual research and teachings upon the Western esoteric and philosophical tradition.”²²

In a lecture entitled “The Mystery of Golgotha”, on December 2, 1906, Steiner said²³:

All initiations into the Mystery of the Spirit pointed to the coming of Christ Jesus. This initiation was attained in the Yoga sleep, in the Orphic sleep, in the Hermes sleep. When the initiate woke up again and returned into his body, so that he could again hear and speak with his physical senses, he uttered the words which are rendered as follows in the Hebrew language: “Eli, Eli, lama sabathani.” The pupil of the Mysteries woke up with the words: “My God, My God, how thou hast raised me!”

...Every initiate experienced this in the Mysteries of the heart. It re-echoed in the words: “My God, my God, how thou hast raised me!” With the appearance of Christ Jesus, the whole Mystery, the whole experience, became reality upon the physical plane. At that time there were brotherhoods in Palestine which had developed out of the old order of the Essenes. Among their institutions, they also had a meal symbolizing the mystical Holy Supper. “To eat the Easter Lamb” is a general expression for something which took place at Easter. Jesus sat down with the Twelve and inaugurated the Holy Supper with the words: “At the end of the evolution of the earth, all men will have absorbed what I brought down to the earth, and the words, ‘This is my Body, This is my Blood,’ will then be true.” [Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:16-20] Afterwards he said: “There is one among you who will betray me.” [Matthew 26:21; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:21; John 13:10-11,18,21] This is brought about by the power of egoism. But as surely as this power of egoism is the source of treason, so surely will this lower soul-force be raised to a higher stage. One of the disciples rested upon Jesus' bosom [John 13:23,25], he rested upon Jesus' heart. This means that all the lower forces, every form of egoism, will be raised to the heart. At this point Jesus repeated to his Disciples the words: “Eli, Eli, lama sabathani” – “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him!” [John 13:31]

... Here too something took place which might have been observed by an astral observer in the astral atmosphere. When Christ died upon the Cross, the whole astral atmosphere changed, so that events could take place which could never have taken place before. This has become possible because by shedding His blood, Christ gave the whole of mankind a Self that is common to all. The blood that streamed out of the wounds of Christ Jesus gave to the whole of humanity a Self which is shared by all. His three bodies remained hanging upon the Cross and were then revived by the Risen Christ. When Christ abandoned his physical frame, the three bodies were so strong that they could utter the words of initiation which follow the transfiguration: “Eli, Eli, lama sabathani!”

To all who know something of the Mystery-truths, these words must have revealed that a Mystery had been enacted. A small correction in the Hebrew text therefore gave rise to the words contained in the Gospel: “Eli, Eli, lama sabathani!” “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!”

In a lecture entitled “The Purification of the Blood from the Passion of Selfhood through the Mystery of Golgotha”, on April 1, 1907, Steiner said²⁴:

Since the pupils who were to be initiated had learned and taken up the appropriate concepts and feelings, the initiator could then lead them to experience as spiritual reality what they had earlier studied and felt. While the soul was out of the body during the three days, it travelled through the astral and devachanic worlds. What it had learned earlier it could experience as reality, and in this way the human being became one who knows. Spiritual scientific teachings were no longer merely teachings; they had become the very life in which the soul maintains itself.

When the pupils then awoke and looked at their physical surroundings, a sound came to their lips that broke free from the soul itself, that must break free when the soul sees itself placed back in the physical world after three and a half days in the spiritual world. The soul felt that its I had become a citizen of higher worlds, that its I had dwelt in higher worlds and could step up to speak before other human beings concerning its experiences. When human beings speak of the spiritual world in this way, they have become proclaimers of the spirit in the physical world, missionaries of the spirit. This is expressed in the words “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*,” which means “My God, my God, how you have glorified me!” This is what could be heard from everyone who was initiated in this way.

Later in the same lecture, Steiner continued²⁵:

Christ Jesus will once again be able to call out the words he once called out [this time] on the cross: 'Eli, Eli,, lama sabachthani!' that is 'My Lord, my Lord, how you have glorified the I in humanity, making it spiritual.' That is the meaning of these words. There is a later translation which is wrong, taking up the lines from the [22nd] psalm. But the proper translation of these words is the one you have now heard. Those are the words that express the Mystery of Golgotha: 'My God, my God, how greatly you have glorified me, made me spiritual.'"

