



# Ego in cultural context

## Egyptian cosmology and their notions about magic, identity and soul

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Understanding the structure of the psyche has long been mostly about cognitive functions, but these days science tries to figure out how neurological imaging can help to figure out how thinking is related to matter (biological functions as visible in all kinds of brain scans) but of course the body and the emotions are part of the whole picture.

In exploring the body-mind connection we can separate the two, the Cartesian mind-matter dualism, but we can also look at what older cultures did know and understood about that. Most of them honored an intimate connection of body and mind.

Of course there are also the more modern insights like what has emerged along and as a counter movement to the psychotherapeutic insights of Freud, Jung, etc. People like William James, Pierre Janet (before Freud), Wilhelm Reich, Laing, Levine, Damasio, Jack Painter and many others have come up with insights about how the body and the mind are not separate as the Cartesian dualists posed, but interrelated.

The notion, that body and mind both matter and that the mind is not the sole director of our lives and health, is of course much older. It shows up in the healing practices of most cultures, in their rituals and ways to deal with the psychological, the social and the magical challenges.

### Cultural interpretation of psyche, ego and self

Concepts like ego or self have different and sometimes confusing meaning in different cultures, the perspective is different. In the West ego/self is seen from a second person perspective, more rational, while the Eastern perspective is more first person, intuitive, based on experiential knowing. The Western position has emerged from a dualistic understanding of mind and matter focused on observed (third person, objective) experiences, while non-dual Eastern science and philosophy is nondual, assuming there is one primary consciousness (Atman) in all. In the Eastern approach, first person experiences are honored (dreams, altered states, psychosis, etc.) while accepting second person research methodologies (inter-subjective engagement, collaboration).

The role of the ego also varies, depending on the appreciation of individuality, in the West this is stronger than in the East, where the collective plays a larger role in the notion of who one is. The ego, seen by Freud as the level where the Id becomes conscious and visible, is often seen as something negative, as the personality we should overcome. Jung talked about individuation, letting go of the ego-identification. In the East this is often stated as that one has to let go of the false self (ego) in favor of the true self, the core identity.

There is, however, another vision possible, whereby the ego is appreciated as a necessary function, as the mechanism that steers the soul towards learning experiences necessary in the core scenario of one's life. In ancient Egypt this notion is clearly visible in how they see the soul and how it is composed of various parts and agents. the Ba, a soul part which comes close to the ego, is seen as the mentor, the helper of the soul (the Ka) to transform, and thus as a far more appreciated and necessary part of the psyche. This means one recognizes the ego as part of the life scenario, as essential part of what we have to learn. In classic psychotherapy the ego it is often seen as the level of consciousness we need to overcome our precocious and unconscious drives, and in the East the ego is often described as the false self we should give up to reach the higher self state. So the Egyptian perspective offers a more positive image of why we have an ego.

