

Lost Masters:
Rediscovering the Mysticism of
the Ancient Greek Philosophers

(An Eckhart Tolle Edition)

by Linda Johnsen, 2016

Introduction

- The spiritual dimension of Ancient Greek thought is often overlooked
- Knowledge arrived at through rational thinking alone, lacking in awareness that engenders wisdom, is a dangerous thing.
- A person— or even an entire nation— then comes to be virtually possessed by certain patterns within the conditioned mind. When thinking and awareness are in balance, wisdom arises.
- Socrates said: “Wisdom begins in wonder.”
- Why did the Oracle at Delphi call Socrates “the wisest of all men” he replied: “I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing.”

1. The Light of the West

- Stature of the ancient Greek philosophers as spiritual masters
- “Greek” scientists and philosophers, artists, and sages didn’t just come from Greece. There are connections between the Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Persian, and Indian cultures.
- The “mystery religions” that so inspired Greek and Roman civilization were also clearly related to the wisdom of India, especially in their doctrines of karma, reincarnation, and spiritual transcendence.

2. The Mystery Religions

- In the mystery religions, inner experiences of the soul were often acted out, enabling initiates to experience these hidden truths viscerally and have powerful transformative experiences.
- Cave initiations meant to guide the soul to palaces in heaven may have been practiced in Europe for twenty thousand years.
- The famous Eleusinian mysteries also were celebrated, in part, in cave-like enclosures. There the descent of the virgin goddess Persephone (representing the soul) into Hades and her reemergence from the land of the dead were ritually reenacted.
- Persephone eats the seed of a pomegranate—the implications were clear: when the soul desires the fruit of the material world, it becomes trapped in the material world or the world of reincarnation
- Ultimately, Persephone rises gloriously from the land of the dead into real life, the life of spirit.

3. Calming the Savage Heart: Orpheus

- Orpheus was already a legend by the 4th century B.C.E., at the time Aristotle lived. Little is known for certain about his life. Aristotle even mentioned that he had trouble believing Orpheus had ever even existed.
- Born in Thrace (just northeast of Greece in the area we'd call Bulgaria today) sometime before 700 B.C.E. He founded a religious cult based on remaining calm and temperate and he modeled a nonviolent, contemplative lifestyle that included vegetarianism.
- Known to have been educated in Egyptian spirituality and had studied in Egypt.
- Chaos, violence, drunkenness, and sensual overindulgence were often associated with the rites of Dionysus.
- Women were passionate practitioners of this religion. It offered them divine dispensation to throw off the rigid, constricted roles assigned them by Greek society and run wild in the woods.
- Orpheus represented a calmer, more contemplative view of life while maintaining the Dionysian emphasis on nature and beauty.
- Orpheus added a dose of calm to Dionysianism, looking for underlying significance in the timeless myths of Dionysus. He said that Dionysus is the ecstasy of cosmic consciousness, not physical intoxication.
- Thracian women, who were angry that many of their finest men were being seduced away to a reformed religion that seemed to turn its back on the world. In a fit of Dionysian frenzy, the story goes, they attacked Orpheus and ripped his body apart

Connections between Orphic Myths and Christianity

- Orpheus instructed Bacchantes to use bread instead of meat and only small quantities of wine during the rites in which they psychically merged with their savior by eating his “body” and drinking his “blood.”
- In the Orphic mysteries Dionysus, the god of wine, says, “I am the vine, and you are my branches,”
- Amazingly, in John 15: 5, Jesus quotes these very words. Anyone reading this in the first few centuries C.E. would instantly recognize that Jesus was pointedly identifying himself with Dionysus.
- The sacrament of the Last Supper is patterned not on the Jewish meal at Passover, in which an animal is sacrificed and eaten, but on the Orphic ritual, in which the savior himself is devoured.
- The connection between Jesus and Orpheus was not lost on early Christians. Scholars have long noted that in Christian catacombs Jesus was portrayed in Thracian clothing holding a lyre: he is actually shown as Orpheus himself!
- Jesus, like Orpheus, was said to have returned from the dead.

