



QUAREIA—THE INITIATE

Module V—Deities and the Magician

Lesson 4: Set and Nephthys, Osiris and
Isis

BY JOSEPHINE MCCARTHY

WELCOME

Welcome to this lesson of the Quareia curriculum.

The Quareia takes a magical apprentice from the beginning of magic to the level of adeptship and beyond. The course has no superfluous text; there is no dressing, no padding—everything is in its place and everything within the course has a good reason to be there.

For more information and all course modules please visit

www.quareia.com

So remember—in order for this course to work, it is wise to work with the lessons in sequence. If you don't, it won't work.

Yours,

Josephine McCarthy



QUAREIA—THE INITIATE

Module V—Deities and the Magician

Lesson 4: Set and Nephthys, Osiris and Isis

“You will go up and go down: you will go down with Nephthys, one of the dusk with the Nightboat.

You will go up and go down: you will go up with Isis and rise up with the Dayboat.”

—The Pyramid Texts of Unis¹


These four deities are heavily interlinked and central to the magician’s work. In power terms these four are subdivisions: Isis and Nephthys^{2 3} are the light and dark of each other, life and death; Set and Osiris⁴ are also subdivisions of the expression of life and death on the earth. Set is the desert upon which nothing grows and Osiris is the rebirth, spring, and the first sprouts of grain.

Set and Nephthys are polarised powers of death and destruction within the rule of Ma’at, and Isis and Osiris are the polarised powers of life and renewal within the rule of Ma’at. They are all ‘children’ of Nut, the sky, who is also the goddess who *is* the Ladder of ascent.

¹PT 222 [2, p.40]

², also  *Nbt-hwt* [5, p.129.]

³Nephthys is the Black Isis.

⁴ *Wsjr* [5, p.68.]

Let us look briefly at the magical aspects of these deities. You can research for yourself the finer temple details of these four powers. I will not go into too much detail, only what is magically needful. The majority of this lesson is practical work, but do your own research first. Also, look into the pre-Greek names for the deities and use them as you are inspired to. I have used the Greek names in places, simply for ease of understanding, but in ritual it is better if you use their original names: you get a clearer connection to the real power.

Like Hebrew, Egyptian hieroglyphs are unpointed. This means that even major vowels are rarely more than vaguely indicated, while unstressed vowels are left out entirely. You will have to try and sound the names out for yourself and let your instinct guide you as to their pronunciation.


Set


Set became the personification of evil in Late Egyptian mythology. This most likely happened as a result of fear of his power and the loss of the deeper understanding that flowed through earlier Egyptian thinking.

Set is the power of the Desert—both the physical desert *and* the Inner Desert. He destroys in order to reestablish balance, i.e. through his battle with Apep⁵ (chaos) in the Underworld. He is a destructive power, and like all pure destructive powers he seeps into the weakest fissure and cracks it wide open.

This appears in his mythology as his habit of sneaking and tricking. He breaks up Osiris (growth), casts firestorms and sandstorms, and is the searing heat of the desert. His power unleashed creates war and death to clear the way for renewal, and his power contained (through the *wꜣs* staff⁶) was used to clear the way in battle.

Remember the Inner Desert is about *what is to come*. This is the domain of Set controlled. Set unleashed creates a firestorm not only in nature but also in people (war) and in the Inner Desert. Whereas Sekhmet herself rages and destroys, Set triggers destruction in the people themselves, turning one against the other. When the *wꜣs* staff is held by a deity or king the power of destruction is contained within the people and focused

⁵  *ꜣpp* [5, p.38.]

⁶  *wꜣs* [5, p.54]

at something: soldiers going to war. Hence most priests of Set were also soldiers.

Looking back to the power of creation, the power of the Unraveller plays a major part in the power of Set. If the penchant to kill is released in men but with containment⁷ then you have an army of disciplined killers. If you have the power of the Unraveller in the form of killing, in men without containment, then you have chaos and destruction.

In this module's ritual we place Set in the south, the position of the future, the Inner Desert, and the sun at high noon. Set guards the power of Ra. The *wꜣs* staff is deeply connected to the magician's wand, and if you think about that you will see why and how a misstep with the wand can bring terrible destruction into the life of the magician.⁸

Nephthys

Nephthys is the polarised power of Set. She is the Black Isis, the power of dismantling, composting, guarding, and one who opens the path towards renewal. Here are some of her titles:⁹

Mistress of the Enclosure¹⁰

She who renews for Him the body that once was

Tefenut who is in the moment of Her wrath

who utters divine decrees

Great of Magic

who rules in the Mansion of Archivists.

Excellent of Kindness

who unites Herself to Ma'at the Great.

