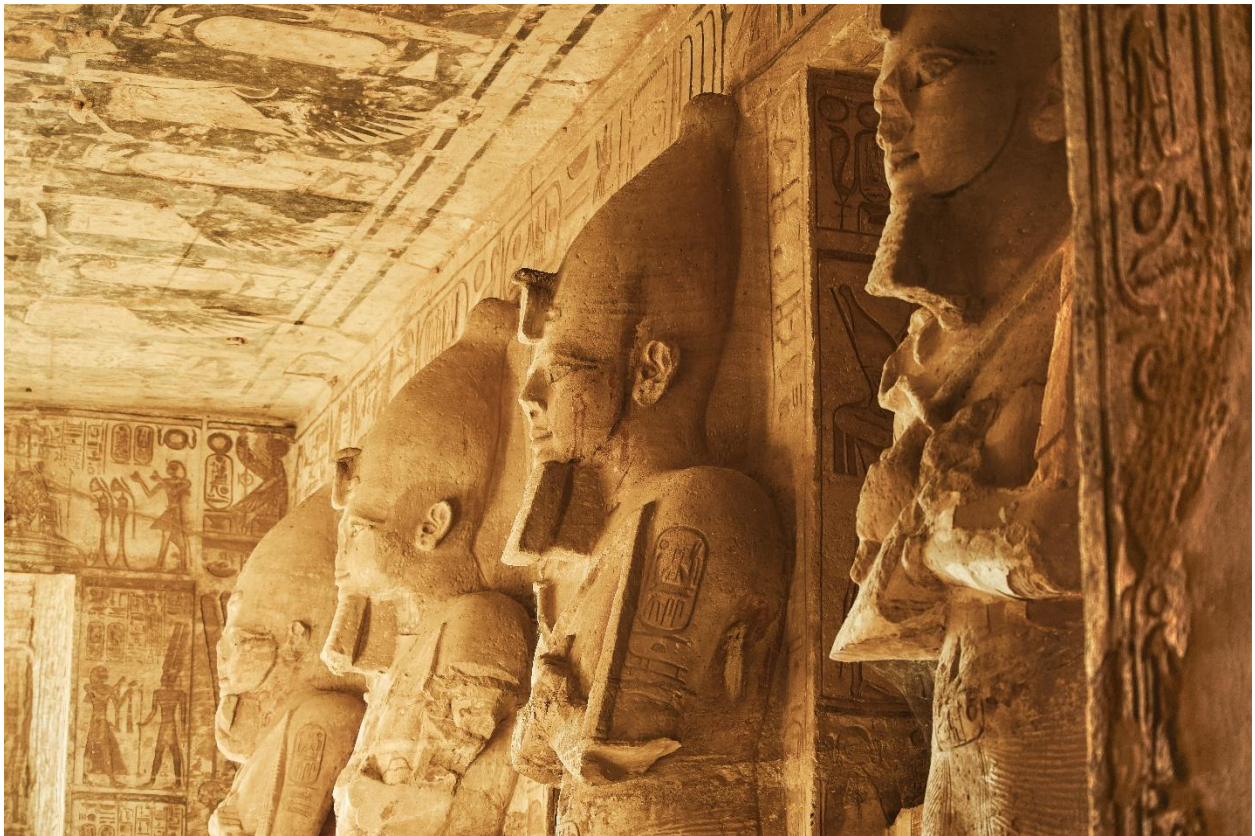


ANCIENT EGYPT & THE 42 LAWS OF MA'AT

MA'AT AND THE 42 LAWS

The concept of Ma'at was one of the most important principles within ancient Egyptian civilization. Ma'at represented truth, justice, balance, harmony, order and right conduct. The ancient Egyptians believed that Ma'at was essential to the proper functioning of society and the natural world. Kings were expected to uphold Ma'at, while individuals were encouraged to live according to its principles. The opposite of Ma'at was associated with disorder, injustice and chaos, often represented by the concept of Isfet.



The expression "42 Laws of Ma'at" is commonly used today to describe a series of moral and ethical declarations associated with the ancient Egyptian judgment of the dead. More accurately, these declarations are known as the Negative Confessions and are most famously preserved in Chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead*. During the judgment of the deceased, the individual declared before a group of divine judges that they had not committed various forms of wrongdoing. There were traditionally 42 declarations, associated with 42 divine assessors.

