

A Summary of Pythagorean Theology

Part V: Theurgy

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The Pythagorean Succession

In ancient times mystical and magical traditions were passed on orally from teacher to student. Often this involved the teacher ritually adopting the student so that they became **Spiritual Parent and Child**. Thus in ancient texts the teacher is sometimes called "Father" or "Mother," and the student "Son" or "Daughter." Such a tradition was called a **Succession** (*Diadokhê*, "what has been received from another"), and it was commonly traced back to a **Divine Ancestor**, a God who first divulged the secret teachings to a mortal (often His son). Thereafter the Succession was under the guardianship of that God, and all its members were said to be in a divine **Seira** (Chord, Series, Lineage) originating from the God. (See [Part I, "Triadic Structure"](#) for the Seirai.)

One of the most famous traditions of this kind is the **Pythagorean Succession** (*Pythagoreios Diadokhê*), which traces its teachings to Pythagoras (572-497 BCE), who was rumored to be a son of **Apollo**: his name refers to Pythian Apollo, and his mother became pregnant after a visit to Delphi, where the Pythoness predicted that she would bear a great sage ([see in Pt. II](#)). Nevertheless, Pythagoras had his own teachers; he studied under Pherekydes and, according to his biographers, was initiated into the Mysteries of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Brahmans, Phoenicians, and Zoroastrians.

As discussed in Part I ([History](#)), the Pythagorean Succession includes many of the most famous Sages and Philosophers of antiquity, including Empedocles (c.495-435), Plato (427-347), Apollonius of Tyana (1st cent. CE), Plutarch (c.46-c.125), Plotinus (205-270), the Emperor Julian (331-363), and Hypatia (365-415). When the Pagan schools were closed by Justinian in 529 CE, the **Wandering Seven** philosophers fled Athens for Persia; they remained there for a time and a few settled in the East. In any case, after more than a thousand years, the Succession disappeared underground, and it is difficult to trace thereafter, although it surfaces from time to time.

Ancient Philosophia

Pythagoras coined the term **Philosophos**, which means Lover of Wisdom. A new word was necessary because, while many people call themselves "wise" (*sophos*), the truly wise person knows that **Wisdom** (*sophia*), like Buddhahood, is an ideal that few attain, and then only after many lifetimes. Desire and pursuit of Wisdom is the most we should claim.

Modern philosophy often seems like a dry, academic discipline residing in the highest attics of the ivory tower, but ancient **Philosophia** was very different; it was a practical discipline aimed at teaching one to live well. This is also the goal of modern teachers of *Philosophia*. (Better living through Enlightenment!)

In some ways *Philosophia* is more like medicine than a theoretical subject. Its goal is both **Therapeia** (care, therapy, cure) and **Hugieia** (health, soundness of mind

and body). That is, it aims at alleviating the troubles and afflictions of people and at showing them a better way to live.

Since each student in a school of Philosophia is in a different situation, each student is prescribed practices suited to their condition. Assessing the spiritual condition and progress of the student is the job of the teacher, who may be called **Kathêgemôn** (Leader, Guide) or **Didaskalos** (Teacher, Master).

The Teacher often makes use of the **Therapy of the Word**, which includes incantations and spells, but also theological and philosophical discourse. The latter might be true or false to varying degrees or on different levels, but their literal truth was not so important as their effect on the mind of the student. Just as the doctor may administer different herbs to you at different times, depending on your condition, so also the Guide administers different doctrines (verbal therapies) appropriate for your spiritual state. The goal is not to build philosophical systems but to cure and care for souls. As Epicurus (c.55-c.135) said, "Empty are the words of that *philosophos* who cures no human suffering."

The Teacher may prescribe other **Spiritual Exercises** (*Askêseis*), including meditation, contemplation, affirmations, visualization, journal writing, and individual and group examination of spiritual progress and problems. More advanced students may be invited to receive training in **Spiritual Magic** (*Theurgy*) and other mystical practices requiring greater dedication.

Is the **Spiritual Guide** superfluous in the modern world? On one hand, the threads of the ancient Succession are hard to find (although self-proclaimed gurus are everywhere). On the other, much of the ancient teaching can be found in books and doesn't have to come from oral teaching. Therefore, **solitary practice** is often the best option nowadays. Nevertheless, a Guide is still useful for being able to assess the condition of the student and to prescribe appropriate practices. Furthermore, a Guide is useful when the student gets stuck or encounters special problems (especially in the more advanced practices). Finally, if a student is psychologically "at risk," a spiritual Guide may steer them away from potentially dangerous practices, and aid their healing (perhaps directing them to professional care). In summary, although a Guide is by no means necessary, your progress may be easier if you can find a competent, honest Teacher.

Mediating Spirits

In ancient Greek, **Daimôn** (DYE-moan) can refer to any divinity from the High Gods on down, but Pythagoreans tend to restrict it to the **Mediating Spirits** between the Gods and us. Some Pythagoreans call the higher orders of Daimones the **Angeloi** (Messengers), because of Their special role as messengers of the Gods; the lower ranks are the Daimones proper and the **Heroes**. A fourth class comprises the *Akhrantoi* (the **Immaculate** or **Undefined Ones**), who are Perfected Beings (including certain Sages), who choose to reincarnate so they can help humanity. All together, Pythagoreans refer to the Daimones as our "Betters" (*Kreittones*).

Daimones have an **intermediate nature** between humans and Gods. All three classes of beings are animate and possess reason. However, the Daimones are like the Gods in being immortal and like humans in having emotions. In contrast, the Gods are impassive, and humans are mortal.

Most of the Daimones reside in the **Air**, which, in cosmological terms, is the intermediate region between the earth, where we live, and the heavens, where the Gods reside. The **Moon** is the boundary between the aerial domain and the aetherial heavens, and so that is where Their Ruler, **Hekate**, has Her domain (see "[Hekate](#)" in Pt. II). ([Recall also](#) that Hades rules the Aerial Daimones.)

As a consequence of Their intermediate nature, Daimones serve as **Mediators** between the Gods and us, and They convey divine **Providence** (*Pronoia*) into the sublunary realm. In particular, They interpret the Gods' wishes for us and are the agents of **divination**, **oracles**, and **rituals**. They are ministering spirits who care for people, and are often called **Savior** (*Sôtêr*). ([Recall](#) that *daimôn* is from the Indo-European *da-*, to provide.) Many rituals are directed to Daimones (who have feelings and can be swayed), and They are thereby convinced to mediate with the Gods on our behalf.

According to Pythagorean doctrine, the Gods reside in the **Noetic Realm**, the world of Platonic Ideas, so They cannot relate to us as individuals, but only as representatives of the Idea of humankind. The Daimones, however, being intermediate, participate in both the Ideal and material worlds, and so they **interact with us as individuals**. They know our personal and family histories, our personalities, and often our thoughts.

Each Daimôn is the **offspring of a God**, who is Their **Arkêgos** (Leader, Progenitor, Originator), and thus a Daimôn combines the nature of a God with Its own individual characteristics. Therefore the **Seira** (Chord, Lineage) of a God includes His or Her Daimones, as well as the Successions of Sages [already mentioned](#). (Nevertheless, all the Daimones are under the rule of **Hekate**, because Her station at the Gate of the Moon is above all the Daimones; She is *Daimoniarkhês*, **Ruler of Daimones**.) A God's Seira also includes various plants, animals, materials, words, etc. that are **symbolically** or **sympathetically** linked to the God; these are used in sacred magical operations directed toward the God.

Personal Daimones

Aside from the many Daimones, with Their various offices, we each have a **Guardian** or **Personal Daimôn** (*Idios Daimôn*), who knows our innermost thoughts and accompanies us through life and through death between lives. Our **Highest Self**, which Pythagoreans call "the **Highest Flower of the Soul**," is our Inner Daimôn; some think It is the same as the Guardian Daimôn, but others, including myself, believe They are different.

