

## ☰☱☲☳☴☵☶☷ Topic Page: [Ra \(Egyptian deity\)](#)

Definition: **Ra** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

(Re) In Egyptian mythology, Sun god of Heliopolis and lord of the dead. He sailed his sun boat across the sky by day, and through the underworld by night. He is most often depicted as falcon-headed, with a solar disc on his head.



Image from: [A magnificent pectoral jewel representing a... in World and Its Peoples: Middle East, Western Asia, and Northern Africa](#)

Summary Article: **Ra**

From *Encyclopedia of African Religion*

In Maatian or ancient Egyptian theology, Ra (Re) is the Creator and has many names, manifestations, and forms according to the sacred texts, beginning with the earliest discourse on Ra in the Pyramid Texts (PT). In the Pyramid and Coffin Texts (Book of Vindication [BOV]), Ra also has the names Ra-Atum, Atum, Ra Kheper, or Kheperra and Kheper. In the BOV, Ra says, “I am Ra—I am Atum” and “I am Atum in his name Ra.” In the Pyramid Texts, it says of Atum, “You develop in this your identity (name) of Kheper.” The names Atum and Kheper represent different aspects of Ra. Atum means totality and completeness, one who is complete and one who completes. Thus, he is called “Lord to the Limit (*nb-r-dr*)” and “Lord of totality” or “Lord of All (*nb-tm*).” Kheper, which means becoming, coming into being, or bringing into being, represents the infinite developmental and creative aspects of Ra.

Also, in the Pyramid Texts, Ra as Atum is praised in this way: “Homage to you, Atum. Homage to you, Kheper, the self-creating one. You are high in your identity as the mound. You come into being in this your identity as Bringer-into-Being (Kheper).” Here the mound refers to the sacred mound of creation that is depicted as both the mound on which Ra stood to create the world and as Ra rising from the primordial waters of Nun as the sacred benben stone, or obelisk—like the pillar in the Benu-Phoenix Temple of On (Heliopolis), the sacred city of Ra.

Also, because the word for sun is *ra* and the sun is conceived as both the physical expression of Ra in his glory and the right eye of Ra, Ra is customarily called the “sun god” in Egyptological literature. However, a critical reading of the texts allows for the approach found here, which is to understand Ra in his spiritual form, rather than as his most definitive symbol, the sun disk or *itrn*, which was the focus of Akhenaton's worship during the Amarna Period. As Ra states in the Coffin Texts, “I am Ra in his first appearances, I am the Great God, the Self-Created One who created his identities (names), i.e., as Ra, Atum, and Kheper.” Moreover, the invisibility of Ra is emphasized in his identity and name Amen, the Hidden or Invisible One, and thus the joint name Amen-Ra. In a praise poem of Amen Ra, it defines him as “power with many names, who cannot be known. He is remote from sight and near in hearing.” Also, the combining of Ra's name with other divine spirits and names extended throughout Kemetic history, and thus one encounters names such as Ra-Harakhty, Khnum-Ra, and Sobek-Ra.

The evolution of the theology of Ra begins with the Pyramid Texts, as noted previously, and was clearly aided in its establishment and development by its conceptualization of the pharaoh as the “son of Ra,” a title that became a central part of the pharaoh's titulary as early as the 4th dynasty. This designation as the offspring of God and his images would spread to humans in the First Intermediate Period

literature. Ra, as the Creator in his name Atum, comes into being and begins creation. His first act of creation of the world is to bring forth Shu (air) and Tefnut (moisture), the first divine powers. Afterward, they brought into being Nut (Heaven) and Geb (Earth), and they, in turn, produced Osiris and Isis and Seth and Nephtys. In the BOV, Tefnut is identified as Maat, the divine power of truth, justice, rightness, and order.

This creation narrative is more developed in the New Kingdom text, “The Book of Knowing the Creations (Kheperu) of Ra.” In it, Ra, described as the Lord to the Limit (i.e., the Infinite Lord), says, “I came into being as the Bringer-into-Being (Kheper). When I came into being, being itself came into being.” Here, Ra defines himself as the source of the ontological process of being. He then notes that afterward he brought other beings into being. He states that at first there was no Heaven or Earth and no place on which to stand, reaffirming his anteriority, aloneness, and self-sufficiency. But he rose up, made a place (the sacred mound) becoming effective in his heart and mind, conceiving the world, and then “made every form alone.” In the *Book of the Coming Forth by Day*, His role as creator is praised thus: “Homage to you Atum who made heaven, who created what exists, who emerged as land (the sacred mound), who created seed; Lord of that which is, who gave birth to the divine powers. Great god, who came into being of himself.” Here, the description of Ra, as having given birth to the divinities, reflects his containing both female and male aspects while transcending both. Thus, he is not androgynous, but inclusive in his totality, in his name and nature, Atum— completeness. Elsewhere he is described as mother and father of humans and the world, giving birth, begetting, and creating through exceptional insight (Sia) and authoritative utterance (Hu). Again, this expresses his infinite and complete inclusiveness.

In the First Intermediate Period, in the Book of Merikara, Ra is portrayed as a creator who cares for his creation, especially humans who are created in his image and provided with the sustenance of life. This is reaffirmed in the BOV in the Four Good Deeds of Ra, which He enumerates as benefactions for all humans, great and small. He says he created (a) the four winds, the breath of life for everyone, (b) “the great flood (the sustenance of life) for the humble and the great,” (c) “each person like his fellow (human equality) with free will,” and (d) cultivated remembrance of the day of death (moral and spiritual consciousness).

These divine endowments are translated in modern Maatian ethics as the granting and grounding of correlative human rights (i.e., the right to life, the right to the sustenance of life, the right to equal treatment and self-determination, and the right to freedom of conscience and thought).

Furthermore, during the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom, a theology of immortality (see afterlife) for all, through righteousness, is further developed. Ra gives Osiris power and kingship in the afterlife, and all are made eligible for eternal life through righteousness and thus to become an Osiris, a risen and powerful one who is “a glorious spirit in heaven and a continuing power on earth.” Thus, the risen and vindicated one who has become an Osiris says, “I am one with Osiris, Lord of Eternity,” and again “I am one with Ra.” Or again the texts say, “May you go ... among the powers of heaven who are in the company of Osiris” (and go) in peace, in peace with Ra who is in the heavens.

However, the fullest development of the theology of Ra is in the New Kingdom. In numerous prayers and sacred praises (hymns), Ra is depicted as a compassionate, justice-providing, protecting, hearing, and loving God. This is especially true in his name and identity as Amen Ra or Amen. Ra is both father and mother of humanity and the world who cares for his creation and all his creatures—humans, birds,

animals, fish, and insects. He is “the helmsman who knows the water well” and “a rudder for the weak”; “protector of the humble and needy”; “prime minister of the poor” who takes no bribes; and “Great Shepherd (Herdsman) who leads his flock (herd) to green meadows.” He is “Creator who loves those in His image”; one “who hears the prisoner’s prayer, rescues the oppressed from the oppressor, and who judges between the weak and the strong.” And he is “Lord of Maat,” “physician who heals ... without medicine,” a hearing God who “hears the prayers of those who call on him,” and “a gentle God with effective counsel.” It is this theological portrait of Ra that lasted to the end of ancient Egyptian history and culture and grounds its ancient and renewed spirituality and ethics.

## See also

Amen, Chokwe, Nkulunkulu, Nyame

## Further Readings

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