

COUNTING THE COST

So you are seriously considering being immersed as a disciple. That's good news. It's going to be a source of tremendous blessing in your life. You are about to enter a spiritual transformation that will alter the course of your life for the good. It's the most important decision you will ever make.

But before you agree to be immersed, let's make sure you understand exactly what it is that you're getting into by becoming a disciple of Yeshua. After all, Yeshua says that anyone considering becoming his disciple should first count the cost. It's a big decision that will impact the rest of your life. You wouldn't want to sign a contract before reading the terms and conditions. Neither should you become a disciple without understanding the basics terms and conditions to which you are agreeing.

The word disciple should be understood to mean “student.” When you become a disciple of Yeshua, you are joining his school. He is the teacher; you are the student. You become part of a student body with members all around the world. To be a disciple is to be a learner. Unlike other schools from which a person graduates after completing a specific course of education, disciples of Yeshua never leave the school. We remain in the school the rest of our lives as lifelong learners—always advancing and improving.

Hebrew Word for Disciple

- *Talmid*: Student (male)
- *Talmidim*: Students
- *Talmidah*: Student (female)

What is Immersion?

What does immersion have to do with becoming a student?

Immersion in water is part of the ceremony for entering Yeshua's school of disciples. Before the Master ascended, he told his disciples, “Go make students from all peoples. Immerse them [in water] in the authority of the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). To this day, we still immerse new disciples when they join our Master's school.

The immersion ceremony is based on an ancient Jewish purification ritual. In Jewish practice, immersion into a *mikvah* (pool) of water indicates a change in status. For example, a person ceremonially unclean immerses to change from a state of ritual impurity to purity. A person getting married immerses to symbolize the change from being single to being married—and to purify himself or herself before the wedding for the sake of holiness. A person undergoing a conversion to become Jewish immerses in water to symbolize the legal change from non-Jewish identity to Jewish identity.

Mikvah

A pool of water or gathering of water suitable for immersion.

For disciples of Yeshua, immersion symbolizes several such changes in status:

- Entrance to the school

- Allegiance to the king
- Spiritual cleansing
- Death and resurrection
- Being born again as a child of God

The immersion does not cause these things to happen. It's not magical. The immersion is an outward ceremonial expression of the transformations you are experiencing as God works in your life through his Son Yeshua.

Entrance to the School

Immersion marks the point in a person's life when he or she officially becomes a disciple of the Teacher, Yeshua of Nazareth. Don't think of it as a graduation from the school; it's more like passing the entrance exams. When you are immersed in the name of Yeshua, you become a student in his school of disciples, and that's when the real education begins. Just like any other school, you will have plenty of homework to do. The person who has gone through the immersion takes his or her place as a lifelong learner and follower of the Master. The name of the school is "the community (*ekklesia*) of Yeshua's disciples." This school is also a family. Your fellow-students are more than just classmates, they are your spiritual brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of God united by deep love for one another.

Ekklesia

Greek word for "assembly" or "community." The followers of Yeshua form "the community (*ekklesia*) of Yeshua's disciples."

Swearing Allegiance to the King

Immersion in the name of Yeshua includes a legal declaration of faith made in front of witnesses. The person being immersed clearly states the conviction that Yeshua is the Messiah, risen from the dead, and coming again to reign as king over Israel and the whole world.

And it's more than just saying those words. The person being immersed is pledging allegiance to the king. The new disciple consents to become a servant of Yeshua and submit to his authority because he is the king. That's what we mean by having "faith in Yeshua."

Faith in Yeshua

Faith in Yeshua implies more than just believing that he is the Risen Messiah, it implies a declaration of allegiance to the king.

