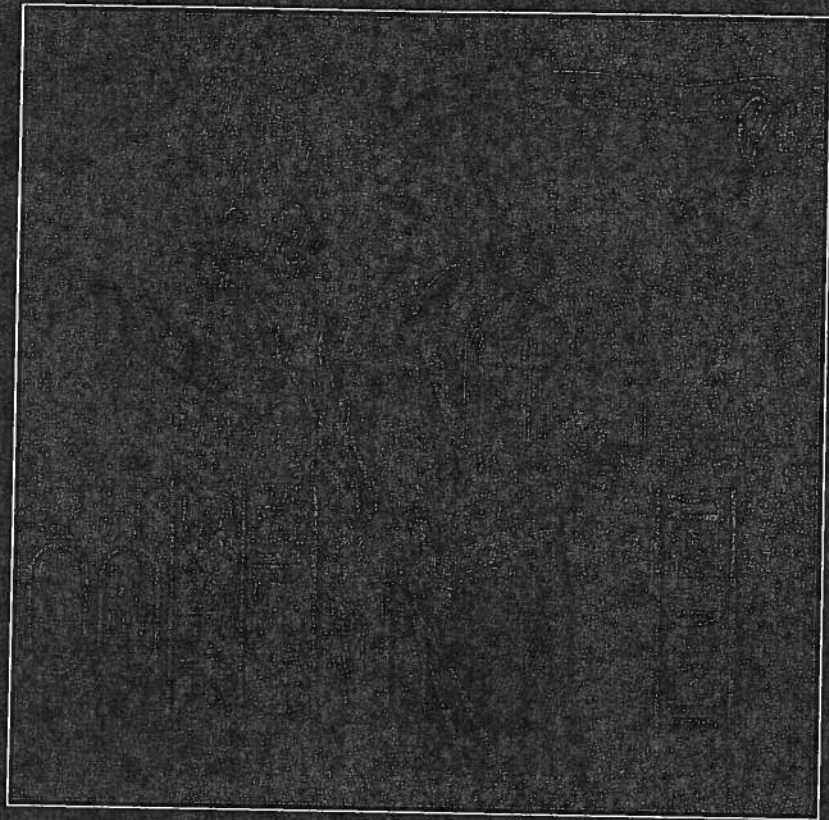


# **AWAKENING OSIRIS**



**THE EGYPTIAN BOOK  
OF THE DEAD**

**NORMANDI ELLIS**

# 1. The Return

Stars fade like memory the instant before dawn.

Low in the east, the sun appears golden as an opening eye. That which can be named must exist. That which is named can be written. That which is written shall be remembered. That which is remembered lives. In the land of Egypt Osiris breathes. The sun rises and mists disperse. As I am, I was, and I shall be a thing of matter and heaven.

On a midsummer's day a rustle of beetles fly singing from dry grass to raise the sun like a dung ball. In the sky bright as Nut's belly above her lover, the sun glints like yellow jasper. The body of heaven lies smooth and firm as an egg. It is joy to lick the wind. On countless mornings I see the fireball roll and tears roll down my cheek. The souls of men like tears from Ra stream down the face of heaven. The eye of the great one sees how stars fade.

Osiris returns from the mountain of sand to the green land of his birth. Morning comes to Egypt. Across an expanse of dirt and stone, cool shadows strain toward the mountain where in dry tombs the dead are yawning, wondering who has lit the temple fire and who has brought sweet cake. I, Osiris, rise and hurry into the two lands of the living. Black earth and red earth join by a buckle of sky. I embrace the double horizon. I embrace the two mountains, the east and west. I am god of the living and dead, embracing my soul and shadow.

The ka of Osiris grows bright wings. His face glows with white heat. Above fields, I speak with the voice of a hawk, my eye sharp as a blade against the wheat. I speak the word from which I was made. I speak

of truth and splendor and strength, of the honor of death and power of return. I speak of the crested ibis.

Where gods have gathered, the heart grows still. A procession of jabiru walk, laying the eggs of other lives, of blue souls in another time. Incense rises where gods gather. Heaven and earth are long dreams weighed in the balance. A man is known by his words and deeds. Beautiful is the new sun sailing in a river of sky in the boat of morning. Beautiful is man in his moments in time, a thousand beads of thought on a white string.

Darkness gives way to light, dumbness to speech, confusion to understanding. Devourers of the dead are given their own dry bones to eat. The worm that would suck the eye of Ra has been pierced by spears of light. His green heart has been pitched into the fire; it sizzles like rotten meat.

The old man's house is a riot of living. In bright corners children are singing because their mother has given birth. The world is made new with laughter. The strings of the lyre hum. The sun floods the country and cities with light. Boats sail on emerald waters. Fish have returned to spawn. In the field a stubborn donkey sleeps, though his master thrashes him with a stick. I laugh because I have come home. I am content with the movement of hours.

This is the meaning of yesterday—that friends remember my name and after long journeys I am greeted by their voices on the road. They embrace my hands and feet. Look what corn and grapes we share. Look what abundance of meat. Under the eye of the great one the children of Egypt gather. Her four winds gather—mountain dwellers, basket weavers, potters and musicians.

In my life I've known the love of men and seen gods on their slow barges passing. The ka of Osiris walks

where he pleases. I am thought, shadow, bone. I am the black ibis pecking at corn and the blade of a hunting knife. I am the guardian of sun and moon, the falcon that flies between them. I shall be given day and night and all the space therein. In the bark of morning and the bark of evening I shall gain passage to hidden things. Law and truth, memory and time shall be my sails and rudders. This is the going forth of gods into the land of triumph. The river is emerald and filled with light. The course of this boat is true. Inside my people has always lived the grace of bullrushes growing. Like a fruit tree sprung up by the river Nile, from my names rises the story of Egypt. That which is written shall be remembered. Osiris lives in the land of his birth.

## Greeting Ra

This day I am with you. Stabbed by the light of the great mind I wake. The sun crests the hill and the hawk, according to a higher will, whirls and circumscribes day. I am called from my house. I shuffle sand underfoot, but my heart leaps. I open, am pierced by light. A cry escapes my lips. I know not what I say; it is the language of soul beneath skin, the song of birds in acacia trees.

