

# Egyptian Beliefs

The Egyptians had elaborate beliefs about death and the afterlife. They believed that humans possessed a ka, or life-force, which left the body at the point of death. Each person also had a ba, or spirit. Unlike the ka, the ba remained attached to the body after death. Egyptian funeral rituals were intended to release the ba from the body so that it could reunite with the ka so that it could live on. However, it was also important that the body of the deceased be preserved, as the Egyptians believed that the ba returned to its body each night to receive new life.

Originally, however, the Egyptians believed that only the pharaoh had a ba, and only he could become one with the gods. Everyone else who died passed into a dark, shadowy underworld.

The most famous symbols of ancient Egypt, the pyramids, were built as tombs for the pharaohs. Most of these huge structures were built during the Old Kingdom. Workers built the pyramids from the inside out, carefully placing limestone blocks cut from nearby quarries. These blocks had to be dragged over-land to the building site on rollers. Historians are not certain how workers hauled the heavy stone blocks up the sides of the pyramid, but some think that workers dragged the blocks up specially built ramps with ropes. Because the pharaoh was thought to be a god, religion and government were closely intertwined.

As the political power of the Pharaoh weakened around the end of the Old Kingdom, so did his religious importance and his status as a god. The Egyptians stopped building pyramids, and later pharaohs were buried in tombs, some of which were underground to protect against robbery, such as those from the New Kingdom in the Valley of the Kings. The Egyptians gradually came to believe that possession of a ba and the possibility of a

heavenly afterlife extended to everyone. By the New Kingdom, it was believed that the souls of the dead undergo a final judgment known as the "Weighing of the Heart". In this judgment, a person's heart, representing their good and bad actions during life, was put on one side of a scale, and on the other side was placed a feather representing Ma'at, the goddess of truth and justice. Those who had light hearts had been good in life and were rewarded after death, while those who were unworthy were fed to a terrible monster. Originally Anubis, the Jackal-headed god, was believed to be the one who weighed the souls, but this job was later given to the green-skinned mummified god Osiris, who rose in importance among common Egyptians.

*World History: Human Legacy, Susan Elizabeth Ramírez et al., Holt*

