

PURIFICATION RITES

in

An Egyptian Temple

Prepared for:

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December 10, 1985

Because of the prevailing climatic and geographical conditions, the entire water supply of ancient as well as modern Egypt is the Nile River. The ground that the Nile cannot reach by irrigation or inundation is, for all intents and purposes, dead. If this same ground, however, is inundated or irrigated, it soon begins to show signs of life - green, beautiful and teeming with vegetation. It seems as though being washed with water both cleanses and gives life - a phenomenon that seems to have profoundly influenced the ancient Egyptians' ideas about purification.¹ Purification is understood as the avoidance or removal of impurities which impair man's relation with the gods.

Among the ancient Egyptians "all religious ceremonies of Pharaonic times were prefaced by some act of ritual cleansing".² Here, it is proposed to give a brief account of the differing materials employed for purification rites, how the rites were performed, and for what purpose. The desire is to describe in outline, religious practice as recorded in the texts and reliefs of the temples as translated and explained by various authors.

¹ A.M. Blackman, "Purification (Egyptian)." in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, nd.), Vol.10, 476.

² A.H. Gardiner, "The Baptism of Pharaoh" in Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 36, (1950), 3.

Lack of space will prevent entering into great detail or even attempting proper justification of differing views. Examples of Hebrew and Christian rituals of purification are presented, when observed, for the purpose of possible comparison and for the sake of interest.

Purity was one of the basic concepts of the Egyptian religion.³ Everyone who approached deity had to be pure. This was especially true for the visitor to the temple. Without purification the effectiveness of the ritual was called into question. Above the entrance to the temple the following text was often written: "May he who enters the temple be pure."⁴ Basins before the temple gateway were for ritual ablution. Priests and kings had to undergo ritual purification before entering.

"Water of all life and well-being" was mentioned in connection with the king's bath. The royal bathroom, called the "house of the morning", was always situated in front of the actual temple; at Edfu, it was built into the forecourt. Even the sun god Re purified himself in the celestial ocean before each daily voyage. Baptism by sprinkling water can be traced back to the Egyptian custom of pouring water (illustration) over a person during the

³ H. Bonnet, Reallexicon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte, (Berlin, np. 1952), 759.

⁴ M. Lurker, The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt, (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1980), 97.

ritual bath.²

In order to get an idea of the purification rites and their relationship to the temple, we must first turn our attention to the actual temple building itself and its history. Most of the numerous temples of Pharaonic Egypt lie in ruins today. Most of them were modified or added to over so many centuries following their construction that it is difficult for the ordinary visitor to gain any idea of their original nature and condition, much less how they were used for worship.

The latest temples built in Egypt, those of the Ptolemaic Period⁴, differ from those of Pharaonic times in preservation, and in the nature and extent of the reliefs and writings that cover their walls. Because of this, these temples (especially those of Edfu and Denderah) will be used heavily. The texts in these late temples, such as Edfu and Denderah, include long descriptions of the temple, room by room. Each room is given a name and the particular purpose of the room is defined. In most cases even the decorations and dimensions are given. Each room and hall usually contains additional texts that repeat its name and give further information concerning its use.

² Lurker, Gods and Symbols, p. 98.

⁴ The Ptolemaic period extended from 332 B.C., with the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great, to 30 B.C. when the death of Cleopatra led to Egypt becoming a Roman province under Augustus. During this time, 332-30 B.C., Egypt was ruled by the Ptolemies.

Each door is similarly named and bears texts that state when and for what purpose it was used.

Other texts record the festivals that were celebrated and indicate when they were held during the year and how long each would last. Sometimes even the ceremonies performed were outlined in some detail. There seems to be significant evidence that, in general, the texts are based on sound ancient tradition. With respect to vocabulary and content, they often go back to the early days of Egyptian civilization, so that if we are careful and use them with discretion, they can provide for us a unique source of Egyptian religious practice. Most references to temples will be from the temple at Edfu since it was the only Ptolemaic temple that was completed.

While the construction of the temples of Pharaonic Egypt extended over many centuries, the Ptolemaic temple at Edfu was completed within a comparatively short period of time, and is almost perfectly preserved. Because of this the 2000 year-old Temple of Horus at Edfu creates an overwhelming impression.

