

Contemplations for Theurgy of Eros

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These are the contemplations (*theôriai*) or guided visualizations that I used in my workshop, “The Theurgy of Eros,” at PantheaCon 2019. I have indicated in footnotes where they correspond to exercises in my book, *The Wisdom of Hypatia: Ancient Spiritual Practices for a More Meaningful Life* (Llewellyn, 2013).

Invocation¹

*Philotês, Thou whose arms the world surround,
embracing all as one, together bound,
we contemplate Thee, from our sight concealed,
but dwelling in our mortal limbs revealed.
We call Thee Friend for Harmony proclaimed,
and Joy Thou’rt called, and Aphrodite named.
When people gather, You unseen arrive,
and mutual desire You contrive.
In lofty clouds You circle like a dove,
and draw us close in bonds of common Love.
Hail, fair Goddess! Χαίρε, ὦ Φιλότης*

I. The Geocentric Ascent and Descent (8 min.)²

In order to fix the Platonic cosmos in your mind, we will begin with a simple ascent to The One. The visualization uses a geocentric view of the Cosmos, which is how our ancestors understood the universe for hundreds of thousands of years. Begin by looking around you at whatever is in sight. Now close your eyes.

To calm our lower souls, we’ll take three deep breaths. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out.

¹ This invocation of *Philotês* — the force of love in the cosmos and complementary to *Neikos*, the force of strife, according to Empedocles, is drawn from the fragments of his poem *On Nature* (DK 31B17.20–25, B21.8; my translation/adaptation). *Philotês* is the force that draws together despite differences, and *Neikos* is the force that separates each kind from the other kinds; both are necessary for things to exist.

² Corresponds to “Geocentric Ascent” (p. 165) and “Geocentric Descent” (p. 166) in *The Wisdom of Hypatia*.

Imagine the solidity and materiality of the objects around you, but also the myriad physical processes taking place in them, that will cause all of these things, even the rocks, to decay eventually. This is the material world. (pause)

Now shift your inner gaze upward into the air, above the tops of the buildings and trees, above the clouds, but not so high as the stars. This clear air is a symbol of the World Soul, for in many languages the same word means soul and breath.

Be aware that you are contemplating the air itself, which surrounds the entire earth with a continuous fluid, a breath-spirit, that enters into the depths of every plant and animal.

As the oxygen goes into your lungs and through them into your blood and thence into every cell of your body, so this all-permeating spirit not only envelops but also connects all living things.

Here dwell the *daimons*, who minister to the Gods and are Their faithful helpers, and carry messages between the Gods and us. (pause)

Now shift your attention upward to the stars, which symbolize the Platonic Ideas. Set aside any astronomical knowledge you might have and contemplate the beauty of these fiery points of light. They have been above us forever, and your ancestors gazed on them in wonder as we do now. Let the stars draw you upward on their rays. The stars are perfect points separated by vast impassible voids, giving each a perfect identity. Yet they are not independent, for they are related to each other, creating eternal forms that are as evocative for us as they were for the Ancients. Contemplate them, trace out their patterns. They symbolize the Platonic Ideas, the Celestial Beings: the Gods. (pause)

Finally, project your imagination into the black void beyond the stars, the perfect silence and invisibility out of which have emanated the stars and all else. This will take some mental effort, but focus on the impenetrable black sky behind the stars. Rest for a while in the unknowable depths, in the perfect simplicity, tranquility, and infinity of The Ineffable One. (pause)

This is the ultimate principle of unity, which makes the universe one living being. Imagine a pure, warm energy of love radiating to you from the heavens. (pause)

In your imagination, begin to notice the faintest stars beginning to appear in the black void. You are witnessing the emergence of the Ideas and the Forms from The Ineffable One. You are witnessing the birth of the Gods. Continue to broaden your attention to take in more of the starry firmament and try to hold the whole sky in your awareness. (pause)

Know that these beings of light are the causes of everything. Though motionless in their heaven, they are the providential governors of the cosmos, the sources of goodness. Feel their eternal love shining on us all. (pause)

Next let your attention descend into the atmosphere, the all-pervasive spirit, moving in currents large and small to connect the earth into one living organism. Think about the air moving through all living things, keeping them alive, but also creating the weather that drives natural processes. This symbolizes the World Soul, the Goddess of Nature, She of Many Names.