4. Helen's Chalice: Thales

- Thales of Miletus - c. 600 B.C.
 - A stunning golden chalice had been discovered, a priceless find thought to be the legendary drinking bowl Helen had cast into the sea. When the Oracle at Delphi suggested that the Greeks award the golden bowl to the most brilliant man among them, they decided to present it to Thales.
 - Said Thales when he received the bowl: “The bowl does not belong to the men of Cos. Nor does it belong to the men of Miletus. It belongs to the wisest man in Greece.” Finally he sent it back to Apollo’s temple at Delphi with the message, “Apollo is the wisest of all.”
- He was deeply spiritual and believed all of nature is alive and filled with divinity.
- He is from a remarkable group of thinkers scholars today call “the pre-Socratics.”
- Thales correctly predicted eclipses, used geometry, defined the summer and winter solstices, and set up a calendar of 365 days— all skills he would have learned in Egypt.
- Thales went out at night to observe the stars, astronomy being among his greatest interests, and fell into a ditch.
 - “How can you expect to know the secrets of heaven, Thales, when you don’t know what’s in front of your own two feet?”

5. The Spiritual Colony: Pythagoras

- In remote antiquity, the priestess at Eleusis served a serpent deity; Apollo killed the snake and established his own worship at the sacred site. The priestess at Eleusis was called the Pythoness, in honor of the great snake.
 - There are legends that the father of Pythagoras was none other than the god Apollo himself.
 - It is said that the father of Pythagoras, Mnesarchus, named his son after the Pythoness who had foretold his destiny: he called the boy Pythagoras.
- Studied with the renowned physicist Anaximander, and with Thales of Miletus, “the father of science”
- Studied in “The East”:
 - Egypt: Iamblichus, Syrian master of the 3rd century C.E., reported, “Pythagoras visited the important temples in Egypt.”
 - Next stop: Babylon. From the Magi he learned music, mathematics, and other Chaldean sciences.
 - He probably studied with Hindu teachers known to have immigrated to Babylon.
- Pythagoras tried at first to found a community in Samos, rooted in the teachings of Egypt and the East.
 - Finally he moved to southern Italy, where he found better-quality students.
 - Devotees quickly gathered around him, helping him build the famous spiritual colony at Croton.
 - Members shared their goods in common.
- Pythagoras married Theano of Croton, a woman with a reputation for exceptional wisdom and integrity in her own right. She had been raised in the Orphic tradition, and along with her husband was a strong believer in reincarnation.
 - Her daughters Arignote and Myia would go on to become leaders in their community.
- He was the first to use the word cosmos, which meant “an ordered universe.” Harmonious patterns, reverberating from the One, lay at the root of all phenomena, he said.
- This Pythagorean vision of the mathematical principles lying behind nature becomes the foundation of Western science.
- Because of their wisdom and good judgment, the government invited Pythagoras and his chief disciples to arbitrate their disputes. Inevitably involvement in politics was seen as meddling, and enemies began to plot revenge. On one of the darkest days in ancient European history, a group of thugs attacked the community, burning its facilities and killing everyone they could find.

6. The Road to Reality: Parmenides

- Parmenides of Elea. Born in southwestern Italy sometime around 515 B.C.E.,
- Parmenides wrote only one short book— a long poem
 - He described a mythical journey that led him into the presence of a majestic goddess.
 - Eventually, he came to the twin Gates of Day and Night,
 - Finally he met the Goddess of Truth
 - The Goddess teaches Parmenides to distinguish between eternal, unchanging reality and the unstable world of the senses, between the absolute and the relative.
 - At the temple of Delphi a cryptic message inscribed on the wall states simply, “Thou art.” Something that’s really real has no beginning or end, it just is.
- Though recognized as one of ancient Greece’s greatest thinkers, he was also honored as a scientist and healer.
- After Parmenides, every Greek thinker would have to think very carefully about what was “really real.”