We also have with us a **Shadow Spirit**, the Other Daimôn or **Bad Daimôn** (*Kakos Daimôn*), who is created from all the beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and so forth that we have rejected as wrong. The Bad Daimôn cannot be banished, and if we imagine we have done so, we only fool ourselves, which generally leads to *Kakodaimônia*:

Misfortune, misery, and even madness. It is better to come to know your Other Daimôn, so that you can satisfy His or Her needs without compromising your moral convictions; to this end, Theurgy is very valuable. (Your Guardian Daimôn and Shadow Daimôn both have the same sex as yourself, in most cases.)

We have other Daimones who are particularly concerned with us as individuals, such as **Muses**, who bring us inspiration, and **Soul Guides** (*Psychopompoi*, often of the opposite sex to ourselves), but there are also other Daimones who may possess us in counterproductive ways; it's best to become acquainted with them all, an important goal of Theurgy.

Interaction with Daimones

Of course, *daimôn* is the origin of the English word **demon**, but Daimones are **neither good nor evil** by nature. They carry out various offices for their Ruling God, which might or might not be to our benefit. Like forces of Nature, They are what They are. However, due to Their intermediate nature, They are subject to emotions, feelings, and passions, and in this They are unlike the Gods. Therefore They can be more capricious and unpredictable.

As mentioned, Daimones can **possess** us, other people, and even non-human things. This is not necessarily bad, for the Daimones are **sources of Divine Power** for us; when poets invoke their Muses, they are inviting Possession by Them.

Nevertheless, unconscious or uncontrolled Possession can be undesirable, and so it is important to be aware of the Daimones. (Here, certainly, is one place where an experienced human Guide can help.) The Daimones can raise us up or drag us down.

There are various ways of entering into **communication** with a Daimôn, the simplest being to create Sacred Space, invite Their presence, and begin talking with Them. [Later](#) we will explore the more powerful methods of Theurgy. Although Daimones deserve respect, do not forget that we mortals also have a Spark of Divinity in us, and so you should never abandon your **moral autonomy**.

Divine Guides

With a Daimôn as Mediator, we can enter into **conversation with the God** who is Their Leader (*Arkhêgos*); the Daimôn may either manifest the God or conduct Him or Her into our presence. As already remarked, Gods are remote from the mundane world, so we are often better off dealing with the Daimones who are Their Ministers, but for some purposes the God must be contacted.

One reason to have a **Sustasis** (Meeting, Compact) with a God is to learn about the Divine Realm. The goal should not be idle curiosity, but to seek **Knowledge** which can aid our cooperation with, and furthering of, Divine Providence. In particular, we can inquire from the Gods Themselves the techniques of Sacred Magic and Theurgy.

For example, instead of trying to guess how best to **invoke** a Deity, or learning it from possibly unreliable sources, we can ask the God how They wish to be

invoked. (Of course, They might not tell us, if They think we're unworthy; indeed, the *Chaldean Oracles* warn us that if an impure person seeks this hidden knowledge, the Gods will punish their presumption with misleading replies.) It is from such Divine Meetings that we have **Inspired Texts** such the *Chaldean Oracles*, which teach us these Arts.

One of the most valuable things that a God can teach a Mage are the **Signs and Symbols** (*Sunthêmata, Sumbola*) by which the Deity may be invoked. These are animals, plants, stones, colors, times, and especially secret characters and words, which belong to the God's **Seira** and attune the soul of the magician to the God.

Since **Hekate** is *Daimoniarkhês* (**Ruler of Daimones**) and is the **Key Holder** (*Kleidoukhos*) and **Gatekeeper** (*Propulaia*) at the boundary of the Divine Realms ([Opsopaus, AGEDE, "Fire"](#)), She is the God most closely connected with **Theurgic Rites**, and so it is from Her we seek instruction in those Arts. (Indeed, it is primarily from Her that we have the *Chaldean Oracles*.) She controls the Daimones, who can assist us or impede our progress. However, the Pythagorean Succession as a whole is in the Seira of **Apollo**, for He is the God of Oracles and the Guardian of Truth and Illumination; Pythagoreans are in the Solar Lineage (see "[Primal Fire](#)" in Pt. III). See also the earlier discussion of Mediating Gods ("[Helios, Eros & Other Mediating Gods](#)" in Pt. III).

Ascent to the One

The Ascent (*Anagôgê*) to The One is the central spiritual practice in the Pythagorean Tradition (see also "[The Threefold Way](#)" in "[Part III](#)"). It is based on the principle that "**like knows like**." Therefore, to know The One, you must become The One. To know the Highest God, you must unify with and become the Highest God, a process of **Deification** (*Theôsis*). Further, since The One is the principle from which all things have their existence, by returning to The One we rediscover and preserve our eternal Essence, and thus the Ascent is the principal means of **Salvation** (*Sôtêria*) in the Pythagorean Tradition. Through Union with the Divine we come to see beyond our individuality and to understand our own roles as organs and instruments (*organa*) of **Divine Providence**. In a sense that will become clear, the Ascent achieves **Immortalization**.

There are three Paths of Ascent in the Pythagorean Tradition, each correlated with one of the three principle **Attributes of The One**: Its Beauty, Wisdom, and Goodness, and the corresponding connecting properties, Love, Truth, and Trust, which are the **Chaldaean Virtues**. This table summarizes their similarities and differences:

Three Paths of Ascent to The One

Attribute of The One	Beauty	Wisdom	Goodness
Connecting Property	Love (<i>Erôs</i>)	Truth (<i>Alêtheia</i>)	Trust (<i>Pistis</i>)

Vehicle of Salvation	Erotic Madness	Divine Philosophy	Theurgic Power
Path of:	Aphrodite Eros	Athena Hermes	Hekate Helios
Stages of Ascent: - material - aetherial - empyrean	Desire for: - body - soul - spirit	Contemplation of: - sense - reason - intuition	Operation by: - material rite - mental rite - unitive rite

Pythagoreans differ about which path is better; different approaches seem to be suited to souls with different personalities and talents. I will discuss them in order:

1. [Erotic Ascent](#)
2. [Contemplative Ascent](#)
3. [Theurgic Ascent](#)

Erotic Ascent

We may begin with the Erotic Ascent (*Erôtikê Anagôgê*), in which the power of Love and Desire (*Erôs*), directed toward **Beauty**, raises the soul toward the Beauty of The One. Naturally, the guides on this path are **Aphrodite** and **Eros** (both of whom I have already discussed). **Erotic Madness** is the Vehicle of Salvation and draws the Lover and Beloved together, with the ultimate goal of union. Its best known description is in Plato's *Symposium* (209E-212C), where it is put into the mouth of the Priestess Diotima (via Socrates); other versions are given by many later philosophers (e.g. Ficino).

The Ascent proceeds through **three stages**, corresponding to the Material, Aetherial, and Empyrean Realms (see "[Theogony](#)" in Part I). At the material level, desire is aroused by the **beauty of the body**, which is experienced through the senses. This begins with love of an individual's beauty, but expands into love of physical beauty in general. The **second stage** ascends to desire for the **beauty of the soul**, which manifests in the **moral excellences** (Justice, Fortitude, Moderation) and the **intellectual excellences** (Prudence, Knowledge, Wisdom). This higher beauty is perceived by the rational mind rather than the senses. In the **third stage** one comes to know **Beauty Absolute** in the only way possible: by uniting with It, This union transcends the duality of subject and object - of Lover and Beloved - for the Lover merges into the Beloved.

