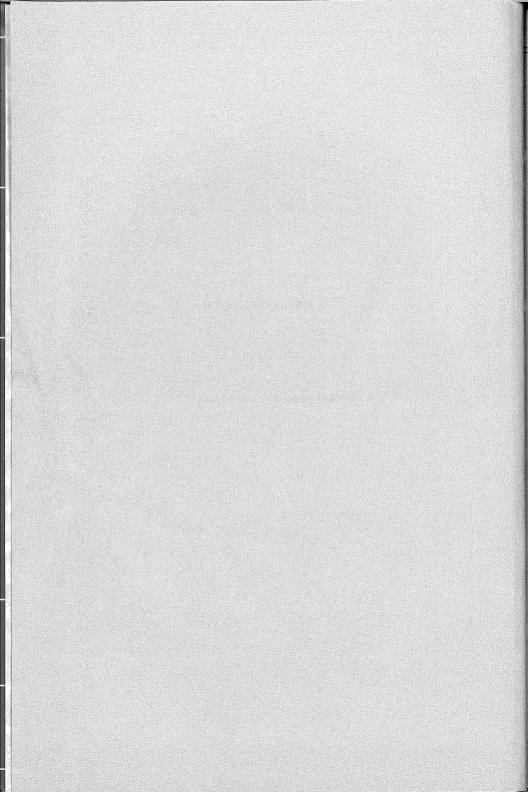
DAILY STOIC JOURNAL

366 DAYS OF WRITING AND REFLECTION ON THE ART OF LIVING

RYAN HOLIDAY and STEPHEN HANSELMAN

Bestselling authors of THE DAILY STOIC





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INTRODUCTION

n his tent at the front near the Granua River in the distant territory of Germania, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius rose at dawn. It was a struggle for him to get up this early, but he did anyway; his job required it. In the lamplight, he sat at the table and began to write in Greek in his journal about what the day ahead held in store for him. "I will encounter busybodies, ingrates, egomaniacs, liars, the jealous and cranks," he wrote to himself, preparing mentally for the inevitable difficulties of the life of an emperor, particularly one faced with leading an army and overseeing the empire from abroad.

But don't assume this was a complaint. There was not a note of frustration or resentment in his tone.

Marcus Aurelius was practicing with pleasure the philosophy he'd come to love and depend on, Stoicism. He was not writing off his fellow men and his subjects. On the contrary, in the completion of that thought, he would say of those busybodies and ingrates "that none can do me harm, or implicate me in ugliness—nor can I be angry at my relatives or hate them. For we are made for cooperation." And so he went about the rest of his morning journaling, writing little notes for himself on how to think, how to live, what to be grateful for, and then he proceeded on to meet the day, not simply as a philosopher, but as a true *philosopher king*.

If we can go back in time a little further, almost exactly one century and one evening before Marcus's morning meditation, we'd find another Stoic philosopher doing something quite similar. His name was Seneca, and he was alternatively a powerbroker, a playwright, and public intellectual serving at the highest levels in the court of Nero. Instead of journaling in the morning, he preferred to do his at night, putting, as he said, each day up for review. Seneca would look back on the day just then coming to a close and ask himself whether his actions had been just, what he could have done better, what habits he could curb, how he might improve himself. "We reflect upon that which we are about to do," he would tell his older brother about this nightly routine, "and yet our plans for the future descend from the past."

Reviewing the previous day is what helped Seneca prepare for the one that he would face the following morning.

Epictetus, another famous Stoic, was a former slave who lived a life not nearly as cushy or powerful as Seneca or Marcus, and would repeatedly remind his students to rehearse their lessons, to write them down for their own use. In *Discourses*, he says, "Every day and night keep thoughts like these at hand—write them, read them aloud, talk to yourself and others about them."

These then, the morning preparation and the evening review, are two of the most essential and intertwining exercises in Stoic philosophy and a tradition now more than two thousand years old. It's a tradition that you, in holding *The Daily Stoic Journal*, are now an heir to and can continue twice per day in your pursuit of the good life.

Unlike many other philosophies, Stoicism wasn't designed simply to be some explanation of the universe. It wasn't overly interested in complicated questions about where we came from or theoretical discussions of this issue or that one. Stoicism was designed by the Greeks and perfected by the Romans for the living and the *doing* of daily life for the man and woman trying to make it in a confusing world. As such, it was much more than a set of teachings or long-ago written sentences. It was instead a set of timeless practical exercises—systems for reducing fear, thoughts for battling destructive thoughts, reminders of things we take for granted, tools for resisting temptation, pillars of strength for tough moments. This meant that Stoicism wasn't something to be learned once or read once. It was meant to be studied and practiced.

Consider the title of Marcus Aurelius's only work, *Meditations*. He was *meditating*, to himself, for himself, on the philosophic principles he was still learning and practicing even in old age. A peek at Seneca's letters finds the same thing—he is writing to someone else, yes, but clearly the intended audience is also himself. He is thinking out loud. Epictetus, too, survives in the form of notes written by his student Arrian, and they read as if his day was spent trying to answer the endless questions of his students: What do I do about this? How can I handle something like that? Any advice for when I ______?

In our book *The Daily Stoic*, we tried to bring a collection of this wisdom to busy readers in a digestible and accessible way. Instead of translating and republishing the Stoics in their original form (which has been done quite well, many times), we created the first ever single-

volume collection of all the great Stoics, arranged to highlight a thought from one each day. The response to the book was humbling and surprising. The book spent three months on the national bestseller lists and debuted in the form of a keynote address at what was likely the largest single gathering of Stoics in two thousand years. Our accompanying daily e-mail at DailyStoic.com was inundated with sign-ups, meaning that each morning tens of thousands of aspiring Stoics were all reading the same thing at the same time. We also began to see photos online from readers who had filled up the pages of *The Daily Stoic* and Moleskine journals with thoughts inspired by each day's meditation.

In response, we set out to create this journal, a companion guide to *The Daily Stoic* and a resource to anyone trying to practice the philosophy. We're honored that you now hold it in your hands.

HOW TO USE THIS JOURNAL

This book presents fifty-two Stoic disciplines or practices, one for each week of the year. Each practice is presented with some direction about its significance and application, along with a few quotes from the great Stoics to help focus your attention on the practice for the week—the first quote about each weekly practice is taken directly from that same week in *The Daily Stoic*. Each day presents a question to help you focus your morning preparations or evening review (or both). The questions will work for you whether you are reading along with *The Daily Stoic*, using our daily e-mail readings, or any other source.

We have not written a set of commandments or a step-by-step system that must be adhered to unthinkingly (if you don't want to respond to the prompts, ignore them and write about whatever you feel would be most beneficial. We also have suggestions at the back for other sources to use). As Seneca said: "The ones who pioneered these paths aren't our masters, but our guides. Truth stands open to everyone; it hasn't been monopolized."

The reason these Stoic practices have been so enduring (and are enjoying a modern-day resurgence) is that they are relentlessly focused on the situations that we face on a daily basis, what Richard Sorabji calls "the ordinary ups and downs of life, on bereavement, loss of office, promotion, the rat race, money, invasions, the sacking of cities, exile, worries about health." As the American philosopher Brand Blanshard marveled at Marcus Aurelius's legacy:

"Few care now about the marches and countermarches of the Roman commanders. What the centuries have clung to is a note-book of thoughts by a man whose real life was largely unknown who put down in the midnight dimness not the events of the day or the plans of the morrow, but something of far more permanent interest, the ideals and aspirations that a rare spirit lived by."

The Roman Stoics focused not on words, but action. As Seneca memorably put it, "Philosophy teaches us how to act, not how to talk." This bias toward improving our actions on a daily basis was something Epictetus made central to his teaching, summarized in his warning "not to be satisfied with mere learning, but to add practice and then training."

This journal is a place to focus your attention (*prosochē*) and practice (*meletē*) as you try to remember and apply what you are learning on the path to progress (*prokopē*). When you pursue the Stoic disciplines presented in this journal, each morning you will ask, as the great modern Stoic Pierre Hadot put it, "What principles will guide and inspire my actions?" And each evening you will examine where you fell short of those principles, as well as where you have made progress. You can begin on any calendar date you choose and proceed until the book is complete.

Together, the fifty-two ideals and aspirations offer something for every situation. Whether it's dealing with bad habits like complaining (Week XXXI), procrastination (Week XXXV), or panic (Week XXXIX), or finding less destructive alternatives to anger (Week XXIX), fear of the future (Week XXXIV), or dealing with haters (Week XXXVIII), you will find practical tools to put to use. You will gain powerful perspective by learning the exercise of taking "the view from above" (Week XXII), or learning to see things as others do (Week XI), and by taking on a role model (Week XXIII). You'll train yourself in the Stoic basics like the dichotomy of control (Week I), focus on the present moment (Week V), or how to test your impressions (Week XV).

It's important to remember this isn't a contest to see if you can live like some perfect sage or escape the correction of someone farther along the path than you. Anyone who uses philosophy that way is decidedly un-Stoic! As Seneca reminded us, "Let philosophy scrape off your own faults, rather than be a way to rail against the faults of others." Think

of this journal as a brush for your own soul, just like brushing your teeth each morning and each evening.

The final lesson at the end of this book is the most essential one of all of Stoic philosophy: learning how to turn words into works. We hope you will make it that far, and if you do, we encourage you to start the same journey once again the following year, for you will be, as Heraclitus said, no longer the same person nor will this be the same book.



WEEK I

WHAT'S UP TO US, WHAT'S NOT UP TO US



pictetus's handbook (the *Enchiridion*) begins with the most powerful exercise in all of Stoicism: the distinction between the things that are "up to us" (in our control) and the things that are "not up to us." It is this, the dichotomy of control, that is the first principle in the entire philosophy. We don't control many of the things we pursue in life—yet we become angry, sad, hurt, scared, or jealous when we don't get them. In fact, those emotions—those reactions—are about the only thing that we do control. If that is the only lesson you journal about or remember for this year, consider it a year well and philosophically lived.

"The chief task in life is simply this: to identify and separate matters so that I can say clearly to myself which are externals not under my control, and which have to do with the choices I actually control. Where then do I look for good and evil? Not to uncontrollable externals, but within myself to the choices that are my own . . ."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 2.5.4-5

"Some things are in our control, while others are not. We control our opinion, choice, desire, aversion, and, in a word, everything of our own doing. We don't control our body, property, reputation, position, and, in a word, everything not of our own doing. Even more, the things in our control are by nature free, unhindered, and unobstructed, while those not in our control are weak, slavish, can be hindered, and are not our own."

—EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION, 1.1-2

"We control our reasoned choice and all acts that depend on that moral will. What's not under our control are the body and any of its parts, our possessions, parents, siblings, children, or country—anything with which we might associate."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.22.10

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WEEK II

THE SPHERE OF CHOICE



If the first step is to discern what is or isn't in our control, the second is to focus our energy on the things we have a choice about. The Stoics viewed the soul as a sphere that, when well tuned, well directed, was an invincible fortress against any trial or circumstance. Protected by our reason, this sphere of choice (*prohairesis*) is like a sacred temple and is the only thing we truly possess in life. We are the product of our choices, so it is essential then that we choose well. This week, consider and reflect on the choices you have: about your emotions, your actions, your beliefs, and your priorities.

"Keep this thought at the ready at daybreak, and through the day and night—there is only one path to happiness, and that is in giving up all outside of your sphere of choice, regarding nothing else as your possession, surrendering all else to God and Fortune."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 4.4.39

"Who then is invincible? The one who cannot be upset by anything outside their reasoned choice."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 1.18.21

"The soul is a sphere, true to itself. It neither projects itself toward any external thing nor does it collapse on itself, but instead radiates a light which it shows itself the truth of all things and the truth in itself."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 11.12

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WEEK III

THE WAKE UP



ach day you write in this journal, you'll be following in the footsteps of Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and all the other great Stoics. The Stoics did not face each day on a whim, but instead with preparation and discipline. They spent real time thinking and anticipating what was to come over the course of a day, a week, a year. Each morning activity—journaling included—was designed to make them ready to face the day. And with your work in this book, so you will be, too.

"Ask yourself the following first thing in the morning:

- What am I lacking in attaining freedom from passion?
- What for tranquility?
- What am I? A mere body, estate-holder, or reputation? None of these things.
- What, then? A rational being.
- What then is demanded of me? Meditate on your actions.
- How did I steer away from serenity?
- What did I do that was unfriendly, unsocial, or uncaring?
- What did I fail to do in all these things?"

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 4.6.34-35

"On those mornings you struggle with getting up, keep this thought in mind—I am awakening to the work of a human being. Why then am I annoyed that I am going to do what I'm made for, the very things for which I was put into this world? Or was I made for this, to snuggle under the covers and keep warm? It's so pleasurable. Were you then made for pleasure? In short, to be coddled or to exert yourself?"

—MARCUS AURELIUS, MEDITATIONS, 5.1

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WEEK IV

A LITTLE BETTER EVERY DAY



The Stoics saw their lives as works in progress. They didn't believe they were born perfect but they believed that with work, and dedication, they could get a little better every day. There is real delight in this progress, as Epictetus quoted by way of Socrates. Marcus Aurelius avidly pursued his own education and improvement, eagerly looking for advice from books, mentors, and historical examples. Follow that example this week, and see how you get a little better as each day passes.

We must keep constant watch over ourselves and, as Seneca phrased it, put each day up for review. Looking back on our day helps us to better understand where we may have fallen short and gives us tangible feedback for how to improve and grow. Only what you measure and record can be monitored; only what you put up for reflection can be learned from.

"I will keep constant watch over myself and—most usefully—will put each day up for review. For this is what makes us evil—that none of us looks back upon our own lives. We reflect upon only that which we are about to do. And yet our plans for the future descend from the past."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 83.2

"From Rusticus...I learned to read carefully and not be satisfied with a rough understanding of the whole, and not to agree too quickly with those who have a lot to say about something."

—Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1.7.3

"But what does Socrates say? 'Just as one person delights in improving his farm, and another his horse, so I delight in attending to my own improvement day by day.'"

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 3.5.14

	January 22nd	What bad habit did I curb today?
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WEEK V

FOCUS ON THE PRESENT MOMENT



arcus Aurelius ruled at a particularly turbulent time. Wars erupted on multiple fronts. Terrible plagues ravaged Rome. His rule was certainly one of constant, unrelenting pressure. But he never let it overwhelm him. From the Stoics and from the example of his adoptive father, the Emperor Antoninus Pius, Marcus found a coping strategy in always sticking close to the present moment and the duties at hand. When our own stress boils over, we can remember his practices and exercises, to stick with what is in front of us and not everything it might mean.

"At every moment keep a sturdy mind on the task at hand, as a Roman and human being, doing it with strict and simple dignity, affection, freedom, and justice—giving yourself a break from all other considerations. You can do this if you approach each task as if it is your last, giving up every distraction, emotional subversion of reason, and all drama, vanity, and complaint over your fair share. You can see how mastery over a few things makes it possible to live an abundant and devout life."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 2.5

"Were you to live three thousand years, or even a countless multiple of that, keep in mind that no one ever loses a life other than the one they are living, and no one ever lives a life other than the one they are losing. The longest and the shortest life, then, amount to the same, for the present moment lasts the same for all and is all anyone possesses. No one can lose either the past or the future, for how can someone be deprived of what's not theirs?"

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 2.14

"Don't let your reflection on the whole sweep of life crush you. Don't fill your mind with all the bad things that might still happen. Stay focused on the present situation and ask yourself why it's so unbearable and can't be survived."

-MARCUS AURELIUS, MEDITATIONS, 8.36

January 2	9th Am I keeping a sturdy mind on the task at hand?
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WEEK VI

SUSPEND YOUR OPINIONS



pictetus would teach that opinions were "the cause of a troubled mind." Opinions about the way we think things should be, need to be. One of the Stoic words for "opinion" is "dogma." The practice of Stoicism begins with a relentless attempt to suspend this dogmatic way of living—a cessation of the belief that you can force your opinions and expectations onto the world.

"We have the power to hold no opinion about a thing and to not let it upset our state of mind—for things have no natural power to shape our judgments."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 6.52

"Today I escaped from the crush of circumstances, or better put, I threw them out, for the crush wasn't from outside me but in my own assumptions."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 9.13

"There are two things that must be rooted out in human beings—arrogant opinion and mistrust. Arrogant opinion expects that there is nothing further needed, and mistrust assumes that under the torrent of circumstance there can be no happiness."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 3.14.8

"Throw out your conceited opinions, for it is impossible for a person to begin to learn what he thinks he already knows."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 2.17.1

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February 7th How can I conquer fear a	and worry—before they conquer me?
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February 8th	Do my outbursts ever make things better?
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THE DAILY STOIC JOURNAL	SUSPEND YOUR OPINIONS
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February 10th What parts	of my life are driven by anger?
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WEEK VII

WATCH OVER YOUR PERCEPTIONS



Leavery moment brings a flood of impressions of the world around us, and our minds are filled with the perceptions that arise with them. The Stoics teach us that we must keep a constant watch on this flood, as if we are standing guard to protect something of vital importance. What is it that we are protecting? Our peace of mind, clarity, and freedom—all of which are anchored in our perceptions. Epictetus reminds us that we need to pay attention to what matters and to learn how to ignore so many of the relentless provocations that come our way.

"Keep constant guard over your perceptions, for it is no small thing you are protecting, but your respect, trustworthiness and steadiness, peace of mind, freedom from pain and fear, in a word your freedom. For what would you sell these things?"

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 4.3.6B-8

"An important place to begin in philosophy is this: a clear perception of one's own ruling principle."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.26.15

"I don't agree with those who plunge headlong into the middle of the flood and who, accepting a turbulent life, struggle daily in great spirit with difficult circumstances. The wise person will endure that, but won't choose it—choosing to be at peace, rather than at war."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 28.7

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February 14th How can I do a be	etter job listening to the little voice inside me?
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February 15th	Do these strong emotions even make sense?
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February 17th What happiness	s am I putting off that I could have right now?
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WEEK VIII

REDUCE WANTS, INCREASE HAPPINESS



The Stoics knew that wanting less increases gratitude, just as wanting more obliterates it. Epictetus focused much of his teaching on helping his students reduce the destructive habit of wanting more. In it he saw the key to a happy life and relationships. By practicing the art of wanting less and being grateful for the portion that we already have before us, we are hopping off the so-called hedonic treadmill and taking a real step on the path to a life of real contentment.

"Remember to conduct yourself in life as if at a banquet. As something being passed around comes to you, reach out your hand and take a moderate helping. Does it pass you by? Don't stop it. It hasn't yet come? Don't burn in desire for it, but wait until it arrives in front of you. Act this way with children, a spouse, toward position, with wealth—one day it will make you worthy of a banquet with the gods."

—Epictetus, Enchiridion, 15

"When children stick their hand down a narrow goody jar they can't get their full fist out and start crying. Drop a few treats and you will get it out! Curb your desire—don't set your heart on so many things and you will get what you need."

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 3.9.22

"Freedom isn't secured by filling up on your heart's desire but by removing your desire."

—Epictetus, *Discourses*, 4.1.175

February 19th	Am I happy with my portion at the banquet of life?
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February 20th	Are the pleasures I'm chasing actually worth it?
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THE DAILY STOIC JOURNAL	REDUCE WANTS, INCREASE HAPPINESS
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February 21st	What can I stop yearning for?
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THE DAILY STOIC JOURNAL	REDUCE WANTS, INCREASE HAPPINESS
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WEEK IX

CULTIVATE INDIFFERENCE



Some people spend their lives chasing good things: health, wealth, pleasure, achievement. Others try to avoid the bad things with equal energy: sickness, poverty, pain. These look like two drastically different approaches but in the end, they are the same. The Stoics continually reminded themselves that so many of the things we desire and avoid are beyond our control. Instead of chasing impossibilities, the Stoics trained to be equally prepared and equally suited to thrive in either condition. They trained to be indifferent. This is a great power and the cultivation of this skill is a very powerful exercise.

"Of all the things that are, some are good, others bad, and yet others indifferent. The good are virtues and all that share in them; the bad are the vices and all that indulge them; the indifferent lie in between virtue and vice and include wealth, health, life, death, pleasure, and pain."

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 2.19.12B-13

"My reasoned choice is as indifferent to the reasoned choice of my neighbor, as to his breath and body. However much we've been made for cooperation, the ruling reason in each of us is master of its own affairs. If this weren't the case, the evil in someone else could become my harm, and God didn't mean for someone else to control my misfortune."

—Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.56

"There are things in life which are advantageous and disadvantageous—both beyond our control."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 92.16

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WEEK X

WHAT EXPENSIVE THINGS COST



From the Cynics, the Stoics learned the powerful practice of focusing on the true worth (axia) of things. That the cost of an item isn't simply what it's sold for, but what it costs the owner to own. So much of our desire for material goods comes at the great price of both anxiety and the loss of our serenity—and even when gained, these things often leave us more anxious and less serene. This week, spend some time reflecting on what the things you buy actually cost. See if they are really worth what you have been paying.