Whereas Set destroys, Nephthys begins the rebirth process. Whereas Set is terrifying, Nephthys is kindness, the guardian, and the guide.

⁷*wꜣs*, Grindstone.

⁸Hence you do not work with one.

⁹Extracted from a Roman period Hymn to Nephthys at her temple at Komir, translated from the original text by Ian Ransom, 2005. [8]

¹⁰The literal meaning of *Nbt-ḥwt*

They are two sides of the same coin, both children of the sky, and both connected to air: Set is the storms, and Nephthys is the Vessel of the Word¹¹ in the form of the protector of knowledge and the Library.

This puts us back in the Inner Desert. Set *is* the Inner Desert; Nephthys *contains knowledge* within the Desert in the form of the inner temples and Inner Library. Set clears the way for the future via destruction; Nephthys holds and protects the acquired knowledge and patterns, i.e. *what was worth saving* from the ruins of destruction. She *is* the power of the Inner Library, and when you realise this and her relationship with Set, the Inner Desert, you begin to get a much deeper magical understanding of these two powers. It also starts the process of understanding how these magical deities work with humanity, and how magicians can in turn work with them.

Nephthys is also the cloth strips that bind the dead: it is said that her hair binds the dead.¹²

Many years ago, when helping my nephew through death, I had a vision of him standing before a goddess in the Underworld whose hair flowed out around him, wrapped him, and pulled him into her. At that time, in my early thirties, I had not come across Nephthys, yet this was a classic vision of her work. She is a powerful goddess, and together with Set she frames the destroying powers that work in balance.

The dangerous tales of Set warn the magician that this is a destroying power not be underestimated or played around with. Sadly Set has been turned into some sort of sexed-up demon who is edgy and Goth by some younger magicians, which is a complete misunderstanding of this deity's power and mythology. It also serves to keep them from the real power expression of this vast deity. Nephthys, on the other hand, has become virtually unknown and ignored. These two work together as a holism and balance each other out; together they stand as polar opposites of Osiris and Isis/Aset.

Plutach refers to the tradition that Nephthys was associated with the desert and the fringes of the earth, while Isis is that part of the earth made fertile by the Nile.

¹¹Mansion of Archivists.

¹²And a similar goddess appears in Africa, Yemaya.

Osiris

Osiris is an interesting deity. He is the polar opposite of Set: whereas Set is the lifeless desert, Osiris is the sprouting grain, the renewed growth upon the land. He is also the Lord of Silence, which gives him dominion over death. The deity Osiris is the classic power of death and regeneration: Set brings about his death, and Osiris rises up again from the dead to bring new life.

When you go to do your own research on Osiris, you will be struck immediately on the similarity between the rites of Osiris at Abydos and the Christian ritual of transubstantiation.

This is not surprising as the very early Christians took refuge in Egypt, and many early Christians were in fact Egyptians. But this is a thread of research for you to follow should it interest you.

One of his titles is *Banebdjedet*¹³ “the *Ba*¹⁴ of the Lord of Mendes.”¹⁵ Another is *Osiris-Neptra*:¹⁶ “Osiris of the sprouting grain.” He is the spark of renewed life that rises out of the Underworld: Osiris triggers life from within death, and Set triggers death within life.

Nephthys, along with her sister Isis, walks with Osiris into the Underworld, into death, with Nephthys leading him to the West, the realm of the dead. Isis walks him up to the east, back to rebirth.


Isis/Aset

Isis/Aset is a goddess with many different aspects, but her most powerful and enduring aspect is that of the *restorer*: she restores to health, stability, and life those who are downtrodden, those who have suffered injustice, and those who have traversed the Underworld.

¹³  *B₃-nb-Dd(wt)* Spelling taken from tomb wall of KV19. Transliteration for *Dd(wt)* (Mendes) from [5, p.325]

¹⁴“Soul” as in the spark of Divinity that powers the person.

¹⁵The Egyptian name for Mendes means “stability” or “duration.”

¹⁶  *Npr* [5, p.130]

She is the seat of power, literally,¹⁷ for the king or queen: Isis/Aset is the throne upon which the monarch sits, hence her images often display a throne on her head. Her power reached widely in the ancient world and was carried throughout the Mediterranean, even as far as ancient Britain.


In magic Isis is the forward impulse into the future, the stability of the magician, and the restorer of that which has been taken against the laws of Ma'at. She is a guardian who wields power in the Underworld, the stars, and the land.

Magically she sits in the northeast corner of the directions: the threshold of regeneration and renewal. She bridges to life that which is rising back out of the Underworld, as well as that which descends from the stars. She is connected to the power of the Light Bearer, and like the Light Bearer she has a counterpart who is Restriction: Nephthys. Together they walk spirits into the Underworld and restrict them, then release and guide them back to the surface world.

