

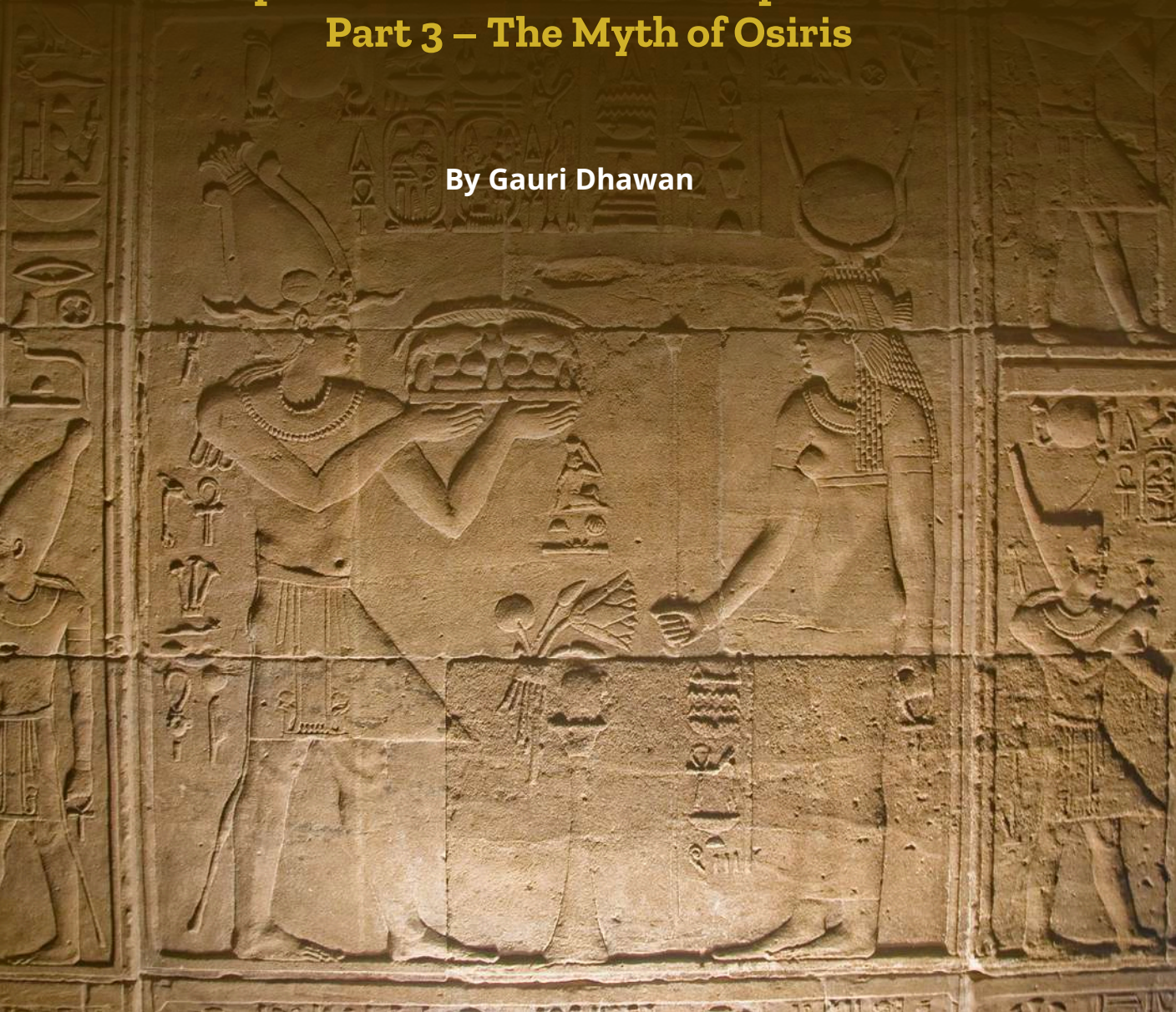


**TRAVELING
BEYOND**
Explorations with New Acropolis

TRAVELING BEYOND: EGYPT

**Explorations with New Acropolis India
Part 3 – The Myth of Osiris**

By Gauri Dhawan



Traveling Beyond: Explorations with New Acropolis India, is an opportunity to travel with a philosophical lens, to visit places, not only as a tourist, but also as a seeker of truth and beauty. To try to uncover together, the wisdom that exists in the world, and to extract from it something that we can apply today, to make our lives and the world better. This orientation for the travel, shared by the National Director of New Acropolis India, along with my experience and education as a member of New Acropolis added another dimension to the travel for me.

This article is Part Three of our learnings from the trip to Egypt and includes my reflection on what it can mean to 'Travel Beyond', specifically in relation to the concept of mythology, as I encountered it on this ten-day journey.



When we think of the word "myth", we often associate it with something that is untrue; a superstition, or just a story. However, when looked at from a philosophical perspective, mythology forms a significant part of the human legacy and tradition, passed down from generation to generation, and used as a tool in the moral education of our young. This offers a fresh way of looking at mythology – as something which uses a story, to communicate some fundamental truths. Therefore, while there may be variations in the way the story is told across geographies and time, the

essential truths communicated remain the same. With this understanding, and backed by my philosophical education and perspective, I tried to 'travel beyond' the mysterious stories of Egypt, to perceive the deeper meaning they had to offer.

One such myth is that of Osiris, the God of the underworld, and of the afterlife. This legend was narrated to us by our travel guides, while on our way to the beautiful Temple of Dendera.

This is a temple dedicated to the mother goddess Hathor, which has 2 notable chapels on its roof – the Zodiac Chapel, showing the various constellations of the Zodiac; and the Osiric Chapel, dedicated to the god Osiris. During our visit, these were highlighted, though some sources suggest there may be additional chapels.