"So, concerning the things we pursue, and for which we vigorously exert ourselves, we owe this consideration—either there is nothing useful in them, or most aren't useful. Some of them are superfluous, while others aren't worth that much. But we don't discern this and see them as free, when they cost us dearly."

-Seneca, Moral Letters, 42.6

"If a person gave away your body to some passerby, you'd be furious. Yet you hand over your mind to anyone who comes along, so they may abuse you, leaving it disturbed and troubled—have you no shame in that?"

-EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION, 28

"Diogenes of Sinope said we sell things of great value for things of very little, and vice versa."

-DIOGENES LAERTIUS,

Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, 6.2.35B

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WEEK XI

THINK ABOUT IT FROM THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE



We tend to assume the best about our own intentions and the worst about other people's. Then we wonder why life is so full of conflict! The Stoics flipped this habit around, reminding themselves to be suspicious about their own first reaction and to approach others first with sympathy. Powerful people are often surprisingly terrible at behaving this way, but Marcus Aurelius, the most powerful man on earth during his reign, was renowned for his humanity in dealing with others. He told himself to always take a moment to remember his own failings and to contemplate how another might see a situation. He reminded himself, as we should, that most people are trying their best, even though that's easy to lose sight of in the rough and tumble of daily life. Let's remember that this week and think about each interaction from more than just our own point of view.

"Whenever someone has done wrong by you, immediately consider what notion of good or evil they had in doing it. For when you see that, you'll feel compassion, instead of astonishment or rage. For you may yourself have the same notions of good and evil, or similar ones, in which case you'll make an allowance for what they've done. But if you no longer hold the same notions, you'll be more readily gracious for their error."

—Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.26

"When your sparring partner scratches or head-butts you, you don't then make a show of it, or protest, or view him with suspicion or as plotting against you. And yet you keep an eye on him, not as an enemy or with suspicion, but with a healthy avoidance. You should act this way with all things in life. We should give a pass to many things with our fellow trainees. For, as I've said, it's possible to avoid without suspicion or hate."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 6.20

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WEEK XII

THE PORTABLE RETREAT



t is in the future—on a vacation, on our day off, when we plan to get out into nature—that we think we'll find peace and release from the crush of the everyday demands of life. Yet this never seems to really happen as often as we think, does it? And when we do get that peace, it is difficult to keep once we're back in the fray. For a Stoic, all of this is madness. The true retreat is to the freedom of our own mind and soul, to consider the gifts we already have that can be our refuge for all time. If we take the time, daily, to do so.

"People seek retreats for themselves in the country, by the sea, or in the mountains. You are very much in the habit of yearning for those same things. But this is entirely the trait of a base person, when you can, at any moment, find such a retreat in yourself. For nowhere can you find a more peaceful and less busy retreat than in your own soul—especially if on close inspection it is filled with ease, which I say is nothing more than being well-ordered. Treat yourself often to this retreat and be renewed."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 4.3.1

"Remember that it's not only the desire for wealth and position that debases and subjugates us, but also the desire for peace, leisure, travel, and learning. It doesn't matter what the external thing is, the value we place on it subjugates us to another . . . where our heart is set, there our impediment lies."

-Epictetus, Discourses, 4.4.1-2; 15

"Remember that your ruling reason becomes unconquerable when it rallies and relies on itself, so that it won't do anything contrary to its own will, even if its position is irrational. How much more unconquerable if its judgments are careful and made rationally? Therefore, the mind freed from passions is an impenetrable fortress—a person has no more secure place of refuge for all time."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.48

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WEEK XIII

SAY NO TO THE NEED TO IMPRESS



If the desire to impress and be liked by others is innate to humans as a species, then every generation born before social media got off lucky. Today we face an unending stream of status updates demanding to be filled with all the impressive things we are doing, the trials we are overcoming, announcements of our dangers averted and triumphs realized. It's exhausting. Centuries ago, Epictetus saw this pride and narcissism even in his (computerless) students and reminded them it wasn't so innocent. In fact, he told them that it would destroy their life's purpose, it would distract and fatigue them. Seneca, too, saw this seeking of the approval of spectators as one of life's disgraces. Watch those impulses this week, notice how much you seem to need your phone and status updates and then ask: Is this the kind of person I want to be? Is this what a philosopher would do?

"If you should ever turn your will to things outside your control in order to impress someone, be sure that you have wrecked your whole purpose in life. Be content, then, to be a philosopher in all that you do, and if you wish also to be seen as one, show yourself first that you are and you will succeed."

—Epictetus, Enchiridion, 23

"In public avoid talking often and excessively about your accomplishments and dangers, for however much you enjoy recounting your dangers, it's not so pleasant for others to hear about your affairs."

—EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION, 33.14

"How disgraceful is the lawyer whose dying breath passes while at court, at an advanced age, pleading for unknown litigants and still seeking the approval of ignorant spectators."

—SENECA, ON THE BREVITY OF LIFE, 20.2

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WEEK XIV

WHAT CAN GO WRONG . . . MIGHT



We call the people who dwell on what might go wrong "pessimists." Some even think that bad thoughts attract bad events. The Stoics found this all to be nonsense. In fact, they had a practice of praemeditatio malorum (premeditation of evils) that specifically encouraged musing on the so-called worst-case scenario. Marcus would begin his day thinking about all the ugliness he would see on display at court—not for the purpose of working himself up, but precisely the opposite, to calm and focus himself to be prepared to act in the proper way rather than to react. Seneca, too, practiced meditating in advance, not only about what normally happens, but what could happen. Epictetus went as far as to imagine losing a loved one every time he would kiss them. The Stoics believed all that we have is on loan from Fortune, and that negative visualization helps increase our awareness of the unexpected—don't shy away from this in your thoughts.

"When you first rise in the morning tell yourself: I will encounter busybodies, ingrates, egomaniacs, liars, the jealous and cranks. They are all stricken with these afflictions because they don't know the difference between good and evil. Because I have understood the beauty of good and the ugliness of evil, I know that these wrongdoers are still akin to me... and that none can do me harm, or implicate me in ugliness—nor can I be angry at my relatives or hate them. For we are made for cooperation."

—Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 2.1

"Being unexpected adds to the weight of a disaster, and being a surprise has never failed to increase a person's pain. For that reason, nothing should ever be unexpected by us. Our minds should be sent out in advance to all things and we shouldn't just consider the normal course of things, but what could actually happen. For is there anything in life that Fortune won't knock off its high horse if it pleases her?"

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 91.3A-4

April 2nd	What can I do today to keep drama away?
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April 3rd	Are my plans at war with my other plans?
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April 4th Can I fight to be th	e person philosophy wants me to be today?
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April 5th What would happen if I stopped to verify my opinions and initial reactions?
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WEEK XV

TEST YOUR IMPRESSIONS



One of Epictetus's key teachings was about testing all our impressions—any experience, perception, or circumstance that we find in front of us. He uses a key verb to emphasize this practice, dokimázō, ten times in the Discourses and once in the opening of the Enchiridion. The word carries the meaning of the assayer, one who tests fine metals and coins to verify their authenticity. In one of the most memorable uses Epictetus compares our need to test impressions to what is done with coins and how the skilled merchant can hear a counterfeit coin cast upon a table just as a musician would detect a sour note. This week, let us go through the exercise of assaying everything that comes before us, assuming it all to be counterfeit or misleading until we can prove otherwise.

"When it comes to money, where we feel our clear interest, we have an entire art where the tester uses many means to discover the worth . . . just as we give great attention to judging things that might steer us badly. But when it comes to our own ruling principle, we yawn and doze off, accepting any appearance that flashes by without counting the cost."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.20.8; 11

"First off, don't let the force of the impression carry you away. Say to it, 'hold up a bit and let me see who you are and where you are from—let me put you to the test.' . . . "

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 2.18.24

"From the very beginning, make it your practice to say to every harsh impression, 'you are an impression and not at all what you appear to be.' Next, examine and test it by the rules you possess, the first and greatest of which is this—whether it belongs to the things in our control or not in our control, and if the latter, be prepared to respond, 'It is nothing to me.'"

—EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION, 1.5

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WEEK XVI

IMPULSE CONTROL



f something is making you upset, write it here and look at it. What happened? Who caused it? Now think about your reaction: What did you say? What did you feel? Did this make it better or worse? Marcus Aurelius, as emperor, clearly had many people and causes to be upset about. He also had real power and authority. Even so we find that he would tell himself, "You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength." So, too, with what has happened to you—you did not control what happened, but you do control which impulses you follow in the wake of it.

"Epictetus says we must discover the missing art of assent and pay special attention to the sphere of our impulses—that they are subject to reservation, to the common good, and that they are in proportion to actual worth."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 11.37

"You say, good fortune used to meet you at every corner. But the fortunate person is the one who gives themselves a good fortune. And good fortunes are a well-tuned soul, good impulses, and good actions."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 5.36

"Frame your thoughts like this—you are an old person, you won't let yourself be enslaved by this any longer, no longer pulled like a puppet by every impulse, and you'll stop complaining about your present fortune or dreading the future."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 2.2

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WEEK XVII

THE FREEDOM OF CONTEMPT



The language we use to describe things imputes value to those things. We often embellish our language with superlatives to help make our choices of what to buy, wear, eat, or drink seem much better than they really are. As emperor, Marcus Aurelius could have the finest Falernian wine at his table at any meal—but he preferred to remind himself it was only grape juice. As emperor, he was the only Roman allowed to wear a purple cloak, but he took pains to point out that his cloak was like any other, just dyed with shellfish blood to produce the purple hue. This week, practice cutting your own luxuries and the things you yearn for down to size with a little contempt. Describe them with the bluntest language you can—and see how much their power over you diminishes.

"Just as when meat or other foods are set before us we think, this is a dead fish, a dead bird or pig; and also, this fine wine is only the juice of a bunch of grapes, this purple-edged robe just sheep's wool dyed in a bit of blood from a shellfish; or of sex, that it is only rubbing private parts together followed by a spasmic discharge—in the same way our impressions grab actual events and permeate them, so we see them as they really are."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 6.13

"Keep a list before your mind of those who burned with anger and resentment about something, of even the most renowned for success, misfortune, evil deeds, or any special distinction. Then ask yourself, how did that work out? Smoke and dust, the stuff of simple myth trying to be legend . . ."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 12.27

"You know what wine and liqueur tastes like. It makes no difference whether a hundred or a thousand bottles pass through your bladder—you are nothing more than a filter."