Built on the site of an earlier temple, it was

dedicated to the sun god Horus ☉, Hathor of Dendera[☉], and their son Harsomtus (Harsentawi), "Uniter of the Two Lands". The history of its construction and a description of the whole structure are set forth in long inscriptions on the outside of the enclosure wall. The rear part of the complex, the temple proper, was begun in 237 B.C., in the reign of Ptolemy II. After several interruptions and continuations by succeeding pharaohs, the building was finally finished in 57 B.C. during the reign of Ptolemy XII. The entire temple took 180 years to complete.

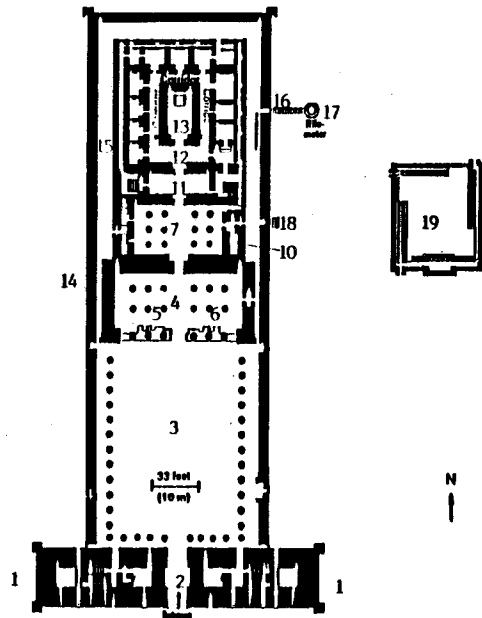
The temple was surrounded by a high brick wall, part of which survives. The temple[☉] is oriented from south to north. Between the two wings of the Pylon (1) is the

☉ Horus was worshipped everywhere in Egypt as a sun god. The earliest national god of Egypt and a member of the Heliopolitan ennead. Usually regarded as son of Osiris and Isis, sometimes as son of Re and brother of Seth. The Pharaoh was believed to be an incarnation of Horus and accordingly the legitimate successor to Osiris. Horus' four sons are symbols of the four cardinal points. Horus was represented in the early period as a falcon; later with a falcon's head; sometimes wearing the double crown and at Edfu as a winged solar disc.

☉ Hathor is the Egyptian sky goddess; goddess of joy, dancing and love. Identified with Isis and the Greek goddess Aphrodite. Principal temple at Denderah. Represented with human body and cow head with the solar disc between her horns appearing at a later date.

☉ See temple map on page 6. The numbers in parentheses after the name of a place in the temple refer to the numbers on the map.

TEMPLE OF HORUS AT EDFU ¹⁰



- (1) Pylon; (2) Main entrance; (3) Forecourt;
 (4) Pronaos; (5) House of the Morning;
 (6) House of Books; (7) Pillared Hall; (8) Laboratory;
 (9) Room of the Nile; (10) Treasury;
 (11) Hall of Offerings; (12) Central Hall;
 (13) Holy of Holies; (14) Stone Wall; (15) Ambulatory;
 (16) Northern door; (17) Nilometer; (18) Southern door;
 (19) Sacred lake.

¹⁰ *Baedekers Egypt*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984), 179.

main entrance (2) to the temple which led directly into the Forecourt (3). The Forecourt was a vast open court with a colonade of thirty-two columns; twelve on the east and west sides and eight on the south end. The most frequent name of the Forecourt was *Court of Offerings*.¹¹ North of the Forecourt was the Pronaos (4) or Outer Hypostyle which was most usually called the *Fore Hall* or *Great Court*. It was higher and wider than the rest of the temple, farther north, and contained twelve great columns. Two small chapels were built in the south wall of the Pronaos. The chapel on the west of the main door, called the *House of the Morning* (5), was for the purification of the King before performing rituals; and the one on the east was called the *House of Books* (6), and contained the temple library with a collection of books required for the services. Beyond the Pronaos lies the original nucleus of the temple, or temple proper. First is the *Pillared Hall* (7), a hypostyle hall with the *Laboratory* (8) in the northwest corner in which incense and unguents were prepared. In the southwest end of this hypostyle hall was the *Room of the Nile* (9) which had in its west wall a door through which the libations were daily introduced into the temple. On the east end of the Pillared Hall was the

¹¹ E. Chassinat, *Le Temple d'Edfou*, Vol. 1, p. 554; Vol. 3, p. 355-357.

temple *Treasury* (10), in which was kept the more valuable equipment used in the temple ritual.

