

Essay on Ma'at

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Just as I pray and listen for the guidance of the Honorables, ancestors, and benefitting spirits as I write this piece, may the readers be guided by these beneficent forces in cultivating their own understanding (and experience) of Ma'at..

INTRODUCTION

The following is more a task presented to me than a chosen endeavor, given the lack of clear and comprehensive information on Ma'at. As a student, some may say a mystic, of the range of Kemetic spiritual teachings, I have been moved to make many changes in my life. One has been the addition of "Ma'at" to my (non-African) surname. The choice of Ma'at was simple: despite the range of life approaches throughout Kemet¹ (often called ancient Egypt), one thing was almost always, if not always, present -- Ma'at. I stress that there was no one overarching Kemetic religion. Many scholars, usually from Western European cultural paradigms, interpret the spiritual components of Kemetic ways of life through their own conceptual lenses. Thus "Egyptian Religion" or "Egyptian Mythology," as they often call it, is interpreted in ways that mirror Christianity: having one set of core principles which are dominant in all the sub-sects that break off from this main core. In reality, each city and village usually had their own primary Honorables (often translated as gods or goddesses) who occupied the most important places in their approach to life. One city may be designed to honor a covenant with one local Honorable who may not be widely known beyond that city, while further down the Nile River another city had covenants with two other completely different Honorables. There were few Honorables widely known throughout the entire Kemetic region, creating a pantheon of Honorables that reaches into the hundreds if not thousands. Yet, despite this reality, Ma'at as a She-Honorable, Principle (that Western European cultures describe as many principles), Energy, and probably more held a fundamental place in the multitude of distinct and differing Kemetic ways of life.

Another point of interest is the prolific presence of symbols of Ma'at in surviving remains from Kemet. On many temple and pyramid walls, on scrolls, on crafts, on coffins, etc., you will find numerous symbols of Ma'at, one of the most notable being the feather. This is true throughout the Kemetic region. I sense the reverence for Ma'at was a strong unifying force for Kemetic peoples who sometimes had very differing ways of life.

¹ I will use terms such as Kemet, Honorables, Kemetic Symbol Alphabet in place of commonly used terms such as Egypt, gods / goddesses, and hieroglyphics. The former terms are indicative of an Eurocentric Egyptologist perspective, which I do not hold. To distinguish the philosophical place I come from, I use different terms that speak more truly to the African-centered paradigm I embody. This practice is informed by an old mystic saying: "as our understanding changes, so should our language."

With Ma'at having such an importance, I've grown to embrace it as a guiding way for my life. As one sacred writing says: the Honorables live on Ma'at. Yet, one will find many different explanations of Ma'at in modern writings. Some define Ma'at as a "goddess." Some define Ma'at as a set of principles or ideas. Some define Ma'at as truth, justice, order, or even all three. But even among such definitions, there is little explanation given to the fundamental importance of Ma'at to the Kemetic ways of life. My aim is to share from what I have learned about Ma'at, that it may assist others on their road to discovering the full reality of Ma'at for themselves -- what I hold to be the only way to (truly) understand Ma'at.

CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPING A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF MA'AT

One of my favorite sayings has become: "do not ignore the obvious." Yet one of the most ignored obvious facts of the study of Kemet has been that there is no comprehensive dictionary that translates the Kemetic writing systems to any existing living language.

The basis for the modern translation of the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet (often called hieroglyphics) lays with the Rosetta Stone. It was discovered in 1799 by Napoleon Bonaparte's army (from France). The stone is said to have been created in 196 B.C., which is late in the history of Kemet. It contains a royal decree which was written in three versions: a Kemetic Symbol Alphabet version, a Kemetic Demotic Alphabet (a type of character script) version, and a classical Greek version. The translation of the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet is credited to a French scholar named Jean-François Champollion, who is recognized as the father of Egyptology. From his ability to read Coptic (an Asiatic language derived from ancient Kemetic) he "interpreted" some of the Kemetic Demotic text of the Rosetta Stone and linked this back to the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet version. With Coptic being derived from Kemetic language, one can reasonably argue that some words will have the same or similar meanings in both Coptic and the Kemetic Demotic. But there are words that are not common to both, thus leaving gaps in the translation process. To address these gaps, Champollion made *educated guesses* for the sake of translation. Yet few question the claimed authority of Champollion's translation of the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet to the Greek, from which Egyptologists claim to be able to read the majority of ancient Kemetic writings.

