

26 When Yeshua had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples,²As you know, the Passover is two days away – and the son of man is going to be handed over to be hanged. ³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Qayapha, ⁴and they schemed to arrest Yeshua secretly and execute him.

commentary

26:2 As you know – If it is about Passover, he said “as you know” because they celebrated it every year. If it is about the son of man being handed over, he said “as you know” because he had told them before (cf. *Matt. 20:17-18*).

26:2 The Passover – The Biblical feast of *Pesakh* פסח, in Aramaic Paskha פסחא, which commemorates the exodus from Egypt (*Deut. 16:1*; cf. *Exod. 12:2-21*).

26:2 the son of man is going... to be hanged – Yeshua refers to himself, talking about the son of man consciousness which he embodied as a tzaddiq. Hanged, i.e., on a tree, to be crucified. A hanged body is a cursing of God (*Deut. 21:23*). Leaving a corpse hanging, even if he committed a capital crime, is considered so humiliating and shameful that God curses the land on account of it (*Ramban on Deut. 21:23*). A man who remains hanged, showing his painful humiliation before the world is causing God himself to suffer, for God says, “My head hurts and my arms hurt” (*mishna Sanhedrin 6:10*). This is because men are created in the image of God, so it is as if the brother of a king is executed and the masses think the naked corpse was the king himself (*Sanhedrin 46b*). “For in his image did God make man” (*Gen. 9:6*). If this is the case for a criminal, then how much more so for a righteous person? The tzaddiq is the image of God for his generation (*Sefer haMiddot, Tzaddiq 1:102*). In Semitic languages, something that is hanging תלוי is also “dependent on” or “up to” someone else, because that which is hanging cannot move by itself and the wind does with it whatever it pleases. By accepting willingly to be hanged, the saint surrenders completely to the Creator, thus attaining absolute self-nullification. He undergoes personal martyrdom in order to bring corrections to the nation of Israel, and even the world itself. It has been taught that “Rabbi Hanina had a dream in which Rav was being hanged from a date tree, and it is well known that he who is hanged on a date tree becomes the head – i.e., the leader” (*Yoma 87b*). And if this is so for a righteous person, how much more so for a messianic figure? Because it is written about the son of man that “He came up with the Ancient of Days” (*Dan. 7:13*). “There are times when a tzaddiq accepts suffering upon himself for the sake of the world. It is like an exchange; he changes the influx of bounty and providence with God... This bounty which should fall upon the tzaddiq is dispersed in the world” (*Liqutei Moharan 63:3*). “In their time of trouble, the tzaddiq bears the suffering of those who support him” (*Sefer haMiddot, tzaddiq 1:102*).

26:3 the chief priests and the elders of the people – These are the Sadducee priests of Beit Hanin – a.k.a., the house of Annas – and the scribes who were with them in the cleansing of the Temple incident (*chapter 21*). The scribes being from the *erev rav* and the house of Hanin being corrupt has already been explained (*see commentary on Matt. 21:12-13*). On them being Sadducees, see Josephus (*Antiquities 20:9:1*). Qayapha קיאפא was precisely the son-in-law of Hanin the high priest. According to Josephus, the Roman procurator Valerius Gratus deprived Hanin of his priesthood, and before being replaced by Pontius Pilate (around the year 27 c.e.), he left Qayapha in charge of the occupation (cf. *Antiquities 18:2:2*). These two high priests were, therefore, not appointed in accordance with the Torah, but picked by a Roman finger, and while Hanin was still held as the high priest, it was Qayapha who performed the duty office that year. Aside from these two, the Romans also appointed a few other high priests for short periods of time. Perhaps this is what transpires under the title of “chief priests.”

26:4 they schemed to arrest Yeshua – Because of the incident at the Temple, where Yeshua publicly reproached them, turned over their tables and exposed their corruption while gaining himself the favor of the masses. This was a twofold issue for them: On the one hand, Yeshua was taking the people’s interest

⁵But they said, Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.
⁶And while Yeshua was in Bethany in the home of Shimon the Leper, ⁷there approached him a woman with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured on his head as he was reclining.

—commentary—

From them. This would be a big blow on their love for popularity and authority. On the other hand, Rome could take immediate action over the city in the event of another altercation similar to the cleansing of the temple: the chief priests would be removed from their positions and the citizens would be punished for violating the Pax Romana. Such commotion between the people and the leaders could be perceived as a riot, and chants with the likes of “Hosanna to the son of David” could be interpreted as a crime of sedition against Caesar himself.

26:6 in Bethany – The place near Jerusalem where Yeshua’s friends lived (*see commentary on Matt. 21:17*).

26:6 Shimon the Leper – The Aramaic term used – גרבא – can refer to someone affected with itch or a blotch (cf. *Targum on Deut. 28:27; Berakhot 41a*). As a play of words, it can also refer to a bottle or container to keep wine or oil. Since Shimon means listener, the name serves as a symbolism of someone who listens to and keeps Yeshua’s wine, i.e., his teachings within. He certainly was not affected by *metzora* (leprosy) at that time since people were gathering at his home. The house of Shimon “the Leper” is probably the exact same house that other accounts call the house of Martha and Miriam – Yeshua’s friends (cf. *John 12:1-8; Luke 10:38-42*).

26:7 approached him a woman – The woman remains anonymous in the synoptics, but the fourth gospel says she was Miriam, the sister of Martha. The fourth gospel is not historically reliable, though. Both versions of the story stem from the same source but branched out into quite different paths: Mattai and Mark’s versions have the woman pouring the alabaster oil on Yeshua’s head, whereas the fourth gospel – probably influenced by Luke’s story of a sinful woman – has her anointing his feet instead.

26:7 alabaster flask of very expensive ointment – Alabaster is a marble-like precious stone which was commonly used to carve sculptures, columns, vases and other objects with a beautiful delicate finish (cf. *Esther 1:6*). The expensive ointment in Mark is said to be made of “pure nard נרד” (*Mark 14:3*). This parallels the verse: “While the king was at his table, my nard נרד gave forth its fragrance” (*Songs 1:12*). Some of the sages interpret it to mean: “While the king of kings, the Blessed Holy One, was at his [wedding] feast, at the firmament, Israel [his bride] released a beautiful fragrance at Mount Sinai when they said, Everything that Hashem has spoken we will perform and we will hear” (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:12*). In the same way, the king represents Moshe, when he stood on the top of mount Sinai, and (*Deut. 33:5*) “became king in Yeshurun [i.e., Israel] when the heads of the people were assembled” (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:12*). Just like this verse represents God himself, who is king of kings, and also Moshe, who was called the king of Yeshurun, the incident with Yeshua’s anointing serves as an allegory for the anointing of the messianic figure, who is being welcome into the bride’s home, i.e., the community of Israel.

26:7 she poured on his head as he was reclining – He was reclining at the table to eat, as it was the custom. This parallels the verse: “while the king was at his table” (*Songs 1:12*). Pouring the perfume on his head was done as a celebration of having a Torah scholar at her home. It was part of the culture to practice hospitality, to clean a guest’s feet and have them wash themselves before eating. People would use aromatic oils on one’s head, body or feet for hygienic or relaxing purposes (*Shabbat 61a*). Oftentimes wives would be the ones anointing their husbands (cf. *Sotah 11b*). But why use a very expensive ointment? It is clear she wanted to honor him as her guest, but not simply as a guest, but as a man sent from Heaven, thus paralleling the verse: “my nard gave forth its fragrance” (*Songs 1:12*). The Talmud records traditions of anointing a sages’ head with fragrant oils, for instance when a son was marrying into a sage’s family (cf. *Ketuvot 17b*).

⁸When the disciples saw this they were indignant and said, Why this waste?
⁹This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor. ¹⁰Aware of this, Yeshua said to them, Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a mitzva to me. ¹¹For you have the poor always with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²When she poured this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Amen I say to you, wherever this my annunciation will be proclaimed in the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

commentary

26:10 She has done a mitzva to me – A *mitzva*, i.e., a good deed. Judaism considers a *mitzva* to show hospitality. About hosting a Torah scholar our sages taught, “Let your house be a house of meeting for the sages and sit at the dust of their feet” (*Avot* 1:4).

26:12 poured this ointment on my body – She poured it on his head and it ran down all over his body.