Beyond this lay the *Hall Of Offerings* (11) or the first antechamber. Then came the second antechamber or *Central Hall* (12), where the portable shrines of the temple divinities were kept. Beyond the north wall of the Central Hall was the *Sanctuary* (13) or *Holy of Holies* often called the *Great Seat*.¹² In the Sanctuary was celebrated the daily liturgy. Surrounding the Sanctuary and separated from it by a corridor, was a series of small chapels, ten in all, which served either as store rooms for ritual utensils or for some cult purpose.

The temple was surrounded by a massive stone wall (14) which separated it from the rest of the sacred enclosure, or temple proper. Starting at the Pylon, the wall formed the east and west walls of the Forecourt, but from the southern wall of the Pronaos northward it formed the outer wall of the *Ambulatory* (15), which encircled the temple. In the east wall of the Ambulatory were two doors, the northernmost of which (16) led to a passage dug under the foundations of the wall itself and to the sacred

¹² E.A.E. Reymond, The Mythical Origin of the Egyptian Temple, (New York: Manchester University Press, Barnes and Noble, 1969), 316 (see also pp. 46, 47, 59, 266).

well or Nilometer¹³ (17) from which pure water for the temple service was drawn. The second door (18), to the south of this, gave access to the temple and through it was brought all the food and offerings for the temple service. Also through this door entered the temple staff, who had purified themselves in the sacred lake (19) in order to perform their duties in the temple.

Purification by Water

To the ancient Egyptian, the sight of the fertile land appearing from the inundation of the Nile River represented the primordial hill emerging from Nun¹⁴, the primeval waters. The larger temples, like this one at Edfu, possessed a sacred lake in which creation was imagined to

¹³ In the Egyptian tradition, lustration (holy) water is viewed as coming from deep springs of water that originate in the abyss, which is associated with the Nile River. These waters then are channeled by means of pipes, ducts, or other water conduits such as the famous Nilometers, directly into the Holy of Holies or Sanctuary, there to be available for lustration or drinking. See R. A. Wild, Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis, *Etudes Prelim. aux Religions Orient. dans l'Empire Romain*, 87 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981). Also in the Jewish tradition, post biblical sources relate the waters of *ḥayyot*, trapped under the Rock of Foundation in the Holy of Holies of the temple, to libation festivals connected to the Feast of Tabernacles. See R. Patai, Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1974), 24-59.

¹⁴ Egyptian Nun, is the god which represents and embodies the waters of creation.

renew itself each morning, a symbol for the beginning of the world. According to A. J. Spencer, "Practically every temple or shrine of this period was considered a replica of the first temple, built upon the primeval mound in the midst of the water of Nun."¹³ The priests therefore took their ritual bath in the water of the sacred lake¹⁴ prior to performing their duties in the temple.

As one enters the temple through the main entrance between the two wings of the Pylon and proceeds to the north into the temple precincts, it becomes darker and darker. For the most part, the temple was without any illumination except for what light filtered through the door between the Pronaos and the hypostyle or Pillared Hall. Small amounts of light were also visible through small windows in an eastern stairway. As one progressed

¹³ H.W. Fairman, "The Brick Foundations of Late-period Peripteral Temples and Their Mythological Origins," Glimpses of Ancient Egypt, ed. John Ruffled and others, (Warminster: Aris and Philips, 1979), 133.

¹⁴ Several inscriptions describe the water of the sacred lake as the primeval waters in which the sun-god daily cleanses his face. Amenhotep III had a great stone scarab set up by the temple lake at Karnak as a symbol of the rising sun. The deceased also desired to be purified in the sacred lake. Images of these lakes, which functioned as libation bowls, are found on offering tables placed in the tomb of the deceased. Sacred lakes were mostly rectangular in shape. It was also used for ceremonies involving sailing the barque of the god or goddess of the temple to which it was attached. See Lurker, Gods and Symbols, pp. 102-103.

through the hypostyle hall into the first and second antechambers, it not only became darker but from chamber to chamber the floor level raised slightly, with the Sanctuary or Holy of Holies being the highest point of the main floor. This was also symbolic of the first temple, being built upon the primeval mound as mentioned above by A. J. Spencer. Continuing with this same idea, Mohiy el-Din Ibrahim writes:

