

fate of both Seth and Osiris.

The Osiris myth stands out against a mythic background that shows Ra sailing through the night sky battling monsters and demons in order to restore the light of consciousness to the world. Ra's archenemy is Apopis whose only ambition is to snuff out this light and render the world lifeless – an empty shell cast back into the sea of Nun. If true evil is unconsciousness, then Apopis is this devil that is the agent of annihilation. Seth's motives are far closer to being human. He is filled with hate, envy and murderous impulses to be sure, but these are emotions that temper and define their opposites. By contrast, Apopis is a serpent of the lowest order – blind to the motives of men and women, acting out of destructive impulses that lack human emotion and reason.

Where Seth takes humans to the outermost limit of humanity, Apopis seeks to end humanity altogether. And yet, these dark gods each belong to a powerful complex that defines the limits of human consciousness, delineating a limen that separates order from chaos. While they draw us back into darkness, countervailing forces remain to prevent total collapse. Certainly, Isis, using love and magic, is a vital force who is there at every turn to confront Seth and have him undo the havoc he wrought. As the story continues, we discover that she is not alone in this mission. It is tempting to get caught in the

drama of the story at this point and miss the hidden meaning concealed in the myth. Before we are finished with this part of the myth, we will discover an archetypal recipe that offers a basic law of the universe.

Seth is enraged when he again sees the dead body of his brother Osiris. He tears the body into fourteen pieces and according to Plutarch, scatters them throughout Egypt. Once again, Isis goes in search of her husband's body. She is accompanied by Nephthys, another indication that this wily goddess is her own woman. In the Pyramid Texts, it is written

Isis comes and Nephthys comes, one of them from the west, one of them from the east, one of them as a 'screecher', one of them as a kite, they have found Osiris, his brother Seth having laid him low in Nedit.¹

We learn then that Osiris was killed and dismembered in Nedit, a word that derives from *nedyet*, meaning, "to fall to the ground." Phrases like "laid low" and "fall to the ground" are ancient expressions indicating death, killing and murder. But, in the case of Osiris, the murder is especially savage and at the same, symbolic. On the human level, dismemberment evokes hideous images of cruel punishment: decapitation, drawn and quartered, the rack, and the guillotine. If we consider the human form as a star shaped body – an

observation that wasn't lost on our ancestors - then, the tearing apart of an astral form proffers symbolic meaning. "Beheading," writes Jung, "is significant symbolically as the separation of the 'understanding' from the 'great suffering and grief' which nature inflicts on the soul. It is an emancipation of the '*cogitatio*'; which is situated in the head, a freeing of the soul from the 'trammels of nature.'"² Anyone suffering from a severe migraine will appreciate the relief to which Jung refers. People whose racing thoughts keep them from a good night's sleep or the manic person who simply can't stop thinking (or talking) might welcome a symbolic decapitation.

Admittedly, it is difficult to suggest that anything positive might result from such a hideous act. But, from an objective standpoint we need only consider how the world evolves to realize that dismemberment is an implicit operation occurring at every level of reality – including the inner world of psyche. We exist in a process of continual dismemberment where supernovas are exploding and subatomic particles disintegrate, each followed by a reciprocal process of re-integration that creates new and more refined forms.

As I indicated earlier, an Egyptian god's power is to some extent determined by the number of his or her manifestations. In other words, this breaking down process is not simply a means to an end, for death in that case is the ultimate decapitation of life. Rather, the

myth presents us with the very real possibility that dismemberment serves to bring new life. As evidence to support this view, we find new settlements springing up where each of Osiris' body parts comes to rest. In one version of the myth, Isis uses her magic to create an effigy of Osiris' corpse from each body part, leaving each town to believe that they alone possess the sacred remains of their favorite god. These settlements or nomes grow from the generative power contained in the "juices" of Osiris' decaying limbs. Eventually, the fourteen colonies born from Osiris coalesce to form a nation. In our own time, the motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, echoes this same principle, namely, "Out of the Many, One." Mythically, this principle is illustrated by the two missions undertaken by Isis, first to retrieve Osiris' dead body, then, to retrieve the severed limbs that have been dispersed throughout Egypt – first one, then many that are magically reunited.

As we've seen throughout this myth, every detail, when examined carefully, has meaning. That Osiris is cut into fourteen pieces and not twelve or nine, must therefore be significant. Thinking in concrete terms, it is easy to see how the number may have come about: dissection at the ankles, knees and thighs equals seven; dissection at wrists, elbows, shoulders and head adds another seven; the final cut is the penis, cumulatively adding up to fourteen. Division in this way brings us into the realm of symbols since there are seven cuts above

and seven below with the penis and head being the only anatomical parts that are not symmetrically paired, except possibly with each other. Viewed in this way, the penis serves as the “head” of the lower body and the head provides intelligence for the upper body. These are two distinct forms of intelligence that recall our earlier discussion of basic neuroanatomy.

Dividing the human body in this manner reveals the different realms that lie above and below the horizon located at the middle. Once again we find a familiar alchemical theme from the Emerald Tablet, “As above, so Below,” only in this instance above refers not to the universe but to the upper body and below to the lower, instinctual body. Certainly, this special number fourteen, with seven plus seven graphically shown in Osiris’ dismemberment is no accident. The significance of the number of seven figures prominently in medicine, mythology, hermetics, religion and spiritual practice.

The numerologist Annemarie Schimmel, in *The Mystery of Numbers*, describes in some detail why the number fourteen is considered to have protective and healing powers. She reminds us that there are fourteen vertebrae in the human spine, a reference that recalls the significance of the *djed* column. Given Osiris’ connection to the moon, it comes as little surprise that these powers relate to the