26:12 she did it to prepare me for burial – The Hassidim are “anointed with the oil of incorruption” (*Prayer of Asenath* 8:5; 15:4). Yeshua saw in this gesture an augury of his imminent burial. The sense of connection a person might have with an unknown beggar is not remotely comparable to the connection he has with the deceased he is performing the burial ritual for, or for a man who is in a specific need. “You have the poor always with you” comes from the verse: “There will never cease to be beggars within the land” (*Deut.* 15:11). There is always a chance to give alms to the poor, but what this woman did for Yeshua was a one-time only mitzva. The first components in a burial ceremony are the *rekhitza* and the *tahara*, which refer to physically and ritually cleansing the body, by washing and purifying it. Anointing the head comes from the verse “Your head must not lack oil” (*Ecc.* 9:8). When Yeshua died, the women who followed him intended to anoint and wash his body according to tradition, but since he died in the eve of Shabbat, they waited until Sunday, but on that morning he had resurrected, so the *tahara* ritual was not performed on him. Hence, this woman’s act of kindness was guided by Divine Providence as a foresight of the cleansing ceremony which would not be performed on Yeshua’s body. For perfumes used in burials of kings it is written about Asa: “They laid him on a bed which was filled with spices... prepared with the perfumer’s art” (*2Chr.* 16:14).

26:13 what she has done will also be told, in memory of her – Ironically, her name remains anonymous. Only her modest act of kindness is known by everyone who learns about Yeshua. Measure for measure, because she honored Yeshua, now she is being honored by his message.

¹⁴Then one of the Twelve—the one called Yehudah Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵and asked, What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you? So they settled for him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶From then on Yehudah watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

commentary

26:14 one of the twelve... went to the chief priests – The author had already anticipated that Yehudah Iscariot was the traitor in the group (cf. *Matt. 10:4*). In this chapter the author uses a narrative technique known as alternate point of view: like in a novel book, he alternates between Yeshua's story and his enemies' story, since both of them take place at the same time, both converging at the end of the chapter. At a first glance it might seem like the previous paragraph was another story of Yeshua showing his wisdom to his disciples, having a satisfactory conclusion. That is not so. It is the cusp of a tension which began when Yeshua arrived at Jerusalem. The author shows that Iscariot and some others of his followers had in fact a different worldview, and probably felt some kind of disappointment in their Rabbi when he not only did not claim his throne as a son of king David (cf. *Matt. 21:9*), but also confronted the authorities at the Temple (*ibid. 21:12-17; 23:13*). The author uses the incident with the alabaster flask as the straw that broke the camel's back. This led Yehudah to give him away to the chief priests, or as Luke puts it "The Satan entered Yehudah Iscariot" (*Luke 22:2*). In other words, from that moment on Iscariot turned against Yeshua and became his accuser. It must be noticed, though, that the synoptics do not blame Yehudah alone for saying the money of the alabaster flask could have been sold and given to the poor; they blame it on "some of the disciples" – in plural – without specifying any names.

26:15 What are you willing to give me if I – From this question we deduce that his betrayal was conditional on receiving a reward. Hence, the fourth gospel says in the alabaster flask incident that Yehudah did not genuinely care for the beggars, but that he was just money greedy (*John 12:6*). However, money compensation was not necessarily his primary motive, since he had been living with Yeshua for some time now and was one of his twelve students. How could a Torah student betray his Rabbi for a few pieces of silver? Disappointment might have been the primary motivation; therefore, in Luke and Mark's versions the chief priests decided to give him money as a reward, instead of him asking for it. It is also possible that Yehudah himself did not see his own behavior as a betrayal and in his own mind he was trying to usher in the messianic era by forcing Yeshua to publicly act as the king Messiah – which would explain his later remorse. In short, Yehudah is a complex character that is not easily labelled and put in a box. His betrayal is in the aspect of the tree of knowledge in Gan Eden, where the Serpent convinced Hava to disobey God through what seemed to her like reasonable arguments.

26:15 they settled him for thirty pieces of silver – Or thirty sheqels of silver. While it was a good amount of money, thirty sheqels were less valuable than the alabaster flask, which comes to show the complexity in Iscariot's behavior (cf. *John 12:3-6*). Thirty sheqels was the price to pay if an ox killed someone's slave (*Exod. 21:32*). In the land of Sumer "thirty sheqels of silver" was a proverbial saying for something with little value. The Midrash interprets the number thirty as "few" and the word *kesef* (silver) as "valuable," in reference to the thirty tzaddiqim there are always in Eretz Israel (cf. *Bereshit Rabbah 49:3; cf. Zech. 11:12-13; Hullin 92a*). The seed of Avraham will always have thirty righteous people in the world, as it is written "So shall your seed be," which can also be read as "so thirty יהיה your seed be" (*Gen. 15:8*).

26:16 watched for an opportunity to hand him over – He could not do so while Yeshua was surrounded by multitudes and followers for fear of a riot (26:5). He finally found his chance when he separated himself from the crowds and went to pray alone with his close disciples.

¹⁷On the first day of the feast of matzot, the disciples came to Yeshua and asked, Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover? ¹⁸He replied, Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, Our Rabbi says: My time has come. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house. ¹⁹So the disciples did as Yeshua had commanded them and prepared the Passover. ²⁰When evening came, Yeshua was reclining at the table with the twelve. ²¹And while they were eating, he said, Amen I say to you, one of you will betray me. ²²And they were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, My master, is it me?

commentary

26:17 On the first day of the feast of matzot – The first day of unleavened bread, which was the night of *Pesakh* (i.e., Passover) in Mattai’s language. Biblical chronology must be assumed, since the hallakha for our modern observance of Passover was adopted by Israel after the destruction of the Temple. Due to certain difficulties in the upcoming chapters, some scholars have assumed the last supper could not be a Passover meal. However, Mattai leaves no room for doubt when he says that day was “the first day of the feast of matzot.” In Mark’s words, “The first day of the feast of matzot, when it was customary to slaughter the Passover lamb” (*Mark 14:12*). The lamb is sacrificed on the 14th of Nissan (cf. *Ibn Ezra on Lev. 23:11*). Officially, the first day of *hag-matzot* is on the 15th (cf. *Lev. 23:6*). However, it begins to be observed on the evening of the 14th at the Seder. *Hametz* (leavened food) is removed before the night of *Pesakh*, and at the start of the feast, unleavened bread is eaten for seven days (*Deut. 16:8*). Therefore, the Passover is sacrificed on the 14th of Nissan and the feast of matzot is observed, as the Torah states, “from the evening of the 14th ... to the evening of the 21st of Nissan” (*Exod. 12:18-19*). Our sages refer to it as the “first day of the feast of Passover” יום טוב הראשון של פסח (*Eikha Rabbah 3:5*).

26:18 I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples – Yeshua clearly states that the last supper was a Passover. To “eat the Passover” (v. 17) or the *Pesakh* refers to the lamb that was eaten on the first night of *Pesakh* when the Temple was still standing (cf. *Exod. 13:3; Lev. 23:5-8*). This clearly evidences that, according to the more historically reliable synoptic gospels, Yeshua’s last supper was indeed a Passover meal, as opposed to what is narrated in the fourth gospel, which depicts the last supper as a normal meal and places Yeshua’s execution on the day the passover is slaughtered (cf. *John 19:14*). The theological motivation is obviously to depict Yeshua as a symbolic “lamb” of God, a mystical Passover lamb (cf. *1Cor. 5:7*). The fourth gospel is mystical and was written a generation after the events. It is evident that, with the course of time, Yeshua’s death was orally moved to *erev-Pesakh* by the people, as they kept commemorating his death on the 14th of Nissan as he had instructed.

26:20 when the evening came – When the festival of Passover began.

26:20 Yeshua was reclining at the table with the twelve – “Even the poorest man in Israel must not eat [the Passover] until he reclines” (*Pesakhim 99b*).

26:21 one of you will betray me – This chapter shows the tension within Yeshua’s own circle. It was not a common or peaceful meal. Yeshua knew he was about to die and that some among his followers were beginning to lose faith in him.

26:22 My master, is it me? – All of the disciples went one by one to him to inquire about the traitor. Even Yehudah Iscariot asked. Was he really not aware that what he was plotting was treason? Was he pretending not to know, acting like a hypocrite? We do not know his true motivations and that builds upon the complexity of this character.