Spiritual Cleansing

The immersion that takes place in Yeshua's name symbolizes repentance and cleansing from sin. An old legend about Adam and Eve says that, after they were sent from Eden, they immersed themselves in a river to try to show their repentance. They wanted the water to wash away the stain of their guilt. John the Immerser taught "an immersion of repentance." The Apostle Peter

A Clean Conscience

Immersion ... is not about removing grime from the body, its about asking God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah. (1 Peter 3:21)

says, “Repent and be immersed, every one of you in the name of Yeshua the Messiah for the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 2:38). Before a new disciple immerses in the water, he or she confesses sins and resolves to live a godly life under the authority of the Bible and all of Yeshua’s teachings. In this way, the immersion ceremony symbolizes a spiritual cleansing. Just as water washes away grime, God’s forgiveness washes away the stains of guilt left on our souls by the sins and wrongful things we have done. The person who comes out of the water is said to be washed clean of sin.

Death and Resurrection

Immersion symbolizes death and resurrection. Going down into the water symbolizes being buried in the ground. Coming up out of the water symbolizes rising from the dead. A person being immersed under the authority of Yeshua connects with the Master’s death and resurrection. Part of us dies in the water. Our old life dies with Yeshua on the cross as we go into the water. We give it up along with our sins and selfish ways. Our new life as a disciple begins when we come out of the water, connected to Yeshua’s resurrection from the tomb. You could say that a disciple’s immersion is a rehearsal for his or her own future death and resurrection.

The Apostle Paul explains that everyone who immerses in Messiah connects with his death and resurrection:

All of us who were immersed into the Messiah Yeshua were immersed into his death. We were buried with him by immersion into death, so that, just as the glory of the Father raised Messiah from the dead, we too might live out a renewed life. For if we have joined with him by dying [to the old self] like he did, we shall definitely join him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

Born Again

Immersion symbolizes being “born again.” In this respect, the water of the *mikvah* symbolizes the womb. When we come out of the water, we are like spiritual newborns who have been born again as sons and daughters of God. When Yeshua was immersed in the Jordan River, he heard a voice from heaven say, “You are my Son in whom I am well-pleased.” Something similar happens to every new disciple. When we are immersed in Yeshua’s name, we too become children of God, spiritually reborn into a new life. In Messiah, we become a “new creation” as a son or a daughter of God. “For you are all children of God through faith in the Messiah Yeshua” (Galatians 3:26). The LORD says, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (Psalm 2:7).

Born Again

To be spiritually reborn as a new creature, ready to be physically resurrected from the dead for life in the World to Come.

Yeshua says, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” To be physically *born again* implies being resurrected from the dead—reborn, so to speak, in a renewed body as a son or daughter of God. Even though we won’t be physically *born again* until the resurrection, disciples of Yeshua are spiritually reborn by taking hold of that future hope in this life through their faith in Yeshua. Since he has already gone through the process, we have confidence that we will also be raised from the dead as sons and daughters of God. Since we have spiritually died along with him, we are spiritually resurrected along with him, in preparation for the future physical resurrection.

A Living Hope

According to His great mercy, God caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

By the way, that’s one big benefit to joining Yeshua’s school of disciples: the assurance of eternal life and a share in the World to Come—the resurrection from the dead.

The Job Description

Becoming a disciple is like starting a new job. You will have new responsibilities and duties. Your main job will be to learn from the Teacher, obey his teachings, and do your best to become as much like him as you can. Yeshua says, “A disciple is not above his teacher. Instead, a disciple fully-trained will be just like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). The goal of every disciple is to become as much like Yeshua as possible.

In the days of the Master, students were expected to apprentice themselves to their teachers. They followed their teachers and studied everything about their lives. They not only learned their teachers’ words, they also learned how their teachers lived and practiced their faith. The students learned to pray the way their teacher prayed, to give charity the way their teacher gave charity, to fast the way their teacher fasted, to eat the way their teacher ate, and to treat others the way their teacher treated others.

A Matter of Torah

Rabbi Akiva said, “Once I followed Rabbi Yehoshua into a privy and I learned three things from him ...” Ben Azzai said to him, “How did you dare to take such liberties with your master?” Akiva answered, “It was a matter of Torah, and I am required to learn.” (b.*Berachot* 62b)

Every detail was considered important. One comical story in the Talmud tells about a student following his teacher into the privy because he wanted to learn how to go to the bathroom in the most godly manner possible. When asked why he had followed the teacher into the privy, he explained, “It was a matter of Torah!”

