UNE ✦ SACRA

Ancient Greece

The Golden Verses of Pythagoras

✦ ✦ ✦

Pythagorean tradition (attributed to Pythagoras)

Translation by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (1920)

Credits

Author	Pythagorean tradition (attributed to Pythagoras)
Date	4th century BC–4th century AD
Original language	Ancient Greek
Version	Translation by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (1920)
Edition	1.2
Translation	Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie
Source	Wikisource
License	CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 · original: Public domain

About:

A Greek poem of 71 hexameter lines setting out the moral and religious precepts attributed to Pythagoras of Samos (6th century BC) and his followers.

It was not written by Pythagoras, who left nothing in writing; scholars date the form that has come down to us between the 4th century BC and the 4th century AD.

The Pythagoreans learned it by heart, and the Neoplatonist Hierocles of Alexandria (5th century) wrote a commentary on it.

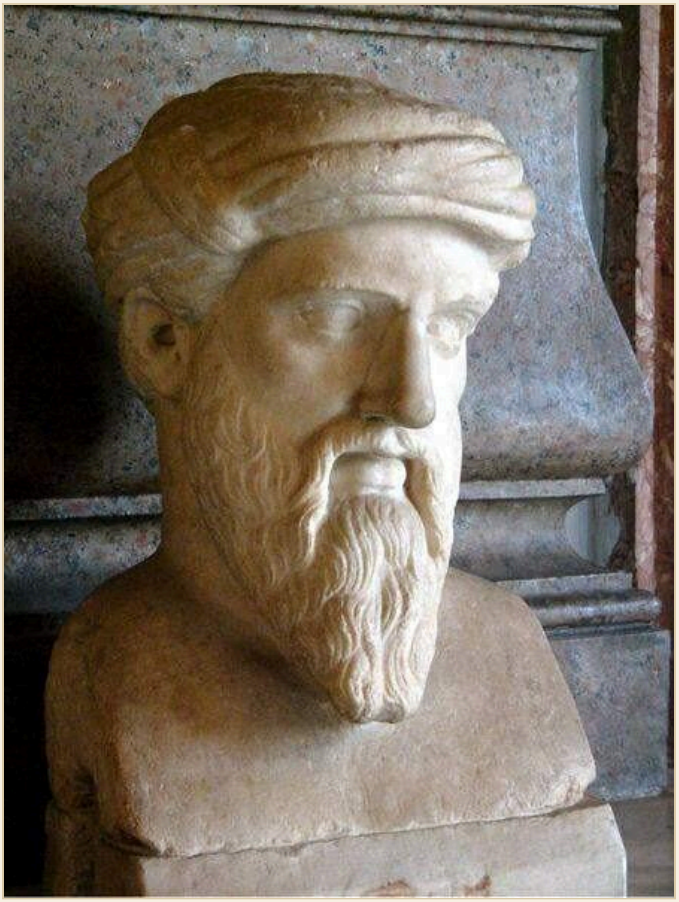
Tradition divides it into three parts, here Parts I, II and III: the Preparation (honouring the gods, the heroes and the spirits), the Purification (duties to parents and friends, self-mastery, justice, measure in all things) and the Perfection (the examination of conscience at the end of the day, the oath by the tetractys, knowledge of nature and the promise that the purified soul becomes immortal).

Source: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Pythagoras_Source_Book_and_Library/Part_2/Chapter_2

See the source listed above for the terms of use of this version. The design of this file belongs to Une Sacra (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0); the text keeps the license listed above.

Digital edition generated on November 26, 2026 by Une Sacra, an open library of sacred texts. · UneSacra.com

Manuscripts and images



Bust of Pythagoras, a Roman copy of a Greek original, in the Capitoline Museums, Rome.

