

Pythagoras: The First Philosopher and Discoverer of the Forty-seventh Problem of Euclid

Many strange legends have been preserved concerning the birth of Pythagoras. Some maintained that he was no mortal man: that he was one of the gods who had taken a human body to enable him to come into the world and instruct the human race.

This most famous philosopher was born sometime between 600 and 590 B.C., and the length of his life has been estimated at nearly one hundred years.

It is said that Mnesarchus, the father of Pythagoras, was in the city of Delphi on matters pertaining to his business as a merchant, when he and his wife, Parthenis, decided to consult the oracle of Delphi as to whether the Fates were favorable for their return voyage to Syria. When Pythoness (prophetess of Apollo) seated herself on the golden tripod over the yawning vent of the oracle, she did not ask, but told Mnesarchus that his wife was then with child and would give birth to a son who was destined to surpass all men in beauty and wisdom, and who throughout the course of his life would contribute much to the benefit of mankind. Mnesarchus was so deeply impressed by the prophecy that he changed his wife's name to **Pythasis**, in honor of the Pythian priestess. When the child was born at Sidon in Phoenicia, it was, as the oracle had said, a son. Mnesarchus and Pythasis named the child Pythagoras, for they believed that he had been predestined by the oracle.

The teachings of Pythagoras indicate that he was thoroughly conversant with the precepts of Oriental and Occidental esotericism. He traveled among the Jews and was instructed among the Rabbins concerning the secret traditions of Moses, the lawgiver of Israel. Later the School of the Essenes was conducted chiefly for the purpose of interpreting the Pythagorean symbols. Pythagoras was initiated into the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Chaldean Mysteries. Although it is believed by some that he was a disciple of **Zoroaster**, it is doubtful whether his instructor of that name was the God-man revered by the Parsees.¹

¹The Secret Teachings Of All Ages, Manley P. Hall, The Philosophical Research Society, Inc., Los Angeles, California, 1978, pg. LXV.

The Parsees are among the leadership in India and Pakistan. Our God talks of them fondly in the Bible. Parsees have been good to the people of God from Old Testament times to this day. In the Old Testament, the Babylonians destroyed the Temple of God, and took away people on whom God had placed His Name. The Babylonians, thereby, dishonored our God.

When the Persians conquered Babylon, they restored the Temple of God, the people of God, and thereby the honor of our God. These Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes belonged specifically to the Parsee people group.

Today, in India, many Parsee property owners graciously allow Evangelical churches to hold their weekend worship services on their properties for free or for negligible rent.²

On his return to Europe, Pythagoras established his celebrated school at **Crotona**, much resembling that subsequently adopted by the Freemasons. His school soon acquired such a reputation that the disciples flocked to him from all parts of Greece and Italy. Pythagoras taught as the principal dogma of his philosophy the system of *metempsychosis*, or the transmigration of souls. He taught the mystical power of numbers, and much of the symbolism on that subject which we now possess is derived from what has been left to us by his disciples, for of his own writings there is nothing extant. He was also a geometrician, and is regarded as having been the inventor or several problems, the most important of which is that now known as the forty-seventh problem of Euclid.³

The true key to philosophic mathematics is the famous Forty-seventh Proposition of Pythagoras, erroneously attributed to Euclid. The Forty-seventh Theorem is stated thus: "In a right-angled triangle the square described on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares described in the other two sides."

²Who Are The Parsees?, Web Directory Site, June 5, 2001, pg. 1.

³A New & Revised Edition, An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, Albert G. Makey, M.D., 33°, Volume II, The Masonic History Company, Chicago, New York, London, 1921, pg. 602.

The Forty-seventh Problem is an important Masonic symbol and because of its close connection to the builder's art is often called the "carpenter's theorem." It is believed that many of the complicated mathematical details of the Great Pyramid were based upon now unknown applications of this theorem. The Forty-seventh Problem is the key to the relationship between the three major parts of man: spirit, body, and soul. In this analogy the number 3 symbolizes spirit, 4 body, and 5 soul. According to the alchemist the Forty-seventh Proposition set forth the proper proportions of salt, sulphur, and mercury necessary to the formation of the Philosopher's Stone. There is also a close correspondence between the three Grand Masters of the Masonic Lodge of Jerusalem and the three squares involved in the Forty-seventh Problem.⁴

