

Religion in Ancient Egypt

The Egyptians worshipped many gods. A belief in many gods is called “polytheism”. The most important god was the sun god called “Ra”. The pharaoh (king) considered himself the “Son of Ra” because he was seen as an earthly form of Ra. Another important god was the judge of the dead called “Osiris”. The Egyptians hoped for life after death. Only those who could prove they led a good life were granted immortality (eternal life) by Osiris.

The pharaohs built huge stone pyramids to serve as their tombs (places of burial). The tombs were well-prepared for their residents. They contained rooms stocked with supplies, including chairs, boats, weapons, games and food. The Egyptians believed that the spirit could return if the physical body was properly preserved and the tomb furnished with all the objects of regular life. To preserve the physical body after death, the Egyptians practiced “mummification”, which is a process of slowly drying a dead body to prevent it from rotting.



Ra

Osiris

In preparation for judgment, deceased Egyptians were entombed with a collection of religious hymns, magical terms and moral principles – together called the “Book of the Dead”. Among its moral principals were: “I did not steal, I did not murder, I did not lie, I have given bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty”.

Pyramids were tombs for the mummified bodies of pharaohs. The “Great Pyramid” at Giza took 100,000 workers over 20 years to build. A huge statue carved from rock called the ‘Great Sphinx’ guarded the



Great Pyramid at Giza (pictured left). The Sphinx has the body of a lion and the head of a human. The pharaohs showed their wealth by building new temples. The most famous is the “Temple of Karnak” near the city of Thebes. The most famous pharaoh was Ramses II who conquered Palestine and Syria. The tomb of Tutankamen (King Tut) was discovered intact in 1922. This helped give us a picture of Egyptian life during ancient times.

Questions to Answer

1. How do we know the Egyptians were a “polytheistic” society?
2. Why did the Egyptians build pyramids and tombs?
3. Why did the Egyptians practice “mummification”?
4. Why was the discovery of King Tut’s tomb important?