

Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

(THE EPISTOLE)

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Hellenic polytheists*

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THE NEOKOROI* are a group of Hellenic polytheists who feel called to a path of service and devotion to the gods. We support mysticism, hard polytheism, and tend to favor reconstructionism as an approach to developing Hellenismos, while also recognizing the importance of personal experience and local cultus. We are especially dedicated to fostering communities, festivals, and public shrines, and providing guidance and information on religious matters – all to ensure the strength and longevity of the worship of the Greek gods.

HE EPISTOLE (a “message” or “letter”) is published four times a year. We offer articles, hymns, prayers, poetry, reviews, information, rituals, community notices, fiction, recipes, and anything else of interest to the Hellenic polytheist community. We welcome feedback, and submissions from guest writers. He Epistole is a free publication and can be found in many locations nationwide. If you would like the newsletter delivered to you directly, subscriptions cost \$20 per year – contact us for more information. And please contact us if you would like to distribute copies in your area – in return you receive the issues in electronic format for free. Back issues can be downloaded in PDF form from the website for free.

To contact the editor, email: info@neokoroi.org - or visit the Neokoroi website: www.neokoroi.org. (We have even more articles online, as well as information on the gods, photos, links and more!) Our next issue will be coming out in September 2008. The deadline for submissions is August 20th.

*The word *neokoros* is derived from the Greek words *naos* (temple) and *koreo* (to sweep) and originally meant "the one who sweeps the temple" or "the temple keeper". It was a humble position, but an important one, for it was the neokoros' responsibility to make sure that the temple was kept clean and free of any pollution, and also to tend to the daily service of the god in whose temple he or she served.

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The Gods and Tough Times

By Sannion

What do you do when bad things keep happening in your life? Where are the gods in all this? That's a question that I am often asked as an exegete, and I admit, it's a tough one, one that many thoughtful people of faith have wrestled with over the centuries. There was certainly much disagreement about this in antiquity.

The Epicureans, for instance, believed that the gods were good and lived lives of complete contentment. They had no concern for mortal kind and thus never intervened, either to aid or to punish us. Understandably, this idea was not very popular in the ancient world, since it made the gods nothing more than show pieces, pretty but powerless. Many went so far as to label the Epicureans atheists on account of this doctrine.

Stoics such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius took a different approach. They said that one ought to attribute all the good in our lives to the gods – but all the bad to our own shortcomings and base nature.

A third approach, which Theophrastus and Plutarch categorized as *deisidaimonia* (literally "fear of spirits" or superstition) held that every bad thing that happened to us was a clear sign of divine disfavor. If you got the sniffles, an evil spirit was certainly behind it. Your wallet went missing – then the gods must be punishing you. You walk outside and hear someone yelling – an ill-omen indicating that you aren't long for this world.

None of these views, in my opinion, are correct. What follows is a rough summation of the teachings of Plutarch, Seneca, Herakleitos, and other wise men who had sensible things to say about this problem.

The word gods in Greek is *theoi* which is derived from a word meaning 'disposers'. The gods are the ones that cause things to happen. Not only do they possess exceptional beauty, wisdom, and longevity – but gods are, by definition, powerful beings. Our gods are intimately connected with the natural world. They maintain its proper order, each presiding over a specific area or concern. Zeus rules the heavens and Poseidon the watery depths; Demeter and Dionysos cause the earth to be bountiful with grain and fruit and all the products of nature which come forth in due season; Artemis protects the wild animals and helps them give birth. Nor are the gods manifest

only in nature; Athene grants wisdom; Apollon inspires the beauty of artists; Ares teaches strength and bravery; Asklepios heals our illnesses. There are a multitude of gods, and each one, large or small, has its role to play in maintaining the divine harmony of creation.

The gods do grant us many wonderful things – life, health, wisdom, protection, good luck - and it is only proper to show gratitude towards them when a happy boon comes our way. And likewise, just as the gods can find favor in us and reward our goodness – so, too, can they become displeased with us and punish our transgressions. To believe otherwise is to strip the gods of that essential quality which defined divinity for the ancients: power. It is further to make the gods nothing more than ideas, disconnected from the real world – or worse yet, to hold out that they are immoral and care nothing for justice and goodness.

But it does not necessarily hold that everything that happens, happens because of the gods, especially with regard to human affairs. We are not robots. The gods have granted us free will – and more than that, the ability to rationally think about things. The gods give no gifts uselessly: everything they bestow upon us, they intend for us to use in its proper manner. Thus when the Muses place poetic inspiration into a person's heart, they want them to sing or write. Being a free creature, they may choose to do so or not – but they will never feel whole and purposeful unless they do.

