

ma'at

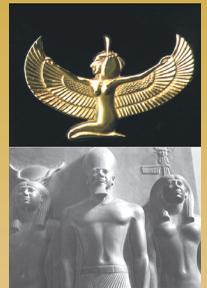
BY: YOLANDA KALI DENSON LEHMAN

All of us, whether Christian, Muslim, Agnostic, or otherwise, need to develop and follow a consistent set of beliefs and practices that lead us into the moral lifestyle.

As we have entered the twenty-first century, no one can debate the fact that our society as a whole is becoming increasingly immoral in character and in action. This year children have gunned down children in schools, people have continued to go hungry and homeless in this land of plenty, and people in general have failed to show one another the love and mercy that is every person's due. All of us, whether Christian, Muslim, Agnostic, or otherwise, need to develop and follow a consistent set of beliefs and practices that lead us into the moral lifestyle. The Ancient Egyptians followed a set of beliefs and practices that governed all that they did and thought called MA'AT.

MA'AT is a catalog of forty-two statements of moral fact that every Egyptian individual tried to base their lives upon. The forty-two Principles of MA'AT are:

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 or women.*
5. *I have not stolen food.*
6. *I have not swindled offerings.*
7. *I have not stolen from God.*
8. *I have not told lies.*
9. *I have not carried away food.*
10. *I have not cursed.*
11. *I have not closed my ears to truth.*
12. *I have not committed adultery.*
13. *I have not made anyone cry.*
14. *I have not felt sorrow without reason.*
15. *I have not assaulted anyone.*
16. *I have not been deceitful.*
17. *I have not stolen anyone's land.*
18. *I have not been an eavesdropper.*
19. *I have not falsely accused anyone.*
20. *I have not been angry without reason.*
21. *I have not seduced anyone's wife.*

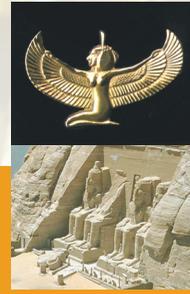




22. *I have not polluted myself.*
23. *I have not terrorized anyone.*
24. *I have not disobeyed the law.*
25. *I have not been excessively angry.*
26. *I have not cursed God.*
27. *I have not behaved with violence.*
28. *I have not caused disruption of peace.*
29. *I have not acted hastily or without thought.*
30. *I have not overstepped my boundaries of concern.*
31. *I have not exaggerated my words when speaking.*
32. *I have not worked evil.*
33. *I have not used evil thoughts, words, and deeds.*
34. *I have not polluted the water.*
35. *I have not spoken angrily or arrogantly.*
36. *I have not cursed anyone in thought, word, or deed.*
37. *I have not placed myself on a pedestal.*
38. *I have not stolen that which belongs to God.*
39. *I have not stolen from or disrespected the deceased.*
40. *I have not taken food from a child.*
41. *I have not acted with insolence.*
42. *I have not destroyed property belonging to God.*



*We all
need to make the
effort to remember that
everything we do
ultimately affects
someone else.*



As one can see, the Ancient Egyptians had very high standards for themselves and for other people. It would be impossible to address all the principles of MA'AT in great detail, but one can easily see how each principle would be important in the quest to attain the moral life. The principles speak about treating other people with dignity and love, the importance of individual person's seeking to attain the highest standards of moral purity within themselves, as well as giving God and the things of God honor and respect. The Ancient Egyptians did not just think these principles were a nice set of rules; rather, they believed that if the principles were not followed, their lives and their universe would become unbalanced. Imbalance would lead to chaos, violence, destruction, death, and ultimately eternal punishment.

As African-Americans who share in the rich legacy of Africa's heritage and history, it is appropriate that we conscientiously choose to practice the principles of MA'AT in our daily lives. We all need to make the effort to remember that everything we do ultimately affects someone else. No one stands alone. As descendants of African slaves, that truth must be profoundly remembered. We are all here because our ancestors worked together to survive. Our heritage is one of community, love, support, and encouragement.

The principles of MA'AT remind us that we should care not only about ourselves, but also ultimately about all of God's creation. Principle 34 says, "I have not polluted the water." This principle can be understood literally and figuratively. Literally, it means that we have a responsibility to conserve and protect natural resources. We should all strive to leave this earth better than we found it. But, this principle also has a figurative meaning. The Ancient Egyptians understood that "If the water was

polluted the fish would get sick.” We are the fish and the depravity of our society is an indication of the pollution that has seeped into our water source. We must clean up the environment in which we live, so that we can raise healthy, happy, and moral families.

Ultimately, the decision is up to us. We can choose to continue to live in a society which is perverted and polluted by a decay of morals, or, as a community, we can decide today to reclaim our heritage and our history and live the moral life. It is really that simple. The Ancient Egyptians understood that it is never enough just to sit around wishing that everyone else would change. As individuals, we must each decide that the madness will stop with us. Today, each of us must decide “I will honor God. I will not steal. I will not

We must contain the illness by treating it with the one and only cure—love. We must choose to love God and love our neighbors, as we love ourselves.

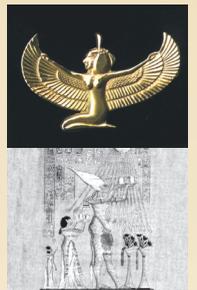
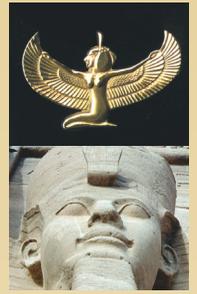
This is the sum of morality.

curse. I will not lie. I will not behave violently. I will not speak in anger.” If we all decided to live the moral life, we would ultimately transform our society one member at a time.

This is the fundamental truth that our Ancient Egyptian brothers and sisters understood. All of creation is connected to itself—because all of creation is connected to the Creator. If I pollute the water, my child will become sick. If my child is sick and contagious, s/he will spread the disease to others. This is the situation at hand. We are in the midst of a moral epidemic. We must contain the illness by treating it with the one and only cure...love. We must choose to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. This is the sum of morality. This is what our Egyptian ancestors understood. Love covers a multitude of sins.

MA'AT was practiced thousands of years ago by the Ancient Egyptians and consequently their society is still venerated as one of the greatest to ever grace the earth. Because the Egyptians understood the interconnectedness of the universe, they were able to build a society that was largely peaceful and prosperous. Their society has greatly influenced every society to arise since, and we must allow it to influence us as Africans in America as well. MA'AT was for the ancient Egyptians, but MA'AT is also for us—contemporary African-Americans. In fact, MA'AT is for all of humanity.

Let's all make the decision as individuals to contain the madness and to treat the epidemic of immorality with the principles of MA'AT.



Yolanda Kali Denson Lehman is a native of St. Louis, MO and received her undergraduate degree with honors from Wesleyan University and a Master of Divinity Degree at Harvard Divinity School.