

JAMBlichUS - IAMBlichUS



The Life of Iamblichus

Iamblichus (c. 250-c. 330), the Neo-Platonist philosopher, was born in Chalcis, Coele-Syria better known as the Beqaa valley of Phoenicia (Lebanon). Iamblichus (a.k.a. Jamblichus) was a pupil of one of the first disciples of the philosopher Porphyry, Anatolius, the peripatetic, before being a disciple of Porphyry itself. While a student of Porphyry in Rome, he came under the influence of the Greek Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus. When Porphyry died, Iamblichus succeeded him as the head of the neoplatonic school. Back home, he established his own school, which attempted to fuse the ideas of Plato, those of the Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras, and Hermetic and the magical literature into a single coherent system. Iamblichus succeeded in transforming the purely intellectual Neo-Platonist of Plotinus into an even more spiritual form of Greco-Roman religious philosophy that include myths, rites, and magical formulas. Eunapius left us his account of Iamblichus' life:

After these men came a very celebrated philosopher, Iamblichus, who was of illustrious ancestry and belonged to an opulent and prosperous family. His birthplace was Chalcis, a city in

inner Phoenicia. As a pupil of Anatolius, who ranks next after Porphyry, he made great progress and attained the highest distinction in philosophy. Then leaving Anatolius he attached himself to Porphyry, and in no respect was he inferior to Porphyry except in harmonious structure and force of style. (...) But because he practiced justice he gained an easy access to the ears of the Gods; so much so that he had a multitude of disciples, and those who desired learning flocked to him from all parts. And it is hard to decide who among them was the most distinguished, for con-patriots Sopater was of their number, a man who was most eloquent both in his speeches and writings; and Aedesius and Eustathius from Cappadocia; while from Greece came Theodorus and Euphrasius, men of superlative virtue, and a crowd of other men not inferior in their powers of oratory, so that it seemed marvelous that he could satisfy them all; and indeed in his devotion to them all he never spared himself.

Occasionally, however, he did perform certain rites alone, apart from his friends and disciples, when he worshipped the Divine Being. But for the most part he conversed with his pupils and was unexact in his mode of life and of an ancient simplicity. As they drank their wine he used to charm those present by his conversation and filled them as with nectar. And they never ceased to desire this pleasure and never could have too much of it, so that they never gave him any peace; and they appointed the most eloquent among them to represent them, and asked: "O master, most inspired, why do you thus occupy yourself in solitude, instead of sharing with us your more perfect wisdom? Nevertheless a rumor has reached us through your slaves that when you pray to the Gods you soar aloft from the earth more than ten cubits to all appearance; that your body and your garments change to a beautiful golden hue; and presently when your prayer is ended your body becomes as it was before you prayed, and then you come down to earth and associate with us." Iamblichus was not at all inclined to laughter, but he laughed at these remarks. And he answered them thus: "He who thus deluded you was a witty fellow; but the facts are otherwise. For the future however you shall be present at all that goes on." This was the sort of display that he made; and the report of it reached the author of this work from his teacher Chrysanthius of Sardis. He was a pupil of Aedesius, and Aedesius was one of the leading disciples of Iamblichus, and one of those who spoke to him as I have said. He said that there occurred the following sure manifestations of his divine nature. The sun was traveling towards the limits of the Lion at the time when it rises along with the constellation called the Dog. It was the hour for sacrifice, and this had been made ready in one of the suburban villas belonging to Iamblichus. Presently when the rites had been duly performed and they were returning to the city, walking slowly and at their leisure, -- for indeed their conversation was about the Gods as was in keeping with the sacrifice -- suddenly Iamblichus even while conversing was lost in thought, as though his voice were cut off, and for some moments he fixed his eyes steadily on the ground and then looked up at his friends and called to them in a loud voice: "Let us go by another road, for a dead body has lately been carried along this way." After saying this he turned into another road which seemed to be less impure, and some of them turned aside with him, who thought it was a shame to desert their teacher. But the greater number and the more obstinate of his disciples, among who was Aedesius, stayed where they were, ascribing the occurrence to a portent and scenting like hounds for the proof. And very soon those who had buried the dead man came back. But even so the disciples did not desist but inquired whether they had passed along this road." We had to," they replied, "for there was no other road." But they testified also to a still more marvelous incident. When they kept pestering