Similarly, when we forgo our divinely-given rational faculties, we are less than human. Of all the animals, we have been given this gift in greatest abundance. (Other animals are indeed wise, but not in the same way as the human animal.) It is a heavy gift to bear indeed, for it demands that we think critically about things, that we cannot simply get by on instinct and emotion. Man perceives the world around him; he is aware of his own thoughts; conscious of his actions and their consequences; he knows, as no other creature does, that he shall die one day and be no more.

So I believe when confronted with unfortunate circumstances it is vitally important that man exercise his reason. He must try to look clearly at the situation. Before he attributes everything bad that happens to him to the gods, he must be sure that he has removed any doubt about his own culpability in bringing these events to pass.

Suppose our hypothetical unfortunate man has just lost his job. He should first examine the

situation carefully. Was he always on time? Productive? Motivated? Disciplined? Friendly towards his co-workers? Could something he did or failed to do (even if he wasn't conscious of it) have caused malice or envy in another, which caused them to take actions against him? Were there other factors at play such as a change in the economy that necessitated downsizing, or plans to relocate the business elsewhere? Until he has eliminated all of these as a possibility, I do not believe that it is fair to lay the blame for this loss in the lap of the gods.

And even if, as it turns out, the gods were in fact responsible for this – it does not logically follow that the gods hate the man and are thus punishing him. After all, he does not know what lies in store for him. Perhaps this job was actually not the best place for him since it did not fully utilize his skills, and he was essentially wasting his time there. By taking the job away from him, the gods may be either clearing the way for something much better to fall into place – or urging the man to seek something better, where he can actually put his talents to good use. We cannot judge whether a thing is good or bad in the midst of it – only in hindsight, once all is completed, do we have the necessary information to make that judgment. Many things which initially seem good to us turn out to harm us in the end, and vice versa.

Furthermore, we must be careful not to make false judgments about the nature of life and human existence. We are frail, imperfect creatures. We want only happiness and security to be ours – but that is not what life is about. A human life, as the poet Homer said, is an admixture. Zeus has two jars, one of blessings, one of ills, and he pours a little of both into each human life. Violent transformations, illnesses, conflicts with friends and loved ones, even exile and death – all this is natural to man. When these things come into our lives, we should not be startled by them, should not curse them and the gods. We should accept them as natural, and be thankful that the gods have given us reason, temperance, fortitude, virtue, and a host of other qualities with which we can navigate our way through life. The Stoics taught that we could control nothing outside of ourselves: only that which lay within us and how we respond to those external forces are able to be controlled by us. Another person may hate us, and we are powerless to stop them from doing so. But there is nothing that forces us to respond in kind.

All of which, of course, is not to suggest that the gods cannot cause bad things to happen to us. Sometimes things are so clearly outside of our

influence, sometimes they occur in such a clear manner that the hand of the gods is obviously discernible behind it, or a series of unfortunate events transpire with such frequency and uniformity that it cannot simply be written off as chance or incompetence. What then?

Reason must come to the fore. Do not be content simply to bemoan your fate or blame the gods. Ask yourself why this is happening. What have you done to offend the gods or what area of your life have you been neglecting that they must chastise you in order to bring it into conformity with right order? What can you do to rectify the situation? If the steps that you take do not seem to make any difference, or you are left without any notion of what lies at the root of your misfortune, there are several things that you can still do. Sacrifice to the gods and pray for an explanation or a sign to put you on the right path. Or take a more direct route and use divination to determine their will, either doing it yourself or turning to a knowledgeable expert in the mantic arts who can help you. Additionally, ask your friends or someone in your religious community whose opinion you respect if they have advice to offer. Perhaps they can see things in your situation that you are too close to perceive clearly. Or perhaps in phrasing the question, an answer will come to you on its own. But however an answer comes to you, follow through with it. And keep up with it, even after the initial evil flees. Many times people will be diligent in adversity, only to fall back into their old patterns once the pressure is off. This merely invites further – and harsher – chastisement down the road.



*Photo by
Autolykos*

The Dance of Flowers (a hymn to Apollon)

By Samantha Frye

Women dancing to your lyre, like butterflies to the fire
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.
Lifting our baskets up high, raising flowers to the sky
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.

In our fair hands we will lift, bearing to you a loving gift
We bring a gift to you, Oh Apollon.
Bringing forth the fairest veil, dyed as morning's sail
We bring a gift to you, Oh Apollon.

Women dancing to your lyre, like butterflies to the fire
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.
Lifting our baskets up high, raising flowers to the sky
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.

We raise our voices to the sky, a birdsong on wing to fly
We sing to you, Oh Apollon.
Singing to vibrant notes of light, chasing away shadows of night
We sing to you, Oh Apollon.

Women dancing to your lyre, like butterflies to the fire
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.
Lifting our baskets up high, raising flowers to the sky
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.