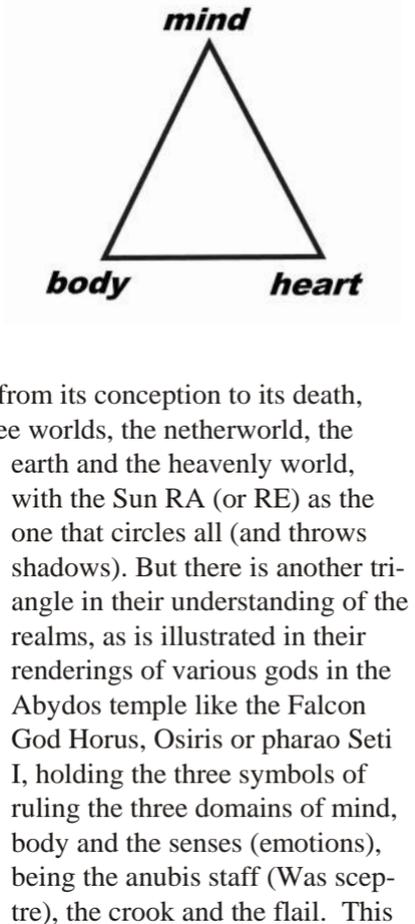
## Embodied spirituality

The connection between the body and the spirit has been acknowledged and manifest in most ancient cultures. Using the body to reach mystical states, magical trance and higher levels of awareness is quite common, in ritual context, in meditation, ascetic practice, pilgrimage. Those methods evolved, don't seem to have a rational underpinning, but they work. We encounter them in many places, like in the labyrinth in Chartres cathedral, and are more common in magical religious traditions than in anti-magical ones. The connection with the otherworld (heavens, netherworld, the divine realm) is, for the magical cultures anyway, a two way street. We can learn and receive from there, the mystical angle, but also magically influence the heavens, with an intent to receive the outcome in the tangible reality of course. We do so by magical practices, which include praying and usually do so in ritual formats, even as we don't call them so, calling the Catholic Holy Mess a magical practice is not usual, but it basically is.

## Egyptian cosmology

In some, like the Egyptian Pharaonic culture, the connection with the spiritual was very physical, embalming mummies and providing food for the afterlife show how one assumed a physical counterpart to the spiritual existence. Pharaoh's would become stars in the sky, and the imagery used to denote the various parts of the soul or non-material existence like the phoenix bird with a human head for the Ba showed how they believed communication between the worlds of the dead and the living would happen.

The Egyptian view of the body was, from its conception to its death, mostly magical. They recognized three worlds, the netherworld, the



earth and the heavenly world, with the Sun RA (or RE) as the one that circles all (and throws shadows). But there is another triangle in their understanding of the realms, as is illustrated in their renderings of various gods in the Abydos temple like the Falcon God Horus, Osiris or pharaoh Seti I, holding the three symbols of ruling the three domains of mind, body and the senses (emotions), being the anubis staff (Was sceptre), the crook and the flail. This is important, as this model comes back in more modern notions of identity and in some old models. The enneagram, of sufi origin, uses the same triangle. Another resonance with more universal models is that the god of the netherworld and the night, Seth, personifies change and transformation, while his brother, the ruler of the dead Osiris, which Seth has conquered and cut to pieces, is the permanence, fertility. Here is a similarity to the ancient Zoroastrian dualism of flux and permanence. The

Osiris myth also represents the mystical rebirth, and may refer to the secret initiation rites of the priesthood. The public Osiris festivals were for the common people, to remember the rebirth of Osiris.

Egypt had a fascinating culture and it's one of the ancient cultures where a rich written legacy is available from about 3400 BCE, in hieroglyphs for sacred texts and in a more normal script for daily use. This maybe even predating Mesopotamian phonetic symbols, although there is also the notion, that writing and metaphysical speculation came to Egypt from there or, a popular notion in esoteric circles, originated from lost civilisations like Atlantis, as mentioned by Plato.

It was all conserved in hieroglyphs inscribed in buildings and steles, but we can now read most of them and there is the parallel but more phonetic hieratic script used to write on papyrus. It was a culture where the sacred and the profane were hardly separated. Something we also encounter in isolated cultures like those of the Australian aboriginals. Everything was holy and related to the overarching fertility issue of the Nile and it's flooding.

Fertility was thus the basis of their life and rituals, which gave women a more or less equal status, unusual in most other cultures.

Their religion was based on the immanence of divine powers, not on transcendence, somewhat pantheistic, nature was imbued with powers. Magic was everywhere, ritual was part of everyday life and philosophy limited to the practical. Their philosophy and theology was not very critical and accepted overlaps and layering of deities, rituals and cosmological views.

The Egyptians were quite knowledgeable, but in some respects not very developed. Their understanding of the human physiology was a bit odd, as they ascribed far greater importance to the heart than to the brains, they did not preserve the brains in the mummification procedure. This leaves me with the suggestion, that they maybe saw our brains as a mere antenna. This ties in with some more modern views



of the mind at large, where memory is not anchored in physiological traces in the brain.

