

Class Set – Do not write

Egyptian Creation

In the beginning, before there was time, water spread in every direction, though there was no direction really because there was no up, no down; no east, no west; no inside, no outside. This water lay cold and colorless. A wet nothingness that hummed *nnnnnnun*. Nun, Nun. This was the cosmos, hardly more than empty chaos. There was but a single entity, so there was no question of order: The cosmos was ordered perforce. The order of a dot, a circle, a sphere, without beginning or end. Utter consistency. Perfect order.

But something there is that doesn't like order. Order can be tolerated temporarily, but on and on like that? Infinite order? How unutterably intolerable. Boring, really.

A hint came. A slight poke. Then another, a little firmer. A full-fledged beat now. More of them. Insistent beats, breaking up the hum, moving the water imperceptibly at first, then in tiny waves, then bigger ones, huge ones now, tsunamis, yet still in a pattern, still ordered, one after another at regular intervals. Thump, thump, thump, thump.

A heart formed around this pulse, for every rhythm evokes an origin.

And in that heart nestled a thought. After all, some think with the head and others think with the heart. This was definitely a heart thought.

Ah, the first and the profound disorder: thought.

This single thought rubbed fast and faster until it warmed and finally ignited into language. The god Ra sprang to life with a word already in his mouth. More bubbled up. Words now crowded his mouth. They trampled his tongue and pushed against his teeth, his lips. He had so many words to enunciate. The need hammered at him. From that very need came lungs and a voice box and muscles to make it all move. Ra shouted the first word, over and over, and those shouts rose in molten mass up and up and spewed forth through the waters of Nun in a fiery explosion.

That was the first firmament, the mound of creation that Ra called *Benben* - it all started with a single tip, like a volcano mouth. Ra stood upon it in triumph and knew he must speak more. For in his voice lay all creation. He must create, he must never stop creating.

Ra spat and the moisture from within him formed the goddess Tefnut, and the breathy force that propelled that moisture formed the god Shu. The products of his new mouth, his new lungs.

So there were three of them now, three deities distinct from the vast wallow of Nun. It felt wonderful to be a triad; it felt sturdy, invincible even. With three backs together, you could face everything at once. With three, you could explore the three dimensions simultaneously. Though there was no music yet, though there were no colors yet, Ra sensed the possibilities of three at some level he was not yet ready to understand.

But even more than the possibilities was the reality. Life mattered. And being a father mattered. Ra rejoiced in his self-creation. He rejoiced in his creation of his daughter and son. This was a good beginning. Ah, what water had yielded. Ah, indeed.

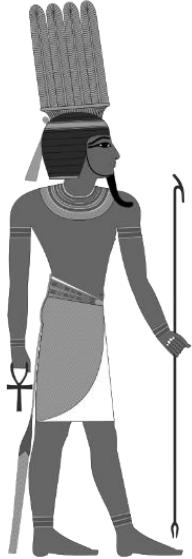
Shu and Tefnut, these royal children, played constantly. They stalked each other and pounced and wrestled. They rolled around and swatted each other. They were like lion cubs, and Ra was like a huge patient lion father, posing contentedly as they chased his tail or combed his mane, though of



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course there were no lions yet. There were only Shu and Tefnut and Ra, and the vast spreading Nun around the island the triad roamed.

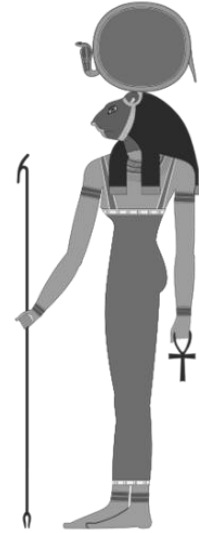
One night, instead of sleeping, Shu and Tefnut went off wandering in the dark. Shu was air and Tefnut was rain and neither of them had special powers to let them see through the blackness. So, as children will, they got lost.



When Ra realized they were absent, he felt bereft. The difference between being alone in the vastness and being with his two children was the difference between sorrow and delight. He was lonely. And, worse, he grew anxious. There could be nothing out there to hurt the children, for, after all, there could be nothing out there period. What existed existed only because Ra had made it. Yet anxiety made this god itch all over until he wanted to scream and scratch his own skin off. He needed those children. He loved them.

At this time Ra had only one eye. He plucked it out from his forehead and sent his eye searching for Shu and Tefnut, for his darlings.

Then he settled down and waited for the eye to return. He waited and waited. While he waited, blind and cold, he



curled in on himself and wondered what he would do if his eye didn't find the children. It might search in vain forever. But the children could come back on their own anyway - that was possible. But that was terrible, too, for their father wouldn't even be able to see them. Ra rolled in wretchedness.