-Seneca, Moral Letters, 77.16

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WEEK XVIII

SHOW, DON'T TELL



The art of living isn't a set of teachings or a formula we can memorize. It's a practice that requires constant work. Epictetus was constantly reminding his students not to parrot back what they'd heard in the lecture hall or read in books, but to put it to work in practice. He knew that progress you could see was better than any proclaimed. Let your writing this week exhibit what you have done and what you are doing, not on what you plan to do or think you are. Let it be a catalog of your actions—good actions.

"Those who receive the bare theories immediately want to spew them, as an upset stomach does its food. First digest your theories and you won't throw them up. Otherwise they will be raw, spoiled, and not nourishing. After you've digested them, show us the changes in your reasoned choices, just like the shoulders of gymnasts display their diet and training, and as the craft of artisans show in what they've learned."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 3.21.1-3

"First practice not letting people know who you are—keep your philosophy to yourself for a bit. In just the manner that fruit is produced—the seed buried for a season, hidden, growing gradually so it may come to full maturity. But if the grain sprouts before the stalk is fully developed, it will never ripen. . . . That is the kind of plant you are, displaying fruit too soon, and the winter will kill you."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 4.8.35b-37

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WEEK XIX

WE ARE A PRODUCT OF OUR HABITS



The Roman Stoics put a heavy emphasis on dealing with habitual behavior in order to make progress in the art of living. The great Roman Stoic educator Musonius Rufus held that all the theory in the world couldn't trump good habits (or overcome bad habits). Epictetus followed Musonius in this focus on habit, with an eye to not reinforcing bad habits—such as anger—and finding a way to replace them with better ones. We all recognize bad habits when we see them in others, but it's a little harder to see them in ourselves. This week meditate on the habits or recurring behaviors that are holding you back—even ask someone close to you to help.

"Every habit and capability is confirmed and grows in its corresponding actions, walking by walking, and running by running . . . therefore, if you want to do something, make a habit of it; if you don't want to do that, don't, but make a habit of something else instead. The same principle is at work in our state of mind. When you get angry, you've not only experienced that evil, but you've also reinforced a bad habit, adding fuel to the fire."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 2.18.1-5

"If you don't wish to be a hothead, don't feed your habit. Try as a first step to remain calm and count the days you haven't been angry. I used to be angry every day, now every other day, then every third or fourth... if you make it as far as thirty days, thank God! For habit is first weakened and then obliterated. When you can say 'I didn't lose my temper today, or the next day, or for three or four months, but kept my cool under provocation,' you will know you are in better health."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 2.18.11b-14

"What assistance can we find in the fight against habit? Try the opposite!"

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.27.4

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WEEK XX

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS



t's easy to complain about the things missing in our lives, and so much harder to appreciate how much we already have. Seneca reminded us that everything we need to be happy is right in front of us, while the luxuries we might be missing would themselves come at great cost—at the cost of what we already have. Marcus agreed, and reminded himself to count those blessings present in our lives and to imagine what it would be like to not have them (and how much we would miss them). List your blessings this week, take conscious note of what you are fortunate to have and enjoy, so you can see clearly, as Epictetus put it, where they came from and feel a sense of gratitude for that.

"Don't set your mind on things you don't possess as if they were yours, but count the blessings you actually possess and think how much you would desire them if they weren't already yours. But watch yourself, that you don't value these things to the point of being troubled if you should lose them."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.27

"The founder of the universe, who assigned to us the laws of life, provided that we should live well, but not in luxury. Everything needed for our well-being is right before us, whereas what luxury requires is gathered by many miseries and anxieties. Let us use this gift of nature and count it among the greatest things."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 119.15B

"It is easy to praise providence for anything that may happen if you have two qualities: a complete view of what has actually happened in each instance and a sense of gratitude. Without gratitude what is the point of seeing, and without seeing what is the object of gratitude?"

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.6.1-2

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WEEK XXI

PRACTICE TRUE JOY



The Stoics held joy (*chara*) to be one of the good passions, worthy of practice in everyday life. But Stoic joy isn't about the delights of the senses or material pleasure. To Marcus, joy was being kind to others. To Seneca, it was freedom from fear of suffering and death. Let's laugh with Democritus, as Seneca says, and engage in our "proper human work" with joy. Consider in your writing this week where you might find joy and what good you might do with it.

"Joy for human beings lies in proper human work. And proper human work consists in: acts of kindness to other human beings, disdain for the stirrings of the senses, identifying trustworthy impressions, and contemplating the natural order and all that happens in keeping with it."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.26

"Trust me, real joy is a serious thing. Do you think someone can, in the charming expression, blithely dismiss death with an easy disposition? Or swing open the door to poverty, keep pleasures in check, or meditate on the endurance of suffering? The one who is comfortable with turning these thoughts over is truly full of joy, but hardly cheerful. It's exactly such a joy that I would wish for you to possess, for it will never run dry once you've laid claim to its source."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 23.4

"Heraclitus would shed tears whenever he went out in public— Democritus laughed. One saw the whole as a parade of miseries, the other of follies. And so, we should take a lighter view of things and bear them with an easy spirit, for it is more human to laugh at life than to lament it."

—Seneca, On Tranquility of Mind, 15.2

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WEEK XXII

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE



The way to escape petty concerns and worries of daily existence requires taking some time out and getting what Stoics like to call "the view from above." This was something Marcus Aurelius reminded himself to do regularly. He had learned from Heraclitus that everything in the world was constantly changing and that remembering this can eliminate so many stresses and concerns. This week don't just look at what you're dealing with in your life up close; try to see it from far away, too. Try to describe what another, larger perspective would look like—of your problems, of your worries, of your obsessions.

"How beautifully Plato put it. Whenever you want to talk about people, it's best to take a bird's-eye view and see everything all at once—of gatherings, armies, farms, weddings and divorces, births and deaths, noisy courtrooms or silent spaces, every foreign people, holidays, memorials, markets—all blended together and arranged in a pairing of opposites."

—Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.48

"Watch the stars in their courses and imagine yourself running alongside them. Think constantly on the changes of the elements into each other, for such thoughts wash away the dust of earthly life."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.47

"The cosmic order—the same for everyone—wasn't made by any god or human, but always was and always will be. An eternal fire, kindled in measures, and extinguished in measures."

—Heraclitus (as quoted by Clement of Alexandria)

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WEEK XXIII

ROLE MODELS



Adoption was a widespread practice in Roman society, especially in the senatorial class and as a provision for imperial succession. Marcus Aurelius himself was the adopted son of Emperor Antoninus Pius, who himself was adopted by the Emperor Hadrian so that Marcus would one day succeed them both to the purple. While Seneca was never adopted, his brother Novatus was, becoming Gallio who in the New Testament refused to press charges on Saint Paul. But Seneca liked to look at the phenomenon of adoption the other way around, saying we can always choose whose children we want to be. For him, Cato, the towering, resolute Stoic who railed against Julius Caesar in defense of the Republic, was always standing by in his mind. The first book in Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* is a catalog of all the people he had learned from and the lessons he had taken from their lives. Use this week to think of models that you can follow, wise and admirable people you can measure yourself against.

"We like to say that we don't get to choose our parents, that they were given by chance—yet we can truly choose whose children we'd like to be."

—Seneca, On the Brevity of Life, 15.3a

"We can remove most sins if we have a witness standing by as we are about to go wrong. The soul should have someone it can respect, by whose example it can make its inner sanctum more inviolable. Happy is the person who can improve others, not only when present, but even when in their thoughts!"

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 11.9

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WEEK XXIV

TRY THE OTHER HANDLE



pictetus offered a powerful tool in his handbook, the *Enchiridion*, which Stoics use as an exercise in decision-making about difficult events. Everything, Epictetus said, has two interpretations, or handles by which they can be grabbed: one that will make it harder, one that will make it easier. Do you take offense? Or do you focus on common ground? Do you focus on all that has gone wrong? Or what has gone right? Ask yourself these questions about everything you see and feel this week. Make sure you are using the right handle.

"Every event has two handles—one by which it can be carried, and one by which it can't. If your brother does you wrong, don't grab it by his wronging, because this is the handle incapable of lifting it. Instead, use the other—that he is your brother, that you were raised together, and then you will have hold of the handle that carries."

—EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION, 43

"No, it is events that give rise to fear—when another has power over them or can prevent them, that person becomes able to inspire fear. How is the fortress destroyed? Not by iron or fire, but by judgments . . . here is where we must begin, and it is from this front that we must seize the fortress and throw out the tyrants."

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 4.1.85-86; 87A

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WEEK XXV

TAKE A WALK



Seneca believed we should take frequent wandering walks, because constant work will fracture our minds. (As a writer he must have agreed with the novelist Helen Dunmore, "A problem with a piece of writing often clarifies itself if you go for a long walk.") Take some good walks this week and watch the dullness and feebleness depart. Enjoy the scenery, enjoy being away from your work. Make them part of your morning and evening writing routine. Return with a stimulated mind that's ready to journal about and follow the philosophy you know. You think that it's taking a "break," but really you end up smarter and clearer than you were when you left.

"We should take wandering outdoor walks, so that the mind might be nourished and refreshed by the open air and deep breathing."

—Seneca, On Tranquility of Mind, 17.8

"Pass through this brief patch of time in harmony with nature, and come to your final resting place gracefully, just as a ripened olive might drop, praising the earth that nourished it and grateful to the tree that gave it growth."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 4.48.2

"The mind must be given relaxation—it will rise improved and sharper after a good break. Just as rich fields must not be forced—for they will quickly lose their fertility if never given a break—so constant work on the anvil will fracture the force of the mind. But it regains its powers if it is set free and relaxed for a while. Constant work gives rise to a certain kind of dullness and feebleness in the rational soul."

—Seneca, On Tranquility of Mind, 17.5

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WEEK XXVI

WHAT'S IN YOUR WAY IS THE WAY



Distacles are a fact of life. Even the most powerful and lucky of us are not exempt from this reality, but we have a superpower at our hands through Stoic philosophy in that our purposes, intentions, and attitudes can adapt to any conditions to find a way forward. The Stoics had a word for this, *hupexhairesis*, meaning acting with a kind of "reserve-clause" or "reverse-clause" that allows us to reconsider and set a new course of action as needed. Marcus Aurelius tells us that any obstacle can actually become the raw material for a new purpose! How might the obstacles you're facing reveal a new path?