7. The Private Investigator: Heraclitus

- Heraclitus, a contemporary of Parmenides who lived in Ephesus
- He was unabashedly arrogant, he rarely had anything good to say about anyone, even Homer.
- Conflict is the very essence of reality. “War is king,”
- Heraclitus became famous because of the only book he ever wrote. No one could understand it.
- “The cosmos was never created, but always was and always will be a living fire, kindled and extinguished in cycles of specific length,”
- Heraclitus emphasized conflict and instability. Everything is always in flux, like a river or a flame.
- Without the interplay of opposites, there would be only stasis, death. Strife is life.
- Contrasting elements contending against each other create a greater harmony.
- Heraclitus attacked the religion of his day, especially the animal sacrifices still widely practiced in his time.
- Heraclitus focused on a more central mystery. “I investigate myself.”
- Heraclitus was inspired by the Persians. Fire was the primary symbol of their religion; for Heraclitus it was the primal metaphor for reality itself.
 - Persia was famous for its astrologers, called Magi, and focus on primeval fire

8. The Man Who Stopped the Wind: Empedocles

- While Heraclitus may have been the least loved Greek sage of his time, Empedocles was probably the most popular.
- Empedocles was born in Sicily, near the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E.,
- He had flashy taste in clothes.
- When he once spotted a young man who was beside himself with rage, about to attack another fellow who'd offended him. Empedocles started strumming soothingly on a lyre.
- Biographers report that he had studied for some time with Pythagorean teachers, as well as with the Persian Magi.
- Empedocles was a vegetarian
- These physical bodies we're forced to wear feel cumbersome and unnatural to our souls, like an itchy new suit that doesn't quite fit.
- Speaking of the great master Pythagoras, Empedocles wrote in a famous poem: There was long ago a man of immense knowledge,
- Picture of Empedocles leaping ecstatically into the volcano remains one of the most heart-stopping images of antiquity.
- Empedocles is primarily remembered as the Greek philosopher who said that nature is made of four elements (earth, water, fire, and air) and two forces (attraction and repulsion, which he described as "love" and "conflict").

9. Atoms and the Void: Democritus

- Democritus, most likely born in northern Greece sometime around 460 B.C.
- Democritus' father was an avid student of the Magi,
- Democritus was an enthusiastic fan of Pythagorean mathematics and may have been motivated to visit Egypt by the fact that Pythagoras had studied there a century earlier.
- He went to study in greater depth with the Magi and the Chaldeans.
- Claimed that matter, though infinitely divisible, could form molecules.
- Consciousness, called *nous*, shaped the vast chaotic mass of primal matter into the form of the universe we recognize today.
- He mentioned that the Sun was a ball of molten metal, not a god). This was a serious charge in Athens in those days, and he was sentenced to death. No less an attorney than Pericles, the greatest statesman in Greek history, defended him in court. Pericles won the case.
- He was so humiliated by the ordeal that, tragically, he committed suicide. But his idea of infinitesimally small pieces of matter had taken hold. According to Democritus, all that exists are atoms and empty space. Worlds come into being as these atoms jostle together.
- Tranquility comes from contentment. People should be happy with what they have.
- Wanting to prove he hadn't simply wasted his time and money over the years, Democritus read his masterwork, *The World System*, out loud in the public forum. His fellow citizens were so impressed they awarded him a small fortune

10. The Man Who Lost a Continent: Plato

- Plato died in 347 B.C.E. at the age of eighty-one.
- Plato was apparently not a popular speaker in his own day. Legend that the students were so bored at his lectures that one by one they got up and left, leaving only a young man named Aristotle still conscientiously taking notes.
- Probing with disingenuous questions that cloaked inexorable logic, Socrates would lead his victims into a mass of self-contradictions, making one after another of Athens' leading citizens look like idiots.
- Young men like Plato followed Socrates on his rounds. It was so much fun to watch their mentor humiliate the city's authority figures.
- When he was accused of impiety, Socrates refused to run. This made Athens' top citizens look not just like idiots but assassins.
- The last day of Socrates' life is chronicled in Plato's ultimate classic, *Phaedo*. He asks the question Is there life after death?
- The death of his mentor in 399 B.C.E. must have been devastating for Plato. He went on to write dozens of short stories called "dialogues," featuring Socrates as the main speaker.
- Travels to Southern Italy, where he studied with the Pythagorean teachers who still lived there.
- Plato eventually was accused of publishing the secret teachings of esoteric groups.
- Plato did make a halfhearted attempt to be discreet about his Pythagorean leanings.
- He believed that a civilization headed by philosopher-kings— men wise, strong, and selfless enough to control the population for the betterment of all— was the solution to many of humanity's worst problems. He was no democrat, observing that many people are just too stupid to be allowed self-rule.
- The orbits of the stars and the magic of music are examples of near perfection we can contemplate in order to draw nearer to God's perfect, transcendent being.
- Fortunately, Plato's writings survived in the Islamic world and were reintroduced to Europe in the fifteenth century.