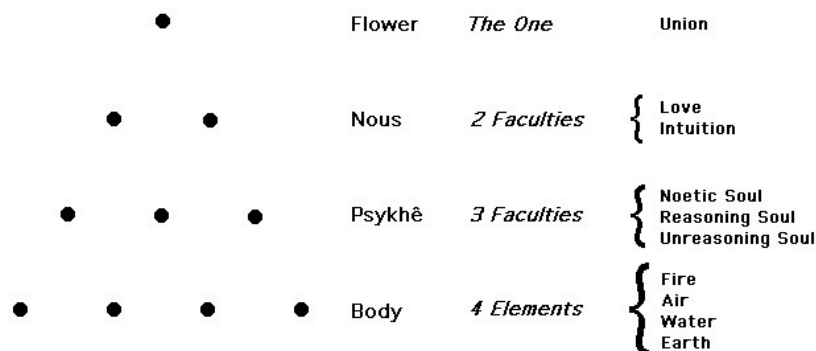
Images of **fire** are common at this stage: As the moth is attracted to the candle and is consumed by it, so the soul desires and is consumed in Beauty Itself. The soul gives itself as a burnt offering to The One. As fire refines gold, so the Holy Fire of Divine Beauty refines the soul, burning away its grosser elements and sublimating it. As the **smoke** ascends to the Gods from the sacrificial fires, so the spiritualized soul ascends to union with the Divine. The Lover and Beloved are united in Bliss.

Unfortunately, this union is imperfect and impermanent, for it cannot be sustained while the soul is still bound to the body. Although the devotee of Love must return to ordinary life, the transformation of the soul is permanent. Much more could be said about the Erotic Ascent, but not in this Summary.

Contemplative Ascent

The second path to The One is the Contemplative Ascent (*Theôrêtikê Anagôgê*), in which the power of **Truth** (*Alêtheia*) leads the soul to the **Wisdom** of The One. The guides on this path are **Athena**, patroness of wisdom, and **Hermes**, the guide of souls, messenger between Gods and mortals, and patron of boundary crossers. (Thus this may be called also the **Hermetic Ascent**, although "Hermeticism" is more theurgic in its operation.) On this path the Vehicle of Salvation is **Divine Philosophia**, which must be understood in the traditional way, as already discussed (see "[Ancient Philosophia](#)"). This Way is described by Plotinus.

The **stages** of this Ascent may be understood by reference to the Pythagorean **Tetractys** as shown in this diagram:



[\(click to open in separate window\)](#)

The Tetractys explains, of course, the phases of Emanation as described in [Part I "Theogony."](#) However it also shows the stages of Ascent back to The One. As usual, the Ascent begins in the material realm with the contemplation of the Divine in the objects of sense; this is **The Awakening**. A further prerequisite for the Ascent, which must be fulfilled before progress can be made, is the practice of the **Four Cardinal Excellences**(also called Civic or Social Virtues), as taught by *Philosophia*: Moderation, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice, corresponding to Earth, Water, Air, Fire.

The **second stage** is **Purification** (*Katharsis*), which brings order to the **Soul's Three Faculties** (Non-reasoning, Reasoning, Noetic). This is accomplished by cultivating the **Kathartic Excellences**, by which the soul is turned inward and upward toward The One. The goal is to calm the lower parts of the soul, which are more intimately connected with the body, so that the higher parts may ascend. Also,

on the principle of "**like knows like**," we attempt to achieve the **tranquillity** of the Gods and the inner unity of The One.

First we must **calm the non-reasoning soul**, which we share with animals and plants, and which is the seat of our appetites and of the faculties of growth and nutrition. Since excessive pleasure and pains can disturb the desired tranquillity, the philosopher strives to live healthily, with proper diet, sleep, and exercise. (Extreme asceticism may be counterproductive.) The higher (reasoning) soul must learn that disturbances arise largely from mental **judgements** about sensations rather than from the sensations themselves. Therefore, by controlling how we think about these things we can diminish the disturbing effects of excessive pleasures and pains.

When the non-reasoning soul has been calmed, you next turn your attention to the reasoning soul, achieving tranquillity by **quieting the inner discourse**. The thought of the Divine Nous is neither discursive nor sequential in time (see [Part III, "The Self-contemplating Nous"](#)), so to become more like It we must quiet our own discursive, sequential thinking.

When the reasoning part of your soul has been quieted, all that is left is the **noetic part**, which is akin to the **Divine Nous**, in its intuitive, direct grasp of the Ideas, but different, for your nous still acts in time, for it is part of the individual soul. Nevertheless, if by a **non-willful surrender** you allow your nous to contract inward and be drawn upward, it will be awakened to its true nature and origin, the Divine Nous.

This brings us to the **third stage**, called **Illumination**, which ascends above the soul to the Divine Nous. Here the divine part of the soul (the individual nous) takes its place in the divine community, for the Gods are living, conscious **Ideas** in a state of mutual, intuitive contemplation. They are separate yet one, like interpenetrating beams of **light**, or the individual colors mixed in white light (see also [Part III, "Pagan Monotheism?"](#)). So also your individual mind experiences itself as separate yet one with the others, moving in the **divine dance** of The All.

To reach this experience of being an integral part of The All in the Eternal Now, you must set aside the **Non-Being** that makes you an individual, for it is Non-Being that separates one thing from another ([recall the discussion of the Dyad in Pt. II](#)). In this way, your nous forsakes the individual, particular, and finite, and ascends to the **Universal** and **Eternal**.

To reach this level, you must not *think* about the Forms, or even contemplate them as other, but you must *become* them and experience their **organic, fluent mutual contemplation**. In this intuitive flow, you are unselfconscious and lose your separate awareness (as in our everyday experience of completely absorbed, competent activity).

To achieve the **final unification** with The One, the nous must transcend even the Divine Nous, for it still has the characteristic of **Multiplicity**, for it contains all the Ideas (even if mutually interpenetrating). The Nous contemplates Itself through Its Ideas, and so there is still an element of **Duality** in It.

The One has **proceeded** outward into the Nous, but now the Nous must **revert** back toward The One ([recall Part I, "Triadic Structure"](#)). In this

movement It is motivated by Its Love for Truth and the Good (and so we see the convergence of the three paths). It must rise above Form and Idea in the **Inebriation of Love**. Thus you are lost in the direct experience of the Truth. In contemplative union with the eternal, immutable Truth, you achieve **immortality** and **deification**, a state which persists even after the inevitable return to ordinary life (for the contemplative, non-dual state cannot be maintained for long).

Theurgic Ascent

The third path to The One is the Theurgic Ascent (*Theourgikê Anagôgê*), in which the Theurgic Power of *Pistis* (**Trust, Faith**) is the Vehicle of Ascent, which leads the soul to the **Goodness** of The One. The guides on this path are **Hekate** and **Helios**, both of whom we have seen to be Mediators (see [Part III, "Helios and Eros the Mediators"](#); [Part II, "Hekate"](#) et seq.; Part V, ["Mediating Spirits"](#) and ["Divine Guides"](#)). Hence this path may be called also the **Heliacal Ascent**. The Theurgic Ascent is presented especially in the *Chaldean Oracles* and Iamblichus' book *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*.

It will be seen that the Theurgic Ascent has much in common with the Erotic and Contemplative Ascents, the major difference being the use of rituals involving symbolically meaningful **material objects** (statues, stones, herbs, incense, etc.). Because it makes use of these material aids, theurgy is claimed sometimes to be easier or more accessible than the more interior paths through Love and Truth. Certainly, as will be seen, the higher degrees of theurgy are less material in their orientation, and so theurgy might be viewed as a lower degree than the Contemplative and Erotic practices. However, it may be argued also that theurgy reaches higher than those practices. The arguments hinge partly on theological disputes about the soul (i.e., whether it "descends completely" in embodiment). Personally, I don't think that either of these views are quite correct, and I think it is better to choose a path that fits your personality, inclinations, and talents. Ultimately you will make more progress **following your own destiny** than someone else's.