"While it's true that someone can impede our actions, they can't impede our intentions and our attitudes, which have the power of being conditional and adaptable. For the mind adapts and converts any obstacle to its action into a means of achieving it. That which is an impediment to action is turned to advance action. The obstacle on the path becomes the way."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 5.20

"... just as nature turns to its own purpose any obstacle or any opposition, sets its place in the destined order, and co-opts it, so every rational person can convert any obstacle into the raw material for their own purpose."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.35

"You must build up your life action by action, and be content if each one achieves its goal as far as possible—and no one can keep you from this. But there will be some external obstacle! Perhaps, but no obstacle to acting with justice, self-control, and wisdom. But what if some other area of my action is thwarted? Well, gladly accept the obstacle for what it is and shift your attention to what is given, and another action will immediately take its place, one that better fits the life you are building."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.32

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WEEK XXVII

PROTECT YOUR OWN GOOD



usonius Rufus, one of Epictetus's teachers, taught that human beings are all born with an innate goodness, or, as he put it, with an inclination to virtue. It's our choices that decide whether that goodness comes out or not. We're not bad people, essentially, though we might sometimes do bad things. The purpose of Stoicism then is to remind us of that goodness and to help us work hard to protect it. Spend some time writing about the choices you can make this week—the actions you can take—to do just that.

"Protect your own good in all that you do, and as concerns everything else take what is given as far as you can make reasoned use of it. If you don't, you'll be unlucky, prone to failure, hindered, and stymied."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 4.3.11

"Dig deep within yourself, for there is a fountain of goodness ever ready to flow if you will keep digging."

—Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.59

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WEEK XXVIII

DON'T LOOK FOR THE THIRD THING



The Stoics teach us that doing well is its own reward. To do the right thing, and to see someone helped by it, is enough. To go around expecting thanks—what Marcus Aurelius described as the "third thing"—on top of it? That's being greedy. Keeping score not only misses the purpose of being good, it's foolish. It sets you up for disappointment. If you are going to do some accounting, look at it from the other direction. How many people have helped us—and what do we owe them in return? Think about clearing your debts this week, and consider forgiving any notion of others owing you.

"One person, on doing well by others, immediately accounts the expected favor in return. Another is not so quick, but still considers the person a debtor and knows the favor. A third kind of person acts as if not conscious of the deed, rather like a vine producing a cluster of grapes without making further demands, like a horse after its race, or a dog after its walk, or a bee after making its honey. Such a person, having done a good deed, won't go shouting from rooftops but simply moves on to the next deed just like the vine produces another bunch of grapes in the right season."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 5.6

"When you've done well and another has benefited by it, why like a fool do you look for a third thing on top—credit for the good deed or a favor in return?"

-Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 7.73

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WEEK XXIX

PRACTICE GENTLENESS INSTEAD OF ANGER



t's easy to imagine Marcus Aurelius losing his temper. His responsibilities were vast and his job required him to work with many frustrating, difficult people. As such, he had an acute sense of the problem of anger, knowing just how counterproductive it can be and how miserable it can make its users. He often repeated a simple exercise designed to preserve goodwill for others by simply replacing anger with gentleness. We can't allow ourselves to desert our goodwill, and we must remind ourselves that no one makes a mistake willingly. Each time you feel anger this week, remember Marcus and see how you might replace it with gentleness—and write these examples down.

"As you move forward along the path of reason, people will stand in your way. They will never be able to keep you from doing what's sound, so don't let them knock out your goodwill for them. Keep a steady watch on both fronts, not only for well-based judgments and actions, but also for gentleness with those who would obstruct our path or create other difficulties. For getting angry is also a weakness, just as much as abandoning the task or surrendering under panic."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 11.9

"As Plato said, every soul is deprived of truth against its will. The same holds true for justice, self-control, goodwill to others, and every similar virtue. It's essential to constantly keep this in your mind, for it will make you more gentle to all."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.63

"Keep this thought handy when you feel a fit of rage coming on it isn't manly to be enraged. Rather, gentleness and civility are more human, and therefore manlier. A real man doesn't give way to anger and discontent, and such a person has strength, courage, and endurance. . . ."

-MARCUS AURELIUS, MEDITATIONS, 11.18.5B

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WEEK XXX

KEEPING "THE NEWS" IN CHECK



Leven the ancients felt inundated with gossip and news. This week you will face a barrage like they couldn't have imagined—from texts, calls, e-mails to the incessant grind of the 24/7 news machine. Instead of responding to every status update, urgent call, or the latest trending incendiary news story, take a moment to remember three ways the Stoics used to keep their focus on their purpose and duty in the present moment: (1) Step away from the noise. (2) Remember that no news can throw you off the purpose of your present choices. (3) Don't add something negative (or positive) to what is being reported.

"Are you distracted by breaking news? Then take some leisure time to learn something good, and stop bouncing around. But when you do, keep in mind the other mistake, to be so distracted by getting control that you wear yourself out and lose a purpose by which you can direct your impulses and thoughts."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 2.7

"Whenever disturbing news is delivered to you, bear in mind that no news can ever be relevant to your reasoned choice. Can anyone break news to you that your assumptions or desires are wrong? No way! But they can tell you someone died—even so, what is that to you?"

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 3.18.1-2

"Don't tell yourself anything more than what the initial impressions report. It's been reported to you that someone is speaking badly about you. This is the report—the report wasn't that you've been harmed. I see that my son is sick—but not that his life is at risk. So always stay within your first impressions, and don't add to them in your head—this way nothing can happen to you."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.49

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WEEK XXXI

A WEEK WITHOUT COMPLAINING



pictetus spoke often to his students about the need to give up blaming and complaining—in fact, he saw it as one of the primary measuring sticks of progress in the art of living. How much of life is wasted pointing fingers? Has complaining ever solved a single problem? Marcus Aurelius would say, "Blame yourself—or no one." This week, try constructive feedback over complaining and responsibility over blame. And if something goes wrong, spend some time reflecting on what the true causes were. Don't waste a minute with complaints—in this journal or out loud.

"You must stop blaming God, and not blame any person. You must completely control your desire and shift your avoidance to what lies within your reasoned choice. You must no longer feel anger, resentment, envy, or regret."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 3.22.13

"For nothing outside my reasoned choice can hinder or harm it my reasoned choice alone can do this to itself. If we would lean this way whenever we fail, and would blame only ourselves and remember that nothing but opinion is the cause of a troubled mind and uneasiness, then by God, I swear we would be making progress."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 3.19.2-3

"But if you deem as your own only what is yours, and what belongs to others as truly not yours, then no one will ever be able to coerce or to stop you, you will find no one to blame or accuse, you will do nothing against your will, you will have no enemy, no one will harm you, because no harm can affect you."

-EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION, 1.3

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WEEK XXXII

WHAT LITTLE WINS CAN YOU FIND?



Zeno of Citium, the Phoenician merchant who founded the Stoic school on the painted porch (stoa poikilē) of the Agora after a shipwreck, said that happiness was a matter of small steps. While the Stoics believed in the perfectibility of human beings, they knew much stood in the way of realizing that potential. So they would be skeptical of the so-called epic wins and quantum leaps that our culture obsesses over today. Instead, they would urge you to focus on your daily duties, on making incremental progress. Spend your writing time this week thinking about the small wins you can rack up, what little gains can be had from this improvement or that one, a decision here or a decision there. Be satisfied with each small step. Keep moving and don't give up.

"Do now what nature demands of you. Get right to it if that's in your power. Don't look around to see if people will know about it. Don't await the perfection of Plato's *Republic*, but be satisfied with even the smallest step forward and regard the outcome as a small thing."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 9.29

"We don't abandon our pursuits because we despair of ever perfecting them."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 1.2.37b

"Well-being is realized by small steps, but is truly no small thing."

—Zeno, Quoted in Diogenes Laertius,

Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, 7.1.26

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August 12th Am I making this philosop	hy my own by putting it into practice?
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WEEK XXXIII

ALWAYS ASK YOURSELF THIS QUESTION



unnecessary. Meetings, material possessions, confrontations, pursuits—pointless distractions and problems. They take us away from tranquility and purpose. A Stoic cuts through these temptations and obligations by asking this question, a question that you should lead your journaling with this week. Try it. Before speaking, acting, or buying something, ask simply: "Is this one of the necessary things?"

"It is said that if you would have peace of mind, busy yourself with little. But wouldn't a better saying be do what you must and as required of a rational being created for public life? For this brings not only the peace of mind of doing few things, but the greater peace of doing them well. Since the vast majority of our words and actions are unnecessary, corralling them will create an abundance of leisure and tranquility. As a result, we shouldn't forget at each moment to ask, is this one of the unnecessary things? But we must corral not only unnecessary actions but unnecessary thoughts, too, so needless acts don't tag along after them."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 4.24

"I was shipwrecked before I even boarded... the journey showed me this—how much of what we have is unnecessary, and how easily we can decide to rid ourselves of these things whenever it's necessary, never suffering the loss."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 87.1

August	13th What troubles can I solve in advance?
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WEEK XXXIV

JUST SAY NO TO FUTURE MISERY



ow often we make ourselves miserable . . . in advance. Out of fear of this, out of desperate hope for that. When we focus on pining for or avoiding a certain future, we make ourselves miserable here in the present. Hecato of Rhodes, the great student of the great middle-Stoic scholar Panaetius, taught that this misery is always tied to hopes or fears we give to imagined future outcomes. From this Seneca reminds us this week to say no to both, because indulging them robs us of the ability to enjoy the present. As you write, don't think about the future—what you hope will happen, what you fear might—just focus on right now. What you're doing and thinking right now.

"It's ruinous for the soul to be anxious about the future and miserable in advance of misery, engulfed by anxiety that the things it desires might remain its own until the very end. For such a soul will never be at rest—by longing for things to come it will lose the ability to enjoy present things."

-SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 98.5B-6A

"But there is no reason to live and no limit to our miseries if we let our fears predominate."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 13.12B

"Hecato says, 'Cease to hope and you will cease to fear.'... The primary cause of both these ills is that instead of adapting ourselves to present circumstances we send out thoughts too far ahead."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 5.7b-8

	August 20th How well is my soul dressed?
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August 21st	What if I stopped worrying about the future and enjoyed the present?
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WEEK XXXV

A CURE FOR PROCRASTINATION



To the Stoic, procrastination almost looks like a form of delusion and entitlement. Who is to say you'll even be around next month or next week to deal with it? If it's important, they'd say, don't wait. Do it now. As Marcus says, if it needs to be done, do it with "courage and promptness." Procrastination seems like it makes things easier, but it damns us to a low-grade, gnawing state of anxiety. Is that how you'd want to spend this week? Any week? Your last week? Ask yourself: What am I avoiding? What can I handle today instead of tomorrow? What can I do promptly and bravely, right now?

