

## The Story of Isis and Osiris

Over the three thousand years of Egyptian civilization, many new gods were added, and sometimes people decided that two different gods were actually the same one, so the stories could become very confusing.

This is a story about how the ancient Egyptians believed their world came to be.

Long, long ago, there was nothing in the world but ocean. There was no land. There were no plants, no animals, and no people. Then out of the ocean rose Re, the sun god. Some people say he came from a giant egg, and some people say he flowered out of an ancient plant, and others say he simply rose up out of the waters. However it happened, he looked around and saw he was alone.

So Re raised up lands from the waters, and carved great valleys for the rivers to flow in, and he made birds and reptiles and growing things. And after he had wandered the world all alone, he had two children, a daughter named Tefnut, who was the goddess of the mists that hung on the river in the morning and evening, and a son named Shu who was the god of the air and the wind that blew over the red sands.

And since there were no other people in the world, Shu and Tefnut married, and they had a daughter named Nut. She was the goddess of the sky. She had long dark hair and her body was covered with beautiful stars. When she stretched out her arms and legs, she covered the whole world, and her arms and legs touched the four corners of the world.

Then Shu and Tefnut had another child, and this was Seb, the god of the earth. Seb was as large as his sister, and he reached out to the four corners of the world and joined hands with her where the sky touched the earth.

Seb and Nut also married, and they had four children. Their sons were Osiris and Set and their daughters were Isis and Nephthys.

Now, as Re looked down on the great empty world, inhabited only by his children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, he wept. And as those tears touched the ground they sprouted and grew into the first men and women. At first, men and women were little better than beasts. They did not know how to farm, how weave cloth to wear, or how to make wine to drink.

Osiris married Isis and Set married Nephthys and the four of them went out into the world to rule over men and women and to teach them how to live.

Wise Osiris taught men how to predict when the river would flood and when to plant grain and harvest crops. He taught them to worship the gods: how to build temples and burn sacrifices to them. And he gave them just laws to obey. Osiris became a great king and ruled over all the people of the Nile, and they worshipped him since he was one of the gods.

But Set was envious of Osiris, nor was he just and wise like his brother. Set had the head of a jackal (a lean, wild dog that hunts alone and can never be trusted), and while Osiris built his kingdom along the great river Nile, Set ruled the barren desert

beyond. One day, Set came upon Osiris alone, and he killed him and cut his body into twelve pieces and threw them into the Nile. Then Set declared himself to be the new king of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Isis wept for her murdered husband, until Anubis, the god who guides the dead down into the underworld, came to comfort her. He helped her to find the pieces of Osiris's body, and he wrapped them in long strips of cloth to preserve them. Then Isis, who was the goddess of life, used her magic to bring her dead husband back to life. They lived together secretly for a short time, hiding from the watchful eyes of Set, and during that time Isis bore a son named Horus, the falcon-headed god of the sky.

But even the magic of Isis could not bring her husband back to life forever, and so Osiris went down into the underworld, and he became the god of the dead. Meanwhile Horus grew up strong and brave. He wanted to avenge his father, and so he fought Set and defeated him and drove him out into the desert.

Then Horus ruled over the land of Egypt, and he was second only to Re, the sun god, in his power.

And that is why the pharaoh is called the son of Re, and wears the crown of Horus while he is alive, and when he dies he becomes one with Osiris and rules over the kingdom of the dead just as he ruled over the living when he was alive.

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