



The Golden Verses of Pythagoras and Other Pythagorean Fragments

Hierocles of Alexandria , Florence M. Firth (Editor) , Annie Besant (Introduction)

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Pythagoras of Samos (born between 580 and 572 BC, died between 500 and 490 BC) was an Ionian Greek mathematician and founder of the religious movement called Pythagoreanism. He is often revered as a great mathematician, mystic and scientist; however some have questioned the scope of his contributions to mathematics and natural philosophy. He is best known for the Pythagorean theorem, which bears his name. Known as the father of numbers, Pythagoras made influential contributions to philosophy and religious teaching in the late 6th century BC. He was the first man to call himself a philosopher, or lover of wisdom, and Pythagorean ideas exercised a marked influence on Plato. Unfortunately, very little is known about Pythagoras because none of his writings have survived. Many of the accomplishments credited to Pythagoras may actually have been accomplishments of his colleagues and successors.

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Vaishali says

Interesting collection of maxims, some of which are divided mid-sentence. Perhaps this is proper grammar in ancient Greek? Anyways, useful and beautiful. A shame that humanity still has not mastered these.

A few samples:

7. Avoid as much as possible hating your friend for a slight fault.

12. But above all things respect yourself.

32. In no way neglect the health of your body.

39. Do only that which will not hurt you, and think carefully about what you are going to do before you do it.

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

Gledynthon Ortiz says

Los versos de oro de Pytágoras, son un conjunto de principios, desde la visión del autor, que permiten llevar una vida digna y buena.

Muchas de sus ideas me parecen válidas y otras no tanto.

Timothy says

I don't have much context for this; as far as I can tell, a lot of the material arguably consists of Neoplatonic shout-outs to Pythagoras rather than truly Pythagorean writings. Anyway, it all makes for fairly compelling reading, but the Golden Verses are a real standout.

Maria says

Holy shit

Maan Kawas says

A masterpiece!

Owlseyes says

I am very much interested in this book and character. One of the reasons: why was he declared a NON-PERSON, by Napoleon? what's a non-person? Why was he condemned by the Pope?

(Hermes)

Fabre, before approaching the verses attributed to Pythagoras, wrote some reflections on world poetry....the essence thereof. He himself invented a new (melodious) form of poetry. He got familiar with several Semitic languages.

I've read some of his reflections and don't agree with his assertion that Camões failed.

He wrote about the Christian Cabala, about music (as a science) and the language of the Hebrews 'restored'....and provided a new interpretation of the book of Genesis. I need to find more.

On his biography I was surprised to find: he had been "initiated" in Germany,...and had had a 10 years sort of seclusion ("disconcerting" by some). He believed in reincarnation (metempsychosis); and had a strange death: "at the foot of his altar".

I'll be back on him.

Well, I'm back.

Someone said (jokingly; but very appropriately) that Fabre was looking for the lost word ("la parole perdu"). Very true.

From my French readings he lived the last years of his life as a protestant. It all seems, he's been persecuted; at 58, he left 3 children.

All those malevolent (?) words such as "mediocre literate" ("littérateur médiocre") or "so strange" and "crazy apocalyptic visionary" are not just. He had a great linguistic talent, whether approaching Latin-based languages (namely the Occitan, and its poetry) or the Semitic languages. Even his most daring hypothesis like the Hebrew as the pure idiom of the ancient Egyptians, should be closely examined.

Nayán Louise Redfield, in 1815, called his work a "prodigious" one. His "neoteric" translation of the first 10 chapters of the Sepher of Moses (Genesis) deserve proper attention.

Finally, the **Golden verses**.

They are a set of principles (some say “moral exhortations”) for a correct/healthy livelihood. On the whole, they consist of 37 recommendations/exhortations on how properly (virtuously) a Pythagorean Philosopher should behave and act.

These principles (commented by Fabre) cover several areas: friendship, sobriety, autonomous thinking, self-respect, freedom of choice, reflection before action; how to subdue the passions; ...and avoid wrath.

Some are like this in formulation: “Revere the memory of the illustrious heroes”; “be a good son, just father...”; “choose for thy friend, the friend of virtue” etc.

I cannot avoid expressing some sympathy for the “tolerance” (Polytheism) imbued in this approach; versus the Christian severity.

"A Christian philosopher could not, without perjuring himself and committing a frightful impiety, bend the knee in China before Kong-Tse, nor offer incense to Chang-Ty nor to Tien; he could neither render, in India, homage to Krishna, nor present himself at Benares as a worshipper of Vishnu; he could not even, although recognizing the same God as the Jews and Mussulmans, take part in their ceremonies, or what is still more, worship this God with the Arians, the Lutherans, or Calvinists, if he were a Catholic".

And: >**"This is what was done by the disciples of Pythagoras, according to the commandment of their master; they saw in the gods of the nations, the attributes of the Ineffable Being..."**.

The 37th and last principle looks like a reward to those who follow such code on Pythagorean conduct.

**37. So that, ascending into radiant Ether,
Midst the Immortals, thou shalt be thyself a God**

To those who follow those wise and golden rules. Golden, because they conceal “the most pure doctrine”.

Fabre followed the Greek text.

Fabre,... **the person**.

Christopher Murtagh says

I think it's a great work.

Some of the parts of the sections from other pythagoreans are quite patchy and a tad too religious. The Golden verses are pretty great, it's kind of a how to guide for living a good and wise life. You'll find some are similar to common sayings or christian preachings, they are probably things that people have been repeating to each other since language began.

The best part for me is the symbols of pythagoras which are cryptic sayings that are alternately baffling, mad as a box of frogs, truly thought provoking and maybe even genuinely useful. For example -
cut not fire with a sword
departing from your house turn not back for the furies will be your attendants
walk in unfrequented paths
eat not beans
Sacrifice and adore unshod

Each saying has an explanation after it, which is usually quite wordy but tends to throw light onto even the most bizarre instruction these are by Iamblichus, though this edition doesn't really make this clear. The main failing of this book is that it seems like something that was just grabbed when it went public domain and printed off with little care to properly format or explain what it is. A better book in this regard is the Pythagorean Sourcebook by Guthrie, which I read after this, even though it still has pretty much the same golden verses. That one is more expensive but well worth it, more symbols, some biographies, a nice essay, some various pythagorean fragments.

This one is still worth reading, if you just want the verses and the main symbols, quick and easy, but then so is just checking wikipedia.

Nox Prognatus says

This is a very interesting book as Olivet uses the first part of the book to show his thoughts on poems, and ancient writings and how they relate to Pythagorean thinking, further to that how some poems have become much removed from the original intent of the Pythagorean verse. He shows how Pythagoras, in his opinion, used the Golden Verses to convey much more than was written. Or should I say Lysis, one of his students, did.

The remainder of the book takes you verse by verse into the interpretation and extrapolation of Olivets's interpretation of the Verses. There is some interesting thought, and other paths in his thinking too. He is very conversant with ancient writings, and is said to have influenced the writings of E. Levi. Anyway, a good read, and worth reading, if Pythagoras interests you.

Peter J. says

I loved the aphorisms in this shorter book. I have to admit that I thought that the translator was reaching a bit when interpreting the "Symbols" in the last chapter.

Guillermo Macbeth says

Wonderful book. The search for knowledge and the search for virtue are the same in these verses. Even the agnostic reader might find many reasonable suggestions. I have no idea about the philology of this book, but its core ideas are really interesting. The split we take as natural came during the last centuries.

