

# SOME ESOTERIC TEACHINGS OF THE INNER EGYPTIAN TEMPLES

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In this article I am going to look at certain aspects of the esoteric wisdom of ancient Egypt. By way of an introduction I would like to make certain statements, to give you the factual truths, which I think should be known to all those who are interested in ancient Egyptian wisdom.

The first fact is that there were in ancient Egypt four main centres of theology, that is, of the elaboration of the ancient wisdom. The oldest was at Heliopolis, the city of the sun, as the Greek version of its name implies, or the city of ON as mentioned in the *Old Testament*. Heliopolis is now a suburb of Cairo. But there, in very ancient times, seems to have been evolved the oldest cosmogony of the Egyptians. Another centre of learning was Hermopolis, called after Hermes who was worshipped there, but whose real Egyptian name was Chmunu, the City of Eight because of the famous cosmogony developed there which divided the 'darkness' or the 'waters of space' into four pairs of differentiated aspects and personified these and paid worship to them. Another centre was Memphis which became the celebrated capital of Egypt for two thousand years after Menes had united upper and lower Egypt. The earlier form of the name was Men-nefer which originally referred to the residence of Pepi I of the sixth dynasty as well as to his pyramid in the necropolis and which gradually became the usual designation of the whole city, becoming Menfi in late Egyptian. The latest was Thebes which became the capital in the New Kingdom and synthesised all the previous cosmogonies.

How do we know that these centres of theology existed? There are records still extant of these various cosmogonies, such as inscriptions on the inner walls of tombs, on stone steles, and lastly on papyri.

The next fact we must know is that there are three particularly important records of religious interest to us.

The first is called the *Pyramid Texts*. By this I do not mean texts on the Great Pyramid that we all know of— in fact the Great Pyramid, apart from



all its other outstanding characteristics, is conspicuous for its lack of inscription! I mean the texts inscribed in the interior walls of tombs (having a pyramid shape) of the kings of the fifth, sixth and seventh dynasties. The quality of the engravings of these inscriptions, the whole perfection of the work, is amazing. As scholars have dated these texts to about 3000 B.C. they are the oldest records we know of. These texts are now thought to have been in existence long before the unification of Egypt. They are compiled from earlier sources and are incorporated in later religious writings. They treat of solar mythology, Osiris myths and worship, funerary rites and prayers, and concern the welfare of the Pharaoh on his journey in the beyond, in the various realms of the Egyptian *Dwat*. They are indeed litanies that reveal the Egyptian thought on the hereafter.

The second important records are called the *Coffin Texts*, called by the Egyptians *Books of Justification for the Other World*. They form the missing link between the *Pyramid Texts* and the *Book of the Dead*. These inscriptions cover the coffins of the Middle Kingdom of the nobles, and comprise incantations for a happy transition and protection against all the obstacles on the journey after death. They are found scattered throughout the Nile Valley.

The third texts of importance are the so-called *Book of the Dead*, which are inscriptions on papyri rolled up and placed by the side of the mummy in the tombs of the kings. It is a complete misnomer. It was never called the *Book of the Dead* by the Egyptians, but the *Book of Coming Forth by Day*— the book of the great awakening to the inner side of life. It was called the *Book of the Dead* by the German Egyptologist Lepsius when he saw the papyri beside the mummies and obviously thought 'this is the book of the dead' - a

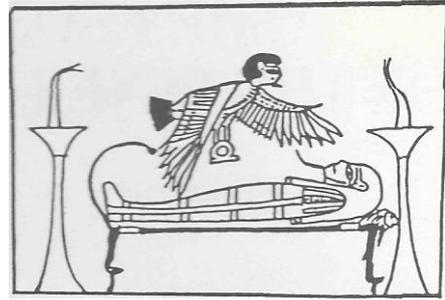
name which stuck! This is the greatest collection of Egyptian religious texts - comprising incantations, spells, vindications and hymns addressed to Ra, Osiris and other gods, revealing Egyptian thought on the questions of the after-death states of consciousness, the soul's pilgrimage through the various mansions of the "underworld", its initiations, and immortality. Three versions may be distinguished — the Middle Kingdom, the New Kingdom and the late period (Dynasty XXI onwards).

We have in these three documents a complete outline of Egyptian religious thought wherein we see certain changes and developments of thought from the ideas expressed in the *Pyramid Texts* with their outline of the Beyond, to those expressed in the *Coffin Texts* and their final redaction in the *Book of the Dead*.