Myth of Atlantis: Plato

- Through Critias, we hear Solon first learned about Atlantis from the Egyptians when on a pilgrimage to Sais in northern Egypt. Sais said “Solon, you Greeks are like children. You don’t remember your own past. You Greeks, however, remember back only a few generations. “
- “Yet if you knew the truth about your distant ancestors, how they fought off a huge invading army that threatened us all nine thousand years ago, you would be extremely proud.” No sooner had these ancient Greeks freed the enslaved peoples of Europe and Africa than a flood of staggering proportions swept away their world, drowning the Greeks and submerging their armies. This happened because they did not design their society according to principles of harmony and order.
- This vanished continent, which once flourished “outside the pillars of Hercules” in the Atlantic Ocean, had been called Atlantis.

11. The Master of Those Who Know: Aristotle

- We don't know how much time he spent in Plato's presence, since the headmaster traveled a great deal, seeking out esoteric knowledge and attempting to establish a utopian city-state.
- Aristotle became the teacher of Philip's feisty son, the young man we remember today as Alexander the Great.
- Eight years later, Aristotle returned to Athens and opened an academy of his own just northeast of the city. It was called the Lyceum after a nearby grove dedicated to the god Apollo.
- His followers were called Peripatetics, named after the *peripatoi*, or colonnades, of the building where he taught.
- Government charged him with impiety, the same charge for which Socrates,
- Aristotle fled to Chalcis, on the Greek island of Euboea, where he died a natural death
- A happy life, he believed, is a balanced life.
- And we see regularity, not randomness, virtually everywhere we look.
- He wasn't saying the universe is guided by a cosmic mind, as Plato believed. Rather, God is the eternal intelligence outside time and space, the final end toward which all of nature inherently aspires.
- He believed in a substance of mind called the *nous*, associated with divine intelligence. It is a supersensory inner being which functions purely intuitively.

Alexander the Great and India

- The effort to conquer India was a total failure—Alexander's first. Yet while he was there he made several important discoveries.
- He found Indians who spoke Greek and were familiar with the Greek gods.
- So Kalyana agreed to accompany Alexander back to Greece as his guru.
- Pyrrho of Elis, who lived in India for a year and a half. Returning to Greece,
- Pyrrho founded a spiritual school called Skepticism, based in part on what he learned in India.
- Be skeptical of— that is, not to accept at face value— knowledge provided by the mind or senses.

12. Apollonius Was Like the Sun: Apollonius

- 1st century CE, one of the most famous men of antiquity
- Remembered as a healer with powers of nearly mythical proportions.
- Traveled the empire with a small band of devoted disciples, urging people to live virtuously, abandon greed and luxury, and care for the poor and oppressed. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead.
- Many hailed him as the greatest prophet of his era, a man who routinely performed miracles and who transformed lives through his inspired teaching.
- Known to have visited India. Wrote a four-volume work describing the teachings he received from the yogis, calling for reform of religion and society along the Indian model.
- Devout follower of Pythagoras
- On his travels, he paused for nearly two years in Babylon to visit the Magi, Zoroastrian priests
- Apollonius visited the city of Taxila (India?) and was shocked. “You speak Greek? Why did you conceal this?” He met Iarchas, guru of the mountain yogis. Apollonius received intensive yogic training with the Indian guru.
- Priests and priestesses in Greek and Roman temples were merely going through the motions of spiritual life. Apollonius rekindled their enthusiasm for spiritual practice.
- Apollonius decided to visit Egypt. He spent years in Egypt and made the long journey up the Nile to visit the Ethiopian ascetics who sought spiritual truths in the desert.
- Called to Rome to answer charges of sorcery instigated by his enemy, the emperor Domitian.
- One day, in his nineties, Apollonius simply walked out the door and was never seen again.
- Remains to this day an important figure in Islamic esotericism.

