

# OEDIPUS



The Myth. The story begins with a son born to King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes\*. The oracle at Delphi\* told them that their child would grow up to murder Laius and marry Jocasta. Horrified, the king fastened the infant's feet together with a large pin and left him on a mountainside to die.

However, shepherds found the baby—who became known as Oedipus, or "swollen foot"—and took him to the city of Corinth. There King Polybus and Queen Merope adopted him and raised him to think that he was their own son. When Oedipus was grown, however, someone told him that he was not the son of Polybus. Oedipus went to Delphi to ask the oracle about his parentage. The answer he received was, "You are the man fated to murder his father and marry his mother."

Along the way, Oedipus came to a narrow road between cliffs. There he met an older man in a chariot coming the other way.

The two quarreled over who should give way, and Oedipus killed the stranger and went on to Thebes. He found the city in great distress. He learned that a monster called the Sphinx was terrorizing the Thebans by devouring them when they failed to answer its riddle and that King Laius had been murdered on his way to seek help from the Delphic oracle. The riddle of the Sphinx was "What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?" Oedipus gave the correct answer: "A human being, who crawls as an infant, walks erect in maturity, and leans on a staff in old age." With this answer, Oedipus not only defeated the Sphinx, which killed itself in rage, but won the throne of the dead king and the hand in marriage of the king's widow, Jocasta.

Oedipus and Jocasta lived happily for a time and had two sons and two daughters. Then a dreadful plague came upon Thebes. A prophet declared that the plague would not end until the Thebans drove out the murderer of Laius, who was within the city. A messenger then arrived from Corinth, announcing the death of King Polybus and asking Oedipus to return and rule the Corinthians. Oedipus told Jocasta what the oracle had predicted for him and expressed relief that the danger of his murdering Polybus was past. Jocasta told him not to fear oracles, for the oracle had said that her first husband would be killed by his own son, and instead he had been murdered by a stranger on the road to Delphi.

Suddenly Oedipus remembered that fatal encounter on the road and knew that he had met and killed his real father, Laius. At the same time, Jocasta realized that the scars on Oedipus's feet marked him as the baby whose feet Laius had pinned together so long ago. Faced with the fact that she had married her own son and the murderer of Laius, she hanged herself. Oedipus seized a pin from her dress and blinded himself with it.

(Source : <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Ni-Pa/Oedipus.html>)