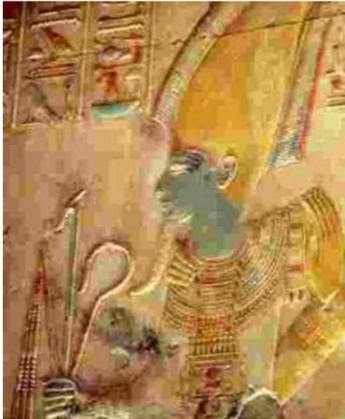
In other directions were very advanced. Their building skills were amazing. There are indications that their large stone constructions were made with a technique to create a concrete very similar to stone. But even more amazing was their accuracy, they were so precise that the pyramids can now be dated because they used stars to align them with true north and the four cardinal directions, and even had certain shafts pointing at specific stars (Orion/Sirius see Hancock, Temple)).

There is, however, still some debate about the exact building date of the Cheops pyramid, although 2450 BCE +/- 25 years is generally accepted. This is also roughly the dating of Stonehenge and it is likely that more bronze-age sanctuaries date from this period, indicating there was some communication between the Mesopotamian, Egyptian and other civilisations. Maybe there was a common legacy from earlier but lost human civilizations



## Heka

The Egyptians had a God of medicine and magic called Heka and referred to “magic” as heka, meaning (James P. Allen) “the ability to make things happen by indirect means”. Magic was seen as the cause of many things, even as the force used to create the universe. It was employed by the gods to work their will and by humans who knew how, had the special knowledge. These were obviously the priests who had access to sacred texts such as the books of the dead and among



other things did divination and performed healing in special places in the temples.

At the level of common people there were more accessible forms of magic, which still exist in all African cultures.

Spells, divination, amulets, snake charming and healing must have been part of normal life too, as can be deduced from the enormous amounts of amulets preserved. Incantations, hymns and rituals were seen as magical, temples and shrines as places and ways to prevent or overcome negative events.

Egyptians believed that with heka they could influence the gods and gain protection, healing and transformation. The word entails activation of the ka, an aspect of the soul of both gods and humans. Health and wholeness of being were sacred and associated with Heka, the divine personification of magic. There is no word for religion in the ancient Egyptian language, mundane and religious world views were not distinct. Thus heka was not a secular practice but rather a religious observance.



Heka = 'employ the Ka'

The basic focus of Egyptian culture was the second chakra, fertility but also lust, pleasure and probably sex. Women were, in their worldview, more or less equal to men. The Egyptians were practical people, literally down to earth, less inclined to speculate about theological or philosophical issues. Rituals, irrigation, agriculture and the afterlife and death were more important.

The body was a magical platform, but differently understood from the way we do in modern medicine. Some techniques like embalming and trepanation were well developed. It turns out that trepanation or making holes in the skull was not uncommon in even stone age cultures, we can

only speculate why, some claim expanded consciousness is behind it. Scientifically, the Egyptians were well developed. They probably started out with some inherited techniques and capabilities from Sumeria, or even Atlantis or other earlier civilizations, but were pretty ignorant about the biological causes. They attributed diseases and bad luck to demonic influences or bad thoughts. Their doctors were good healers and some like Imhotep became famous. They had diseases like rheumatism and malaria, but little traces of cancer have been found in the mummies. Upper class people were often overweight and adult life expectancy was about 35 for men and 30 for women. The mummies of high ranking men and pharaohs show there was circumcision, but it's not clear whether this was a general custom.

The heart (jb or Ieb) was very special, it was seen as the essence of life, the seat of the mind with its emotions, intelligence, and moral sense, more so than the brains. The heart was believed to be the center of consciousness, even the center of life itself. This metaphysical heart was believed to be formed from one drop of blood from the child's mother's heart, taken at conception. It was the seat of emotion, thought, will and intention. The heart gave human life its direction, contained a record of its moral past, and after death was weighed by Anubis against a feather representing Ma'at. The final judgment however was not influenced by the social position of the deceased.

The actual understanding of the heart's function was limited. They described how from the heart tubular channels (metu) linked all parts of the body together. Like irrigation channels, they delivered not only blood, but also air, tears, saliva, mucus, sperm, nutriment and even bodily waste. The brain was less important. Its only real function was thought to be to pass mucus to the nose, so it was one of the organs that were discarded during mummification. The heart was preserved and even protected by a scarab image, a beetle. Maybe their dismissive treatment of the brain was because they realized that the brains are the seat of self-consciousness and would be an encumbrance to functioning in the otherworld.