Beautiful is the golden seed from which the corn arises; beautiful the sun on the hill from which springs god's day. My body nourishes some unfolding time and purpose. I shine bronze as Hathor's mirror. My heart lifts like the sun. Passion and power quiver on the land, casting long shadows.

Now the people in their houses stir, yawning, shouting, stretching. Shot through with light, they glow and quiver. Stones of sunlight pile up in heaven. Emerald is truth when god draws near. Blessed are we by sun.

Ra is the child, a golden knot of flesh dropped from open air, bright star in the dark house of Osiris, heir to the ages, word edged into world. He grows a long beard and sits on the mountain, knowing its secrets. He rises from the flood. Drawing up water, he quenches the thirst of his people. They drink and enter the river. He sucks the breast of heaven, golden-haired, flesh on fire. Always burning, returning, always constant and new.

It is his breath we breathe, his love that endures, his power that moves the world. We are the quivering of his arrows, the stirring of his hands. We are his spirit moving in matter. May the eye of god pierce us and give us the grace of his will. We are held in god's hands. Like the ocean, we whirl and remain the same. We are bound

by law and held by the truth of change, that all seasons return, and that which was once and is no more shall come again.

Sing then, rejoice and bind yourself to god's will. See how the seed falls from the tree and is buried. Die at once and live again. You shall grow like that sycamore, rooted in matter, bound for boundless sky. You shall be blown by wind. You shall see the storm and sing its praises. You shall lie in the fields and kiss the earth. Raise your arms. You shall see the fury and power of god and change forever.

Drink the cup of heaven. Let grace roll down your head like water. Drink in earth, take in the things of the world. The barley grows straight in rows; the young shoots unfurl according to a higher purpose. Truth rides visibly through the world. Have you not seen it? The sun shimmers with the power of gold. We are breathless in golden air. Drink in the light and praise the cup of forever that spills out the threads of eternity.

Ra is an old man walking the world, as much with the earth as the skin of a snake. He is with us, the spirit, the gold, the god, the ebb of life, watcher over the world. We rise like swallows and fly up the ladder of heaven. We sit in his hand. He buries us in the blue egg of the world. We are pressed into the soil and rise. We grow in him. The world changes, and god and men. We spin and sing in the house of sun. The earth is glad. Cows chew the cud of light. We breathe the perfume of a golden flower. Old men and women rise, burst from their houses, arms lifted, dancing, crying, singing. Dawn is a lyre playing the song of day.

Ra rises. He goes out into the world, a passion, a fire burning up night, making day. His light ennobles the face of heaven. He warms the belly of sky. He gladdens



Nut, his mother. He walks the upper regions, his heart inflamed with love. The waters in the pool of the farthest oasis are calmed. He gathers the sand serpents to his breast. He fears no living thing. He made them, what is known and not known. He speaks their names and takes their venom. The snake who gobbles the world enters Ra. Burned in fire, he vomits the evil he has spoken. His words are smelted into gold. With a kiss, Ra turns poison into magic. He twines the snake about him. Now death lives on his forehead, side by side, with light. Let breath come and go. Let the great world change. Let men see that serpents entwine the god as the light of god entwines each man. It brushes his lips with sunlight, with kisses of life, kisses of death, kisses of joy, kisses of poison and magic.

The evening boat draws near. Ra comes to meet it at the edge of sky, the edge of river, the thin blade of time. It arrives and he steps from the shore of knowing. He enters. Small waves rock the boat and the stems of reeds are bowing. He sails off: north, south, east or west. He travels lightly toward the other shore of time. Infinity is his. Behold! a star has entered sky. The geese take flight across a waxing moon. Oh substance, understanding of earth, creature of becoming making himself understood. Flames of fire lick his body like golden serpent tongues, like the mouths of women in love. The wind uplifts him. He sings a dark song gliding toward dusk in the boat of evening. We show him our hands, the magic he placed in them. His boat slices water. He passes towering papyrus. Three godlike ducks wade in and follow. They glide, turn and spiral. Three godlike sparrows swoop and spin above the banks. Even the frogs are dancing and singing.

Ra rules the air and the gods invisible. The book of law lies in his hands. The speech of his lips falls lightly

into being. His word enters the world. "Creation," says he. "Destruction. Power invisible. Glory. The house of heaven is the house of man. No walls stand between heaven and earth. You are no farther from me than from your own hot breath." At any moment you enter heaven by saying, "I am a temple of Ra." Love is his light; compassion the light of the world. Ra is fire. Joy is the sky. His heart beats with forever. The white clouds of his thought pass over the sky and water.

## Greeting Osiris

That quivering evening star is his, blue eye of the watcher, body of Osiris, heart, mind and soul of a god awake in the darkening world. Here, where the sun and sorrow stop, a man may sit long by the river, let water flow through his fingers like history, the ageless Osiris, watch corn rise up and dream vegetal dreams. Or, he may hold grains of sand in the palm of his hand, count and name them "everlasting." The god is walking, walking, a million years, the beat of his left foot, his right—the flux of the universe. He hurries on, going somewhere, running messages between gods and men, propelled by the power in his feet.

Blessed be Osiris. Blessed be the son of earth sprung from the egg of the world, the great cackler. Blessed be the son of heaven, dropped from the belly of sky. Blessed is his birth, five days of peace won from the hands of gods. He is light, the white crown, the ain soph, the joy of becoming in heaven and earth, the father of men and angels. He takes the gold crook and makes himself shepherd. He takes the silver flail and makes himself judge. The power of his divine fathers encircles his spine, as the snakes entwine the caduceus. His heart is hidden fire, it burns a hole in the mountain. He guides his people to the light.

"Come," he says. "I come in the power of Light. I come in the light of Wisdom. I come in the mercy of the Light. The Light has healing in its wings."

He is Nebercher, the infinite, lord of the universe. The words of becoming taste sweet to his tongue. That which was ravaged is made whole in him, seeds are planted and the earth greens. He is Tahersetanef who

walks backwards into yesterday, a man of secrets in a world hidden away. His footsteps are possibility. That which is follows in stride and that which is not yet flows behind him as his shadow. He is Seker, never seen nor looked upon, the benevolent face of darkness, the good death that men call upon, the end, the beginning of truth. He is Osiris, the dark and terrible eye, the broken body and scattered limbs, the smell of rotten flesh, the knowingness and finality of death. He judges the souls of men. He is Unnefer, and he endures forever upon a road bordered by flowers. He sits long by the waters, hears its music, becomes its song. He smiles, time passing, lost in dream.