"Anything that must yet be done, virtue can do with courage and promptness. For anyone would call it a sign of foolishness for one to undertake a task with a lazy and begrudging spirit, or to push the body in one direction and the mind in another, to be torn apart by wildly divergent impulses."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 31.B-32

"This is the mark of perfection of character—to spend each day as if it were your last, without frenzy, laziness, or any pretending."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.69

"You get what you deserve. Instead of being a good person today, you choose instead to become one tomorrow."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.22

August 27th	Where can I learn to laugh rather than cry?	
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WEEK XXXVI

A HARD WINTER TRAINING



The art of living has three levels of discipline: study, practice, and hard training. Reading the Stoics, that's study. Trying out the lessons and reflecting on them in this journal, that's practice. What's left is the hard training. Epictetus liked to use the analogy of the Roman army's practice of training hard in the off months of winter so they would be prepared to meet any challenge when they returned to battle in the spring. Seneca would spend time each month exposing himself to tougher than usual conditions. He, too, used a military analogy, pointing to the way soldiers are tasked with hard jobs so they would be strong when the enemy eventually came. What are you doing this week to push yourself beyond mere study and practice?

"We must undergo a hard winter training and not rush into things for which we haven't prepared."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.2.32

"Here's a lesson to test your mind's mettle: take part of a week in which you have only the most meager and cheap food, dress scantly in shabby clothes, and ask yourself if this is really the worst that you feared. It is when times are good that you should gird yourself for tougher times ahead, for when Fortune is kind the soul can build defenses against her ravages. So it is that soldiers practice maneuvers in peacetime, erecting bunkers with no enemies in sight and exhausting themselves under no attack so that when it comes they won't grow tired."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 18.5-6

"When a challenge confronts you, remember that God is matching you with a younger sparring partner, as would a physical trainer. Why? Becoming an Olympian takes sweat! I think no one has a better challenge than yours, if only you would use it like an athlete would that younger sparring partner."

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.24.1-2

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WEEK XXXVII

A NEW WAY TO PRAY



We often pray for the things we desire and, in the process, excuse ourselves from the equation. We're hoping the heavens will magically gift us with the outcome we want—whether it's for a promotion or the speedy recovery of a loved one. The Stoics would urge you to stop doing this. Marcus Aurelius reminded himself not to present the gods with a list of demands for pleasures or comforts, but instead to ask for help not needing those things. In a sense then, he was really asking for inner strength. He was asking himself. Think about all the things you want—that you're praying or hoping for this week—and try turning them around like that. See what you come up with instead.

"Try praying differently, and see what happens: Instead of asking for 'a way to sleep with her,' try asking for 'a way to stop desiring to sleep with her.' Instead of 'a way to get rid of him,' try asking for 'a way to not crave his demise.' Instead of 'a way to not lose my child,' try asking for 'a way to lose my fear of it.'"

—Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 9.40.(6)

"We cry to God Almighty, how can we escape this agony? Fool, don't you have hands? Or could it be God forgot to give you a pair? Sit and pray your nose doesn't run! Or rather just wipe your nose and stop seeking a scapegoat."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 2.16.13

"But I haven't at any time been hindered in my will, nor forced against it. And how is this possible? I have bound up my choice to act with the will of God. God wills that I be sick, such is my will. He wills that I should choose something, so do I. He wills that I reach for something, or something be given to me—I wish for the same. What God doesn't will, I do not wish for."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 4.1.89

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WEEK XXXVIII

ON HANDLING HATERS



The Stoics taught that kindness trumps hate. They believed that those who engage in hate are prisoners to a destructive passion—one that hurts the practitioner, not the intended target. There's no reason to hate a hater; they are already suffering enough. In fact, when you see them this way, it makes it easier to be kind, good-natured, genuine, and useful. Remember the line in the Bible about how loving your enemies is like pouring hot coals on them, because it's so unexpected? Who can you surprise like that this week? Whose enmity can you meet with kindness and compassion? How much better do you feel having done so?

"What if someone despises me? Let them see to it. But I will see to it that I won't be found doing or saying anything contemptible. What if someone hates me? Let them see to that. But I will see to it that I'm kind and good-natured to all, and prepared to show even the hater where they went wrong. Not in a critical way, or to show off my patience, but genuinely and usefully."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 11.13

"Kindness is invincible, but only when it's sincere, with no hypocrisy or faking. For what can even the most malicious person do if you keep showing kindness and, if given the chance, you gently point out where they went wrong—right as they are trying to harm you?"

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 11.18.5.9a

"Keep in mind that it isn't the one who has it in for you and takes a swipe that harms you, but rather the harm comes from your own belief about the abuse. So when someone arouses your anger, know that it's really your own opinion fueling it. Instead, make it your first response not to be carried away by such impressions, for with time and distance self-mastery is more easily achieved."

—EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION, 20

September 17th	Can I resist giving in to haters—and hating them in return?
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WEEK XXXIX

PANIC IS SELF-INFLICTED HARM



ame one situation that is improved by panicking. Go ahead—write it down if you've got one! Seneca mused often about the problem of panic both in his letters and essays. It creates danger and limits our ability to function effectively. It prevents us from finding success and seeing objectively. Worse, it makes us weaker over time because we've never truly faced the danger we are so worried about. Meditate on the scary things that might make you panic. Think about what is so overwhelming about them. Come to understand them. Get familiar with them.

"For even peace itself will supply more reason for worry. Not even safe circumstances will bring you confidence once your mind has been shocked—once it gets in the habit of blind panic, it can't provide for its own safety. For it doesn't really avoid danger, it just runs away. Yet we are exposed to greater danger with our backs turned."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 104.10b

"Success comes to the lowly and to the poorly talented, but the special characteristic of a great person is to triumph over the disasters and panics of human life."

-Seneca, On Providence, 4.1

"The unprepared are panic-stricken by the smallest things."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 107.4

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WEEK XL

PRACTICE SILENCE



Social media teaches us to have an opinion about everything. Silence beckons us to speak. We live in a loud culture and we try to keep up by being louder in return. How much trouble does that cause us? How much might we learn if we spent more time listening to others than we do trying to sandwich our opinions in at every turn? How much of what we say have we come to regret? The truly loud thing to say is nothing. Write your thoughts down here this week, but see how many of them you can keep to yourself. Be bold in your silence, in how much you hold your tongue this week.

"Better to trip with the feet than with the tongue."

—Zeno, Quoted in Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, 7.1.26

"To the youngster talking nonsense Zeno said, 'The reason why we have two ears and only one mouth is so we might listen more and talk less.'"

-Diogenes Laertius,

Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, 7.1.23

"Cato practiced the kind of public speech capable of moving the masses, believing proper political philosophy takes care like any great city to maintain the warlike element. But he was never seen practicing in front of others, and no one ever heard him rehearse a speech. When he was told that people blamed him for his silence, he replied, 'Better they not blame my life. I begin to speak only when I'm certain what I'll say isn't better left unsaid.'"

—Plutarch, Cato the Younger, 4

"Silence is a lesson learned from the many sufferings of life."

—SENECA, THYESTES, 309

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WEEK XLI

PRACTICE LOVE



The Stoic notion of *sympatheia*, that we all are part of an organic whole, connected by mutual interests and affinities, is greater than the Golden Rule. Don't treat others how you would like to be treated, treat them like you treat yourself, because we are all one. Seneca said that whenever he encountered another human being he saw an opportunity for kindness. He had learned from Hecato that if you want to be loved there is only one thing to do: love others. Who can you give love to this week? What kindness can you expend? How can you show how you feel—strangers, friends, and family? How can you show them that you believe we are all part of the same whole?

"Hecato says, 'I can teach you a love potion made without any drugs, herbs, or special spell—if you would be loved, love.'"

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 9.6

"A benefit should be kept like a buried treasure, only to be dug up in necessity. . . . Nature bids us to do well by all. . . . Wherever there is a human being, we have an opportunity for kindness."

—Seneca, On the Happy Life, 24.2–3

"Nature produced us as a family, since we all sprang from the same source and toward the same end. Nature bestowed upon us mutual love, and joined us together as friends."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 95.52

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WEEK XLII

MAKE HONESTY YOUR ONLY POLICY



A semperor, Marcus Aurelius did not see the best of humanity. At court there would have been backbiting, people who sold their friends out when they saw an opportunity to advance themselves, avarice, and deceit. But he especially didn't like faux attempts at honesty. His point: if you have to say "I'm going to be honest with you here," you're casually saying that honesty is the exception and not the rule. How sad is that? It's time to think about what those little statements say about us—and make sure that our default policy is honesty and straightforwardness.

"How rotten and fraudulent when people say they intend to give it to you straight. What are you up to, dear friend? It shouldn't need your announcement, but be readily seen, as if written on your forehead, heard in the ring of your voice, a flash in your eyes—just as the beloved sees it all in the lover's glance. In short, the straightforward and good person should be like a smelly goat—you know when they are in the room with you. A calculated 'giving it to you straight' is like a dagger. There's nothing worse than a wolf befriending sheep. Avoid false friendship at all costs. If you are good, straightforward, and well-meaning it should show in your eyes and not escape notice."

—Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 11.15

"It's in keeping with Nature to show our friends affection and to celebrate their advancement, as if it were our very own. For if we don't do this, virtue, which is strengthened only by exercising our perceptions, will no longer endure in us."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 109.15

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WEEK XLIII

BUILD UP, DON'T TEAR DOWN



s there a worse environment to work in than one where bullying and one-upmanship is the norm? Sometimes leaders seem to think that that is part of the job description—that they are there to regulate and keep people in line. In truth, tearing people down is incredibly counterproductive. Pete Carroll, coach of the Seattle Seahawks, poses a question: If self-confidence is so important for players, why would a coach ever do anything to damage it? Marcus Aurelius, who had the power to take down anyone at will, almost never did. Instead, he reminded himself that it was better to build up—be community-minded, modest, prepared, and tolerant of others. We are made for cooperation (synergia) and to render works held in common (praxeis koinonikas apodidonai). Let's think about that going forward: How can we help build the self-confidence of others? How can we find some of our own in doing so?

"So someone's good at taking down an opponent, but that doesn't make them more community-minded, or modest, or well-prepared for any circumstance, or more tolerant of the faults of others."

—Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 7.52

"Whenever you have trouble getting up in the morning, remind yourself that you've been made by nature for the purpose of working with others.... And it's our own natural purpose that is more fitting and more satisfying."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 8.12

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WEEK XLIV

ACCEPTING WHAT IS



Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer is a mantra for many: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference." The Stoics wanted to push past simply "accepting" what is—they wanted to be grateful and happy with what it is. Epictetus taught that we get a well-flowing life when we wish for what is going to happen not what we want to happen, and Marcus added that we should meet anything that comes our way with gratitude. Not "I wish this was different, but I'll tolerate it"; instead "I am glad it happened this way. It is for the best." Try that on for size this week.

"Don't seek for everything to happen as you wish it would, but rather wish that everything happens as it actually will—then your life will flow well."