A few things are of note...

Firstly, the date of creation of the Rosetta Stone being 196 B.C. Use of the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet dates back to as early as 3100 B.C., some argue earlier. Should we assume that the use of this writing system in 196 B.C. is identical to how it was used from its origins? That there were no changes in the use and meanings of words and symbols? I ask these questions because the "alphabet translation" from the Rosetta Stone is used to decode texts from much earlier. To make my point in modern terms, a 2007 A.D. English dictionary is not the best tool to use for Middle English texts written between 1100 and 1500 A.D. Examples of words written identically in both periods but having different meanings include:

Word	Middle English Meaning (in modern words)
axe	ask, demand
bar	baron, bare
boot	boat
heed	head
reed	red, advice
sad	steadfast, sated

But even words used in Shakespearean plays (1500s to early 1600s A.D.), which is considered Early Modern English, can have different meanings now. Examples include:

Word	Shakespearean Meaning (in modern words)
baggage	strumpet, prostitute
base	low, common
cousin	close relative, not limited to an aunt or uncle's child
housewife	hussy, prostitute
list	listen
mess	meal, food
nice	squeamish, delicate
silly	innocent
proper	handsome
want	lack

These are just a few examples. And I have not even included Middle English and Early Modern English words that are no longer used today.

But even within the same age, a single word may have varying meanings. Take the word "bad" for example: its mainstream traditional meaning has a negative connotation, while its modern use has positive and negative meanings. Or even a word such as "key" has different meanings in its contemporary traditional mainstream use: an object that opens a door, a thing that explains something else, musical tone.

Were factors such as these taken into account by Champollion and those who hold his translation of the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet as the authoritative basis for interpreting Kemetic Symbol texts? Even Champollion acknowledged that the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet “is a complex system, writing figurative, symbolic, and phonetic all at once, in the same text, the same phrase, I would almost say in the same word.” So even a literal translation would probably not capture the intended meaning of texts, given the circumstances Champollion faced in his endeavor to create a “code” for the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet.

Let us also take a look at the alphabet translation Champollion constructed. The Kemetic Symbol Alphabet has hundreds, some say thousands, of symbols. And such a count does not include those we may never discover because they were contained in documents or in structures that were marred and destroyed since Kemet was conquered. Yet Champollion, with his basis as the Rosetta Stone, translates the symbols of the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet into less than 30 Greek characters. His premise for doing so is his *hypothesis* that the Kemetic alphabets, like Greek, are phonetically-oriented: which means words are written as they would be pronounced. This differs from alphabets that are ideologically-oriented: where “words” (symbols, and characters) are not written for how they are pronounced but for what they represent and / or seek to communicate. A number of symbol alphabets are ideologically-oriented, written with no intention of ever being pronounced but to communicate (often sacred) ideas.

For example, in an ideologically-oriented alphabet the symbol ☺ could mean happiness. It does not correspond to a letter or sound to be spoken, but instead conveys an idea. The mass number of symbols in the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet is suggestive of it being an ideologically-oriented alphabet. Especially since most phonetically-oriented alphabets have far fewer characters to correspond to the more limited sounds of human enunciation. In other words, you are less likely to have hundreds of symbols for an alphabet designed to correspond to languages that may have a few dozen sounds. Champollion defends his hypothesis regarding this point by stating that many different symbols were used to correspond to a single sound: for example, you may have ten symbols that correspond to the sound “r.” But even if Kemetic alphabets are phonetically-oriented, and have been so from the beginning of their use, just because you can pronounce a word does not mean you know what it means.

(I also acknowledge that an alphabet can be both phonetically and ideologically-oriented, although that tends to be less common with alphabets.)

The fact remains that Champollion’s assertions remain a theory: we have no way to confirm if he is correct. (The same can be said about my thoughts.) Due to the brutal and destructive conquest of Kemet by Europeans and Arabs, any documents that may have served as a dictionary from Kemetic to a living language were destroyed. Libraries and temples were targeted for destruction, vandalism, and conversion to eliminate and obscure “pagan” writings contained therein (in books and on walls). Also, those who knew how to read and write the Kemetic alphabets were often killed or imprisoned in isolation from the rest of the people as cultural / religious imperialism was part of the strategy of European and Arab conquests. Thus, most scholars agree that by 400 A.D. Kemetic languages were

virtually dead: with very few, if any, people being alive who spoke and could translate these languages.

