

## Mystery Religions Notes

Mystery religions were philosophical religious schools in the Greco-Roman world (600 BC–300 AD) in which participation was reserved for initiates. They were based on the idea that enlightenment is gained through obtaining hidden and mystical esoteric knowledge, which frees one from the bonds of the material realm.

### History

The ancient world had been dominated by polytheism and the idea that the gods controlled the fate of everyone.

People stayed within their ethnic community, remaining loyal to their city-state and local gods.

War, the Greek empire, and Hellenism (334 BC) began to erase the borders between countries. This brought religious doubt, cultural dissolution, and pessimism.

These changes led to syncretistic philosophies and religions and a desire to connect with God.

This new way of thinking began with the elite and philosophers and trickled down to the common people through the arts (stories, theater, music, and art).

The mystery religions, starting in the 600s BC, began to anticipate this new worldview. This new thinking put man in the center of the cosmos and focused on how to escape death. Protagoras (490–420 BC) stated that “man is the measure of all things.”

This shift meant the gods no longer controlled the nations, and art no longer honored them.

The mystery religions would come to an end by the 300s AD with the rise of Christianity.

### Main Characteristics

Reason (the philosophers called “nature”) is supreme and brings salvation.

Therefore, God (Mind) is rational and constant.

The goal is to know truth through a mystical, esoteric connection to the Mind.

**Exoteric** is knowledge outside of and independent from experience. Can be ascertained by anyone. Surface meaning.

**Esoteric** is knowledge from the inner consciousness; the contemplative, mystical, or meditative perspective. Hidden or secret meaning.

#### Three main characteristics:

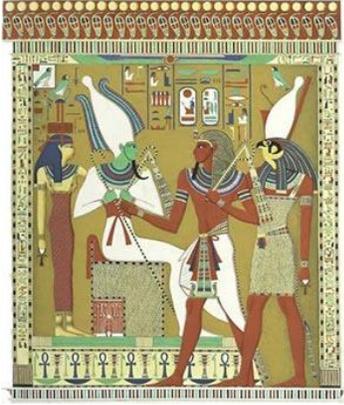
- Esoteric knowledge is necessary for enlightenment.
- Knowledge is kept secret from all others.
- Knowledge is earned.

The Mystery Religions were influenced by the Egyptian triad:

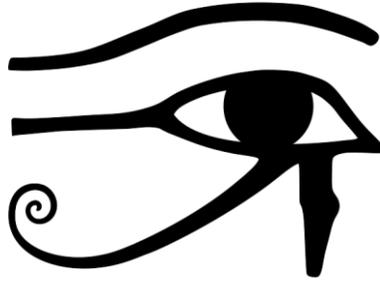
**Osiris (father)** was the god of the underworld and judge of the dead.

**Isis (mother)** was goddess of nature, fertility, and magic.

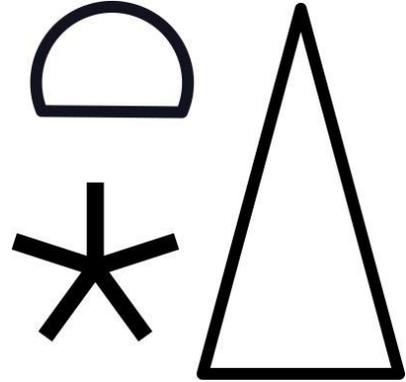
**Horus (son)** was the god of the sky and war. He was represented by the dog star Sirius.



Horus bringing a human to Osiris for judgment, with Isis next to Osiris.



The all-seeing eye of Horus.



The Egyptian Hieroglyphic for Sirius. The three most powerful occult symbols.

## Beliefs about God

God is an unknowable and impersonal force.

God is monistic in being but dualistic in nature.

God is reason and logic and is constant.

The God force emanated lesser, more personal beings (angels/spirits).

The most prominent is the Demiurge, known as Reason, Nous, or the Dragon.

## Beliefs about the Material Realm

Material realm was created by the Demiurge.

Material realm is real, orderly, and rational.

Material realm is good since the Demiurge created it.

Material realm is separate and inferior to the God force since it is not God.

## Beliefs about Humanity

Humanity emanated from the God force.

Humanity is God and a part of God.

Humanity is a microcosm of God and the universe.

True godhood is found within.