There you reach out your hand, stretching it across the land
How we adore you, Oh Apollon.
And you touch our face, with the warmth of your embrace
How we adore you Oh Apollon.

Women dancing to your lyre, like butterflies to the fire
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.
Lifting our baskets up high, raising flowers to the sky
We dance for you, Oh Apollon.

Here we dance for you, Oh Apollon
Here we bring a gift to you, oh Apollon
Here we sing to you, Oh Apollon
How we adore you, Oh Apollon.

Painting by Samantha Frye



Gardening with Demeter

Jennifer Lawrence

Every year at this time, the world turns green, Demeter rejoices at the return of her daughter, and I fall in love all over again.

When I was a child, summer was my favorite time of the year; after all, summer meant being out of school. What kid doesn't love summer vacation?

But I haven't been a child for a long time. These days, Spring is my favorite time of the year – Spring, when the world explodes into life after the long, gray, drab expanse of Winter, and when I can once again return to the garden to worship Demeter in the way I love best.

I haven't always been good with plants. My mother and grandmother had such green thumbs that they could make styrofoam grow, but up until about ten or twelve years ago, every plant I had died. Even the sturdy Aloe Vera plant my mother gave me developed some sort of cottony fungus on its thick leaves and withered away.

I don't know precisely what changed; maybe I never will. I'd like to say that it was Demeter coming into my life, but I suspect that might be wishful thinking. Even so, once I realized that the things I was trying to grow weren't dying anymore, I threw myself into gardening with fervent prayers of thanks to Demeter for her aid.

Four years ago, I began really gardening in earnest. No longer content to simply plant tulip bulbs in the pre-planned flower beds alongside the driveway of my house, I tore into the sod in the side yard, displacing it to create the first of two circular beds that measured nine feet in diameter. These I filled with herbs – sage, rosemary, thyme, garlic, peppermint, spearmint, basil, chocolate mint, angelica, soapwort, hyssop, tarragon, oregano, lemon balm, and yarrow. A second circular bed followed the first, and I branched out, planting strawberries and raspberries and an apple tree, all the while singing Her praises.

This year, I moved on to the back yard, once again removing the sod in a 12'x16', 192 square foot rectangle. I sweated and ached and sang to Her as I loaded layers of grass and earth into my wheelbarrow, spreading blood meal in an odd sort of sacrifice to prepare the ground for the seeds. My final act before planting, once the soil was loosened and the little pebbles pulled out and tossed aside, was to walk the boundaries

of the garden, pouring out a libation to Her as I asked Her to help me make it fruitful.

With the earth prepared, it was time to plant. The price of food has skyrocketed this year, and there would be no flowers in this garden. I planted peas and green beans, asparagus and radishes, beets and spinach, tomatoes and green peppers, potatoes and corn, red onions and green onions and yellow onions. I planted more garlic, and fennel, and dill. I thought of Her, searching the world for her missing daughter, the earth turning cold and bleak and dead all around her. And I looked around me at the trees with their lush emerald leaves, the tiny sprouting vegetables and the flower buds on the berry bushes that would soon turn to fruit, and could imagine the joy She felt when She finally found Persephone and returned to the world above with her.

There are few sacraments greater, for me, than gardening. In it, I can commune with Demeter and speak with her freely, seeing her answers in the richness of the soil and the bounty it produces. I can feel Her with me as I pull up weeds, squash grubs and other pests, and water the ground and the plants growing in it until the earth is as dark and wet and sweet as wine. When I work in the garden, I do my best to emulate Her and be guided by Her in creating food where before there was none. Her gift—this skill, and what it produces—help me to live, and to provide for my family, which includes daughters like Her own. I thank Her every day for what She has given me, and as Spring begins to give way to Summer, I begin to look forward to Fall, when I know She will be with me as I gather in the harvest.

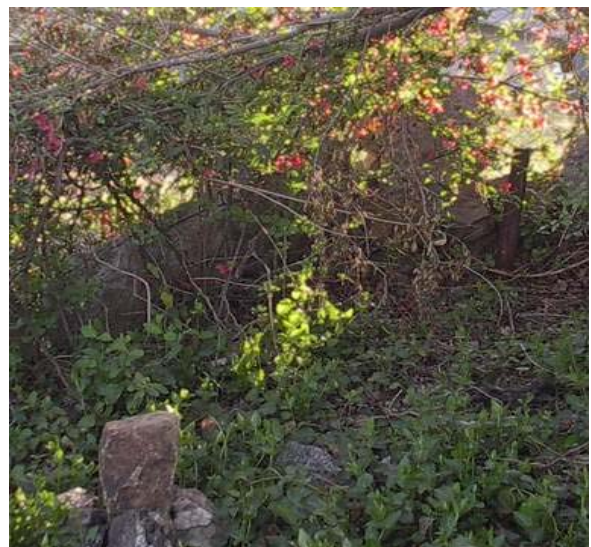


Photo by Autolykos

Hounds...

