

THE
MEDITATIONS

An Emperor's Guide to Mastery



MARCUS AURELIUS

THE MEDITATIONS

*Rendered in contemporary language by Sam Torode,
loosely based on a translation by George Long*

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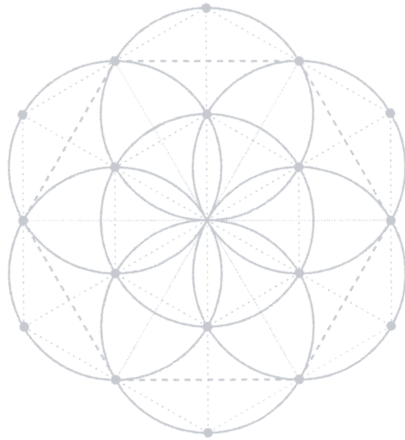
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FOREWORD

IN 2008, as the world plunged into the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, I experienced my own collapse—financial stress, loss of faith, and then divorce.

Enduring each day became a struggle. My inner landscape (my mind) was now a war zone. Daydreaming—previously my refuge—became dangerous. My imagination could only conjure despair.

I desperately needed peace of mind.

For the first time in my life, I ventured into the Self-Help section of the bookstore, and worked my way through every title. Things I'd always scoffed at—like positive thinking, affirmations, and visualization—were now of vital interest. Even the cheesiest volumes usually had something of value to take away. For instance, from Rhonda Byrne's *The Power* (a sequel to *The Secret*—a book I'd often mocked), I copied down this sentence: "Every challenge is presented to you so that you will choose love and turn away from negativity and blame."

I also combed the nearby Philosophy aisle, where I discovered two ancient books that proved to be the most helpful of all: the *Manual* of Epictetus and the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius.

Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius are pillars of the Stoic school of philosophy. Stoicism doesn't mean repressing emotion and shunning pleasure, I learned, but—in essence—focusing on what is in our power and letting go of everything we can't control.

Stoic philosophy, I found, is at the foundation of the best modern self-help approaches, such as rational emotive therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and positive psychology. (Its influence is even reflected in the Rhonda Byrne quote above).

“Your experience of life is determined by how you look at it,” Marcus said.

To change your experience, change your opinion. If you're upset by something outside you, it's not the thing itself that upsets you, but your opinion of it. And it's in your power to wipe away that opinion immediately.

Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius offered practical help, here and now. They showed that by changing my thoughts about a situation, I could let go of pain.

The way to peace of mind, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius taught, was in tending the garden of my own mind (by nurturing the positive and weeding out the negative) and disregarding other people's opinions of and actions towards me.

“Retreat into your inner sanctuary,” Marcus directed.

Here, away from strain and distraction, you are free to observe the world and your reactions objectively. Nothing touches the soul; it can't be harmed by anything external. . . .

What truly hurts you is what makes you a worse person. Don't say you've been harmed if your reason and character are untouched. And no one can muddy your reason and mar your character but yourself.

Other books that I found particularly soothing at this time were the *Tao Te Ching* and Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*. As a writer and book designer by trade, I decided to create my own editions of these works. I saved the *Manual* and *Meditations* for last.

Nearly ten years after first discovering the wisdom of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, I made it part of my daily morning routine to study a passage from an old translation of their words and re-write it in simple, contemporary language.

While my rendering of the *Manual* sticks very close to the original, I took greater liberties with the *Meditations*. That's because the *Meditations* is not a unified book, but a series of private journal entries written down over the course of years in twelve separate folios. Naturally, some entries are more relevant to us than others, and Marcus often repeats the exact same idea in only slightly different words; so as I went along, I left out repetitive passages and honed in on the essential concepts.

If you are searching for peace of mind, I hope you benefit from the *Manual* and *Meditations* as much as I have.

—SAM TORODE

May, 2017

BOOK ONE

I'm grateful to all my teachers and exemplars:

My grandfather (Marcus Annii Verus II) modeled good morals and an even temper.

