

Osiris and Isis

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For Grades 5–12

During the ancient Egyptian culture Osiris and Isis emerged as the most central gods. The myth of Osiris who was killed by his brother Seth, and Isis who gives birth to Horus after his father's death, lived at the core of Egyptian religion both as myth in the broad public and as esoteric knowledge among the leaders. Under the Twelfth Dynasty (roughly 2000 – 1800 BC), as Pharaohs Amenemhet I, Sesostris I, Amenemhet II, Sesostris II, Amenemhet III, Sesostris III, and Amenemhet IV ruled Egypt, thousands of people journeyed yearly to Abydos to experience the ritual, mystery plays of the myth of Osiris and Isis, Seth and Horus that were performed in ceremonial acts by priests (according to the hieroglyphic text on the I-cher-nofret-stone). We can also follow these myths far beyond the boundaries of Ancient Egypt in literature to the present day.

The most concentrated and encompassing form of the myths is found in the writings of Plutarch, who was himself an initiate of the mysteries, though in a time when they were receding. In his version we find the final event of a long process, in which the Osiris myth had lived for a couple of thousand years in very different forms. In the first historical phase Osiris dies, but resurrects by his own power. Osiris is the winning spiritual strength that sheds its light with sovereign security. In *The Book of the Dead* from the earliest Ancient Egyptian time, Osiris is the strong god, who has the entire warmth, life and light of the sun in him, and who carries each Egyptian individual's spiritual being, as well as the entire people's spiritual being. After death, human souls live further according to how much of Osiris lives in them. No matter what name they had in their earthly life, after death they were Osiris N.N.

In the next historical phase, Osiris is murdered by his own brother Seth and locked in a beautifully painted coffin. The spiritual, creative force is locked in by the earthly, bodily material. Though Seth is evil when carrying out the murder, he is also the brother of Osiris. His body is not alien or rejectable. He has the same godly origin as Osiris. Yet the physical body begins to effect the spirit in such a way that Osiris becomes locked in and his

body is thereafter cut into fourteen pieces, so that his spirit may no longer shed light and work into the physical, earthly world. Osiris continues to live, but he is now displaced to the world beyond, the world of life after death, the subconscious and the superconscious.

His sister and wife Isis is left behind as the mourning wife. Who is she? On sculptures of her we find written: "I am she who was, who is, and who shall become. No mortal can ever lift my veil." Is this not the same eternal force as Osiris? She is the "sister." Osiris is the creative spiritual force that has now been displaced to the subconscious realm beyond life. Isis is the eternally searching and the eternally receptive force that can receive the creative forces of Osiris. Isis lives inextinguishably, searching in the depth of the human soul. She is the force that, when the time is right, will give birth to a new spiritual child, Horus, who can reestablish the Osiris activities.

The Osiris-Seth-Isis-Horus myth was interpreted in many ways before Plutarch's time. It was placed within the seasons of the year, in the desert (Seth) and in the fruitful Nile (Osiris), or in the heavens as the sun-reflected light from the moon that recedes after fourteen days (Osiris was cut into fourteen pieces) and returns anew in fourteen days (Isis finds all fourteen pieces). Or the myth has been considered a human drama that took place on earth a long, long time ago when Osiris-Seth-Isis-Horus lived in Egypt as godly incarnations in human bodies. All of these interpretations and even more may have their full legitimacy without one being singularly correct. The mythical pictures are deeper than simplified, fixed concepts. Their essence lives in the activity of the dramatic images and poetry, and resounds deeply in the human soul, while also living in the outer world and in nature. In myth the spiritually creative forces of the world and inner human life are experienced as a unity.

An especially deep aspect of the myth is the moment Horus defeats the evil Seth and leaves Isis to judge him. She refuses to give him the death sentence despite the fact that he murdered Osiris, for Seth is of the same godly origin as Osiris. He must be freed and the battle continued. The physical body cannot be rejected. It also belongs to the human being. But the heavy, foreign quality of the body must be continually overcome. He who interprets the situation is Dsjoti (Dehuti or Thot), whom the Greeks called Hermes or the "three times great Hermes" (Hermes trismegistos), the great initiate, he who was considered the inspirator of the Egyptian culture.

In the following play most of the details are taken directly from ancient sources (Plutarch and the *Book of the Dead* texts). In Scene 2, as the searching and mourning Isis comes to Byblos where King Malkandros rules, she appears disguised and unknown as a nurse for Queen Astarte's child. In the next scene, in which Isis wants to give the child the forces of eternity through the cleansing fire, to purify the physical, bodily nature, the initiation scene is interrupted by Astarte's fear (the lower, immature soul force) and lack of understanding, and Isis cannot yet fulfill her task. We find the exact same dramatic pictures in the "Homeric" Demeter hymn, Eleusis mysteries' esoteric

legend. The connections between Demeter and Isis, between Eleusis in Hellas and the Egyptian mysteries are revealed.

Once the children in grade five have been given simplified pictures of Ancient Egyptian culture, such a play may be performed by the children as a new, more conscious step in the direction of understanding the qualities of Ancient Egyptian culture, of the eternal, immortal drama of its myths, and, overall, of the evolution of the human being.