Museus Capitolinos, Roma — Wikimedia Commons · High resolution

Contents

Part I

Part II

Part III

PART I

✦

1 First honor the immortal Gods, as the Law demands;

2 Then reverence thy oath, and then the illustrious heroes;

3 Then venerate the divinities under the earth, due rites performing.

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

PART II

✦

4 Then honor your parents, and all of your kindred;

5 Among others make the most virtuous thy friend!

6 Love to make use of soft speeches, but deeds that are useful;

7 Alienate not the beloved comrade for trifling offences,

8 Bear all you can, what you can, and you should are so near to each other.

9 Take this well to heart: you must gain control of your habits;

10 First over stomach, then sleep, and then luxury,

11 And anger; what brings you shame, do not unto others;

12 Nor by yourself; highest of duties is honor of self.

13 Let justice be practiced in words as in deeds;

14 Then make the habit, never inconsiderately to act;

15 Neither forget that death is appointed to all;

16 That possessions here gladly gathered, there must be lost;

17 Whatever sorrow the fate of the gods may here send us,

18 Bear, whatever may strike you, with patience unmurmuring.

19 To relieve it, so far as you can, is permitted; but reflect:

20 Not much good has Fate given to the good.

21 The speech of the people is various, now good, and now evil;

22 So let them not frighten you, nor keep you from your purpose.

23 If false calumnies come to your ears, support it in patience;

24 Yet that which I now am declaring, fulfil it full faithfully:

25 Let no one with speech or with deeds e'er deceive you;

26 To do or to say what is not the best.

27 Think, ere you act, that nothing stupid result;

28 To act inconsiderately is part of a fool;

29 Yet whatever later will not bring you repentance, that you should carry through.

30 Do nothing beyond what you know; yet learn

31 What you may need; thus shall your life grow happy.

32 Neither grow anxious about the health of the body;

33 Keep measure in eating and drinking, and every exercise of the body;

34 By measure, I mean what later will not induce pain;

35 Follow clean habits of life, but not the luxurious;

36 Avoid what envy arouses,

37 At the wrong time, never be prodigal, as if you did not know what was proper;

38 Nor show yourself stingy; that which is medium is ever the best.

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

PART III

✦

39 Never let slumber approach thy wearied eye-lids,

40 Ere thrice you review what this day you did:

42 Wherein have I sinned? What did I? What duty is neglected?

43 All, from the first to the last, review; and if you have erred,

44 Grieve in your spirit, rejoicing for all that was good.

45 With zeal and with industry, this, then, repeat; and learn to repeat it with joy.

46 Thus wilt thou tread on the paths of heavenly virtue,

47 Surely, I swear it by him who into our souls placed the Four (elements),

48 Him who is spring of Nature eternal. Now start on your task

49 After you have implored the blessing of the Gods.—If this you hold fast,

50 Soon will you recognize of Gods and mortal men

51 The peculiar existence, how every thing passes and returns.

52 Then will you see what is true, how Nature in all is most equal,

53 So that you hope not for what has no hope, nor that aught should escape you.

54 Men shall you find whose sorrows themselves have created,

55 Wretches who see not the Good. that is too near,

56 Nothing they hear; few know how to help themselves in misfortune.

57 That is the Fate, that blinds humanity, in circles,

58 Hither and yon, they run, in endless sorrows;

59 For they are followed by a grim companion, disunion within themselves,

60 Unnoticed; ne'er rouse him, and fly from before him!

61 Father Zeus, O free them all from sufferings so great,

62 Or show unto each the Genius, who is their guide!

63 Yet, do not fear, for the mortals are divine by race

64 To whom holy Nature everything will reveal and demonstrate;

65 Whereof if you have received, so keep what I teach you;

66 For I will heal you, and you shall remain insured from manifold evil.

67 Avoid foods forbidden, reflect, that this contributes to the cleanliness

68 And redemption of your soul; This all, oh, consider;

69 Let reason, the gift divine, be thy highest guide;

70 Then should you be separated from the body, and soar in the spiritual aether,

71 Then will you be imperishable, a divinity, no longer a human!

Une Sacra · edition 1.2 · unesacra.com · CC BY-NC-SA 4.0