We must realize also that in the course of Egyptian history which scholars date as approximately five thousand years of duration, not only did the ideas and religious conceptions change but also the language. The Egyptians were conservative to the extreme, but nevertheless they evidence a certain amount of change in their political, religious and social fields, and above all, language.

With regard to the language certain facts should be known. The names of pharaohs, cities and gods have come to us via Greece, and so what we generally have is the Greek form of the names. Until the decipherment of the hieroglyphic language this is all we could have. Examples are Amenophis which is the Greek form of Amenhotep and Osiris of Ausar. Furthermore, there are certain names of Egyptian gods which scholars do not think are of Egyptian origin, such as Ra, Shu, Tefnut, Nut and Geb. This would mean that they were gods imported into Egypt by another very early migrant race. A further difficulty about the names is that hieroglyphs do not include vowels, hence the constant changes in our transliteration of names such as Atum or Tern, Akhenaton or Iknaton, Ra or Re etc.

A word about the hieroglyphic language. We know that hieroglyphs are pictures or pictographs. If you want to write a word like a house, a man, a tree, a bird you can draw each of these and it is clear what you mean; but it is not enough to draw a picture to express an abstract idea. Something else has to come in. One easy way of showing this is to choose a word like 'wind'. How are we going to show 'wind'? The ancient Egyptians drew a full blown sail. So here you have the literal meaning of 'sail' and the figurative meaning of the 'wind'. But there is a third meaning, which is symbolic or spiritual. For us the symbolic meaning of the 'wind' is the 'spirit'. The



Egyptians in this respect expressed the 'soul' as a bird with a human face. Hieroglyphic texts have at least three meanings - literal, figurative and spiritual. Only the literal with occasional flashes of the figurative has been investigated by the scholars. This is due to their literal-mindedness and their (usually) lack of intuition or spiritual insight.

So, in order to express their thought in a written form the Egyptians first had the hieroglyph or pictograph. Later they developed signs for each sound, hence a phonetic language. But, as in our own language we have many words with similar sounds but different meanings, so did they. An example in our own language is the word 'plane' as used in carpentry and the word 'plain' which is either the opposite to mountain or that which is neither ugly nor beautiful. For each word there was the hieroglyph, the sign for the sound, and finally, a determinative which gave out the full meaning. For example, the word for 'mother' was "mut"; the mother is the womb of the birth, so we have the hieroglyph of the vulture for mut, the sign for 't', and the determinative 'woman'. The same word means 'death', for death is the womb into the beyond, so here we have as determinative the picture of a little figure with a sickle.

It is interesting to note that the *Pyramid Texts*, generally speaking, omit to inscribe the determinatives. This means that they are *esoteric texts* whose inner meaning was known to the priests but which, without determinatives, cannot yield their real meaning to the profane! The *key* has been withdrawn.

Scholars, as usual, take the texts in their literal meaning. In the book *Serpent in the Sky*, by John Anthony West, which is a summary of the last masterpiece of Schwaller de Lubicz. *The Temple of Man*, examples of passages from the *Pyramid Texts* are given as translated by three or four scholars. They make sense, but are very common and down to earth - not what you would expect from the great wisdom of Egypt. Then J.A. West gives his own rendering which immediately lifts

the whole passage to a much higher level. So we must admit that we are struggling with texts to which we do not have the key. However, if we are trained esoterically and have some intuition we can make our way more or less successfully in this maze. It is like a jig-saw puzzle, you find pieces here and there and finally put them together.

#### PRIMORDIAL CREATION

In the *Pyramid Texts* we find the old Heliopolitan cosmogony and theology. We have all heard of the *primordial ocean of matter* - a concept which appears in *The Secret Doctrine*, in the Vedas, and in the ancient Egyptian cosmogonies. In the beginning there was nothing but *water* say the ancient Scriptures. But this water is not to be taken literally — it refers to the abyss of primordial, undifferentiated *matter* out of which the universe is to be moulded. In the Egyptian hieroglyphs three wavy lines and three urns plus the sign for the sky demonstrate the masses of waters, or primordial matter, which the Egyptians personified as the very old god, Nun. In the *Coffin Texts* we have a description of this state of inactivity as ...*In the infinite, in the nothingness, the nowhere and the dark.* This darkness is described in great details in the Hermopolitan cosmogony where it is differentiated and personified as four mythical figures with their female counterparts ... the primordial waters (male and female); boundlessness or the infinite nature of the primordial depths (positive and negative also); darkness; and the wind of the hidden primordial function of activity. These are the famous eight of Hermopolitan cosmogony which concentrates on Cosmic Matter. In the Heliopolitan cosmogony Nun is the father of the gods. He represents darkness, inertia and age, but He also represents the nurturing principle, and is more or less androgynous and remains in the background once the activity of manifestation has started.

