

## Sisyphus

1 Hades, the god of the underworld, was also a brother of Zeus; but the Greeks did not think of him as being bright and beautiful like the other gods. They believed that he helped make the seeds sprout and push their leaves above the surface of the earth, and that he gave men the gold and silver which they dug out of their mines. But more often they thought of him as the god of the bleak world of the dead; so they imagined that he was dark and grim in appearance, and they feared him more than they did the other gods, although he was not the one to punish those who were corrupt.

2 The spirits who had lived bad lives in the world above were horribly punished in the world of the dead, and a few were so evil that they were directly punished by Zeus himself. One such soul was King Sisyphus, who had been cruel all his life, constantly trying to outsmart the gods.

3 One day, Sisyphus made the mistake of angering Zeus, the king of all the gods. "How dare you interfere in my life!" roared Zeus. "I condemn you to spend an eternity in Tartarus, suffering in torment and despair."

4 Tartarus was a place of punishment for the most evil people. It was located in the deepest, darkest part of the Underworld where all people went when they died. Hades, the god of death, led Sisyphus away to serve his punishment.

5 Sisyphus' mind worked furiously as he tried to figure a way out of his predicament. He watched Hades take out a heavy set of chains. Each metal rung looked as if it weighed a ton. Sisyphus saw an opportunity to turn the tables on his captor.

6 "I've never seen chains like those before, O mighty King of the Underworld," said Sisyphus. "Perhaps you can show me how they work."

7 "It's quite simple," replied Hades. "There is a circle of metal at the end that clasps around your wrist like this." Before he realized what he had done, Hades had chained himself in place.

8 Sisyphus couldn't believe how clever he had been or how foolish Hades had been. He celebrated his victory, but his freedom didn't last long because Zeus had discovered what had happened. Hades was freed and Sisyphus was once again sentenced to Tartarus.

9 "Your insolence is unbearable," said Zeus. "I decree that your punishment shall be excessively difficult and laborious. I'm sure Hades will have no problem finding a punishment that fits your crime against the gods."

10 Hades led Sisyphus back to Tartarus and said, "Gaze upon your new home and the task I have set before you." Sisyphus stood in front of an enormous boulder as Hades pointed to a

nearby hill. "You will roll that boulder to the top of the hill, no matter how long it takes," explained Hades. "Let's see if your wits can save you this time."

11 Sisyphus leaned his shoulder against the giant rock and pushed as hard as he could. The rock barely moved, but Sisyphus knew he could not give up. He groaned as he struggled to move the boulder inch by inch up the hill. His spirits started to lift as he saw the top of the hill edge into sight, but suddenly the rock rolled back down to the bottom.

12"NO!" he pleaded in agony and despair. Sisyphus started his task anew, but each time the result was the same. He was doomed to repeat his frustrating, difficult, and pointless task forever.

## Sisyphus and the Ants

BY JENNIFER S. FLESCHER

The story tells us Sisyphus is being punished.  
Over and over he has to push that boulder

up and up. The mountain and God glaring.  
And you, you have

your avalanche of moods.  
Pills the size of stars to nearly quell

cascade and tumult.  
And still you step

gravity amplified by incline, each hazard  
in the way of the boulder a reminder

it should be easier. There should be  
a hot fudge sundae at the top. A long nap in the shade.

The story forgot to tell us, though, Sisyphus thrived.

He learned to guide his wrists  
and shoulder girdles safely to protect himself.

And later he worked to safeguard every insect  
from here to the crest. Considers this his calling.

Even as the sun and the weight of time bears down.  
Your strength is kingly.

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