²³But he replied and said, He who dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The son of man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man by whose hand the son of man is betrayed! It would be better for him if he had not been born.

—commentary—

26:23 he who dipped his hand into the bowl with me – He said this only to a few of his disciples privately. Had he said it openly, Yehudah would not have asked too. Or perhaps other disciples also dipped their hand into the bowl, so they were not certain who among them was the traitor.

26:23 dipped... into the bowl – Dipping into the bowl refers to the *hazeret* – the bitter herbs that were eaten at the beginning of the *Seder* table (We now eat them later, as a *korekh* sandwich). Originally *hazeret* was dipped into water as an appetizer (*Mishna Peshakhim 10:3*). Bitter herbs or *maror* were used a second time during the supper; one dips them into the *kharoshet* – which is a sweet paste made with the mixture of apples, wine, cinnamon and nuts. The bitter is dipped into the sweet. The traitor was dipped with Yeshua's Torah, and as we know, "if a person is not worthy, the Torah he learns becomes a deathly poison" (*Yoma 72b*). This might be a *peshet* on Micah's words: "Your enemies will be the people in your own house. A son will not honor his father" (*Micah 7:6*); in other words, a Torah student will not honor his Rabbi. Others apply the verse, "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (*Psalms 41:9*). This implies Yehudah was reclining at the table next to Yeshua.

26:24 the son of man will go just as it is written about him – A person must endure suffering on earth, but we must know that everything happens for a reason. The calamities of Messiah ben Yosef are God's design, as it is written, "You intended to harm me, but God had designed it for good... to give life to many people" (*Gen. 50:20*).

26:24 It would be better for him if he had not been born – The schools of Shammai and Hillel debated for two years whether or not was preferable to have been born into this world. One said yes, one said no, but both concluded that since we are born into the world, we have a responsibility towards its elevation, and if we fail to do so and pollute our souls, it would be definitely better if we had not been born (cf. *Eiruvim 13b*). Like the Mishna says, "He who has no concern for the honor of his maker it would be better for him if he had never come into the world" (*Mishna Hagiga 2:1*). After all, our own soul will testify against us in the day of judgment (*Hagiga 16a*).

²⁵Then Yehudah, the one who would betray him, said, Rabbi, Rabbi, is it me?
Yeshua answered, You have said so.

commentary

26:25 Yehudah, the one who would betray him – For a deeper understanding of what Yehudah Iscariot represents, come and see: Yehudah Iscariot represents the Jewish people יהודים from among the cities קריית. What does it mean? There are Jewish people in the world who began in the path of Torah, but the world did not unfold as they expected. They thought the Messiah would come in a moment of need, or that God would miraculously save them in a moment of suffering, but it did not happen as they wanted. Others expected luxuries and a life free of suffering, but this is not how life unfolded. What did they do? They became people among the pagans. Therefore, Yehudah Iscariot represents four kinds of people, who, being Jewish by birth, took their part among the erev rav. The first group become heretics, as it happened with Elisha ben Abuya, who became a heretic after he saw a child losing his life while trying to fulfil a mitzva for which observance of the Torah promises a long life (*Yerushalmi Hagiga 2:1*). The second group are those who became disinterested in or resented with God and turned atheists, searching only for their own glory and money, in the aspect of the house of Hanan. The third group are those who attempt to radically transform the world – i.e., to become a messianic figure of some sort – and at the cost of other human beings try to usher in a new era. This is what certain survivors of World War II did,^a of whom Luke says, “the Satan entered” them (*Luke 22:2*). Pretending to help humankind, they betray the good people of Israel and shape the modern world with ethics that are contrary to Torah. They are in the aspect of Qorakh, who rebelled against Moshe’s authority, claiming he is not needed because the entire congregation is holy on its own (*Num. 16:3, 13*), ironically, Qorakh was acting like he was the new leader himself. The fourth group of people represented by Yehudah Iscariot are those who have studied authentic Torah for years, and they know that a sage – in this case Yeshua – is actually holy and righteous, but because, perhaps, they feel the pressure of society, they betray the tzaddiq, giving him away to the Other Side. This is the primary sin committed by Yehudah, namely, the “selling of Yosef” (*Bereshit Rabbah 13:13*) which is a sin that God does not forgive in various generations, as it is written “For three transgressions of Israel, even for the fourth, I will not return to them, because they sold a tzaddiq for money” (*Amos 2:6*).

26:25 Rabbi, is it me? – In verse 22 the disciples call him “my master” whereas Iscariot calls him “Rabbi.” It may seem superfluous, but it sets Iscariot as an outsider. For him Yeshua is just another Rabbi, not his master.

^a The “certain survivors” refers mostly to George Soros; a survivor of the Nazi occupation in Hungary who at the age of 14 betrayed his fellow Jews and helped the Nazi to identify and register them in order to deport them to labor camps and to their execution (cf. Tivadar Soros, *Maskerado cirkau la morto*). George Soros embraced a Marxist political worldview and made a fortune in investments, which he used to create a network of foundations that promote his communist philosophy, theoretically advocating for freedom, equality and diversity, but at the same time stimulating hatred against “the white man” and openly opposing any worldview that contradicts his own. He became the biggest donor of world politicians, mass media and even entertainment, to patronize progressist and social-liberal ideologies all over the world, such as same sex marriages, transgenderism, abortion of babies, euthanasia, the sterilization of children by convincing them they are not born into the correct gender, child abuse... and other similar ideologies which eventually lead to the extinction of humankind.

²⁶During their meal, Yeshua having taken bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take and eat; this is my body. ²⁷Then he took the cup, said the blessing, and he gave it to them saying, Drink from it, all of you.

—commentary—

26:26 During their meal – Iscariot left them after asking who the traitor was. This is presupposed in verse 47 and plainly stated in other accounts (cf. *John 13:30*). He was absent in the meal, as he left at some point between the first and second cups of wine, after having dipped the *hazeret* into Yeshua’s bowl.

26:26 Having taken bread – In a modern Passover meal^b we first say the *Qadesh* (blessing over wine), then a blessing over the *karpas* (the vegetable) and eat it, we then break the *afikomen* and tell the story of the Exodus while taking a second cup of wine, and only afterwards we break the bread and recite the blessing over it, which marks the start of the meal. In the days of the Temple, although the steps were not exactly the same, they were very similar (cf. *Mishna Peshakhim 10:3*).

26:26 said the blessing – Blessing over bread is called *hamotzi*; he who brings forth: “*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh haOlam hamotzi lekhem min haAretz.*” The meaning is: “Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth” (*Tosefta Berakhot 4:6*). The Gemara interprets *hamotzi* in past tense: God “brought forth bread” for Israel during the Exodus (*Berakhot 38a*).

26:26 and gave it to his disciples – The common practice is that the host will say the *berakha* (i.e., the blessing) over the bread, then break it and then share it with the others (cf. *Berakhot 47a*).

26:26 Take and eat; this is my body – This episode is one of the few historical accounts of Yeshua’s life that are registered in detail in all early sources (except Thomas). Paul mentions that Yeshua’s last supper and his betrayal took place on the same night (cf. *1Co. 11:23*). His words on the bread and the wine became liturgic reading in the early community. The Pauline tradition reads, “This is my body, which is given/broken for you” (*Luke 22:19; 1Co 11:24*); the later words being absent in the Keifa tradition. While the fourth gospel does not explicitly mention this saying of Yeshua in the last supper – perhaps because its version is not a Passover Seder – chapter 6 contains a parallel in the “bread from heaven” passage (cf. *John 6:52-59*).

26:27 Then he took the cup – Some time passed between the bread and the wine. When it was time for the fourth cup, he then said those words. Luke connects two sayings of Yeshua with two different cups of wine, one at the beginning of the Seder (*Luke 22:18*) and another at the end of the Seder (*ibid. 22:20*). When Yeshua took the cup and said, “This is my blood,” this was the cup “after the supper” (*Luke 22:20*).