But this did not stop early Egyptologists, who were all White Europeans, from embracing Champollion's alphabet as the authoritative "code breaker" for the Kemetic written languages. (A few scholars did challenge Champollion's hypothesis, but his alphabet became accepted by the field of Egyptology as a whole.) Acceptance of this unproven theory as fact, which goes against the laws of their own sciences, has allowed a certain set of hypotheses to be the basis upon which we accept the translation of Kemetic writings. When unproven theories are accepted as unquestioned truth, the quest for understanding becomes compromised. Most translations which have since followed conform to a narrow set of Eurocentric ideas that have defined the grain of Egyptology and, thus, the modern world's understanding of Kemet (ancient Egypt). A theoretical alphabet that can (and should) be questioned has been accepted with almost complete legitimacy. So has Champollion's practice of making "educated guesses" to fill in the gaps of translated Kemetic texts. Countless translations of "ancient Egyptian" writings are filled with educated guesses not presented as such. And from what place of understanding have scholars drawn upon to make these educated guesses? Have they looked to other African cultures and civilizations to explain what they otherwise cannot explain about Kemet, an African civilization? Or have they, instead, projected their own European values and concepts to bridge the gaps they encounter in their efforts to decipher ancient Kemetic texts? Let us not forget that early Egyptologists (and even some today) held "ancient Egypt" to be a civilization of Whites. Such thoughts were part of a wider arrogance and mentality that denied even the possibility of an African civilization, let alone a great one. It is only after continuous evidence has surfaced that Kemet is now acknowledged as having Black African origins, although there are still efforts to credit the progress of Kemetic civilization with Semitic peoples. We would be naive to dismiss the explicit and implicit influence of White supremacy in Egyptology, from its origins to today.

My intent is not to totally dismiss Egyptology and the translations based on Champollion's alphabet. He presents an interesting theory in light of the situation history presents. Also, due to the popularity of some of the Kemetic stories and teachings, some translated texts can be cross-referenced to accounts captured in other languages prior to the eradication of the Kemetic languages. For example, when the Greeks came to Kemet they recorded some of the Kemetic stories in Greek, thus providing classical Greek versions of these stories made when both languages were alive. Such accounts can be a reference to guide later translations of the Kemetic writings. (Although even these should be taken with a grain of salt since these stories evolved and changed as they traveled to other peoples and cultures, resulting in different versions of the "same" story.) But I do stress: what is presented from the foundation of Egyptology should be read with a question mark, not a definitive period. As things stand, we may never know the meaning of the Kemetic writings as the Kemetians understood them. Which has led me to the approach I take to study their writings.

Many Kemetic temples had writings on the walls. Such places were designed for spiritual study, reflection, and meditation. The Kemetic Symbol Alphabet is almost always used in these settings. If we approach these writings as *ideologically-oriented*, it places them in a different light. They are not presented to communicate spoken words (which usually have accepted collective meanings), but ideas to be understood. Such an approach emphasizes a more internal process. For example, the

symbol ☺ is not limited to happiness. To some, it could mean face. But even if we have an agreed association of happiness for this symbol, it may have a different meaning (beyond the surface) to me than it does to you, especially if the symbol does not have a spoken sound. This idea is celebrated by many purveyors of visual art, who may agree on a surface meaning or purpose to a visual art form but often experience (internally understand) the art form in differing individual ways; i.e., how the art form *speaks to you*.

Combine this approach with the following factors, and it can dramatically transform how we view the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet. Firstly, this writing was seen as sacred messages (or revelations) from the Honorables, often held to be gifts captured (written) and delivered by Tehuti (also called Thoth). Many texts (in books and on temple walls) were held to be copies of scrolls originally written by Tehuti, and recopied generation after generation by Kemetians. "Books" were held to have dropped from the sky, revealing messages Honorables wished to convey to the people. Other discovered texts were held to be hidden in secret places by Tehuti, to eventually be found by those in quest of wisdom and truth. Placing the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet in such a context makes the alphabet more than just a means to convey ideas. It is a place where the messages of the Honorables and the Kemetians' quest for understanding come together. One can say it is an act of revelation by the Honorables, most often Tehuti who is regarded as the (or a) scribe and messenger of the Honorables.