By Diotima

She ran...

The day had begun as many others – nothing to show that it would come to terror and flight...

She'd fetched water, taken the bread for the baking – and yes, she had stayed there longer than she quite needed to, passing the time of day with the women – and aware of the baker's son in the background. That would be a good match for her – above what might be thought right, but she'd set her sights high...

Now, her sights were set only for the perilous twilight footing – they were not long behind her, and gaining. She'd only avoided them so far by coming into the woods, forcing them to dismount and follow her on foot – she never thought the day would come when she would bless the close growing trees...

"Go on through, girls, there's nothing to hurt you there!"

The mister often sent her on errands through the wood –

"One day you'll come back with more than you take in!"

The mistress had made it clear her idea of a good match for Merewenne would be the charcoal burner's son, but Merewenne had no desire to live out her days in the isolation of the deep forest, coming into town only for market days, if she was lucky...

Luck was what she wanted now, as she ran on. The way through the woods was familiar enough – familiar enough to tell her that it held no hiding place for her tonight. She looked ahead and up, through a gap – if she could get up into the crags, surely she'd find a place to hide – to rest? She was so very tired...

"Tired? I'll give you tired, my girl!" The mistress had passed the mill on her self important way to visit her sister, and had seen Merewenne sitting on the low wall outside the mill, talking to the other women there. "Get you home and about your work, girl!". Merewenne had dodged the blow but not the words or the look, and had hurried home to continue her day's work – carrying the fresh loaves, reveling in the scent of them...

The scent of the forest – pine – loam – was giving way to the sent of open land. It was almost too dark to see but still Merewenne ran on, confident in her memory to get her across the boggy pastureland to the rising crags beyond. A splash and a muffled curse told her the men following were not so sure of their own footing...

Merewenne ran on as they stopped to pull their comrade free of the bog – it gave her an edge. She ran on....

"How you do run on!" The master's voice carried, complaining at the long account of his sister-in-law's doings. "See to my own household, wife – and leave hers to her". Merewenne had pretended to be very busy about mending the tunic on her lap as the mistress came through, as though she had not heard. She should have seen, then, perhaps, that the day would go from bad to worse – the look in the mistress' eye held trouble for someone; Merewenne just didn't realise it would be her.

But it was... and it sounded as though her pursuers had returned to the chase. It was only the warning from the baker's son that had given her what little lead on them she'd had...

"Merry! Your mistress is in a state!" He found her at the well, at the edge of the village, fetching the night's water. "She's always in a state, that one". "It's worse". He'd looked as though he had bad news ..and he did. "The tithe money? In silver, due next market day?" Merewenne nodded - everyone knew her mistress insisted on seeing to the tithe herself..."It's gone". "Gone? How can it be gone?" "There's worse, Merry. She's saying everywhere that...." He'd trailed off, looking at his feet. At that moment, even from where they'd stood at the well, she'd head the master's shout of rage – she couldn't make out the words – but looking at Marcus, she didn't really need to. Even before he managed to stammer it out, she knew who the mistress was blaming for the missing silver. Merewenne didn't even stop to consider trying to defend herself, to prove that she had not taken the money...they'd never believe her, they'd put her to the trial...

So now, she was still running – she'd made it to the end of the boggy land and was on the first part of the scree at the base of the crags, when she heard something that caused her steps to falter, and sent her spirits plummeting – hounds! They'd brought the hounds with them! They must have been kept back, in the woods, but from the sound, they'd been loosed...

She called up a last bit of strength from somewhere, and spotted a cave; almost hidden, just ahead of her to the left. Too tired to run much further, she made for the cave – maybe a stream would hide her scent, maybe she'd be able to crawl into a place too small for the men to follow....

The cave was almost pitch black in the gathering gloom, but she ran on. If there was a pit in front of her – well, falling would be quick and, after all, better than going back....

So when she missed her footing and began to fall, it was almost with something like relief. But her fall was arrested by strong arms, holding her. She was too frightened to think, and too tired to care – she lashed out, trying to break his hold.

"No".

The one word brought her up short – stopped her frantic pummeling of his chest, her pushing against his arms. She looked at him, but could only see an outline of a face...

"Please sir! I didn't do it, sir! I didn't! Tell them, sir, you believe me, sir?"

He looked at her and said simply, "Wait".

Releasing her, he turned away, toward the mouth of the cave. Now that she'd stopped running, she could hear the hounds – so close, so close...

