

Yeshua and Salome

Introduction

There is a moment recorded in Mark's gospel that is distanced from us:

far away in **time** – nearly 2000 years ago;
far away in **culture** – that of illiterate Galilean peasants;
far away in **language** – translated from Aramaic to Greek to Latin to English.

That moment is recorded in Mark 1:29–31 as an encounter between Jesus and Simon's unnamed mother-in-law. Here is how the story first appeared printed in English (spelling modernized) in 1526, as translated by William Tyndale from Erasmus's third edition of his Greek–Latin text, printed as *Novum Testamentum Omne* in 1522:

And immediately as soon as they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay sick of a fever and anon they told him of her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up and the fever forsook her by and by: and she ministered unto them.

For us today, many parts of this tale are unknown, blurred or missing.

Firstly, Mark's Greek written record was made, at the earliest, thirty years after the time of the story's setting. And such written records were not valued by the illiterate groups

in which the tales were told. Someone in the group might start recounting the tale in such a gathering, but then all would join in its unfolding, merging their own experience into its telling. This was how they fondly and imaginatively remembered Jesus and his friends. We will imagine this in the following expansion of the story, so that we might appreciate better what had come about within the earliest groups – among Jesus and his friends – and within later groups and why it was that this tale was particularly remembered and recorded.

Secondly, unknown to many today are the secret meanings within Jesus's Aramaic name. This name comes to us from the Greek '*Jesus*' that mimics, without translation, the Aramaic '*Yeshua*' or '*Yehoshua*'. Different Hebrew / Aramaic roots (written without vowels) lie hidden within it: *yh*, the start of the name for God *yhwh* (out of reverence never spoken); *ys*, the root-form of a verb 'to rescue'; and *sh*, the root-form of a verb 'to help'. In translation, these roots might combine as 'God+Help' or simply 'Rescued' or 'Rescuing'. His name both implies himself 'being rescued' and his 'rescuing' others. In this story, Mark has Jesus as the 'rescuer rescuing'. In the story expanded below, 'rescuing' is happening for all those involved including Jesus. Each person contributes to and experiences the rescuing, not as something done once for all, but as a beginning or continuing of a shared journey. These elements will be revealed in the expanded story.

Thirdly, the woman's name is missing in the text. It was typical of a man writing down such a summary in the first

century to think of her as just a woman, nothing more than Simon's mother-in-law. But Mark does name her 'Salome' among the women at the crucifixion (15: 40). Again, using Tyndale's words:

There were also women a good way off beholding him among whom was Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Ioses, and Mary Salome which also when he was in Galilee followeth him and ministered unto him, and many other women which came up with him to Jerusalem.

(Note: Tyndale used 'Mary Salome', her late-mediaeval mythical name, even though the 'Mary' is missing from Erasmus's Greek text. Translations today simply call her 'Salome'.)

Fourthly, it is not clear exactly what Salome's 'illness' was. Tyndale's 'sick of a fever' could equally mean 'being in a hot rage' in the original Greek. This meaning will be used in what follows.

Fifthly, the writer of Mark could presume everyone to experience and understand the strong meaning of the Greek 'egeiro', translated by Tyndale simply as 'lifted up'. This word means 'to rouse from deep sleep', 'to be raised into wakefulness', a word often translated as if literally a 'resurrection [from the dead]'. It is, however, a hope word that primarily describes a here-and-now experience of coming alive as if from the dead, of enlightenment, of

awakening. This is an essential component of the ‘rescuing’ that Jesus experienced within himself and with others.

Sixthly, entirely missing is the dialogue that took place between Salome and Jesus. The story that follows imagines this interchange between Jesus (‘Rescued’, ‘Rescuing’) and Salome filled with raging resentment as she lay on her straw bed. Such instances of oral imagination and expansion were commonplace in early community gatherings of illiterates when recalling a story such as this.

Seventhly, Aramaic names – *Ya’aqov* (James), *Yochanan* (John), *Shimon* (Simon), *Alaha* (The One, usually translated ‘God’), *Abba* (Father) and *Abwoon* (our Father) – will be used in what follows. This is to distance us from familiar Christian usages and enable us to draw close to the human story as it unfolds.

Yeshua and Salome

After meeting in the village, the men returned, along with *Ya'aqov* and *Yochanan*, to *Shimon* and *Andreas'* place. *Shimon* warned them not to expect a welcome. His dead wife's mother was burning with anger these days and he could get nothing from her. However, they could share some wine and carry on talking together.

Yeshua glimpsed the woman lying inert and apart when they entered the gloom of the house. Knowing *Shimon's* worry about her, he left the men talking and went over to where she lay on straw bedding at the back of the living space.

“What is it?” he asked. “What happened you?”

