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Questions The Odyssey Answers

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This translation comes from the end of Book 8 of *The Odyssey*. In the original Greek, King Alcinous of Phaeacia poses a series of questions to Odysseus. I have translated the second half of these questions into a meter that follows an ABAB rhyme scheme. It seemed appropriate to make an attempt at maintaining the poetic nature of *The Odyssey*. Alcinous is practically relentless in his questioning of Odysseus. I believe this translation's rhythm and the close proximity of the questions within the poem allow for Alcinous' insistent nature to be revealed.

Although this translation comes from a portion of Alcinous' direct address to Odysseus, I have added an anonymous narrator who both introduces and concludes Alcinous' quotation. This method of delivery not only draws the reader into the scene, but also reflects the narrator of the original Greek text, who calls for the Muses' help in the beginning of Book 1.

I hope the reader will enjoy the epithets that come from the original Greek. I thought it was important that these were included. Throughout this poem, Odysseus' name is never revealed. Rather, he is referred to by his epithets because Alcinous does not yet know his name (and 'Odysseus' is a difficult word to fit into a poem!).

The original Greek passage is powerful. The answers to Alcinous' questions spell out much of Odysseus' troublesome journey home. My hope is that this poem will allow anyone, whether they know this story by heart or read it just as a homecoming story, to more effectively and more enjoyably ponder these questions and once again experience Odysseus' tale.

Note on translation of Greek words in poem

- Verse 3 : κλέος (CLAY-os) - *fame, renown*
- Verse 18 : θυμός (thew-MOS) - *soul, spirit; the seat of emotion*

Questions *The Odyssey* Answers

Behold, the god-like king does speak
And makes his presence known.
He bids the stranger - face so bleak,
“Reveal your land, your own!”

Alcinous, the blameless king,
Persuades the Greek with lures of home:
“Tell us of this tale we sing
Which makes you weep and groan.

Reveal to us your birth and name,
That common thread that ties us all,
Your kin and town from which you came -
Bring them κλέος from this hall!

We'll send to them our manless masts,
Our ships, which sail yet heed our will.
They travel through the sea which casts
A mist, a shield from other's ill.

Many have come in search of aid
To cross the mighty sea;
And all who come for sport or trade,
A ride we guarantee!

Poseidon loves our ships for this,
For all the good we do.
But soon a day will end this bliss
And all we know that's true.

This tale my father used to tell,
A day - we don't know when,
A hill will fall on where we dwell;
Poseidon shakes our earth again!

But come, sad soul, do tell me now (Don't
hold back - I wish to know!) About the
lands you've seen and how you roamed
them long ago.

Tell me of those well-built cities,
Of men, so wild with crime.
Who among them shared your pities
And helped you in your trying time?

Who among them feared our great gods,
Those who rule o'er our seas?
For they alone decide the odds
Of all our fates, as they please.

So once again, I shall repeat:
Why aren't you filled with joy?
Our hero bard sings loud the feat
Of valiant Greeks at Troy

It was the gods, you surely know,
Who aptly sealed their fate
The gods composed their end of woe
So men compose a song so great.

Perhaps a kin of yours did die
While on the field in war
An inlaw - one you can't deny,
You hide your grief no more.

Perhaps you lost a friend so dear,
Instead of one through marriage?
Lost on the blood-filled mud in fear,
Trod down by Trojan carriage.

If that is so, now please do tell,
For I can wait no longer:
Did you know this lost soul well,
A kin that made you stronger?

Friends like these, who know your heart
And feel your pain as if their own,
When senseless war tears you apart
That pain is thrust on you alone!"

In this way, the good king did speak
And pressed in great detail,
Till finally he moved the Greek
To tell them all his tale.

The tale this cunning hero told
Was rife with pain and grief.
Right from his θυμός - oh so bold,
He hoped for some relief.