—relevant quotes—

“For I received from the master what I also passed to you, that the master Yeshua, on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the master’s death until he comes. For this reason, whoever may eat this bread and drink this cup of the master unworthily, he will be guilty of the body and blood of the master.” (**1 Corinthians 11:23-27**)

^b While the basic elements are always the same, certain traditions regarding the celebration of the Passover Seder have changed throughout the centuries. The destruction of the Temple, the fact that we could no longer offer a Pesakh lamb, the exile and many other elements have notoriously contributed to the evolution of our modern Seder.

²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

commentary

26:27 Then he took the cup – As it is written, “I will lift up the cup of salvations” (*Psalms 116:13*). This verse is recited during the Passover Seder in a hymn known as the *Hallel*, a recitation of Psalms 113 to 118 (cf. *Taanit 28b*). While Psalms such as 113 and 114 commemorate the Exodus, Psalm 116 is a prayer for salvation, as it deals with the topics of suffering, fear of death and the death of the righteous in God’s eyes. Yeshua took this Psalm as a *peshet* and applied it to himself. “I will lift up the cup of salvations.” Why is the word “salvations” plural? Because it corresponds to the four empires that subjugated Israel (cf. *Gen. 40:11-13*). The fourth empire is Rome, whose dominion is still upon us. Therefore, the fourth cup of wine is the salvation from this current world. “Salvations” also refers to the salvation we will experience in the days of Messiah and the salvation we will experience in the days of Gog (*Bereshit Rabbah 88:5*). Therefore, in the Passover Seder we drink four cups of wine accordingly, as our sages taught that on Passover night “a man should be given no less than four cups of wine” (*Pesakhim 99b; Mishna Pesakhim 10:1*).

26:28 This is my blood of the covenant – What did Yeshua mean with these words? He gave them *matza* to eat and said it was his body. Then he gave them wine and said it was his blood. This is clearly a historical account as it is recorded in all the early sources. In the plain meaning Yeshua is simply asking his disciples, whenever they celebrate Passover, to remember how he died for them. Many Jewish and Christian communities commemorated Yeshua’s death on the 14th of Nissan – Passover – up until the 4th century, when Roman Christianity began to persecute the practice.^c It must be noticed, though, that in the way Yeshua formulated the sentence, it surely made his Torah-observant students uncomfortable, to say the least. This calls for a midrashic interpretation: Is Yeshua asking us to eat him? Does the bread magically become Yeshua’s body and does the wine magically become his blood? This is obviously absurd; such pagan interpretation is contrary to Judaism. Yeshua is not advocating for some sort of cannibalistic ritual, neither asking people to consume blood, which is forbidden (*Keritot 21b*) under the command “you must not eat any blood” (*Lev. 7:26*). One might wonder like the Judeans in the fourth gospel do: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (*John 6:52*). To which Yeshua responds: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life... he who drinks my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me, and I in him” (*ibid. 6:54, 56*). The conclusion provides a better insight: “The living Father has sent me and I live by the Father, so whoever eats me, he will also will live by me” (*ibid. 6:57*).

26:28 This is my blood of the covenant – It is written, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by all that proceeds from Hashem’s mouth does man live” (*Deut. 8:3*). The word translated as “proceeds” מוצא shares the root מץ with the word *matza* מצה (unleavened bread). The root *mem-tzaddiq* מץ refers to oppression, as it is the root in the Hebrew word for Egypt – *Mitzraim* מצרים – and the additional letters (the *hei* and the *alef*) refer to God’s hand in the process of salvation. Come and see: The teachings of a *tzaddiq* come from Hashem’s decree. He is, therefore, the true food for the soul, as our sages taught, “Where there is no bread,

relevant quotes

“The anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of Hashem: O Hashem, save me... For you, Hashem, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling that I may walk before Hashem in the land of the living... Precious in the sight of HaShem is the death of his saints.” (*Psalms 116:3-15; Hallel*)

^c cf. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* chapters 23-25; The Passover-Easter-Quartodeciman controversy.

²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

commentary

there is no Torah, where there is no Torah, there is no bread" (*Avot 3:17*). This is because "the true tzaddiqim do not just study Torah, they are themselves a living Torah" (*Seder hadorot heHadash 21a; Liqutei Diburim vol 2, p. 492*). They embody the words, "Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven" (*Avot 2:17*). "Even one who has studied Torah, as long as he does not learn from a *talmid hakham* – an authentic wise scholar – is still considered an ignoramus" (*Berakhot 47a*). The tzaddiq embodies the wisdom of the Torah on earth, and so the wisdom of the Torah says: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed... live in the way of understanding" (*Proverb 9:5-6*). This is precisely the teaching Yeshua of Nazareth left us on the night before his death. He was telling them, "Absorb my teachings, make them your way of life, become part of me, just like I became part of the Creator. Remember how I lived and what I taught, eat it like food from heaven and make it part of your essence." Drinking his blood represents absorbing his life, as it is written, "the soul of the flesh is in the blood" (*Lev. 17:11*). His blood is represented by wine יין, which has the numerical value of *sod* סוד "secret wisdom" (*Eiruvim 65a*). Become a living Torah and you will be rewarded in the world to come. This is the sign of the new covenant, as it is written: "I will set with the house of Yehudah a new covenant... I will place my Torah in their inwards and I will write it in their hearts" (*Jeremiah 31:30-32*). One who has the Torah in his inwards written in his heart has become himself a living, breathing Torah, and this is the covenant that Yeshua is talking about; to become a living Torah like he was, hence the saying: "The word became flesh" (*John 1:14*). Hillel believed "Israel had already enjoyed Messiah in the days of Hezekiah" (*Sanhedrin 99a*). The word he used for "enjoyed" is *akal* אכל, which literally means consumed, eaten. During the reign of Hezekiah the people of Israel "ate" i.e., tasted the Messiah, as it is written: "He did according to all that David his father did... crushed the idols [even the bronze serpent]... so that there was none like him among the kings of Judah, neither after him nor before him" (*2Kings 18:3-7*).

26:28 for the forgiveness of sin – "Precious in the eyes of Hashem is the death of his saints" (*Psalms 116:15*). The true tzaddiqim bring atonement as it is written (*Prov. 16:14*), "the sage brings atonement" (*Liqutei Moharan 1:7:4*). The Torah juxtaposes Miriam's death to the section of the red heifer. The Talmud asks: Why is this so? "To inform you that just as the red heifer effects atonement, so does the death of the righteous effect atonement" (*Moed Qatan 28b*). "The death of a tzaddiq atones for the generation" (*Shemot Rabbah 35:4*), as it is written, "He was pained because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the chastisement of our welfare was upon him and with his wounds we were healed" (*Isaiah 53:5*). "Just like Yom Kippur atones, so does the death of the righteous" (*Vayiqra Rabbah 20:12*). However, Yom Kippur only atones when accompanied by penitence (*Yoma 85b*), and so the atonement of a tzaddiq atones for those who are attached to him. Because "without repentance there is no atonement" (*Hebrews 10:26*). In order to understand this, the Zohar asks: "Why do the martyrs and the tzaddiqim have to die by the hand of men and not by God's kiss [i.e., departing without pain]" (*Zohar 2:254b*). The Zohar answers somewhere else, concerning the martyrdom of tzaddiqim: "Rabbi Aqiva's martyrdom was divinely decreed" (*Zohar 1:131b*). In other words, it served a heavenly purpose; it was a *tiqun* (a spiritual correction) which served to usher the world into the world to come (cf. *Derekh Hashem 2:3:8*). The aspect of experiencing martyrdom for the sake

relevant quotes

"Know that while sometimes forgiveness of sins comes about through the collective merit of the community, there are times when the members of the community are not sufficiently worthy to have their sins forgiven in their own merit. The tzaddiq is then obliged to undertake to suffer for the sake of the Jewish people (*Is. 53:4*), Surely he bore our diseases and carried our pains. The community in general is saved from illness but not the tzaddiq, because he undertakes to suffer on behalf of Israel." (*Liqutei Moharan 2:8:6*)

²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹But I say to you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

—textual variants—

26:28 my blood of the covenant – In some manuscripts, “my blood of the new covenant.”

