



LODGE VEGAS # 32

THE SYMBOLIC APHORISMS OF PYTHAGORAS

Iamblichus gathered thirty-nine of the symbolic sayings of Pythagoras and interpreted them. These have been translated from the Greek by Thomas Taylor. Aphorismic statement was one of the favorite methods of instruction used in the Pythagorean university of Crotona. Ten of the most representative of these aphorisms are reproduced below with a brief elucidation of their concealed meanings.

- I. *Declining from the public ways, walk in unfrequented paths.* By this it is to be understood that those who desire wisdom must seek it in solitude.
- II. *Govern your tongue before all other things, following the gods.* This aphorism warns man that his words, instead of representing him, misrepresent him, and that when in doubt as to what he should say, he should always be silent.
- III. *The wind blowing, adore the sound.* Pythagoras here reminds his disciples that the fiat of God is heard in the voice of the elements, and that all things in Nature manifest through harmony, rhythm, order, or procedure the attributes of the Deity.
- IV. *Assist a man in raising a burden; but do not assist him in laying it down.* The student is instructed to aid the diligent but never to assist those who seek to evade their responsibilities, for it is a great sin to encourage indolence.
- V. *Speak not about Pythagoric concerns without light.* The world is herein warned that it should not attempt to interpret the mysteries of God and the secrets of the sciences without spiritual and intellectual illumination.
- VI. *Having departed from your house, turn not back, for the furies will be your attendants.* Pythagoras here warns his followers that any who begin the search for truth and, after having learned part of the mystery, become discouraged and attempt to return again to their former ways of vice and ignorance, will suffer exceedingly; for it is better to know nothing about Divinity than to learn a little and then stop without learning all.

VII. *Nourish a cock, but sacrifice it not; for it is sacred to the sun and moon.* Two great lessons are concealed in this aphorism. The first is a warning against the sacrifice of living things to the gods, because life is sacred and man should not destroy it even as an offering to the Deity. The second warns man that the human body here referred to as a cock is sacred to the sun (God) and the moon (Nature), and should be guarded and preserved as man's most precious medium of expression. Pythagoras also warned his disciples against suicide.

VIII. *Receive not a swallow into your house.* This warns the seeker after truth not to allow drifting thoughts to come into his mind nor shiftless persons to enter into his life. He must ever surround himself with rationally inspired thinkers and with conscientious workers.

IX. *Offer not your right hand easily to anyone.* This warns the disciple to keep his own counsel and not offer wisdom and knowledge (his right hand) to such as are incapable of appreciating them. The hand here represents Truth, which raises those who have fallen because of ignorance; but as many of the unregenerate do not desire wisdom they will cut off the hand that is extended in kindness to them. Time alone can effect the redemption of the ignorant masses

X. *When rising from the bedclothes, roll them together, and obliterate the impression of the body.* Pythagoras directed his disciples who had awakened from the sleep of ignorance into the waking state of intelligence to eliminate from their recollection all memory of their former spiritual darkness; for a wise man in passing leaves no form behind him which others less intelligent, seeing, shall use as a mold for the casting of idols.

The most famous of the Pythagorean fragments are the *Golden Verses*, ascribed to Pythagoras himself, but concerning whose authorship there is an element of doubt. The *Golden Verses* contain a brief summary of the entire system of philosophy forming the basis of the educational doctrines of Crotona, or, as it is more commonly known, the Italic School. These verses open by counseling the reader to love God, venerate the great heroes, and respect the dæmons and elemental inhabitants. They then urge man to think carefully and industriously concerning his daily life, and to prefer the treasures of the mind and soul to accumulations of earthly goods. The verses also promise man that if he will rise above his lower material nature and cultivate self-control, he will ultimately be acceptable in the sight of the gods, be reunited with them, and partake of their immortality. (It is rather significant to note that Plato paid a great price for some of the manuscripts of Pythagoras which had been saved from the destruction of Crotona. See *Historia Deorum Fatidicorum*, Geneva, 1675.)