She realised she was leaning against the wall of the cave. Her strength finally exhausted, she slid down till she was sitting on the bare earth. She felt she no longer cared what happened to her, as long as she could rest...

When she woke, it was to a good fire, and a simple meal in front of her – oat cakes, rough wine, part of a roast hare. Realising how hungry she was, she fell to, eating and drinking as much as she could. Just as she was sitting back, wiping greasy fingers on her skirt, he came into view – as much of him as she could see by the light of the dying fire.

“Sir... I’ve eaten your supper..?” She asked it as a question, but the evidence was clear...

“No, there is more than enough here – be easy. Some of the country folk ... remember”.

He looked down at her – she could see he was not tall even for the men of the village. She also realised he was waiting for her to speak.

“I was accused of stealing, sir”.

“And did you steal?”

“No, sir”. She didn’t add any more – he would believe her or not.

He nodded, as if satisfied.

“Not that I might not have given you refuge, even if you had, mind you.” He smiled, and pull off a part of what she’d left of the hare.

“But this really is no place for you... And it’s safe for you to go back”.

“How...?”

“How do I know, or how is it safe? Tell me, why were you so afraid?”

“Hounds, sir – they’d loosed the hounds.” She didn’t give voice to the fear she felt, but he seemed to understand.

“As I thought. In this place, the hounds are your friends, as they are mine. They didn’t find you – but they did find a stranger hiding in a barn... a stranger who had silver...”

“The tithe! It wasn’t me, you see, sir?!”

“And they know that, now.”

A large hound pushed past him, toward the remains of the food. Merewenne drew back, and he laughed.

“I tell you, he is the best friend you have this night. Next to me, that is...” He held out a hand to her....

She came back to the village in the morning mist, the large hound at her side. No one questioned her – the matter was ignored by common consent. But the hound, having joined the master’s hunting pack, would always run to her if given and chance – and made his home outside the bakery, when she married....

One might suggest that a Saxon village is an odd place to find the Lord of the Hounds. One might, however, think twice before suggesting it directly to him...

Peacock Dionysos

By Sannion

Amused, the tipsy satyrs pause in the midst of their wine-pressing to watch the plump baby Bacchos ride through sitting proudly astride his peacock mount, oblivious to the bird's frantic squawks as it darts this way and that over the sandy shore, the young god's delighted squeals lingering long after.

"Ho ho!" laughs Seilenos, "Look at him go!"

in between mouthfuls of juicy grapes fed him by one of the lovely Kanopic nymphs dark-haired and dusky-skinned.

They watch the peacock vanish into the distance, racing off to the western desert wastes and Zeus only knows where else.

Then Seilenos claps his hands and says,

"Back to work, my boys! Those grapes aren't gonna stomp themselves!"



Spiritual Exercises of the Ancient Philosophers: An Outline

by Brandon Newberg

I have been reading Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy As a Way of Life*, which is all about how philosophy used to be more than mere theory. In the ancient world, it was a total way of life, a spirituality. Hadot gives particular attention to spiritual exercises. I'm gonna try to outline them here. I'm also drawing on an essay by Elen Buzare, which takes Hadot as a starting point for a program of Stoic spiritual exercises. My hope is that understanding the ancient approach to spiritual exercises may inspire me to find new and useful ways to approach the gods. I share this in case anyone else has a similar interest. Please keep in mind this is a work in progress.

By philosophy, I'm talking about schools of the ancient world, including the Stoics, Epicureans, Platonists and Neoplatonists, and others.

Basics

*The predicament - All ancient schools agreed that people find themselves in a state of unhappy disquiet - suffering, disorder, and unconsciousness.

*The cause of the predicament - The principle cause of this unhappy disquiet were the passions. "Passions" I understand to be emotions, feelings, or urges which cloud one's thinking against one's better judgment. They tend to be unregulated desires and exaggerated fears. The word "passion" has in modern times taken on positive connotations, as in "a passion for one's work," "a passionate lover," or "compassion." These are mostly good things, and not necessarily implied by the ancient sense of the word. Although some philosophers may have taken harder stances on this than others. Certainly the climate in those days was much more biased toward the rational intellect than we find ourselves today, in our post-Romantic day and age. In addition to the passions, schools added other causes with unique nuances that fit their particular worldviews.

*The goal - Almost all schools agreed that the goal was *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing. This is often translated as happiness, but it is not quite the same. Perhaps the best definition would be something like "the most desirable state for man." Schools disagreed on precisely what this state was, but most agreed that it was a worldly state - *eudaimonia* was to be achieved in this world and this life, not in some afterlife or future incarnation. Neoplatonism may have differed on this point.

