[the last lines of VI 9: 8]

Otherness and the lack of otherness. Bodies are hindered from communing with each other by their very corporeality, but incorporeal things are not kept apart by bodies, and they are not separated by being in different places. They are separated only because they are other than each other, different from each other. So where there is no otherness, things are present to each other. The One has no otherness and therefore is always present. And when we have no otherness about us, we are present to it.

As a Greek chorus circles around the conductor… The One does not desire us and does not want to circle around us. Rather, it is we who desire the One, and we who circle around it. We are always circling around it, but we do not always look at it. It’s like a [Greek] chorus singing and dancing in a circle. They chorus members are constantly circling around the conductor, but sometimes the dancers turn away from him, so that he is out of their sight. But when they turn back to him, they sing beautifully—they are truly with him.

. . . so we circle around the One. We are likewise always around the One. If we were not, we would no longer exist but would dissolve into nothing. But we are not always turned to the One. But when we do look to him, we are, at that moment, at our goal: we achieve stasis and rest. We do not sing out of tune but truly dance our god-inspired dance around him.

VI 9: 9.

Seeing the source. In this dance the Soul sees the spring whence issues life, the spring that pours out into Mind, the spring that is the source of reality, the cause of all good, and the very root of the Soul.

The One is undiminished. As they are poured out of the One, Mind and Soul do not lessen the One. As poured out from him, they do not diminish him, because there is nothing quantitative here. And they are not perishable – they are eternal because their source remains ever the same. It remains whole rather than being divided up into them, just as light keeps shining as long as the sun is still there.

The Good eternally gives of itself. Even when the body intrudes and draws us to itself, we are not cut off from the One or separated from it, because the One does not give its gifts and then go away. As long as it is what it is, it is always pouring out its gifts. We exist more fully when we turn to him, because our well-being is there with him. To be far from him is to exist less. When the soul is there, it takes its rest and is beyond all evil. It has hastened upwards to the place that is clear of evils.

At the level of Mind. And there [i.e., in and with the Mind] the soul “minds” and is not passive. Its true life is there; our present life, the life without God, is a mere trace of life, it is an imitation of that life. But life in the Mind is the [pure] activity of minding. The Mind, in quiet contact with the One, generates gods, beauty, righteousness, and virtue, which in turn are what the soul conceptualizes when it is filled with God.

Our beginning and our end. This is the soul’s beginning, because the soul comes from there, and it is the soul’s end because it is the good for the soul. When the soul gets there, it becomes itself, becomes what it always was. What we have here and now among the things of this world is all fallenness and exile. The soul has “shed its wings”[cf. Plato, Phaedrus 248C8].

Desire for God. The soul’s desire makes it clear that the Good is there. (That is why, in pictures and stories, Eros is coupled with souls, the Psyches.) Although the soul is other than God, it comes from God, and therefore, its desire is for God. When it is there, it has heavenly love, but here love becomes vulgar. When it is there, the soul is the heavenly
Aphrodite; when it is here, it becomes the vulgar Aphrodite, a kind of whore [cf. Symposium180D-E]. Every soul is Aphrodite, as is symbolized in the story of the Aphrodite’s birthday, which is also the birthday of Eros, who was born with her [cf. Symposium 203B].

An analogy. The soul in her natural state is in love with God and wants to be united with him. It is like the noble love that a young girl has for her noble father. But when the soul is bereft of her father and has entered into the world of becoming, she gets deceived by the blandishments of her suitors and changes her love to a mortal love and is shamed. But eventually she comes to hate her shames here below, and purifies herself of the things of this world and sets herself on the way to her father, and she fares well.

Earthly love. And if you are unfamiliar with this experience, think of it in terms of our loves here below and what it is like to actually attain what you most desire. These earthly loves are mortal and harmful. This is a love for mere images: they change because they are not what we really and truly love. These images are not our real good, they are not what we seek.

True love. Our true love is there with God, with whom we can be united. We can have a part in him and truly possess him rather than embracing something in the flesh from outside. But [as the initiates in mystery rites say], “whoever has seen, knows what I am saying.” The soul gets another life and draws near to God and has already come near and has a part in him. It is in a condition to know that the giver of true life is present and we need nothing more.

Exhortation. We must put away all other things and take our stand only in this. We must become only this, this alone, cutting away all the other things in which we are encased. We must be impatient at being bound to the other things. We must be eager to go out from here so that we may embrace him with our whole self. We must have no part in whatever does not touch God. There you can see both him and yourself in the way that one should see. There you can see the self glorified, full of intelligible light—the self becomes pure light, weightless, floating free, having become God—or better: being God—set on fire. But if you get weighed down again, the fire is extinguished.

