

To finish up this week's set of emails, I thought I would tell you two Greek myths, both of which are about the Underworld, which is where the Greeks thought everyone went after they died, and which was ruled over by HADES (pronounced 'Hay - dees'), who was the brother of ZEUS, the king of the Greek gods, and POSEIDON (pronounced 'Poss - eye - den'), who was the Greek god of the sea. Hades probably thought he had got the worst deal, ruling over the Underworld, while Zeus got the whole of the Earth (and Mount Olympus, where the Greek gods lived) to rule over, and Poseidon got the sea. And that's what leads us to our first story about the Underworld, which is the story of –

PERSEPHONE and DEMETER

So Demeter (pronounced 'De - meet - ah') was the goddess of the harvest and farming - her job was to ensure that the weather was nice so that the farmers could grow their crops and get a good harvest in at the end, which would provide for them and their family for the rest of the year. She and Zeus got together and had a beautiful daughter called Persephone (pronounced 'Per - seff - on - ee'). Hades fell in love with Persephone and asked Zeus if he could have her as his wife. He said to Zeus, 'It's only fair I should get Persephone as my wife because it's miserable ruling over the Underworld all on my own. She'll brighten the place up a bit.' Zeus replied, 'Okay - but you are going to have to grab her and take her to the Underworld, because Demeter's not going to be happy about you marrying Persephone.' So Hades found out where Persephone was playing with her friends, burst out of the Earth and dragged Persephone, screaming, down into the Underworld. Once he had got her there, Hades told Persephone, 'You are my wife now, and you are going to be Queen over the Underworld.' Persephone was really unhappy about this, and refused to have anything to eat - which was lucky for her, as the legend says that if you eat anything in the Underworld, you cannot leave.



In the meantime, Demeter found out that Persephone had gone missing, and she searched the entire world for her, but she couldn't find her. When she asked the other Greek gods about where Persephone was, they looked shifty and said, 'I dunno - maybe you should ask Zeus.' And if Zeus knew anything, he wasn't telling. So Demeter reversed her powers - before, she would ensure that the earth had good weather for farmers, but now she ensured that the weather was terrible and the whole earth was covered in ice. The gods told Zeus, 'This can't carry on - the whole Earth is being destroyed. You have to tell Demeter where Persephone is.' So Zeus told Demeter that Hades had made Persephone his Queen. As soon as she heard this Demeter descended into the Underworld to get Persephone back. Persephone was so pleased to see her mother and ran to her, crying and saying that she wanted to go home.

Hades realised it was hopeless to try to keep Persephone back, but he had one last trick to play. He said to Persephone, 'Of course, if you don't want to stay, you should go - but it's a long journey back. Why not just have this teeny-weeny pomegranate seed to keep you going

until you get home?' Persephone thought it couldn't harm to eat the seed, but as soon as she did, she was prevented from leaving the Underworld. When she realised how Hades had tricked her daughter, Demeter screamed and threatened to turn the Underworld into an ice box in revenge for what Hades had done. So Hades and Demeter worked out a deal. While Hades couldn't reverse the rule that Persephone could never leave the Underworld, she could be let out for a while. So Demeter and Hades agreed that Persephone would spend half the year on the surface of the Earth and the other six months down in the Underworld. And that, the Greeks said, is why half the year is sunny and warm, and the other half of the year is cold and rainy. When it's sunny and warm, that's because Persephone has been let out of the Underworld, and Demeter is happy. And when it's cold and rainy, that's because Persephone has had to go back to the Underworld, and Demeter is unhappy.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

This is another story about trying to rescue someone from the Underworld. ORPHEUS (pronounced 'Orff - ee - oos') was an amazing musician who had learned his skills in music from the best - the god APOLLO, who is the god of music (among other things). It was said that Orpheus was such an amazing player of the LYRE (a stringed instrument, a bit (but only a bit) like a guitar) that animals would come up to him to listen to his music, and even the trees would bend their heads to get closer to the notes coming from his lyre. One day, Orpheus met EURYDICE (pronounced 'Yur - rid - ess - ee'), a beautiful NYMPH who was actually a daughter of Apollo. As soon as Orpheus played Eurydice some music, she liked him too, and they decided to get married. But while they were very happy together, their marriage did not last long. Shortly after they got married, Eurydice was playing in the woods with some of her friends, and she was bitten on the ankle by a snake. She died instantly from the snake-bite, and her spirit descended into the Underworld.



Orpheus was heart-broken to have lost his beautiful wife, and was determined to get her back. So he got instructions from Apollo how to descend into the Underworld, and he went down and down and down until he was in the Underworld, and face to face with Hades. 'What do you want?' Hades asked, 'You shouldn't be here - you are still alive.' 'I've come to get my wife back,' Orpheus replied. 'Why should I give her back?' Hades asked. 'Because we were happy together, and we were going to have long life together, and then a stupid snake ruined everything,' answered Orpheus. 'We deserve a second chance at happiness.' Persephone had been listening to all this, and felt sorry for Orpheus - perhaps because he reminded her a bit of her mother - and she asked Hades to let Orpheus have his wife back. Hades agreed, but as usual, he couldn't resist playing a last trick. Hades told Orpheus, 'Okay - if you start walking back up to the surface of the Earth, I will send your wife to follow you. She will be only a few steps behind you - but you must not look back to check that she is behind you until you are both back on the surface of the Earth. If you look back any earlier than that, she will go straight back to the Underworld, and that will be it. Living people only get to visit the Underworld once - you won't be able to come back and try to get her back a second time. So don't look back! - or you will lose everything.'

Orpheus was delighted at this, and started walking back up to the surface of the Earth. He knew he wasn't allowed to look back to see if Eurydice was following him, but no one had said that he couldn't use his ears to listen out for her. But no matter how hard he listened, all he could hear were his own footsteps - he couldn't hear Eurydice. In fact, Eurydice was following him - but because she was a spirit while she was in the Underworld, her feet didn't make any sound when they touched the ground. Orpheus started to worry: 'Maybe Hades has tricked me, and Eurydice isn't there at all. I want to turn round to look, but I can't in case she is following me. But if she were following me, I would hear something, and I can't hear anything! I can't stand the suspense - is she there or not?' And just before he got to the surface of the Earth, Orpheus couldn't take the suspense anymore, and he turned around - and saw Eurydice only a few steps behind him. But as soon as he looked at her, she looked back at him with horror on her face, and she plunged straight back into the Underworld. Orpheus had lost Eurydice forever, because he didn't have any faith that she was behind her (where 'faith' means a belief in things unseen) and he didn't have the patience to wait until he was back on the surface of the Earth to find out whether his wife was just behind him. So learn a lesson from Orpheus - have faith, and patience, and also love, and all good things will come to you!