## Beliefs about the Problem with the World and Humanity

Humanity is trapped in the material realm and ignorant of their godhood.

Humanity is repeatedly reincarnated into the material realm.

Birth into the material realm is death.

## Beliefs about the Solution to the Problem

Goal is the escape of the material realm.

Esoteric knowledge brings enlightenment.

The Dragon/Nous/Reason helps one shatter the embryonic egg of the material realm.

One is reabsorbed into the God force and loses all individuality.



## The Eleusinians

Based on the cult of Demeter beginning in the 1600s BC.

Persephone (soul) is trapped in Hades (material realm).

She is allowed to return to the surface (spiritual realm), which restores life.

Life in the material realm is death, and liberation is the true life.

They reenacted the story in a festival of ritual and intoxication.

## Pythagoreanism

Pythagoras (570–495 BC) was a philosopher and mathematician.

He led a philosophical commune that believed men were not ruled by fate.

He believed that mathematics was the language of God.

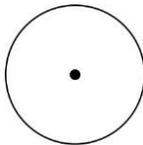
The key to unlocking the universe was an esoteric understanding of mathematics, music, and astronomy.

This knowledge would lead to the transmigration of the soul.

He believed numbers had esoteric meaning and were the key to unlocking the secrets to the universe.

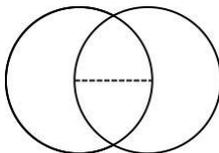
### Monad is the Eternal All

- Male and female
- Wisdom/reason
- Spiritual realm
- Symbol of the sun



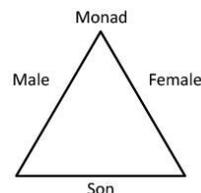
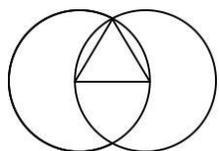
### Duad is the material realm

- Female splits from male
- Polarity
- Ignorance



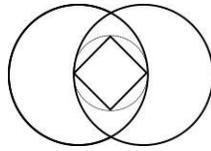
### Triad is unity

- Reunification
- Androgynous son
- Salvation



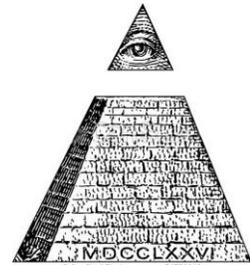
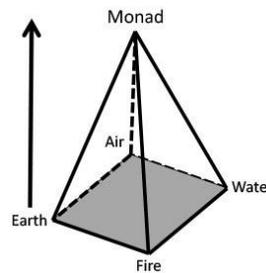
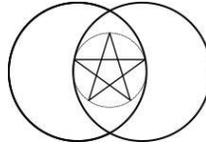
### Tetrad is nature

- Four elements
- $3+4=7$
- Dragon



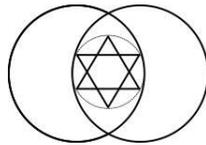
### Pentad is equilibrium

- Fifth element (ether)
- Ascension
- $1+4=5$
- Monad and Dragon

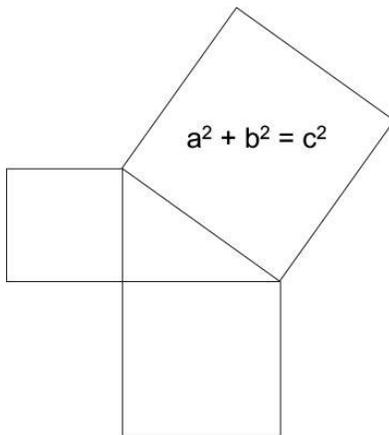


### Hexad is harmony

- Marriage
- Spiritual and Material
- Godhood



Pythagoras believed that the Pythagorean theorem was esoterically pointing towards the Egyptian triad.



### Platonism

Aristocles/Plato (427–347 BC) was a philosopher.

He believed that this world did not contain true forms.

Material realm is a shadow of the spiritual realm as illustrated through the analogy of the cave.

You cannot know reality through the five senses.

You do not learn; you recollect.

Concepts are something we discover rather than create.

The light that we need to see is “the Good.”

If you know “the Good,” then you will act upon it.

Reason (nature) leads you back to the source.

Irrationality leads to chaos and wickedness.

The Philosopher-King is to be ruler.