Plotinus lived 205 – 270 CE, was born in Egypt but probably a Greek, and was the head of his Platonic school. In Platonism it was common to tell the central ontological notions in an unencrypted way to the students only within their schools, but after his death his student Porphyry published 54 of his treatises in the form of six groups of nine books; therefore the name “Enneads”. (It can be assumed that Porphyry did not publish all his treatises.) The Enneads are one of the most important documents of the entire history of philosophy and had an immense influence in antiquity and in the renaissance. One may wonder why Porphyry published these secret (esoteric) writings. Maybe, he did it because the Gnostics, whom Plotinus had criticized, pretended that many of the Greek philosophical ideas would stem from them and presented them in a distorted and vulgarized form – and Christianity emerged from it, after the idea of reincarnation had been eliminated, perhaps by Jewish influence.

Plotinus regarded himself as an interpreter of Plato`s philosophy, and since Plato transmitted his most important ontological teaching in an unencrypted way only orally to his followers Plotinus` text was the first systematic presentation of Platonism to the public. However, it is, of course, hard to distinguish those statements which truely stemmed from Plato from those statements with which he imputed him his own opinions. In addition, Plotinus also represented views from Aristotle and from Stoicism but who were also influenced by Plato. And of course, there had been a development since Plato`s days. In the fifth century CE, Proclus, the head of the Platonists in Athens, wrote several books in which he interpreted Plato`s exoteric writings, in which Plato often gave only mythological hints to his views, in a detailed way although it can certainly not be decided when he correctly interpreted Plato. Nowadays, the teaching of the Platonists which refer to Plotinus` text is called Neoplatonism, and his basic views are to be summarized in the following way:

According to Plato and Plotinus, everything existing is a unity, and they called this basic and all-encompassing substance the “One”. Since everything arose from this One, and since therefore it also gave the existence to us the One is also called the “Good”. Another name is “God” or “Godhead” from which also the many gods of antiquity had developed. But in the end, the One is unknowable to
humans and no name can denominate its true nature. The One is even more than God, and this is why even this name is unsatisfactory.

The whole world arose from the One by multiple emanations. The first emanation was the Spirit (Greek: nous), from the Spirit the soul of the world emanated, the many individual souls of all living beings withdrew from the soul of the world, as the lowest emanation matter developed from the world-soul, and the individual souls descended into matter which forms their physical body. It is distinguished the material physical world (which was created, according to Plato, by the Demiurg) from the supersensible world, the world of the intellectual-principle. This intellectual consists of the Spirit (nous) and of all ideas, souls, laws etc. But the more remote something is from the One, the more unreal it is. Thus, in particular matter has no real being. Plotinus compares material objects with the objects in a mirror which are also no real objects but mirror images of real things. Nowadays we can express it in such a way that material objects are only images within our consciousness: Consciousness as a mirror of objects which in reality are only ideas or concepts. The objects of our apperception are reflections or shadows of ideas and concepts. However, Plato and Plotinus had another conception of matter than we have today. They understood matter as something invisible from which our observable objects are generated by the addition of form, concepts, or ideas. But really existing is only the unknowable One.

The aim of human life should be to uplift your soul from the material world to the world-soul within the world of the intellectual-principle, and maybe even higher in order to unite yourself with the One in an act of vision or ecstasy. To achieve this and in order not to be reborn in the material world, a complete virtuous life and a striving for beauty and knowledge are necessary. The four main Platonic virtues are prudence, modesty, justice, and bravery.

So much as a brief summary of his philosophy. According to Plotinus, the One is above the concept of God. However, Plotinus – just like Plato – uses the word God in the singular when meaning the One. But this usage of the one God and the many subordinate Gods can cause a linguistic confusion which made the Christians speak of God only in the case of the basic substance of everything and call all the other higher bings angels and demons.

Since the term God in the way how the Christians introduced it can cause a confusion with the mean God of the Jews (Jews only worship one God), which had fatal consequences within the last centuries for the killing in the name of religion is without an end and is constantly getting worse, it would be better to use another name if you do not want to use the term One. In recognition of the great achievements of ancient Indian wisdom we could call it “Brahman”. Another and equally good name is the Chinese name “Tao”. Especially people in the East could use these names, whereas in the West we could prefer the
usage of present philosophy and talk of the “Being” when meaning the basic substance.

If you do not want to call the other higher beings Gods you may name them “Beings of Light” as they are seen in the near-death experiences; although the light is certainly only a symbol. The manifestations of higher beings in the form of human appearances, how you can experience them in the mystical states, for example within the mysteries orders, or how the ancient Greeks described their Gods, are probably only another symbolism – at least, if they are not even only automatic world programs in the sense of the computer world view.

The following quotations from the Enneads are from the website [http://sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/index.htm](http://sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/index.htm) It is a translation from the Greek by Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page (1917 – 1939). Paragraphs between the quotations indicate that the texts are from different passages of the Enneads.