In a lecture entitled “Supersensible Knowledge”, the thirteenth in a series on “The Bible and Wisdom”, on April 26, 1907, Steiner said²⁶:

These things may sound extraordinary to many, but there are, and always were people who recognize that a spiritual reality exists that is as real as the one perceived through physical senses. After three and one-half days the initiate was guided back to the sense world enriched with knowledge of spiritual existence, and prepared to bear witness of the spiritual world. All initiates on their return to the ordinary world uttered certain words that were always the same: "Oh my God, how thou has glorified me!" These words expressed the sensation felt by the one just initiated as he set foot again in the everyday world. Those who guided the initiation knew all the stages by heart; later when writing came more into use certain things were written down. But there always existed a typical or standard description of the life of an initiate. One said as it were:

"He who is accepted into the cult to be initiated must live according to certain rules and pass through the experience which culminates with the words: "Oh my God, how thou hast glorified me!"

... They are those mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount as: "Blessed are those who are beggars of the Spirit, for within themselves they shall find the Kingdom of Heaven." These words applied to the followers of Christ. But how could they give a description of the life of the highest God incarnated? What description would be worthy of Him? Only the one that was contained in the canon of initiation, describing the rules of initiation. There was described the way the one to be initiated must from stage to stage pass through certain experiences which culminated in the words: "Oh my God, how thou hast glorified me!"

In a lecture entitled "Reading the Pictures of the Apocalypse", on May 1, 1907, Steiner said²⁷:

In Christianity, for the first time, something was experienced as an external physical event that otherwise only took place in the mystery centers. The course Christ's life followed is the same as that experienced by all initiates when, to begin with, they had their etheric bodies lifted out of their physical. Everything that Christ Jesus experienced physically, on the physical plane, they had experienced in the etheric realm. Their last words were also, "My God, my God, how you have glorified me!" They had experienced earlier in the etheric body what Christ experienced in a physical body. In this way the prophecies of the prophets were fulfilled. This one time only experience of Christ represents the greatest decisive turning point in our world history and separates it into two parts.

In his twelfth lecture on "The Gospel of St. Matthew", Steiner said²⁸:

Let us now try to picture in what way the writer of this Gospel regarded the Jesus dying on the cross. He had always kept his attention fixed on that which it was his special mission to describe, that of which he tells in the beginning; but now the spiritual part forsakes the physical body, and what is godlike departs with it. So the attention of the writer of the Gospel is directed to the separation of the inner being of Christ Jesus from this Divinity in His physical nature. And the ancient cry which was always heard in the Mysteries when the spiritual nature of a man forsook his physical body to gaze into spiritual worlds – 'My God, my God, how hast thou glorified me!' – is altered by Matthew; so that with his attention fixed on the physical body he says, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!' 'Thou has gone from me! This is what he exclaims. It is on this 'forsaking' that the writer of the Gospel of Matthew fixes his attention at this moment.

In his twelfth lecture entitled "The Stages of Christian Initiation" in his series "Theosophy and Rosicrucianism", Steiner said²⁹:

When he returned, he was given new name; he laid aside his old name and as an initiate he continued to use his new name. A strange phenomenon arose when he descended from the spiritual worlds and again took possession of his physical body, when he again began to live in the physical worlds. In the case of every initiate – this was a law – words rose to his lips which can be translated with: “My God, my God, how Thou hast glorified me!”

As we see from these cited passages, Steiner regarded it as an established verity that the last words of Jesus were not those cited in Greek translation and subsequently in all other tongues including his native German as “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” His audaciously associates the last words with Jesus’ declaration to his loyal followers during the last supper, reported in the Gospel of John (13:31). He also associates this saying with the soul cry of the initiate who has experienced the spiritual worlds and now speaks of them from knowledge rather than mere faith.

In the same year, 1907, Mary Hanford Ford³⁰ went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the very location where this last words of Jesus were spoken, and where Psalm 22 was first uttered, according to Jewish tradition, by King David. There she talked with the leader of the Baha’i movement, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and among her conversations with him is the interview that was written down years later and published in July 1933³¹:

In these difficult days, when the entire economic system of the world is in confusion, and when ordinary life has become so hectic as to be almost unbearable, I am reminded again of the memorable visit I made to ‘Abdu’l-Baha in the prison of ‘Akka, Palestine in 1907. He had been held there as a prisoner ever since He was incarcerated with the family of Baha’u’llah after their exile from Persia...