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We also visited the ritual tomb of Osiris in Abydos, which is believed to be the site where this myth took place, and the final resting place of Osiris.

According to tradition, Osiris was the primeval king of Ancient Egypt, and his brother Seth, was jealous of him, and wanted to usurp the throne. Seth prepared a beautiful sarcophagus, made with precious metals and studded it with jewels, and announced that it would be given to the one who fits into it perfectly. One after the other, many men and women tried to enter the sarcophagus, but could not, as it was made specifically to the measurements of Osiris. This was all part of Seth's plan. When Osiris got into the Sarcophagus, Seth immediately closed it and threw it into the Nile, thus killing Osiris.

Hearing about this, Osiris' wife, Isis, was deeply impacted, and started looking for her husband everywhere. She found out that there was a tree by the shore of the Nile, which looked just like the

sarcophagus, but before she could get there, Seth had cut up Osiris' body into 14 parts and scattered them all over Egypt.

Isis painstakingly travelled all around Egypt, in search of the pieces of her husband, collecting one piece after the other, until finally she was able to find all but one – Osiris' reproductive organ. Together with her sister Nephthys, who was also the wife of Seth, she guarded the body of Osiris and called upon the Gods for help, to resurrect him.

In the Osiric chapel located on the roof of the temple of Dendera, we see a beautiful depiction of the resurrection of Osiris, and his body being guarded by the two sisters – Isis and Nephthys.

With the help of Thoth, God of Wisdom and Right Knowledge, and Anubis, God and Guide of souls in the Afterlife, Osiris was resurrected, but without his reproductive organs, which symbolise attachment to the material world. He dies to the physical realm, and is reborn as a God.



One can look at any difficulty in life, as an opportunity for internal growth, and any person that challenges us, as a facilitator of that growth without which we would not be able to actualise our latent potential.



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If the heart is as light as the feather, it means that the person has lived with justice, true to their purpose on earth, and can pass on to the afterlife. On the other hand, if the heart is heavy, the person must incarnate again on this earth, as another opportunity to live with meaning and justice.

According to the ancient Egyptians, at the end of a lifetime on earth, each soul goes through a trial. In this trial, the heart of the deceased is weighed against the feather of justice, or Ma'at as the Egyptians called it. If the heart is as light as the feather, it means that the person has lived with justice, true to their purpose on earth, and can pass on to the afterlife. On the other hand, if the heart is heavy, the person must incarnate again on this earth, as another opportunity to live with meaning and justice. This judgement at the end of life, is presided over by Osiris because it is believed that he has crossed this boundary. He has died to the material and has entered the afterlife, taking his rightful place as the King and Judge of souls at the gates of the afterlife.

Here are some of my key learnings from this myth:

1. Learning to see Challenges as Opportunities

When I first heard the myth, I was tempted to look at the characters as hero or villain, good or bad, but I was urged by our instructor, who accompanied us on this travel, to try to look deeper:

Life and death are in the here and now. In every decision we make, it is up to us to choose what we will give life to, and what we will allow to die within us.

Perhaps the challenges posed by Seth are not just evil actions, but necessary trials for Osiris to go through before he can take his rightful place as the King of the Afterlife. Perhaps Seth in this story is not a "villain", but a facilitator in the journey of Osiris, allowing him to reach his full potential. With this perspective, one can look at any difficulty in life, as an opportunity for internal growth, and any person that challenges us, as a facilitator of that growth without which we would not be able to actualise our latent potential.

When I choose to act in service, I kill selfishness, that is, I don't allow it to take form through me.

2. The 'Small Deaths' and 'Small Resurrections' of the Day to Day

From a philosophical point of view, death is not just something that happens at the end of life. Life and death are in the here and now. In every decision we make, it is up to us to choose what we will give life to, and what we will allow to die within us. When I choose to act in service, I kill selfishness, that is, I don't allow it to take form through me. The recognition of unhelpful tendencies within us like laziness, greed, selfishness, is not enough. We also need to find it's opposite. A virtue which can replace it, which will serve us better. Only then will we be able to uproot the bias, habit, tendency, or shortcoming and give birth to the right virtue in its place.



It is through our choices, that day after day, we can work towards transmuting ourselves, into better human beings, with more love, generosity, and courage.

This can be an inspiring way of looking at our daily choices as opportunities for 'small deaths' of those attributes and tendencies which no longer serve us, and the birth, or resurrection, of those which can better serve us, and those around us.

3. The Painstaking Path of Transmutation

The word 'transmutation' refers to an irreversible change of form and composition, wherein the object or person cannot go back to its previous state, like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly; whereas a 'transformation' is simply a change of form - like that of water to ice - which is reversible.

In this myth, we see the transmutation of Osiris, as he dies to the material realm, symbolised by the reproductive organ, and is born to the divine realm, as an immortal God - a step in the journey of evolution, which can be seen in many other mythologies - referring to a conquering that cannot be undone, a movement forward which is permanent in nature.

4. Life and Death - Duality or Continuum?

The myth sheds light on the concepts of life and death in an interesting way, treating death, not as the absolute end of life, but rather a continuation. Like Osiris continues as a God, after dying as a mortal, the ancient Egyptians believed that there is a part of us which continues even after dying to the material. Perhaps this can inspire us to spend our life in the pursuit of virtues and values that nourish the eternal aspect of ourselves, which will empower us to take those irreversible steps forward in the journey of our evolution.

Travelling Beyond allowed me to see deeper into this myth and to perceive that perhaps the ideas of resurrection and transmutation can hold some meaning for the way we live our lives, and the way we make decisions. It is through our choices, that day after day, we can work towards transmuting ourselves, into better human beings, with more love, generosity, and courage. Perhaps this is how we can make our way, step by step, towards human nobility. ☸☸