### Quotations from the Enneads

**Ennead 1, Book 6:**

And this inner vision, what is its operation? Newly awakened it is all too feeble to bear the ultimate splendour. Therefore the Soul must be trained - to the habit of remarking, first, all noble pursuits, then the works of beauty produced not by the labour of the arts but by the virtue of men known for their goodness: lastly, you must search the souls of those that have shaped these beautiful forms. But how are you to see into a virtuous soul and know its loveliness? Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.

Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful. Therefore, first let each become godlike and each beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty. So, mounting, the Soul will come first to the Intellectual-Principle
and survey all the beautiful Ideas in the Supreme and will avow that this is Beauty, that the Ideas are Beauty.

Ennead 4, Book 4:

The secret is: firstly, that this All is one universally comprehensive living being, encircling all the living beings within it, and having a soul, one soul, which extends to all its members in the degree of participant membership held by each; secondly, that every separate thing is an integral part of this All by belonging to the total material fabric - unrestrictedly a part by bodily membership, while, in so far as it has also some participation in the All.

Ennead 4, Book 8:

Many times it has happened: Lifted out of the body into myself; becoming external to all other things and self-encentered; beholding a marvellous beauty; then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order; enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the divine; stationing within It by having attained that activity; poised above whatsoever within the Intellectual is less than the Supreme: yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning, and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the soul ever enter into my body, the soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be.

Ennead 5, Book 3:

In order, then, to know what the Divine Mind is, we must observe soul and especially its most God-like phase.
One certain way to this knowledge is to separate first, the man from the body - yourself, that is, from your body [out-of-body experience] - next to put aside that soul which moulded the body, and, very earnestly, the system of sense with desires and impulses and every such futility, all setting definitely towards the mortal: what is left is the phase of the soul which we have declared to be an image of the Divine Intellect, retaining some light from that sun, while it pours downward upon the sphere of magnitudes [that is, of Matter] the light playing about itself which is generated from its own nature.

The One is in truth beyond all statement: any affirmation is of a thing; but the all-transcending, resting above even the most august divine Mind, possesses alone of all true being, and is not a thing among things; we can give it no name because that would imply predication: we can but try to indicate, in our own feeble way, something concerning it

We do not, it is true, grasp it by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of it; we hold it not so as to state it, but so as to be able to speak about it. And we can and do state what it is not, while we are silent as to what it
is: we are, in fact, speaking of it in the light of its sequels; unable to state it, we may still possess it.

**Ennead 5, Book 5:**

We are in agony for a true expression; we are talking of the untellable; we name, only to indicate for our own use as best we may. And this name, The One, contains really no more than the negation of plurality: under the same pressure the Pythagoreans found their indication in the symbol "Apollo" [a= not; pollon= of many] with its repudiation of the multiple.

**Ennead 5, Book 8:**

Beauty without Being could not be, nor Being voided of Beauty: abandoned of Beauty, Being loses something of its essence. Being is desirable because it is identical with Beauty; and Beauty is loved because it is Being.

**Ennead 6, Book 6:**

The first question is whether Number can exist in and of itself or is dependent upon things – Two being something observed in two things, Three in three; and so of the arithmetical One;

Number then pre-exists and is the cause by which produced things participe in quantity.

Number exists before every living thing, before collective Life-Form.

Next we come to Being, fully realized, and this is the seat of number; by number, Being brings forth the Beings; its movement is planned to Number; it establishes the numbers of its offspring before bringing them to be

**Ennead 6, Book 9:**

Generative of all, The Unity is none of all; neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time: it is the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was, or Movement or Rest, all of which are attachments of Being and make Being the manifold it is.

Think of The One as Mind or as God, you think too meanly; use all the resources of understanding to conceive this Unity and, again, it is more authentically one than God, even though you reach for God's unity beyond the unity the most perfect you can conceive.

the soul takes another life as it approaches God; thus restored it feels that the dispenser of true life is There to see, that now we have nothing to look for but, far otherwise, that we must put aside all else and rest in This alone, This become, This alone, all the earthly environment done away, in haste to be free,
impatient of any bond holding us to the baser, so that with our being entire we may cling about This, no part in us remaining but through it we have touch with God.

Thus we have all the vision that may be of Him and of ourselves; but it is of a self-wrought to splendour, brimmed with the Intellectual light, become that very light, pure, buoyant, unburdened, raised to Godhood or, better, knowing its Godhood, all aflame then - but crushed out once more if it should take up the discarded burden.

No doubt we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities, seen and seer, instead of, boldly, the achievement of unity. In this seeing, we neither hold an object nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it: centre coincides with centre, for on this higher plane things that touch at all are one;

[[The last sentences of the whole text:]] When the soul begins again to mount, it comes not to something alien but to its very self; thus detached, it is not in nothingness but in itself; self-gathered it is no longer in the order of being; it is in the Supreme.

There is thus a converse in virtue of which the essential man outgrows Being, becomes identical with the Transcendent of Being. The self thus lifted, we are in the likeness of the Supreme: if from that heightened self we pass still higher - image to archetype - we have won the Term of all our journeying. Fallen back again, we awaken the virtue within until we know ourselves all order once more; once more we are lightened of the burden and move by virtue towards Intellectual-Principle and through the Wisdom in That to the Supreme.

This is the life of gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of solitary to solitary.