

A COMPANION GUIDE
TO THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

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OF THOMAS

A Guide to Inner Presence,
Self-understanding and Fullness
of Personal Expression

Christine Folan

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INTRODUCTION

A journey with the Gospel of Thomas

The *Gospel of Thomas* is a collection of 114 sacred texts (or codices; each codex here is a saying, an affirmation or advice) which, together with several other ancient writings, are collectively known as the Nag Hammadi Scriptures. These Coptic writings were discovered in 1945 by two Arab peasants in an area of Egypt known as Nag Hammadi. The ancient papyrus texts were originally bound in leather and concealed in large earthenware jars, possibly around 150–200 AD. Although there is some dispute about the exactness of these dates, there seems to be general agreement in the astonishing earliness of these writings.

When the two Arab brothers took the ancient and fragmented texts home to use as burning material, they had no idea of the potential financial value of the papyrus they held in their hands. Nor had they any concept of the interest these priceless writings would eventually generate worldwide.

It seems, however, that *someone* had recognised their worth when one of the texts was discovered to have been secretly, and illegally, traded on the Egyptian black market. The world of antiquities was now alerted to this precious discovery.

The remaining texts were to begin a tortuous and contentious journey, subjected to lengthy legal battles regarding ownership. This was partially settled in the early 1950s when some texts were placed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, where these fragments still remain and can be viewed on the museum's website. Some were purchased by, and placed in the care of, The Jung Foundation in Zurich.

The final part of this story reads like an Agatha Christie novel. It covers the intense rivalry that existed between an international group of scholars who sought the rights to translate the remaining texts from the original Coptic language into English. In addition, there was the highly contentious issue as to who held the rights to copy and to publish them. Great personal prestige would come from working with these texts, not to mention the significant financial reward that may be attached to their ownership.

Following many lengthy legal and political battles, the first completed English translation of the Nag Hammadi Scriptures was made available to the general public in the mid-1970s.

Several traditional Christian interpretations followed. These were largely written in ecclesiastical terminology and quite biblical in their approach. For many laypeople, their meaning remained obscure.

I have, therefore, chosen a more visceral approach in this book, which offers a sensitive and effective way of 'seeing' the texts' hidden messages. I have also added some authentic life stories which, I hope, demonstrate their relevance to contemporary life.

My intention in writing this book has been to illustrate the profound messages that are held, often quite obscurely, in these codices. As a practising therapeutic counsellor, and also a committed seeker of Spiritual Truth, I have been able to recognise the advice and guidance described in these very early life-lessons. Their contents still have profound relevance for today's contemporary world, some 2000 years later.

Scientific dating of the original texts, although open to debate, seems to agree that the Nag Hammadi Scriptures came into being between 150–200 AD approximately. These scriptures hold Christian teachings that predate the version of Christianity we have today.

To see the original codices and ecclesiastical translations, you can access the *Gospel of Thomas* at: www.biblicalarchaeology.org.

Mark M. Mattison's interpretations are also freely available at www.gospels.net (NB the 's' after gospel).

My personal journey with the Gospel of Thomas

My attention was drawn to these precious texts in 1990; in particular, the *Gospel of Thomas*. On my many readings over the years, the writings made little sense to me. However, something about their uncorrupted message would not let me go.

Intuition told me that hidden within these sacred texts was something of the greatest and most authentic spiritual value. I was driven to find the uncontaminated truth of early Christian teachings. I wanted to wrestle and dig deep within myself for *my* understanding. I wanted no other's opinion, no other's intellectual or learnt interpretation.

Because the original translation was carried out by ecclesiastical scholars, the terminology is biblical and an understanding as to how this teaching can benefit everyday life has remained beyond the reach of most laypeople. My intention in recording my interpretations was originally for my benefit only. However, several people expressed an interest in how the *Gospel of Thomas* can provide guidance in living their life well in current times and I made my interpretations available to them. These were well received. And so the idea was born that I should make my interpretations more widely available to those who are interested.

The chapter headings in the book are my own abbreviated translations/understandings of the teachings, and what follow are my interpretations of the underlying message, along with various true stories which emphasise the message.

* * *

In this book, I share my discernment with the sole intention of showing that an authentic Christian understanding can be found within every one of us, should we choose to seek it. We each have our own version of Truth. The *Gospel of Thomas* gives us permission and freedom to explore, to seek, to struggle with our inhibitions and, perhaps surprisingly, to face our fears about owning our unique version of Truth! I believe these writings are deliberately obscure, and at times repetitive, so we will search deep within ourselves for our own truth and meaning; that we will seek, until we find, that which is pertinent and personal to our unique character.

Everyone, I believe, has a contribution to make in life, whatever their calling happens to be. If spiritual understanding is your life's quest,

you need no other person to teach you. Your inner Christ awaits your awakening interest and your commitment to discovering *your* Truth.

The sayings contained in the *Gospel of Thomas*—other than the necessary translation into English—are unadulterated. The translations were taken from the original texts and predate much of the Christian doctrine that exists today.

What follows is my interpretation of them.

The *Gospel of Thomas* is, I believe, a manual about the practical application of spiritual principles. It challenges us, not only to make sense of these texts in our own unique way, but to actually live them, day by day.

Please note

In order to protect privacy and confidentiality, names and identifiable details have been changed in the writing of the authentic life stories.

The companion guide to the Gospel of Thomas

The *Gospel of Thomas* came into existence approximately 2000 years ago. It was written at a time when life for many people was harsh and heavily controlled by undemocratic laws. Punishments for infringements were swift and ruthless. Crucifixions and floggings were common place and rebellions rapidly and brutally suppressed.

Humanity was in need of a completely new approach to living. It is my belief that the *Gospel of Thomas* came into being as a counter to the powerlessness experienced by the majority of the population. Although approximately 2000 years old, its wisdom is still relevant and pertinent to our current times.

To gain the most from this Companion Guide, it is suggested that it be used as a workbook and studied in conjunction with the *Gospel of Thomas* manuscript, which is freely available at www.gospels.net/thomas.