She glared at him, eyes glittering. He settled near her on some straw and waited, not speaking, seemingly untroubled by the silence between them.

For a while she did not speak. Only the murmur of the men's voices was heard. But once she began speaking, she could not stop.

“What is it?” she spat. “I've had enough, that's what! I will do no more. I lie down and will stir no more.

“What happened me? I'll tell you what happened: I fetch water in the day's heat. I grind the corn I had sown and reaped. I bake bread. I clean, I toil, I ache. And what thanks do I get? Huh! These men – do they help, do they notice, do they care? They sit around talking, having deep thoughts. Do they share these with us women? Not at all! They say, ‘You know nothing of what we speak. You, a woman, couldn't understand. Get back to what you know!’

Where's the supper? Have you lit the fire? Have you swept the floor? Have you patched the cloak? Get back to what you know. Stay in the realm *Alaha* made for you. You, a woman, know nothing of the things we talk about!' They do not even call me by my name!

"Enough! Enough already! Too much! No more! I can't be asked! I lie down as one dead, even as my daughter who is no longer here to help me. I have no strength, no will to carry on. Why should I? Who cares? Enough!"



As she paused for breath, he gently took her hand. It lay lifeless in his. He felt how calloused and worn it was from threshing and pounding grain, from gathering wood, from doing the fire, from hauling water, from sweeping the floor, from making, cleaning and mending clothes.

"I asked *Shimon* your name," he said. "*Salome*, isn't it? *Salome* - Bringer of Peace, Peace Maker, Source of Peace. May I call you by your name, *Salome*?"

She looked at him coldly in the gloom. Nothing moved in the musty air. Only the sound of the men talking together.

"Your menfolk dream their dreams of making peace." he went on. "Like you, they are poor, oppressed, unfree. They cower under the weight of Roman power. They feel shame, unable to free themselves, you or the children. They know not what to do at all, let alone what to do for the best. They had hoped that the *Alaha* would save us, but they see no sign of that.

“This is what we were talking about in the village meeting, about *Alaha*, the One, the Source, the Parent from whom all the living come and in whom we live, the One who binds us together and makes us family. We talked of this One’s Sacred Name whose light, sound, and breath form the shimmering web within which we live.

“We talked of ourselves as children of *Alaha*. We named this One as *Abba*, *Abwoon*, our Father, our Sole Parent, the First One, the One who is ours, our One, our Mother. The One we know and feel is as near and close to us as our breathing. The air surrounding us is *ruha*, the breath of *Alaha*. The breath that keeps all alive.

“But ‘our’ is not simply the ‘our’ of us gathered. ‘Our’ includes everyone. Those with us, those absent. Women and men. You, *Salome*, and the children. All humans. Even the Romans? Yes! And all living beings. In fact everything that makes up earth, the world that is our home, a home made for all the children of the One Parent.

“But our talk, I now know, was the poorer for your not being among us. Men are not as close as women to *Alaha*, the Mother of Life. You, *Salome*, you who have carried and raised children, are closer to and more like that LifeMother, sharing closely in your body the work of that One, birthing life into the world. You share that work at first hand, for long periods, inescapably. You are more blessed than your menfolk – both more gifted and more hurt than they. If you but knew how close you are to *Alaha*, as close as your very breathing, then your heart would soften. You would know truly who you are. You would know that *Alaha* has no power without you. If you were not with us, there would

be no children, no future, no hope, no family joy. We men are the poorer when we are blind to this, when we know it not, when we forget it..."



Still she stared at him, shifting on the straw, unsure yet of his meaning, or of his intent toward her. He was a man, was he not? What could he know about a woman's life? What could he care? Was he not just like the rest? Did he not simply want her service, not her talking, not her thinking? But he had called her "Peacemaker". How long it was since anyone had knowingly called her that...



They saw a gecko move above them on a rafter, just as a swallow flew into her nest there. The murmur of the men had long ceased. They were trying to catch every word between *Yeshua* and *Salome*. Then he spoke again, unthreateningly, using her name, seeing her just as she was, indeed more clearly than she saw herself.

"All this is a secret, though hidden in plain sight like that gecko," he said. "Every living thing may glimpse this secret. All know it and feel it, more or less. You see that swallow, and the hens, and the sparrows? They have always known it. They wake with the break of dawn, stretch their wings and fill the air with song. If the year is young, they think nests. If the day is warm, they fly the skies together for joy. In cold and rain, they shelter where they can and wait for things to ease and pass. Earth is their home and mother; their place, their space.

“Earth’s gifts to each are for this moment now, for today and maybe tomorrow, though not forever. Gift given will be gift returned, maybe soon, maybe not soon. *Alaha* makes no demands, does not speak, has no voice, waits in stillness, like silent silence, to see how each alone, each with others, and each among all will fare, will give, will take, will share ...”