My father (Marcus Annii Verus III), through his reputation and my memories of him (he died when I was three), exemplified humility and manliness.

My mother (Domitia Lucilla) demonstrated reverence, service to others, and simple living, far from the habits of the rich. She was pure not only in her actions but in her thoughts.

My great-grandfather (Catilius Severus) instilled in me the value of education, and that it's worth the expense to hire at-home tutors for your children.

My first tutor taught me not to pick favorites at the Circus games or the gladiatorial fights. He also taught me the value of hard work, using my hands, and minding my own business.

Diognetus taught me not to busy myself on trifles, not to breed birds for fighting, and not to give credence to supposed seers and miracle-workers about prophecies, incantations, the driving away of demons, and such. Most importantly, he introduced me to philosophy, taking me to hear Bacchius, Tandasis, and Marcianus. Because of their influence I began writing philosophical dialogues, wore a coarse robe, and slept on a plank bed, following the Greek discipline.

Rusticus showed me that my character needed discipline and development. He taught me not to be led astray by sophists or by speculative, esoteric philosophies. Not to show off, whether in flowery orations, feats of asceticism, or public acts of charity. To speak and write simply, without rhetorical flourish, following the example of his letters. To react calmly when wronged or offended; not to hold grudges; to reconcile with others as soon as they show willingness. To read books deeply, not superficially. He loaned me books from his own collection, and introduced me to the teachings of Epictetus.

Apollonius extolled the freedom of the will and an undeviating steadiness of purpose. He taught me to depend on reason above all else, and to be the same person in hard times as in good, in sickness as in health. He demonstrated that a person can be both resolute and flexible, learned and humble.

Sextus exemplified the spirit of generosity. He led his family as a true father. He cared for his friends, tolerated the ignorant, and conversed with everyone on their level. He was agreeable without flattering; affectionate, but free from the extremes of passion. I never saw him angry. He had a rare ability to discover and organize the principles of life, and possessed great learning and wisdom yet never made a show of it.

My grammar teacher, Alexander, showed how to correct without criticizing. Instead of interrupting others to point out their mistakes, he would gently introduce the proper way of speaking in his reply.

Fronto taught me to recognize tyrants by their duplicity, hypocrisy, and envy. Those called Patricians, he said, are all too often lacking in paternal affection.

Alexander the Platonist taught me not to complain that I have no free time. Busyness is no excuse for neglecting our duties to family, friends, and community.

Catulus urged me to listen to my friends even when they are critical, to honor my teachers, and to love my children truly.

Severus imparted his love for truth, justice, and the people. He introduced me to the idea of a polity in which there is one law for all, a state with equal rights and freedom of speech, and a ruler who respects the freedom of the governed above all. He urged me to pursue philosophy with consistency, to be generous, to think well of others, and to cherish good hopes. He always spoke his opinions outright so we never had to wonder what he really thought.

Maximus exemplified self-government, steadiness of purpose, cheerfulness in all circumstances, and working without complaining. Everyone trusted his words as genuine and his intentions as good. He never showed surprise, haste, frustration, anger, or suspicion. He was eager to give and quick to forgive. He also had a wonderful sense of humor, kindhearted rather than caustic. In Maximus' presence, no one could feel small or worthless; neither could anyone feel superior.

My adoptive father (Emperor Antoninus Pius) demonstrated mildness of temper and unshakable resolve. He considered himself one of the people, had no vain hunger for praise and honors, and was ready to listen to anyone with ideas for helping the commonwealth. His justice was impartial; his wisdom gained from experience. He was loyal to his friends, but not to the point of indulgence; he flattered no one. He investigated each matter carefully and thoroughly, never satisfied with first appearances.

He honored true philosophers and was not fooled by sophists. He took care of his body for the purpose of health—not vanity—and he rarely needed a doctor’s services. He humbly sought help from experts in oratory, knowledge of the law, and other fields, and he freely gave help to others.