So the *Pyramid texts* contemplate a state of existence when there was nothing but the waste of waters, Nun, *when heaven existed not, and earth existed not, when existed not that which was to be established, when the disorder existed not (Pyr. T. 1040 a-d).* The Cosmic Ocean was occasionally symbolised by a serpent with its tail in its mouth. This implies a delimitation of space which is going to be *Creation*. Creation is a limitation. *Atum rises within his limit*, in assuming his form he gives the limits to the world, hence is said at the beginning to be within the coils of the serpent. The verb used for 'to exist' is 'Kheper' which means to transform, manifest, hence, come into being. This implies pre-existence in a state of latency. Manifestation is a transformation, evolution. Hence a text says. *I have evolved the evolving of*

*evolution. I evolved myself under the form of the evolutions of the god Khepera which were evolved at the beginning of all times... I developed myself from the primeval matter which I made. (The Book of Knowing the Evolutions of Ra and the Overthrowing of Apepi).*

At a particular moment in time, which the Egyptians called the 'first time', *motion* occurred within a particular space in the inertia of the *waters*. The 'event of creation' was the 'first time', which implies 'the first event in a series'. This joins back to the idea of eternal reoccurrence expressed in *The Secret Doctrine* as the Second Fundamental Proposition ... *The Eternity of the Universe in toto.. periodically the playground of numberless universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing (Vol. 1, Page 16).* However, no scholar has yet come to this conclusion although the idea of 'the first event in a series' as expressed by Rundle Clark should lead one to it.

This primeval motion was imaged as the emerging of a hill or mound out of the waters which Rundle Clark beautifully interprets as signifying the *Coming of Light, Life, Land, Consciousness*. Out of the unconscious undifferentiation arises conscious differentiation; out of the primordial fluidic state of the beginnings emerges the solid state of the creation. This emergence which is motion, activity, manifestation, was symbolised in Atum, the primeval God of Heliopolis, the Primal Mover whose sign is the sledge or vehicle of movement, that which carries along. The Egyptians did not know the 'wheel' until much later. They used the sledge, hence the choice of the symbol. The meaning of Atum is 'he who completes himself', which implied unfoldment and evolution.

*The Secret Doctrine* sums up this aspect in the following important words.. *The Secret Doctrine teaches us that everything in the Universe, as well as the Universe itself, is formed (created) during its periodical manifestations by accelerated Motion set into activity by the Breath of the ever-to-be unknown power within the phenomenal world.*

*The Secret Doctrine Vol. 2 Page 551*

Atum is called the 'Great He-She', hence contains within himself both the positive and negative poles of creation. The Egyptians gave him the double epithet of...

*aa* great through his uniqueness - the synthetic unity

*wr* great through his division or multiplicity, the differentiation of primordial unity, hence unfoldment.

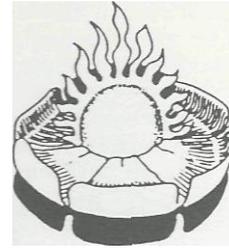
Thus they attributed to him the faculty of synthesis and analysis. The Demiurge is simultaneously the Cause of all manifestation, its possibility and its realization, hence, 'he who completes himself.

Atum and Nun are referred to in the seventeenth chapter of the *Book of the Dead* as *The traverser of millions of years* and the *Great Green Lake* respectively, epithets which to the student of *The Secret Doctrine* give out their esoteric meaning. In this respect there is a passage in *The Secret Doctrine* referring to Osiris's identification with Atum .. *The creative force in nature. giving form to all Beings, spirits and men, self-generated and self-existent, issued from Nun, the celestial river, called Father-mother of the gods, the primordial deity, which is chaos or the Deep, impregnated by the unseen spirit... He is the Law of existence and Being, the Bennoo (or phoenix, the bird of resurrection in Eternity), in whom night follows the day. and day the night - an allusion to the periodical cycles of cosmic resurrection and human re-incarnation; for what can this mean? "The wayfarer who crosses millions of years, is the name of the other", one begetting millions of years in succession, the other engulfing them, to restore them back (Vol 1, page 312).*

The two ideas contained in *The Secret Doctrine* of eternal motion and boundless space as the pre-requisite of any universe are the very foundation of Egyptian cosmogony. Also, the idea of the One Active Deity or Demiurge issuing out of the Cosmic Waters of Space or Chaos shows that the Egyptians knew of the ultimate Oneness of all manifestation, but this was a teaching of the Inner Temple, and was not promulgated to the masses except through certain myths which have come down to us.

