

## The Egyptian Book of the Dead- A Manual for the Dead

The death of the body, according to Egyptian belief, was the beginning of eternal life. It was essential, therefore, that careful preparation be made to assure a happy state of immortality for the individual. In the early days of Egyptian history, only the pharaoh and the men of wealth could receive the necessary funeral rites administered by the priests to assure eternal life. After hundreds of years, all people, regardless of wealth, were granted this right. Eventually this approach to the afterlife through ritual evolved into a system of rewards and punishments for behavior on earth. The dead were thought to be judged soon after death by Osiris and other gods.

The Book of the Dead is a collection of hymns, prayers, and petitions. The following excerpt is from the scene of judgment. This confession, which the dead were supposed to utter, gives us a good idea of the Egyptian moral code.

Hail to thee, O great god....I have come to thee, my lord, I have been brought that I might see thy beauty. I know thee; I know thy name and the names of the forty-two gods who are with thee in the Broad-Hall of the Two Justices, who live on them who preserve evil and who drink their blood on that day of reckoning up character in the presence of Wennofer. Behold, "Sati-Mertifi, Lord of Justice," is thy name. I have come to thee; I have brought thee justice; I have expelled deceit for thee.

I have not committed evil against men....  
I have not committed sin in the place of truth....  
I have not seen evil....  
I have not blasphemed a god.  
I have not done violence to a poor man.  
I have not done that which the gods abominate.  
I have not defamed a slave to his superior.  
I have not made anyone sick.  
I have not killed.  
I have given no order to a killer.  
I have not caused anyone suffering.  
I have not cut down on the food in the temples.  
I have not damaged the bread of the gods....  
I have not taken milk from the mouths of children.  
I have not driven cattle away from their pasturage....  
I have not built a dam against running water.

**SOURCE:** J. B. Pritchard, editor, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1950, p. 34. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