Blessed be the god in his names, salvation of priests and goatherds, king of kings, lord of lords. He counts the hairs on every man's chin. Celestial fire descended, he steps down lightly onto earth. He hears the prayers of all men, animals, angels. He hears the dead murmur with their mouths full of sand. He uplifts the sky, rents the veil, reveals the temple. His flesh is burnished bright as copper. The eyes in his head are like blue stones underwater, lapis lazuli. Priest and man, his body shimmers turquoise green.

He is solitude and perfection, ether and atmosphere at all times and in all places. His body widens and his people are welcomed into it, his embrace is sleep. He is fire dancing about the heads of dreamers, the instant of forever that sparks poets and lovers. He turns his beautiful face in the dark. He flows quietly away on subterranean waters.

His is the splendor of heaven, strength of earth, triumph over the worm. His is the mind of ibis, the intelligence, in his bones the instinct of animals, in his blood the pulse of iron. He is the elemental made eternal,

the upright pillars of temples, the trunk of sycamore trees. The living soul of land, he is matter and mind taking form. He is what he imagines, divine, a spark thrown into dust. The winds swirl above a city of sand. Eternal in essence, he transmutes. He is death, a phoenix, a fire raging, changing, going in and coming out of form in time. He is a mad genius wind howling and the beat of winds, individual and inspired. He is one god or else he is two old men walking, leaning on their sticks, conspiring. He is hell become heaven, becoming hell, he is evolution, a matter of energy, a star in the dark tomb, a shadow cast by sunlight. He is life that can not be contained, a holy insurrection, blessed negativity.

I am with him. I am like that old Osiris waking in the night. Drunk on the cool wine of darkness, I eat the bread of life and die. I know. I am blessed by mortality. I am a field enduring, growing wheat one year, barley the next, tangled flowering papyrus, a hill of sand. I am everafter, changing, while the eye of the watcher shines and takes me in.

## 4.

## The Speeches

I cross an open field of stones shaped all like hearts and say to the rocks: this one shall break, and this hold the rain, and this one be still, and this other crumble and its grains of sand shall mark my passage. Beat. Beat. Beat. The power of my Self is moving. My heart. My birth. My coming into existence. My passions. My indifference. The sun within warms me, the heart enlightens the intellect. I am my Self coming forth, a creature bearing light.

May I stand amazed in the presence of god. May the rhythm of my heart stir music that enslaves darkness. May my heart witness what my hands create, the words I utter, the worlds I think. May my flesh be a sail propelled by the breath of dream. May I ride in calm waters toward destiny. May life flow through me as the seed from the phallus flows, with a shout of joy, life begetting life.

May I stand in the midst of celestial fire until my heart is molten gold. May twelve goddesses dance every day about me, a circle of flesh aflame. May I spin among them, my face flushed with heat. May I walk on earth radiant, everywhere complete. May the omniscient eye observe my deeds and know the law my heart knows, the zodiac of men and beasts alive, the call of angels, the word. May my body bend toward the will of the heart. May I not think and act diversely. May truth rest on me light as a tail feather dropped from a falcon in cloudless sky.

Thou spirit within, you are my Self, my power, my ka, the fire of god. May I create words of beauty, houses of wonder. May the labor of my hands be mirrors unto god. May I dance in the gyre and draw down heaven's

blessing. May I be given a god's duty, a burden that matters. May I make of my days a thing wholly. May I know myself in every pore of skin. May the god's fire burn in my belly and heart. May I be stronger than these bones and bits of flesh. May my health be the wholeness of divinity.

On earth I walk daily before the gods, but in the house of heaven my feet are still. There is no need for haste. My heart is a lyre that hums. My lungs fill with the breath of fire. A cool breeze encircles me. I rest in god's bosom here, while on earth my hands are busy. And when work is done, I return to the heart afire, center of the universe, peace, unto god.

I remember the names of my ancestors. I speak the names of those I love. I speak their names and they live again. May I be so well-loved and remembered. In truth, may the gods hear my name. May I do work with my hands worth remembering.

I am an old man travelling amid strange cities and faces. I've prayed in temples from the plains to the delta. In Hermopolis, beneath the crumbling feet of a statue, I found this heart of stone, encircled in bronze, ringed all in silver, made of lapis lazuli. It was inscribed in iron by the god in the god's own hand before the dawn of history, and it was this book wherein lay the law that is. It was the secret name of god. And I lay the stone heart upon my own that I might memorize it, that its words might be etched into my being. Great is the nothingness, the all that is. I am a being of light.

*Thoth speaks:*

The ibis and the ink pot—these are blessed. For as the ibis pecks along the bank for a bit of food, so the scribe searches

among his thoughts for some truth to tell. All the work is his to speak, its secrets writ down in his heart from the beginning of time, the gods' words rising upward through his dark belly, seeking light at the edge of his throat. We are made of god stuff, the explosion of stars, particles of light, molded in the presence of gods. The gods are with us. Their secrets writ only in the scrolls of men's hearts, the law of creation, death and change inscribed in the blood and seed of man's love. In the beginning and at the end, the book is opened and we see what in life we are asked to remember.

Hear, then, my words, the ringing of my speech, as the heart and the scroll of this life fall open. Truth is the harvest scythe. What is sown—love or anger or bitterness—that shall be your bread. The corn is no better than its seed, then let what you plant be good. Let your touch on earth be light so that when earth covers you, the clods of dirt fall lightly. The soul of a man forgets nothing. It stands amazed at its own being. The heart beats the rhythm of its life. The lungs breathe the ions of its own vibration. The mind recalls its thoughts. The glands respond to its emotions. The body is a soul's record. And when a man's life ends, his body is given back to gods and the gods shall see what use their laws have been. They shall see the deeds its hands have made, the sparks of light its heart set in the world. They shall see whether or not



their love, their powers have been wasted, whether the plants it has grown were nourishing or poison. And like the ibis, the gods shall circle about him, hunting for seeds that remain uncultivated, for ideas that lie dormant, thoughts left unexpressed. They shall find new seeds from the plants he has tended. And these shall be planted again in the clay of a new man and he shall be sent back to the world until all the gods have seen fit to create in man is cultivated, and then, in final death, he shall be welcomed home as one of them.