#### UNFOLDMENT INTO MANY

So, from the zero of non-being emerges that I of being. This is the first step in time, the *traverser of millions of years* comes into manifestation and starts the work of evolution by rising on his mound, i.e., by unfolding to full self-consciousness and then by dividing himself *or multiplying*. From the One the two emerge. As H.P.B. states in *The Secret Doctrine*... *"When the One becomes Two, the Three-fold appears": to wit, when the One Eternal drops its reflection into the region of Manifestation, that reflection, "the Ray", differentiates the "Water of Space": or, in the words of the "Book of the Dead". "Chaos ceases, through the effulgence of the Ray of Primordial Light dissipating total darkness by the help of the great magic power of the WORD of the (Central) Sun". Chaos becomes male-female, and Water, incubated through Light and the "Three-fold Being issues as its First-born ". (Vol. 1, page231). I have not yet been able to find this passage in the *Book of the Dead*, probably because the translations are so very different.*



The very notion of *becoming two* was symbolised by the sign for transformation or the scarab, which means evolution, unfoldment. The beetle pushing its egg enclosed in a heap of dung in front of it seemingly referred to the cyclic recurrence of creation.

So we have on one hand the First Trinity ...

NUN Primordial Ocean, Chaos, Abyss of undifferentiated Waters  
 ATUM Principle of Movement, Time, sign of the sledge, demiurge, life, motion, breath.  
 KHEPRI Principle of transformation, sign of scarab

and on the other hand the second Trinity...

ATUM Primeval Motion  
 KHEPRI Transformation  
 RA Sign of the mouth and arm - the action of the mouth or the word in action

ATUM-KHEPRI merge in RA, the bringer of light, life, consciousness, manifested Deity, the *Word* which is life and light. Hence the identification of RA with ATUM and the joining of the two names - ATUM-RA.

The first step in creation is the emission of the *Word*. This is obvious in the very hieroglyph for

Ra - the mouth and the arm. Ra is the *word* made manifest as light or the *word* in action and concretises the symbolic meaning of Atum (though scholars don't see this at all!) The Prime-Mover is the spirit-word whose power is Fire. So Ra creates all forms with what comes out of his mouth, and utters his name as a word of power.

*The Egyptian Ra. issuing from the DEEP, is the Divine Universal Soul in its manifested aspect, and so is Narayana. the Purusha.*

*The Secret Doctrine Vol. i. page 231*

*I am the god Atum in rising: I am the only one.*

*I came into existence in Nun.*

*I am Ra who rose in the beginning the ruler of... what he has made —*

*I am the great god who created himself, even Nun.*

*Who made his names to become the company of the gods as God.*

*Book of the Dead ch.XVII*

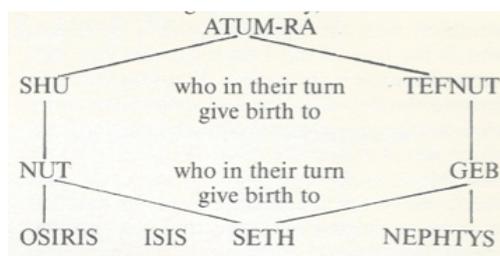
This takes us to a further trinity whereby Atum-Ra breathes forth Shu and Tefnut, the electropositive and electronegative forces of the universe, personified as gods who emerge from the mouth of Atum at the beginning. There is controversy here as to the exact mode of creation. Here it suffices to say that it seems obvious from the *Pyramid Texts* that the sexual act is meant and that the feminine part of Atum is personified in his hand; that, moreover, the exhalation by the mouth is also intended; that to the Egyptians every aspect of the act of creation, whether through the lower chakra or the higher chakra, was expressive of a divine act which itself was beyond all expressions. *The Papyrus Nesi-Amsu* sums it all up thus ...

