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"FOREVER TO LIVE"



Detail from tomb mural.

Horus guiding Queen  
Nefertari into the  
presence of Harmachis.

DEAR FRIENDS:



IN HIS BOOK "Religion of the Ancient Egyptians," Alfred Wiedemann stated that the followers of the Osirian cult developed a doctrine of immortality, which in precision and extent surpasses almost any other that has been devised. For more than three thousand years Egypt dominated the lives of most of the peoples inhabiting the Mediterranean area. Scholars from many countries journeyed to the great centers of Egyptian learning. They were received with hospitality, and if qualified, they were instructed in the arts and sciences by the priests of Luxor, Thebes, and Memphis. The origin of Egyptian learning is not known and some authorities accept the old legends that it originated in India.

Most ancient peoples had no systematic explanation for the survival of the human soul after death. As late as the time of Homer, the Greeks believed that the realm of the dead was a ghostly subterranean region where those who died dwelt as shades without hope or fear. Even in modern times the old uncertainties prevail, and there are millions of materialists who have rejected the concept of immortality completely. The belief that the condition of the soul after death depended upon its conduct while dwelling in the physical world was introduced into Egyptian metaphysics at a very early date. The emphasis was upon posthumous rewards for the virtuous deeds it had performed through keeping the commandments bestowed by the deities. The scope of the Egyptian ethical system is set forth in considerable detail in that section of the BOOK OF THE DEAD which has been called "The Negative Confession." Punishment for misdeeds is passed over rather lightly. Most of the Egyptian deities conspire together to assure the salvation of the human soul. Because of this positive emphasis on righteousness, most Egyptians died without fear and accepted the transition from this world to the other sphere as normal, natural, and even desirable.

What is now generally referred to as THE EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD, seems to have been based upon the funereal rituals, including prayers, offerings, and the processes of embalming the physical remains. The various texts and inscriptions were gradually codified in that version now called THE THEBAN RESCENSION. A number of fine manuscript versions of THE BOOK OF THE DEAD have been recovered from the early tombs, but equally important are the elaborate mural decorations on the walls and ceilings of the mortuary chambers. It is from one of these latter sites that we gain an intimate insight into the Egyptian philosophy of death.

Ramses II, who reigned for sixty-seven years, from 1291 to 1225 B.C., was one of the most powerful of the Egyptian pharaohs. The tomb of his wife, the beautiful queen, Nefertari, is one of the finest yet to be opened. The walls and ceilings of the various chambers are covered with exquisitely drawn pictures depicting the elements of Egyptian theology. A number of representations of the Queen, herself, are included in the murals. In one scene which sophisticates might consider pathetic, the Queen is shown sitting quietly in her tomb playing chess. Presumably she is waiting while the parts of her soul are being judged. It was believed that every human being has seven souls, of which the last and highest is eternal. All the others are subject to dissolution, but have differing periods of survival. These souls impel the person to various actions and attitudes during the physical life span. All souls are essentially good unless their virtues are compromised to selfishness, ambition, or arrogance. During the Queen's chess game, the Ba, or breath of life, has already left the tomb in the form of a human-headed bird. Esotericists have likened the Ba to the vital body, or energy field. The mural then continues, and the Queen is represented kneeling with her hands upraised to form the hieroglyphic of the Kha that corresponds with the astral body. Each of the scenes is accompanied by an appropriate hieroglyphical text from THE BOOK OF THE DEAD.

In another scene the Goddess Isis is leading Nefertari into the presence of the enthroned Osiris, Lord of the Quick and the Dead. The right hand of Isis holds the left hand of the Queen, and the painting is quite lovely. In another panel the hawk-headed deity, Horus, leads the Queen to Harmachis. Horus is the only begotten son of Osiris, and was given the power to intercede for the souls of the dead. If their virtues were not sufficient to permit them to enter the Elysian Fields of the blessed, Horus forgave them in the name of his father. In this scheme, also, we have the finest portraiture of Queen Nefertari. She is crowned with the double ostrich plume, wears an elaborate headdress, and is gowned in a flowing and pleated, white robe. Even though she has passed beyond the vanities of mortal life, she has made generous use of cosmetics. Her cheeks are rouged, her lips painted, and her eyebrows and eyelids are lined in black. A golden sash binds her body, and her right hand is held firmly by the right hand of Horus. The fact that the Queen is being conducted to Harmachis is highly significant. This deity personifies "the sun in its rising," and indicates that the Queen is to see again the light of day. Incidentally, the great sphinx at Gizeh shows Harmachis with a human head and the body of a lion.

One of the earliest names for THE BOOK OF THE DEAD was THE BOOK OF COMING FORTH BY DAY AND THE OPENING OF THE MOUTH. The Egyptians believed that in sleep the soul bodies were separated temporarily from the physical form, but this occurred at night and there was no conscious recollection of the circumstances. The Queen

is led into the presence of the solar god to imply that she is "coming forth by day and that she is conscious of the transformations that are occurring. She beholds the great gods in their glory, not hidden by the mist of illusionary existence. The same sun shines in both regions--that of the living and of the dead, and all beings adore its splendor.

The Elysian Fields were considered to be an invisible counterpart of the Nile Valley. Here the deceased lived out the familiar activities with which they were accustomed. The farmer followed his plow drawn by patient oxen; the banker added up his assets and liabilities; children played while their elders regarded them fondly. The main difference was that this happy realm had as its ruler the benevolent Osiris. There was no injustice or selfishness or incentives for delinquency. Each person lived according to the dictates of the voice in his heart. The Elysian Fields were not far away and those initiated into the State Mysteries might journey there while still alive. The pleasant region of the after life was a temporary abode, though beyond the measure of time. The Egyptians recognized that all souls passed through many gates or spheres of existence before their ultimate union with the Divine Principle.

A word about those whose shortcomings were so numerous that Horus was unable to go against the dictates of Maat, the goddess of justice. She was often depicted blindfolded or without eyes to indicate that she could never be corrupted by appearances. Those with evil hearts or unregenerate natures were said to have been swallowed by the god, Typhon, represented with the head of an alligator and the body of a hog. In the light of Egyptian philosophy, this almost certainly meant that unworthy souls were swallowed up in matter and were reincarnated in the physical world and given further opportunity to mend their ways. Ultimately, all would be saved.

After the Queen, Nefertari, had been welcomed into the great hall of the twin truths, she made appropriate offerings to the various divinities in the form of celestial foods and flowers. These represented her good deeds and noble thoughts, which were the only gifts acceptable to the deities who already possessed the whole world, and rejoiced only in the spiritual graces of redeemed souls.

The mortuary ritual was also presented as a spiritual drama which has been called "The Egyptian Passion Play." The death and resurrection of Osiris insured that all souls would be born again in the realms of his blessedness. In THE BOOK OF THE DEAD, therefore, the deceased is no longer mentioned by his earthly name. It would be said, "Osiris, who was Nefertari travels through the shadowland." The Queen has become one with the Deity, and with the other happy souls abides in Him "unto everlastingness." This term is a figure of speech to suggest a long interval of time which must come before a still greater resurrection. The simple beauty of this Egyptian life way and the journey of the soul through the "House of Many Places," when interpreted in the total pattern of Egyptian metaphysical theology, transformed the unknown future from a dismal and uncertain prospect to a plan for an everlasting life in realms of light and hope.

At this Holiday Season, may I wish for all the friends who have contributed to our work the blessings of this Holy time, and a happy and important New Year.

Always most gratefully yours,

*Mamby I. Hall*

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