

Along with this, there were many popular personal ritualistic practices engaged by the common people, where they entreated the gods directly for personal protection and support. These personal practices became more widespread in the later period as the status of pharaohs gradually declined.

Egyptian rituals and practices aimed at maintaining cosmic order, both in society and in the wider universe, keeping nature's cycles going, and avoiding the influence of anything which might disrupt natural order and stability. There were rituals to ensure the daily rising of the sun, the annual flooding of the Nile river, and the balanced expression of many other elements of the natural world which affected the lives of the Egyptian people.

Unlike the Greeks, whose deities were strongly associated with human qualities, while at the same time having domain over different aspects of nature, the Egyptian deities seem to be more a direct expression of the natural world, rather than being human-like personalities. For example, Nut was not simply a goddess of sky, but was literally the sky, a representation of that natural phenomenon. The god Geb was literally the earth, and the goddess Maat was the cosmic order of the universe. The Egyptians recognised the true nature of their gods & goddesses to be abstract, and the depiction of these deities in art was understood to be purely symbolic. This same flexibility extended to myths and stories. Often, the details varied, and it was most important only that the symbolic meanings remained the same. Deities were depicted in a variety of different forms, and were often shown with animal features which reflected their qualities. It was also common to worship animals themselves, as embodiments of different deities. For example, the goddess Hathor is strongly associated with the cow, a symbol of fertility and nourishment. The deities were also regularly merged with, and into, one another at different times, according to the varying interactions of different natural phenomena throughout the cycles and seasons of nature and human life.

The theological framework in Egypt consisted of three levels of existence... the realm of the gods / goddesses, the realm of the afterlife (deceased humans), and the human realm. The afterlife was a very important factor in Egyptian belief, and humans in the afterlife had many god-like qualities. A great many rituals and customs surrounded the preparation for, and transition into, the afterlife, particularly with ensuring the individual's ability to reach and survive in that realm. In earlier beliefs, only the pharaoh could ascend into the afterlife, while regular people simply ceased to exist. Later, the beliefs shifted to allow the possibility for any person to reach the afterlife. This reflected the emerging view that all people, and not just the gods, have a soul which continues to exist once the body dies.

The Supportive Qualities of Egyptian Gods & Goddesses

Hathor ... *mother creator goddess* ... joy & upliftedness ... love & sexuality, romantic relationships ... creativity ... new projects ... artistic projects ... music, singing, dance, entertainment ... all aspects of mothering (conception, fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, nurturing newborns, raising children / parenting) ... nurturing others & being nurtured ... feminine beauty & attractiveness, cosmetics, fashion ... miners & mining ... decision-making, esp. from the heart ... releasing procrastination ... life choices & direction ... courage to trust & follow inner guidance

Horus ... *falcon-headed god with one all-seeing eye* ... courage, strength and victory ... upholding the truth ... standing your ground ... spiritual protection ... sight and vision of all kinds (physical eyesight, clear insight and intuition, seeing the truth of situations, seeing all people and situations through the eyes of love, etc) ... mother-son relationships



Isis ... (*also later Greek & Roman*) *moon & mother goddess* ... femininity, motherhood, womanhood ... beauty & joy ... self-esteem & confidence ... divine magic, healing, and spiritual power ... herbs & herbal remedies ... living through the heart, and expressing goodness, truth & righteousness ... supporting and defending the poor & weak

Maat ... *goddess of truth, justice and fairness* ... honesty and truth in all situations ... personal integrity ... keeping promises ... avoiding dishonest situations and individuals ... avoiding deceit and manipulation ... protection against unloving and impure energies ... harmony and honesty in legal matters and business dealings ... overcoming addictions and cravings ... purifying the body; spiritual and physical detox ... gaining clarification in confusing situations ... commitment to beliefs and purpose ... accessing divine wisdom ... respect for, and maintenance of, natural law, balance and order (in the environment, in relationships, in your life in general) ... compassion for self and others