Iamblichus and saying that this that I have just related was a trifle, and perhaps due to a superior sense of smell, and that they wished to test him in something more important, his reply to them was: "Nay, that does not rest with me, but wait for the appointed hour." Some time after, they decided to go to *Gadara*, a place which has warm baths in the area, inferior only to those at Baiae in Italy, with which no other baths can be compared. So they set out in the summer season. Now he happened to be bathing and the others were bathing with him, and they were using the same insistence, whereupon Iamblichus smiled and said: "It is irreverent to the Gods to give you this demonstration, but for your sakes it shall be done." There were two hot springs smaller than the others but prettier, and he bade his disciples ask the natives of the place by what names they used to be called in former times. When they had done his bidding they said: "There is no pretense about it, this spring is called Eros, and the name of the one next to it is Anteros." He at once touched the water with his hand -- he happened to be sitting on the ledge of the spring where the overflow runs off -- and uttering a brief summons he called forth a boy from the depth of the spring. He was white skinned and of medium height, his locks were golden and his back and breast shone; and he exactly resembled one who was bathing or had just bathed. His disciples were overwhelmed with amazement, but Iamblichus said, "Let us go to the next spring," and he rose and led the way, with a thoughtful air. Then he went through the same performance there also, and summoned another Eros like the first in all respects, except that his hair was darker and fell loose in the sun. Both the boys embraced Iamblichus and clung closely to him as though he were a real father. He restored them to their proper places and went away after his bath, revered by his pupils. After this the crowd of his disciples sought no further evidence, but believed everything from the proofs that had been revealed to them, and hung on to him as though by an unbreakable chain. Even more astonishing and marvelous things were related of him, but I wrote down none of these since I thought it a hazardous and sacrilegious thing to introduce a spurious and fluid tradition into a stable and well-founded narrative. Nay even this I record not without hesitation, as being mere hearsay, except that I follow the lead of men who, thought they distrusted other signs, were converted by the experience of the actual revelation. Yet no one of his followers recorded it, as far as I know. And this I say with good reason, since Aedesius himself asserted that he had not written about it, nor had any other ventured to do so. (...) He (Alypius) died an old man, in Alexandria, and after him died Iamblichus after putting forth many roots and springs of philosophy. The author of this narrative had the good fortune to benefit by the crop that sprang therefrom. For others of his disciples who have been mentioned were scattered in all directions over the whole Roman Empire. (Excerpts from "Lives of the Sophists" by Eunapius.)

The Works by Iamblichus

His work was considerable, and the most sensible loss has been the *Chaldean Theology* quoted by Damascius, from which five books have survived belonging to the "Collection of Pythagorean opinions":

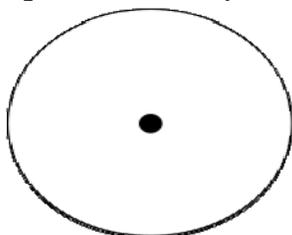
1. *The Life of Pythagoras*;
2. the *Protreptic*, were can be found the one by the platonic Aristotle;
3. "De communi mathematica scientia";
4. *In Nicomachi (Geraseni) mathematicam introductionem*; a treaty with the meaning of the numbers, and maybe the anonymous work *Theologumena arithmeticae*.

Strobe has preserved important fragments from *De anima*, also from the *Letters* to Macedonius

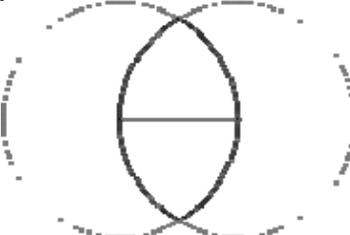
and to Sopater *About destiny*, to Dexippos and to Sopater *About dialectic*; and there are no more doubts about the authenticity of *De mysteriis* (On The Mysteries).