UPON MY arrival in 'Akka my mind was filled with pain caused by the vivid description I had heard in Paris of another terrible martyrdom of Baha'is that had occurred in Persia³². These martyrdoms continued from the period of the Bab's Declaration until the advent of the present Shah of Persia³³, who put an end to all religious persecutions. The description of these particular atrocities was so detailed that finally I could bear no more and cried out my protest, exclaiming "but don't you realize that the martyrs are in a state of bliss from the moment the torture begins, and feel none of the pain inflicted upon them."

Whereupon the assembled company turned upon me in deep disgust, and reproached me severely saying: "How dare you say such things! You are taking away all the glory of martyrdom!"

I remained abashed but not convinced, and felt that I must ask 'Abdu'l Baha for the settlement of this disturbing question, but I never asked it. The first morning that He came into my little room He did not sit down, but walked back and forth in the narrow space and presently remarked, while I listened with awe, "There are many kinds of martyrdom. How many times have I prayed for it, but instead

of that I have lived on in prison as if with the sword of Damocles suspended by a hair over my head! Each morning as I waken I feel that before the day ends I may be dragged to the public square and shot to death. But nevertheless I have been very happy in this long martyrdom, for no victim suffers from the cruelties inflicted upon him. The instant the torture begins he is in a state of bliss, and feels nothing but the joy of Heaven which surrounds him.'

He paused, looking out through the wide windows at the blue Mediterranean, the view of which beyond the huge walls seemed to eliminate their imprisoning power. Then he added, 'So Christ never suffered upon the cross. From the time the crucifixion began His soul was in Heaven and He felt nothing but the Divine Presence. He did not say, speaking in Aramaic: "O God; O God why hast Thou forsaken me?" But this word Sabacthani is similar in sound to another which means glorify, and he actually murmured, "O God! O God! How thou dost glorify me."''

Clearly Skinner, Blavatsky, Steiner and 'Abdu'l-Baha were referring to the Hebrew word shibakhTany, which means "you have glorified me". The whole phrase in Hebrew would be: Ely, Ely, kamah shibakhTany, translated "My God, My God, how [greatly] dost Thou glorify Me!" This interpretation, apart from challenging the standard exegesis of Christian theologians and academic scholars, which has been, as Skinner affirmed in 1875, unanimous in its interpretation of the saying and in its association with Psalm 22:1, represents an esoteric, one might even say a gnostic gloss on the message of Jesus. The Gospel of John is the canonical gospel that most clearly expresses such an esoteric teaching, and there are of course many non-canonical gnostic gospels that do so even to a greater degree. However, none of these gospels make mention of this saying and give it this interpretation. While this exegesis conflicts with the common sense understanding of the verse, as is confirmed by a side-by-side comparative study of the Syriac and Greek texts of the gospels of Mark and Matthew, with the Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew texts of Psalms 22, it is nevertheless consistent with the message of the Gospel of John. John makes it clear, from his copious quotations from Jesus on "glorification", none of which are found in the synoptic gospels, and which have no parallel therein save in reference to eschatology (Mark 8:38, 13:26; Matthew 16:27, 25:31; Luke 9:26). The synoptic gospels refer to the "glory" of the eschatological Son of man, as the Gospel of John (15:26, 16:7,13-14) references the "glory" of the Comforter and Spirit of Truth.

While there is a precedent for mention of the "glory of God" (Psalm 19:1; Ezekiel 8:4, 9:3, 10:19, 11:22, 43:2), the "glory of YHWH" (Exodus 16:7,10; 24:16-17; 40:34-35; Leviticus 9:6,23; Numbers 14:10,21; 16:19,42; 20:6; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chronicles 5:14, 7:1-3; Isaiah 2:10,19,21; 3:8; 6:3; 10:16; 35:2;

40:5; 58:8; 59:19; 60:1); Ezekiel (1:28; 3:12,23; 10:4,18-19; 11:23; 43:2,5; 44:4); Habakkuk (2:14), and the "God of glory" (Psalm 29:3), these terms apply exclusively to God and not to any celestial or human being. Several verses of the Christian canon which ascribe "glory" to God and are not eschatological include those in the Gospel of Luke (2:9), Acts of the Apostles (7:2), Epistle to the Romans (6:4), Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (3:18), Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (1:17), and the Apocalypse (15:8). In addition, there are select verses found in the epistles which refer to the "glory" of Jesus. The Epistle of James calls Jesus the "Lord of glory" (2:1), as does the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (2:8) and the Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians (2:14). The Apocalypse (21:23) speaks of the New Jerusalem, which has "no need for the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