—commentary—

of Israel is the aspect of Yosef, whose family was in disunity until he was sold, considered dead and put under pain, all of which brought them back together. Hence, the Talmud calls Rabbi Aqiva: Aqiva ben Yosef. His death brought down the soul of unity, as he died uttering the word *ekhad* – one – from the Shema (*Berakhot 61b*), in the aspect of “In that day Hashem will be one and his name will be one” (*Zech. 14:9*). Similarly, Yeshua's prayer was “that everyone will be one, as you, Father, and I are one” (*John 17:21*). A midrash says that Moshe Rabbeinu saw Rabbi Aqiva's death and, when he turned around, his flesh was being weighted in the marketplace (*Menakhot 29b*). The marketplace is a public place, open for everybody to watch, so this is the meaning of these words: For some people Rabbi Aqiva's death only left a chunk of meat here on earth, not different from the carcass of a cow. But others will consume the wisdom that he left for us in this world and will get closer to the Creator. This is the meaning of “take and eat; this is my body.”

26:28 for the forgiveness of sin – Yeshua gave us instructions to commemorate his death when partaking of the bread and the wine on Passover. How do we perform this? The sages gave us the means through the modern way in which we observe the Seder. Know that our physical departure from Egypt was a reflection of the spiritual salvation our soul yearns to receive from the forces of impurity (*qlipot*). Whenever we partake of Passover, we not only remember how God rescued our ancestors; we reflect on our personal liberation. During the meal, we break a piece of matza and hide it until the end of the meal. This broken and hidden matza is called *afikomen* – which means “that which comes after.” The *afikomen* represents Messiah's final redemption which we will enjoy/eat in the end (cf. *Haggadah of the Sefat Emet*). The fact that we break it and hide it during the Seder serves as a reminder of the atonement brought by the tzaddiq who was broken and then concealed in this world, as it is written, “Hashem willed to break him.. if his soul makes restitution, he will see seed” (*Isaiah 53:10*). In the same way, the fourth cup of wine which we drink at the end of the Seder represents the final redemption, as already mentioned.

26:29 I will not drink from this fruit of the vine... until – Interestingly, after the fourth cup of wine, it is customary in certain communities to pour a fifth cup of wine and recite the Great Hallel over it without drinking it (cf. *Mishneh Torah, Hametz uMatza 8:10*). This represents the world to come, for the world to come is called “the wine which is kept for the righteous, which has been preserved in the grapes of the six days of creation” (*Berakhot 34b; Zohar 1:81b*). In the future, the Blessed Holy One will make a feast for the righteous from the flesh of the Leviathan, “and a river will flow from Gan Eden to the place where the feast will take

—relevant quotes—

“Suffering and pain may be imposed on a tzaddiq as an atonement for his entire generation. This tzaddiq must then accept this suffering with love for the benefit of his generation, just as he accepts the suffering imposed upon him for his own sake. In doing so, he benefits his generation by atoning for it, and at the same time is himself elevated to a very great degree ... Such suffering also includes cases where a tzaddiq suffers because his entire generation deserves great punishments, bordering annihilation, but is spread via the tzaddiq's suffering. In atoning for his generation... he saves these people in this world and also greatly benefits them in the world to come. In addition, there is a special, higher type of suffering that comes to a tzaddiq who is even greater and more highly perfected than the ones discussed above. This suffering comes to provide the help necessary to bring about the chain of events leading to the ultimate perfection of mankind as a whole.” (*Ramhal, Derekh Hashem 2:3:8*)

²⁹But I say to you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

³⁰When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹Then Yeshua told them, This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. ³²But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.

—commentary—

place, and wine will flow from that river" (*Pesakhim 68a*). In Ashkenazi communities the fifth cup is called "the cup of Eliyahu" and symbolizes the anticipation for the final redemption.

26:29 I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on – Come and see: "I will not drink from this fruit of the vine" is in the aspect of Messiah ben Yosef, who suffers for his brother's sake. It is thus written about Yosef, "he was separated from his brothers" (*Gen. 49:26*). The word "separated" is *nezir* נזיר, which also means nazirite, as in the verse: *ki-nezir Eloqim* "a nazirite of God" (*Judges 13:5*). Thus, the sages interpret here: "From the day Yosef was separated from his brothers, he did not taste wine anymore" (*Shabbat 139a*).

26:29 until I drink it new with you – This refers to the joy of reunification and the new Torah of Messiah. Wine symbolizes the Shekhina's supernal flow of abundance (*Zohar III:94b*) as well as the secrets of the Torah (cf. *Sanhedrin 38a*). This is the aspect of the world to come, in which the Torah will be interpreted and observed in a totally different way, as it is written, "a [new] Torah will emanate out of me" (*Isaiah 51:4; Vayiqra Rabbah 13:3*). It will be the same Torah but in a completely different level; for the world will turn divine (cf. *Liqutei Halakhot, Eiruvei Tekhumim 5:22*). This new wine will issue from the river [Yesod, the tzaddiq] that flows from Eden [the intellectual sefirah of Binah] (cf. *Zohar I:194a; cf. Pesakhim 68a*). Hence it is taught that "the Torah one learns in this world will be vanity when compared to the Torah of Messiah" (*Qohelet Rabbah 11:8*). Hence, about Messiah in the future it is written, "He washes his garment in wine, his robe in blood of grapes" (*Gen. 49:11; cf. Ketuvot 111b*). A person can gain access to this new Torah of Messiah even when alive in this world, as Yeshua said, the kingdom is at hand. Today, if you listen to his voice (*Psalms 95:7*).

26:30 When they had sung a hymn – It is traditional at the conclusion of a Passover Seder to sing hymns on addition of the Hallel (cf. *Pesakhim 95a*).

26:31 I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered – He is citing from the prophet Zechariah (13:7) and interpreting it as a peshet. In *remez*, the shepherd is the son of man, in the light of the verses preceding it: "On that day, a spring will be opened for the house of David... for purification" (*Zech. 13:1*), "O sword, awaken against my shepherd; against the man associated with me, says Hashem Tzevaot" (*ibid. 13:7a*). Who is this shepherd associated with Hashem? He is the son of David, as it is written, "I will place over them one shepherd to shepherd them; my servant David" (*Eze. 34:23*); "he will stand and shepherd them with the strength of Hashem" (*Micah 5:3 [4]*).

26:32 I will go ahead of you into Galilee – After his suffering and death, he will revive and go ahead to Galilee; i.e., the Galil, in the aspect of what is written, "There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress... He will honor Galilee of the nations... The people walking in darkness have seen a great light" (*Isaiah 8:23-9:1 [9:1-2]*). It is called Galilee of the nations because the redemption of the entire world will come forth from Galilee, for it is the center of illumination, where the secrets of the Torah radiate for the world (cf. *Aryeh Kaplan, Meditation and Kabbalah 5:1, Safed*). The Zohar says, "In the future the children of the world will awaken the Torah from the side of Galilee, for from there will emanate Israel's salvation and the awakening of the dead. This is called the light of the king, for it is written: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light" (*Zohar III:239b*).

³³Keifa replied, Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. ³⁴And Yeshua answered, Amen I say to you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. ³⁵But Keifa insisted, Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you. And all the other disciples said the same. ³⁶Then Yeshua went with his disciples to a place called Gadsemani, and he said to them, Sit here while I go over there and pray.

—commentary—

26:34 before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times – Keifa denied Yeshua. This seems to be the product of inner struggle rather than genuine denial of him. The sudden arrest and prosecution of his master must have left Keifa in a state of panic and confusion, in dread of being arrested along with his teacher due to social pressure. In such state, the rooster gains a special meaning for a Torah student, since roosters' crowing sound announces the end of the night and the clarity of the morning. Upon hearing a rooster we recite: "Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, king of the universe, who gave the mind understanding to distinguish between day and night" (*Berakhot 60b*). In Hebrew: *Barukh ata Adonai Eloqeinu melekh haOlam, asher notein leshekhvi Binah, l'havkhin bein yom ubein lailah*. The word for mind (*shekhvi שכחי*) is written the same way as the word for rooster (*sekhvi שכור*). Only the sound of the letter *Shin* changes.