The basic plan of an Egyptian temple is logical and comprehensible. The Holy of Holies was a small *dark* room in the central axis of the temple toward the back. It thus appears as at the end of a long road which passed through the forecourts and narrowed through porticos and halls until the hidden shrine was reached. *This road also mounted steeply*, in the case of the pyramid temples and the rock temples, *less noticeably in other cases. But at every door we find a few steps or a ramp to mark the rise.* For the Holy of Holies was ideally conceived as the primeval hill, the first land to arise from the waters of chaos on the day of creation. Since all that exists had gone forth from this spot, it was a center of immeasurable potency well suited for the manifestation of a divinity.¹⁷

The Jewish tradition makes explicit the connection between the temple and the first spot of

¹⁷ M. el-Din Ibrahim, "The God of the Great Temple of Edfu, Glimpses of Ancient Egypt, p. 170; emphasis added.

ground to have emerged from the tĕhôm.¹⁸ A well known Midrashic passage says:

Just as the navel is found at the center of a human being, so the land of Israel is found at the center of the world. Jerusalem is at the center of the land of Israel, and the Temple is at the center of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies is at the center of the Temple, the Ark is at the center of the Holy of Holies, and the Foundation Stone is in front of the Ark, *which spot is the foundation of the world.*¹⁹





Such was the setting for the many ceremonies and rites that were celebrated in the temple. Now that it was built and dedicated or *handed over to the Lord*²⁰, we must turn our attention to the specific purification rites that were carried on within the temple itself.

As mentioned above, "all religious ceremonies of Pharaonic times were prefaced by some act of ritual cleansing" (see above, p. 1). Purification rites, which precede all important ceremonies, are initiatory in nature, preparing one for another phase of existence or for some

¹⁸ tĕhôm - The Hebrew word meaning the primeval ocean or waters of creation.

¹⁹ Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 10, quoted in The Temple in Antiquity, 65; emphasis added.

²⁰ See Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 32, p. 81. See also A.M. Blackman and H.W. Fairman, "The Consecration of an Egyptian Temple According to the Use of Edfu", Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 32: (1946), 75-91.

special office, or calling, and take place not in the temple proper but in the w'b.t., or "purification room", a sort of annex²¹. The priests pronounced a special formula when entering the temple. They always had to wash or sprinkle themselves in the sacred pool before entering. They most likely would stand in a shallow pool while water was poured over them. An accompanying text reads, "Going down to wash by the prophets...and then entering into the temple".²² The characteristic mark of the priest, from the earliest dynasties down to the latest period, was his purity. This is evident in the ordinary word for priest, *we'eb*, or 'pure one'. The word sign for *we'eb*, 'priest' is .²³  (variation )²⁴ 'web' means 'be pure or clean' and the sign  = 'i' is a pronominal suffix for the first person singular common, meaning 'I, me or my'. Even the retention of the Coptic term by the Christian

²¹ H. Nibley, The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: an Egyptian Endowment, (SLC: Deseret Book, 1975), 93.

²² G. Legrain and E. Naville, L'Aile nord du pylone d'Amenophis III, (Paris, np. 1902), plate 11.

²³ A.H. Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, (London: Oxford University Press 1969), 621.

²⁴ Ibid. pp. 560, 608.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 550.

Egyptians suggests that with them it was still his purity, rather than his sacrificial and intercessory functions, that separated the priest from the layman.²⁶

"Before entering the temple the priest had to purify himself in the sacred pool", and "the lustration which the king underwent before officiating as high-priest" was very similar.²⁷ This, in turn, is similar to the priests in the temple at Jerusalem who had to purify themselves in the 'sea' or 'lake' before entering the temple. Even the doors to the temple acted as a reminder of the purificatory act that was essential before a person could enter. Inscriptions above or to the side of the doors are very specific in directing the officiant to purify himself. All the inscriptions at Edfu have been collected and translated by M. Alliot.²⁸

²⁶ Blackman "Purif. (Egypt.)" in Encycl. of Rel. and Ethics, p. 480

²⁷ J. Černý, Ancient Egyptian Religion, (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952), 101-103.

²⁸ Culte, vol. 1. pp. 1-179; a collection of material concerning the worship of Horus at Edfu.