The declarations covered many aspects of moral behavior. They included statements concerning murder, theft, falsehood, dishonesty, injustice, adultery and mistreatment of others. Other declarations concerned behavior toward religious institutions, food supplies, water sources and the property of other people. Together, these statements provide an important insight into the ethical values that ancient Egyptians considered important.

The 42 declarations should not necessarily be understood as a single legal code comparable to a modern set of laws. Instead, they formed part of a broader religious and moral tradition surrounding Ma'at. They expressed the expectation that a person should live a life characterized by honesty, justice, restraint and respect for others.



THE JUDGEMENT OF THE DEAD

The 42 declarations were closely connected with ancient Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife. Egyptians believed that after death, a person's heart would be examined to determine whether they had lived according to Ma'at. The heart was considered the center of a person's character, memory and moral identity.

In the famous judgment scene associated with the *Book of the Dead*, the deceased appeared before Osiris, the god associated with the afterlife, together with other important deities.

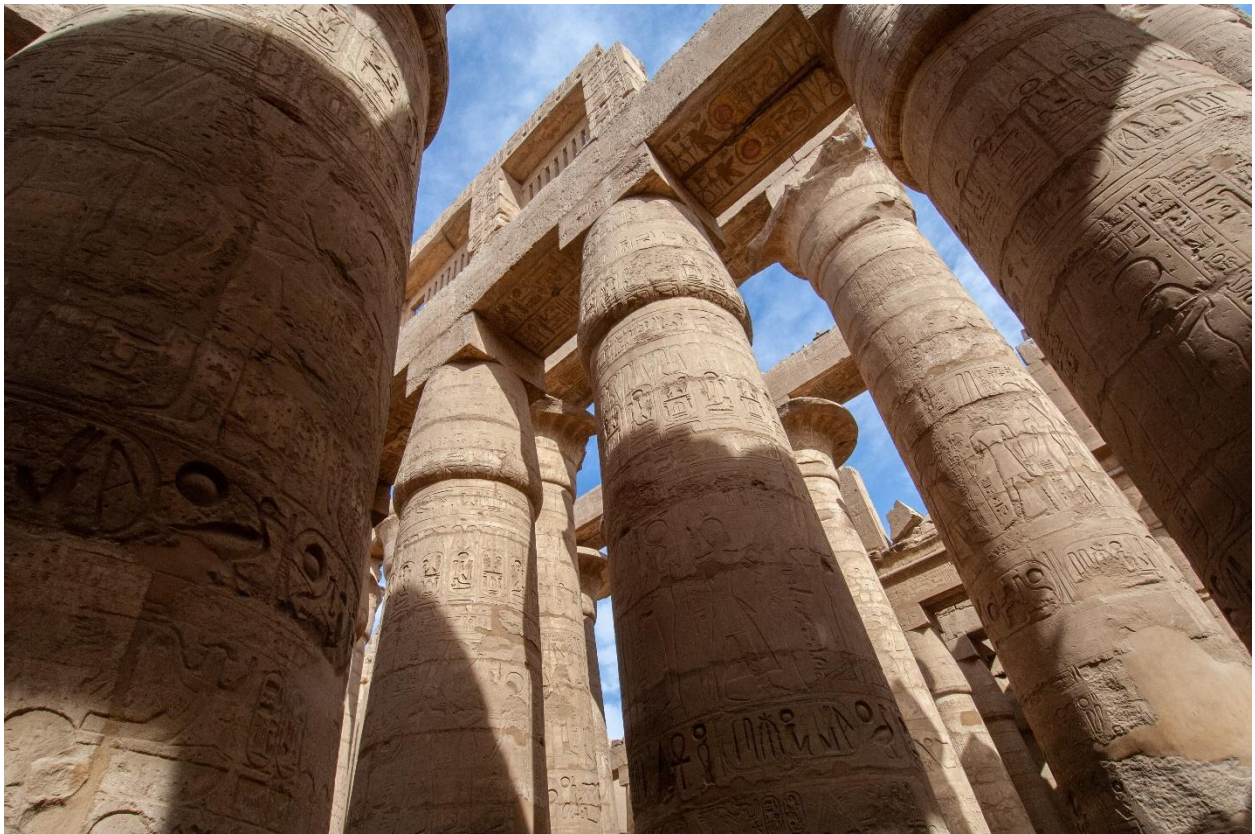
The heart of the deceased was placed upon one side of a balance, while the feather of Ma'at was placed upon the other. The feather represented truth, justice and cosmic order. The deceased then made declarations of innocence, stating that particular wrongs had not been committed. These declarations were addressed to the divine assessors who formed part of the judgment. The purpose was not simply to claim personal innocence but to demonstrate that the individual had attempted to live according to the principles of Ma'at.



