Pythagoreanism: The Pythagorean Sentences of Demophilus

1. Request not of Divinity such things as, when obtained, you cannot preserve; for no gift of Divinity can ever be taken away; and on this account he does not confer that which you are unable to retain.

2. Be vigilant in your intellectual part; for sleep about this has an affinity with real death.

3. Divinity sends evil to men, not as being influenced by anger, but for the sake of purification; for anger is foreign from Divinity, since it arises from circumstances taking place contrary to the will; but nothing contrary to the will can happen to a god.

4. When you deliberate whether or not you shall injure another, you will previously suffer the evil yourself which you intend to commit. But neither must you expect any good from the evil; for the manners of everyone are correspondent to his life and actions. Every soul too is a repository, that which is good, of things good, that which is evil, of things depraved.

5. After long consultation, engage either in speaking or acting; for you have not the ability to recall either your words or deeds.

6. Divinity does not principally esteem the tongue, but the deeds of the wise; for a wise man, even when he is silent, honours Divinity.

7. A loquacious and ignorant man both in prayer and sacrifice contaminates a divine nature. The wise man therefore is alone a priest, is alone a friend of Divinity and only knows how to pray.

8. The wise man being sent hither naked, should naked invoke him by whom he was sent; for he alone is heard by Divinity, who is not burdened with foreign concerns.

9. It is impossible to receive from Divinity any gift greater than virtue. 1

10. Gifts and victims confer no honour on Divinity, nor is he adorned with offerings suspended in temples; but a soul divinely inspired solidly conjoins us with Divinity; for it is necessary that like should approach to like.

11. It is more painful to be subservient to passions than to tyrants.

12. It is better to converse more with yourself than others.

13. If you are always careful to remember that in whatever place either your soul or body accomplishes any deed, Divinity is present as an inspector of your conduct; in all your words and actions you will venerate the presence of an inspector from whom nothing can be concealed, and will, at the same time, possess Divinity as an intimate associate.

14. Believe that you are furious and insane in proportion as you are ignorant of yourself.

15. It is necessary to search for those wives and children which will remain after a liberation from the present life.

16. The self-sufficient and needy philosopher lives a life truly similar to Divinity, and considers the non-possession of external and unnecessary goods as the greatest wealth. For the acquisition of riches sometimes inflames desire; but not to act in any respect unjustly is sufficient to the enjoyment of a blessed life.

17. True goods are never produced by indolent habits.

18. Esteem that to be eminently good, which, communicated to another, will be increased to yourself. 1

19. Esteem those to be eminently your friends, who assist your soul rather than your body.

20. Consider both the praise and reproach of every foolish person as ridiculous, and the whole life of an ignorant man as a disgrace.

21. Endeavour that your familiars may reverence rather than fear you; for love attends upon reverence, but hatred upon fear.

22. The sacrifices of fools are the aliment of the fire; but the offerings which they suspend in temples are the supplies of the sacrilegious.

23. Understand that no dissimulation can be long concealed.

24. The unjust man suffers greater evil while his soul is tormented with a consciousness of guilt, than when his body is scourged with whips.

25. It is by no means safe to discourse concerning Divinity with men of false opinions; for the danger is equally great in speaking to such as these, things either fallacious or true.

26. By everywhere using reason as your guide, you will avoid the commission of crimes.

27. By being troublesome to others, you will not easily escape molestation yourself.

28. Consider that as great erudition, through which you are able to bear the want of erudition, in the ignorant.

29. He who is depraved does not listen to the divine law, and on this account lives without law.

30. A just man who is a stranger, is not only superior to a citizen, but is even more excellent than a relation.

31. As many passions of the soul, so many fierce and savage despots.

32. No one is free who has not obtained the empire of himself.

33. Labour, together with continence, precedes the acquisition of every good.

34. Be persuaded that those things are not your riches which you do not possess in the penetralia of the reasoning powers.

35. Do that which you judge to be beautiful and honest, though you should acquire no glory from the performance; for the vulgar is a depraved judge of beautiful deeds.

36. Make trial of a man rather from his deeds than his discourses; for many live badly and speak well.

37. Perform great things, at the same time promising nothing great.

38. Since the roots of our nature are established in Divinity, from which also we are produced, we should tenaciously adhere to our root; for streams also of water, and other offspring of the earth, when their roots are cut off, become rotten and dry.

39. The strength of the soul is temperance; for this is the light of a soul destitute of passions; but it is much better to die than to darken the soul through the intemperance of the body.

40. You cannot easily denominate that man happy who depends either on his friends or children, or on any fleeting and fallen nature; for all these are unstable and uncertain; but to depend on oneself and on Divinity is alone stable and firm.

41. He is a wise man, and beloved of Divinity, who studies how to labour for the good of his soul, as much as others labour for the sake of the body.

42. Yield all things to their kindred and ruling nature except liberty.

43. Learn how to produce eternal children, not such as may supply the wants of the body in old age, but such as may nourish the soul with perpetual food.

44, It is impossible that the same person can be a lover of pleasure, a lover of body, a lover of riches, and a lover of Divinity. For a lover of pleasure is also a lover of body; but a lover of body is entirely a lover of riches; a lover of riches is necessarily unjust; and the unjust is necessarily profane towards Divinity, and lawless with respect to men. Hence, though he should sacrifice hecatombs, he is only by this means the more impious, unholy, atheistical, and sacrilegious, with respect to his intentions: and on this account it is necessary to avoid every lover of pleasure as an atheist and polluted person.

45. The Divinity has not a place in the earth more allied to his nature than a pure and holy soul.

Footnotes

31:1 Because virtue is the perfection of life, and the proper perfection of any being is the felicity of that being.

32:1 And this is the case with intellectual good.