Like the Paths of Love and Wisdom, theurgy seeks the salvation of the soul through Union with The One. However, by its emphasis on the necessity of material rites, it focuses on our **embodiment** and its role in the system of the universe. For embodiment is part of the necessary Procession from The One and the **Manifestation of Love** in the universe. Love is a relation between the Lover and the Beloved, and so there must be an Other for there to be Love. The creation of the **Indefinite Dyad** and Her separation from the Monad were necessary before Love (*Eros*), Firstborn of the Paternal Nous, could appear in the universe (see [Part II, "The Indefinite Dyad"](#) and [Part III, "Helios and Eros the Mediators"](#)). This Love proceeds outward from the One Mind and is directed toward Primordial Matter. As part of this *procession*, our souls are embodied in human bodies, but the completion of the "**Erotic Circuit**," which binds the universe into one, requires us to *turn back* toward our essential source, The One.

Thus theurgy uses material objects, which participate in the **Eternal Forms**, and reorients our souls, into which the Ideas have descended, to turn material creation back toward The One, which is its origin. In this way theurgists complete the work of **creation** begun by the Demiurge; they participate in the eternal creative work of the Gods and by this participation become immortal and deified themselves. Finally, theurgists participate in the **Providential Evolution** of the universe; in so doing they win **Salvation**.

Basic Principles of Theurgy

The Gods, which exist as Henads in the Monad ([see Part III](#)), *proceed* outward into manifestation, thereby becoming **Living Ideas** in the Nous of the Demiurge and giving rise to a lineage of Daimones and mortal human souls (see "[Pythagorean Succession](#)" above). These Ideas descend through the World Soul, who births them into time and space to inform the material world. Thus all around us and in our souls we find the Forms and Ideas belonging to the **Seirai** (Chords) of the Gods; they are the material and means of theurgy, and our next topic.

Sumbola and Sunthêmata

When things that are enformed by the divine Ideas, whether they are found externally in physical reality or internally in psychical reality, are used in theurgy, they are called *sumbola* or *sunthêmata*. These words are often translated "symbols" and "tokens" or "signs," but we will understand better their role in theurgy if we begin by looking at their meanings in ancient Greek.

A **súnthêma** is something put together or devised (*suntithêmi*), an agreed upon signal, password, passport, indeed any token or sign. More generally, *sunthêma* may refer to a pledge, covenant, or agreement, or to tokens of these relations. Further, it may refer to a communion or connection between two parties. Thus, in the context of theurgy a sunthêma is a password or sign, given to us by the Gods, in token of and to facilitate our **communion** with Them. Reread the preceding definition and try to grasp the full meaning of sunthêma, for it will help you understand the role of sunthêmata in theurgy.

A **súmbolon** brings together (*sumballein*) two things. We may begin with the most concrete meaning: in ancient times the parties to an agreement might break an *astragalos* (small bone), *ostrakon* (pottery shard), or coin into two pieces; the two parts, each retained by one of the parties, fit together like lock and key. So also a seal impression in wax or clay, such as made by a signet ring, is a sumbolon, a good metaphor (oft-repeated in antiquity) for the impression of the Forms on matter. The **Material Form** or **Embodied Idea** is the signature or imprimatur reflecting the sanction of the God. The sumbolon is a sign of **goodwill**, and thus in theurgy of a God's goodwill. The signet ring and like sumbola are **proofs of identity**, the passwords and secret signs that allow one to proceed and, in a theurgic context, to approach and contact the Gods. Such a password might take the form of *signum* and *responsum*, and so also in theurgy there is an **interchange of signs**. The God teaches the Signs; if the theurgist responds appropriately, they are

admitted. So also, the *sumbolon* becomes a token of the **agreement**, treaty, or contract between the parties; here, between the God and theurgist. In particular, the *sumbolon* as **secret sign** leads to its meaning as allegory, omen, portent, or occult sign, and in these meanings we arrive at the English word "**symbol**." Again you should try to grasp the full range of meaning of *sumbolon* to understand the role of *sumbola* in theurgy.

The *sumbola* and *sunthêmata* are in the Seirai of the Gods; they participate in the divine Forms or Ideas; they are in the Gods as the Gods are in them. They are found everywhere, as the *Chaldean Oracles* (fr. 108) attest:

Paternal Nous sows *Sumbola* throughout the World;
He thinks the Thoughts, called Beauties Inexpressible.

Literally, the *Nous* intuitus (*noei*) the Ideas (*Noêta*). Henceforth, in the context of theurgy, I will use the terms *sumbolon* and *sunthêma* synonymously.

Examples of *Sumbola* and *Sunthêmata*

Once you understand the general principles of *sumbola* and *sunthêmata*, you can see that they take many different forms: anything in the God's Seira, anything participating in the divine Idea.

A *sumbolon* may be **material**. For example, gold and golden colored **objects** (e.g., the stone citrine) are in the Seira of the Sun. So also **animals**, such as the cock, which welcomes the Sun, and **plants**, such as the heliotrope, which turns toward the Sun. Hot **spices**, such as cinnamon, are *sumbola* of the Sun, and may be used in ritual food, offerings, or incense. Obviously **images** of the Sun or of the God Helios participate in the Form of the Sun and may be used as *sumbola*. More abstractly, various **kharaktêres** - secret gestures, figures, and geometric shapes that participate in the divine Form - may be used. Such figures may be written, drawn, or engraved, or they may be uttered or otherwise enacted in time.

Sunthêmata need not be so material. For example, a **poem** or **hymn** to the Sun may serve as a *sunthêma*, as may various **musical modes, melodies, or vocalizations** ("magic words") that have occult sympathies with the Sun. Indeed, the *sunthêmata* need not be external at all, but may be constructed or **imagined** in the soul of the theurgist, and contemplated and offered to the Gods upon that most sacred altar.

Furthermore, since the Celestial Gods are important mediators by which the Ideas *proceed* into the sublunary world and by which we *return* to the Gods, so also **astrological correspondences** are important *sumbola*, and astrological considerations enter into the timing of theurgic rites.

How does one learn a God's *sumbola* and *sunthêmata*? Sometimes they have been handed down by **tradition** and can be learned from ancient **mythology** as well as from more recent **magical texts** (such as Cornelius Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*), which tabulate correspondences. Such sources, however, cannot be accepted blindly: just because it's old doesn't mean it's correct! The more

recent work of **depth psychologists**, such as Jung, can also be helpful, as can dictionaries of symbolism.

None of these sources can be accepted uncritically. At very least, they should be tested by your own **intuition**, for your individual nous participates in these same Ideas. (The Gods place the *sumbola* in our souls as well as in the material world.) In the final analysis, we must learn the *sunthêmata* **from the Gods** Themselves: They teach us the appropriate *signa* and *responsa*.

How do we learn them from the Gods? One of the principal ways is **by theurgy**, which is therefore the means as well as the end. By theurgy we learn the rites and *sunthêmata* for more advanced theurgy. As a practical example, the **Chaldean Oracles** are the result of **Julian the Theurgist** (2nd or 3rd cent. CE) learning theurgical technique from Hekate Herself.

Theurgic Invocation

It is necessary to say a few words about theurgic invocation, for when we invoke the Gods we do not in any sense order Them to come to us. Nevertheless, the theurgist's actions, including the invocations, are instrumental in the God's arrival. This may be explained by analogy.

We cannot order the **Sun** to shine, but by uncovering and cleansing our windows we can allow the sunlight in. So also, you cannot order a God to come, but by proper theurgic cleansing of your soul, you may make it a suitable **Receptacle (Dokhê)** for the God's presence.

To change the analogy somewhat, light follows its own law and the sunlight contains all the **colors**. You cannot command a certain color to descend from the Sun, but you can put a colored filter over a window to admit only one color, bathing everything in that hue. Or you can paint an object or make it of a material that reflects only one color; for example a golden object manifests the yellow light in the Sun's rays. That is, you can, by appropriately skilled means, create a **Receiver (Dokhê)** that is "tuned" to a particular color like a radio receiver is tuned to a radio frequency.

So also in theurgy. Although all the Gods are everywhere, like the colors in the sunlight, we may arrange suitable receivers or receptacles that are tuned to a particular God. This tuning is accomplished by means of the God's **sumbola**. Like one half of a **sunthêma**, they match and engage the God's energy, causing it to resonate and reflect, illuminating the world and our souls with this energy.

