

Contemplations for Theurgy of Eros

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These are the contemplations (*theôriai*) or guided visualizations for my workshop, “The Theurgy of Eros,” at Mystic South 2022. 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.*

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.

I. Imagined Beauty (4 min.)²

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?

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. (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 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

² Corresponds to "Imagined Beauty" exercise (p. 220).

II. Evocation of Divine Beloved (9 min.)³

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)

Next, allow your body to relax so that it is centered, calm, and still 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 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.

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

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

Next, clear your mind of your *mortal* beloved, the one whom you love in *this* life. In the next stage you will now seek your *ideal* beloved, perhaps a god or goddess, a hero or chivalrous knight, a wise and clever maiden — whatever your vision is of the perfect beloved. Do not try to construct this ideal according to your preconceived ideas about what the perfect beloved ought to be. Rather, you will 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 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)

³ Corresponds to "The Ideal Beloved" exercise (p. 226).

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."

Three times we invoke the Divine Beloved into the image. In your mind 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? (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 special message does the Divine Beloved have for you? Hear it! (pause)

"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.
We beseech thee to appear before us
whenever we invoke thee by the name
on which we have agreed.
Look kindly on us, O Divine Beloved."

Finis

III. Invocation of Divine Beloved & Beautification of Soul (6 min.)⁴

We will continue with your eyes closed. In the first two stages of Purification we have calmed our lower souls and witnessed the beauty in the soul of our Divine Beloved. In the third stage we will beautify our own souls so that we are worthy of our Divine Beloved.

Feel again your all-consuming love and devotion for your Ideal Beloved. 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 fare well.*

What things do you think are attractive to your Beloved? (pause) 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)

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)

⁴ This contemplation does not correspond directly to an exercise in *The Wisdom of Hypatia*, but it corresponds to the discussion on pp. 226–228.

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 some other 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. Admire and love your future self. (pause)

Thank your Beloved for their guidance, aid, and love, but keep your eyes closed. (pause)

Finis

IV. Union with Divine Beloved and Love of the Good (7 min.)⁵

We come now to the row of two in the Tetractys, which represents the third level of ascent, called Illumination in the ancient Mysteries. In this operation our souls will ascend to the eternal Platonic Ideas in the Cosmic Mind or Nous, the realm where the immortal gods reside. Here you will behold Divine Beauty and unite with your Divine Beloved.

These last 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.

In your ascent 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. Relax. (pause)

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

We may pray to the Ideal Beloved 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 your wings! (pause)

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

Allow the image of your Ideal Beloved's body and soul to fill your mind, and feel your 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

⁵ Corresponds to exercises "Contemplation of Ideal Beloved" (p. 230) and "Love of the Good" (p. 231).

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*. (pause)

When you have their permission, approach your divine Beloved and, in your mind, stand beside them and 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)

Pray to your Divine Beloved that they inspire you with their divine energy. Feel your two bodies merging so lover and Beloved unite. Your Divine Beloved surrounds you and sinks into you. 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.

If 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)

Finis

V. Ascent to the One (2+ min.)⁶

The final level of ascent, which is represented by the highest point of the Tetractys, is called in the Mysteries *Perfection* or *Completion*, because it is complete union with The Ineffable One. It is a rare attainment, and if you practice this Theurgy, you will receive it when you are ready for it.

Let's give it a try. Remain in your state of stillness. Relax. Notice any points of tension in your body and relax them. (pause)

Continue to experience your Divine Beloved infusing your being. (pause)

Became aware of the divine power of your Beloved, which shines out, uniting them and you with all the Gods, *daimons*, and mortal beings in mutual love. Breathe in this divine power and feel yourself united with The All. (pause)

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

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)

⁶ This contemplation corresponds to the discussion surrounding the exercise "Union with the Good" (p. 235).

VI. Return (1.5 min)

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 Beloved within you and around you, and allow your mind to become aware slowly of your body, but keep your eyes closed. (pause)

Listen to my words. Remember 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 Divine Love and 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