*The way to the goal - To get from the predicament to the goal, schools prescribed spiritual exercises. Broadly, it can be said that all exercises aimed at transforming one's worldview, helping one to see the world in a new way, such that the passions may be

overcome by the bright light of rationality.

Transformation of worldview leads to transformation of behavior, and thus to human flourishing in the world.

The rest of this outline will focus on these exercises.

Spiritual Exercise

There were two basic kinds.

*Physical training - special regimens - These were different for each school, but generally limited one's physical pleasures, especially those perceived to exceed the basic needs, and on the whole contributed to a simpler, more moderate way of life. They addressed such things as alcohol, diet, physical exercise, luxuries, and cold or heat. Most schools saw the body in positive or at least neutral terms--it needed training, but was not inherently bad. The Neoplatonists may be an exception.

*Mental training - dialogue - These were different for each school as well, but consisted of various kinds of dialogue. There was dialogue with oneself, dialogue with others, and dialogue in writing. The aim was almost always to internalize a new way of thinking or to elucidate insights, in either case leading to a transformation of one's worldview. "Meditation" in the ancient sense was the practice of dialogue with oneself.

Specific Spiritual Exercises

There were no specific exercises shared by all schools so far as I know. And since so much of the ancient record is lost, we don't necessarily even know which exercises were the most common. All we can do is look at those attested by this or that author, and judge which seem the most generally applicable. Below are a few of the most common examples.

Morning Exercise - go over the day's plan and decide on the principles which will guide you through it.

Evening Exercise - examine the day's events and how you dealt with them, acknowledging where you did well and recognizing where and how you could have done better.

Aphorisms Exercise - memorize a number of short, striking phrases applicable to various situations, so as to always have your principles at hand.

Training for Death Exercise - contemplate one's place in the Whole, so as to elevate one's thought, rise above individual passions, and in effect die to one's passions.

Conclusions

The outline above makes for a frame of reference in considering how the ancient philosophers approached their practice. They called it philosophy. We might call

it spirituality. As Hadot is at pains to make clear, the ancient approach was more than an academic, "arm-chair" discipline. It was spiritual discipline. It was a way of life.

Looking over the outline, it is striking that many of the principle ideas and exercises seem easily compatible with modern living. We may already be doing some of them. Others, such as the Training for Death, may take some interpretation and contemplation before its full relevance to contemporary spirituality can be fathomed.

I hope this outline may be helpful to some people. As I said, it is still a work in progress, so explore with care.

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Sun-God's Crown

By Jennifer Lawrence

Whose sweet leaves,
This green hair--
Where has she gone?
I saw her on that riverbank,
Lusted
Pursued
--there never was a sweeter chase--
I heard her call out her father's name.
"Save me!"
That devil, that river-god, that tyrant,
Peneius who loves not love--
Whose magicks these are which have
Torn my Daphnis away?
No woman born should dare so much,
This disappearance--
Cassandra I punished,
Calliope I loved,
Coronis bore my son.
But this jewel, this prize--
How did I lose her?
I might well wear willow-weeds
(Disconsolate),
But instead I gather emerald fronds,
Lovers'-token,
Almost-what if-might have been--
And weave them for my brow
Her silk, entwined,
Not golden wreath for a locket's heart,
But verdant chaplet for my diadem:
Such hollow victory crown.

Photo by Autolykos



Marriage Blessing Prayer

by Mariah Sheehy

Hestia, may we have peace and harmony between us, may we always have a safe place to come home to.

Artemis, may you aid me in this transition to married life. Thank you for watching over me as a maiden.

Hera, may we always honor our marriage, our promise to each other.

Zeus, may we always be fair and just towards one another.

Aphrodite, may there always be romance and passion between us.

Apollon, may there always be truth and honesty between us. May we be healthy and strong.

Hermes, may we listen to each other and communicate well.

Athene, may we always respect each other's independence and personal needs.

Hephaistos, may we always have work, may we labor together to build a strong family.

Demeter, may our table always have food. May we never go hungry.

Dionysos, may the wine flow, and may we experience joy as you do with your bride Ariadne.

Poseidon, may you grant us smooth sailing in the seas of life.

Ares, may our home and our relationship be safe from all enemies.

Hestia, may our hearth always be as warm as our hearts are towards one another.

Wise and mighty theoi, please bless our marriage. Grant us many happy and prosperous years with each other.





*Photo by
Autolykos*

Hermaphroditos

Re-told by Ruadhan J McElroy

Once, many millennia ago, just after the conception of man, the Goddess Aphrodite, who many years before rose from the sea-foam formed by the blood of the Titan Ouranos' genitals, fell captivated by the beauty of the God Hermes and sought to seduce him. The three Moirae, the Goddesses of Fate whom both mortals and immortals alike are ultimately bound to, advised against this, telling the Goddess that the child born to her from such lust would only be half a boy. But Aphrodite, being very headstrong, did not heed such cryptic advice.

