

SANKOFA POLITICAL STUDIES

GENERAL THEME :

MAATIAN ANTHROPOLOGY



PERFECTIBILITY OF HUMANS

BY
ALEAKWE ODIOR

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42 Ideals of Ma'at

1. I honor virtue
2. I benefit with gratitude
3. I am peaceful
4. I respect the property of others
5. I affirm that all life is sacred
6. I give offerings that are genuine
7. I live in truth
8. I regard all altars with respect
9. I speak with sincerity
10. I consume only my fair share
11. I offer words of good intent
12. I relate in peace
13. I honor animals with reverence
14. I can be trusted
15. I care for the earth
16. I keep my own council
17. I speak positively of others
18. I remain in balance with my emotions
19. I am trustful in my relationships
20. I hold purity in high esteem
21. I spread joy
22. I do the best I can
23. I communicate with compassion
24. I listen to opposing opinions
25. I create harmony
26. I invoke laughter
27. I am open to love in various forms
28. I am forgiving
29. I am kind
30. I act respectfully of others
31. I am accepting
32. I follow my inner guidance
33. I converse with awareness
34. I do good
35. I give blessings
36. I keep the waters pure
37. I speak with good intent
38. I praise the Goddess and the God
39. I am humble
40. I achieve with integrity
41. I advance through my own abilities
42. I embrace the All



HOW ANCIENT AFRICANS SAW THEMSELVES

The God-Self is called Faro in the Mandé culture of Mali and Ausar in Kushite-Kemetic culture. Both of these Black African divinities represent the manifestation of the God-Within.



Djenne, Mali “Faro”



- Conceptual Implication
- Assimilation With God
- Essential Goodness of Human Nature
- Potentiality and Maatian Practice

CONCEPTUAL IMPLICATIONS

- What does it mean, perfectibility of humans?
- Did the Egyptians considered themselves Perfect?
- How did the ancient Egyptians arrive at perfectibility?



Divine Image and Perfectibility

Closely linked with the Maatian anthropological concept of the divine image of humans is the concept of the perfectibility of humans .

- The orientation of the ancient Africans towards moral life is the idea that they can strive towards perfection .
- Hence perfectibility means in this sense : a progressive development; perpetual becoming and the possibility of assimilation with God.
- These assertions are well expressed in the book **of The Coming Forth by Day** and other ethical-religious texts which project blameless and faultless characters .

The Book of Coming Forth by Day

- The *Book of the Coming Forth by Day* is an ancient funerary text generally written on papyrus and used from the beginning of the New Kingdom (around 1550 BCE) to around 50 BCE. The original Egyptian name for the text, transliterated *rw nw prt m hrw*, is translated as *Book of Coming Forth by Day* or *Book of Emerging Forth into the Light*. "Book" is the closest term to describe the loose collection of texts consisting of a number of magic spells intended to assist a dead person's journey through the *Duat*, or underworld, and into the afterlife and written by many priests over a period of about 1,000 years .

Common illustrations of the book of the dead



- This detail scene, from the Papyrus of Hunefer (c. 1275 BCE), shows the scribe Hunefer's heart being weighed on the scale of Maat against the feather of truth, by the jackal-headed Anubis. The ibis-headed Thoth, scribe of the gods, records the result. If his heart equals exactly the weight of the feather, Hunefer is allowed to pass into the afterlife. If not, he is eaten by the waiting chimeric devouring creature Ammit composed of the deadly crocodile, lion, and hippopotamus. Vignettes such as these were a common illustration in Egyptian books of the dead.

The Concept of Perfectibility

- Scholars such as Battiscombe G. Gunn, Miriam Lichtheim and François Daumas among others have posited that: the way the egyptians are reflected in these texts show that they were assertive before the deity . That is, their world view did not permit them to approach the deity or the divine with the attitude of the miserable sinner .
- According to Gunn, all the candidates for immortality “proclaim their freedom from every human frailty,” identify themselves with various divine powers and describe themselves “as miracles of human perfection .”

Where did they get this audacity from?
This sense of profound confidence ... Is it
from a deep spiritual and material pride
(probably unequalled elsewhere in the
world) or as a consequence of the
profound belief in the creative power of the
spoken word or just lying and bluffing?



What do you think is the answer to this
question? Was it a bluff ?

- The ancient Egyptians were proud, self-confident and believed deeply in the power of the word as both *Hu* (authoritative utterance) and *Heka* (word of power) which along with *Sia* (exceptional insight) Ra created the world.
 - That the ancient Egyptians believed . . . is seen as an act of emulation and aspiration to be like Ra.



Therefore, perfectibility was a clear goal and conception of the human person in ancient Egypt, assert both Lichtheim and Daumas.

Miriam Lichtheim notes...

- ... central point of the anthropology expressed in the *Sebait* (teaching) was the “optimistic belief in the teachability and perfectibility of man ...”