The god Anubis was traditionally associated with weighing the heart, while Thoth, the god of writing and knowledge, was associated with recording the result. If the heart was found to be in balance with Ma'at, the deceased could continue into the afterlife. If the heart was judged to be too heavy for wrongdoing, it faced a different fate. In the judgment scene, the creature known as Ammit was believed to consume the hearts of those who failed the judgment. The judgment of the dead therefore reinforced the importance of moral behavior. The individual was expected to demonstrate that they had respected other people, avoided wrongdoing and maintained a proper relationship with religious and social order. The 42 declarations provided a framework through which these values could be expressed.

THE LEGACY OF THE 42 LAWS OF MA'AT

The principles associated with the 42 declarations provide an important window into the moral and religious thinking of ancient Egypt. They demonstrate that concepts such as truth, justice, honesty and social responsibility were deeply connected with Egyptian religious beliefs. Ma'at was not simply an idea concerning individual morality; it was also connected to the stability of the kingdom, the authority of the pharaoh and the continued balance of the universe.



The declarations also reveal that ancient Egyptian ethics included responsibilities toward other members of society. Wrongdoing was not limited to major crimes. Dishonesty, theft, corruption, deception, exploitation and disrespect for others could all be understood as actions that disturbed the balance represented by Ma'at.

Living according to Ma'at therefore required individuals to exercise self-control and consider the consequences of their actions. The importance of Ma'at extended beyond the afterlife. Egyptian kings were frequently represented as rulers who maintained Ma'at and defeated disorder. Temples, religious ceremonies and royal inscriptions repeatedly emphasized the restoration and preservation of cosmic and social order.

In this way, the principles associated with Ma'at influenced both personal morality and the wider political and religious structure of ancient Egyptian civilization.



The 42 declarations have also attracted considerable interest in the modern world. They are frequently discussed in relation to African philosophy, ethics, spirituality and the history of moral thought. However, it is important to distinguish the surviving ancient Egyptian sources from modern interpretations. The 42 declarations were part of a specific religious tradition concerning the judgment of the dead and should be understood within the wider context of ancient Egyptian beliefs. The concept of Ma'at remains one of the most enduring ideas from ancient Egypt. Through its emphasis on truth, justice, balance, harmony and responsible conduct, it demonstrates the importance that ancient Egyptians placed upon maintaining order in both human society and the universe. The 42 Negative Confessions provide one of the clearest surviving expressions of these principles and remain an important source for understanding ancient Egyptian religion, ethics and civilization.

THE 42 LAWS

Here are the 42 Laws of Ma'at (often referred to as the 42 Negative Confessions or Declarations of Innocence), which formed the core moral and ethical principles of ancient Egypt, found in the *Book of the Dead*:

1. I have not committed sin.
2. I have not committed robbery with violence.
3. I have not stolen.
4. I have not slain men and women.
5. I have not stolen grain.
6. I have not purloined offerings.
7. I have not stolen the property of the gods.
8. I have not uttered lies.
9. I have not carried away food.
10. I have not uttered curses.
11. I have not committed adultery.
12. I have caused no one to weep.
13. I have not eaten the heart (i.e., grieved or tormented myself needlessly or caused terror).
14. I have not attacked any man.
15. I am not a man of deceit.
16. I have not stolen cultivated land.
17. I have not been an eavesdropper.
18. I have not slandered anyone.
19. I have not been angry without just cause.
20. I have not debauched the wife of any man.

21. I have not debauched the wife of any man (*repeated in variant lists focusing on purity of conduct*).
22. I have not polluted myself.
23. I have caused no terror.
24. I have not transgressed the law.
25. I have not been hot-tempered.
26. I have not turned a deaf ear to the words of truth.
27. I have not blasphemed.
28. I am not a man of violence.
29. I am not a stirrer up of strife.
30. I have not acted with undue haste or judged hastily.
31. I have not pryed into matters.
32. I have not multiplied my words in speaking (i.e., not gossiped or spoken excessively).
33. I have wrong done no one; I have done no evil.
34. I have not worked witchcraft against the King or my parents.
35. I have never polluted the water.
36. I have not spoken haughtily.
37. I have not cursed God.
38. I have not stolen from the offerings to the dead.
39. I have not taken food from children.
40. I have not acted insolently towards the gods of the city.
41. I have not slain the cattle belonging to the temple.
42. I have not cheated or inflated measurements/weights.

