

*Sparta was one of the most powerful city-states in ancient Greece. While other city-states were known for their philosophers and writers, Sparta had a different identity. Read "The Spartan Creed" and answer the questions that follow.*

## **THE SPARTAN CREED**

Translated by Richmond Lattimore

I would not say anything for a man nor take account of him  
for any speed of his feet or wrestling skill he might have,  
not if he had the size of a Cyclops and strength to go with it,  
not if he could outrun Bóreas, the North Wind of Thrace,  
5 not if he were more handsome and gracefully formed than Tithónos,  
or had more riches than Midas had, or Kínyras too,  
not if he were more of a king than Tantalid Pelops,  
or had the power of speech and persuasion Adrastós had,  
not if he had all splendors except for a fighting spirit.  
10 For no man ever proves himself a good man in war  
unless he can endure to face the blood and the slaughter,  
go close against the enemy and fight with his hands.  
Here is courage, mankind's finest possession, here is  
the noblest prize that a young man can endeavor to win,  
15 and it is a good thing his city and all the people share with him  
when a man plants his feet and stands in the foremost spears  
relentlessly, all thought of foul flight completely forgotten,  
and has well trained his heart to be steadfast and to endure,  
and with words encourages the man who is stationed beside him.  
20 Here is a man who proves himself to be valiant in war.  
With a sudden rush he turns to flight the rugged battalions  
of the enemy, and sustains the beating waves of assault.  
And he who so falls among the champions and loses his sweet life,  
so blessing with honor his city, his father, and all his people,  
25 with wounds in his chest, where the spear that he was facing has  
transfixed  
that massive guard of his shield, and gone through his breastplate as  
well,  
why, such a man is lamented alike by the young and the elders,  
30 and all his city goes into mourning and grieves for his loss.

His tomb is pointed to with pride, and so are his children,  
and his children's children, and afterward all the race that is his.  
His shining glory is never forgotten, his name is remembered,  
and he becomes an immortal, though he lies under the ground,

35 when one who was a brave man has been killed by the furious War  
God

standing his ground and fighting hard for his children and land.

But if he escapes the doom of death, the destroyer of bodies,  
and wins his battle, and bright renown for the work of his spear,

40 all men give place to him alike, the youth and the elders,  
and much joy comes his way before he goes down to the dead.

Aging, he has reputation among his citizens. No one

tries to interfere with his honors or all he deserves;

all men withdraw before his presence, and yield their seats to him,

45 the youth, and the men his age, and even those older than he.

Thus a man should endeavor to reach this high place of courage  
with all his heart, and, so trying, never be backward in war.

—*Tyrtaeus*