Like all analogies, these are imperfect and should not be taken too literally. Nevertheless, it's astonishing how much theurgy can be learned from them, and the student will be rewarded for contemplating them carefully.

Theurgical Operations

The following are the principal theurgical operations (*praxeis*):

1. [Telestikê, or Ensoulment](#)

2. [Desmos kai Eklusis, or Binding and Releasing](#)
3. [Sustasis, or Liaison](#)
4. [Anagôgê, or Ascent](#)

They are of increasing difficulty.

Telestikê, or Ensoulment

The first theurgic operation (*praxis*) that I will discuss is called in ancient Greek *Telestikê*, a vague term that means "mystical" or "initiatory"; in this case it refers to a particular mystical art (*tekhnê*) or science (*epistêmê*). In English the procedure is often called "**animating a statue**," which might suggest statues dancing about unless you remember that *anima* is a Latin word for soul, and thus *animation* is literally giving a soul to something. In Greek this process is called **empsychôsis**, since it puts a soul (*psukhê*, psyche) into something. Normally *empsychôsis* (ensouling) is used to cause a divine or daimonic soul to take up residence in a divine image (*agalma*); thus the soul is given a material vehicle through which it may operate. Therefore in this, as in all theurgic operations, the theurgist participates in the creative activity of the Demiurge, specifically, in the **ensoulment of the material world**. Such an operation may be used to **consecrate a statue** (for example, to be the principal divine image in a temple), or to provide a **medium of communication** with a God or Daimôn, or to **purify the theurgist's soul** by serving as a medium by which the individual soul may participate in the divine image.



Needless to say, a God is not ordered or compelled to take up residence in the image. Rather, the theurgist prepares the image as a suitable *dokhê* - **receptacle or receiver** - for the divine power (*dynamis*), so that it may actualize its energy (*energeia*) in the material world. It is like preparing an object to reflect a certain color of light, but the light must be present already for the reflection to take place. This is accomplished by using the *sumbola* and *sunthêmata* of the God (or a Daimôn representative) in the preparation of the divine image. The more *sumbola* that are used, the better the *agalma* will reflect the divine energy.

First we may consider the form of the *agalma*: it may be a **statue** or other image (e.g., a **picture**) of the God in a characteristic pose, or an image of an attribute associated with the God, such as an animal sacred to the God (e.g., an owl for Athena), or the God's instrument (e.g., a lyre for Apollo). The *agalma* may be engraved or otherwise marked with the name (especially the Secret Names) or epithets of the God. Esoteric signs or other *kharaktêres* may be used also.

Often a statue has a **receptacle** in its back or base into which the God's *sunthêmata* may be placed. These include gemstones, metals, herbs, plants, and animals. This is also a good place to put tokens marked with secret names or signs, if the image is to be visible to the public. (If the image is a picture, it may be mounted on or placed above a box in which *sunthêmata* are put.) The *agalma* may be fumigated with incense appropriate to the God and anointed with appropriate oils or perfumes. The

theurgist may address invocations, prayers, chants, poetry, or other texts to the God, sing hymns, or play music in the appropriate modes (*harmoniai*) for the God. Finally, the agalma will be a better receiver if it is constructed or consecrated at a time that is **astrologically auspicious** for attracting the God's power. The general principle should be clear: the more *sumbola* and *sunthêmata* that can be combined in the image, the better the receiver it will be.

The agalma will become **numinous** when it is in the *energeia* of the God or Daimôn. **Phenomena of light** may appear around it: luminous or luciform apparitions (*purauyé* or *phôtoeidê phasmata*). When this occurs, the *energeia* of the God will be actualized in the soul of the theurgist, and the image may induce prophetic dreams, manifest omens, or deliver revelations (*theoparádota*), often in response to the theurgist's petition. In particular, this is an opportunity for the theurgist to obtain information and instructions for theurgic operations.

Desmos kai Eklusis, or Binding and Releasing

Through the operations of *Desmós kai Éklusis* (Binding and Releasing) a God or Daimôn is called to take temporary **possession** of a person. The terminology is from traditional magic, but in theurgy we must interpret "binding" in the sense already discussed ("[Theurgic Invocation](#)"): preparing a suitable *receiver* for the divine energy. In fact, the easiest was to understand *Desmos* is as *Telestikê* in which a human receiver replaces an *agalma* (divine image).



But first some **terminology**. The theurgist, who invokes the God or Daimôn, is referred to as the *Klêtôr* (CLAY-tor, Caller) or *Theagôgós* (God-evoker), whereas the subject is referred to as the *Dókheus* (Recipient), *Theatês* (Seer), or *Kátokhos* (the "Held-down One"). They may be the same person (i.e., the theurgist may call the divinity to seize themselves), but this more advanced operation will be described later ("[Autodesmos](#)") and for now we will treat them as different people.

In *Desmos*, *sumbola* and *sunthêmata* are used in much the same way as in *Telestikê* (with obvious adaptations, some of which are [described later](#)). The goal again is to "tune" both the Caller and the Receiver so that they are receptive to the divine power (*dunamis*) and actualize the divine energy (*energeia*). This allows the energy to awaken and shine forth, in the souls of both the Caller and Receiver, as well as in the material environment.

The advantage of *Desmos* over *Telestikê* is that the Receiver is a human being, and therefore they can speak with the **divinity's voice**. On the other hand, the disadvantage of a human Receiver is that their soul may (consciously or unconsciously) **contaminate** the revelation from the God. Less obviously, there is a danger that the Receiver's **personal daimones** (see "[Personal Daimones](#)" above) may seize them, rather than their being possessed by the God or Daimôn who was invoked. (Similar problems can arise in *Telestikê*, for the theurgist is human too,

but they don't usually directly contaminate the receiving image.) This is the reason that naive young boys were often used as Recipients in ancient times: they are less likely to put their own ideas and personalities in the way, and their personal daimones (especially sexual daimones) are fewer and weaker. They have what theurgists term **epitêdiôtês** (suitability, fitness). In general, we can see that the Seer needs to be able to enter a trance state in which their conscious mind is quiet; their personal daimones should be pacified and dormant during the operation. Then the Seer may become a **pure and uncontaminated Receptacle** for the divine energy. To reflect the divine light clearly, the mirror should be unblemished, clean, and polished.

Needless to say, depending on their **psychological state** and the activity of their daimones, Seers may be better able to bear the God at some times than at others. This must be taken into account before attempting Desmos. In what may be a fragment from the *Chaldean Oracles* (fr. 211), a God complains,

The Recipient's wretched heart supports me not.

Furthermore, an inexperienced Seer may have trouble at first achieving an adequate receptive state, but with talented Seers this improves with practice. We say that they acquire the *Hieratikê Dunamis* (**Hieratic Faculty**).

The Desmos

The Desmos operation begins with the **cleansing and purification** of both the Caller and Receiver. They will take a ritual bath and dress in ceremonial attire: typically a white robe bound with a belt bearing the *sumbola* of the God to be invoked; they may wear also garlands and other divine *sumbola* as appropriate. Next, the Caller, Receiver, and ritual area are purified, typically with salt water and burning sulfur (*Hólme kai Theíon*: **Brine and Brimstone**). The atmosphere may be prepared by *Atmoí* (Vapors), that is, **incense** appropriate to the divinity.

During the operation, the Caller may stand on **kharaktêres** (esoteric characters and figures) that are **sumbola** of the divinity.

In general, as in *Telestikê*, the more *sumbola* and *sunthêmata* that are used, the better will the Recipient be prepared for the arrival of the divinity. To help the Seer achieve a trance state, it's helpful to provide a point **offocus**, such as an **oil lamp** (traditional), a **candle**, or a **kharaktêr** or other divine *sumbolon*.

The **state** we wish to achieve is called *Theophoría* (bearing a God), *Enthousiasmós* (having a God within, *entheos*), *Epípnoia* (inspired by a God).