Only the buzzing of a fly was heard.



After a while, she asked, “How will *Alaha* rescue us? Will *Abba* come in power against the Romans? Wasn’t that what you men were talking about? What will the realm or rule of *Alaha* be like? How will we be rescued? You speak as if our rescue is for Romans too! ...”

Yeshua was silent for a while. Then he said to her, “The realm of *Alaha* is like a woman who, needing water, had set out for the well to fetch it. The well was a long way off. When she got there, she dropped her jar down, drew up water and filled the jar. Then she set the jar on her head and wearily made for home. She did not know that the jar had cracked when she had dropped it on the rocks beside the well. And as she walked home, the water slowly dripped away behind her. When she reached home, she found the jar was empty.”

Salome raised herself onto her elbow. “What are you talking about? Where is the rescue in that? What has this to do with the rule, the new kingdom of *Alaha*?”

He replied, “But I heard this from a woman. Do you need me to tell you what it means? Before coming here, I was

travelling in Samaria and came to *Ya'aqov's* well at the hottest time of day and was very thirsty. Being a man, of course I had no means for getting water. But a woman was already there filling a jar. So I asked her for a drink.”

Salome sat up suddenly. “You what?” she shouted. “You spoke... You asked... Samaritan trash?! You couldn't have! How could you!” The men were listening spell-bound.

“The woman was rather startled,” *Yeshua* replied, “And she did say, ‘Why are you speaking to me, you a Galilean, me a Samaritan? How can you ask me for water? Did you really think I would help you?’ I replied, ‘But I am just as thirsty as these sparrows sipping water from the puddles made by those who use the well. Will you not help me to drink too?’ Then she yelled at me, ‘How can you ask me? It was your people who destroyed our sacred temple on Mount Gerazim. It was they who told us that *Alaha* was insulted by our worship and that we were cast out from that Sacred Presence for ever. Why should I listen to you? How dare you speak to me!’ She was right of course. My people had done that, and though it was eight generations ago, the hatred between our peoples still runs deep...”

“I felt her anger and knew it was well founded. But even as we faced one another and even as old hatreds set us apart, still we were breathing the same air, sharing the living *ruha* of *Alaha*. We were of the same earth, the home *Alaha* made for all her children. And we had the same thirst that brought us to the well.

“Then it struck me that the ancestors of both our peoples were quite wrong to claim *Alaha* as one who loved a people

by shutting out others. So I said to her, ‘Do you think that the One each knows as Parent, who is Mother and Father to every kind of living thing, would not love each and every one of the children she has birthed? Could a mother refuse milk from her breast to any of her children? Could a father hand any son of his a stone instead of bread as food? Look at these sparrows. They too are *Alaha*’s children. Do they not get all they need? Are they not content in the presence of *Alaha*, finding food and drink enough, friendship in being together, zest for flying, nest building and chirruping? Do they not live and share kinship within the kin-dom of *Alaha* that our ancestors and leaders are so quick to claim for their peoples by cutting out those they hate?’...

“The awkwardness between us slowly melted away as we talked of these things, as we watched the birds cheerfully pecking and jostling, enjoying being together. It was then that the Samaritan woman handed me some water.”



Salome had sat up straight as *Yeshua* had been speaking. “You took a drink from her then?”

“But of course,” he replied. “I was thirsty and she was kind. A friendship had grown between us, like that of the sparrows...”

“It was after I had drunk that she told me the story of the cracked jar. Like you, *Salome*, at first I did not know what she meant. Then she told me it was the story of what had happened to a neighbour in her village that morning. And it was the reason I found her at the well at midday. The water she had drawn earlier she had shared with the woman

whose jar had emptied. She already knew kinship within the kin-dom of *Alaha* in her village. But our meeting at the well changed us. As we spoke together and shared the blessing of life-giving water with the birds, we understood more clearly how widespread and all-embracing was the kin-dom of *Alaha*, how the Parent of all has no favourites, and how we are all children born from the love of that Parent, and that the Parent is a loving Parent to each and every one. So when we meet any other living being, we meet a brother, a sister. And when that brother or sister is in need, we know it right to meet that need. Or when we are in need, to accept help happily and thankfully from any who will give it.

“So the story of the cracked jar awakens us to how good children might live in the presence of the common Parent. It is a clue to what is hidden in plain sight, a beckoning to work at kinship in the kin-dom, to be like *Alaha*, the Silent One, just as children become like their parents...”



Suddenly, *Salome* got up briskly saying, “All this talk is hungry work. What we need is food! Get me some wine and join the men. Tell them we eat in half an hour! We will talk of these things again!”