However, the Gospel of John remains the principal source of non-eschatological "glorification" verses (cited pp. 6-7 of this paper). In view of such language, the esoteric reading of the final words of Jesus that is affirmed by Skinner, Blavatsky, Steiner and 'Abdu'l-Baha is in fulfillment of this vision of the cosmic Jesus, already found in the Gospel of John (cited above), and in the epistles of Paul and the Apocalypse. In the cases of Paul and John of Patmos, their only experience of Jesus was supernatural. Their experience, and that of Jesus in speaking to Thomas, is that future and the most intimate experience of his presence is supernatural: "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."³⁴

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End Notes

¹ "English-Hebrew Dictionary" of Israel Efros, Judah Ibn-Shmuel Kaufman, Benjamin Silk, Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing Company, 1956, p. 280; "English-Hebrew/Hebrew-English Dictionary", of Ben Yehudah

² A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, by Robert Payne Smith (Oxford: Clarendon 1903), p. 557
[<http://www.tyndalearchive.com/tabs/PayneSmith>]

³ "English-Hebrew Dictionary" of Israel Efros, Judah Ibn-Shmuel Kaufman, Benjamin Silk, Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing Company, 1956, p. 297: GLORIFICATION, n. shevach; GLORIFY, v.t. shabeach

English-Hebrew/Hebrew-English Dictionary of Ben Yehudah: SHiBaKH (Hebrew) means "to praise, glorify"; SHiBaKHTaNY (Hebrew) means "you have glorified me", "you have praised me"; LaMaH (Hebrew) means "why, wherefore" in the form of a question; KaMaH (Hebrew) means "how much, how many".

⁴ [<http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/showsubtexts.php?subtext=81002&csset=Hebrew>]

⁵ The Peshitta Psalter according to the West Syrian text; edited with an apparatus criticus by William Emery Barnes; Cambridge University Press, 1904. [<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001410296>]

⁶ Brown-Driver-Briggs [<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/426.htm>]

שֶׁלֹּהֵ ⁹⁴ *noun masculine god, God* (= Biblical Hebrew שֶׁלֹּהֵ (p. 43), see also √ I. הֵלֵה); – *n'* absolute [Daniel 2:28](#) +, construct [Daniel 2:18](#) +; emphatic שֶׁלֹּהֵ [Daniel 2:20](#) +; suffix הֵלֵהִי [Daniel 6:23](#), הֵלֵה- [Ezra 9:14](#) +, הֵלֵה- [Daniel 6:6](#) +, הֵלֵה- [Ezra 5:5](#); [Ezra 7:16](#), הֵלֵהִי- [Daniel 3:28](#) (twice in verse); [Daniel 3:29](#), הֵלֵה- [Ezra 7:17](#), etc.; plural absolute הֵלֵהִי

Daniel 2:11 +, emphatic *Jeremiah 10:11*, construct *Daniel 5:4,23*, suffix *Daniel 3:14*, etc. [with prefix *Daniel 5:23*, *Daniel 3:14*, etc.; but not in singular absolute or construct, e.g. *Ezra 5:12*, etc.]; –

1 god, in General *Daniel 6:8*; *Daniel 6:13*; heathen deities *Jeremiah 10:11*; *Daniel 2:11*; *Daniel 3:15*+ 15 t. *Daniel* (made of gold, etc. *Daniel 5:4,23*) + *Daniel 3:25*. (see *בר*).

2₇₃ God (of Israel), *Daniel 2:28*; *Ezra 5:2* +; phrase *Ezra 5:1*; *Ezra 6:14*; *Ezra 7:15*; *Ezra 7:19*; *Ezra 7:19*; *Daniel 2:23*; *Ezra 5:11* (+ *Ezra 5:12*), *Ezra 5:12*; *Ezra 6:9,10*; *Daniel 2:18*; *Daniel 2:19* 6t. (see *שְׁעִים 2a*); *Daniel 2:45*; *Daniel 2:47*; *Daniel 3:26*; *Daniel 3:32*; *Daniel 5:18,21*; *Daniel 6:21*; *Daniel 6:27*; also *Daniel 5:3*; *Ezra 4:24*; *Ezra 5:2* 16t. *Ezra*; *Ezra 6:18*.

⁷ <http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/septuagint/chapter.asp?book=24&page=21>

⁸ [Nestle GNT 1904](#) – Eberhard Nestle, Greek New Testament, Text with Critical Apparatus; London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1904.