Of course, being quite possibly the most beautiful of the Goddesses, she didn't even really have to work for this seduction of her fellow Deity, and Hermes took her up and penetrated her in a lovers' embrace. From this copulation, Aphrodite bore a son, who was named after both of them: Hermaphroditos.

When Hermaphroditos grew into a beautiful young man, he attracted the attention of many, both men and women, but none adored him more than the shy yet lovely Naiad Salmakis, the nymph to whom the spring of the city Halikarnassos in Anatolia was sacred. She was too timid to bring herself to approach him when she happened to see him, but he always saw her watching him and would sometimes, very slyly, wink in her direction, just to let her know that he knew.

One day, Salmakis finally proclaimed her love to Hermaphroditos, and made complimentary comparisons to his looks with those of the eldest ephebe of all, Eros, the God of Love and ancient force of lust and desire; and despite knowing precisely what she would say, the young God's cheeks rouged like a flattered young lady. But her feelings toward him he could not return with the same passions that would invoke the Eldest One's name and he declined her as gently as he

could, and apologised for his youthful flirtations.

Salmakis fled from him, weeping, and Hermaphroditos went about his doings, his heart saddened that he had hurt her.

Some weeks and days later, Hermaphroditos happened upon Salmakis' spring, unaware that it was hers, and began to bathe his breathtaking body in its waters. When Salmakis returned to her spring, she saw his alabaster skin and shiny dark hair moving flawlessly through the water, and forgetting that He was not a God who kept track of the Nymphae, she assumed his presence meant that he had a change of heart and she flung herself upon him, squealing with delight. When he tried to push her away, she screamed to whatever Gods may have been listening to make him hers so that they would be together, forever.

Such screaming as Salmakis made is destined to be heard by some God. And not always the God or Goddess you want to hear it. Aphrodite and Her companion Eros had heard her, but ignored her requests, assuming that she'd take a hint that the answer was intended to be "no." Unfortunately the two did not speak it, and Eris, the Goddess of Discord, heard the nymph as well and answered "sure, why not?"

In a move that would be sure to delight Her followers millennia later, Eris brought the two together in the most literal fashion imaginable and before he could fully realise what was happening, Salmakis was gone and Hermaphroditos had sprouted the small, pert breasts of a young woman along with the full hips of one destined to one day give birth. His thighs and arms maintained their slender and baby-fat softened musculature of youth. His voice took on an indiscernible and genderless quality. His genitals became bi-gendered with his sack and root splitting down the centre to reveal the hollowness of a woman's cleft as his shaft remained intact.

At first abhorred by his new form, Hermaphroditos cursed the spring so that any mortal man who drank or bathed in its waters would become softened like a young woman, but after years of consideration, he grew intrigued, and even enamoured by his new body and appeased Zeus to become the protector of "androgynes" – mortals who were somehow split between masculinity and femininity, whether in body or in spirit, and those afflicted with such duality could seek his counsel and guidance.

My Dionysos

by Brandon Newberg

Anyone who knows me in person knows I hardly come across as the "Dionysian" stereotype. I'm calm, reserved, quiet, moderate, intellectual, and generally self-controlled. And I'm not very boisterous, eccentric, or prone to revelry (by common standards anyway). I am much more the "Apollonian" type (devolving into Nietzschean labels here). But Apollo doesn't draw me at all, while Dionysos exerts a steady attraction. Why?

That's what I've been trying to figure out. I guess Dionysos attracts me because he represents to me sheer embodied, sensuous existence. The very fact of being here, alive and sensate. It's what intellectual pursuits can neither explain nor escape, however much they may help us understand it. I've tried to make sense of the ancient maenads, the mad Bacchic frenzies, the drinking, the feasting, the eating of raw meat (these being the most extreme but not the only characteristics of Dionysian cult--there were much tamer aspects too!). The only thing I've come to understand is just the raw, unadulterated dread, awe, and mystery of it--what Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*.

My own way of life has explored some deeper aspects of raw, sensuous being. I can hardly say I've ever found myself in a "frenzy," but yet the exploration and sometimes even confrontation of the senses has been something that has produced that feeling of dread, awe, and mystery.

Last year, as I researched and performed my Anthesteria ritual to Dionysos, two things really struck me: the depiction of Dionysos in early art, and the connection with death...