Secondly, in keeping with not ignoring the obvious, the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet is comprised of pictures. It would be unwise to dismiss or discount the visual element of this alphabet, especially when many symbols resemble realities in the Kemetic life. Would we dismiss that symbols that resemble birds have no connection to birds? That a feather is not a feather? That an eye is not an eye? Or that a more "abstract" symbol such as ^^^^^ is not connected with water? or maybe mountains? The presentation of such symbols in temple halls, where meditation was practiced, leads me to think about the connection of visuals and meditation. One of the major forms of meditation, which can be traced back to Kemet, is that of visual meditation. I can envision one of the practices being sitting in a temple hall upon which sacred symbols are displayed, sitting there to meditate upon the symbols. To allow the symbols *to speak to you* in a way beyond words, beyond thoughts, to a deeper level of understanding. To focus on the symbol that it may speak to you, to hear it as the Honorables reveal its meaning to you. This approach to meditation is even practiced today among a number of religious / spiritual traditions. And those who cultivate this practice have noticed the power of this approach in deepening one's understanding, expanding their consciousness, embodying and becoming honored virtues.

What if in our quest to understand Ma'at we did not go to a book that summarizes positions based on the Eurocentric canon of Egyptology?² That instead, we look to the symbols associated with Ma'at, and meditate on them. And as a guide to inform our explorations, we keep in our awareness that the

² Even many scholars and writers who claim an Afri-centric or African-centered perspective write from a knowledge foundation based in Egyptology when writing about Kemet.

Kemetians were African people who lived in ways that are more in line with Africa than any other place in the world. Not only would this debunk the myth of expertise often ascribed to Egyptology, this approach is more in line with the practices our Kemetian ancestors employed. It makes our understanding not a collectively accepted dogma to conform to but a series of individual quests that unite and challenge us to grow as we continue a legacy of (spiritual) traditions which originates with our ancestors. This is reflected in the differing spiritual approaches of Kemetians: different groups held different Honorables as primary in their partnership with the Honorables. Different groups drew differing lessons from some of the same stories, which led them to emphasize different elements in how they lived. Even from generation to generation changes occurred in people's understandings. For in such, the symbols remain not as specific interpretations challenged to stand the test of time, but as open messages to be understood in the specifics of the time people find themselves within. So as much as there is value in knowing how our ancestors understood Ma'at, the more prominent challenge is: how will we understand it in this day and age?

THE FEATHER OF MA'AT

During the time I was conducting research for this essay, an elder said to me: "Africa is a place of *mystery*." Much (if not most) of the teachings of Africa are not meant to be explained, although that does not mean you will not come to understand them. The transmission of teachings throughout much of traditional Africa is held to be sacred: where the deep wells of what has been learned (from the ancestors till now) is reserved for those whose purpose coincides or is aligned with such teachings. For example, the knowledge of carving will be reserved for those who are to be carvers, the knowledge of healing will be reserved for those who are to be healers, etc. That is not to say that those who are not carvers will not know anything about carving, but passing on the full scope of the art of carving will be reserved for apprentices of this sacred art.

So in many ways, the idea of writing a document about a particular field of understanding that may be made available to a larger audience contradicts with many African traditions, especially with "spiritual" matters. Any field of understanding is, in many ways, held to be a "living being" that must be respected and protected just as you would any human you hold in loving esteem. Part of such protection was manifested through the sacred traditions of apprenticeship in which "chosen" students were taught (orally and by example) in the context of a nurturing, supportive relationship. And this context is very important as those outside such a context will rarely be taught the full scope of a matter.

I preface the following remarks with what is said above. I emphasize Ma'at is not something that can be explained as much as one must come to understand it for one's self. Traditionally, the best way to do this has been through the supportive nurturance of someone who has come to realize and live Ma'at. But for those who are not in such a situation, I will share some things from what I have learned. The tone of the following words will be more "mystic" than "scientific" and "historical." Thus, the challenge for the reader is to not blindly accept what I share, but use what I present as a starting point for a discussion within: where you explore, test, and reflect upon what is presented. For

if your heart is pure (which it is if not covered by impurities) and you live your life in alignment with such purity, you will come to a beneficent understanding and embrace of Ma'at. And surely, the Honorables will see to the care of their children: those who live their ways...