⁹ James Ralston Skinner (1830-1893) was a attorney, freemason, and kabbalist from Cincinnati, Ohio. [http://www.theosophy.wiki/mywiki/index.php?title=James_Ralston_Skinner]

¹⁰ James Ralston Skinner, *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery in the Source of Measures*; Philadelphia: David McKay, 1875; Appendix VII, pp. 300-301.

¹¹ [H. P. Blavatsky](#) was definitely aware of Skinner, and corresponded with him. Six letters that he received from her are in a collection at Harvard University. His writings on [Jehovah](#) were quoted by in her book *The Theosophical Glossary*, and additional references to his ideas in *The Secret Doctrine*. However, he does not seem to have been a member of the Society. In the 1880s and 1890s, Cincinnati was a hotbed of activity. It was there that the [Cincinnati Theosophical Society](#), one of the first American lodges, was founded by [Jirah Dewey Buck](#) on [May 9](#), 1886, and later that year on [October 30](#) the [American Section](#) of the [Theosophical Society](#) took form. The records of the Cincinnati lodge from 1878-1901 make no mention of Skinner as a member or lecturer, although there is one letter from Skinner to Buck dated September 4, 1887.^[7] [http://www.theosophy.wiki/mywiki/index.php?title=James_Ralston_Skinner]

¹² [Helena Petrovna Blavatsky](#) (Russian: Елена Петровна Блаватская, Ukrainian: Олена Петрівна Блаватська), was born at Dnepropetrovsk (Ekaterinoslav), Ukraine, on [August 12](#), 1831 (31 July, old style). She was a [Theosophist](#), writer, and traveler. In 1875 (together with Colonel [H. S. Olcott](#), attorney [William Quan Judge](#) and others) she established the [Theosophical Society](#). Blavatsky was the main source of [Theosophical teachings](#) and discussed the major themes of Theosophy in many articles and several major works, including [Isis Unveiled](#), [The Secret Doctrine](#), [The Key to Theosophy](#), and [The Voice of the Silence](#). She died in London, on [May 8](#), 1891. Blavatsky was instrumental in bringing the spiritual wisdom of the East and that of the ancient Western mysteries to the modern West, where they were virtually unknown. [http://www.theosophy.wiki/mywiki/index.php?title=Helena_Petrovna_Blavatsky]

¹³ The Theosophical Society was officially formed in [New York City](#), United States, in November 1875 by [Helena Petrovna Blavatsky](#), Colonel [Henry Steel Olcott](#), [William Quan Judge](#) and others. Olcott was its first president, and remained president until his demise in 1907. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosophical_Society]

¹⁴ [Annie Besant](#) (1 October 1847 – 20 September 1933) was a prominent British socialist, [theosophist](#), [women's rights](#) activist, writer and [orator](#) and supporter of Irish and Indian self-rule...In 1890 Besant met [Helena Blavatsky](#) and over the next few years her interest in [theosophy](#) grew while her interest in secular matters waned. She became a member of the [Theosophical Society](#) and a prominent lecturer on the subject. As part of her theosophy-related work, she travelled to India. In 1898 she helped establish the [Central Hindu College](#) and in 1922 she helped establish the [Hyderabad \(Sind\) National Collegiate Board](#) in [Mumbai](#), India.^{[2][3]} In 1902, she established the first overseas Lodge of the International Order of Co-Freemasonry, [Le Droit Humain](#). Over the next few years she established lodges in

many parts of the *British Empire*. In 1907 she became president of the *Theosophical Society*, whose international headquarters were in *Adyar, Madras, (Chennai)*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie_Besant]

¹⁵ Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner (27 (25?) February 1861^[3] – 30 March 1925) was an *Austrian philosopher, author, social reformer, architect, and esotericist.*^{[4][5]} Steiner gained initial recognition at the end of the nineteenth century as a *literary critic* and published philosophical works including *The Philosophy of Freedom*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he founded an esoteric spiritual movement, *anthroposophy*, with roots in *German idealist philosophy* and *theosophy*; other influences include *Goethean science* and *Rosicrucianism*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Steiner]

¹⁶ Virginia Sease, translated from the German by Marguerite V. Miller and Douglas E. Miller, *Rudolf Steiner's Endowment: Centenary Reflections on His Attempt for a Theosophical Arts and Way of Life, 15 December 1911*, London: Temple Lodge Publishing, 2012.