While accounts of his travels differ, historians agree that he visited many countries and studied at the feet of many masters.⁵

Pythagoras was said to have been the first man to call himself **philosopher**; in fact, the world is indebted to him for the word philosopher. Before that time the wise men called themselves **sages**, which was interpreted to mean *those who know*. Pythagoras was more modest. He coined the word *philosopher*, which he defined as *one who is attempting to find out*.⁶

When he was about sixty years old, Pythagoras married one of his disciples, and seven children resulted from the union. His wife was a remarkably able woman, who not only inspired him during the years of his life but after his assassination continued to promulgate his doctrines.

As is so often the case with genius, Pythagoras by his outspokenness incurred both political and personal enmity. Among those who came for initiation was one who, because Pythagoras refused to admit him, determined to destroy both the man and his philosophy. By means of false propaganda, this disgruntled one turned the minds of the common people against the philosopher. Without warning,

⁴The Secret Teachings Of All Ages, pg. LXVIIIc.

⁵Ibid, pg. LXV.

⁶Ibid, pg. LXV.

a band of murderers descended upon the little group of buildings where the great teacher and his disciples dwelt, burned the structures and killed Pythagoras.

Accounts of the philosopher's death do not agree. Some say that he was murdered with his disciples; others that, on escaping from **Crotona** with a small band of followers, he was trapped and burned alive by his enemies in a little house where the band had decided to rest for the night. Another account states that, finding themselves trapped in the burning structure, the disciples threw themselves into the flames, making of their own bodies a bridge over which Pythagoras escaped, only to die of a broken heart a short time afterwards as the result of grieving over the apparent fruitlessness of his efforts to serve and illuminate mankind.⁷

His surviving disciples attempted to perpetuate his doctrines, but they were persecuted on every hand and very little remains today as a testimonial of the greatness of this philosopher.⁸

However, Robert Morris, as he was sailing near Crotona, on the eastern coast of Italy, recalled the name and labors of Pythagoras, commemorated in the *Freemason's Monitor* in these words: "Our ancient friend and brother, the great Pythagoras, who, in his travels through Asia, Africa, and Europe, was initiated into several orders of priesthood and raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason." Here, at Crotona, his celebrated school of philosophy was established about 539 B.C., in which the sciences enumerated in the Fellow-Crafts Lecture were inculcated, namely, grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.

⁷Ibid, pg. LXV.

⁸The Secret Teachings of All Ages, pg. LXV.

Masonic honors are paid to Pythagoras as the reputed discoverer of the Forty-seventh problem of Euclid, thus acknowledged in the *Monitor*: “This wise philosopher enriched his mind abundantly in a general knowledge of things, and more especially in Geometry or Masonry; on this subject he drew out many problems and theorems, and among the most distinguished he erected this, which, in the joy of his heart, he called *Eureka*, in the Grecian language signifying *I have found it!* and upon the discovery of which he is said to have sacrificed a hecatomb. It teaches Masons to be general lovers of the arts and sciences.”⁹

It is not uncommon that the old Masons should have called Pythagoras their “ancient friend and brother,” and should have dedicated to him one of their geometrical symbols, the forty-seventh problem of Euclid; an epithet and a custom that have, by the force of habit, been retained in all the modern rituals.¹⁰

“The great philosopher, Pythagoras, who, by the superiority of his mind, infused a new spirit into the science and learning of Greece, and founded the Italic sect, taught his disciples Geometry that they might be able to deduce a reason for all their thoughts and actions, and to ascertain correctly the truth or falsehood of any proposition by the unerring process of mathematical demonstration. Thus being able to contemplate the reality of things and to detect imposture and deceit, they were pronounced to be on the road to perfect happiness. Such was the discipline and teaching of the Pythagorean Lodges.”¹¹

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August 31, 2005

⁹Freemasonry In the Holy Land or Handmarks of Hiram’s Builders: Robert Morris, L.L.D., Published for the Author by Knight & Leonard, Printers, Chicago, 1877, pp. 45-46.

¹⁰A New & Revised Edition, An Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry, pg. 603.

¹¹The History of Freemasonry: Albert Gallatin Mackey, M.D., 33^o, The Masonic History Company, New York and London, 1906, pg. 1736.