On one door for instance we read:

Everyone who enters by this door, beware of entering in impurity, for God loves purity more than millions of possessions, more than hundreds of thousands of fine gold. His food is Truth, he is satisfied with it. His heart is pleased with great purity.²⁷

And in another place:

Turn your faces to this temple in which His Majesty has placed you. He sails in the heavens while seeing what is done therein, and he is pleased therewith according to its exactitude. Do not come in in sin, do not enter in impurity, do not utter falsehood in his house, do not covet things, do not slander, do not accept bribes, do not be partial as between a poor man and a great, do not add to the weight and measure, but (rather) reduce them; do not tamper with the corn-measure; do not harm the requirements of the Eye-of-Re (i.e. the divine offerings); do not reveal what you have seen in the mysteries of the temple; do not stretch forth the arm to the things of his house, do not venture to seize his property. Beware, moreover, of saying "Fool!" in the heart, for one lives on the bounty of the gods, and "bounty" one calls what comes forth from the altar after the reversion of the divine offerings upon them. Behold, whether he sails in the heavens, or whether he traverses the Netherworld, his eyes are firmly fixed upon his possessions in their (proper) places.³⁰

²⁷ H.W. Fairman, "Worship and Festivals in an Egyptian Temple", in Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 37 (1954-55): 201; emphasis added.

³⁰ Ibid; emphasis added.

These inscriptions not only set before the priest a goal and high ideal, but they also seem to suggest that the ancient Egyptian was no less concerned with moral cleanliness than he was with physical contamination.

At birth the Pharaoh was purified with a cleansing which endowed him with vital power and certain divine qualities.³¹ Before the Pharaoh could enter the temple to participate in any ceremony, he had to be purified by two priests impersonating Horus and Thoth. This purification, instead of taking place outside of the temple proper in the sacred lake, was held in the House of the Morning (see map p. 6). This was a part of the daily ritual and seemed to serve several purposes. First, it not only cleansed the Pharaoh physically, but symbolically it represented, at least in theory, the King of Egypt rising each morning and bathing only to emerge from the waters of his ablutions at the very same moment that his father, the sun, arose from the waters of the eastern pool of

³¹ E. Naville, The Temple of Deir el-Bahari, (London: np., 1908), 6.

Heliopolis.³² The sun-god Re was thought to purify himself in the celestial ocean before each daily voyage across the sky. Finally, the libation water that was used for this ritual, was drawn from the well, or Nilometer, dug under the east wall of the temple to ensure extreme purity; it naturally follows that the waters of the sacred lake, which lie outside the temple wall, were not sufficiently pure for the purification of the King.

Several scholars, among them Nibley, Jequier, and Gardiner to name a few, have compared this libation to the Christian practice of baptism. G. Jequier feels that the word *wa'b* really means that one is baptized, in every sense of the word, including that of being qualified by baptism "to participate in the divine life", meaning the afterlife.³³ Gardiner compared it to Christian baptism since in a symbolic way the cleansing by water seems to serve as "initiation into a properly legitimated religious life."³⁴

Water was the most usual and most natural purificatory medium. It is not only a symbol of cleansing, refreshing and reviving; actually it does all these things at the

³² Nibley, The Message, p. 94.

³³ G. Jequier, Egyptian Religions, 3, 21.

³⁴ Gardiner, Bapt. of Pharaoh, Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 36, p. 6.

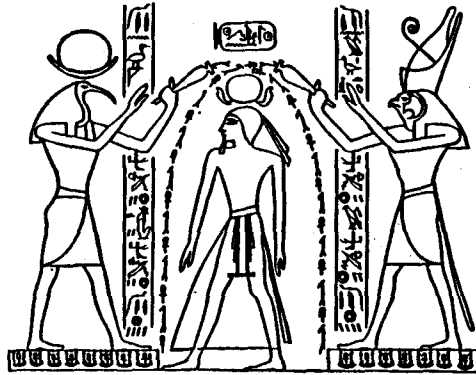
same time. Hence, the supreme example of one who passes through water for purification or cleansing is the Sun, who emerges from the waters of the Underworld, fresh, clean and reborn at dawn, again similar to the Christian baptism²⁰ but differing from it in that the Egyptians thought it not merely a symbol, but an absolute necessity.