*The gods speak:*

Let the great wheel turn. We sit at the hub of the universe and the stars spin around. A man's fortunes rise and decline. He makes plans and his plans are changed. When the moon is full, it shall grow thin. Some days it's easier to commune with gods than others. Bless the wheel where all things spin. This is the story of a life. A man learns nature is not always kind. Nature acts according to nature. Crocodiles eat fish and no one can be blamed. A man takes his fortunes in stride. Swaying first to his left foot and then the right, he learns to walk and hold his balance. He sees that gods surround him, but most days he walks his path alone. With one foot always forward, a man reaches heaven.

The oar is in the water and the boat glides along. The seeds are planted, the

ideas, the inspiration, the words rise like wheat from his mouth. Let one's speech be thoughtful so that small things said unthinkingly shall not fall as bad seed and sprout vines that surround him. A man reaps what he sows. What he dreams of shall come to pass. Before the world formed it was the Great One's idea, and so a man is careful about what he wishes. He knows his death is but another harvest. His life is spent nourishing his people. He saves seeds for the future. He offers up life and gives the gods their due. We've not seen the last of him. He is not greedy and so has all he needs—all the love, the joy, the days. When he hungers, there is bread. When he thirsts, the water is cool. He gives himself and the Self is given to him. He comes and goes in the presence of gods. He is given a field to tend and he tends it, therefore, his harvest is plentiful. As he cares for his children, so is he cared for in his old age. What goes around comes around, and so the great wheel turns.

*Horus speaks:*

I am life rushing on, born from the egg of the world, from the belly of a magic woman, born of my father's dreams. I am the screech of wind, the rush of falcon wings, talons sharp as knives. I came after you. I stand before you. I am with you always. I am the power that dispels darkness. Look upon the dark face of my father,

Osiris. He is nothing. Embrace him. Even nothing can not last. The seed laid into the void must grow. The candle's only purpose is to shine in the darkness. Bread is meant to be ground to pulp in the teeth. The function of life is to have something to offer death. Ah, but the spirit lies always between, coming and going in and out of heaven, filling and leaving the houses of earth. A man forgets, but his heart remembers—the love and the terror, the weeping, the beating of wings.

I am an Osiris, a man waking in the night, listening to the varied voices of stars. The gods speak through me and I am one of them. Yet, at times, they seem to shine so far away from me. Some days I push the plow, gather corn, make bread for the children, dig wells and wait for them to fill, and nothing of my life seems holy. It is only labor, sweat drying on sun-burnt skin. I go on believing in miracles. I bend my back and lift heavy stones, legs trembling, and I strive to believe it when I say, "I do the work of gods. The fields will be cleared. The temples will be built." If I were an animal perhaps I could be happy, untortured by bitterness, unconfused by what I think. I am learning to master thought, to do as I say I do, to say I feel what I feel. I am not angry when I speak gentle words. I do not beat the donkey and call myself beloved of gods. Truly, I strive to carry the load without noticing the burden, to be on this hot earth a cooling of water, to stand in the wind like sturdy sycamore branches, a place where birds rest, where cattle gather, where sap rises, wherein earth and sky are home.

## 5.

## Coming Forth by Day

The forepaw of a lion, the forearm of a man, the primal ray of sun. I wake in the dark to the stirring of birds, a murmur in the trees, a flutter of wings. It is the morning of my birth, the first of many. The past lies knotted in its sheets asleep. Winds blow, flags above the temple ripple. Out of darkness the earth spins toward light. I feel a change coming. My thoughts flicker, glow a moment and catch fire. I come forth by day singing.

Blessed are the cattle asleep in the fields. They shake their horns, tearing the dream. Blessed are the bulls waking, their first thoughts of creation. This day I make myself anew. I create life, my flesh coils about me foot to head. My breath rushes through and my blood. The mind sparkles, dances, the world whirls beneath the sun. I am given to know things I knew not yesterday. I burn like a god aflame, sail my boat upstream at dawn, pushing on quietly among the reeds, softly.

For you I light a fire in the sky. My love dispels darkness. I place the pot over the fire, add water, flour and meat. We shall nourish each other with words and bread. Born of stars, of pale moonlight skimming mountaintops, we are men and women exchanging glances at the crossroads. I am born of sky, filled with light. I darken. I am various as weather. I am predictable as sunrise, moonset, the winds that blow, breatheraking as Sirius rising. I am for you. I am the utterer of your name. Speak of me often and we shall live.

I am a thought that came to pass. Long believed, I live forever. I am words repeated often. I am a happy man. I am a blessed man. I am a perfecting man. I am love and shall endure forever. I am a thankful man, a man

of peace, poetry, dream. I am a well-fed man. I am a dancing man beloved of gods. I am an old man who has lived long. I am heading home.

I am an old tree by the Nile banks. A thousand birds nested in my branches and beneath, women cooled themselves from the sun. Years passed. I grew slowly and with grace. This earth I love, the water, the sky. Tomorrow I fall and, at last, the women with baskets on their heads shall make a passage across the river. They will speak for the first time in years to the women on the opposite bank. They will clasp hands and hold their voices to whispers. They shall marvel at each other's faces. And that will be as good a death as any for me, with women weeping, lotus blooming, and cool breezes blowing. That will be a victory. And so on, through the ages, have I been useful and loved.

I come forth by day. I go out burning. To the end, I burn white with heat. On the day of unwrapping the mummy cloths, on the day of opening the storehouse, on the day of washing the body, on the day of speaking secrets, I am with you, my love, as gods are. I stand beside you at the lotus pool watching that pink bud ready to flower. It is I, Osiris. I am joyful as a stone. It is not the joy of men I feel, it is the joy of matter. I am a presence. I am of the world. I am magic. I went the circuitous path of the unseen, from nothing but thought into becoming. I am anointed in oil. The power shivers from my heart down into my arms. Self-sacrifice is only learning to make one's self holy, to be the sum of a man, more than his parts. These breaths I release to the wind, make me one with the wind. This blood flows back to the river like water. This flesh dries, it cracks and scatters, dust again. When the light in my eyes flickers out, the spark

flies back to the flaming heart of gods. It is only flesh and breath, blood, bones and hair. I come and go out of the fire unchanged.

I am air and flame, water and dust. I am a wick burning in a blue bowl of oil, a fiery sun rising in a tranquil sky. I am the phoenix. I am light. I come forth by day. I am heat burning up mist. I am power, an ancient river overflowing. I am love and memory and sorrow that drift away.