One way to look at the Egyptian cosmological view, suggested by Chris Goldfrap, is to see our normal existence as a theater, where the stars play out their battles with us as their proxies. This ties in with Timothy Leary's idea of earth being a laboratory of some higher level entities. This notion shows up in some mythical stories from older cultures, in many 'channeled' books, in the work of Ron Hubbard, and assumes ex-

traterrestrial influence of some level in the development of the human race and indeed life on our planet.

## Afterlife and death

*The heart is a god, the stomach is its shrine.*

The inscription of Nebneteru

To ancient Egyptians, the heart was the seat of emotion, thought, will and intention. In Egyptian religion, the heart was the key to the afterlife, but note that the gut also was recognized, something we now see in modern science, where the gut-biome is considered an essential part of our identity and influence on our moods and thinking.

In ancient Egypt the heart was conceived as surviving death in the nether world, where it gave evidence for, or against, its possessor in an examination by Anubis during the Weighing of the Heart ceremony. If the heart weighed more than the feather of Ma'at, it was immediately consumed by the monster Ammit, and the soul became eternally restless. Death was a complex affair, the funeral rites were complex, involved embalming and much ritual. The afterlife was what certainly concerned the rulers. They had the means to ensure that their identity parts like the ka were taken care of, that their names were preserved and thus could aspire to become literally stars (akh) in the sky after they died and passed the tests. The Egyptian rulers were thus resurrectionists believing that when they died they could be reborn as a star (akh) in the 'Kingdom of Osiris.' When Egyptians looked at the sky, they saw it as a real place and the stars as pharaohs and deities. To exist there after the body died required that one had to prepare, but also that earthly existence had to have a counterpart in the otherworld, the heavenly realm.

## The Egyptian soul and identity notions

The notions about the otherworld and the soul we find in the Egyptian cosmology have value if only because they have lasted for more than three millennia and demonstrate a refined and complex world view. Even though archeology and the study of the ancient texts has revealed much about how the ancient Egyptians lived, performed their rituals and buried their death, there is no clear account of their culture or their model of the psyche or notion of identity. Their view is complex, but somehow for me resonates better with the common denominator in a wide range of cultures, even better than the view of people like Freud.

The ancient Egyptian view of what made up a human being is complex. Egyptians described a person's individuality as several independent beings, each of which was a personality seen as a whole having separate existence after death, and even during life. Apart from the physical body (khat or kha) there were a number of constituents forming a psyche or a soul, or rather a multifaceted presence in two time dimensions and three worlds. Their concept of identity as the whole of one's existence, both physical as well as spiritual, is fascinating, and maybe shows they understood better than we do how things like dissociation, causation, will and the timeless otherworld (overworld) are related. Even as we don't know exactly what all the parts entail, they included in the total identity the physical body (Ha,khat), but also parts like the Ba, the Ka, the Sahu (the incorruptable spirit-body twin of the mortal body), the name Ren, the heart (Jb) and the shadow (Sheut). It was indicated as Akh, and changed from the envelope of all parts in a living person to a re-united Ka and Ba in a dead one, for pharaohs becoming a star in the heavens. The whole constellation is often portrayed as indicating the 'soul' or soul constellation, but this is more because the concept of soul itself is so convoluted these days. Also the notion that the Akh is like the Freudian Id, the name as the Ego and the Ka as the Super-ego seems ill-conceived.

One of the distinguishing features of the Egyptian imagery concerning the body and the psyche is that of twins or mirrors, always there is a spiritual and eternal counterpart to the physical. When Khnum, the sculptor who gives lives and creates the new bodies of all things and beings on his 'Potters' Wheel' creates a child's body, the khat, it emerges together with its twin, the Ka. But one also recognized dualities, the Ka had a female complementary, the Hemset.

There are some eight non-material (soul) parts or identities named beside the physical body, so it's rather complex.

There are the ka (kA, the twin), ren (rn, the name), shut (shadow), the ba (soul), sahu (spirit-body) and akh (star). Other attributes were an individual's khu ("spiritual intelligence") and sekhem ("power").