After such a cleansing, or baptism, the King, or he who is now pure, can be a servant of the gods and can actually assist the Creator himself. He is allowed to see the hidden things (temple rituals, ceremonies, etc.) of the exalted land (the Holy of Holies or primeval hill), which rose out of the waters (Nun or primeval waters) of creation. As Horus and Thoth baptize a female subject, for example, they recite:

She is pure, she is pure! She is pure with
purity (or purification) of Horus.
Horus is pure, she is pure, her
purification is the purification of
Seth. Seth is pure, she is pure; Thoth
is pure, Thoth is pure! She is
pure!²¹

²⁰ It is well known that early Christian baptism took place at sunrise and in some regions could only be performed at Easter.

²¹ Nibley, The Message, p. 95.



As Horus and Thoth pour water (*ankh* and *was* symbols) over the Pharaoh, each declares him to be "very pure", - "thou art pure". In this Egyptian baptismal scene in the Temple of Ramses II at Karnak it shows the King being baptized with *ankh* (life) and *was* (divine power) symbols as he enters the temple. It bears the inscription, "Water for his Father, that life might be given to him".³⁷ This seems to indicate further that the baptism is not only a physical cleansing from

³⁷ Ibid. p. 96.

contamination, but also symbolic of an actual rebirth. In other words, the ancient Egyptian felt that purification or cleansing with water actually gave life, as the Nile gave life to the land.

Purification *always* prepares the way for things to follow, being a part of a larger sequence of ordinances. It never is an end in itself, but must precede each of the five basic Egyptian ceremonies. Nibley has described these five rites as: 1) the daily temple liturgy, 2) the ceremonial toilet in the House of the Morning, 3) the preparation of the dead king's body for burial, 4) the daily funerary liturgy, and 5) the Opening of the Mouth, all of which resemble one another in their main features, namely washing, using natron, robing, anointing, donning the insignia, and perhaps taking a meal.³²

Purification by Natron

We will now leave purification by water and discuss the other materials used to purify, such as natron, incense, unguents, etc. Natron, a native carbonate of soda, was used in various ways. Chemists have identified it as a natural soda made up of a combination of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate mixed with varying

³² Ibid.

amounts of common salt and sodium sulphate. It was called by several names including *hsan*, *san*, *sain*, *ntr*, and *bd*³⁷ and was often dissolved in water to enhance its cleansing properties.⁴⁰ One inscription reads, "I am pure, cleansed, censed with *hsan*, with *sntr*, with sweet fragrance that comes from the Horus eye."⁴¹ It is further stated that *bd* and *hsan* are often mentioned together and that *sntr* sometimes appears in the place of *bd*.⁴² Both are soda and as Claudia Dolzani points out, *bd* is called the "saliva of Seth" while *hsan* is called the "saliva of Horus".⁴³ All of these various words for natron or varying mixtures of natron are not only associated with the various gods but also seem to have purifying qualities. From a well preserved papyrus in the Turin Museum dating from the reign of Ramses IV and V, we see that a prefatory purification was comprised of drinking natron for a specified number of days, and until this time period was accomplished, the priest was not allowed to enter certain

³⁷ Gardiner, Egypt. Grammar, pp. 564, 582, 619.

⁴⁰ Blackman, "Purif. (Egypt.)" in Encycl. Rel. and Ethics. p. 476.

⁴¹ H. Junker, Die Stundenwachen in den Osirisnysterien, (Vienna: A Holder, 1910), 69-71.

⁴² Ibid. p. 82.

⁴³ C. Dolzani, "Soda and Incense in Pyramid Texts", Agyptus 48, (1968) 11.

parts of the temple precincts nor carry an image or statue of the god. The papyrus makes grave accusations against, among others, a lay-priest of the temple of Chnum who was charged with many acts of sacrilege, one of which was "joining in the carrying of the god's statue while three of his ten days of purificatory natron drinking were still to run."⁴³

Purification by Incense

Incense was used almost exclusively for the dead, although priests possibly fumigated themselves with incense before officiating in the daily service. The wailing women who bemoaned Osiris had to purify themselves four times before they could stand within the door of the Broad Hall.⁴⁴ Part of this purification consisted of fumigation with incense in order that both they and the lamentations might be pure.⁴⁵ Before the pharaoh

⁴³ A.H. Gardiner, Egypt of the Pharaohs, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 296.