At its simplest, discipleship is the art of imitation. The Apostle John writes:

This is how we know that we are in him: the one who claims he abides in him should be walking the same way he walked. (1 John 1:4-6)

The disciples of a rabbi had four main jobs:

1. Memorize the teacher’s words
2. Learn the teacher’s interpretations

3. Imitate the teacher's actions
4. Raise up more disciples

By signing up to become a disciple of Yeshua of Nazareth, you are agreeing to diligently study Yeshua's teachings and even to memorize his words as you are able. In the days of the apostles, this was a normal part of the education process for disciples of the sages and great rabbis. They committed their teacher's words to memory. The sages say, "The disciple who repeats his lesson one hundred times is not as worthy as the one who repeats his lesson one hundred and one times." The Jewish disciple was responsible for passing on a whole body of oral tradition, received from his teacher, to the next generation.

Making Disciples

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua (his disciple), Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly. The men of the Great Assembly said three things, "Be careful in making legal decisions, raise up many disciples, and make safeguards for the Torah." (m.Avot 1:1-2)

After the disciple was fully trained, he became the teacher and passed on the teaching to disciples of his own, who, in turn, when fully trained, became teachers and raised up disciples of their own. They taught their disciples in the name of their own teacher, and his teacher, and his teacher's teacher.

Yeshua's first disciples had the same job. A disciple of Yeshua memorizes his words and learns his interpretations and explanations of the Bible. The disciple learns the stories, parables, illustrations, and anecdotes that Yeshua told. The disciple learns to serve God by imitating the Yeshua as much as possible, down to the even the smallest details of behavior. And when fully trained, the disciple becomes like the Teacher, ready to raise up more disciples—not for ourselves, but more disciples for him:

You are not to be called rabbi; for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers ...
neither be called teacher, for you have one teacher, the Messiah. (Matthew 23:8-10)

The Relationship to the Teacher

In the days of Yeshua, there were no Bible Schools or seminaries. A young man seeking a future in teaching Torah would apprentice himself out to a rabbi just as a would-be craftsman would apprentice himself to a known expert in order to learn a trade. In this case, the trade was Torah. The teacher and the disciple shared a powerful bond.

Disciples regarded themselves as servants and their teachers as the master. Disciples in the days of Yeshua referred to their teachers as "master" or "rabbi (teacher)." Yeshua said to his disciples, "You call me Teacher and Master, and you are correct, for so I am" (John 13:13).

Disciples thought of their relationship to their teachers as a parent-to-child relationship. The disciples of a teacher were called his sons, and his school was called his family, or household. Yeshua also referred to his disciples as his household (Matthew 10:25). Disciples regarded their teachers higher than their own fathers.

Loving Messiah More

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37)

Yeshua also told his disciples that, in order to be worthy of discipleship, they must learn to love and honor him more than they loved and honored own family members.

In the writings of the apostles, the relationship between Yeshua and his disciples is even compared to the relationship between a husband and his wife: “For the husband is the head of the wife, as the Messiah also is the head of the church.” (Ephesians 5:23)

A disciple is to his teacher like:

- Servant to his or her master
- Son or daughter to his or her parent
- Wife to her husband

Important Decisions in Life

Life is full of big decisions. Should you go to college or trade school after completing high school? If so, which one? What career path should you pursue? What political party do you support? Should you get married? If so when and to whom? Should you buy a house? Should you move to a new community? Big decisions like this are difficult to make because they can affect you for the rest of your life.

The decision of whether or not to become a disciple of Yeshua of Nazareth is an even bigger decision. Imagine you were considering marriage. You would be asking yourself, “Do I want to have this person as my spouse? Am I going to be able to live with this person for the rest of my life? Am I able to commit to loving this person, and no other, from now until death-do-we-part?” You should be asking yourself the same questions about whether or not you want to become Yeshua’s disciple. Do you want to take him as the master of your life? Do you want him as the head of your household in authority over you? Do you want him as your spiritual husband? Think it over carefully. It’s the most important decision you will ever make.

