

Following Your Bliss, Egyptian Style: The Wisdom of Ptah-Hotep
I have two versions of Ptah-Hotep's maxims, one by Christian Jacq and one by Vincent Tobin. Tobin writes, *"This text, one of the undisputed masterpieces of ancient Egyptian literature, dates possibly from as early as the late Sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom. Some scholarly opinions, however, prefer to see it as a Middle Kingdom composition dating from the Twelfth Dynasty."* Whether from 2345-2183BC or from 1991BC-1802BC, it is a very early book of wisdom. Tobin explains, *"Due to the extreme difficulty of this text, modern translations of it show very wide variations in the interpretation of certain passages."* (*The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, edited by William Kelly Simpson, page 129)

It's very interesting to read the two translations side by side. Jacq has a more literal translation, which gives more of a feeling of how the ancients thought, their vernacular. I've only read to maxim 11 of these roughly 44 maxims. But this one has particularly intrigued me. I will give first the Tobin translation:

Maxim 11 (via Tobin)

**Follow your heart as long as you live,
And do not work beyond what is allocated (to you).
Do not waste the time of following the heart,
For wasting time is an annoyance of the spirit.
Do not lose the hours of daylight
Beyond (what is necessary for) keeping your household in order.
When wealth has been amassed, follow your heart,
For wealth brings no advantage when it is a burden.**

Jacq's version is quite different. It has some nice subtleties:

Maxim 11 (via Jacq)

**Follow your heart during the time of your existence,
Follow your ka during the time of your existence,
do not commit excesses regarding what has been prescribed.
Do not shorten the time to follow your heart.
To squander one's moment of action (of the heart) is the abomination of the ka
Do not neglect your daily attention to the spirit
in an excessive manner to do house chores.
Whatever happens, follow the heart;
events will not benefit the negligent.**

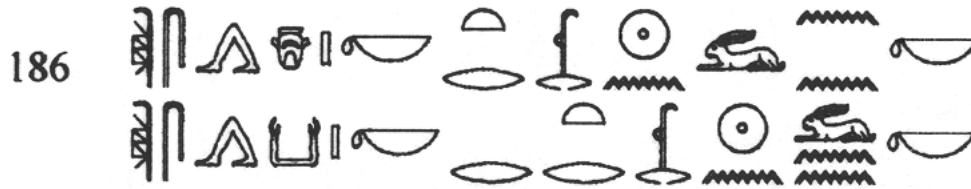
Jacq has a footnote regarding 'following your heart':

"The heart is an ethereal organ of the conscience, symbolized by a vase capable of containing the sacred. 'To follow the heart' is to respect one's spiritual desire and to lead an existence that is in accordance with it. Unfortunately, it is frequently translated as 'do what you like, have fun', which is a misinterpretation." (*The Wisdom of Ptah-Hotep*, page 162)

It's more like Joseph Campbell's "Follow your bliss". It's deeper than following whatever hedonism of the moment, although that can be needful at times. It's more like finding out what your essence is, the real Self, your true Will. Don't squander your moment of action by following robotically what everyone else is doing, or what you think you should do. Get in touch with your Higher Self, and listen to your own innate wisdom and then you will have the greatest happiness.

And here are the hieroglyphs:

Maxim 11



Follow your heart⁵⁵ during the time of your existence,
Follow your ka during the time of your existence,



do not commit excesses regarding what has been prescribed.



Do not shorten the time to follow your heart.



To squander one's moment of action (of the heart) is the abomination of the *ka*.




Do not neglect your daily attention to the spirit

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in an excessive manner to do house chores.

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Whatever happens, follow the heart;

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events will not benefit the negligent.

The Wisdom of Ptah-Hotep, as translated by
Christian Jacq , (*from French to English by Marcia de Brito*)