⁴⁴ Since the Old Kingdom the deceased was accompanied on the way to burial by two mourning women, one at his head and one at his feet. These were professional mourners hired for the occasion. They were represented, on an earthly plane, the goddesses Isis and Nephthys bewailing the dead Osiris. The Pyramid Texts describe the lamentations for Osiris: 'They beat their flesh for you, they smite their hands for you, they dishevel their hair'. See Lurker, Gods and Symbols, p. 82.

⁴⁵ Junker, Stundenwachen, p. 6.

could enter the temple he had to undergo purification in the House of the Morning. Part of this ceremony also included fumigating the king with incense and providing natron for him to chew.⁴⁷ Whenever the living pharaoh went among the public, censuring or the burning of incense preceded him to banish any evil influences and to decontaminate him from pollution in the air.

For the dead, the incense became the element of his respiration. Thus we read in Pyramid Text 877a: "This air that you breathe is incense, and thy wind of the North is the smoke of incense."⁴⁸ Incense and libation often, as seen above, go together. Smoke, like water, has certain obvious functions that are not merely symbolic in nature. Fumigation repels insects and demons and thus protects as well as purifies. The use of incense, however, seems to be less indispensable than the primal use of water. The ancients themselves had reason to limit the use of incense at extremely critical times since inhaling too much of the stuff, even in relatively small doses, had a narcotic effect.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ A.H. Gardiner, The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage, (London: 1909), 76.

⁴⁸ C. Dolzani, Agyptus, 48, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Nibley, The Message, p. 98.

Purification by Oils and Unguents

Thus far, we have discussed purification with water, natron, and incense, but this is only half of the picture. It is clear that for the purification of water, natron, and incense to be effective it must be followed by anointing.⁸⁰ Anointing was done with various oils and unguents, which had been used from the earliest times, as was water. Incense and natron, however, were in all probability later additions.⁸¹ Anointing then entered sacred ritual as a symbol of purification. The divine image for example was not only washed but anointed. In a hymn to Amun it says, "Oil and wax are mixed with myrrh in order to boil the unguent intended for your limbs." The deceased also needed unguent and oil for purification and transfiguration. The deceased are depicted many times with a vessel of oil being raised to the nose. This was significant because to have a sweet smell like a god, is to share in divine grace. The name of the God Horhekenu, who was venerated in Bubastis, the capital of the Bubastite nome, has the meaning 'Horus of Unguent'. This god bore the epithet 'lord of protection', indicating the protective power of unguents.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 98-99.

⁸¹ Ibid. pp. 98-99.

⁸² Lurker, Gods and Symbols, p. 27.

The anointing with holy oil was necessary also to sanctify the god, or the dead who had been "clothed with royal and divine garments..." The oil was said also to bestow "vigor and endurance on ones body."²³ The reliefs in the Temples of Seti I and Ramses II often show the sequence of washing, anointing and clothing, and from an inscription in the temple of Seti I we find that the oil not only protects, but preserves and even revives.²⁴ Even though these reliefs and inscriptions leave us in no doubt that the anointings were indeed done, the actual act of anointing is never shown. This is unlike baptism which, as shown above (see pg. 19) is depicted often in reliefs. Perhaps this is because anointing was more sacred and was to be kept at least somewhat secret for, "The rite of anointing is the most sacred moment of all the royal ceremonies."²⁵ Although the rite itself is never depicted, it is at least known that the oil was placed on the head or forehead as anointing took place. From Pyramid Text #418:742 we read "Hail to thee, O fine oil... I place thee upon the (crown

²³ A. Moret, Le Rituel du Culte Divin Journalier en Egypte, (Paris: E. Leroux, 1902), 196.

²⁴ A.M. Calverly and M.F. Broome, ed. by A.H. Gardiner, The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938) Vol. 1; Pl. 6.

²⁵ S. Mayassis, Mysteres et initiations de l'Egypte ancienne, (Athens: Biblioteque d'archeologie orientale d'Athenes, 1957), 381.

of the head of my father, as Horus placed it on the crown of the head of his father Osiris."²⁴

The Opening of the Mouth - A Ceremony of Purification

The rite of Opening the Mouth was supposed to return to the deceased the use of all the parts and organs of the body by means of a miraculous act. In essence it was to reverse the process of death, allowing the deceased to answer questions put to him in the next world, especially those of the 42 gods who sit in the Hall of Judgment, where the Weighing of the Heart of the deceased took place. The heart of the deceased was placed on one side of the scales of justice and weighed against the feather of Ma'at, symbol of truth, as the questions were asked.