13. The Priest of Delphi: Plutarch

- Plutarch was the Priest of the Temple of Delphi, the spiritual center of the Greek world.
- Well-educated and deeply spiritual man.
- Born about 45 C.E. in central Greece, he studied at the Platonic Academy in Athens, then moved to Rome,
- For more than twenty years he also served the god Apollo at Delphi
- Best remembered as the author of Lives, biographies of leading figures in Greece and Rome.
- Warmly in support of women.
- Like many educated people of his day, Plutarch was well versed in the culture and philosophy of Egypt.
- Considered seven theories about the nature of the gods.
- The part submerged in the body is called the mind (psyche in Greek), but that part which remains above is the Higher Self (the nous).”
- “Many wrongly assume the Higher Self is somehow part of the mind, but that’s as mistaken as supposing the mind is part of the body.
- Sooner or later, the Self separates from the mind. Then the cast-off mind disintegrates in the mental world just as the cast-off body decays in the physical world.

14. From the Alone to the Alone: Plotinus

- Plotinus was born in Egypt eighteen hundred years ago.
- At the age of twenty-seven (around 231 C.E.), Plotinus met his master, Ammonius Saccas, who made his disciples swear to strict secrecy.
- Found himself instead in Rome, where he started a small school and began teaching a type of spirituality scholars today call Neoplatonism.
- Eventually Plotinus' students included not only other famous philosophers such as Porphyry
- Augustine considered Plotinus a sort of reincarnation of Plato
- When rabbis in medieval France discovered Plotinus' doctrines, they blended them into Jewish mysticism, reshaping Kabbalah into the form we know today.
- Deep within, the soul remembers its true nature. This recollection motivates it to begin meditating.” Remembrance of one's real nature is called *anamnesis*
- Plotinus believed that all great art comes from the inner world.
- Mathematics is a tool that Plotinus suggested philosophically oriented people can use to help them learn one-pointed concentration on nonmaterial realities.
- Now bring the vision inside yourself, as if you are that all-pervading God who holds the universe within himself.
- He used a mandala or spherical mental object as the point of departure for his meditation.
- So at the root of the cosmos lies an infinite, unified intelligence. Because of this, meaning is inherent in all things.
- “Try to unite the divinity in yourself with the divine in all things.”
- Story about Augustine of Hippo on his deathbed - As he gazed into the unblinking eyes of eternity, he didn't ask his students to bring him the Gospels or any Christian homilies. Instead he asked for his beloved copy of Plotinus' Enneads.

15. The Work of Enlightenment: Iamblichus

- Came from the city of Chalcis in the province of Syria. It was the third century C.E.;
- Iamblichus (Latin, Yamliku in Syrian), one of the most respected spiritual masters of the ancient Western world.
- Influence from Zoroastrian and Chaldean roots
- Iamblichus' interests led him to one of the most respected teachers of his time, the learned and influential philosopher Porphyry, one of the best known disciples of Plotinus
 - Plotinus was a saint and a meditator. Porphyry, however, was an intellectual who spent his time writing and teaching. Porphyry hoped to permanently root his awareness in the One.
 - Porphyry preserved Plotinus, the master's words for future generations.
 - Iamblichus was dissatisfied, however, with Porphyry's overly analytical approach and antipathy to rituals and said philosophy alone is not enough to lead one to enlightenment.
 - Divine reality could be more than a topic of philosophical debate; it could be a living experience.
- He based his rituals on the Egyptian, Chaldean, and Assyrian systems he had studied in which the seeker aligned himself with the cosmic forces that drove the universe.
- His classic work *On the Mysteries*, explaining how seekers can tell if their spiritual experiences are authentic.
- The second tier of spiritual practices involved working with mantras. This is "Devotional music," he wrote, "elevates our spirit because it reminds us of the divine harmonies experienced in higher worlds before we entered our physical body."
- Through properly performed rituals and correctly pronounced mantras, we can activate the *sympatheia*, or "sympathetic links," between ourselves and higher realities. When we finally master this process we too may be able to "speak" a thought and see it become a physical reality.
- Releasing all physical and mental activity and resting in pure awareness itself. This condition, called *henosis*,
- His rituals incorporated gems with certain qualities, plants, fragrances, and other carefully chosen objects designed to synchronize the participants with particular cosmic forces. Black seeds, lapis lazuli, or dark pieces of rough cloth might be used to align oneself ritually with the dark and destructive energies associated with the planet Saturn and to balance these energies.