My time is a reflection on the surface of water. A leaf falls and the dream shatters, breaks to pieces, the leaf drifts off. Slowly the waters calm and draw themselves together. And the leaf's life, like a thought, passes from me on the ripple of its own vibration. It enters the world. I am a holy man, not because I am so wise, but because I am a temple of god. I am a priest of the heart. I know what is mine to feel. I let the rain from heaven fill me. I give love away as easily as water.

I am changeable, yes. It is like this. A hummingbird's wings beat so fast he seems to fly standing still. Atoms in the rock whirl about, yet the rock holds together. Lions roar in the temple and the earth trembles. It is only yesterday and tomorrow keeping watch over today. The solid earth like a baby is lifted up to be kissed, to be blessed and set down again. I see things other men don't see. Secret words repeated in mirrors, bits of legend fallen from the lips of slave girls. I gather the greater seed as they thresh their wheat. I am an old priest dancing the mad dance, whirling, whirling, whirling.

I have studied the manifestations of gods and men, and I've seen the dead conversing in thin, reedy voices amid the air. I have read books of magic and made offerings of moly. I have longed to be free, to rise up as smoke

from earth into air. I am a priest of change.

I am a priest of love, a courtier enchanted by the slender ankles of women, by bells and incense, dances and gauze. Beneath the moon my boat rocks gently. I scoop up fish by the fistful and feed the ibis outside the temple. I remember to weave my garlands of onions and flowers on feast days. I plant my seeds and carry god in my hands through the fields to bless them. I drag the large stones to higher ground and write prayers to last forever, songs to gods and creations, women and kings. I have turned the spade and smelled the black moist secret smell of earth and I knead the clods gently in my hand. They are supple and innocent as woman. In the right season, I plant my seeds.

Oh spirits that guide a man through the dark halls at death, guide me safely in life past sorrow and depression, steer me from fear and anger and hopelessness. Let me always know the reason for my becoming. Let me hear what gods hear, see what gods see. When the sun is blotted from the sky, let even a small light shine to steer a man's feet. Let me stand in light, bathe in light, clothe myself in light. Let me sit in the lap of gods and hear words of comfort. Oh offerers of cake and bearers of beer, let me not also starve for love, thirst for wisdom. Let my spirit be stronger today than it was yesterday, my heart more peaceful, my mind more fertile, my hands more gentle. Let gods touch my face. Let me go forth shining. Let my feet know the way. Let me walk and pass through fire. Let wild beasts and thieves by the roadside go on sleeping pleasant dreams. Let me pass undeterred into heaven.

For I have made a reckoning of myself, of the

things I have done and said and of my intentions; and I long for nothing but to live as a light within, to enter god's heart singing a song so stirring that even slaves at the mill and asses in the field might raise their heads and answer.



## The Arrival

I have come like a priest in panther skin, having crossed the Nile by boat, having come through the gap in the mountains, having walked black corridors restless. Like a rabbit from the depth of its hutch, blinking at light, I have come. In my heart a lyre is humming. Its strings ring true. My body is a rolled papyrus tied with red string that holds no pretense. I shall not see such misery and love again. I spread the length of myself before friends and gods and let them study me. What I have done needed to be done. What I said needed to be said. No malice obscures the crystal pool of my heart. No worms hide in the folds of my scroll. I have come to the other world a pure man. I am washed and fasted.

There is no rest in Egypt. The laurel tree sends forth no shoots, the oasis shrinks to sand, the fig tree gives up no fruit. Men hammer the hard heart of the mountain, but the mountain refuses them gold. They grow weary and turn wicked. Yet I have done what must be done. I led seven goats to the temple. I offered cake to the gods. When I spoke, butterflies burst from the crevices of my lips. I burned three grains of moly every day. I brought my father oxen and ducks. I fed the hungry and clothed the beggars. I gave water to the thirsty. I drove away scorpions, marauders and thieves. I've sailed the Nile and walked through the gap in the mountain. Faithful in word like a scribe I have come. I've walked darker chambers believing the light.

In return I ask for only a little honied cake and a loaf of bread heaped high in the pan. I ask to enter those houses lit by candles and gods, and to fill my nostrils with the smoke of prayer, to come and go in the dark

world, to sail the Nile again. I ask for water and a strong sailing wind, and a delta island on which to raise my children, wheat and cattle.

I have come to this dark world like a bright star in the southern sky, a shaft of light gleaming in the hawk's eye.

13.

## Giving a Mouth to Osiris

I rise from a buried egg. Give me my mouth, I want to talk. Give me iron words forged in fire that I may speak the language of earth. In the dark house I stand at the top of the stairs. I am I. I am Osiris. I have come because I wish to have come. My two hands cling like ancestors. My lips are red as ox blood. I speak charms that drive snakes back into the rocks and bring the lotus to flower. In my time I've been struck dumb by the sun. Stars fall into my heart, a pool of fire. I am a man grown weary of ignorance, consumed in darkness and light. Give me a mouth, I want to talk. I am a child of earth and sky who rose from the buried egg, who followed his heart like light following the sun into this season of fire. Give me raisin cake and beer. Bless me with ancient dreams. Give me songs green as earth.

14.

## Opening the Mouth of Osiris

Untie these rags on my face. Open my mouth. Unbind my legs. Give me charms and incense and cake. Pry open my mouth with the red knife of heaven and I will speak of days unending.

I am a wild goose honking. I am an ember burning in the heartland of Egypt. Open my mouth and fill me with the countless lights of heaven. Bind the jaws of doomsayers and let me dance on their rotten teeth. I strain against the lies told about me as I strain against the bondage of earth. Open my mouth. Build a bright fire of rags on the west bank of the Nile. We shall roast the leg of an antelope. Give all the gods mouths to sing.

15.

## Giving Charms to Osiris

One day the movement of moon and sun had nothing to do with seasons and that day I crawled from my mother's legs. I am Osiris spawned from two thighs. In such manner wolves are made and lift their shaggy heads to howl beneath stars. In such manner hyenas call.

I remember receiving a charm, who gave it and where, how the spell held me fast as nets, quicker than greyhounds, fleeter than light. I remember the place in every man. Now bring me a boat in the wind, strong in the wind, fast in the wind. Sail it over this lake of fire, quicker than greyhounds, fleeter than light.