Breathe the life-breath of Nature into your heart. Feel it enlivening, harmonizing, and perfecting everything in the world, including you. (pause)

Be grateful. (pause)

When you feel full to overflowing with this love, direct it back toward its source: the heavens. (pause)

Feel yourself as a conduit through which the power of love circulates, from above, to below, and back above. With each breath, draw in the power and send it out. (pause)

When you feel the circulation is well established, allow the feeling to dissipate, and return your attention to the physical things around you, but experience them as emanations and effects produced by all the levels above you. (pause)

Keep with you the feeling of the interconnectedness of all things, both horizontally to other things on the same level, and vertically as emanations of The One.

You can open your eyes now.

Finis

II. Imagined Beauty (4 min.)³

This exercise may be practiced as a continuation of the Observed Beauty exercise⁴ by simply closing your eyes. It can also be practiced on its own in the absence of your loved one, which is the case for most of us here.

The practice is simply to imagine your beloved and to feel your overwhelming love for them.

Let's do it. Close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. In. Out. In. Out.

Picture your loved one's face in your mind's eye. Gaze into their eyes, as they gaze back into yours.

Focus now on their nose. What's its shape?

³ Corresponds to "Imagined Beauty" exercise (p. 220).

⁴ Described on p. 218.

Shift down to their mouth and see them smile in happiness at your love.

Watch as they turn their head and glance to the side, so you can see their ear and beautiful hair. (pause)

Now hear your beloved speak to you, whispering words of love, or laughing — whatever you find most endearing. (pause)

Imagine yourself nuzzling into their neck or hair. Notice how it feels. Notice their smell, which you know so well.

Imagine touching their cheek, their hair. Or touching more intimately...

Imagine touching your lips to theirs, ever so softly, just grazing, softness against softness. Now push a little harder so you can feel the fullness of their lips against yours. Your lips part a little, as do your beloved's. The tips of your tongues touch, warm and moist against each other. Soon you both probe more actively, your tongues caressing each other and exploring each others' mouths.

Now take a longer perspective on your beloved, so you can see their whole body. What posture seems most characteristic? Sitting? Sleeping? Lounging about? Or perhaps standing or walking.

See your beloved moving about, perhaps walking or dancing. Perhaps approaching lustfully or consumed in sexual ecstasy!

See them in your mind's eye, in whatever way best captures their essence and compels you to love them. Let your mind be filled by their presence, their appearance, their movement, their sound, their smell, their touch. How they behave and how they think and feel.

Let your soul be filled with your adoration for them and the power of your love.

(pause)

OK, that is enough to illustrate the practice of Imagined Beauty. I hope you found it delightful! You can open your eyes.

Finis

III. Evocation of Divine Beloved (8 min.)⁵

The first stage is to calm your lower soul, that is, your sensations, which are especially connected with your body. So close your eyes and take three deep breaths with me. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out. (pause)

Relax any places where you feel tension. (pause)

If you are feeling any discomfort, note it mentally and let it go. (pause)

Stay in this state of calm equilibrium with your eyes closed as we go to the next step, which is a visualization.

For the second stage, clear your mind of your mortal beloved, the one whom you love in this life. For you will now imagine your ideal beloved, perhaps a god or goddess, a saint, a hero or chivalrous knight, a wise and clever maiden — whatever your vision is of the perfect beloved. Do not try too hard to construct this ideal according to your preconceived ideas about what the perfect beloved ought to be. Rather, let your imagination follow its own course, for you want an image that will fire your love, not an intellectual abstraction. In this way you will activate the complex in your psyche that has formed around the archetype of the Soul Guide. That is, you will become acquainted with the *daimôn* engendered by the Divine Beloved in the Cosmic Nous.