16. The Shepherd of Men: Hermes Trismegistus

- In 1460, Cosimo De Medici stumbled across a manuscript that rocked the foundations of Europe.
- *Corpus Hermetica*, a collection of discourses by the legendary Egyptian master Hermes.
- Cosimo expressed his indebtedness to the priest philosophers of Egypt.
- Hermes Trismegistus was felt to be the greatest spiritual teacher Egypt ever produced.
- The ancient master was called Tehowti by the Egyptians (mispronounced “Thoth” by the Greeks)
- Egypt’s greatest priest, scientist, and engineer and was thus “three times great.”
- Ficino worked day and night, completing the work of translating before Cosimo passed away. His translation of the *Corpus Hermetica* would become one of the most influential books of the next hundred years,
- Internal textual evidence suggests it was originally composed in Greek, not translated into Greek from Egyptian, as Cosimo believed. Represents what Greek speakers simply imagined the ancient Egyptian teachings must have been. Written by native Egyptians borrowing the language and philosophical vocabulary of their Greek rulers.
- Hermetic treatises were included in the ancient Christian library unearthed near Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945.
- The Greek-speaking Hermetists made much of this doctrine of the logos, the divine word.
- word as the creative energy of the Supreme Being, the power of divine thought.

17. The Golden Chain: Proclus

- Proclus was born in Byzantium around 410 C.E.
- The lineage the ancients called the Golden Chain, the stream of spiritual knowledge that entered Greece through Orpheus and Pythagoras, that flowed through Plato and Plotinus, and that poured so generously through Proclus' study manuals and lectures.
- Athena, goddess of wisdom, appeared to him in a vision and advised him to go to her city to study philosophy
- Initiated into the spiritual practices of this lineage by Asclepigenia, one of the leading women teachers in the tradition.
- At twenty-five, Proclus became the youngest teacher ever to head the illustrious Academy.
- Capacity for work was nearly miraculous.
- Quick temper.
- Chaldean wisdom tradition influence. The most important Chaldean text known by the Greeks, the amazing Chaldean Oracles.
- It's the third body, an astral or "starlike" body that Proclus says endures forever. This is our Higher Self.
- He wrote of special pure souls who descend into physical bodies in order to serve humanity.
- The Creator, sometimes called the Demiurge or World Soul, is not identical with the One.
- Proclus taught that we must master the state of transcendental consciousness, which Proclus called henosis, an intuitive state of living unity with all things.
- His scientific insights were astonishing for his time.
- Proclus was the last of his kind; not long after his death authorities closed the great Greek universities, burned their books, and drove their teachers out of Europe.
- (We're told he spent his last hours reciting the hymns of Orpheus.)