The ka is like a double, the ren is the name and remains close to the body, but the shut, the ba, sahu and akh were more mobile and independent and could appear and act separately from the body. It is hard to translate these terms, and even harder to equate them with modern psychological or philosophical insights. The Freudian model is sometimes

mentioned to denote the akh as the id, the name as the ego and the ka as the super-ego, but this doesn't make much sense.

## The spatial perspective

If we look at it from the perspective of the three Egyptian worlds, underworld, earth and heavenly world, with the Sun RA (or RE) as the one that circles all (and throws shadows), it makes sense to see the heavenly world as something which for the Egyptian was a real sky-world, above them, but only accessible for mortals (and especially kings) after death. Gary Gilligan (in "the God King Scenario" with some Velikovsky lore) made the point that the whole notion of Upper and Lower Egypt might not refer to the geographical North/ South division, but to the earthly and the heavenly realms. Lower Egypt or Earth was, in his view, home to humans. An intermediate region was occupied by human 'doubles,' and Upper Egypt or the 'land above' was home to the eternal form of humans, the 'all powerful' stars that were divine. The upper world was reflected in the lower, so part of one's identity or soul was a kind of mirror of the heavens, an astrological image.

We can divide the various beings and soul parts according to the location. Humans in this world (Lower Egypt) and then the deceased (at least those lucky enough to be taken care of) and deities above, plus some messengers in between. Who didn't make it up there died not only here, but in the underworld. The moral value of everybody's life was weighed against the feather of Ma'at. This underworld or netherworld is also where the Sungod Ra goes at night.

So the different souls or soul parts were different stages, belonging to different realms.

## The ka (kA)

The Ka, the unique life-force or vital spark of a person, in the context of the identity models like the formation of substitute identities, could be interpreted as the core identity, it is sometimes represented hieroglyphically by a drawing of a very little person standing next to a picture of the same person drawn much larger. This reso-



nates with the imagery of the inner child. Ka was also represented by two arms, outstretched, warding off evil, imagery reminding one of Heka, the god of magic. This is also the word for magic and, points at using the Ka to achieve change.

It is only in the core-identity (free from the spatial and temporal limitation of the ego attachments and thus accessible only in a state of detachment and mindfulness) that magic works, that the mind can influence matter and the otherworld

The name Heka (magic, god of magic) means employing the Ka. The Ka lived on when a person died, their Ka continued to live in the afterlife. Upon the body's demise the Ka rejoined its divine origin, but always remained in close proximity of the body. This has led to the interpretation in modern times of the Ka as being the soul, the eternal essence. But the difference is that the ancient Egyptians in their embodied spirituality paradigm believed the Ka needed the same nourishment that a person needed, even after they died. They thus left food and painted pictures of food on the walls of their tombs, for the Ka to absorb the life giving force they represented, so the Ka would live forever. At night, both the Ba and the Ka returned home to the tomb to rest up for the next heavenly day.

The Ka is an interesting concept, as it resonates with our inner nature, with causation and will, as the source of free will where change emanates, the will to manifest. This is somewhat in the sense Schopenhauer talks about the will, or the inner nature of things, beyond the perceived appearances and it also resonates with Henri Bergson's Elan Vital. Ka is not limited to humans, animals and certain objects can have a Ka. Ka seems to be the active part of one's being, the life-force or potency, that what makes us act and manifest, the core identity containing the will (Schopenhauer) or elan vital (Bergson). The Egyptians believed that animals, plants, water and even stones had their own ka, indicating some connection with consciousness or sentience. Heka or magic thus applied to everything. The human ka, as its vital essence, was a constant companion of the body in life and death, a kind of spiritual double, manifested from birth on. It was also immortal if taken care of by real or virtual nourishment in the form of offerings after death.

The ka has been interpreted as consciousness and the will to manifest, it is with us as a double. So it isn't a tangible part, but existing in the otherworld, beyond time and space. The ka as the nonphysical 'double' or twin emerged the moment a person was born.

In many images the creator-god Khnum was shown modeling the ka on a potter's wheel at the same time as he was molding the body of a human. Ka was there but invisible as long as a person lived, dwelling in the intermediate realm.

