

# "Prayer" vs "Choice and Avoidance"

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[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

since he was a materialist perhaps he did not do any prayer.

Philódēmos records Epíkouros of having written that "it is fitting for us to pray". In *On Piety*, he affirms that their opponents observed the Epicureans to share "propitious offerings and sincere and sonorous prayers" to the gods. So, *even then*, the opponents of Epíkouros, who accuse him of being impious, *still* document ancient Epicureans to have engaged in "sonorous prayers".

What *kind* of prayers? At least, whatever was being recited at the local *theatron*. Since it is not otherwise specified, I imagine they would have used the available prayers, just as they patronized the available civic festivals and available religious rituals provided in Attica. Perhaps a traditional hymn in Athens would have provided familiarity and calm, like our yearly Christmas tunes:

## ORPHIC HYMN 15 (TO ZEUS)

Zeus invaluable, Zeus imperishable, here, *you see*, we [bear] testimony: you [are] to be revered, delivering and pre-eminent. Oh, King — by your lead it was revealed on this account, divine, Earth, Goddess, Mother, mountains and resounding cliffs, both sea and all, as high as heaven, positioned within, Zeus Timekeeper, sceptered, thundering, wild, All-Generator, beginning of all, and end of all, Earthquaker, Increaser, Purifyer, All-Shaker, Flashing, Thundering, Electrifying, Nourishing Zeus; Hear me, One-of-Changing-Form, permit, *then*, immaculate health, and peace, Goddess, and immaculate magnificence of wealth.

Ζεῦ πολυτίμητε, Ζεῦ ἄφθιτε, τήνδε τοι ἡμεῖς  
μαρτυρίαν τιθέμεσθα λυτήριον ἠδὲ πρόσευξιν.  
ὦ βασιλεῦ, διὰ σὴν κεφαλὴν ἐφάνη τάδε θεῖᾱς,  
γαῖα θεὰ μήτηρ ὀρέουσά θ' ὑψηχέες ὄχθοι,  
καὶ πόντος καὶ πάνθ', ὀπόσ' οὐρανὸς ἐντὸς ἕταξε  
Ζεῦ Κρόνιε, σκηπτοῦχε, καταιβάτα, ὄμβριμόθυμε,  
παντογένεθλ', ἀρχὴ πάντων, πάντων τε τελευτή,  
σεισίχθων, ἀύξητά, καθάρσιε, παντοτινάκτα,  
ἀστραπαῖε, βρονταῖε, κεραύνιε, φυτάλιε Ζεῦ ·

κλυθί μευ, αϊολόμορφε, δίδου δ' ὑγίειαν ἀμεμψῆ  
εἰρήνην τε θεᾶν καὶ πλοῦτου δόξαν ἄμεμπτον.

*Zeú polytímēte, Zeú áphthite, tēnde toi ēmeís  
martyrían tithémestha lytérion édè próseuxin.  
ó basileû, dià sēn kephalēn ephánē táde theías ,  
gaîa theà métēr oréousa th' hypsēkhées ókhthoi,  
kaí póntos kaí pánth', opós' ouíanòs éntos étaxe  
Zeú Krónie, skēptóúkhe, kataibáta, ombrimóthyme,  
pantogénethl', árkhē pántōn, pántōn te teleuté,  
seisíkhthōn, auzēntá, kathársie, pantotinákta,  
ástrapaeîe, brontaèe, keraünie, phytálie Zeú;  
klythí meυ, aïolómorphe, dídou d' ygíeian ámempthē  
eirénēn te theàn kaì ploútou dóxan ámempton.*

I'm sure most of us here both reject the narrative of the nativity, while also enjoying a few Christmas songs that were inspired by the celebrations related to the mythic birth of Christ. I have to imagine that Epicureans were the same in their preference for familiar comforts.

The key point is the rejection of intercessory prayer. Usually, we imply "intercessory" in the modern world when we say "prayer" to mean wish-fulfillment. Rather, as he writes in *On Lifecourses*, **we pray "in order that [...] we may realize our fulfilments and social conformity with the laws"** (Philódēmos, *On Piety*). Indeed, "prayers and obeisances and such honours for the gods are fitting".