*I made a foundation in my own heart or I worked a charm upon my heart and I laid a foundation in Maat and I made every form or attribute. I was one by myself, for I had not emitted from myself the god Shu and I had not exhaled out from myself the goddess Tefnut: there was no other being who worked with me.*

This working of a charm upon his heart refers to the Egyptian doctrine of the *Heart* which was the seat of consciousness. The God, as human being, first conceived in his *heart* that which was to be done and then pronounced the words of power and as a result forms were shaped. This is found fully expressed in the Memphis theology.

Shu and Tefnut are emitted by the mouth of Atum. They represent the centrifugal and centripetal force that rules the whole universe, the principle of expansion and constriction, and also, in a certain sense, *akasha*, the differentiation of primeval matter, the manifested breath of Deity which can be described as electricity, fire and light, that which separates and links the absolute spirit and dense matter and whose reflections are Heaven and Earth, Nut and Geb. Where there is movement there is also opposition, giving rise to the centrifugal and centripetal forces which contribute to the creation of positive and negative worlds. Shu expands, Tefnut contracts. Here again *The Secret Doctrine* throws light on the esoteric meaning of these gods... *The active Power, the "Perpetual motion of the great Breath", only awakens Kosmos at the dawn of every new Period, setting it into motion by means of two contrary Forces (\*the centripetal and the centrifugal forces, which are male and female, positive and negative, physical and spiritual, the two being the one Primordial Force), and thus causing it to become objective on the plane of Illusion. In other words, that dual motion transfers Kosmos from the plane of the Eternal Ideal into that of finite manifestation, or from the Noumenal to the phenomenal plane. (Vol. 1 page 282)*

We have here again a trinity, thus ...



the whole forming the *Ennead of Heliopolis*.

The expansion principle is called Shu, and he came to be known as the god of Air and Light, the god who separates heaven from earth as these lay in close embrace in the womb of his daughter Nut. He becomes more personified in the *Coffin Text* where he is 'co-extensive' with Atum. The fact that he subsequently becomes identified with Hike, the magic word whereby all forms come into existence, shows that we are very far from having fathomed out his fundamental meaning. This meaning has deep esoteric overtones, especially when we remember that the *word*, or primordial sound, is esoterically a 'correlation of *akasha*' as we are told in *The Secret Doctrine*.

But a further hint as to the esoteric meaning of Shu and Tefnut is given to us in their epithet, for they are called the *Double Lion-God*.

*Hail thou God Atum who comest forth from the Great Deep and who shinest with glory under the form of the Double-Lion-God.*

*Book of the Dead (Ch. HI)*



They pertain to the very ancient symbology of the *lion* whose sign is *fire*. Being in actual fact the first two emanations, they are esoterically linked to the 'highest group' of Creative Powers which H.P.B. describes in *The Secret Doctrine* as *the divine Flames, so called, also spoken of as the 'Fiery Lions' and the 'Lions of Life', whose esotericism is securely hidden in the Zodiacal sign of Leo (Vol. I. page 213)*. Represented in the Sphinx, the Lion of Self-Assertion, that guards the entrance to the Temple of Man and the Cosmos - the Pyramids, Shu personifies enlightenment, discrimination and destruction. These three

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are embodied in his consort, Tefnut, who became identified with the Lioness goddess, Sekhmet, who is the Eye of the Demiurge, the Eye that creates because it enlightens, illumines, but also destroys the unready. The vast symbolism of the wisdom of ancient Egypt is contained in that 'Eye' which was sent into the Abyss to take back Shu and Tefnut at the beginning of the cycle, and which was sent in the desert where men had fled in order to destroy mankind that has revolted against God.

It is the female energy of the universe, the fire that illumines, gives insight, but in the process burns up all the dross and therefore destroys the

coarser matter. It is that fire now called *Kundalini* which the Egyptians knew and which they personified as Sekhmet and in the Eye, which becomes a rearing cobra placed on the forehead of gods and pharaohs. a hint as to their knowledge of the *Third Eye* and its all-illuminating knowledge. Thus the identification of so many disparate symbols, such as the lioness, the cobra, the eye and the fire, becomes understandable.

I have far from exhausted the depth of the Egyptian wisdom. However, the hint given out can be followed, and a complete esoteric doctrine can be worked out which will vindicate that which is stated in *The Secret Doctrine*.



### OZYMANDIAS

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless  
things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that  
fed:

And on the pedestal these words appear: 'My  
name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on  
my works, ye Mighty, and despair!' Nothing  
beside remains. Round the decay Of that  
colossal wreck, boundless and bare. The lone  
and level sands stretch far away.

Percy Bysshe Shelley