## Ba

The ba hieroglyph contains a phoenix bird with a human head. The ba was depicted watching over the physical body after death, with the job to reunite it with the ka, the deceased's astral 'twin'.

It has been interpreted as the noble part of the soul, as a connection with the heavenly realm but also as the sum of the immortal forces inherent in human beings which made up the personality. But then we have to ask what the role of the personality, as expression of underlying identity is? Is it then the way the core identity fashions the learning, the development of the soul? In this perspective the Ba can be seen as the ruler of a process of growth, it feels like the guide or vehicle, the indeed noble and timeless teacher or mentor of the ka and the physical body, making sure they reach their destination.

This notion of the personality or ego being not the false self, (the core identity being the true self) as Eastern traditions suggest, but an essential element in the development is an indication that the Egyptians understood very well how we develop and grow. Their view is in a sense more mature than the notion the ego is just some defense layer we should abandon if we try to reach for enlightenment..

The Ba had an effect on the world, like it carried and protected a reputation, a (moral and powerful) superego part of the psyche. This power also existed in some material things, there it was called bau.

The ba providing for the time after physical death (70 days of embalming procedures) an anchor, a conscience in the magical for the more earth-bound ka. It concerned usually a pharaoh or deity, ba was not associated with mere mortals. The ba had an effect on the world, like it carried and protected a reputation, a (moral and powerful) superego part of the psyche. This power also existed in some material things, there it was called bau.

And yet the ba was magical, spells enabled it to assume any shape and it had something to do with creativity and sex, it was often shown with an erect phallus. So the ba was also a (male) sexual being, which needed food and drink after the body died. The ba moved about, sometimes in the company of the shadow, but did not stray far as in the night it has to

unite with the ka of the body ensuring continued and sublime existence in heaven (the Elysian Fields) in the afterlife.

The akh (also used to denote the totality of one's identity) or star was then the fully resurrected and glorified form of a dead pharaoh in the next (sky) world, enduring and unchanging for all eternity, the 'powerful one.' This star image makes me think of the Jewish star, with the male and female triangle moving into each other to form the star.

Now apart from the stars there must have been some more humanlike identity in the heavens, immortal and similar in form to the mortal body, living as before but in the Elysian fields. This is what could be indicated by the sahu, the spirit-body or the repository of the soul as Wallis Budge, who first translated the Ani Book of the Dead, called it.

## The name (rn)

The Ba and the Ka were not only depended on an intact (mummified) body, but also on one's name (Ren). This name was essential, it had to be visibly written somewhere near the coffin, like on cartouches found so abundantly in tombs. These made it easy for one's Ba and Ka to find their way home. As a part of the soul, a person's ren (rn is 'name', no vowels) was given to him or her at birth. The Egyptians believed that the identity would live for as long as that name was spoken or read, which explains the practice of placing it in numerous writings. I think

## Theurgy: Iamblichus

We owe some understanding of the Egyptian magic to Iamblichus (ca. CE 250-325) who is among the most important of the so-called Neoplatonic philosophers, second only to Plotinus. Under its abbreviated Latin title *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* (The Egyptian Mysteries), he answers some critical questions of Plotinus' disciple Porphyry.

Now Porphyry regarded the ceremonial rites of Egyptian theurgy with distrust. He favored Mithraism, which prevailed in Asia, while Iamblichus belonged rather to the cult of Serapis, which was the State religion of Egypt. Iamblichus wrote about the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians, also known as the Theurgia, and how this deals with a 'higher magic' which operates through the agency of the gods.

it's a correspondence, a link between the physical and the spiritual. The name of the ba and the ka is the foundation of a being as an individual existence. Names were vulnerable to magic, but had to be preserved after death, hence the many seals or cartouches encircled with a protective loop of rope with the name of a deceased Pharaoh. In inscriptions of virtual offerings crucial for survival in the hereafter the recipient had to be named. The various aspects of one's being are reflected in different names it is given, one could have more names and just like in many other cultures, some had to remain a secret. True names were hidden, this is common to many cultures. He-who-must-not-be-named shows up in Harry Potter.