VI 9: 10

The body and rational thinking hinder the vision. Then why do we not always remain there? It is because we have not yet completely escaped from this world. But there will be a time when the vision will be continuous, since there will no longer be any hindrance by the body. That part of our soul that has seen God will not be hindered by the body; and only the other part of our soul will be hindered. The part that sees God remains at rest in that vision, whereas the rest of the soul busies itself with empirical knowledge, with its proofs and evidence and discursive arguments. But the [mystical] vision and what it sees are not a matter of reasoning – they are greater than reason, prior to reasoning, prior to and above it.

Mystical union. When you see yourself in that [superior] vision, you will see yourself as like unto what you see. Or better: you will see yourself as merged with yourself [συνέσται] and with what you see. You will see yourself as like unto God, for you have become single and simple [ἄπλοον]. Or maybe I shouldn’t say “you will see” [ὁψεται] but instead “you will have been seen” [ὁφέν]. But that is still to speak of “two” things here, the seer and the seen. More boldly we would say: no longer two, but one.

Coinciding. As the one who sees, you do not “see something,” you do not distinguish seer and seen as if they were two. Rather, it is as if you had become someone else and are not yourself, you are not you with your own place, belonging to yourself but rather belong to him, coinciding, center to center. Down here, when two centers have come together, they are one and not two centers as when they were separate.

The difficulty of expressing this. We do speak of God as “something other, but that is because it is hard to put the vision into words. How could you call him “the other” when in the vision you did not see “an other” but were one with yourself?
Divulge nothing. In the mystery religions the rule is: “Divulge nothing to the uninitiated.” The divine is not to be disclosed [ἐξοφορέω] to them. These religions prohibit anyone from speaking about the divine to someone who has not had the good fortune to have the vision.

No duality. Rather, the visionary was one with what was seen. In fact, what was seen was not “seen” but rather united to the visionary. If you recall who you were when you were united with what you “saw,” you will retain an image of that in yourself. You yourself were one, with no distinction between you and yourself or between you and other things. When you made the ascent, you experienced no movement, no emotion, no desire for anything else. There was no reasoning, no minding [νοησις]—in fact, if we may say this, you yourself were not there. It was as if you were carried away or possessed by a god, in quiet solitude and a state of calm, not being distracted at all in your being, not busy about yourself, but entirely in repose, having become a kind of rest. You did not think of beautiful things because you had already gone beyond beauty and gone beyond the choir of virtues.

The inner sanctum. You were like someone who leaves the statues behind in the outer shrine and enters the inner sanctum. In the inner sanctum you will see no statues or images but only the Divine itself. Having had your vision, and having communed not with statues or images but with the Divine, the first thing you will see when you come out of the inner sanctum will be those statues—at best, secondary objects of contemplation.

Ex-stasis. Perhaps the experience you had in the inner sanctum was not a “vision” but another kind of seeing, an ex-stasis, being outside of yourself: becoming utterly simple, giving yourself over to and pressing on to an act of touching, to perfect rest, to meditation and adaption. Only in this way can you see what is there in the inner sanctum. But if you try to see in a different way, what you will find present in the inner sanctum is—nothing.

Images and riddles. But this is only an image, a set of riddles that wise men use when speaking about holy things and about how God is seen. A wise priest, if he understands the riddle, may make the contemplation real by entering the inner sanctum.

An invisible sanctuary. But someone may have never been in such a sanctuary. He or she may hold that the real inner sanctum is an invisible source and origin, but nonetheless will come to know that the origin is seen only by way of the origin and that like is united with like. That person will experience all the divine elements that the soul can have even before the vision. From the vision he or she will demand whatever still remains, and what remains for the person who has gone beyond everything is: that which comes before everything.

From relative non-being to union with the One. The soul has such a nature that it does not go towards whatever is not. Yes, if it falls down far enough, it will arrive at evil (which is relative non-being) but never at absolute non-being. But when the soul goes in the opposite direction, it finally arrives not at something other than itself; instead, it arrives at its own self. But when in itself alone (rather than in something that has being), it is in the One. There the person, the visionary, is not something real, not something that is. It is beyond being and “is.” It is identical to the One.

On to the end of the journey. When this happens, you will have yourself as like unto the One; then if you go beyond yourself, from image to archetype, you have reached “the end of the journey.” If then you see that you have become this, you have yourself as a likeness of that, and if you go on from yourself, as from image to original, you have reached “the end of the journey” [Republic 532E3].

Fallen and reawakening. When you fall from the vision, you can reawaken the virtue within yourself and, meditating on the order that is within you, you can again be lightened so that you pass through virtue to Mind or Wisdom, and then pass through Wisdom to the Good.

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1 ἐκστασις καὶ ἀπλωσις καὶ ἐπίδοσις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔφεσις πρὸς ἁρήν καὶ στάσις καὶ περινόησις πρὸς 25ἀφαρμογήν
This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed person. It is liberation from these other things here below. This life takes no pleasure in the things of this world.

This life is the flight of the alone to the Alone.

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