It is worth pointing out that the Underworld plays a massive part in the work of a magician. You stand upon the shoulders of the Underworld, and on the shoulders of those of your blood who have gone before you. This is where you draw your power and stability from, which is why you did so much work in your Apprentice training on ancestors, the land, and the Underworld. The same is true of the *LXXXI Magician's Deck*: in the layout you will notice that a major source of the dynamics are various aspects of the ancestral realm, ancestral contacts, and the Underworld.

When things go wrong in magic, when you are injured, attacked, or disorientated magically, you go into the Underworld, bathe in the waters, sit among the trees, and work with the contacts there. From death comes renewal, and from the Underworld comes regeneration and rebirth.

These four deities are major power sources and contacts for the magician to work with in various ways. When working magically with this group of powers (Egyptian), often the goddesses are given forms (statues) while the male deities are not; instead they are fully present in their powers in the magical space. The male power outputs and the female power reacts to that output by creating a vessel or being a vessel. The male output comes through utterance, the wind, and energy; the female contains that and dispenses it. Hence often the magician works with the female statues as a physical presence, while the male powers are the energies that are moved around.

¹⁷Her name,  *is*t, means "throne."

As we progress through the practical work and the large ritual action, write out the positions of the various deities and ponder the patterns they create, the dynamics that become apparent, and what this tells you about directional power and deity power. Their positions are not dogmatic and can flow according to what the magician is doing—just remember that none of them are standalone powers: they are all deeply linked and polarised, and work in partnerships, families, and unions.

A note on the practical work

Remember the mark on the arm from the Temple of Fate, the mark of future knowledge?¹⁸ Hold it up before Set and Nephthys when you greet them to establish and secure your fate, so that you will not be destroyed.

Task: Vision

Light the lights, put out the tools, and open the gates. Sit down before the central altar, facing south, and have the stone shield in front of you, touching you. Still yourself and when you are ready close your eyes and see the Stone Temple as well as the magical room in which you sit. Also be aware of the Cave at the centre of all things.

Feel the powers of the Light Bearer and Restriction build behind you. Beyond them feel the wind and the moisture of Shu and Tefnut in the distance, beyond the north gate. Be aware of the ancestors there, and also of the Stone deep within the earth.

Hold up your arm that holds the Mark of Future Knowledge, a mark that was placed on you earlier in your training. When each deity appears, hold up this mark so it can be seen: it will protect you and also identify you as someone who has done the inner connections that will allow you to do this work safely.

Ahead of you be aware of the power of Hathor in the southeast, and of Sekhmet in the southwest. Let a sense of those powers and their images build in those directions. When you have a visual sense of them both,

¹⁸Module VIII Lesson 7 of the Apprentice course.

bow your head, hold up your mark, then see them turn to face each other with the south altar between them.

Watch as Hathor throws a thread of power to Sekhmet who catches it and wraps one end of it round her right wrist. Hathor wraps her end round her left wrist and the two goddesses hold the thread tight between them.

Sekhmet growls a loud growl, like a call, and from beyond the south altar comes a hot whirlwind, a storm that whips up the sands of the Inner Desert. Through the sandstorm comes Set. He is tall with long red hair, and beyond his hair is the storm. He strides up to the thread but can go no further, so he stands on the threshold looking at you. Hold up your mark and bow your head.

Beyond him, emerging out of the sandstorm, is a series of beings, some very strange-looking, all of whom carry blades—the Choppers. As Set's hair blows in the wind you notice that each chopper is connected to the hair of Set. They cannot step beyond the threshold, but they can see you and you can see them.

You feel a presence building up, coming out of the power of Restriction. Cast your mind to the northwest corner of the room. You will see a goddess with deep black skin and long black hair emerging out of the cross-quarter: this is Nephthys. Bow your head and show her the mark.

She looks deeply into you and then begins to whip her hair around. A strand of her long hair flows into the south area. Sekhmet catches the hair and holds on to it with her right hand.

Now you start to feel a build-up of power beyond the Light Bearer. The goddess Aset, full of light, steps out of the shadows and stands in the northeast corner of the room. Bow your head to her and show her your mark.

She too has very long hair, and she begins to allow a wind from behind her to blow her long hair across the room in all directions. A strand of the hair flows towards Nephthys who captures it in her left hand and wraps it round her wrist. Nephthys holds the hair tight that flows from Aset. As the two goddesses stand with the tension of hair between them, a presence builds up in the north.