The Opening of the Mouth rite was basically an anointing and was an integral part of washing and purification rites²⁵, and was performed in the temple.²⁶ The exact place where the ceremony was performed on statues was called the "House of Gold" or

²⁴ Nibley, The Message, p. 99.

²⁵ A.M. Blackman, "The Rite of Opening the Mouth in Ancient Egypt and Babylonia," in Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 10, (1924), 58.

²⁶ S. Morenz, Egyptian Religion, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 163.


workshop of sculptors and goldsmiths.³⁹ The rite was also performed on the corpse in the place of embalming. Although the Opening of the Mouth rite has been found in private tombs as early as the Fourth Dynasty (c. 2500 B.C.), it did not appear in any detail until the 18th Dynasty (c. 1575 B.C.).

The preliminary rites of purification consisted of anointing with water. After this a bull was slaughtered, whose foreleg, the symbol of physical power, was severed and extended toward the mouth of the statue or mummy. Next, the mouth was officially opened by an instrument usually called an adze (see below), and various parts of the body were anointed with oil.⁴⁰ "One was anointed on the mouth, eyes, ears and different parts of the reconstituted body..." thus making it so "the mouth, eyes, and ears can breathe, eat, see, and hear, and the arms can act and the legs can walk."⁴¹ The rite is called the Opening of the Mouth, I suppose, because that is what comes first, and because the mouth is a very important organ of the body; allowing one to breathe, eat, and speak.

³⁹ Blackman, "Purif. (Egypt.)" in Encycl. of Rel. and Ethics, p. 479

⁴⁰ The purpose of the oil and the water is the same in the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, i.e. to revive and refresh.

⁴¹ A. Moret, Kings and Gods of Egypt, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 30.

The Egyptian valued the mouth most for its highest function, that of speech. Perhaps Moses was aware of this when he said to the Lord, "...how then shall Pharaoh hear me who am of uncircumcised lips?" (Exodus 6:12, 30.) From Pyramid Text 539 we have a fuller list of the body parts of Re that were anointed with oil: head, cranium, brow, eyes, nose, mouth, tongue, teeth, lips, chin, back, arms, heart, belly, buttocks, thighs, legs, feet, and toes, in that order. There are many reliefs showing the priest holding a strangely shaped instrument to the mouth of the mummy or image and as he goes over the entire body he recites words similar to these: "I open your mouth that you may breathe, eat, and speak; I open your eyes that you may see and your ears that you may hear," etc. All this was done with a special instrument of copper or meteoric iron called an adze. In Egyptian it was called the *ntr-ty* implement, meaning "that which makes divine" and the *pdsh-kt*, meaning "with which the mouth of every god and goddess is opened".⁴² The shape of the adze instrument was patterned after the constellation of Ursa Major or Big Dipper. This is indicated by the Egyptian word sign , *ashtyn*. According to Gardiner,

⁴² Nibley, The Message, p. 113.

the Egyptian word *mshtyw* means adze. Later the word *Mshtyw* was used to mean the Foreleg, i.e. the constellation of the Great Bear (Ursa Major) and replaced the earlier conception of adze. This is borne out by the later Egyptian word sign for the adze instrument **𓏏𓏛𓏏𓏛**.⁴³ The Opening of the Mouth rite, as with all other rites of purification assured the body of rebirth to a higher existence with the ultimate goal of the ordinance being exaltation, purification, and deification.⁴⁴

Conclusion

It has been shown that purification rites were indeed the beginning of the daily temple cult. All had to be pure in order to enter the temple and officiate therein. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the rites of purification were initiatory in nature and prepared one for another phase of existence or for another particular office or calling. The actual rites were not an end in themselves, but a means to an end and preceded all religious ceremonies, being part of a larger sequence of

⁴³ Gardiner, Egypt. Grammar, p. 570.

⁴⁴ E. Otto, Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual II, (Wiesbaden: Ottarrassowitz, 1960), 5-7.

ordinances. The materials used in the rites were not merely symbolic of cleansing, cooling, refreshing and reviving, but actually accomplished these things. And finally, symbolic of the waters of the Nile, literally giving new life to the parched earth, so does purification lead to the rebirth of a new life with the ultimate goal of the ordinances being purification, exaltation and deification.

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