Count the Cost

Yeshua warned people to count the cost before committing to becoming disciples. When people asked for permission to become his disciple, he cautioned them about the demands and the difficulties. He told them that they would have to forfeit living a life of comfort: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). He told them that they would have reprioritize their entire life (Luke 9:60). He said that, once they started on the path of discipleship, there was no turning back: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

To illustrate the importance of first counting the cost before committing to a life of discipleship, Yeshua told two parables: the parable of the unfinished tower and the parable of the king going to war:

The Unfinished Tower

Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow after me cannot be my disciple. If someone wanted to build a tower, wouldn’t he first sit down and calculate the cost, to see whether he has enough money to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation

and cannot afford to finish it, everyone who sees it make fun of him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” (Luke 14:27-30)

In this parable, the man building the tower is like a person who wanted to be a disciple, but he foolishly rushed into it without first counting the cost. Later, when he realized the great demands that Yeshua made on his life, he changed his mind. He couldn’t afford the cost, and he looked foolish in the end.

The King going to War

If a king goes out to meet another king in war, will he not first sit down calculate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if he decides he cannot, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace while the other is still a long way off. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26-33)

In this parable, the king considering going out to war is like a person who wisely considers the cost of being a disciple before rushing into it. He decides the cost is too high.

These parables are not supposed to discourage us from becoming disciples, but they are supposed to warn us not to rush into it before we have thought about what it will take. A person needs to take it seriously and realize what he or she is agreeing to before being immersed. A third parable illustrates that, even though discipleship might cost us everything, in the end, it will be worthwhile:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure buried in a field, which a man found and reburied. Then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

In this parable, the man who finds the treasure is like a person who realizes that, in the end, the rewards of becoming a disciple of Yeshua will far outweigh the cost—even if it costs him everything. And it does cost everything. When we become disciples of Yeshua, there is no part of our life that does not belong to him. And it could literally cost us our lives. The disciple of Yeshua has to be ready to die as a witness (martyr) rather than deny the Master’s name or betray him. Yeshua taught that anyone who wants to obtain life in the world to come needs to be able to let go of life in this world—even if it means dying as a martyr:

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26)

You’re in the Army Now

Becoming a disciple can be compared to joining the military. When a person joins the military, he or she agrees to surrender all his or her personal rights over to the authority of the commanding officers. As long as the soldier is in the military, obedience is the only option. Even more than that, the soldier agrees to forfeit his or her life, if necessary, on the field of battle. All soldiers know that they might not survive their term of service.

The Good Soldier

Share in hardship as a good soldier of the Messiah Yeshua. No soldier lets himself be entangled in civilian life, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

It's the same for a disciple of Yeshua. You might not survive. You might be called upon, at some point, to lay down your life for the sake of the Master (God forbid). History is soaked red with the blood of disciples of Yeshua. He warned his disciples that they could expect to be persecuted and hated and even put to death for the sake of his name: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

In the Roman Era, the government arrested disciples and told them to renounce their allegiance to Yeshua or die. They chose to be honest about their allegiance to Yeshua and testify as witnesses to his name. Yeshua had already warned them that, if they denied him before the men, he would deny them before God (Matthew 10:32-33). When considering whether or not to become a disciple, keep in mind that it could cost you your life one day.

Denying the Master

Everyone who acknowledges [their allegiance to] me before human beings, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies [their allegiance to] me before human beings, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33)

The Big Decision

Before you decide to be immersed as a disciple of Yeshua, you need to count the cost. Think about what it entails. Are you ready to be a fulltime student to Yeshua? Are you ready to forfeit your personal rights, die to your past, and start a new life as a disciple? Are you ready to give the rest of your life to him as your teacher, master, head of household, and husband? Are you ready to make him the most important relationship in your life? Remember, it's not an easy, comfortable life. He doesn't promise us that life will get easier; he says it will get harder. And it could cost you everything. You might even have to give up your life as a witness for his name.

So think it over carefully. You have a choice to make.

Nevertheless, the right decision should be obvious. God always puts this choice in front of us: to choose life or to choose death. And he also tells us which choice to make:

I have set before you a choice of life or death, blessing or curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your children may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)