Let's begin. In your imagination you are standing in front of a beautiful temple, but its doors are closed. It is peaceful and safe here in this sacred precinct. You approach the temple doors, reach out your arms, and call to the Divine Beloved within.

"I beseech thee, who art Love, to open the portals for me, so that I can enter the Temple of Love. Grant me admittance to thy divine presence so that I may bask in thy beauty and adore thee. Reveal thyself to me, O Divine Beloved!"

Three times we will call for the temple to be opened. Repeat after me either in your mind or out loud: "Open! Open! Open!"

The doors swing open and you step inside the Temple, where you are confronted with a life-sized statue of your Ideal Beloved, that is, divine Love itself. Look carefully at this image. What is Love's posture? (pause) Facial expression? (pause) What is Love wearing? (pause) Is Love holding anything? This is your image of the Divine Beloved. Remember it. (pause)

Now we will invoke the living spirit of Love into this image. In your mind, do the invocation with me. "I call on thee, O Divine Beloved, O spirit of Love itself, to enter this image, this physical form, to animate it with your living spirit, so that I may converse with thee."

⁵ Corresponds to "The Ideal Beloved" exercise (p. 226).

Three times we invoke the Divine Beloved into the image. Repeat after me: “Enter! Enter! Enter!”

See the statue’s skin acquire a living hue. It softens. The garments begin to move and shift. The statue comes alive and Love smiles upon you! The Divine Beloved greets and approaches you.

What is this spirit called? Do you know their name? You can ask their name, or let your intuition pick a name for them. (pause) Repeat this name in your mind and remember it, for this is the name by which you will invoke your Divine Beloved.

Begin to shift your attention from the Divine Beloved’s appearance to the characteristics of their soul; that is, let your imagination reveal how your spiritual Beloved feels, thinks, and behaves. See them in action. How do they move? Swift or slow? (pause)

See them doing what they love to do most. If you love a story about them, see your Divine Beloved enacting it now. (pause)

Try to understand the soul of your Divine Beloved. What is their character, their personality? What is their will and desire? What do they love? (pause)

What do they reveal to you about what you most love and desire? (pause)

What traits and behaviors does your Divine Beloved most value in their devotees? What is asked of *you*? (pause)

What special message does the Divine Beloved have for you? (pause)

In your mind or out loud repeat after me:

“We thank thee, O Divine Beloved,
O spirit of Love itself, for the insights you have granted us,
and especially for the opportunity to adore thee.
I beseech thee to appear before me
whenever I invoke thee by the name
on which we have agreed.
I thank thee. Farewell!”

See the spirit of Love bid you farewell and return to the statue, which becomes inanimate. You turn your back on it and leave the temple.

That is the end of the exercise. You may open your eyes.

Finis

IV. Invocation of Divine Beloved & Beautification of Soul (6 min.)⁶

Close your eyes and we'll begin again with three deep breaths. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out.

In your mind return to the temple of Love and invoke your Ideal Beloved in the way that they have taught you. Do it now in your mind. (pause)

Imagine them in their temple in all their divine beauty and splendor. (pause)

Feel your all-consuming love and devotion for them. They represent all that you desire, your highest aspirations. (pause)

You want to please your Ideal Beloved and have them love you as much as you love them. Therefore you want to make yourself beautiful for them, and especially to make your soul beautiful.

We may pray, as Ficino prayed:

*Grant, O Gods, that my soul may be beautiful,
and that those things that pertain to my body
may not impair the beauty of my soul,
and that I may think only the wise are wealthy.*

What things do you think are attractive to your Beloved, and what about you is unattractive?

