

The Osiris Legend

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... **T**he story of Osiris is one of Egypt's most ancient myths. So old, its origins have been lost in time. It was an important story to the Egyptians because of Osiris' role as the king of Egypt who is resurrected as the "King of the dead". A king that every Egyptian, from the mightiest pharaoh to the lowliest peasant, hoped to join in the afterlife. Other important themes that we find in the story are; the trials of Isis in which she is idolized as a dutiful wife and protective mother. And the revenge of Horus the son of Osiris against his evil uncle Seth, which is a **powerful struggle** of good versus evil. In an effort to avoid confusion you should be aware that there are two forms of the god **Horus** in this story, first we find him as the brother of Osiris, then later we find him called **Harpocrates** or Horus the infant son of Osiris.

... **I**t may be worth noting that in all the vast amount of text that we have from the ancient Egyptians, we find no complete version of this tale. We find only pieces, references and additions to it. This version of the story comes to us from a Greek writer named, Plutarch, who lived in the first century A.D.

Ideas in the Osiris myth.

These links are within the legend of Osiris.

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Cast of Deities:

Ra.....King of the gods.
Nut.....Sky goddess, mother of Osiris.
Geb.....Earth God, father of Osiris.
Thoth.....God of wisdom.
Silene.....Moon goddess.
Osiris.....King of the dead
Horus.....Brother of Osiris.
Seth.....Evil brother of Osiris.
Harpocrates...Horus the infant, son of Osiris.
Isis.....Sister & wife of Osiris.
Nephthys.....Sister of Osiris.

The lord of all the earth is born.

In the beginning, there was the mighty god **Ra** and his wife **Nut**. Nut was in love with the god **Geb**. When Ra found out about this union he was furious. In his rage, he forbid Nut to have children on any of the 360 days that currently made up the year. Nut was very sad. She called on her friend, **Thoth**, to help her. He knew that Ra's curse must be fulfilled, but he had an idea. Thoth engaged the moon goddess, **Silene**, in a wager. At the time, Silene's light (the moon) rivaled the light of Ra (the sun). Thoth was victorious, he was rewarded with one seventh of Silene's light. This is why the moon now wanes each month. Thoth took this light and added five days

to the calendar, bringing the year from 360 days to 365. This gave Nut 5 days on which she could have children, while at the same time obeying Ra's commandment. On the first of these days, Nut gave birth to Osiris. On the second day Horus was born, Seth on the third, Isis the fourth, and Nephthys on the fifth day. At the time of Osiris' birth, a loud voice was heard all over the world, saying, "The lord of all the earth is born."

Osiris the mighty king.

Osiris grew and became a mighty king. He went about the job of civilizing his people. He taught them agriculture and animal husbandry. He gave them a code of laws to live by and showed them the proper ways in which to worship the gods. Egypt became a mighty land under his kind and gentle rule. His subjects gladly worshiped the ground on which he walked. When Egypt was civilized, Osiris left to bring his teachings to other lands. While Osiris was away, he left his wife, **Isis**, in charge. She ruled the country in the same fashion. But Osiris had an enemy, his bitter and jealous brother **Seth**.

Seth plots against the king.

Seth began scheming against the great king. He aligned himself with Aso, the queen of Ethiopia, and 72 other conspirators. But nothing could be done while Isis ruled the country, Her authority was unquestionable. Upon Osiris' return, an evil plot was put into motion. Seth secretly acquired the measurements of Osiris and began having a wonderfully decorated box built to fit those measurements. When the box was finished, Seth had a great feast to which he invited Osiris and the 72 conspirators. Having absolutely no evil in him, Osiris suspected nothing. When the feasting was done, Seth had the box brought out. He offered it as a gift to anyone whom the box fit. One at a time they tried to fit into the box until it was Osiris' turn. He layed in the box suspecting nothing. The conspirators slammed the lid, nailed it closed, and poured molten lead in the seam to seal his fate. They threw the great chest into the Nile river. Osiris was never seen again, walking in the land of the living.



Isis grieves for Osiris.

This news reached Isis and she was grief stricken. She put on her dress of mourning and set about trying to find the body of her husband. She knew well, the dead could not rest until they have had a proper funeral. Isis searched long, but found nothing. She asked every man and every woman if they had seen the giant box that contained her husband, but no one had. Finally, Isis asked some children who were playing by the Nile. They told her where Seth and the conspirators had thrown the chest into the river. After further investigation, and consultation with some demons, Isis learns that the chest had floated out to sea, to the land of Byblos and become lodged in a tamarisk bush. As if by magic the bush shot up and became a magnificent tree. The towering tree enclosed the ornate box within its huge trunk. The king of Byblos admired the great tree so much that he had it cut down and made into a giant pillar to support the roof of his palace.

Isis in the land of Byblos.

Meanwhile, Isis makes her way to the land of Byblos to recover the body of her husband. In Byblos Isis sits by a fountain and talks to no one, except the queen of Byblos' maidens. To these maidens she is quite pleasant, she braids their hair and breaths on them a wonderful perfume sweeter than the most fragrant flowers. Upon their return to the palace, the queen asks them, how they came by such wonderful perfume. They told her of the beautiful stranger they had met. The queen requested that Isis be brought to the palace where she was treated most graciously. She was appointed to be the nurse of one of the young princes.

Isis fed the young prince by giving him her finger to suck. Each night when the palace had retired Isis piled logs on a great fire, into which she would thrust the child. Then she would change into a swallow and flutter about mournfully chirping for her dead husband. Word of these strange happenings reached the queen. She could not believe these tales, so she decided to see for herself. That night, she hid herself, and sure enough, Isis built a fire and thrust the child in it. The queen squealed in terror and scrambled to save the

child. Isis turned on the queen and rebuking her sternly, revealed her true identity. Explaining to the queen that with her magic she was tempering the child to be a god. But now his immortality was lost. Isis explained to the queen why she had made the journey to Byblos and her desire to have the giant pillar in which her husband was encased. The queen granted her wish.



Isis Returns to Egypt.

The pillar was taken down, cut open, and the great box was revealed. Isis took the chest and returned to Egypt but the mighty pillar remained in Byblos and was worshiped from that day forward. When she arrived, she opened the box and wept over her dead husband. She was joined by her sister, **Nephthys** in her sorrow. The sisters turn into Kites and circle the chest screeching in mournful tones. But Isis' thoughts soon turned to her infant son, **Harpocrates**, Horus the younger. She had left him in Buto and now had to retrieve him. She hid the box in a secret place, and went after her son.

Seth's evil revisited.

That night, while hunting by the light of the moon, Seth stumbled upon the finely decorated box. He was blinded with rage at the sight of his brother. He ripped Osiris into fourteen pieces and scattered them throughout Egypt. Isis learns of this new crime, and her grief is renewed. She once again sets out to find her husbands remains. She used a boat made out of papyrus reeds to conduct her search. It was believed that, because of this, a crocodile would never attack a papyrus boat, fearing that it might contain the mighty goddess. Where ever she finds a piece of Osiris, she buries it, and builds a shrine in that place. This is the reason that Osiris has so many tombs in Egypt.

The revenge of Horus.

In the meantime, Harpocrates has grown to manhood, and he is called Horus. Osiris has been resurrected as the king of the dead in the underworld. One day, Osiris appears to Horus in the land of the living. He convinces Horus to avenge the wrongs that have been committed by Seth. So, Horus tracks down Seth and a **huge battle** begins. Victory is elusive and the battle turns first to one side, then to the other. It is said that this battle of good verses evil still rages, but some day, Horus will be victorious and on that day, Osiris will return to rule the world.



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