One of the most common "symbols" of Ma'at is the Feather of Ma'at. I put the word "symbol" in quotes because from a traditional / mystic perspective the symbol *is* a form of the being, which is the being. An example: as I write these words they are a form of me such that if you accept these words, you accept me (to the extent that I am reflected in these words). And, probably more clearly for most people, if you violate these words you violate me. Such that if someone plagiarizes this essay it will not be seen as a wrong against the words, it will be seen as a violation against me. This principle is key to understanding the Honorables: that they exist as beings that are one with (not separate from) their forms and their energies. Their forms are often displayed in pictures, symbols, sculptures, etc. Their energy is often displayed in action: acts of the Honorables themselves, acts of nature, and (especially important for us) acts of humanity - those performed individually and collectively. So from a traditional perspective, when you see the Feather of Ma'at you see Ma'at (one of her forms). When you read the word "Ma'at" you are encountering Ma'at. And the same reverence you would show to Ma'at if she presented herself as the Honorable she is, this same reverence should be shown to the symbols, to the name, and other forms of Ma'at.

But back to the Feather of Ma'at: the importance of Ma'at is reflected in the constant occurrence of the feather symbol (as well as other symbols) in numerous Kemetic texts. It is among one of the more common symbols used. It is presented as simply a feather (or feathers) that stands alone. It is seen being held by beings. It is seen being worn by beings (in crowns or clothing). My point being: it is presented in many ways.

Yet, do not limit the Feather to just this form. Anytime you see a bird "symbol" in texts, of which many are prevalent in Kemetic writings, Ma'at is present there. Why: because most birds have feathers. To explain this point in another example, imagine if a drop of water is a sacred symbol for an Honorable. The reference to such an Honorable should not be limited to just the drop symbol. Symbols for rivers, lakes, streams, oceans, and other bodies of water are connected to this Honorable. Why: because, to state the obvious, these entities are made of water; and more specifically, they are made up of countless drops of water. Depending on the depth of your level of connection, you may also make a connection with this Honorable to a boat. Why: because boats travel on water, and thus explore the relationship of travel (or journey) in relation to this Honorable. You might even make a connection with this Honorable to a beach. Why: because this is a place where land and water meet; and if there is an Honorable (or Honorables) of land you may explore the connection between these Honorables. And, at the risk of overemphasizing my point, you may even connect the water drop Honorable with any symbol for the human body since the body is comprised mostly of water.

It is for the reader to determine to what extent they will make connections of one symbol with other symbols, of one Honorable with other Honorables and realities. Wisdom is a guide as to how far to make such connections. But I think it is not a far reach to extend the feather form of Ma'at to bird

symbols, and thus other Honorables and realities these represent. Thus, Tehuti (Thoth), Heru (Horus), Nebt-het (Nephthys), Auset (Isis), Het-Hurt (Het-Heru or Hathor), Bennu and others are connected to Ma'at. It is neither a far reach to connect Ma'at with Honorables who appear in winged forms, such as: the winged sun disk, the winged eye, the winged scarab, and others.

I hope you are able to see how far reaching the Feather of Ma'at is in the Kemetic Symbol Alphabet. (This reach extends even further when you include the other symbols of Ma'at.) And if Ma'at has such a presence in this alphabet, used to convey sacred messages from the Honorables, it follows that Ma'at has a comparable importance among the Honorables. When we look to Kemet and see how their ways of life (prior to their decline) were partnerships with the Honorables, we can see why Ma'at holds such importance in their lives. And one of the best testaments of such importance is the Weighing of the Heart.

For those who pass on from this world and complete a safe journey through the Realm of the Passed Ones (the Netherworld), they arrive at the Hall of Ma'at. Within this hall, they come before Ausar (Osiris) and other Honorables, where the traveler's heart is weighed on a scale against the Feather of Ma'at. As paintings of this scene convey, the goal is to have one's heart (which is depicted as being in a container) balance the scale with the Feather of Ma'at. It is understood that a pure heart is required to attain this balance. Such a person fulfills a major objective of life (from an African perspective): to become an ancestor and thus be granted the opportunity to live until the end of time, often understood to be eternally. (For those who do not know, to become an ancestor is one of the greatest accomplishments one can achieve, greater than words can convey.) The one who does not balance the scale with the Feather of Ma'at, their heart (and thus existence) is devoured by Am-mit, the Devourer of Hearts. Such a person no longer exists.