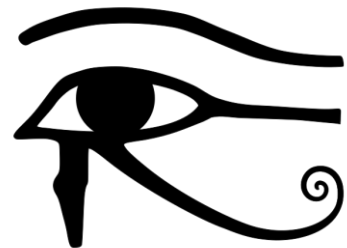
And so Ra fashioned for himself a new eye, as he waited and waited some more.

Meanwhile the first eye of Ra, the original eye, lit up the world and flew across the firmament. It hugged the sands. It seeped into rock crevices. And now it soared across the waters, rising with each wave, falling as it crested. The old eye checked everywhere, everywhere and at last found the cowering cubs, who had grown all gangly and awkward, almost full size by now, and led them back to their father, dripping and skinny and needy.

Ra gathered his children to his chest and felt whole again. These children were his very limbs, they were his own breath, his own fluids, they were everything. He broke himself on the joy of being reunited and he wept. With great huge sobs, he exhausted himself. And strange creatures - human beings - stepped delicately out of each teardrop, resplendent in their wet newness, gaping at the awe-inspiring wonder of creation. Innocent, yes. Yet with hungry hearts that made Ra's new eye blink, for he sensed those hungry human hearts would allow innocence to be consumed and vanish.

But the old eye of Ra, the original eye, was glad to see that humans were corruptible. That eye wanted Ra's creations to make trouble for him, for Ra had been disloyal-Ra had replaced the old eye with the new eye. The old eye smoldered in fury.

Ra was stupefied at the old eye's reaction. He understood nothing of jealousy, nothing of loyalty. Those emotions came from interacting, and he had never had to interact with anyone but Tefnut and Shu. Still, as his old eye hissed and spluttered, he understood the need



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for appeasement. And so he transformed his old eye into a snake, the very first snake ever, a cobra. And he picked it up and put it on the front of his forehead-the place of highest honor-and he called it his Iaret. It worked! The Iaret was proud to precede Ra wherever he went.

Everything was getting better and better.

But now something else was happening. Snakes slithered across Ra's feet. They slithered across Shu's and Tefnut's feet. Amazing: Creation had led to more creation. Shu and Tefnut considered the snakes and they knew, as though by instinct, that they could create, too. Air and moisture can dance together, after all. A mist, Shu and Tefnut tangoed over the unending sea, they dipped and twirled in graceful embrace, and Shu breathed into Tefnut until they gave birth to Geb and Nut.

The new generation lay there, tangled in a heated hug, so much so that they risked merging entirely.

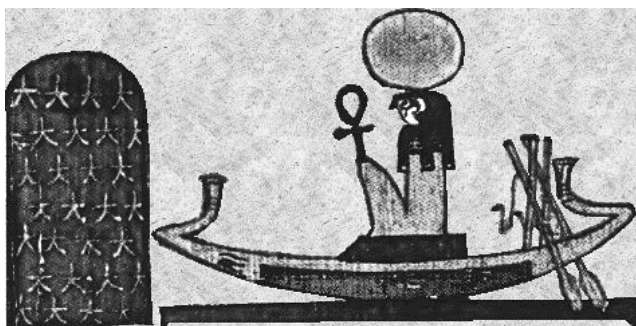
Ra and his daughter Tefnut looked on with puzzled interest, but the god Shu knew better. Nothing could happen right if Geb and Nut didn't separate. Shu sensed that life wanted to crawl forth on the back of Geb and for that to happen, light needed to dance between Geb and Nut. So Shu did what a father had to do; he tore Geb and Nut asunder. He raised Nut up in his long strong arms to make an arch of sky, leaving Geb prostrate, the waiting earth, ready for whatever gifts might come from above and below.



But Ra didn't wait for anything; it wasn't in his nature. He looked at the bow Nut's body formed and all those words that filled his heart now spilled out of his mouth in a new form: stories. Ra became brilliant like Nut, brilliant with stories. He had to tell those stories, those stories could make anything happen, anytime, anywhere.

Ra snuck behind the mountain Manu (which appeared even as he said the name) and climbed into his boat Manjet (again gaining solidity as it was named, yet somehow being as old as forever, millions upon millions of years old) and sailed across the sky as a glowing ball of fire that appeared to roll over Nut's thighs and spine and neck. He landed in the far west horizon (since the directions now existed as he spoke them) and then journeyed back to Manu, to his starting point, this time traveling through the underworld Duat in his second boat, Mesektet.