He filled the role of emperor comfortably, without pomp and show. He followed a consistent routine, shunning novelty, unpredictability, and change for change’s sake. His secrets were few, and then only when matters of the empire were at stake. He considered only what needed to be done, not whether he would be praised or blamed. We know how he graciously pardoned the toll collector at Tusculum. Such was his way—never harsh, inflexible, or vindictive.

He was ever watchful over the empire and its finances, always mindful of the long-term. He was prudent in constructing public buildings, putting on spectacles, and otherwise spending the people’s taxes, and he patiently endured the criticism he incurred for being so frugal.

He was frugal in his personal life, too. When he had fine things he enjoyed them in moderation, and when he was without them he did not complain. He didn’t build multiple houses, lounge in leisurely baths, care about gourmet meals, or think about the color and style of his clothes. Like Socrates, he was able to abstain from those things many are too weak to abstain from, and to enjoy in moderation those things many can only enjoy to excess. Such strength and sobriety is the mark of a perfect, invincible soul.



I give thanks to the gods for having such good parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, associates, and friends. It's to their credit that I stayed on the straight path when, as a youth, bad influences might have led me astray. Instead of being handed over to temptations, indulgences, and distractions, I was blessed to have a father and ruler who showed me how to live in a palace without regard for elaborate gowns, bronze statues, armed guards, and other displays of power. He fulfilled his duties as a ruler while retaining the spirit of a common citizen.

I thank the gods that I found the path of philosophy. My teachers showed me the laws of nature and how to live by them. It's my fault alone if I have failed to lived up to their example.

I thank the gods that I didn't fall into the hands of sophists; that I wasn't swept up in the study of flowery rhetoric; that I didn't waste time resolving syllogisms, studying arcane histories, or searching for signs in the heavens.

I thank the gods that my children are healthy in body and mind; that my body is still holding up; that though my mother died young she spent the last years of her life with me; that whenever I want to help someone, I have the means; and that I have such a lovely, affectionate, virtuous wife.

For all these blessings, I thank the gods and Fate.

BOOK TWO

Begin each morning by saying to yourself: Today I will meet people who are nosy, ungrateful, arrogant, deceitful, envious, and unsocial. They can't help it—they are ignorant of the difference between good and bad. But I, who know the difference, also know that I share the same human nature with them.

I can't be angry with my fellow humans. We were made to work together, like pairs of hands, feet, eyelids, or rows of teeth. To hate each other is against the laws of nature.

No one can hurt me but myself, for no one else can make me forsake the good and embrace the bad.



All I am is a little flesh and breath, plus mind.

Put away entertainments, set aside distractions, and look at yourself as you truly are: blood and bones, a network of nerves and veins. Your breath is only air, sucked in one moment and blown out the next. The mind, then, is the ruling part.

You're an old man now. It's time to stop being a slave; to no longer be pulled along like a puppet on strings; to stop being dissatisfied with today and afraid of tomorrow.



Nature and Fate are woven together by providence. All things flow from one Source. Everything that exists has its place in the cosmos—including you. That which serves the whole is good.

The universe preserves its wholeness even though its elements are constantly in flux. Life is change.

Let these principles be enough for you. Don't die bitterly, regretful of all the things you haven't yet learned, all the books you haven't yet read. Die serenely and content, with a heart full of gratitude.



Remember how long you've put off truly living your principles; how many opportunities you've squandered.

Look at the universe of which you are a part. Realize that you exist within its constant flux, that your days are numbered, and that if you don't clear the clouds from your mind now, you may never have another chance.



Every moment, focus your attention and perform the task at hand with simplicity, efficiency, and dignity. Fill your mind with thoughts of love, freedom, and justice, leaving no room for negative and destructive thoughts.

If you live every moment as if it were your last—putting aside all carelessness, fear, anger, unreason, hypocrisy, selfishness, and dissatisfaction—you will find salvation.

You need only hold onto these few principles and you can live in peace and contentment, watching things come and go in the stream of life. This is how the gods live.



Do people and events distract you? Stop being whirled around by things outside yourself.