26:34 three times – Three times for emphasis and confirmation, as it is common in the Semitic culture. When Samson repeated the same sin three times, he was subject to punishment (*Bamidbar Rabbah 9:24*). It is taught, "If a man transgresses three times, he is forgiven. If he transgresses four times, he is not forgiven" (*Yoma 86b*). This is deduced from the verse, "For three transgressions of Israel, yet for four I will not avert it" (*Amos 2:4*). The sound of the rooster saved Keifa from falling into divine punishment. Now learn that Keifa's denial is in the aspect of *tzimtzum*; a spiritual descent for the sake of ascent (cf. *Makkot 7b*). In a way, it served as a catalyst for his rebirth and transformation, to become one of the pillars in the community. "When a man needs to spiritually ascend from one level to the next, first he will experience a descent, as the descent is for the sake of [a higher] ascent... In the end, the descent will be transformed into a great advance... through repentance, sin will become Torah" (*Liqutei Moharan 1:22:11*). "Each time man rises up to a new level [i.e., he has no intention to sin] the *qlipot* attack him... in the form of temptations, strange thoughts, confusion and all types of obstacles. They range against our physical world of action [Assiyah], which ascends to *Yetzirah*" (*ibid. 1:25:2, 4*). Having fallen into darkness... into doubts, heresy and great confusion, "if he then examines himself... as a consequence of seeing himself far from God's glory, having fallen into such places... and seeks the place of his Glory, this is the essence of his correction and ascent" (*Liqutei Moharan 2:12:1*).

26:36 Gadsemani – *Gadsemani* גדסמני is the Aramaic equivalent to the Hebrew גת שמנים *Gat-shmanim*, which literally means 'Oil-press.' An oil press was a round stone in which gathered olives were pressed and squeezed in order to draw oil from them (cf. *Bava Metzia 74a; Yerushalmi Maaserot 4:2*). Symbolically, the oil press is another example of "descent for the sake of ascent." The sole purpose of crushing the olives was to produce a more valuable product out of them. Therefore, the place was a perfect symbolism of what Yeshua and his disciples were about to experience.

³⁷He took Keifa and the two sons of Zavdai along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. ³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. But let it be, not as I will, but as you will. ⁴⁰Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. He asked Keifa, Could you not men keep watch with me for one hour?

commentary

26:38 My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow – “The difference between depression and a broken heart is that when you have a broken heart, you can be standing in a crowd of people and still turn around and claim: Master of the universe!” (*Sikhot haran #231*).

26:38 Stay here and keep watch with me – “The best time for *hitbodedut* is at night, when everyone is sleeping. Ideally you should go to a place outside the city and follow a solitary path where people do not even go during the day” (*Liqutei Moharan I:52*).

26:39 may this cup be taken from me – The cup of suffering (cf. *Isa. 51:17, 22*), and the cup of death. “The sin of Adam is to pass the cup of death כוס המיתה upon all creations... even the righteous die due to the snake’s counsel [with Hava]” (*Daat Tevunot 72:2*). Yeshua was saying, “is there another way?” He knew that prayer and repentance can indeed alter God’s course of action (cf. *Exodus 32:32; Jer. 18:5-8*). “Anyone who prays long enough does not go empty-handed” (*Berakhot 32b*). “A man must pray for everything, even for the most minor thing” (*Sikhot haran #233*). “Plead with God to have mercy on you... This was how king David composed the book of Psalms. ... King David said (*Psalms 6:7*), Every night I converse from my bed in tears” (*Sikhot haran #68*). It is not that God did not hear Yeshua’s prayer, but rather, the atonement through his death had been divinely decreed for the sake of Israel and ultimately for humankind. Similarly, Moshe prayed to enter Canaan, but it had been divinely decreed that he would die at its entrance. It is thus written, “At that time I besought Hashem... But he responded, Enough, do not speak to me about this matter anymore” (*Deut. 3:23-26*). Hashem would have cancelled the decree had Yeshua sinned, or decided not to cooperate, as it has been taught that the force of MBY must accept the suffering of Israel willingly (cf. *Derekh Hashem*). In that case, Yeshua could have been saved or not, but the punishment would have fallen over the world. On the other hand, the decree could also have been annulled if the nation of Israel had repented on that day, in which case they would all have been forgiven and redemption would have occurred. Hence it is taught in Kabbalah that Messiah ben Yosef does not need to die, and that we should pray for Messiah ben Yosef not to die (cf. *Vilna Gaon, Yahel Ohr; Qol haTor 1:16*).

26:40 keep watch with me for one hour – Rabbi Elazar ben Yaaqov said, “Better is one hour of prayer than good deeds” (*Sifrei Devarim 29:5*). “*Hitbodedut* – self-seclusion – is the greatest form [of prayer]; one must set aside one hour or more to seclude themselves in a room or in a field and to dialogue with the Creator” (*Liqutei Moharan II:25*).

commentary

“In Gan Eden there is a hall which is called the hall of the afflicted. It is into this hall that Messiah goes and summons all the afflictions, pains and sufferings of Israel to come upon him, and they do. And had he not eased the suffering of Israel of their sorrow and taken their burden upon himself, there would be nobody who could endure the suffering of Israel in their punishment for neglecting Torah. It is thus written (*Isa. 53:4*), Surely he bore our disease, and our pains he carried.” (**Zohar II:212a**)

⁴¹Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. ⁴²He went away a second time and prayed, My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done. ⁴³When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. ⁴⁵Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour has come, and the son of man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise! Let us go! He who betrays me has come. ⁴⁷While he was still speaking, behold, Yehudah, one of the twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, Whomever I will kiss, that is he; arrest him. ⁴⁹Approaching at once Yeshua, he said, Shalom, Rabbi; and kissed him.

textual variants

26:47 behold, Yehudah – in some manuscripts, “the traitor.”

commentary

26:41 the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak – There is a constant battle between our divine soul and our animal soul (cf. *Tanya ch. 37, 6*). As the divine soul is clothed within the animal soul, the divine soul requires cultivation (cf. *Ohr haTorah, Tehillim 159*).

26:42 may your will be done – The sages taught: “Nullify your will before his will that he may nullify the will of others before your will” (*Avot 2:4*). The nullification of self for the sake of Heaven became one of the most important teachings of Hassidut. *Bitul hayesh* (self-nullification) is achieved through constant prayer. It is written, “Love Hashem your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might” (*Deut. 6:5*). The sages explain, “With all your heart, meaning, with your two inclinations [that is: making his will your will] ... With all your soul means, even if we have to give up our own life” (*Berakhot 54a*). Yeshua would rather give up his life than delay redemption more than necessary. Hence, he willingly took the mission upon himself. This is a state known as *mesirat nefesh*; i.e., willing to give up one’s life for the sake of sanctifying God’s sacred name on earth.

26:46 he who betrays me has come – He would have gone back to pray but he noticed Yehudah Iscariot in the distance coming with a crowd. He probably saw the torches first. The phrase “Rise!” – although relevant, since his disciples were sleeping – has a military connotation. Yeshua is telling them it is the time to face the enemy. The same goes for “the hour has come.” It was the time for the final chapter in Yeshua’s life.

26:49 Shalom, Rabbi; and kissed him – Notice that Iscariot consistently keeps calling Yeshua “*Rabbi*” instead of “*Mari*” (my master) like the other disciples did. The kiss resembles Esav’s kiss to Yaaqov. It is written, “Esav ran to greet him; he embraced him and, falling on his neck, kissed him” (*Gen. 33:4*). In the Hebrew, the word translated as “kissed him” *וישקרו* is dotted above each letter, as implying that such word has a hidden meaning. How did the early sages interpret this? Rabbi Yannai said, “It teaches that Esav came not to kiss Yaaqov, but to bite him [like a snake]” (*Bereshit Rabbah 78:9*). The same principle applies here: Yehudah approached Yeshua, not to kiss him, but to bite him. Do not read “*vayishaqehu*” – kissed him – but “*vayinshakhehu*” – he bit him (cf. *Pirquei d’Rabbi Eliezer 36*). The verse in the Torah ends with the phrase “and they cried” (*Gen. 33:4*). Why did they cry? It means that even after such act of treason, Yaaqov’s love for his brother awoke. When he saw how Yaaqov had humbled himself under him, Esav’s heart broke and cried (*Sforno on Gen. 33:4*). Similarly, Yeshua calls him “friend,” and afterwards Yehudah repents of his betrayal.