The power or identity of the shadow or of the ka could be transferred to statues or images, the kas were thought to reside in tomb statues. The ba resided in a statue in the likeness of the deceased, just in case the mummy got lost or damaged.

Many statues in Egypt were destroyed or the faces damaged, this has to do with this belief in magical contagion, something that represented, touched or belonged to someone could be used magically for good or bad. A subsequent king or ruler didn't want his predecessors present in any form. Obliterating inscribed names or images was a kind of post-mortem punishment or revenge: the person was assigned to oblivion. This was probably the fate post-Amarnan pharaohs had in mind when they erased the name of Akhenaten (Akhnaton). I believe that many of what we call grave robbers were in fact sent by later rulers and were not mere criminals.

## The khaibit or shadow (Sw.t or shut/sheut).

The shadow is a crucial concept, in a land where the sun is so much present. The line "the night is the shadow of the earth" has multiple meanings, literal and poetic, but also relates to the image of the sun, drawn across the sky in daytime but with a nighttime shadow in the underworld. Images, shadows, they were seen as correspondences, ways to connect to the person, before and after death.

Everything has a shadow, so man must have one too and we see it depicted as a black figure. Shadows were not negative things, under the hot Egyptian sun shadow was protective and came from Ra. It might have been something like a guardian angel, a protector. Unlike the body, it was supposed to have an entirely independent existence and to be able

to separate itself from the body; it was free to move wherever it pleased, and shared with the ka and ba the offerings of real and depicted food in the tomb.

## Egyptian two time dimensions

Although in modern times the idea of multiple time dimensions has not really been accepted, in ancient Egypt there was such a notion. Neneh and djet were two different concepts, associated with time and eternity. These concepts were not included in our modern way of thinking, they were seen as repetitive and redundant.

The neneh (nhh) notion of time is associated with the finite, serial clock time or periodic time measured in relation to cyclic nature like the days and the seasons. Neneh means ‘cyclic time within the world of physical phenomena’, the eternity of continuous, repeating cycles. The neneh hieroglyph resembles a rope that has been twisted and looped to make a chain pointing at the cycling motion of the sun as it rises up and sets down. The hieroglyph also resembles a standing-wave and the dual serpent energies as seen in the symbol of the Caduceus.

The djet (dt) is the other concept relating to time, it comes much closer to magic time or eternity (as no time) and is translated as “everlastingness”, “changelessness”, “continuing eternity”, or “eternal continuity” and is about getting beyond or out of cyclic time. Djet “perfect time” is basically “No Time”, timelessness expressed by the “serpent at rest” hieroglyph, also associated with the backbone or spinal column, which symbolizes the meditative state; ‘resting’ within the neutral point.

To the Egyptians each of these represented something concrete and distinct, and they were used in rituals, texts, and illustrations, as separate ideas but used together.

Jan Assmann (The Search for God in Ancient Egypt, 2001) speaks of them (in analogy with the ‘united double kingdom’) as ‘united double time’, where neheh, the imperfect time dimension is associated with change, Kheper, the One who Becomes, and djet, the perfect aspect of time is related to completion, Atem, the Perfect One.

The Egyptians according to Jan Assmann viewed “totality” as the opposite of finite and bounded. To them, the boundaries of totality were not contrasted with the unbounded, but with the “whole,” with “plenitude”. Djet and neheh are symmetrical concepts and are almost always used together like in the act of ritual purification, pouring water jars containing

the symbol ankh, or life, over the person being purified who was then said to be pure forever (djet) and ever (neheh).

Neneh is time which belongs to this earth, to celestial events, equinoxes, the movement of the sun and stars, as in repetition, measurement. Djet is of the otherworld, where time is not present, things unchanging in eternity and yet the Gods (or magic, assuming divine powers) could change them, fixing time (in the future).

The notions of the Egyptians concerning the soul are not clear, but the fact that they did recognize two time dimensions, neneh and djet makes their complex imagery of identities and soul components fascinating.

The idea of a ba assisting the soul to make the transition comes back in other cultures, like in the Bardo Thodol of the Tibetan Buddhists. The importance of rituals assisting in the process of dying and transition is growing as more and more people these days choose conscious deaths (euthanasia).