



Sacred Travel in Egypt—Ancient Land of Mystery and Magic

Nicki Scully

The pilgrim's quest is age old. People are always traveling in search of the sacred, whether to the top of a mountain, a sacred spring, or across the great waters to an obscure oracle or temple. We are motivated by the desire to transcend the ordinary, to interact with spirit, to reflect, or to remember ourselves. Egypt is the source and the goal for many modern pilgrims. Her call reaches out through dreams and visions, schoolbooks and stories, and her art and statuary that live in museums around the world. The lure of Egypt reaches each of us in a unique way and can be a joyful, sometimes frightening surprise that wraps around our mind and tugs at us 'till we yield to do whatever it takes to get there.

The ancient Egyptians recognized the spirit in all forms, the life in all matter. Their neters, the gods and goddesses of Egypt, represent the principles of nature. By honoring the neters and recognizing that they are part of us, we come to know ourselves in a new way. When we enter the temples with this new awareness of self, we interact with these principles and are transformed through insights.

One of the most powerful goddesses we encounter in our travel groups is found in the temple of Karnak, a huge, magnificent complex just north of Luxor, which was built during many dynasties that spanned hundreds of years. A chapel dedicated to the triad of Memphis, Ptah, Sekhmet, and Nefer-tum, is set apart from the main temple. Inside, an opening in the stone roof illuminates a statue of the goddess Sekhmet, wife and sister of Ptah, the Creator God who oversees the creation of the material world. Her name means "The Power" and she is the lioness goddess, the great ancient Mother of all, creatrix and destroyer, and an expression of feminine fire. She expresses the energy of life itself. Since the 18th dynasty, for more than 2500 years in the same location, this statue has been a charged presence calling her children from her living heart of stone and granting boons to those who visit her.

Until I met this goddess face to face at Karnak, I only understood her intellectually, based on her myth. Sekhmet was the fiery force sent to teach a lesson to the rebellious humans who had become disrespectful of the rule of Ra, the sun god. After ravaging the land, slaughtering humans, and drinking their blood, she had to be placated through trickery. Many thousands of vats of barley beer were brewed with sacred herbs and colored as blood. This was poured on the land where she was sure to pass. Thinking it was blood, she consumed it and, according to the myth, became intoxicated and turned into her more docile aspect as the cow goddess, Hathor. Because of her

uncontrollable rage, fear surrounds many of the accounts of Sekhmet, yet she is also venerated as a deeply compassionate healer.

The original stone "hotep" stands in the courtyard of Sekhmet's chapel. Before entering her presence we place our power objects on the stone for an altar, light a candle, and take time to prepare ourselves with an appropriate reading from Awakening Osiris, (1) or a special invocation to Sekhmet. We leave our fears on the altar and pay our respects to both Ptah and Nefer-tum before entering the abode of the goddess. Each of us goes alone to meet Sekhmet. For me, stepping into her chamber the first time was like walking into an electrical field that was vibrant and alive. I approached the standing statue of the goddess and looked into eyes of stone that seemed to look back at and through me. A tear appeared to well in her eye, and the unfathomable mystery of direct communication informed me that I was truly her daughter, called home and directed to bring others so that they, too, might remember. I wanted to run to her and bury my face in her fur. Though my body stood still, I could feel her hold me, her coarse lioness tongue lick my face, and her powerful energy course through my body. She was both outside and inside of me, and to this day she remains as accessible as that first encounter at Karnak. She enters me to heal and has taught me numerous healing techniques. She gives me the courage to show up, the power to achieve, and the strength to continue.

Each temple or monument in Egypt still expresses the original intention with which the stones were imbued by ancient initiates. The neters that are carved and painted on the walls remind seekers of ancient beliefs. The pictorial images and symbols seem to unlock deeply held patterns in our psyche, as though we are programmed to respond, often in a very emotional way, as the energies are set into motion. Part of the excitement of Egypt is the ease with which one can connect to the energies that still pulsate within the stones. The temples are alive, and speak loudly and clearly to those who ask and listen. Insights can be heard, felt, seen, or simply known. The mysteries are multi-layered, faceted, inter dimensional, and express themselves in accordance with the development of each individual. Like tuning forks rung on granite, we resonate to the frequencies raised during our experiences. These vibratory emanations become part of us and affect our surroundings as we move forward in our lives.

Sacred travel in Egypt offers individual opportunities for spiritual growth and transformation. Because we go there to die to our old selves, it can be a true shamanic journey. One of the leitmotifs of shamanism is the disintegration and remembering of self. The journey through the underworld, through the underworld (Amenti) and death, is also a journey of renewal. Much like Osiris in the myth of Isis and Osiris, we find ourselves bound by the limitations of material reality. We are cornered, locked in a three dimensional box like the jeweled sarcophagus into which Osiris was nailed by his jealous brother Set. When Isis's magic proved strong enough to return the entombed Osiris to the land of Egypt, Set found him, cut his body into 14 pieces, and scattered them throughout Egypt. The phallus that was thrown into the Nile was devoured by a fish.

Through the traumas and torments of life, we, too, become fragmented. Those disassociated parts become scattered the way Osiris's body was scattered throughout Egypt. Like Isis, who erected a temple where each of Osiris's thirteen parts were found, when we travel from temple to temple in Egypt, we can find the lost and separated parts of ourselves and through that process become whole

again. To put her husband back together and conceive their son, Horus, Isis used magic taught to her by Thoth. The theme of birth, death, and resurrection is the substance of the Osiris mysteries, and a sacred journey through Egypt can personify that mythic experience.

Every journey to Egypt deepens and enriches the work. Group travel creates a wonderful dynamic, especially if the group determines at the beginning that it has a unified intention. With one heart and one mind, the circle can establish parameters that enhance each person's individual goals as well as extend influence into the community and world stages. I generally suggest that people hold three levels of focus during their journeys: their individual purpose for being there, a family/community/planetary level of perceiving the influence of their experience, and the cosmic connection of how the work they are doing fits into the bigger picture.

Although the players are constantly changing, the beauty of the play is in the essential nature of the script. Egypt's mysteries simultaneously work on many levels. Rhythms and cycles as true and as potent as the moon draw us into the living symbols that unlock knowledge. It is familiar. Nothing is new here. We remember. Our modern litters are the cruise boats that sail the Nile and carry us in comfort from temple to temple and from ritual to ritual to meet the gods and nourish our souls. Each person, with a unique perspective and experience of the processes and rituals, carries a piece of the holographic puzzle. And every group that visits Egypt's temples with spiritual intentions contributes to the continued vitality of her age-old sacred sites.

The gods of Egypt are part of us. They dwell in our psyches express aspects of our nature. I am forever grateful and pleased that these deities have so thoroughly permeated my own life and surroundings. My home reflects their presence; they reside in recreated temples in both the material and spiritual worlds. A walk to our pond is a visit to Wadjet's sacred lake, and when our resident blue heron is feeding, I sense the presence of Thoth. An altar to Goddesses in her numerous forms, our garden is filled with the flowers and sacred herbs that bring her pleasure, cala lilies, roses, and, of course, poppies, one of her most sacred plants. And when I need help, guidance, or inspiration, I can find whomever I need within myself.