Meanwhile, avoid the opposite trap of being absorbed in the minutia of daily life. Don't weary yourself in endless activity with nothing of real accomplishment to show for it.

Don't worry about what others think. Mind what *you* think. Watch the movements of your mind, and focus your thoughts on something worthy.

Ask yourself the important questions: What is the nature of the cosmos? What is my nature? How is this related to that? What part do I play in the whole?

No one can stop you from living according to your nature—from thinking, saying, and doing things that benefit all.



Theophrastus, in ranking bad acts, says that sins committed from desire are worse than sins committed from anger. Anger is a temporary lapse from reason, usually in reaction to pain—someone hurts you, so you become angry and strike back. But desire is self-generated and its appetite for pleasure is insatiable.



Your life may end at any time, so think and act accordingly.

Death itself is nothing to fear. If there are gods, they will take care of you. If there are no gods, or if they have nothing to do with human affairs, what difference does it make? Live as best you can, regardless.

But I believe that there are gods, they do care for us, and they would not send evil upon us.

Death, life, pleasure, pain—these are universals. Life and pleasure come to bad people as well as good; pain and death come to the good as well as the bad. Therefore, none these things can be good or bad in itself.



How quickly all things disappear. They pass from this world and all memory of them soon fades.

Reason allows humanity to view the universe from the perspective of the gods. Consider all those things which attract by pleasure, repel by pain, or are famous the world over—how fleeting, fragile, and vaporous they are. Reason sees right through them.

Look at death, too, through the eyes of reason: it's nothing more than a process of nature. Death is not only necessary, but beneficial to nature's ongoing work. Why fear it?



Few things are worse than nosy people who try to imagine what's in their neighbors' minds, instead of tending to their own.

It's enough to know ourselves and reverence the light within. Our task is to clear away apathy, dissatisfaction, and the extremes of passion.

We should reverence our inner light—reason—because it's a gift from the gods. And we should reverence all living beings because they are our kin.

Pity those who don't know the difference between good and bad—they're out of touch with their own reason.



Suppose you lived for a thousand years, or ten thousand years; would you have any more life than you have now? When you finally died, would you lose any more life than you'd lose if you died today?

This present moment is all the life we ever have. The longest life and the shortest converge on this same point. No matter how many years stretch behind or in front of us, the present moment remains the same.

The person who lives shortest owns the exact same amount of life as the one who lives longest. For the present is all we have and all we can lose. When we die, we don't "lose" the past or future—we never owned them.

Eternity revolves like a wheel, with its circumference touching a still point—the present moment. Whether you stay at that point for hundred years, a thousand, or infinitely, you’ll only see the same cycles repeating themselves.



Remember the words of Monimus the Cynic: “Everything is opinion.”

This principle is not only true but beneficial—if you know how to use it.



When human nature rebels against Mother Nature, humanity becomes a cancer on the earth.

The natures of all things are nested within nature as a whole. When you reject what life gives you, you place yourself in opposition to nature—including your own nature—and so harm yourself.

When you turn away from another person, or rush towards them with violence, you harm yourself.

When you surrender your nature to pleasure or pain, you harm yourself.

When you do anything insincere, halfhearted, or thoughtless, you harm yourself. Even the smallest action should be performed with a goal in mind.

Your assignment as a human being is to follow reason and the laws of nature.



Life is a pilgrimage and a struggle. All we have of time is a moment; the universe is in constant flux; our bodies are fragile; our senses grasp so little; our souls are a mist; the future is a fog; and fame is fleeting.

The physical world is an ever-flowing stream, and the spiritual is an elusive vapor. Neither can be grasped and held.

What can guide us? Only one thing: philosophy.

Philosophy consists in keeping your inner spirit free, undisturbed, above pain and pleasure; acting with purpose in line with principle; embracing all that happens as coming from the same Source that gave you life; and accepting death as nothing more than a reconfiguration of the elements and particles that make up all things.

In other words, living according to nature.