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Steiner

¹⁸ [<http://www.fourhares.com/anthroposophy/christ-passion.html>] The text has been transcribed from the online copy of the first edition:

[<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t4bp0246d;view=1up;seq=332>]

¹⁹ Mistakenly identified as being on p. 158 in *The Secret Doctrine* –

[<http://www.fourhares.com/anthroposophy/christ-passion.html>]

H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Part II, Vol. III, pp. 146-147

[<http://hpb.narod.ru/SecDoctrine3B.htm#159>]

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

²¹ H.P. Blavatsky, *The Crucifixion of Man*, originally published in *Lucifer*, Vol. II, No. 9, May, 1888, pp. 243-250; reprinted in *Collected Writings*, Volume IX, pp. 272-273 (1888)

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²⁴ Rudolf Steiner, translated by James H. Hindes, *Early Lectures: The Christian Mystery*; Anthroposophic Press, 1998, pp. 96-97. Also published in Rudolf Steiner, *Original Impulses for the Science of the Spirit: Christian Esotericism in the Light of New Spiritual Insights : Summaries Based on Notes Taken by Members of the Audience of 20 Lectures Given in Berlin Between 29 January and 12 June 1907*; Completion Press, 2001.

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²⁹

http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA100/English/ANS1942/19070627p01.html;mark=340,18,30#WN_mark

³⁰ Mary Hanford Ford (November 1, 1856 – February 2, 1937) was an American lecturer, author, art and literature critic and a leader in the women's suffrage movement...In 1907 Ford went on *Bahá'í pilgrimage*, in 1910 she started writing Bahá'í books such as *The Oriental Rose*, and traveled with `Abdu'l-Bahá during some of his journeys in various places in Europe and then America. Ford spent the years of *World War I* in California following the first Bahá'í International Congress at the *Panama-Pacific International Exposition*, and then moved back to New York where she spent almost the next 20 years. In this period she was censored off a radio broadcast, helped develop the religion's community both in meetings she supported and literary efforts, and traveled in Europe for the religion, before reducing her travels and speaking engagements in the early 30s. She died with her daughter by her bedside in 1937. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Hanford_Ford]

³¹ "An Interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá," by Mary Hanford Ford, *Star of the West* Vol. 24, Issue 4 (July 1933), pp. 103-107; cited portion p. 103, 104-106: http://bahai.works/Star_of_the_West/Volume_24/Issue_4

³² Seems to be a reference to the massacre of 100 Baha'is in Yazd and Isfahan in 1903. [http://bahai-library.com/winters_chronology_babi_persecutions] Also see:

<https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/vol6/nuvvab/nuvvab.htm>

[http://iranpresswatch.org/post/4536/.](http://iranpresswatch.org/post/4536/)

It is possible that Mary Hanford Ford actually learned about events related to the Constitutional Revolution then taking place in Iran, and to this event: *In a scuffle in early 1906 the Government killed a seyyed (descendant of the prophet Muhammed). A more deadly skirmish followed a short time later when Cossacks killed 22 protesters and injured 100.* Source cited: Abrahamian, Ervand, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* by Ervand Abrahamian, Princeton University Press, 1982, p.84 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_Constitutional_Revolution]

³³ While she is writing about events in 1907, her article is addressed to readers in 1933, so she appears to be referring to the Shah then in power -- Reza Shah Pahlavi (*Persian*: رُزَا شَاه پهلوی; pronounced [*re'za: 'fa:he pæhlæ'vi:l*] (15 March 1878 – 26 July 1944), was the *Shah* of *Iran* (Persia) from 15 December 1925 until he was forced to *abdicate* by the *Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran* on 16 September 1941.^[2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reza_Shah] As for the status of the Baha'is in Iran -- At least one scholar has described Bahá'ís in Iran prior to the Islamic Republic as "a political pawn". Government toleration of Bahá'ís being in accord with secular Western ideas of *freedom of worship* was "a way of showing *mullahs* who was boss." Correspondingly, since the Bahá'ís were a relatively small minority and most Iranians followed traditional beliefs of *Apostasy in Islam*, when the government was politically weak and in need of clerical support, withdrawal of government protection to "allow active persecution of the Bahá'ís," was a "low cost pawn that could be sacrificed to the *mullahs*". Thus during the heyday of secular ruler *Reza Shah* Bahá'ís were protected; while in 1955, when Reza Shah's son, Muhammad Reza, needed clerical support for the *Baghdad Pact* and with the *1953 Iranian coup d'état* only two years past, Bahá'ís were attacked.^[12]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%ADs]

³⁴ John 20:29