Look how the charm is everywhere, how it rests in the hands of men, how life creates itself as I did from my mother's thighs. Look at it as I must look at it. Its silence fills me up. It gives power to my hands, light to my feet. It fills my head with heat.

Bring me a charm, a boat in the wind, strong in the wind, quicker than greyhounds, fleeter than light.

16.

## Remembering His Name

At night in this house of fire I recount the sadness of years. I tell the story of months. Give me my name. Say it over red jasper dipped in an unguent of flowers. When I had no visions, ravens came for my eyes. The breath of life escaped. When I had no words, worms crawled through my teeth. I am more than flesh and bone. I am more than the deeds I have done. I am more than all I remember. Give me my name. Say it over red jasper laid in the heart of sycamore. Give me my name that gods may call me to soar like the hawk and crane.

17.

## Giving a Heart to Osiris

My heart sleeps in the house of hearts. My heart dreams in the house of hearts. It does not rest with me. It does not rest in the palm of my hand. On the east bank of the river, I am too sad to eat cake. White lilies float by on green water. A boat goes down the Nile. It comes back, having ferried another man to his tomb under the rocks. It hoists its sail for me.

I can't go. I haven't the heart.

Give me a mouth. I want to talk. Give me my severed legs and I'll walk. Give me hands and arms and fists and I'll shout and curse. I'll crush the skull of the snake. Throw open the door of heaven. Perhaps Ra has two jawbones to give me. He'll open my blind eyes, straighten my bent feet. He'll give me legs and I'll rise. I'll rise. By heaven I'll walk. I know my heart. It stirs within me. It throbs in my right hand. Blood quickens beneath my skin.

Give me my heart. Let it pump again life's power in me, infuse my hands and feet with spirit. Give me my heart. Let me rise and walk. I am quickened. No more sleep. No more dream. No more death.

18.

## Giving Breath to Osiris

I am the blue egg of the Great Cackler. I am the egg of the world. I was asleep inside a mound of dirt, now I rise from a buried egg. I live, I say, I live. I smell the air. I sniff the air. I walk with my toes in black earth. I give my family duck meat to eat. I guard the fledgling in the nest. What food there is for man in the sky, blue sky. A swallow darts and circles. I am the egg. I smell the air.

I am the first-born, the light of the sky. I breathe in the presence of gods under the belly of sky, upon the shoulder of Egypt. My breath is like a child to me. My breath hangs sweet in my nostrils. I am the blue egg of the Great Cackler. I grow, I swell, I sniff the air. I live there like the wing of a goose.

What a journey I have made, what things I have seen. I am one of you. In my hand I grasp the sailing mast while my left hand trails in the water. The trees are heavy with figs and olives. The dates drop to the ground. I have separated myself from myself to sail the green Nile again. I sail to the temple where gods have gathered to gaze at their faces in deep pools. In my boat the souls of the years sail with me. The hair stands on my head in the wind. I hear the splashing of oars like the cracking of a thin, blue shell. My son keeps one hand on the rudder. What a journey we have made, what things we have seen. We glide to the middle of the lake. The hippo raises herself and smiles. Give me a cup of milk and cake and bread. Give me a jug of water and the comfort of flesh. Give me air to breathe and a strong sailing wind and I shall rise, sail out of the dark world, be blown by the warm breath of god.

A sycamore rises white from the river, filling itself



57.

## Column of Gold

Beside the well the sycamore rises. Beside the well bright cornflowers grow. Do they rise on their tender stalks by will or does some force of love mold them, drive them up? In the seed lies the will to become and the greater will gives form. The power of the green shoot parts the earth. The water in the well is nourishing.

I rise. My spine is of bone, sinew and flesh. I am a man desirous of life. I will dance, harvest corn and make children. I will make my peace with earth. I shine. The power of gods courses through me and makes of my backbone a column of gold. I am the flower on its stalk, the budding of sycamore branches. I am the pillar on which the balance of life is weighed. Oh! my heart beats with joy; my life is golden as the humming of bees.

I live for a time and pass away, but the column of gold will stand. The powers of gods shape us, and those who give themselves not to its will, grow twisted, bent and stunted. It is easier to live in the light of the great will, to love than to grow in the shadows of self imaginings. As the gods will, so grows the universe.

I rise.

I am a column of gold, eternal, at peace, in harmony.

58.

## The Eye of God

The eye opens seeing old men, women and children. The eye opens seeing gods, flesh, vapors. The eye recalls the beauty of the ordinary. It sees me, therefore I am. As such are we all created. It watches and pierces the heart. Who knows its name? Call it love, creation, conspiracy. Call it an impossible sky hung with moons and stars. It is yesterday or tomorrow, a million years travelling. The sun circles and the hawk. We follow a flow. Thus looked upon the world receives its god.

I lived in the delta in a house of mud when I first felt its glance. I lived in its fire and never knew. I was asleep, dreaming blue dreams in the egg of the world. The eye opened and closed, blinking once perhaps as it does every million years, and I came from unknowing into knowing. I left my hut yawning. I was naked in a bed of light. I shone like day. I opened like a purple flower at dawn.

I am in the eye of god, resting in its blue orb.

Golden eyelids encircle me. Eyelashes grow like stalks of dark truth. I see what I never dared—beyond the bucket banging the well, beyond mountains pushing up dirt. Light shimmers in every blade of grass, gods dance in every leaf, blue and gold fires leap from my pores. I shine in and out of life.

A thousand forms have I, wholly mine—man and hawk, sycamore, lotus and fig. I please myself to be born and to die over again. I walk a flowered path bordered by a million years. Season to season I change as a leaf greening. I flow as blood through flesh. The eye opens and closes, and then . . .

What lives in the gods and rivers lives in me, parts

of the whole, one in One. I take my journey seriously. I've seen mountains, deserts and seas. Going nowhere one morning I suddenly entered heaven. I opened its door and passed through. I stood on polished floors and understood heaven no better there than while I was planting corn. Then I laughed, in that was truth.

Does the world die with me when I sleep? It seems so. I wake in the morning and it is born again—my wife, my children, my cattle, the stars. There are times in the day when I forget her, then seeing her pass, a jug of water on one hip, she is born in me and love rises.