There are various **signs** that the experienced Caller may use to tell if the Recipient has achieved a state of Theophoria. These include changes of voice and facial expression. Also, there may be unusual bodily movement or rigidity. Levitation has been reported! Often there is insensitivity to pain. Theophoria is often accompanied by **luminous visions**, which may be perceived by the Seer (called *autoptic*) or by the Theagôgos (called *depoptic*). In the latter case, the Caller may describe the visions to the Recipient, so that they may experience the Enthousiasmós more fully. Both may experience visions. Sometimes the Seer is

seized completely by the God, in which case they will be unconscious of what transpires, and the Theagôgos will witness *epoptic* manifestations of the God; the Recipient may have no memory of the Theophoria. At other times the Seer will consciously experience the Enthousiasmos; they may feel their mind and body to be seized and bearing the God, or they may experience the God externally through *autoptic* visions. Also, the Dokheus may observe the **lamp focus** to transform from the ordinary "mortal light" to a numinous "strong immortal light."

The experienced Caller can tell from the luminous apparitions what sort of God or Daimôn has seized the Seer (some of the rules can be found in Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, Bk. II). This is important because some of the **lower ranks of Daimones** (which are governed more by emotion than by reason) do not respond honestly when asked their identity. In any case, you should never accept a divine spirit's statements uncritically nor abandon your intellectual and moral autonomy.

Generally, **formless luminous apparitions** are more reliable indicators of divine presence, since they are truer to a God's form than recognizable shapes (see Iamblichus, loc. cit.). Also, the *Chaldean Oracles* (fr. 148) state:

But when you see the very holy Shapeless Fire,
which shines by leaps and bounds throughout the whole world's depths,
attend the Fire's Voice....

In any case, an incorporeal Deity adopts a corporeal form for our benefit. As the Goddess explains in the *Oracles* (fr. 142),

... for you these bodies have been bound
upon autoptic apparitions ...

The Eklusis

The operation is usually brought to a close when the Theagôgos perceives that the divinity has departed from the Recipient, but it may be terminated also if the Recipient or Theagôgos are becoming too tired to sustain the Theophoria. At this time, the Eklusis (Release) removes the burden of bearing the God (Theophoria) from the Katokhos (Held Down One).

The Theagôgos bids the divinity to depart (if necessary) and thanks them for their presence:

At last release the Lord; no more the mortal holds the God.

(*Chaldean Oracles*, dub. fr. 225). Again, in theurgy it is recognized that a God cannot be "banished." Rather, this dismissal begins the "detuning" of the Recipient's soul from the divine power and back to the material realm, thereby allowing the divine energy to dissipate.

Once the Recipient begins to return to normal consciousness, they should accelerate the process by turning away from the focal lamp and turning their attention to **mundane matters**. Focusing on their body (which is probably uncomfortable after the operation) is a good strategy. This process, which may happen accidentally if the Seer loses focus, is described in the *Oracles* (fr. 141):

The sluggish mortal, nodding here, is God's Release.

That is, if the sluggish (matter-bound) Recipient "nods" or inclines towards the things *here* (of this world), it will result in the God's Release.

The Theagôgos may step off of the God's kharaktêres, if they were used, and extinguish the incense and focal lamp. These and other kharaktêres and sumbola of the God may be covered. Finally, the Theagôgos and Theatês remove their ceremonial robes and the sumbola of the God. This **ends the rite**.

Note that the goal is not to sever all contact with the God, but simply to effect the Release (*Eklusis*) of the Held Down One (*Katokhos*) from divine control. The Theagôgos must be sensitive to any signs that the Release is not complete and take measures, if necessary, to restore the Katokhos to himself. This is, in brief, the operation of *Desmos kai Eklusis*.

Autodesmos

As previously remarked, it is possible for the Caller and Recipient to be the same person, an operation that we may call *Autodesmos*, but the preceding description highlights some of the difficulties of this more advanced operation. First, since you are acting in both roles, you must be both **active and passive** at the same time: concentrating your mind on the invocations and other sumbola, while surrendering your body and soul to the divinity. In practice, the operation goes through **stages**, from more active invocation, to more passive contemplation of kharaktêres or divine *logoi* (sayings), and finally to surrender. Obviously, you cannot surrender completely, or you will not see the (necessarily autoptic) visions or here the revelations.

Finally there is the matter of **Release**. When you perceive that the God has departed or you have become too tired to continue, you must refocus your attention on the material realm, as in ordinary *Eklusis*. Remove your robe and leave the ritual area.

It's worth noting that there is little danger of a trained theurgist getting **stuck in a trance**. The mortal frame cannot sustain a divine spirit indefinitely; eventually it will fatigue, and you will fall asleep. This is not necessarily bad, for in this still-inspired state you are likely to have revelatory or prophetic **dreams**. In any case, it's important to know that when you awake there may be lingering effects of Enthousiasmos, and so it's still necessary to take definite measure to **reground** yourself in the material world. (Clap, stamp, dance, exercise, have sex, eat, etc.)

Recall ("[Goal of Theurgic Ascent](#)") that in theurgy a **return to embodiment** is an essential part of the process, for that is our role in the creation of the universe. Theurgy effects the **Epistrophê (Turn Back)** toward The One, and thus the full actualization of Divine *Energeia*.

Sustasis, or Liaison

Sustasis is usually translated "meeting" or "conjunction," but again we will get more insight into the goal of the operation if we look at the range of meaning of the word.

A *sústasis* (pl., *sustáseis*) is literally a putting-together (from *sun-istêmi*, to set up or place together). Therefore, in its most basic sense, a divine *sustasis* is a **meeting** that brings together a mortal and a divinity (Daimôn or God). *Sustasis* also means an **introduction** or **recommendation**, by which a mortal and divinity may make each other's acquaintance. By extension "*sustasis*" can refer to a **friendship** or **alliance**, and this cooperative relation is also a goal of divine *sustasis*.



Therefore we may say that the purpose of a divine (or *hieratic*) *sustasis* is to meet and form an alliance with a divinity for the sake of cooperation. By means of such an alliance you can place yourself under a God's **guidance and protection** (tutelage, in the ancient sense), or you may secure the assistance of a Daimôn for furthering divine purposes. Such an assistant is called a **Paredros**, which literally means "one who sits beside," and by extension an assistant divinity, a **familiar** spirit, or a counselor who provides magical aid.

Sustaseis with Gods and Their Daimones

As previously discussed ("[Mediating Spirits](#)"), Gods exist outside of space and time, and know us individually only as representatives of humankind. Therefore it is usually easier, more beneficial, and more common to have a **Sustasis with a Daimôn**, for They exist in time and space and know us as individuals. Since the Daimones are intermediate between humans and Gods (recall "[Mediating Spirits](#)" above), They are ideal mediators and are especially suited as **messengers** (*angeloi*, "**angels**") between our material universe and the Noetic Realm of the Gods. We may bring our individual problems to Daimones and request Their guidance and aid in our individual lives.

Sometimes it is appropriate to form a **Sustasis with a God**. This may be when the issue or goal is transpersonal (i.e., dealing with humanity as a whole), or when you wish to participate in the transcendent *energeia* of the God. (In the latter case beware, however, since the High Gods, in fulfilling Their purposes, may have little regard for the needs, desires, or sensibilities of individual humans. Being the instrument of **Divine Will** may be neither convenient nor pleasant.) Practically, even if your goal is *sustasis* with a God, you should start with a Daimôn. The Gods have created Their **Chords** or **Lineages** of Daimones as mediators and messengers for us. Therefore, a God is normally approached through Their Daimones.

Even if a God is invoked, a Daimôn may appear in Their stead, and you should not be surprised at this. Further, if asked to identify Themselves, the Daimôn may claim to be a God. This may not be intentionally **deceptive** (although Daimones are capable of such deception). Rather, the Daimôn may be delegated to this purpose by the God, for we are better able to relate to the individual personality of a Daimôn than to the transcendent character of a God. Second, as we have seen,

names may be duplicated at each level of the divine hierarchy; thus, since many Daimones do not have names, They may call Themselves by the name of the God who heads their lineage. As previously remarked, there are theurgic means for distinguishing divine and daimonic **apparitions** ([see under "Desmos" above](#)), but it is probably safer to assume that you are communicating with a Daimôn.