⁵⁰And Yeshua replied, Do what you came for, friend. Then the men stepped forward, laid hands on Yeshua and took him. ⁵¹And lo, one of them who were with Yeshua stretched out his hand and drew a sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵²Yeshua said to him, Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled, that this must be? ⁵⁵In that hour Yeshua said to the crowd, Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. ⁵⁷Those who had arrested Yeshua took him to Qayapha the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had assembled.

commentary

26:51 one of them who were with Yeshua – The fourth gospel says it was Shimon Keifa (*John 18:10, 11*). Among the twelve disciples, two of them had swords, probably for self-defense (cf. *Luke 22:38*).

26:52 all who draw a sword will die by the sword – The sentence is probably partially inspired by the prophet's words, "If they ask you, where shall we go? Tell them... Those destined to death, to death, those for sword, to the sword" (*Jer. 15:2*).

26:53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father – This is, as it was explained above (v. 42), that Yeshua had the choice to refuse fulfilling the *mesirat nefesh* martyrdom. He did so willingly, as a midrash states about the spiritual messianic force of redemption: "With gladness of my heart I take this suffering upon myself... provided that not one soul of Israel perishes" (*Pesiqta Rabbati 36*). In the same manner, God had told Moshe not to pray anymore about entering Canaan (*Deut. 3:26*), and Moshe decided to obey the decree. However, a midrash states, had Moshe kept praying about it, Heaven would have had no other choice but to let him in and alter the intended course of events (cf. *Yalqut Shimoni 31*).

26:55 Am I leading a rebellion...? – This goes against modern interpreters who believe Yeshua was a zealot. Yeshua's capturers simply took him and arrested him, without telling him why. This begins a series of shadowy practices that proved Yeshua's entire trial to be illegal.

26:56 all the disciples deserted him and fled – Yeshua had been in distress since the cleansing of the Temple. At Gadsemani he tried to have his close friends with him in his last moments of freedom, but they all fell asleep. He was all alone. Mark adds that certain man – maybe Mark's author himself or perhaps Keifa (as per *Mattai's v. 58*) – was following Yeshua at a distance and the people grabbed him by his linen cloth. In the fear of being arrested he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked (*Mark 14:51-52*). This and the incident with the sword depict Yeshua being captured in a very violent manner.

⁵⁸But Keifa followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. ⁵⁹The chief priests and the whole tribunal were looking for false evidence against Yeshua so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward ⁶¹and declared, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days. ⁶²Then the high priest stood up and said to Yeshua, Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?

—commentary—

26:58 the courtyard of the high priest – Yeshua was brought to Qayapha’s house for an informal trial. Qayapha’s house was like a palace and had in the lowest levels a guardroom and a prisoner’s cell. This is the first evidence of the trial being illegal, as Yeshua’s trial was proved to be a death-penalty case, which could only be carried out in the “chamber of Hewn Stone” within the Temple, where the Sanhedrin met (*Mishna Makkot 1:10*). All seventy members had to be present for the trial. Yeshua’s court case was not carried out according to the Pharisee’s hallakha; it was a farce carried out by a Sadducee high priest, with the sole intention, not to have a fair trial, but to sentence Yeshua to death at all costs. The Mishna says: “a Sanhedrin that performs one execution in seven years is called destructive. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah responds, even if it is one execution every seventy years. Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Aqiva said, If we were in the Sanhedrin we would make sure no man would ever be executed” (*Mishna Makkot 1:10*). It is against Jewish law to try capital cases at night or on certain days such as the eve of a festival (*Mishna Sanhedrin 4:1*; cf. *Megillah 14a*; *Sanhedrin 35a*). Yeshua’s case happened to be both at night and on Passover.

26:59 The chief priests – Sadducees of the house of Hanan and Qayapha.

26:59 the whole tribunal were looking for false evidence – While the vast majority of translations say “the whole Sanhedrin,” this can be misleading. It must be noticed that the Greek *sunhedrion* literally means ‘a joint session’ or tribunal. The Aramaic uses the word *kanusta* כנוסתא, which means “assembly.” It was not the seventy sages of the Great Sanhedrin. It was a tribunal mostly composed of Sadducees.

26:60 But they did not find any – Meaning, many bribed witnesses were brought to testify against him, but their testimonies did not match (cf. *Luke 14:56*). This is another violation of the Torah which commands: “Do not conspire with a wicked person to be a corrupt witness” (*Exodus 23:1*). The true witnesses who would speak in favour of the convict were not present; his disciples had fled, his friends had not been called into the trial, and Pharisaic sages such as Gamliel who would speak in his favour were, most likely, sleeping. The unanimous verdict of guilt proves this, since at least one member of the council should defend him.

26:61 I am able to destroy the Temple of God – Yeshua did not say this. He said, though, that “not one stone of the Temple will be left upon one another” (*Matt. 24:2*). Concerning the third day, Mattai writes, “From that time on Yeshua began to explain... that he must be killed and arise on the third day” (*Matt. 16:21*). Probably in one of those occasions, when Yeshua taught about his death, he referred to his body as a Sanctuary or a Temple, because the Torah scholars are a living sanctuary for the Shekhina (cf. *Mesilat Yesharim 26:13*), as it is written, “Let them make me a Sanctuary and I will dwell within them” (*Exod. 25:8*; *Midrash Tanhuma, Naso 16*). “Within them” here refers to the people. The fourth gospel records him saying: “Destroy this Sanctuary and in three days I will rise it up” (*John 2:19*). If the witnesses heard him say this, they probably misinterpreted what he meant or intentionally misconstrued it.

⁶³But Yeshua remained silent. The high priest said to him, I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the son of God. ⁶⁴And Yeshua responded, You have said so. And I say to all of you: From now on you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven. ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy.

—commentary—

26:63 the Messiah, the son of God – While we have built many layers of interpretation over the centuries upon these words, it is necessary to understand what they meant to the Sadducee high priest when he uttered them. The title “the Messiah,” as a noun per-se, with the article, is not directly found anywhere in the written Torah. “The Messiah” is an element of Oral Torah based on verses like “Hashem... will grant strength to his king, and raise the horn of his messiah” (1Sam. 2:10). Concerning the title “son of God,” the nation of Israel receives the generic name of sons of God and the firstborn of God when Hashem sees them as righteous (cf. Exodus 4:22-23; cf. Avoda Zara 3a). The apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, referring to the wicked within Israel – which applies to the corrupt priesthood – says that the *tzaddiqim* accuse them of “breaking the Torah of Moshe and the *mesorah* of the elders, and claim to know God by calling themselves sons of Hashem” (Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-13). As it is written “You, Hashem, are our father” (Isa. 63:16). The Messiah is the head of Israel, and as the main agent of God, he receives a preferential title of son of God. About the king of the Jews, who comes from the line of king David, it is written “I will be for him as a father and he will be to me a son” (2Sam. 7:14). When a king of Israel is enthroned, the Creator himself says: “Today I have begotten you” (Psalm 2:7). It then says: “I Hashem will be for them their God and my servant David will be a prince in their midst” (Ezekiel 34:24). Therefore, the Sadducees, who took a more literal approach to the Scriptures than their fellow Pharisees, clearly meant to ask if Yeshua regarded himself as the ultimate king of the Jews, as both designations – The Messiah and son of God – are synonyms for such title. This is precisely the “crime” that Pilate questions him about (Matt. 27:11) and the charge for which the Romans executed him (Matt. 27:37).

26:64 you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand... coming with the clouds – Yeshua accepted being the Messiah, but not the type of Messiah the people were waiting for. He did not claim to be a royal leader who would rescue Israel from the tyranny of Rome, or that he would restore the physical kingdom of David. “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). He rather resorts to the mystical passages concerning the “son of man” consciousness. “From now on,” he says; not in a distant future, not in a specific date, but “from now on.” You will see “the son of man,” which is Daniel’s messianic consciousness awakening within the saints of Israel. This is the aspect of the communal *Yehida* soul, which is in the level personified as “the Ancient of days” (cf. Dan. 7:13-14, 27). “Coming with the clouds,” meaning, in a supernatural manner to those who are worthy. “Sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One” is a reference to the verse: “Hashem said to my master, Sit at my right hand” (Psalm 110:1), as the midrash teaches “Hashem will sit the king Messiah at his right hand” (Midrash Tehillim 18). “The entire Psalm, beginning with: Sit at my right hand, refers to Messiah ben Yosef” (Qol haTor 2:61). In the phrase “Sit at my right hand,” the root for the word sitting *שב* is a metaphor for staying or waiting *ישיבה* (cf. Rashi on Psalm 110:1), so it can also be translated as “Wait at my right hand.” The “right hand” is a symbol of salvation and lovingkindness. Come and see what Yeshua meant: Yeshua’s mission at this point was not to restore the Davidic kingdom on earth, but to become the Yosephan Messiah, liberating the souls of Israel in the spiritual realms. How? By leading them to repentance in a transcendental manner. Hence the Psalm continues: “Sit at my right hand, while I

⁶⁵Look, now you have heard the blasphemy.