All things are one beheld in the eye of god. We are his bodies. His time moves in our bellies. There is no season in which heaven does not hold the shape of its beloved, no time in which the earth does not sing. Under the sun, flamingos nod and bow and walk. Birds of the air spin in countless exhaled breaths. We are growing, remembering, forgetting, becoming. The many are one face changing expression.

The eye is everywhere. There is no act it does not see, no desire it can not hold, no secret that can not be known. The heavens speak. The flame bursts on your cheeks. Things are possible. In a moment we live a million years, a thousand lives in a breath.

Behold the eye that holds you. Without hands, it made you. You will be its hands. Without tongue, you become its tongue. Your work is its will. If what you make—your body, your love, your peace—is good, it shall be looked on by gods and endure forever.

When the eye opens, I look back.

## Entering the House

There is a house built for me on the rocks above the river where the odor of sweet roots and flowers keeps goats and gods company. To reach it I walked through papyrus marshes, spikelets of flowers towering. I rested shaded by tall reeds and watched a hawk in flight.

Through this journey it followed me like a beautiful wife, now crying, now singing. I plowed blue fields of flax, now wove flowers into robes, crushed seeds to make oil. I have been many men in my passage and as often as I thought of death, I thought of my palm grove. All my life goats danced upon these hills. All my life I've seen the same spring, different goats amid different flowers.

In the house there is meat for the hungry. There is truth for those who can hear. At night around the house lie a thousand stars. The world's infinite arms carry the weary home.

My bread is made of white corn. My beer is made of red barley. Hungrily I eat the gods' food and join a feast of mystery. Along the river barges filled with grain and cake and ale pass. Gods reside with sailors and farmers. Blessed are those who feed the people. Beneath fruit trees I ponder blossoms and tassels. Like the slender arms of dancing women are their hanging branches. I lie on my back and shudder to think it might be some vaporous dream. It is good to be here, a husband of earth.

No greater joy exists than a walk among gardens, smelling herbs and flowers. I am lifted from the fretful earth as the green plant lifts clods of dirt. The sun pours its grace upon my head, its luster an oil falling from a red jar. This is the house where spirit was born. My bones and skin I leave like rags. I tear the veil and see the light I

## The Confession

In every stone the gods live, in the bushes, in the eyes of children. In every stone lies truth one could hold in the hand. In every breath we speak what we know, being what we are. I am a man of good intention. I know a god or crocodile when I see one. I know the branches that make the tree. I know the sap that rises and falls and the fidelity from which blossoms spring. And I've heard of horrors awaiting men who never see the action of gods in things. I've heard talk of blood and sinew, but I know worse than this must be the shock of falling from earth, of becoming less than a gnat flung from the hand of god. It is not death I fear, it is unbeing and uselessness, of having never been.

I am a man given mostly to song, to pleasantries and not to fact. I've been too eager to congratulate myself. Confessions never come easily. Today I put aside the lyre and hold the stone of truth. Today I repeat what gods know.

I've told stories for the delight of story, but where truth was needed I told no lie. Though never easy, I turned from easy profit. When the cow ran, I ran after the cow. Whether I stood before children, men or gods, I've not given myself airs. Harder still, I've not mocked those who did.

I've spoken the names of the gods daily that they might live in me. I have not asked them to do that of which I am able. I've done their will when requested. When they gave me strength, I gave them the profit of strength. Through too much talk I've learned wisdom is silent. I've caused no servant to be whipped by his master. I broke no woman's heart. I gave my wife laughter

instead of tears. I took no man's life in word or deed.

I stole no milk from the mouths of children nor the temple ale and cake. I've taken no riches from the dead, other than the words by which they taught me. I stole neither grapes nor figs from my neighbor's orchard. I tramped not on the wheat in his field. When we had food, I fed beggars and priests; when we had but kernels, I fed the children. When the time came, I gave the king his due, though I had but little. When others had little and I had much, I gave the king his corn and shared with my neighbors.

I made love to my wife. We raised fine sons and daughters. We shared our bodies like a secret. When another's wife offered herself to me, I spent the afternoon plowing. When starved cattle came to my pasture, I did not chase them away. I killed no bird soaring above the cliffs, nor captured ducks on the public river. I caught only the fish our mouths could eat. I baited no hook nor deceived them with meat. When the floods came even to the floors of my house, I gave them my fields and turned the water from no man. Where once there was desert, I irrigated the land and wheat grew. The flowers that grew wild, I let grow.

I have not hurried a difficult day by praying for night. I extinguished no candle before its hour. I have not tested the limits imposed by gods nor tried to turn back the stampede of events that brought me to my knees and destiny. In all things—the opening of cornflowers, the opening of my heart—I've seen the hand of god.

Of these things I am pleased, but pride brings grief when proclaimed too loudly. Though I lay with no other woman I often imagined it so. I diverted attention from my wife. Not often enough did I praise her work or kiss the bread dough from her fingers. Not often enough did I

hold and pet my children. Not often enough was I silent in the temple of the world. Not often did I listen well when an old man told his story.

I have been tired and stopped short in my journey when I could have travelled further. I broke the bowl rather than wash it. I blamed the goat for rancid cheese. Many times in life I longed for death and despised the gift of gods. I've been angry, impatient and afraid. In ignorance I failed to see light gathering. Consumed with sorrow, I ignored the sorrows of others. Too often I judged the actions of friends, too often closed my eyes to the injustice of others. I've thought too much and done too little. I longed to take care of the world when I should have taken care of my family.

Not a perfect soul, I am perfecting. Not human being, I am human becoming. A phoenix asleep in the ashes of night, I rise anew each day. I burn with fever, with all I crave to know. I enter the temple, my mind afire. I've come to burn down the house.

Gods live not in the crevices of mortar and stone, nor in the jewelled eyes of a ram but in the hands of men and the hearts of women and in the land of wonder. Dip your cup in the river and you drink in gods. Breathe the air and gods fly up your nose. The god in the wind puffs the sail and speeds the traveller home. Nodding and crowing, the lapwings are gods clinging to sycamore branches. Daily gods rise in blades of wheat. Daily they walk cities by the river. Covered with the blood and mucus of women, gods enter the world and we call them children.