The fact bears repeating that you cannot simply accept that a spirit is who They say They are. How, then, can you trust anything They say? You can't! Even if you are confident that you are communicating with one of the High Gods, you should not **believe uncritically** what (you think) They say or **blindly accept** Their advice or commands. Although your ego - your individual conscious mind - should serve divine Providence, it was given to you for a reason. Use it! Do not abandon your **critical reason** or your **moral autonomy**. They are essential to our role, as **humans and Magi**, in the Divine Order.

Sustaseis with Personal Daimones

As previously discussed ("[Personal Daimones](#)"), we all have personal daimones who are assigned to us throughout our lives and perhaps beyond. For example, each of us has a **Guardian** or **Personal Daimôn** (*Idios Daimôn*), who mediates between us and the God who originates our lineage. In particular, your Guardian Daimôn watches over you and strives to guide you according to your destiny; some say that this Guardian is your advocate between lives. In any case, your cooperation with your Guardian will be facilitated if you make Their acquaintance and form an alliance with Them. Thus a **Sustasis with your Personal Daimôn** (*Sustasis Idiou Daimonos*) is especially worthwhile; life will go much smoother.

Another personal daimôn is the **Evil Daimôn** (*Kakos Daimôn*), which is born from the rejected potentials and energies of your soul. That is, everything that you, consciously or unconsciously, whether by conscious decision or by cultural and environmental osmosis, take to be bad, all those qualities will be the characteristics of your Evil Daimôn.

Such might seem to be the last sort of Spirit one might hope to meet (for It's demonic in the colloquial sense), but that is incorrect. For if you ignore the existence of the Other Daimôn, He or She (for its sex is the same as yours) will act outside your awareness, **possessing** you or possessing those with whom you deal. For the Other Daimôn wants to live and act, and will find a way to do so.

Therefore it is much better to establish a **Sustasis with your Evil Daimôn** (*Sustasis Kakou Daimonos*). Become acquainted so that you will recognize Him or Her: whether seizing you or another person, or simply hovering in the air. Find out the Kakos' needs, desires, and issues with you, so that you may form an agreement that satisfies the Daimôn without sacrificing your personal needs and moral autonomy. By this alliance your Other Daimôn, who was created from **rejected parts of your own soul**, may be recruited to work for your higher (divine) purpose. The Kakos Daimôn holds **great power**, and by a proper alliance ("pact"), you may reclaim this power for divine ends. By reclaiming the lost parts of your soul, you become more whole.

For many centuries **Western culture** has rejected and denied the Evil Daimôn, both individual and collective (for the collective consciousness of a culture, nation, or religion also creates its Kakos Daimôn); this is the reason these destructive powers are rampaging ungoverned around our world. They cannot be banished; the only solution is a cooperative alliance in conformity with modern society and ethics.

The Operation of Sustasis

Having discussed at length the meaning and purpose of Sustasis, we can describe the operation briefly, for it builds on the techniques already discussed ([Telestikê](#), [Desmos kai Eklusis](#)). This is because the first step is to **invoke the Divinity** into your presence. This may be accomplished by invoking Them into a **divine image** (*agalma*) or other prepared and consecrated **focus** (as in Telestikê), or into a **human Receiver** (as in Desmos). To this end, all the techniques of Telestikê and Desmos are appropriate, so long as you have gained experience with seeing visions through practice of these arts. The principal difference is that once the Spirit is present, you engage in a dialogue directed toward establishing an alliance. This might include **vows** on your part in thanks for the divine aid, and other agreements on **Sunthêmata** (signs, tokens) by which you may communicate with each other. Standard techniques of Eklusis (Release) are used to terminate the Sustasis.

The so-called "**Mithras Liturgy**" (Betz, PGM IV.475-289; Meyer, 211-21) is a good example of an ancient Rite of Sustasis, although it is not purely Pythagorean.

Theourgikê Anagôgê, or Theurgic Ascent

We now come to the last, and most advanced, theurgic operation, the *Theourgikê Anagôgê* or Theurgic Ascent (also known as the **Hieratic Ascent**). Although the procedures are similar to the operations already discussed, in particular [Desmos kai Eklusis](#), there is a crucial difference between Ascent and all the other operations, for in those operations the Divinity is always experienced as "other," but by means of the Anagôgê you ascend so that your soul, so far as is possible for a mortal, unites with a God. In this way you experience **deification** (*theôsis*).

Thus the goal of theurgic ascent is **union** (*henôsis*) with a God. This may be any God, including even the Demiurge and The Ineffable One (an especially difficult operation). By means of this union you may experience your own inherent divinity and your continuity with The One, and thus, by means of the union, come to be in better harmony with Providence. Consciously experiencing your participation in Providence gives meaning to life.

The stages of the Theurgic Ascent are essentially similar to those of the [Contemplative](#) and [Erotic](#) Ascents, but the Theurgic Ascent makes more use of ritual (material substances and actions). Therefore, it may be effective when the other, more interior, ascents are not.

By the principle of **like knows like**, it is the image of The One in your own soul (called the **Flower of the Whole Soul**, *Anthos Pasês tês Psukhês*) that is able to unite with The Ineffable One. (See "[Personal Daimones](#)" [above](#) on the Flower of the Soul.) By means of this "knowledge through identification," your individual One comes to participate more perfectly in The One Itself. This is the turn back toward the One (the ultimate source), known as the *Epistrophê* (**Return**; recall "[Triadic Structure](#)" [in Part I](#)), by which your soul becomes the *energeia* actualizing the power (*dunamis*) of the One. This is our destiny.

To accomplish the ascent, the parts of your soul that are more like The One must be separated from those that are less like It. This separation is accomplished by a **symbolic death**: "dying before you die." Before describing the procedure it is necessary to explain that the ascent is a cooperative activity between the Initiate (masc. *Tetelesménos*, femn. *Tetelesménê*), who makes the ascent, and an Initiator (*Telesiourgós*) or Theurgist (*Theourgós*), who usually has (human) assistants. ([As for Desmos](#), it is possible, but difficult, for a Theurgist-Initiate to make the ascent on their own.)

Step 1: Purification and Protection

Preparatory to the ascent is the Purification (*Kátharsis*) of the **Soul**, its **Vehicle** (*ókhêma*), and the **Body**. The principal goal is to facilitate the ascent by making the initiate as similar to the Gods as possible. Purification of the body may include a ritual bath ([as in Desmos](#)), sexual abstinence, and dietary restrictions or prescriptions, as appropriate to the Deity. The bath corresponds to the **washing of the corpse**, and after it the initiate dresses in a *khitôn termiôeis* (funeral robe), which is a loose ankle-length tunic, white or mostly white in color. In addition, the initiate is purified by Burning Brimstone and is anointed with olive oil and other perfumed unguents. These preparations also will facilitate purification of the soul's vehicle, the goal being to make it "well-wheeled" (*eútrokhon*) for the ascent. Purification of the soul is directed toward quieting the lower parts of the soul, which do not ascend. To this end, the techniques described under "[Contemplative Ascent](#)" are appropriate. Clearly, these skills are not developed overnight; some of them require a lifetime of practice.

While, on the one hand, purification is intended to eliminate those influences that may impede the ascent, on the other hand we aid the ascent by means of **sumbola and sunthêmata** appropriate to the Deity who is our goal. Physical sunthêmata may be worn, ingested, or placed in the ritual area. Nonphysical sunthêmata, such as hymns, prayers, and chants, will be recited out loud or in the initiate's mind as the ascent proceeds.