There was something exhilarating and renewing at the start of the journey across the sky and something tiring and withering at the end. A tantalizing mix. Ra had to repeat it; it was far too



involving to experience only once. He allowed himself to be born again, coming out through Nut as though she were his mother rather than his granddaughter, reversing the order of things, confusing time by letting it circle back on itself. He rose as a baby. By midday, when the boat Manjet arrived at the first knob of Nut's spine, he was a man in the prime of life, a hero ready to tackle any problem and win. He set in the

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evening as an old man, tottering on a short stick, a flame fanning to a flicker of heat and finally a memory of warmth. What a journey. What a thrill. He had to repeat it forever.

And so a new order was formed. The sun god Ra defined the fundamental rhythm of life. But disorder could never disappear now; life entails it. And Ra's words ensured it.

Pay attention, all.

Behold my majesty.

I am the Lord of Radiance.

I am the father of all, the lover of strength, the giant of victory.

So now, let us conquer.

Conquer? What could that mean? Who was there to conquer? Where was the disorder, the discord that would require vanquishing? Ra couldn't see it yet. But he knew beyond a doubt it was coming.

Then Ra himself took on the form of a man and became the first Pharaoh, who ruled over Egypt for thousands of years. But, being a man, Ra grew old and feeble, and the humans began to mock him and laugh at him and disobey his laws. This, of course, made Ra very angry, so he called all of the gods together to ask their advice. "Turn your mighty Eye upon them and send destruction," they advised.

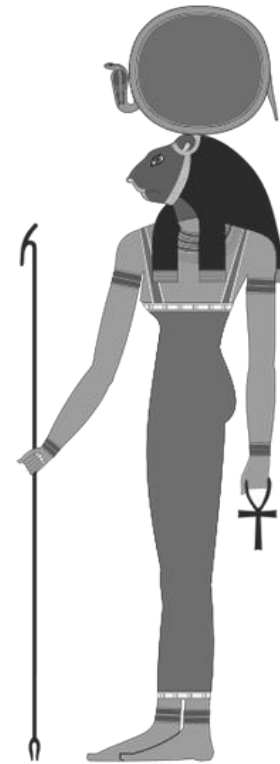
So Ra cast a terrible look from the Eye and his daughter Sekhmet, the fiercest of all goddesses, came to be. Like a lioness, she began to slaughter her prey, enjoying their blood and suffering. For many days and nights the Nile ran red with blood, so much so that Ra began to pity the people despite all they had said and done.

To end the slaughter, Ra sent for seven thousand jars of beer and mixed it with red ochre to look like blood. Then he poured the red beer over the fields so when Sekhmet saw it, she licked her lips and stooped to drink. She drank and drank, laughing, until she reached the point she could no longer kill and mankind was saved. Ra said to his daughter, "You come in peace now, sweet one," and her name was changed to Hathor. From then on she was a goddess of sweetness and beauty.

Though mankind was saved, Ra continued to age, growing even more feeble and weak. But still, he would not give up his power. Now Isis, the mother and goddess of nature and magic, saw Ra's weakness and wanted him to give up his power. In fact she wanted to know the Secret Name to gain power for herself. So she placed the first cobra at a place on a dusty road Ra passed each day, and he was bitten. As the poison coursed through his body, Isis came to him. "I can cure you," she assured, "but you must tell me the Secret Name."

After trying to trick Isis with many falsehoods, Ra was finally forced to tell her the truth. "Let the Name of Power pass from my heart to yours, but swear to me that you will tell no one but your only son, Horus, and no other gods or men."

After so swearing, Isis took the poison from Ra. But he no longer had the power to reign on earth. Instead, he took his place in the heavens, traveling each day across the sky.



Name _____

Per _____

Egyptian Creation

1. Who was the first god of the Egyptians? _____
2. How did this god create new beings and objects? _____
3. What was the first firmament (land) called? _____
4. What are the names of the first two gods created by Ra? _____ & _____
5. What does Ra send out to find his lost children? _____
6. What creatures are formed from Ra's tears of joy? _____
7. What does Ra transform his old eye into? _____
8. Who are the children of Shu and Tefnut? _____ & _____
9. Who is the god of the sky? _____
10. Who is the god of the land? _____
11. What is the name of the first boat Ra creates? _____
12. Who becomes the first pharaoh of Egypt? _____
13. Why do humans start to mock their first pharaoh? _____
14. What advice do the other gods give Ra regarding the disobedient humans? _____

15. Who is created from Ra's "terrible look" from the Eye? _____
16. Why does Ra regret his decision to punish the humans? _____
17. How does Ra end the slaughter? _____
18. What does Ra change Sekhmet's name to? _____
19. Who tries to steal Ra's power? _____
20. What does she need to gain Ra's power? _____
21. What happens to Ra after he gives up his secret? _____