To see the goodness of things, we must see the god in things. To see the god in things, we must see goodness. To find god in sorrow, fear and death is to see its usefulness. To know is to understand. To praise the gods, we

must praise life. To honor gods we must make of the world something good. To be gods, we must hold goodness in each pore. We are filled with light, wholly divine. The sun rises, an eye of fire, and through its light we come to see the world as gods would have it.

In the land of the sun, in the season of the end, I climb the highest hill. The moon is a sliver caught in the trees. Entering night I carry the lamp. Though no man sees it, I shine my light into darkness. See how even a single beam cuts through so the path lies clear. The wolves run frightened. Still, no great harm comes to a man who walks unafraid to die.

I leave these words to those with ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts to know, hands to do. I leave these words in the world of forms. I am becoming invisible.

I speak the names of gods and so saying, my words give power and life. Their power gives truth light as a feather, a soul light as air.

Hail long-legged beast striding through the cornfield, creature from the house of light, I've seen nothing in the world but beauty. May we live forever.

Hail priest of incense, smoke and flame, fresh from the soul's daily battle, I've taken nothing from life but strength. May we live forever.

Hail wind in my face blown from the mouths of gods, I returned the goslings to their nest. The hawks soar freely above the cliffs. May we live forever.

Hail devourer of shadows, terror lurking in the entrails of mountains, I extinguished no man's light. I took neither his life nor dreams. May we live forever.

Hail that which brings the trees to flower, the wheat to grow, the lotus to blossom, which bursts from the black bowels of earth singing, I've not wasted the gift of your labors. May we live forever.



Hail lion of heaven, bearer of yesterday and tomorrow, I've not been less than what I was. May we live forever.

Hail seamstress of the cloth of life, whose thread is gold, whose needles are fire, I've not severed the cord that binds men to their gods and destiny. May we live forever. Hail candle guttering in the wind, flame that lashes like the blown branches of trees, my resolve wavered, but my spirit was never broken. May we endure forever.

Hail crocodile, crusher of bones hiding in the rushes of the river, I am not afraid. May we live forever.

Hail tongue of fire spit from the mouth of a god, hail word that took root in the desert. Hail craftsman of forms, utterer of life, I've told no lies. May we live forever.

Hail two pairs of lips touching in the amber blush of sunset, I've not wasted love. May we live forever.

Hail fair of face hidden among the flowers, sudden snake entwined around blossoms, I've not made my wife blind with tears. May we live forever.

Hail peaceful cat stretched out in the noonday sun, warm and content and asleep, I've not made myself so unhappy with plans and foolish insistences that I could not find pleasure in the hour. May we live forever.

Hail star in the darkness, white spider legs dancing on a web of night, I've made my home within. Wherever I go, I am no stranger. May we live forever.

Hail spitter of my blood coming back from the slaughter, I never shrank from the task. May we live forever.

Hail claw in my heart, talon of the hawk, knife in my gut, I gave no man poison and called it nectar, but the

Hail listener in the dark, I've not troubled myself with the small words men say. I hear the words gods weave into silence. May we live forever.

Hail odd one walking backwards with grace, who am I to say otherwise? May we live forever.

Hail bull inflamed with the heat of the sun, I took the blow and gave no cause for rage. May we live forever.

Hail head of the serpent, beauty, terror and grace, hypnotic yellow eye, I danced with an old man's young wife as he tended his garden. I spoke with her while my wife fed our children. She was like a well of sweet water that begged to be lifted up. I hurried home. I defiled the woman of no man, but god, how I thought of it. May we all live forever.

Hail seer of the beginning and the end coming forth unbidden, I've not altered the flow of nature. I released myself to destiny. A seed must take root. Winds must blow. May we live forever.

Hail great face beyond the sky, looking down on men, a falcon crowns the sycamore and I walk in its shadow. There are days I feel like climbing up to heaven. May we live forever.

Hail river that swells its banks, heart overflowing, I've not run from the flood. May we live forever.

Hail breath of god, throat of the goddess, I've not wasted my time with harsh words. May we live forever.

Hail child rising like a lotus from the river, I've heard the seductive song of reason. I know the truth in my belly. May we live forever.

Hail god of gods, web of being, I've not ensnared myself in my own sorrow. May we live forever.

Hail peace that comes of its own volition, I've not chased after things I thought would make me happy. May

Hail fortune teller, portent of things to come, I have followed my instincts. Though I sought the counsel of others, I have not let their words stir confusion. May we live forever.

Hail three faces: truth, doubt and expedience coming out of the snake's milky mouth, I've not gone back upon my word. May we live forever.

Hail wise man sitting by the river listening to birds, I've strained to hear the secrets of my own heart rather than the thoughts of another. May we live forever.

Hail two plumes of the ostrich, two horns of the ram, I've not wasted time talking while my hands slept in my lap. May we live forever.

Hail beginning and end, sunrise and sunset, I've not wasted light trying to reveal another's inconsistencies. May we live forever.

Hail smoking sun, burner of the mists of time, straight of spine, order sprung from chaos, I've not encircled other men with curses. May we live forever.

Hail seer into hearts, I have walked the burning sands, seen my crops destroyed and lost my sheep to jackals; but I've not ruined the good taste of my wife's bread worrying with these troubles. May we live forever.

Hail herald of kings on a barge brightly covered with flags, I've not proclaimed myself. May we live forever.

Hail vulture upon the sycamore branch, I've not made false promises or hasty oaths. I've not bound myself to the gods with a lesser magic than love. May we live forever.

Hail snake in the grass near his snake hole by the river, I've not searched for a crack in every pot. May we live forever.

Hail gold hawk spinning charms above the caves in

the cliffs, I've not tried to darken the light of the moon. I've not looked for mold on the bread of gods. All things are perfect in themselves. May we live forever.

Hail mind of heaven, arranger of the stars, I've not questioned the laws of nature, nor scorned the gods of another man. May we live in peace forever.

Hail hands of fire, baker of bread and men and truth, I've not fed myself before the hungry child. I've not carried off the praise intended for gods. May we live forever.

Hail white teeth, a biter of heads, devourer of men, I have not killed the cow nor uprooted the wheat, but that I know its spirit feeds mine. When the time comes, I give up life without regret to feed a spirit greater than mine. I shall die, a small thing become part of the larger world. May we live forever and forever.

May the light shine through us and on us and in us. May we die each night and be born each morning that the wonder of life should not escape us. May we love and laugh and enter lightly into each other's hearts. May we live forever. May we live forever.