

*"I escape my day of death, as Set escaped his day of death.  
 I escape my half-months of death, as Set escaped his half-months of death.  
 I escape my months of death, as Set escaped his months of death.  
 I escape my year of death, as Set escaped his year of death."  
 – from the Pyramid Texts, Utterance 570*

Time is one of the few universal realities of human existence. None of us can touch it, taste it, start it or stop it, but we are all subject to its rule. From the earliest times, humans have sought to understand the mystery of this intangible reality that marks one moment from its next in a linear fashion, or one day or season from the next in a cyclical fashion. The ancient Egyptians designated the two kinds of time (linear and cyclical) using two different hieroglyphic words:

*Djet*, written with long and linear hieroglyphs, represented "forever" in a linear sense — time that continued to stack up moment by moment and month by month and year by year, never to return to the same place again. This linearity also marked chthonic time — things that were complete and would always be complete in a timeless sense — and not just linear time in the modern sense.

The concept of cyclical time, the passage of days and seasons marked by the same natural events that recurred eternally, was written with circular and rounded and twisted hieroglyphs, in the word *neheh*, which we usually translate into English as "eternity." Unlike *djet* time that noted things that had-and-always-will happen, *neheh* time described things that are-and-will-keep-happening in a continuative and recurring sense. *Neheh* time is most easily observed in the natural recurrence of the solar cycle itself, which is perhaps why the sun disk (the circle with a dot in the middle of it) was used as the central part of "spelling" the word *neheh* in hieroglyphs. Just as the sun rises, crosses the sky from east to west, then sets, only to do it again the following day and every day after that, *neheh* is time that happens and keeps happening. See Bakir 1974 for more philosophical discussion of the difference between *djet* and *neheh*, and how they apply to the human understanding of time.

Together, *djet* and *neheh* make up the existence of time in the human world. Our experience of time is simultaneously linear and cyclical. We measure minutes, but we also measure days and seasons. The ancients

