

FEAST DAY IN THE TEMPLE OF ISIS

By Kerri Ryan MA

This is my most favourite time of the day. Right before the sun breaches the horizon in the east and spills forth its life giving rays upon the earth. But for now the last vestiges of night cling lovingly to the awakening day and the energies of light and dark mix magically in the peaceful stillness right before dawn. It is still very early and there is no movement yet as I stand on the flat rooftop, contemplating what this special day will bring and give thanks to the mother for a life well lived.

I am Sunsuray, senior priestess of the Great Goddess Isis, mother of all. “May her great name be exulted”. My whole life has been spent in loving service of her greatness and now as I move into my senior years, I am charged with the work of teaching those who will serve after I am gone. My bones ache sometimes and I am a little slower now, but my devotion is greater than ever.



This temple has been my home for as long as I can remember. My mother before me also served the golden one and I was born within these sacred walls that I call my home. She left the service of the mother on a blisteringly hot summer day when I was only a girl in my seventh year. It is etched in my memory as I watched her struggle for breath in the dry searing heat. I was frantic with what was happening, but all the other priestesses sat in calm stillness and joined hands around her and began to chant a strange and eerie repetition that filled the high temple with not only sound, but a tangible force that I did not understand. It rose and flowed and seemed to embody a presence. That day I met her for the first time. She was imminent in the most tangible sense. She rode the sound, a spectral image of light and energy. I could not believe what I was seeing, for it wasn't that I was really seeing – I felt, I sensed, I knew! It seemed that she circled over my dying mother and as I observed her, the struggle left her laboured breath and she became quite calm, but the pitch of the chant changed and increased in intensity. Everyone knew what was going on but

me and as I watched my mother slipping away I lunged toward her, but was stayed by a firm hand that planted me back in my seat. Mesmerised now, the golden winged one came to settle in the space above my mother, her translucent energy shimmering. As I watched, my mother's mouth fell open and a whisper of light left her body and was secreted into the hovering vehicle above her.

As a girl of seven years I knew not what I witnessed that day, but it is a sacred and celebrated mystery that I have witnessed many, many times since. My mother's Ka, or spirit essence was released from the physical body to join with her Ba or personality so that they could meet in the afterlife and be born once again into the physical body known as Sekhu. I didn't understand then that there is no such thing as death, just one transition into another. My blessed mother was released into the wings of our great goddess and taken on the most sacred journey to join with the oneness in the afterlife.

What I witnessed that day was my initiation. Not my formal one, no, no, that came much later, but I then decided to devote my life to the Great Goddess of All Things. It was that day that I knew who she was in the most intimate place in my heart and that I would serve her for the rest of my life. She is my life!

I look down at Mistra, one of the numerous temple cats who weaves herself between my legs and looks up at me, uttering a thin mew. She is awake and looking for breakfast, which is my sign to end this reverie and wake the young acolytes to ready the temple for worship. There is much to do today for it is the Festival of Aset, feast day of the 'Mother of Gods, She who



Encompasses All'. Dua Aset – Adoration be to ISIS! The common people will be welcomed into the outer temple today as they bring offerings and prayers to receive the blessings from the great mother. There is much to do and the sun has just breached the horizon, signaling the journey of Great Ra across the skies and the heat that will accompany his flight.

In the cool of breaking day I leave the rooftop and come down to the great central colonnade that runs between the inner sanctuary and the large outer court. A chill runs through my bones, as it has done since I was a small girl, when I look up at the great sandstone columns that support the portico entrance. More ancient than I can imagine and so high their loftiness reaches to the Sun God himself and protects us from his searing heat at the noon of the day. I gaze in awe upon the fresco images etched into the stone, never ceasing to thank the Goddess for this blessed life.

The young girls quarters are far from the senior priestesses, but near to the kitchens and washing rooms. There is much work to do for these young girls in every day, and some act with more enthusiasm than others. But I was the same at their age, dreamy sleep is ever enticing.

As I enter the darkened living quarters, no-one has yet stirred.

“Hish! wake Aisha, wake Nebet and Tiye. Come the day beckons.”

Only years of 11 and 12, these girls will be soon ready for their next level of instruction, but for now they oversee the younger ones and make them ready for the day. These girls have come to the temple at the request of their families to be in service of the Great Goddess. It is an honour to be received at the temple, and not every girl is automatically taken. The life of the priestess does not suit all, but for those who choose to remain, there are many blessings. These girls will soon know their first blood and they will be initiated into the mystery teachings. The orphans of course are always welcome. We never turn away a homeless child. They cannot of course enter into the priestesshood, but many grow and are happy to remain in domestic service at the temple.

In a very short time, the dormitory of young girls is alive, twelve of them in all. Chatter and movement start to escalate as they wake and realize it is feast day. As the excitement begins to escalate I admonish them to hurry to their tasks. While they know and love me as someone who has watched them grow, they also know I am a stern task master and they put their minds to rolling up their reed mats and bedding and dressing in their simple tunics.

I move to the kitchens nearby and find three of the domestics already busy with the tasks at hand. Platters of fruit, dates and figs are piled high and the cellars have been opened to bring out the large earthenware vats of beer. Bread dough is being kneaded and made ready for the ovens.

Halima oversees the kitchens and has been with us since orphaned as a child. She is most capable and dedicated.

“Halima, is there enough food? You know I always worry there will not be enough. The Great Mother is ever abundant and we must show her magnificence.”

“Yes Sunsuray, all is in order. There will surely be a feast like none other to honour the Mother today.”

I survey the piles of meat, fowl, honey and vegetables awaiting preparation, many of the supplies from our own gardens and herds and know that there is much to do here this morning, but Halima always manages.



At just after noon today there will be a grand procession through the streets of the town and down to the river. The Mother will be carried from her sacred resting place deep within the temple and brought out to

receive the blessings of the people. Even now the other high priestesses will be readying her for this special feast day. Blessings be to the great mother of all! Once it was my greatest honour to enter into the most holy of receptacles and prepare her golden body for this most auspicious of days. Now I have taught others how to bathe and dress her. She will be adorned with jewelry from the temple treasury with magnificent necklaces, bracelets, scepters, amulets and trinkets of gold and silver. The most lavish will be encrusted with lapis lazuli, enamel, glass and semi-precious gems. She will become the living representation of ISIS and her vehicle must be worthy of such an honour.

When she emerges just after noon today, she will be enclosed in a shrine and placed on top of a ceremonial barque, supported by poles for carrying by eight men on their shoulders. She will emerge from the temple, incense filling the air, and move into the crowded streets where people will elbow and jostle to catch a glimpse of the sacred vessel. She will be led by a joyous and colourful procession of the town's people. Acrobats and musicians will entertain everyone, while the women from the temple will play the sistrum which makes a soft haunting sound like a breeze blowing through the papyrus reeds.

She will be carried to the river and be placed on the holy Nile to continue the journey on her golden barque up to the temple at Karnak where more celebrations are planned and rituals to the honouring of the dead will take place. There she will remain for seven days and seven nights, taking central place beside the great Pharaoh himself and her beloved husband Osiris, before returning to her resting place deep within the temple.

And for that whole week there will be much feasting and celebration. Blessings and gifts will be exchanged and a holiday air will reign while everyone relaxes and enjoys the blessings of the divine mother of all.

I glance at the sky and note that Ra has already ridden far from the horizon. Ah, so much to do and I get lost in the reverie of my thoughts. I must get on, I must get on. Where are those girls? Hurry everyone, there is much to do today!

Kerri Ryan