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Pythagoras

The Golden Verses

Although no original writings of Pythagoras have survived antiquity, this collection of seventy-one aphorisms is mentioned by Hierocles of Alexandria in the fifth century CE. From internal evidence, some scholars believe that they come from a hexameter poem by Pythagoras, which was transmitted orally until persecution scattered the Pythagoreans, and they were then committed to writing

The present edition is an original translation by Florence M. Firth, adapted here for modern readers.

1. First worship the Immortal Gods, as they are established and ordained by the Law.
2. Reverence the Oath, and next the Heroes, full of goodness and light.
3. Honor likewise the Terrestrial Guiding Spirits by rendering them the worship lawfully due to them.
4. Honor likewise your parents and those most nearly related to you.
5. Of all the rest of humanity, make friends with those who distinguish themselves by their virtue.
6. Always give ear to their mild exhortations, and take example from their virtuous and useful actions.
7. Avoid as much as possible hating your friend for a slight fault.

8. [And understand that] power is a near neighbor to necessity.
9. Know that all these things are as I have told you; and accustom yourself to overcome and vanquish the following passions:
10. First gluttony, sloth, sensuality, and anger.
11. Do nothing evil, neither in the presence of others, nor privately;
12. But above all things respect yourself
13. In the next place, observe justice in your actions and in your words.
14. And do not involve yourself in anything without rule or reason.
15. But always realize that it is ordained by destiny that all human beings shall die,
16. And that the goods of fortune are uncertain; and that as they may be acquired, so may they likewise be lost.
17. Concerning all the calamities that humans suffer by divine fortune,
18. Support with patience your lot, be it what it may, and never repine at it.
19. But endeavor what you can to remedy it,
20. And consider that fate does not send the greatest portion of these misfortunes to good people.
21. There are many possibilities that people can choose from, both good and bad;
22. So, from among the possibilities, carefully choose the best path for yourself.
23. But if falsehoods be advanced, hear them with mildness, and arm yourself with patience.
24. Observe well, on every occasion, what I am going to tell you:
25. Let no person, either through words or deeds, ever seduce you.
26. Nor entice you to say or to do what is not beneficial for yourself.
27. Consult and deliberate before you act, that you may not commit foolish actions.

28. For it is the mark of a miserable person to speak and to act without reflection.
29. But do that which will not afflict you afterwards, nor oblige you to repentance.
30. Never do anything which you do not understand.
31. Learn all you ought to know, and thus you will lead a very pleasant life.
32. In no way neglect the health of your body;
33. Give it drink and food in due measure, and also the exercise of which it has need.
34. Now, by measure, I mean what will not inconvenience you.
35. Accustom yourself to a way of living that is neat and decent without luxury
36. Avoid all things that will occasion envy.
37. And be not prodigal out of season, like one who knows not what is decent and honorable.
38. Be neither covetous nor stingy; a modest measure is excellent in these things.
39. Do only that which will not hurt you, and think carefully about what you are going to do before you do it.
40. Never fall asleep after going to bed,
41. Till you have carefully considered all your actions of the day:
42. Where have I gone amiss? What have I done? What have I omitted that I ought to have done?
43. If in this examination you find that you have gone amiss, reprimand yourself severely for it;
44. And if you have done any good, rejoice.
45. Practice thoroughly all these things; meditate on them well, for you ought to love them with all your heart.
46. It is they that will put you on the path of divine virtue.

47. I swear it by the one who has transmitted into our souls the Sacred Quaternion, the source of nature, whose cause is eternal.

48. But never begin to set your hand to any work, till you have first prayed to the gods to accomplish what you are about to begin. . . . observe justice in your actions and in your words.

49. When you have become familiar with this habit,

50. You will know the constitution of the Immortal Gods and of humans.

51. Even the extent of the power of gods and humans, and what contains and binds them together

52. You shall likewise know that according to Law, the nature of this universe flows through all things alike,

53. So that you shall not hope for what you ought not to hope; and nothing in this world shall be hidden from you.

54. You will likewise know that human beings bring on their own misfortunes, voluntarily and of their own free choice.

55. Unhappy that they are! They neither see nor understand that what is best for them is within them.

56. Few know how to deliver themselves out of their misfortunes.

57. Such is the fate that blinds humanity, and takes away their senses.

58. Like huge barrels they roll to and fro, always oppressed with innumerable problems.

59. For fatal strife, seemingly innate, pursues them everywhere, tossing them up and down; nor do they perceive this.

60. Instead of provoking and stirring up strife, they ought, by yielding, to avoid it.

61. Oh! Jupiter, our Father! If you would deliver humans from all the evils that oppress them,

62. Show them the veil of ignorance that blinds their eyes.

63. But take courage: the human race is divine:

64. Sacred nature reveals to them the most hidden mysteries.

65. If she imparts to you her secrets, you will easily perform all the things for which I have ordained you,

66. And by the healing of your soul, you shall deliver it from all evils, from all afflictions.

67. But abstain from meat, which will prevent you from the purifying and the deliverance of your soul;

68. Carefully distinguish between things, and examine all things well.

69. Leaving yourself to always be guided and directed by the understanding that comes from above, allowing it to control your destiny.

70. And when you have eventually divested yourself of your mortal body, you will arrive at the most pure Æther,

71. And you shall be a God—immortal, incorruptible—and Death shall have no more dominion over you.

Never fall asleep after going to bed, till you have carefully considered all your actions of the day... Where have I gone amiss? What have I done? What have I omitted that I ought to have done?

Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library. (Newburyport, MA: Red Wheel Weiser, 1987), 163. 2Florence M. Firth,

The Golden Verses Of Pythagoras and Other Pythagorean Fragments (Krotona, Hollywood: Theosophical Publishing House, 1904

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