The first thing was the demeanor of Dionysos as depicted in older vase paintings. He wasn't an effeminate youth, full of naive sensuousness. He was a mature, bearded man. Also, he wasn't always shown looking drunk. Often he appeared quite in possession of himself. Although surrounded by the revelry of nymphs, satyrs, and silenoi, he didn't seem to be caught up in it. He was just sitting or standing there, watching the scene, in complete self-possession. Here was not a naive but rather a mature sensuousness. Dionysos ruled the scene, participating in the revel but not a slave to it. It was the satyrs who ran after the objects of desire. And although they were constantly upon the nymphs, they never seemed to catch them. The only satisfaction they ever seemed to enjoy was masturbation. The satyrs are a direct counterpoint to Dionysos, sitting in perfect composure, apparently satisfied in every moment, not

lusting after nor recoiling from anything. That is the kind of embodied being, the wisdom if you will of being fully in the world but not caught up in it, that I can identify with. It's a serene kind of revel. At the end of the day, I'm no satyr. But I am a certain kind of reveler.

The other thing that struck me was the Anthesteria's connection to death. It starts out on the first day with relatively innocent wine drinking, but gradually the mood deepens and darkens, until the third and final day, which is given over to the ancestors and death. This juxtaposition to me is powerful. It reveals another side to Dionysos. Perhaps it may be likened to the Cyrenaic philosophy, "Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die"--although what I've written above shows a deeper dimension than pure hedonism. In juxtaposing the wine-drinking with death, there almost seems to be a spiritual exercise going on: reconciling oneself to death, so as to more fully appreciate life.

These two things--the stillness-in-motion aspect of serene revelry, and the reconciliation to death aspect, conducive to appreciating life--are probably what most define my relationship to Dionysos. Again, they hardly make me the "typical" Dionysian-type personality. I'm a different breed--a wallflower, perhaps, but no less a participant of the Dionysian revel.



Hekate's Prayer

By Grizz

Hekate - Maiden, Mother, AND Crone

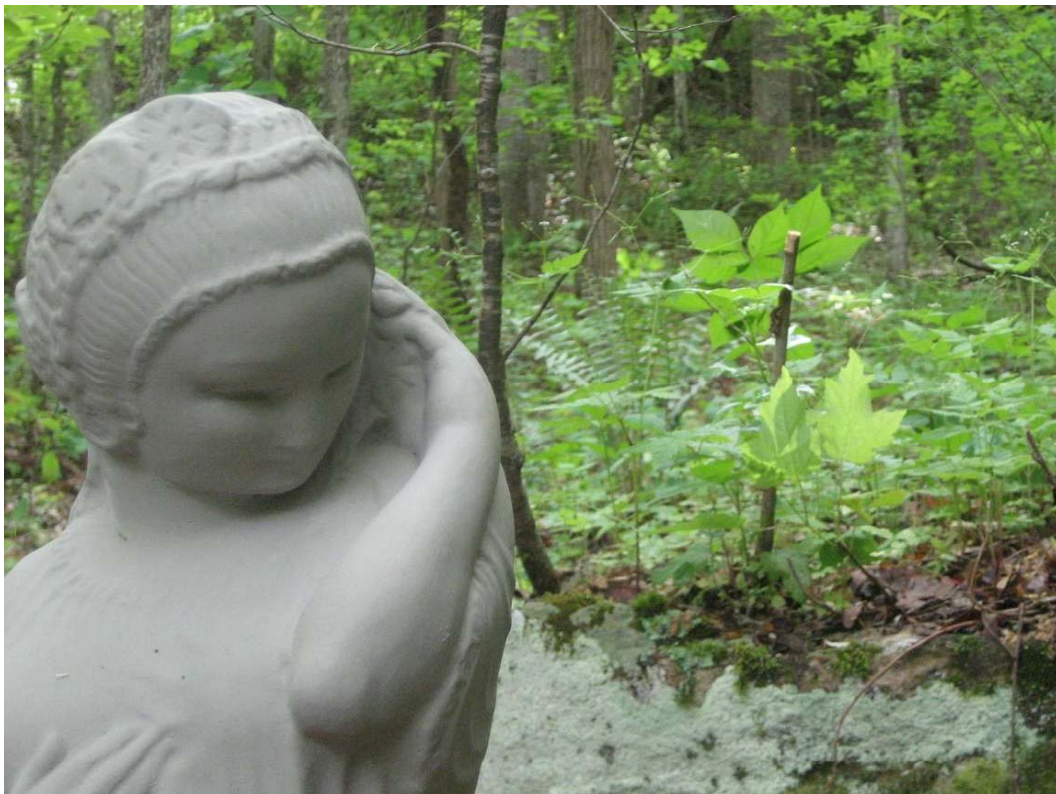
Queen of the crossroads and of fate.

Hekate - traveler of the lower, middle, and upper worlds

You see what was, what is, and what could be.

Hekate - ruthless and harsh, yet merciful

You reign over each choice and ask that we be true to ourselves as we make each choice.



Persephone's Glade
Photo by Laura M. LaVoie