



Edited excerpts from **The Daily Stoic** [www.dailystoic.com](http://www.dailystoic.com)

Stoicism is ideal for the real world. It reminds us that life is brief and the world unpredictable; that the source of dissatisfaction is impulsivity, not logic. It teaches self-control, strength and steadfastness. It's about overcoming destructive emotions and acting on what can be acted upon. The Stoics wrote honestly, often self-critically, about how to be better, happier people. Stoicism isn't abstract, it's a series of reminders, tips and aids for living a good life.

Founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in the early 3rd century BC, Stoic philosophy asserts that virtue (such as wisdom) is happiness and that we don't control external events, only ourselves and our responses. Its principal leaders were three men of action who wrote daily for the purpose of self-examination. **Marcus Aurelius**, emperor of the Roman Empire, most powerful man on earth, with unlimited wealth and adulation, sat down daily to write about restraint, compassion and humility. **Epictetus** endured the horrors of slavery to found his own school and teach many of Rome's greatest minds. **Seneca**, power broker and playwright, could think only of comforting his wife and friends when Nero turned on him and demanded his suicide.

Over the centuries, kings, presidents, artists, writers, entrepreneurs and other influential global figures have studied Stoicism, using its tools to become better people. The following are some basic Stoic practices:

**Journal** – Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus and Seneca were three radically different men with one habit in common: Journaling. The practice of Stoic writing is more than keeping a diary, it's a spiritual exercise leading to the right state of mind for action. Preparing for the day ahead by reflecting on the day that's passed. Reminding oneself of the wisdom learned from teachers, reading and experience. It's practicing these lessons by writing them down and feeling them flow through our fingers. Journaling is Stoicism.

**Is This Within My Control?** – “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

Of prime importance in Stoicism is differentiating between what we can and can't change. What we have influence over and what we do not. Return to this question daily in every trying situation. Journal and reflect on it constantly. If you can make clear what parts of your day are within your control and what parts are not, you'll be happier and have a distinct advantage over other people who fail to realize which battles are unwinnable.

**Practice Negative Visualization** – Premeditatio malorum (“the pre-meditation of evils”) is imagining things that could go wrong or be taken away from us. It prepares us for life's inevitable setbacks. We don't always get what's rightfully ours, and not everything is as clean and straightforward as we think it might be. Psychologically, we can prepare ourselves with this powerful exercise in the Stoics' toolkit that builds resilience and strength.

**Practice Misfortune** – Seneca, who enjoyed great wealth as Nero's advisor, suggested setting aside time each month to practice poverty. Eat little, wear old clothes, get away from comfort, come face to face with want then ask yourself “Is this what I used to dread?”



He doesn't mean "think about" misfortune, he means live it. Comfort is the worst kind of slavery because you're always afraid that something or someone will take it away. But if you anticipate and practice misfortune, then it can't disrupt your life. Emotions like anxiety and fear have their roots in uncertainty and rarely in experience. Make yourself familiar with the worst-case scenarios, which are almost always reversible or transient.

**Train Perception to Avoid Good and Bad** – "Choose not to be harmed and you won't feel harmed. Don't feel harmed and you haven't been." – Marcus Aurelius

There is no good or bad to the practicing Stoic. There is only perception. You control perception. The Stoics had an exercise called Turning the Obstacle Upside Down; every "bad" becomes a new source of good. Suppose you're trying to help someone who is being surly or unwilling to cooperate. Instead of making your life more difficult, the exercise says, they're actually directing you towards new virtues, like patience or understanding. Marcus Aurelius described it like this: "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."

**Take the View from Above** – Marcus would often practice an exercise that is referred to as "taking the view from above" or "Plato's view". It invites us to take a step back, zoom out and see life from a higher vantage point than our own. This exercise—envisioning all the millions and millions of people, all the "armies, farms, weddings and divorces, births and deaths"—gives us perspective and reminds us how small we are. It also taps into what Stoics call "sympatheia", or a mutual interdependence with the whole of humanity.

**Remember, It's All Ephemeral** – "Alexander the Great and his mule driver both died...the same thing happened to both." – Marcus Aurelius

The point is simple: remember how small you are...how small most everything is. Achievements can be ephemeral. What does matter? The now. Being a good person and doing the right thing right now. Be humble and honest and aware. That is something you can have every single day of your life.

**Memento Mori: Meditate on Your Mortality** – "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. The one who puts the finishing touches on their life each day is never short of time." – Seneca

Meditating on your mortality is only depressing if you miss the point. For Stoics, it's invigorating and humbling. Epictetus urged his students: "Keep death and exile before your eyes each day, along with everything that seems terrible—by doing so, you'll never have a base thought nor will you have excessive desire." Meditate on these reminders daily as building blocks of living to the fullest.

**Amor Fati: Love Everything That Happens** – Two thousand years ago, in his personal journal, which would become known as *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius wrote: "A blazing fire makes flame and brightness out of everything that is thrown into it." Epictetus, who as a crippled slave faced adversity after adversity, echoed the same: "Do not seek for things to happen the way you want them to; rather, wish that what happens happen the way it happens: then you will be happy."

*Amor fati* is the Stoic mindset that makes the best of anything that happens: Not avoiding but embracing each and every moment—no matter how challenging. Not just being okay with but actually loving each circumstance that comes your way and being better for it. So that like oxygen to a fire, obstacles and adversity become fuel for your potential.