I stress the importance of balancing the scale with the Feather of Ma'at. Often when this scene is discussed, people state that those whose hearts weigh more than the Feather, a sign of an impure (or evil) heart, will be fed to Am-mit. But as the paintings show the goal is to be in balance with the Feather, it follows that those hearts which weigh less than the Feather will also be fed to Am-mit. And by the way, I have never seen Am-mit portrayed as skinny. It usually appears well fed and ready to eat in every painting of the Weighing of the Heart I have seen.

So what are the lessons to be drawn from this? There are more than what I have discovered and surely more than what I will convey in this essay. But let's start with the Feather of Ma'at itself. One of the most obvious lessons is that: the Feather of Ma'at has some weight. It is something that can be weighed and measured. Yet, it is light enough to fly, to be moved and carried by air (which we embrace as breath). For someone seeking to live Ma'at, these are powerful lessons. Our lives should have some weight. Or put another way: our lives should have meaning, a purpose. Yet this weight (purpose) should not be heavy or burdensome, we should be able to carry (live) it with our breath. We also should be able to measure how we live, and hopefully before the Weighing of the Heart where an unfortunate weighing will mean our end. And that which we balance our lives with is Ma'at. Thus, the elements of purpose and balance are revealed as (part of) Ma'at.

Also, in the paintings, the Feather of Ma'at is drawn standing upon the stem of the feather on the scale. It is not laid flat but is placed upright. Thus, the elements of being upright and standing firm are revealed as (part of) Ma'at.

The Feather of Ma'at is the only thing on its side of the scale. This reveals that Ma'at is enough, it is sufficient for life. One need not embrace a complex system of doctrines or even multiple doctrines. The living of Ma'at is enough to become an ancestor. Thus, the element I call simplicity is revealed as (part of) Ma'at.

When we start to deal with the scale, we encounter more lessons. Let us not overlook that the purpose of the scale in this Hall is to weigh Ma'at and the heart. Therefore, lessons drawn from the scale have a direct correlation to Ma'at and our hearts. The fact that the continuance of life into the ancestral realm is determined on a scale is important. Beliefs, proclamations, faith, lineage, and alliances are irrelevant here. The only thing that is relevant is the heart. Now some may use beliefs, proclamations, faith, lineage, alliances, etc. as ways to cultivate the heart, but even this reveals their limited relevance because the only thing on the scale is the heart (in its container) and the Feather of Ma'at. Thus, how you cultivate the heart (your path, your religion) is irrelevant when it comes time to weigh the heart. This sets an order for how to conduct one's affairs since how we live purifies or pollutes the heart. The "how we live" brings us to our actions, which are measurable through what they produce: outcomes. Did what you do benefit yourself and others in undisputable, measurable ways? Beneficent actions produce beneficent outcomes. Destructive actions produce destructive outcomes. This differs from intentions and thoughts which are less likely to produce outcomes. They may be the reason we do something but it is *actions that produce outcomes*, usually not the thought or intention itself. This becomes clearer when people with beneficent intentions perform destructive actions that produce destructive outcomes. Thus, an order for how life is measured, how we can choose to live (performing actions that balance with Ma'at) is revealed as (part of) Ma'at.

The heart, in its container, is the only thing on its side of the scale. There are no family, friends, and loved ones there to help balance the scale. There are no sacred books or items there to help balance the scale. Only your heart which has the responsibility to balance the Feather of Ma'at. In other words: you are responsible for you (and only you)³. Thus, responsibility (or some may say self-responsibility) is revealed as (part of) Ma'at.

The scale also measures things as they are. A pound is a pound, two pounds are two pounds, a ton is a ton. Two lessons can be drawn from this: first, to see things as they are, to realize reality as it is. This is a (mystic) definition of truth. Also, in this way, honesty is realized: for a scale cannot say that one pound is two pounds being that it measures things as they are. The combination of truth and honesty leads to equality, where all are treated by the same measures. And since all hearts are weighed by the same standard, the Feather of Ma'at, this brings us to justice. Thus, truth, honesty,

³ This should not be read to justify abandonment of those who are in our care (i.e. our children). Our responsibility to them is to teach, nurture, and support them in developing their awareness and practice of their own self-responsibility.

equality, and justice are revealed as (part of) Ma'at.

