

Soul Mates or Past Lives?

(An Egyptian Myth)

A new civilization emerged into power and with that a new belief system. The Egyptians had a slight different approach to life. Northeast Africa proved to be an optimal climate for Egypt. It was always sunny and ideal for cultivation as it promoted steady growth, beautiful crops and harvests. Prosperity was remarkable and gave them a very positive outlook for their future and innately affected their belief system as well.

They placed the sun in the highest position and referred to it as Aten, Ra or Amon. It became the ruling god. Ra was the responsible entity over all creation and in fact, was a symbol for heat, light and fertility. The spirit of the live-force was given to the river Nile. Because every year, like clockwork, it would overflow and leave a fruitful soil behind. The Egyptians identified these changes with the transformational process of time. Over the years, the spirit of the Nile became known as Osiris, god of the dead and ruler of the underworld. The constant cycle created a deep sense of order and gave them the understanding of seasons.

Ancient Egyptians believed in many gods, goddesses and also in life after death. They perceived that the land was sacred and belonged to the gods who owned spiritual and political superhuman powers. These qualities flowed from the gods to the pharaohs, who were their appointed agents. The farmers and slaves cultivated their land and obeyed their superiors. Hopes and dreams were played out lavishly, and most of all, pharaohs spared no expense to expand their lives beyond their death.

Thus, the myth of Osiris and Isis are connected, because Osiris was wise and creative, manifested through the river's spirit, Isis emerged through the floods, giving life. Osiris and Isis became known as the gods of cultivation and crops. They complemented each other well and eventually got married.

After their wedding, they were appointed as king and queen of Egypt and shortly thereafter, conceived a son, called Horus. Osiris was a man of great vision. He was talented, wise and knew how to change outdated ways of thinking. He transformed and renewed old patterns and guided people towards higher levels of understanding. He brought a new philosophy to his kingdom.

When Osiris came first to power, people were ruthless. They committed murders, believed in evil and cheated their way through live. Osiris saw that and began to teach his people different value systems. Thus, he achieved freedom and created harmony. His wisdom grew beyond the borders of Egypt, and people from distant land heard of this newly acquired peace within. Osiris decided to share his vision with many different cultures and ventured into the world. He appointed Isis to reign over his kingdom while he is away. Since she was a dutiful wife and very loving queen, she proudly accepted his reign and looked after the well being of ancient Egypt and its people.

But Osiris also had a brother, called Set. He was of an extreme jealous nature and, in fact, was frequently referred to as the "devil of Egypt". In his malevolence, he devised a plan to rid himself of his brother. When Osiris came back from his journey, Set had crafted a gift for him: a huge wooden box. It fit perfectly Osiris' body shape. As soon as Osiris decided to lie in the coffin, Set swiftly closed it tight and threw it into the sea. He then proceeded to overthrow Osiris' kingdom.

Stricken by grief and heartbroken, Isis longed for her husband; she decided to recover his body. The legend tells that Osiris' spirit grew into the most beautiful tree and quickly spread his magic within his new surroundings in Syria. Isis naturally heard of this news and began her journey.

While traveling across country to the distant land, she encountered many tragic hardships, but all along Ra was carefully watching over her. He sent her guides to assist her in her despair. Finally,

arriving in Syria she discovered the coffin and tree. At night, she transformed herself into a swallow and flew above her dead husband. She pleaded with Syria's queen to grant her, her dying wish to care for Osiris at once.

Isis smuggled the coffin back to Egypt and deep into the Nile Delta. Set learned of Isis doing and tracked her down. When he found the dead body he had it cut into fourteen pieces and thrown into the river in the hopes that the crocodiles would eat the remains. However, the creatures were afraid of Isis' scorn and left them in peace. Only a fish, a representation of continuous fertility, ate the phallus. Once more, poor Isis determined to find every piece of her husband's body; she set out to gather them. She found each part along the Delta banks and buried one piece at a time. Fourteen tombs marked their spots; later, temples were erected.

Their son, Horus, grew older, stronger and became quite capable of ruling Egypt. As the rightful king, he defeats Set and takes the throne of his beloved father Osiris and his mother Isis.

The legend continues to tell the rebirth of Osiris. Isis and her sister, Nephtys, had gathered all the body pieces and they prayed to Ra. They asked to please reconstruct Osiris. Ra, who favored Isis for her love and loyalty, granted their wish and ordered them to wrap his body in blankets. It resembled a mummy. After the procedure, Isis remained close to his body and cared for him through days and nights. At night she always transformed into a bird and gently hovered over him. Her wings produced air, and it is said that this air entered through Osiris' nostrils, reviving his essence once again. And once more, Osiris received honor and notability, as he became the judge and the ruler over the dead and the world beneath.

Mackenzie, Donald A. *Egyptian Myth and Legend*. Portland: Longwood Press, 1976.

Fiero, Edith. *The Humanistic Tradition*. 1998.

© Marianne Zaugg