BOOK THREE

Don't put off learning how to distinguish appearances from reality. There's no guarantee you'll live a long life and, even if you do, you may slip into senility. In old age, bodily appetites often outlive the mind's powers.

Use your reason now, before you lose it.



Even nature's accidents are pleasing. For instance, when a loaf of bread is baked, the top splits open. Though unintended by the baker, the resulting shape is attractive and appetizing.

Figs, too, split open when they're ripe; and olives take on a lovely color when they're nearly rotten.

In the wild, we're terrified by the sight of a lion or wild boar. But if we could see them objectively, we would marvel at the beauty of the lion's eyebrows, and the foam flowing from the boar's mouth.

Seen in themselves, all of nature's productions are marvelous. Look at the gaping jaws of wild beasts with the same awe you would reserve for a great sculptor's work. Observe the wrinkled face of an old woman as you would a fine painting, and you will discover its subtle beauty. See the smooth face of a young woman, too, as a work of nature's art, and your heart will remain pure.

When your eyes become attuned to Nature and her works, everything is beautiful.



Hippocrates, after curing many diseases, became sick himself and died. The Chaldaei oracles foretold the deaths of many, till Fate took them, too. Alexander, Pompeius, and Caius Caesar laid waste to entire cities, massacring tens of thousands of opposing soldiers; then they, too, departed this earth. Heraclitus, after speculating on the elements that make up the universe, himself returned to dust. Democritus was killed by lice. Another sort of vermin murdered Socrates.

Life is a voyage. You embark; you sail; and, when you reach the far shore, you get out of the boat.

What is your destination? If the gods exist, you step into their divine realm. If there are no gods, you enter a state without thought or feeling, freed from the bonds of pain and pleasure that held you on the ship.



Don't waste the rest of your life worrying about what others think and do. Direct your thoughts to a useful end. When you dissipate your mental energy on things you can't control, you lose the opportunity to accomplish something yourself.

Cease all useless thoughts. Fretting about others—*What is she doing? What is she thinking? What is she planning?*—keeps you from exercising your own power.

Endeavor to live such that, if someone were suddenly to ask, “What are you thinking about?” you could give a quick and confident reply, saying something simple, clear, and edifying—not something that would make you blush.

Those who dwell on useful and uplifting thoughts—uncorrupted by pleasure, unharmed by pain, unprovoked by insult, standing up for justice, defending what is right, accepting their lot in life without complaint, and not prying into the minds of others—are the true ministers of the gods, for they’re exercising the spark of divinity within themselves.

They remember that every other person is their brother or sister, and treat them accordingly. They mind their own business, make sure their own actions are virtuous, and trust that whatever life gives them is for their benefit.

Those who live this way disregard both the praise and scorn of those who live otherwise.



Put your whole heart and mind into your work, laboring not just for yourself but for the common good. Be a person of few words and a few projects, not busy and scattered.

Let the spark of divinity within you—the light of reason—guide you the rest of your days as a Roman, a ruler, and a man. Be cheerful, too, and self-reliant. Stand on your own two feet without needing to be propped up by others.

Stay at your post, do your work as best you can, and be ready to go when Fate calls you.



If you find anything on earth better than justice, truth, virtue, and courage—in other words, better than the satisfaction that comes from following your inner light—by all means, pursue it.

But if you find nothing better than the spark of divinity within you, which orders all thoughts, tames all desires, objectively examines all sensory impressions, reverences the gods, and cares for all people—if you find that everything else pales in comparison to this, then devote your life to it.

Reason is your own rightful treasure. Would you trade it for power, praise, or pleasure? Those things may seem good for a time, but they are worthless next to the rational soul within you.

Choose reason and cling to it.



Don't imagine that something is good for you if, in pursuing it, you must break a promise, harm anyone else, lose self-respect, act hypocritically, or hide in shame.

Follow the light within—it will not lead you astray.

Those who follow the light within don't lead tragic lives. They don't wail, complain, and run from death. What do they care if their days are short or long? They do all things with excellence and efficiency. If Fate calls them, they leave in the same serene manner. They are not mere intelligent animals, but worthy members of a civil society.