Cast your mind to the north threshold. You will see a large white crystalline rock, like a chrysalis, with something moving within it. Aset

starts to sing, and her voice carries great power. The vibration of the song awakens whatever sleeps within the white rock, which cracks open. Out steps a young man, his face full of life potential, and with an energy that shines.

As she sings, her hair flows out across the room. In the southeast Hathor reaches out and catches a thread of the hair: now all four goddesses are connected by hair and threads. All four start to make noises and sing in a strange but beautiful harmony. The sounds seem to take form and rise up, which makes you cast your mind up to the stars.

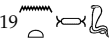
Out of the stars come two female hands. The hands gather the hair that is flowing from Nephthys and Aset, and the threads between Hathor and Sekhmet, and begins to weave them. The hands move faster and faster, weaving more and more threads, hair, and energy, like a spider spinning a web. As you watch, you notice that a thread of hair has risen from you. One of the hands grabs your arm that holds the mark and pauses for a moment. The hands begin to weave your hair or thread of energy into the pattern that is being made.

As the hands touch your hair or thread, you get a sudden strong sense of the very powerful and ancient goddess who is weaving a pattern: Neith.¹⁹ Only her hands and arms appear, the rest of her is obscured by mist. As you watch, more and more of her arms appears in the room, and you watch in fascination as her hands move swiftly back and forth, weaving an ever more complex pattern. The pattern seems to centre round the central flame, which is turning into a gateway.

Once the gateway is complete, bow your head to her. Neith then withdraws in silence.

A sound comes out of the east, a calling of a name. With that sound, the young vibrant man in the north, who is the power of Osiris, steps forward to answer the call. He is drawn into the centre of the pattern and stands in the power of the central flame. He glows with light. When his light gets too strong Set blows a wind at it, which dims it a little, allowing it to exist in the space without overwhelming everything round it.

A name is called once more in the east; a voice carrying upon the east wind and crossing over the east threshold. The voice seems to be teaching something through sound, and the young Osiris in the centre listens intently.

¹⁹  Nt [5, p.125.]

From the west you can hear the sound of a pen scratching the surface of papyrus. You cannot see anything, but you become aware that something is transcribing the words.

The Companion enters the space and stands before you. He tells you to remember what you have seen and felt. And then he asks you to remember something deeper. He puts his hands out for you to put your hands upon his. When your hands touch, your awareness of the deities in the room strengthens, and also a memory emerges from deep within you: you have seen or experienced this collection of power before, somewhere, somehow.

The companion then reaches over and touches your forehead. With that touch all the images, deities, and powers vanish, and you are left alone in the magical space with the candles burning. Stay in that stillness for a while.

When you are ready, put out the candles, leave the gates open, and write up your notes immediately.

Task: Ritual

Using the *LXXXI Deck*, map out the ritual so far, by asking:

“Show me the powers that are present so far, in this visionary ritual working.”

Use the mystical map layout. If you do not have the deck and do not wish to buy one, you can download the deck book for free on the Quareia website. Get yourself eighty-one plain cards and mark them up yourself with the different names, then add in your own images that are straight representations of the card images or simply colour in their borders appropriately. You will need to do this if you do not have a deck, as it will be used more and more frequently in the lessons. The Mystical Map layout is also on the website, with the positions and position meanings.

When you have looked at the overall picture so far, do a Tree of Life reading for each direction and cross-quarter to see what powers are present so far in those directions. Write down your findings and compare what you have seen in the readings to what you know of the deities you are working with.

Bibliography

- [1] Allen, James P. *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*. 2000. Reprint: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- [2] Allen, James P. *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.
- [3] Budge, E. A. Wallis. *The Book of the Dead*. 1895. Reprint, New York: Gramercy Books, 1999.
- [4] Budge, E. A. Wallis. *Gods of the Egyptians, Volume 2*. 1904. Reprint, Oxon: Routledge, 2010.
- [5] Faulkner, Raymond O. *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. 1962. Reprint, Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1981.
- [6] Gardiner, Alan. *Egyptian Grammar*. 3rd Ed. Rev. 1957. Reprint, Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1999.
- [7] Meltzer, Edmund S. *In Search of Sinuhe: "What's in a name?"* Paper presented at The 58th Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, Wyndham Toledo Hotel, Toledo, Ohio, April 20, 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20111007013806/http://www.ceae.unlugar.com/meltzer.htm> (accessed October 5, 2015).
- [8] Ransom, Ian. *Translation of original text of a hymn to Nephthys*. 2005. Message posted to <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Fellowship-of-Isis/conversations/topics/8530> (accessed October 5, 2015).

QUAREIA

COPYRIGHT

© Josephine McCarthy 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher.