WHO IS DIOTIMA?



Good question! Diotima, wise woman of Mantinea, is used as a symbol of wisdom in the rituals of Beta Sigma Phi.

In Plato's Symposium, Socrates, the ancient Greek teacher and philosopher, tells friends at a dinner gathering of Diotima's teachings. Socrates says to them, "I want to talk about some lessons I was given, once upon a time, by a Mantinean woman called Diotima; a woman who was deeply versed in this and many other fields of knowledge. It was she who brought about a ten years' postponement of the great plague of Athens on the occasion of a certain sacrifice and it was she who taught me the philosophy of love."

These writings are often quoted by authorities as proof that Diotima actually lived. Many other scholars believe she was purely legendary. The International Offices researched information on Diotima, and also asked advice of a professor of Greek history and language, himself a native of Athens. From these sources, we have found that Diotima was not a goddess; however, we still do not have enough evidence to confirm her actual existence.

However, we do know she was a woman of great insight. Studies show that Socrates once asked Diotima to tell him who are these seekers after truth if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant? To this Diotima says, "They are those that come between the two, and one of them is love. For wisdom is concerned with the loveliest of things; and love is the love of what is lovely; and so it follows that love is lover of wisdom."

She is a bit of a lady of mystery, our Diotima. Perhaps that is why, in part, Mrs. Lynn Terry made her an important part of the Beta Sigma Phi rituals she created. We do not know much about the character—but we know she was a seeker of truth, with very high standards for living and learning, and a philosophy that embraced love in the broadest esthetic sense.