Do they seem disappointed when you have been angry? Unfair? Unsympathetic? Intolerant? Petty? Dishonest? Pessimistic? Greedy? Selfish? Aggressive? Abusive? Arrogant?

Or whatever you understand to be the less attractive attributes of your behavior. (pause)

Now commit to beautify yourself spiritually for your Beloved's sake. What will please them? What dragons must you conquer? Which innocents should you rescue? Are these challenges outside of you? Or within?

What behavior will make your Beloved smile, and love you in return, and grant you their divine aid in your struggles?

Is it courage? Self-esteem? Independence? Wisdom? Self-control? Patience? Tolerance? Compassion? Fairness? Friendliness? Being more helpful and loving? Being more optimistic?

Ask your Beloved what will please them. (pause)

⁶ This contemplation does not correspond directly to an exercise in *The Wisdom of Hypatia*, but it corresponds to the discussion on pp. 226–228.

As the heroes and heroines of old swore to defend the honor of their beloveds and to win their respect and love through deeds of valor, make a vow now to your Beloved to defeat these dragons and rescue your own soul. Do it now! (pause)

Call on your divine Beloved to accompany you through life as your understanding companion, your Soul Guide, inspiring you to good deeds and a beautiful life. (pause)

Ask your Beloved to give you a word or token of their love by which you can invoke them. It may be a gem, a flower, a talisman, or another gift. (pause)

Remember the token you've received, and imagine it whenever there is need, and your Beloved will be there. Know that whenever you need their aid they will be beside you.

Fulfill your Beloved's expectations. Don't disappoint them! By so doing, the wings of your soul will grow strong so they can lift you up to the Gods. (pause)

Now thank your Beloved for their guidance, aid, and love. (pause)

Bid your Beloved farewell for now. (pause)

Return your attention to this room, and when you are back, open your eyes.

Finis

V. Union with Divine Beloved and Love of the Good (7 min.)⁷

The remaining stages of the Ascent by Love are more difficult than the preceding, since they are at the level of the *nous*, and you cannot strive to bring them about, for sequential mental activity — that is, thinking — will drop you back to the level of the soul, where thinking takes place.

To approach toward union with The Ineffable One, you must make yourself as much like it as is possible for a human being. That is, you must make yourself unified, simple, changeless, and filled with love and beauty.

Begin by making yourself comfortable, for we want to minimize disturbances from the body. (pause)

Close your eyes and we'll begin again with three deep breaths. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out.

Next, allow your body to relax so that it is centered, calm, and impassive like The One. Begin with your feet, letting their muscles relax and go soft. Tense them a little first if that helps. Now move up to your calves and relax them. (pause) Next, your thighs. (pause) Relax the muscles in your stomach and lower back. (pause) Relax your chest. (pause) Relax now your

⁷ Corresponds to exercises "Contemplation of Ideal Beloved" (p. 230) and "Love of the Good" (p. 231).

hands. (pause) Your arms. (pause) Your shoulders. (pause) Your neck. (pause) The muscles of your face. (pause) Finally, feel your scalp relaxing. (pause) With each exhalation you relax more.

Rest in this relaxed state, breathing slowly and easily, feeling yourself calm, centered, and unified like The Ineffable One.

We are going to ascend from the body to the level of the Soul, as we did in The Contemplation of the Ideal Beloved. Therefore, invoke your Ideal Beloved as they have instructed you to do. We may pray as Proclus prayed:

*Breathe into my love
a power great and capable
to raise me up again
from Matter's bosom to Olympus.*

(pause)

Feel the power of your Ideal Beloved extending and strengthening the wings of your soul for the ascent to Divinity. Feel them! (pause)

See your Divine Beloved before you in whatever form and pose best embodies what you love about them. (pause)

When you have established the image of your Ideal Beloved's body and soul in your mind, and you are feeling love for them, continue to focus on this image and this feeling of love in your mind. You are attempting to rise above the level of time, so this should not be a moving image, but a stable thought or Idea: the essence of your Divine Beloved. (pause)