Philódēmos also reports Epíkouros of having written in *On Lifecourses* that "to pray in natural for us", so, in the *first* place, prayer developed organically, like we developed the forms of gods in ancient dreams, so the act of praying precedes the composition of religious hymns. Then, also, there wasn't a great need for an Epicurean founder to craft a prayer that could be privileged by Epicureans as a proper, Epicurean prayer. Any prayer can be an Epicurean prayer so long as the supplicant is not requesting that the object of their reverence perform magic.

...but, in such the event that we needed one, I gave it a [shot](#) a while ago:

## **AN EPICUREAN HYMN TO HĒDONĒ**

PLEASURESS Blessed, PLEASURESS Incorruptible, to *this*, truly, we  
are disposed, *testimony*, both liberating and therepeutic;  
Oh, Queen, because of your divine image, the good life was disclosed,  
*flavor, fragrance, radiance, warmth*, oh, Goddess Fruitful,  
and the immortal good of *friendship*, oh, Mother Bountiful;  
PLEASURESS of the GARDENS, *prudent, principled, peaceable*,  
All-Mother, Source-of-all, and End-of-all,  
Common-to-All, Motivating, Smile-Loving, Nurse of Love,  
Faithful, Fearless, Beloved, Nourishing PLEASURESS;

Hear me, LEADERESS: permit, then, immaculate *painlessness*,  
*peace*, and, *Goddess*, also, immaculate *impassiveness*.

Ἦδονή μακαρία Ἦδονή ἀφθαρτε τήνδε τοι ἡμεῖς  
μαρτυρίαν τιθέμεσθα λυτήριον ἠδὲ θεραπευτικὴν·  
ὦ βασίλισσά διὰ σὴν εἰκόνα θεία ἐφάνη τὸν ἀγαθὸν βίον  
γεῦσις εὐωδία καλὴ θέρμη ὦ θεὰ πολὺφορβος  
καὶ ἀθανάτη ἀγαθὴ φίλιας ὦ μήτηρ καρποφορος·  
Ἦδονή ἐν κήποις φρόνιμη καλὴ δίκαια  
Παντογένεθλ' ἀρχὴ πάντων πάντων τε τέλα  
Ποθεινοτάτη φιλομμειδῆς ἐρωτοτρόφος Πάνδημον  
πίστη ἄφοβε φίλιε φυτάλιε Ἦδονή·  
κλυθί μευ ἠγεμόνη δίδου δ' ἀτάρᾶξιᾶν ἀμεμπτον  
εἰρήνην τε θεὰν καὶ πλούτου ἀπονίᾶν ἀμεμπτον.

*Hēdonē makaríā, Hēdonē áphtharte, ténde toi ēmeís*  
*martyrían tithémestha lūtérion édè therapeutiíēn.*  
*ó Basílissa dià sēn eikóna theía ephánē tòn agathón bíon,*  
*geúsis euodía kalé thérme, ó theà polýphorbos,*  
*kai athanátē ágathē philías ó métēr karpophóros.*  
*Hēdonē èn Kēpois, Phrónimē, Kalé, Dikaía,*  
*pantogénethl' árkhē pántōn, pántōn te teleuté,*  
*Pándēmon Potheinotátē Philommeidēs Erōtotróphos,*  
*Pisté Áphobe Phílie Phytálie Hēdoné;*  
*klythí meυ Hēgemónē dídou d' aponían ámempton*  
*eirénēn te theàn kai plóutou ataraxían ámempton.*

And while it isn't explicitly a hymn, or a prayer, I've always liked Usener fragment 469:

"Thanks [to] the blessed nature that has made the necessities *obtainable*,  
but the *unobtainable*, unnecessary."

χάρις τῇ [μακαρίᾳ φύσει](#) ὅτι τὰ ἀναγκαῖα ἐποίησεν εὐπόριστα,  
τὰ δὲ δυσπόριστα οὐκ ἀναγκαῖα.