Ptahhotep teaches
that:

If you are a leader who
commands the affairs of the
many, seek out very
excellent things so that there
is no fault in your conduct
(Ptahhotep 84–87).

*Ir wnn .k m ssmy
hr wdw shrw n sȝt
hh .n .k sp nb mnh
r wnt shr .k nn iw im .f*

*if you wish your
conduct to be perfect
and free from all evil
guard against the vice
of greed.
(Ptahhotep 298–300).*

*ir mr,k nfisšm .k
nhm .k .tw m' dwt nbt
H thr spn 'wn -ib
(Ptahhotep 298–300).*



nfr

- The word basically means good, beautiful, however, the sense indicated here by the following phrase “be free from all evil” is clearly that of “perfection”
- According to Daumas, the moral ideal of Maat is that “one must without ceasing, strive towards perfection.”
- Karenga says, the striving towards perfection is what he calls “progressive perfection”
- It is good to note that, no one is assured of absolute wisdom or absolute perfection. However it remains the goal, it represents an aspiration and Ideal standard instead of an actuality.

Paheri notes ...

- "my excellent character raised me high. I was summoned as one who is blameless. If I were placed on the scales I would come out complete, whole and sound," he speaks to an ideal of perfection. It is a claim or rather projected standard, made not simply to his peers but to posterity as an epitaph, an aspiration and request to be remembered as such.
- Again as Lichtheim argues, this literature is for eternity and thus one projects the best. But the *Sebait* are for daily life.

Progressive Perfection

- The goal is progressive perfection and the teachings thus express the assumption of human perfectibility.
- This conception of progressive perfection is best expressed by the concept of *hprt* or *kheper* the perpetual process of becoming, perpetual striving, going through stages of moral achievement, of self-mastery, reciprocity and all the other virtues or excellences.
- Hence, the anthropological concept of perfectibility is more of an aspiration than announcement of final achievement. It is an unfolding and becoming at ever higher levels, not a finished state of static completion.

ASSIMILATION WITH GOD

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The concept of Assimilation with God is imbedded in the concept of Perfectibility. Since the concept of perfectibility is more of an aspiration, a becoming, or what karenga calls a progressive perfection, it then implies that, in the becoming, one is striving to assimilate with God, hence, becomes one with God.

This idea is present in the following texts : The Pyramid Texts, The Book of the Coming Forth, The Book of Vindication, the Sebait and the Declaration of Virtues.



THE PERFECTION IS IN THE BECOMING

In these texts one finds prayers or declarations of assimilation with the Divine through Maatian practice and being judged righteous after death . As presented in our previous lessons, Maat is the ground for common substance and unity .

EXAMPLES OF DECLARATION OF ASSIMILATION

Chapter 22 of Coming Forth presents a justified who says, I shall . Not be kept from the Council of the Great God (For i am) Osiris, the Lord of Rosetau, this (God) who is at the top of terrace . ”

And in Coming Forth, Chapter 11b, the risen and justified says, "I have stood up as Horus : I have sat down as Ptah . . . , identifying and assimilated with Horus and Ptah .

in the Pyramid Texts, it says King Pepi has risen and been equipped with the form of Osiris (Budge 1960, 91) .

The most centre idea here is that, these claims are made by the justified, who because of his /her Maat is able to declare «i live again after death like Ra every day» (coming Forth Chapter 38)

EXAMPLES OF DECLARATION OF ASSIMILATION

Cont...

The Book of Vindication (CT 1, 314 –320)

In the chapter of becoming, the divinity Shu, the vindicated one says,

«I am the soul of Shu, the self-created god ... I have come into being from the flesh of the self-created god. I am merged into God. I have become him.»

We find yet again an expression of identification with the divine which occurs in the context of post-justification or vindication. It thus, reaffirms the power and glory associated with vindication. For having being justified, one is enabled to say, « I shine like Ra daily. I establish truth and expel falsehood»



I will not perish. For I have entered into Maat, I have upheld Maat. I am a possessor of Maat. I have gone forth in Maat and my form is raised up . . . I have entered in Maat. I have attained its limit. I am Ptah (CT IV, 170–171).

Doing or practicing Maat is both an ethical and spiritual act. It is not simply for humans but for the universe and God himself who lives by Maat. For it increases the good in the world and enhances it and the doer's ontological potential .



Doing Maat  Assimilates with Ra

Conclusions

- From What we have seen so far, Maat is the source of perfection and assimilation with God.
- To be perfect means in this context a progressive perfection, which means the aspiration or the continuous becoming of the human person towards a likeness of the deity or the divine.
- The perfectibility does not stand alone, it shares common source with assimilartion with God. Hence, in the course of progressive perfection or the continuous becoming, one is assimilating, taking the shape of God.



Khet Nebet Neferet.

Source

Maat the Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt

By

Karenga Maulana