Intermediate between purifications and sumbola are the *apotrópaia*, or **averting charms**, whose purpose is to ward off the **Material Daimones**, known as the **Dogs of Hekate**, for She is

the Driver of the Dogs of Water, Earth, and Air. (*C.O.* fr. 91)

(For more on Hekate, see [Pt. II, "Hekate"](#) and ["Mediating Spirits"](#) above.) The Material Daimones are not hostile, as is sometimes supposed, but it is their function in the Cosmos to carry forth the Ideas into material embodiment. Thus, in the ascent we oppose Their natural activity, and therefore They must be placated.

While the Material Daimones are agents of Procession (*Próodos*), the **Heroes** are agents of the Return (*Epistrophê*). Therefore, the Heroes, especially **Heracles** (see ["Examples of Heroization"](#) in "Fire" in [Opsopaus, AGEDE](#)), may be invoked to keep the Material Daimones at bay and to facilitate the ascent. This will be more effective if, through a prior [Sustasis](#), you have recruited the Hero as a *Paredros*.

An *apotrópaion* may be a physical charm hung or tied on the initiate (called a *períaption*, "tied-on thing"), or it may be less material: an apotropaic prayer, chant, or hymn. The principles of *sumbola* and *sunthêmata* apply. In this way the initiate is "well-equipped" for the ascent, "all-armed" (*pánteukhos*) in Plato's terms (*Laws VII, 796C1*). Using the same word, Hekate Herself sets the example in the *Chaldean Oracles* (fr. 72):

for now, equipped, all-armed, I have come Divine.

Step 2: Symbolic Death and Dissolution

The next step is a symbolic *Thánatos Autháiretos* (**Voluntary Death**) followed by a **Funeral** (*Kêdeía, Kêdos*) and symbolic **Burial** (*Entaphiasmós*). The procedure derives from an esoteric interpretation of the funeral of Patroclus in the *Iliad* (XVIII.343-53).

The **initiators** (theurgist and assistants) have spread a bier cloth (*strôma*) over the garlanded bier (*klínê*) on which the initiate will be layed out. (The *klínê* is a waist-high, cushioned platform, but an ordinary bed or mats on the floor will work.) The *klínê* is oriented with the feet towards the (principal) door, if indoors, or towards the East, if out of doors, for the dead go to the Otherworld feet-first.

For the *Próthesis* (**Laying Out**) the initiate lays upon the bier with their head on a pillow (see [illustration](#)). The initiators spread the *kosmos*, a predominantly white **funeral mantle**, over the initiate; the **kosmos** (or **pharos**) represents Mother Earth, in which the initiate's body will be buried (see [Pt. II, "The Wedding"](#) on the *kosmos-pharos*). The initiators station themselves around the bier, with the theurgist at the initiate's head. When the initiate has prepared themselves for the voluntary death, they pull the *kosmos* over their face. The assistants begin their lamentation, but the theurgist interrupts it, saying something like this:



Euphêmeite! Keep sacred silence! "What is this strange outcry?" [*Phaedo* 117D] Let there be no such lamentation, for [Initiate's name] has chosen die while yet in their body. "One's End [*teleutê*] ought to be in sacred silence" [*Phaedo* 117D, a Pythagorean precept].

There follows the *Anakaluptêria* (**Uncovering**), in which the theurgist uncovers the initiate's face. The initiate's head is uncovered because it is the residence of their immortal nous, which resides in the round cranium just as the Divine Nous resides in the Celestial Sphere. After some additional funerary rites, the initiators begin to sing chants and hymns while they process around the bier.

For the *Entaphiasmós* (**Burial**) the initiators return to their places around the initiate. The theurgist symbolically buries the initiate by tossing three handfuls of earth on them; the earth prevents the initiate's body from polluting the Divine Realms and permits its **dissolution** and **separation** from the initiate's soul.

Next is a very important operation called **Breathing and Thrusting Forth the Soul** (*Anapnoê kai Psukhês Éxôsis*). The theurgist grasps the initiate's head on both sides ([see illustration](#)) and invokes the Winds and Rays of the Spheres to fan the fire to separate the initiate's soul and body. Then the theurgist admonishes the initiate to shield themselves with **Sounding Light** and **Three-barbed Strength** in preparation for scaling the Rays. The theurgist might say: "My child,



when thou hast donned the Vigor full-arrayed
of Sounding Light,
and hast equipped thy nous and soul with
Three-barbed Strength,
then cast the Triad's whole Sign in thy
breast, and haunt

Empyrean channels, not dispersed, but gathered in." (*C.O.* fr. 2)

The theurgist begins to call forth the initiate's soul, invoking the Three-barbed Strength, the Soul Spark born of the Father's Thought, to draw their soul forth from their body. He declares the initiate to be clothed in Shining Raiments, girded by the Substance of the Spheres, and bids them to concentrate their nous upon the sumbola and sunthêmata, and calls their soul to come forth to scale the Fiery Rays. The theurgist continues with various magical formulas to evoke the soul, and the assistants begin singing chants and hymns to aid the separation. While the theurgist calls forth the soul, the initiate focuses on their breath and begins to breathe more deeply and quickly, in time with the chanting or music.

Step 3: Ascent Through the Spheres

Through the following stages the assistants, under direction of the theurgist, adjust their chanting, singing, or other music to aid the elevation of the initiate's soul. Henceforth the initiate may breath through the mouth and intone the **vowel chants**, *Onoma Barbara*, and *Voces Magicae* selected to aid their ascent.

After an initial phase of relaxation, the initiate may experience opposition from the Material Daimones. By attention to the Three-barbed Strength and other sunthêmata of The One, and by appeal to the Heroes and *Kosmagoi* (Rulers of the Three Realms) the ascent through the **aetherial spheres** may proceed. (See [Pt. III, "Junges, Teletarchs, and Connectors,"](#) on the *Kosmagoi*.) In each of the planetary spheres the initiate gives up (sacrifices) one of the outer/lower **layers of their soul**. Eventually a new peace is attained, as the initiate rests at the **Gate of the Sun**.

Once the initiate has ascended above the aetherial sphere, they should focus on chanting the sunthêmata in their mind rather than out loud, for they are ascending through the immaterial **empyrean spheres**. Here the initiate may encounter the Gods, who may assist the ascent. **Visions** of the Gods are possible.

Step 4: Unification (Henôsis)

Ultimately the initiate may ascend all the way to **The Ineffable One**. At this transcendent pinnacle they will be beyond duality, beyond language and conceptual thought, indeed beyond all differentiation and change. In this eternal realm, beyond time itself, this domain of **Aiôn**, the initiate experiences **immortality** and **deification**. (Recall our discussions of Aiôn in [Part I, "Theogony,"](#) and [Part III, "The Monad and the Indefinite Dyad."](#)) *Henôsis* cannot be described; it must be experienced.

Step 5: Redescent

The Initiate cannot remain in the state of unification for very long, and when they sense its dissipation they must begin to redescend and to redon the **layers of their outer soul**. The trained theurgist will perceive that the initiate is falling from the unitive state and assist their redescent with appropriate formulas, chants, songs, prayers, and hymns. The methods of the theurgic Release ([discussed above](#)) can be used to help the initiate to re-ensoul their body.

When the descent is complete, the initiate is "unburied" (i.e., the Kosmos is removed) and they rise from the bier. The initiators welcome the **reborn initiate** with joyous hymns of welcome and praise.

As a result of the ascent, the initiate is transformed, reborn with a new soul. Although they have returned to the material world, henceforth their soul retains **roots** planted in The One. With this permanent connection to the **Transcendent Source of Divinity**, the initiate henceforth consciously embodies divinity on earth.

The theurgic ascent is a difficult and hence infrequent rite, for which years of preparation may be required. But when it is successful, the initiate is transformed into a *Theios Anêr* (**God-Man**), one of the **Perfected or Immaculate Beings** (*Akhrantoi*), who by Their very presence on earth bring grace to humanity and to all of Nature.

This completes our discussion of Theurgy and hence our Summary of Pythagorean Theology. Vale!

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