—Epictetus, Enchiridion, 8

"To be truly educated means this—learning to wish that each thing happens exactly as it does."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 1.12.15

"All you need are these: certainty of judgment in the present moment; action for the common good in the present moment; and an attitude of gratitude in the present moment for anything that comes your way."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 9.6

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WEEK XLV

THE REAL POWER YOU HAVE



There is fleeting power and there is real power. Fleeting power can be taken away, while real power is in our minds and our bones. The former tends to be along the lines of wealth, fame, high position, and the leverage all those things give us over others. The Stoics thought this kind of power was inferior to the real power that each person possesses—the power of our minds to reason and make judgments and choices based on the real worth of things. You can have both kinds of power, too, but only if you keep the first kind of power subject to the kind of power the Stoics cared about.

"This is the very thing which makes up the virtue of the happy person and a well-flowing life—when the affairs of life are in every way tuned to the harmony between the individual divine spirit and the will of the director of the universe."

> —Chrysippus, Quoted in Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, 7.1.88

"Don't trust in your reputation, money, or position, but in the strength that is yours—namely, your judgments about the things that you control and don't control. For this alone is what makes us free and unfettered, that picks us up by the neck from the depths and lifts us eye to eye with the rich and powerful."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 3.26.34-35

"Understand at last that you have something in you more powerful and divine than what causes the bodily passions and pulls you like a mere puppet. What thoughts now occupy my mind? Is it not fear, suspicion, desire, or something like that?"

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 12.19

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WEEK XLVI

JUDGE YOURSELF, NOT OTHERS



There is nothing less philosophical than being a know-it-all. This is especially true of those who use their knowledge to scold others for their mistakes while proclaiming the superiority of their knowledge or insight. The Stoics taught that behaving this way was to miss the entire purpose of philosophy—as a tool for self-correction, medicine for our own souls, not a weapon for putting others down. Seneca's letters twice employ the metaphor of scrubbing down or scraping off our faults. We need to see ourselves as "in the care of philosophy's principles," or, as Epictetus put it later when referring to the philosopher's lecture hall, we need to see it as a hospital for our own therapy. Don't let yourself write down a single complaint or problem of another person in this journal this week—focus on what ails you.

"When philosophy is wielded with arrogance and stubbornly, it is the cause for the ruin of many. Let philosophy scrape off your own faults, rather than be a way to rail against the faults of others."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 103.4B-5A

"Some people with exceptional minds quickly grasp virtue or produce it within themselves. But other dim and lazy types, hindered by bad habits, must have their rusty souls constantly scrubbed down. . . . The weaker sorts will be helped and lifted from their bad opinions if we put them in the care of philosophy's principles."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 95.36-37

"Men, the philosopher's lecture-hall is a hospital—you shouldn't walk out of it feeling pleasure, but pain, for you aren't well when you enter it."

—Epictetus, Discourses, 3.23.30

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WEEK XLVII

PRACTICE LETTING GO



We lose people we love—a natural and unavoidable part of life. The Stoics say this suffering is increased by our belief that we possess the objects of our love—that they are, as we like to say, "a part of us." This belief doesn't increase our love and care for them, but rather is a form of clinging that ignores the simple fact that we don't control what will happen, not to our own bodies, let alone to the ones we love. Epictetus taught a powerful exercise that every time you wish a dear child, family member, or friend good night, remember that these people are like a precious breakable glass, and remember how dramatically things could change while you sleep. Marcus, too, struggled to practice this with his own family as he tucked them in at night. The point isn't to be morbid but to create a sense of appreciation and a kind of humility. Don't take anyone—especially someone you love—for granted this week.

"Whenever you experience the pangs of losing something, don't treat it like a part of yourself but as a breakable glass, so when it falls you will remember that and won't be troubled. So, too, whenever you kiss your child, sibling, or friend, don't layer on top of the experience all the things you might wish, but hold them back and stop them, just as those who ride behind triumphant generals remind them they are mortal. In the same way, remind yourself that your precious one isn't one of your possessions, but something given for now, not forever."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 3.24.84-86A

"But the wise person can lose nothing. Such a person has everything stored up for themselves, leaving nothing to Fortune, their own goods are held firm, bound in virtue, which requires nothing from chance, and therefore can't be either increased or diminished."

—Seneca, On the Firmness of the Wise, 5.4

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WEEK XLVIII

BALANCE THE BOOKS OF LIFE DAILY



We journal as a way of gathering up life's experiences, insights, frustrations, unexpected struggles and triumphs, and more. In all of this we are making a reckoning of our progress on life's way. Seneca, whose father-in-law was in charge of keeping the books on Rome's granary, liked the metaphor of balancing life's books each day. Rather than postpone, our impulse each day should be to bring things, as much as possible, to completion. Why? Because we never know what tomorrow might bring. Epictetus, too, would tell his students that the important thing was that they had begun: begun to practice, learn, get better. Give yourself credit this week for the journey you are on—and reflect on how far you have come (and how far there is left to go).

"Let us prepare our minds as if we'd come to the very end of life. Let us postpone nothing. Let us balance life's books each day. Life's greatest flaw is that it's always imperfect, and a certain portion of it is postponed. The one who puts the finishing touches on their life each day is never short of time."

-SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 101.7B-8A

"Believe me, it's better to produce the balance-sheet of your own life than that of the grain market."

—SENECA, ON THE BREVITY OF LIFE, 18.3B

"I am your teacher and you are learning in my school. My aim is to bring you to completion, unhindered, free from compulsive behavior, unrestrained, without shame, free, flourishing, and happy, looking to God in things great and small—your aim is to learn and diligently practice all these things. Why then don't you complete the work, if you have the right aim and I have both the right aim and right preparation? What is missing? . . . The work is quite feasible, and is the only thing in our power. . . . Let go of the past. We must only begin. Believe me and you will see."

-EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 2.19.29-34

November 2	26th What	petty comparisons am I bothering myself with?
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November 29th	How can I be less agitated—and complain about it less,	too?
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WEEK XLIX

BE STINGY WITH TIME



One of the most common sayings we hear is "life is short." It is—but as Seneca remarked, it's also plenty long if you know how to use it. The first step to that? Not giving so much of it away to other people. Becoming miserly about our time is a powerful exercise, which can keep us from squandering this nonrenewable resource. What in your life consumes a lot of time for no good purpose? What amusements and desires consume our time without giving us any good return? As you review that list, make a commitment to doing something about it. Life is short, after all; you don't have too much to spare.

"Were all the geniuses of history to focus on this single theme, they could never fully express their bafflement at the darkness of the human mind. No person would give up even an inch of their estate, and the slightest dispute with a neighbor can mean hell to pay; yet we easily let others encroach on our lives—worse, we often pave the way for those who will take it over. No person hands out their money to passersby, but to how many do each of us hand out our lives! We're tight-fisted with property and money, yet think too little of wasting time, the one thing about which we should all be the toughest misers."

—Seneca, On the Brevity of Life, 3.1-2

"It's not at all that we have too short a time to live, but that we squander a great deal of it. Life is long enough, and it's given in sufficient measure to do many great things if we spend it well. But when it's poured down the drain of luxury and neglect, when it's employed to no good end, we're finally driven to see that it has passed by before we even recognized it passing. And so it is—we don't receive a short life, we make it so."

—Seneca, On the Brevity of Life, 1.3-4A

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WEEK L KEEP THE RHYTHM



arcus Aurelius must have known that as emperor he was part of a grand and great history. As a philosopher, he also knew that all people are part of a rhythm pulsing through both history and their own lives, and he liked to remind himself to not lose that beat. Return to your philosophy, he would tell himself when he drifted. Don't give in to the distractions. In fact, he tried constantly to return to it. That kind of awareness (*prosochē*, paying special attention) is something he learned from reading Epictetus, who told his students that while none of us can be perfect, we can catch ourselves when we begin to slide, when we drift from where we should be. Can you feel that rhythm this week? Can you point to examples of when you really felt locked into it?

"Walk the long gallery of the past, of empires and kingdoms succeeding each other without number. And you can also see the future, for surely it will be exactly the same, unable to deviate from the present rhythm. It's all one whether we've experienced forty years or an aeon. What more is there to see?"

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 7.49

"When forced, as it seems, by circumstances into utter confusion, get a hold of yourself quickly. Don't be locked out of the rhythm any longer than necessary. You'll be able to keep the beat if you are constantly returning to it."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 6.11

"When you let your attention slide for a bit, don't think you will get back a grip on it whenever you wish—instead, bear in mind that because of today's mistake everything that follows will be necessarily worse. . . . Is it possible to be free from error? Not by any means, but it is possible to be a person always stretching to avoid error. For we must be content to at least escape a few mistakes by never letting our attention slide."

—EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES, 4.12.1; 19

December 10th What are you getting in return for the time you spend so freely?	
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December IIth	Are you living with dignity and courage?
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December 12th Will I keep the rhythm	of life, no matter the interruptions?
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December 13th	Can I be grateful for the time I've been given?	
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December l6th	What am I doing to build my self-confidence?
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WEEK LI

STAKE YOUR CLAIM



Well, let's do it. Let these pages reflect the insights you have learned by your own experiences. Let the inspiration you've taken from the Stoics create your own exercises, reminders, and perspectives.

"For it's disgraceful for an old person, or one in sight of old age, to have only the knowledge carried in their notebooks. Zeno said this... what do you say? Cleanthes said that... what do you say? How long will you be compelled by the claims of another? Take charge and stake your own claim—something posterity will carry in its notebook."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 33.7

"Won't you be walking in your predecessors' footsteps? I surely will use the older path, but if I find a shorter and smoother way, I'll blaze a trail there. The ones who pioneered these paths aren't our masters, but our guides. Truth stands open to everyone, it hasn't been monopolized."

—Seneca, Moral Letters, 33.11

"Don't act grudgingly, selfishly, without due diligence, or to be a contrarian. Don't overdress your thought in fine language. Don't be a person of too many words and too many deeds.... Be cheerful, not wanting outside help or the relief others might bring. A person needs to stand on their own, not be propped up."

-Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 3.5

December I	17th How well do I really know myself?	
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WEEK LII

TURN WORDS INTO WORKS



arcus spent a great deal of time on his journals, yet within their pages we find him admonishing himself to throw them away, to never read their pages. Why? Because he didn't want them to be an excuse from the essential tasks at hand. The art of living will never be found anywhere but in our own efforts to be a good person. Never forget that is the aim of this journal. It is not to fill up pages with pretty thoughts but to inspire you to take action, to turn the words, as Seneca said, into works. In that we have the perfect place to end this year, with the ultimate Stoic prompt: Get active in your own rescue.