It is strange that the old Freemasons, when inventing their legend, which gave so prominent a place to Pythagoras as "an ancient friend and brother," should have entirely forgotten his biographer, Jamblichas, whose claims to their esteem and veneration are much greater than those of the Samian sage. Jamblichus was a Neo-Platonist philosopher, who was born at Chalcis, in Calo, Syria, *though Anjar in Bequaa, Lebanon* has also been suggested as the site of ancient Chalcis and flourished in the fourth century. He was a pupil of Porphyry, and was deeply versed in the philosophic systems of Plato and Pythagoras, and, like the latter, had studied the mystical theology of the Egyptians and Chaldeans whose divine origin and truth he attempts to vindicate.

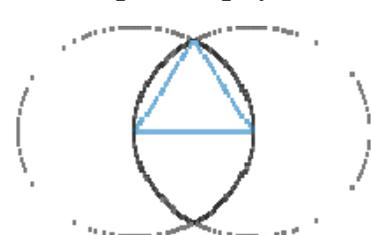
He maintained that man, through hermit rites and ceremonies, might commune with the Deity; and hence he attached great importance to initiation as the means of inculcating truth. He carried his superstitious veneration for numbers and numerical formula to a far greater extent than did the school of Pythagoras; so that all the principles of his philosophy can be represented by numbers. Thus, he taught that one, or the monad; was the principle of all unity as well as diversity, the duad, or two, was the intellect; three, the soul; four, the principle of universal harmony; eight, the source of motion; nine, perfection; and ten, the result of all the emanations of the to en. It will thus be seen that Jamblichus, while adopting the general theory of numbers that distinguished the Pythagorean School, differed very materially in his explanations. He wrote many philosophical works on the basis of these principles, and was the author of a Life of Pythagoras, and a Treatise of the Mysteries. Of all the ancient philosophers, his system assimilates him most if not in its details, at least in its spirits to the mystical and symbolic character of the Masonic philosophy.



The Monad



The Dyad



The Triad

At the head of his system, Iamblichus placed the transcendent incommunicable "One", the *monad*, whose first principle is intellect, *nous*. Immediately after the absolute One, Iamblichus introduced a second super-existent "One" to stand between it and 'the many' as the producer of intellect, or soul, *psyche*. This is the initial *dyad*. The first and highest One (*nous*), which Plotinus represented under the three stages of (objective) being, (subjective) life, and (realized) intellect, is distinguished by Iamblichus into spheres of intelligible and intellectual, the latter sphere being the domain of thought, the former of the objects of thought. These three entities, the *psyche*, and the *nous* split into the intelligible and the intellectual, form a *triad*.

This philosopher was a disciple of Porphyry, and died about 333 A.D. He says:—

"If the soul rises up to the gods, she becomes god-like and able to know the *above* and the *below*; she then obtains the power to heal diseases, to make useful inventions, to institute wise laws. Man has no intuitive power of his own; his intuition is the result of the connection existing between his soul and the Divine Spirit; the stronger this union grows, the greater will be his intuition, spiritual knowledge. Not all the perceptions of the soul are of a divine character; there are also many images which are the products of the lower activity of the soul in her mixture with material elements. Divine Nature, being the eternal fountain of Life, produces no deceptive images; but if her activity is perverted, such deceptive images may appear. If the mind of man is illumined by the Divine Light, the ethereal vehicle of his soul becomes filled with light and shining."

1. Masonic dictionary.com

2 Original Edition Published in Boston and London, 1890 by The Theosophical Society and Occult Publishing Company

3 Between Eros and Anteros: The Teachings of Iamblichus, article by Leonard George

Eros and Self: Iamblichus on the Paradoxes of Consciousness, article by Leonard George, Ph.D., R.Psych

4 Wikipedia