But all these lessons are not only to be lived in the Hall of Ma'at. For if we wait till then to live these virtues our hearts will probably become food for Am-mit. It was well understood that we are to live these lessons in our lives in this world, particularly in our interactions with other beings (humans, Honorables, animals, nature, etc.) If a group of people live Ma'at -- what we in this age call purpose, balance, uprightness, standing firm, simplicity, order, responsibility, truth, honesty, equality, and justice -- it will naturally bring them together. The beneficent outcomes produced by such interactions will produce unity. This shared beneficence leads to community (the foundation for civilization). And to continue the beneficence of community, reciprocity is necessary: that actions of Ma'at be mutually performed by all. If not, a community will fall apart due to a lack of purpose, lack of balance, chaos, dishonesty and lies, irresponsibility, inequality, injustice, etc. Thus, unity (which manifests as community) and reciprocity are revealed as (part of) Ma'at.

So when people ask me to define Ma'at in general discussions, I usually state in part: purpose, balance, uprightness, standing firm, simplicity, order, responsibility, truth, honesty, equality, justice, unity, and reciprocity. But as you can see, there is a deeper meaning to these "components" of Ma'at. For, as the above illustrates, these "components" are so inseparable from each other that if you remove any one of them you do not have Ma'at. For example, you cannot live all the above listed virtues except justice and call it Ma'at. The same goes for every one of the listed virtues, and probably others that I have yet to discover words to explain. In living Ma'at, the living of the whole is just as important as living the "components." They are truly inseparable, so much so that all of these "components" *lived simultaneously* is Ma'at; anything less is not.

And lastly, as the path to becoming an ancestor is a path of love, the purpose of Ma'at is love. And so I also include love as being (part of) Ma'at.

CONCLUSION

As it is understood that one of the main purposes of this life (for African people) is to become an ancestor, it may be more clear why a literal definition of Ma'at is: "things as they ought to be." That if we live Ma'at, we will fulfill the purpose of life. But as I stated earlier, it is not something to be explained as much as it is to be understood (by living it).

I encourage people to expand their awareness of seeing Ma'at. In connection to the Feather of Ma'at, I have made it a personal practice that when I see a feather in the grass, a bird in the air, that I see Ma'at. When I see people perform honest, just actions I have witnessed Ma'at. When I perform actions of beneficence (i.e. kindness) to my wife and others, I am living Ma'at. Ma'at abounds, and we are invited to be one with its boundlessness.

But the responsibility (Ma'at) lays with you to develop your own awareness. The above lessons are realizations I discovered over the course of hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of ongoing

meditation. Meditation was a sacred and essential practice throughout Kemet. It connects us with our breaths, which has the power to carry Ma'at. Meditation also brings us to the abode of silence. As mystics have said throughout the ages, the Honorables are more apt to talk in whispers, whereby it is easier to hear them in a quiet place. Through meditation we can cultivate our minds to be such a quiet place. Instead of being preoccupied with passing and unimportant thoughts, we can have a focused mind that has cleared a sacred space (by removing "noise" and "clutter") to hear the guidance of the Honorables. Meditation may even reveal how much Ma'at is (intertwined with) other Honorables, and we may even be blessed to receive distinct lessons regarding Ma'at from them.

Much writing exists on mediation and I encourage those seeking more information to embark on their own quests for understanding. There are also many places people can go to learn and practice meditation with others. There are many approaches to meditation and may you find those that best resonate with who you presently are. One approach that may be helpful for those seeking to understand (or deepen their understanding of) Ma'at is that of visualization. After relaxing into a meditative state you can visualize the Feather of Ma'at and give it the opportunity to speak for itself. It may take time for it to do so, but if it does you may be amazed by what it reveals. Remember, the Feather of Ma'at is Ma'at.

As an African in quest of deepening my understanding of my ancestors, perhaps you now see why Ma'at holds a vital place in my quest. And if more of us come to understand Ma'at, we will not only better understand our ancestors, we will have an unstoppable means to transform our state of being in this world: to rebuild and expand our African communities which will lead us to the stage of African civilization.

Peace, Blessings, and Understanding to those who seek and live the way...

nashid

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