—commentary—

make your enemies your footstool" (*Psalm 110:1*). And who are the son of man's enemies? Scripturally, Amaleq, the spirit of doubt, as it is written, "Hashem has war with Amaleq from generation to generation" (*Exod. 17:6*). Our sages teach that "Messiah is the archenemy of Satan" (*Pesiqta Rabbati 3:6 [161b]*), so Messiah ben Yosef's first and foremost spiritual enemy is the evil inclination, as it is written "an evil animal consumed him" (*Gen. 37:34*). For this reason, the sages juxtapose MBY's death with the destruction of the evil inclination (cf. *Sukka 52a*). As we know, Satan, the evil inclination and the angel of Death are three different aspects of the same principle (*Bava Bathra 16a*). Therefore, Messiah's last enemy will be death itself, as it is written, "he will swallow death forever and Hashem God will erase tears from all faces" (*Isaiah 25:8*).

26:65 the high priest tore his clothes – A high priest is forbidden to tear his clothes (*Lev. 21:10; Exod. 28:32*). Qayapha was attempting to evoke a socking reaction on the audience in order to secure his expected verdict. The sudden impact probably prevented observants from realizing that it was Qayapha, and not Yeshua, the one acting against the Torah.

26:65 He has spoken blasphemy! – Nothing Yeshua said in his response was blasphemy. If we say the blasphemy was that he claimed to be the son of God, we have explained above how that title was used in those days for the king of Israel and for Israel as a whole. If we say that his claim to sit at the right hand of God was blasphemous, again, we have also seen this is written in Scripture, interpreted by the sages as referring to Messiah (and other Biblical characters, such as Avraham). If we say that by sitting at God's right hand Yeshua is claiming to be equal with God or God himself, then we fall into absurdity, because he is using Scriptural language, and the Jews, let alone the Sadducees, did not use those terms in such a manner. Besides, claiming to be God would not be blasphemy, it would be *avoda zara*. The authentic Sanhedrin taught that a blasphemer is only sentenced to death if he utters God's Tetragrammaton out loud (*Sanhedrin 55b*), which Yeshua never did. Therefore, Qayapha's accusation of blasphemy was baseless, just like the trial itself was baseless. Yeshua had not been accused of anything specific, and neither sentenced to death for any specific crime. He had been questioned to see if anything he said deserved punishment. The witnesses who were brought accused him of wanting to destroy the Temple, but in the end he was sentenced to death for claiming to be the Messiah. The entire trial was so arbitrary and random that the ultimate reason of the punishment is left to people's imagination, which is why Qayapha's tearing of his clothes was obviously premeditated to provoke and justify the resolution.

26:65 You have heard the blasphemy – There are two ways in which Qayapha's accusation of blasphemy might be seen somehow relevant: The first one is according to Rabbi Soloveitchik (*on Matt. 26:65*). When Yeshua said, "You will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One," perhaps the Sadducees understood these words literally, claiming that Yeshua was attributing physicality to God, since he who interprets a verse literally is a liar, and he who adds his own interpretation upon it is a blasphemer (cf. *Qiddushin 49a*). However, this interpretation is not satisfactory, because he would still not be punished to death by the Pharisees, and neither were these Talmudic words taken to mean what Soloveitchik says. The second way to understand the text is more in line with the general context of the gospels. The chief priests saw themselves threatened by Yeshua. Qayapha said that it was better "that one man dies for the people rather than the whole nation be destroyed" (*John 11:50*). Be destroyed by whom? By the same people who had put them in charge, the Romans. The Romans controlled the nation and secured the *Pax Romana*, the Roma Peace. Should any troublemaker incite the nation against Caesar, the implacable weight of Rome would fall upon everyone. The Romans had given Qayapha and his family the priesthood and held them responsible for the Roman peace in Jerusalem. A man with a massive number of followers, causing disturbances and claiming to be the king of the Jews, would be, under the Roman law, under the crime of insurrection. This is why the council told Pilate that Yeshua was "inciting the nation, forbidding to pay taxes

⁶⁶What do you think? They answered, He is worthy of death! ⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him ⁶⁸and said, Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?

⁶⁹Now Keifa was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him and said, You also were with Yeshua of Galilee! ⁷⁰But he denied it before them all: I do not know what you are talking about. ⁷¹Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, This fellow was with Yeshua of Nazareth! ⁷²He denied it again, with an oath: I do not know the man! ⁷³After a little while, those standing there went up to Keifa and said, Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away. ⁷⁴Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, I do not know the man! Immediately a rooster crowed.

commentary

to Caesar and claiming to be a king" (*Luke 23:2*). This is why the chief priests shouted from the depths of their throats, "We have no king but Caesar!" (*John 19:15*). The trial was merely an illegal set up to get rid of Yeshua with false accusations, but there was some truth to Qayapha's last words: Yeshua's messianic claim was blasphemy, but not against God. It was a blasphemy against Caesar, the deified monarch of the Roman Empire.

26:66 He is worthy of death! – If a sentence of death is to be pronounced, it cannot be concluded in one day, so that witnesses in support of the convict will have time to testify (*Mishna Sanhedrin 6:1*). Also, according to Jewish law, if all the members of the Sanhedrin declare the convict unanimously guilty of capital punishment, the convict is acquitted (*Sanhedrin 17a*). Once again, declaring him worthy of death and then ending the trial in such a rush was against Jewish law.

26:69 Keifa was sitting out in the courtyard – He was following Yeshua at a distance (v. 58). He stayed in the courtyard, warming himself together with a group of people (*Mark 14:67*). Luke explains it was night and cold, and people had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat together (*Luke 22:55*). Either the fire had been kindled in the evening before the holiday or had been kindled with an already existing flame. The fourth gospel says the fire was made of coals (*John 18:18*).

26:69 a servant girl – A servant of the high priest (*Mark 14:66*).

26:73 those standing there – It began with only one woman and escalated to the entire crowd who were in the high priest's palace.

26:73 Your accent gives you away – As the servants kept questioning him, he raised his voice more and more, causing the Judeans to notice that his Aramaic accent was from Galilee.

26:75 he went outside and wept bitterly – His descent was for the sake of the ascent, as it is written, "Hashem will not leave him in its hand, nor suffer him to be condemned when he is judged" (*Psalms 37:33*). The three negations correspond to the three levels of the *yetzer hara*, which are depicted in the parable of the prophet Nathan; i.e., the parable of the rich man who steals the poor man's lamb (*2Sam. 12:1-4*). In this parable, the evil inclination is initially introduced as הלך א "passer-by" that approaches the rich man. The second time it is called ארר א "guest" and the third time it is called איש א "man." The more we feed the evil inclination, the more prominence it gains over us. Keifa's parallel has initially a servant girl approaching him while he was sitting at the courtyard together with everybody. After the first negation there is a descent, and Keifa moves away from the courtyard, out to the gateway, separating himself from the crowd. Here he meets a second servant girl, to whom he swore not to know Yeshua. This is the second descent. In the third and last descent, all the people he was initially sitting with come now against him. The entire crowd accuses

⁷⁵Then Keifa remembered the word Yeshua had spoken: Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. And he went outside and wept bitterly.

—commentary—

him, causing him to curse and to swear. The more the evil inclination gains possession over you, the more you deny the messianic consciousness within you. He who has ears to hear let him hear.

26:75 Then Keifa remembered – The sound of the rooster came with the light of the sun. It brought clarity. This is in the aspect of what is written, “And they heard the voice of Hashem God... in the breeze of day... and Hashem God called to the human and said to him, Where are you?” (*Gen. 3:8-9*). We must always ask ourselves this question, whenever the evil inclination causes us to fall: Where are we?