"Stop wandering about! You aren't likely to read your own note-books, or ancient histories, or the anthologies you've collected to enjoy in your old age. Get busy with life's purpose, toss aside empty hopes, get active in your own rescue—if you care for your-self at all—and do it while you can."

-MARCUS AURELIUS, Meditations, 3.14

"You have proof in the extent of your wanderings that you never found the art of living anywhere—not in logic, nor in wealth, fame, or in any indulgence. Nowhere. Where is it then? In doing what human nature demands. How is a person to do this? By having principles be the source of desire and action. What principles? Those to do with good and evil, indeed in the belief that there is no good for a human being except what creates justice, self-control, courage, and freedom, and nothing evil except what destroys these things."

—marcus aurelius, Meditations, 8.1.(5)

"All study of philosophy and reading should be for the purpose of living a happy life . . . we should seek precepts to help us, noble and courageous words that can become facts . . . we should learn them in a way that words become works."

—SENECA, MORAL LETTERS, 108.35

December 24th	Can I consume less to make more room for virtue?
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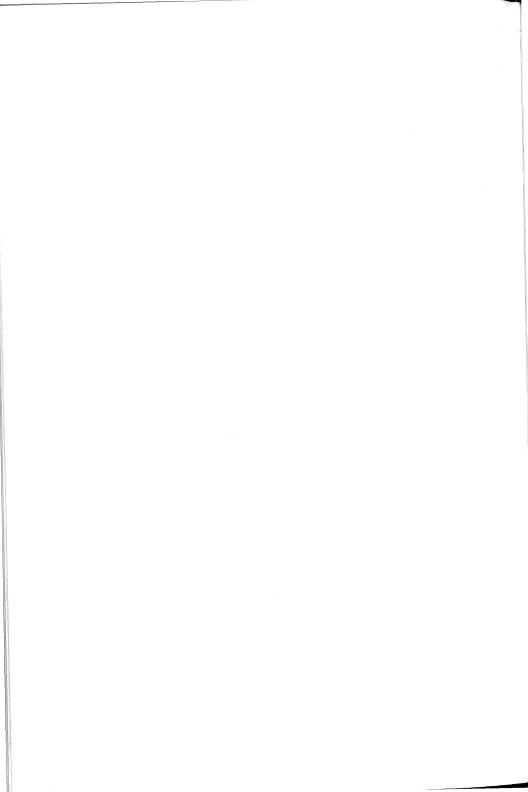
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December 29th Wh	at am I grateful for?
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December 30th H	ow can I bring a calm mind to tough situations?
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MORE STOIC PROMPTS

While this journal was designed to be the ultimate companion for *The Daily Stoic*, and *The Daily Stoic* was designed to be read as many times as a reader would like, you might well be looking for even more prompts and Stoic readings, especially if this is your second go around with the journal. That is something we are happy to provide.

First, we send out a free e-mail every single day of Stoic wisdom at DailyStoic.com. If you haven't signed up yet, you absolutely should!

Second, if you're looking for some classic and modern Stoic texts to journal along to, we have some recommendations:

- Meditations by Marcus Aurelius (we strongly recommend the Gregory Hays translation for Modern Library)
- Letters of a Stoic by Seneca (the abridged Penguin Classics edition is wonderful and there is also a full—and free—e-book edition put out by Tim Ferriss)
- Discourses and Selected Writings by Epictetus (again, hard to do better than Penguin Classics)
- The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius by Pierre Hadot (this is a wonderful deep dive into Marcus Aurelius's philosophy and what makes him tick)
- The Moral Sayings of Publilius Syrus: A Roman Slave by Publilius Syrus (another slave turned philosopher whose pithy epigrams will give you something to write about each day)

If you want to learn more about Stoic exercises and practices, and their purpose, we like the following sources:

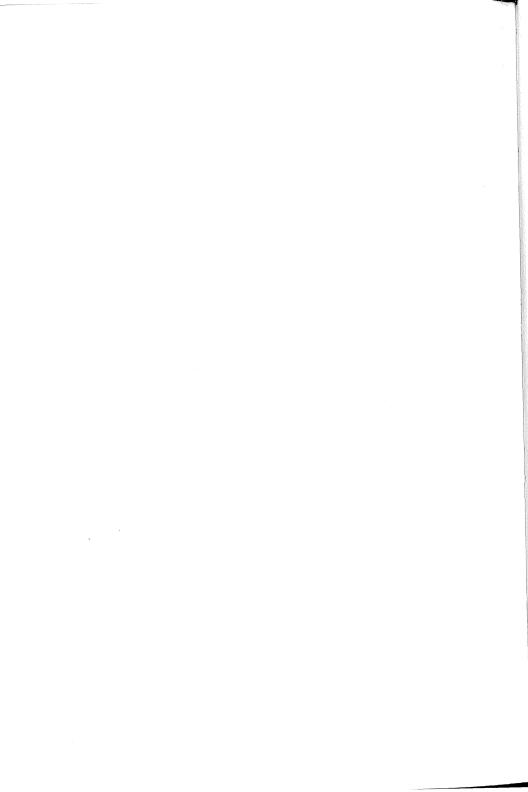
- Chapter 3 in Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1995)
- Chapters 15–16 in Richard Sorabji's Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation (Oxford University Press, 2000)

- Part Two of Donald Robertson's The Philosophy of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: Stoic Philosophy as Rational and Cognitie Psychotherapy (Karnac Books, 2010) or his equally excellent Stoicism and the Art of Happiness (Hodder & Stoughton, 2013)
- Part III of Massimo Pigliucci's How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life (Basic Books, 2017)

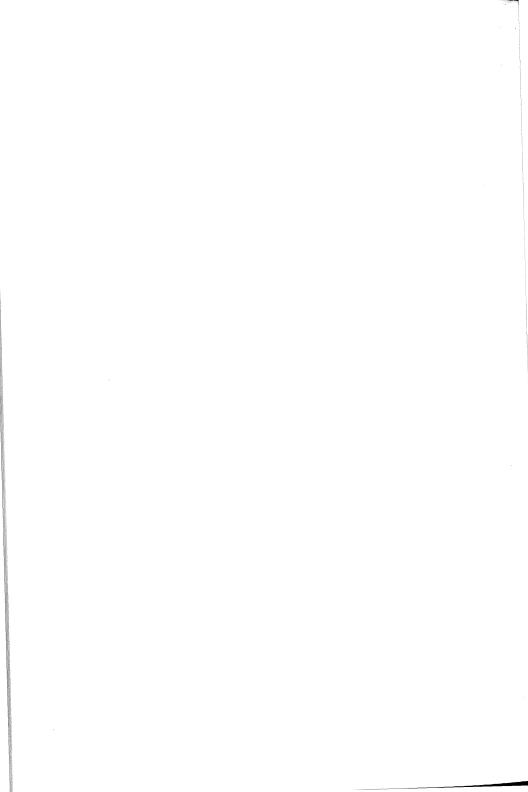
For a broad selection of Stoic reading beyond the titles above, we have compiled the following list, which is continually being revised and added to at www.dailystoic.com/books-on-stoicism:

- James B. Stockdale's Courage Under Fire: Testing Epictetus's Doctrines in the Laboratory of Human Behavior (Hoover Institution Press, 1993)
- James Romm's Dying Every Day: Seneca at the Court of Nero (Vintage, 2014)
- Rob Goodman and Jimmy Soni's Rome's Last Citizen: The Life and Legacy of Cato, Mortal Enemy of Caesar (St. Martin's Griffin, 2014)
- Tom Wolfe's A Man in Full (Dial Press, 2001)
- William B. Irvine's A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy (Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Alain de Botton's The Consolations of Philosophy (Vintage, 2001)
- Nassim Nicholas Taleb's *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* (Random House, 2014)
- James Miller's Examined Lives: From Socrates to Nietzsche (Picador, 2012)
- Nancy Sherman's Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy Behind the Military Mind (Oxford University Press, 2007)
- John Sellar's Stoicism (University of California Press, 2006)
- R. W. Sharples's Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy (Routledge, 1996)
- M. Andrew Holowchak's *The Stoics: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2008)
- F. H. Sandbach's *The Stoics* (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994)

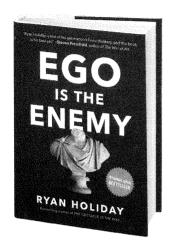
- Margaret Graver's *Stoicism and Emotion* (University of Chicago Press, 2009)
- Brad Inwood's *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- Ronald Pies's Everything Has Two Handles: The Stoic's Guide to the Art of Living (Hamilton Books, 2008)
- Jules Evans's *Philosophy for Life and Other Dangerous Situations* (New World Library, 2013)
- Lawrence C. Becker's A New Stoicism: Revised Edition (Princeton University Press, 2017)
- Emily Wilson's *The Greatest Empire: A Life of Seneca* (Oxford University Press, 2014)

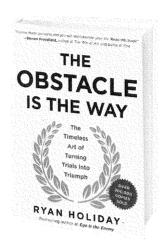


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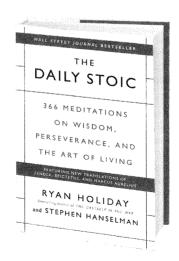


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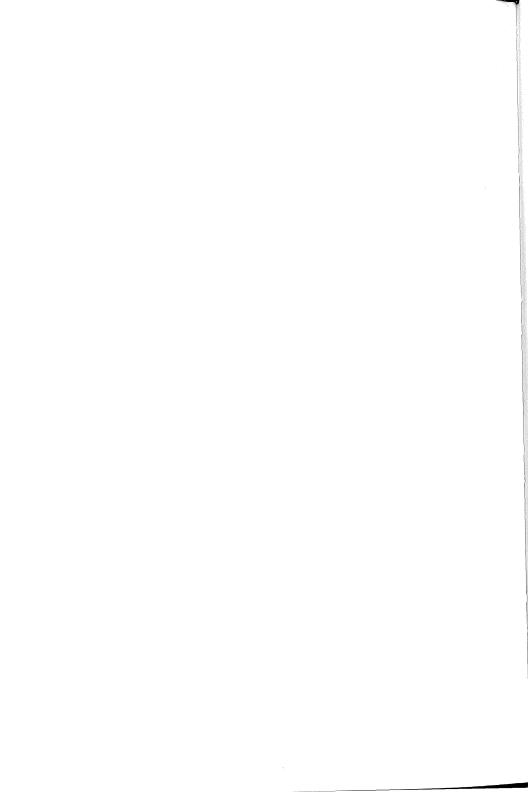


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READ THEM ALOUD, TALK TO

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ABOUT THEM."—EPICTETUS



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