Your mind will wander from time to time, and when it does, reestablish your contemplation, first at the level of the soul, and then return to the noetic level. The goal is to remain as long as possible in a state of stable contemplation, devotion, and love for your Ideal Beloved, who is the manifestation of Ideal Beauty. Rest calmly in this state of pure love. (pause)

Pico della Mirandola teaches that Love transforms the lover into the Beloved. Therefore, in your mind, ask your Ideal Beloved to fill you with the qualities you most admire in *them*, to make your soul beautiful like *theirs*.

When you have their permission, approach your divine Beloved and, in your mind, assume the same pose. It is natural for friends and lovers to mimic each other unconsciously, so let yourself imitate your Ideal Beloved. Breathe with them. (pause)

When you are attuned to your Beloved, allow your consciousness to drift out of your body, as in a dream, so you can observe both yourself and your Beloved from above. (pause)

Now, with their permission, allow your consciousness to drift into your Beloved so that you see yourself through their eyes. How do they feel about you? How can you become more attractive to them? What do they love about you? Admire and love your future self. (pause)

The Divine Beloved, with your consciousness still inside, approaches your mortal self. Embracing, lover and Beloved unite. Know that the insights, qualities, and character of your Beloved have entered your soul, possessing it. Feel your Beloved's admirable qualities shining inside you, permeating all of your being. You embody this divine being; vow to be worthy of this indwelling spirit, who will always be a part of you. Thank your Divine Beloved for their love and generosity. (pause)

Ideal Beauty is an emanation of The Good, and in the final stage of Illumination, you may reside in a state of intense and intoxicating love for the Good. You may find yourself in this state, sooner or later, while united with your Divine Beloved.

When you experience it, try not to focus on it, for if you think about it you will drop back to the level of distinct Ideas, or even down to the Soul level.

With practice you will get better at remaining in this state, and at allowing occasional thoughts to dissolve before they interrupt your contemplation. (pause)

You may open your eyes now if you like or keep them closed for the next operation.

Finis

VI. Ascent to the One (5 min.)⁸

Let us try an ascent the One. Return to your state of stillness. Relax. Notice any points of tension in your body and relax them. (pause)

Contemplate again your Divine Beloved before you. You are in front of them, adoring them. (pause)

Now let your mind rise out of your body and hover above you and your Ideal Beloved. (pause)

Focus on the space between the lover and the Beloved. The divine atmosphere that seems to separate you is in fact the bridge that joins you. Indeed this divine ether is the bond that unites all the Gods, *daimons*, and mortal beings in mutual love. Breathe in this divine ether and feel yourself united with The All. (pause)

Exhale and relax in the tranquil stillness of The One. (pause)

⁸ This contemplation corresponds to the discussion surrounding the exercise "Union with the Good" (p. 235).

Continue to breathe slowly, inhaling love and dissolving into The One. (pause)

Don't try to comprehend; just feel. (pause)

Let yourself be filled by the goodness of The Ineffable One. (long pause)

We must return now to material reality. Therefore, feel gratitude in your heart for the goodness and beauty of The Ineffable One. Focus again on the lover and Beloved below you, and allow your mind to drift gently back into your body. (pause)

Listen to my words and pay attention to whatever you have experienced. If you haven't felt much, don't worry. These are practices and they must be practiced to be effective. I am only trying to teach them to you now. You must practice them until you can do them easily, and you must make them a habit in order to achieve union. Know that your Divine Beloved has placed in your heart the tokens and symbols that you can use to invoke them, to benefit from their wisdom and love. You will discover later that you have gained more from your ascent than you realize now.

Please open your eyes *now* so we can discuss your experience. Clap your hands or stamp your feet to make sure you are firmly established back in your body. (do it) Everyone OK?

Finis finium