18. Extinguishing the Light: Alexandria

- Tragically, in 391 C.E. the Christian patriarch Theophilus, convinced that no books other than Christian scripture were worth reading, ordered the Library of Alexandria burned to the ground. It was one of the greatest crimes against humanity ever committed.
- Theon of Alexandria - his daughter Hypatia was said to outshine him. scientist— Neoplatonist,
- Her seminars were immensely popular, and her students that they adored her. For her scholarship, scientific ability, and skill as an educator she was showered with awards.
- Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria, was consumed with hatred for this great woman. She was a demoness from hell.
- In 415 C.E. a Christian mob, instigated by Cyril, attacked Hypatia in the street.. (Today, however, the Roman Catholic Church hails Cyril as a saint.)
- 380 C.E. the emperor Theodosius I declared Christianity to be the Roman state religion. A series of edicts ordered that the old Greek and Roman temples be destroyed. People barricaded themselves inside the temples, trying to save their sacred sites, but they were hacked to death or pulled out and crucified and books were confiscated and burned.
- in 529 the Christian emperor Justinian ordered Plato's Academy in Athens closed forever. Thinking for oneself had literally become illegal.
- Many pagans felt uneasy with these claims. Their perspective was that many virgin-born "sons of God," such as Hercules, had appeared in the past. They noted that the Christians' sacred rite of Holy Communion was unmistakably patterned on Orphic ritual; the cult of the Virgin Mother was incorporated into Christianity directly from the Egyptian Isis religion; the doctrine of a risen savior had been brought over from Mithraism; and the idea of a battle against Satan and a final day of judgment were obviously borrowed from Zoroastrianism. Jesus had no doubt been a great teacher and healer, they felt, but so were numerous pagan saints, such as Apollonius of Tyana.
- This confused pagan observers, who thought the Christians worshiped a number of different gods themselves, including a Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Christianity Arrives

- Much easier path than the older Greek traditions, where teachers like Iamblichus and Proclus insisted that in order to free yourself from the wheel of rebirth, you had to do your own spiritual homework. In Christianity, Jesus had done it for you.
- In his book *Against the Christians*, Porphyry went through the Gospels passage by passage, raising a host of objections.
- In his *Enneads*, Plotinus also expressed his reservations about Christianity as it was being taught in Rome at that time. “They say look to God, without offering any instruction how to do so.
- Meditation, reincarnation, vegetarianism, spiritual practices designed to turn us inward, and a recognition of the essential unity of all things to be purely Eastern. We’ve forgotten that these teachings were once an integral part of our own Western spiritual heritage.
- Very early Christian texts, some as old as the books of the New Testament, that cast astonishing new light on Jesus’ teaching.
- Earliest generations of Christians were avid readers of Plato and the *Corpus Hermetica*?
- Acknowledge not only the fatherhood but also the motherhood of the Supreme Being
- Real resurrection is not the resurrection of the dead body but of the living soul from the tomb of its body—
- Jesus repeatedly explains that the soul existed before it was born in a physical body,
- The poet T. S. Eliot wrote movingly of returning to the point from which we started our journey, and truly seeing it for the first time.
- All appear very different externally, their mystical inner cores are remarkably similar.
- Plato was right when he said the soul remembers the truth when it hears it again?

19. The India Connection

- Socrates was making the point that knowledge of real value comes through the guru-disciple relationship.
- “Living instruction directly from a person who knows the subject” is vastly superior to the written word.
- Written information was always meant to be generously supplemented with personal instruction from a qualified teacher.
- True understanding could be passed only from one mind directly to another. Consciousness itself, not paper, was the only fitting medium for wisdom.
- Socrates, had a “spirit guide.” All with the help of this inner muse.
- Divine intelligence wasn’t sealed away in heaven but was accessible to human awareness through superconscious states.
- The later Greek tradition concerned itself with henosis, a state of consciousness in which an individual knows an object (perhaps even God) by merging with it completely.
- Archetypes, patterns that exist in the mental universe, or Cosmic Mind.
- Plato says, on the contrary, that when consciousness impresses itself on matter, chaos is transformed into cosmos, order emerges from entropy, and lifeless rock becomes living, organic matter.
- Shared cultural roots deep in Indo-European antiquity.
- We forget that even in antiquity these regions were linked by the Near Eastern civilizations in between them, such as the Assyrians and Chaldeans, and later the Persians. Trade between these regions has been going on for at least five thousand years; couldn’t ideas as well as merchandise have crossed borders?

20. Exploring Our Western Heritage

Some Reading of interest:

- Netherworld by Robert Temple.
- Have You Been to Delphi? by Roger Lipsey.
- Peter Kingsley's book Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic is
- John A. Vella's Aristotle: A Guide for the Perplexed.
- are Return to the One by Brian Hines and Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision by Pierre Hadot (translated by Michael Chase),
- The Way of Hermes by Clement Salaman,
- Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science by Lucas Siorvanes.
- The Emperor Julian by Constance Head
- The Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius,
- In this deeply moving work, the author grapples with the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people