Honor the power of discernment, which enables you to form opinions while remaining skeptical of those opinions—subjecting them to further discernment.

Don't stop at first impressions; look deeper, and see whether your opinions are in line with reason and nature.



Cast aside all that is extraneous and superfluous, and cling to the few things that really matter.

Remember that you live only in the present moment—a single, indivisible point in time. The past is gone and the future is unknowable. Brief is the moment in which you live; small is the plot of earth beneath your feet.

Do you seek fame, so that you will live on in people's memories after you're dead? Remember that their days are short, too—they barely have time to know themselves, much less learn about those who died long ago. And even if they were to live ten thousand years and keep your memory—what good is that to you?

Life is for the living.



Here's an exercise for your reasoning power: Each time you see something—whether an object, a person, a situation, a phenomena—define and describe it to yourself.

Ask, *What is it? What are the parts that compose it? Where did it come from? Where is it going? What will it decompose into?*

This is a sure way to elevate your mind and sharpen your discernment. As you examine everything that life shows you, you'll learn about the universe you live in, the place and purpose of each thing in it, and how each relates to the whole.

Ask, too, how you can best respond to each thing that life shows you. Which virtue is called upon—gentleness, strength, justice, mercy, honesty, loyalty?

With everything that happens, remind yourself: this is part of my unfolding destiny, an unwinding thread spun by the gods.

With each person you meet, remind yourself that you share a common humanity. You are members of the same family. They may not know this, but you do—so show them by the way you treat them.

Live in harmony with nature and its laws, including the laws of friendship, justice, and generosity towards your fellow rational beings.



If you focus on the task at hand, shed all distractions, and follow reason with steadfast determination, the divine spark within you will burst into flame.

Nurture this inner light, keep it pure, and be ready to return it to its Source when your time is done.

Enjoy the present moment. Expect nothing, fear nothing, speak truly, and act heroically. No one can stop you.



The body receives information through sensations; the mind through intelligence. Both humans and animals have sensory impressions and are pulled by the strings of desire, moving towards pleasure and away from pain. And all humans have intelligence, including cruel and treacherous people.

What, then, makes for a good person? These principles: Be content in all circumstances, accepting whatever Fate brings you; preserve the spark of divinity within, not crowding it out with entertainments and distractions; follow the light of reason, always speaking truly and acting justly; live simply and serenely, disregarding what others may say about you; be happy with your lot in life, and ready to depart when you're called.



Just as surgeons have their knives and scalpels at the ready, you have all the principles you need to divide the ephemeral from the essential. With your every act—even the smallest—slice until you find its connection to what is enduring. This is the place where the human meets the divine.

BOOK FOUR

When your mind is in harmony with nature, you'll easily adapt to every possible situation. Reason doesn't require particular circumstances to work; it works with every circumstance. It turns obstacles into opportunities.

A spark may be extinguished by contact, but a fire makes fuel from everything it touches. It consumes seemingly insurmountable objects and burns stronger and brighter because of it.

Nurture the flame of reason within until it is a blazing fire.



People long to escape life's struggles and relax in country houses, by the seaside, or in the mountains. But it is within your power to find solace at any time, by retreating into yourself. When your thoughts are orderly and tranquil, there's no place quieter and more peaceful than your own soul. There, you are free.

Take this retreat often to renew yourself. Let your principles be few and fundamental—sufficient to clear your mind and send you back into the world refreshed.

What troubles you? The bad behavior of people? Remember these principles: humans are meant to live together in community; some do wrong unconsciously because they are ignorant; countless wrongdoers have died already; and those disturbing you will someday be reduced to ashes, too.

Are you dissatisfied with your lot in life? Remember that Fate is either is guided by providence or a chain of fortuitous coincidences—either way, circumstances can be turned to your benefit. Also, remember that the universe is like one great organism made up of many tiny cells, and each has a role to play—including you.

Do you burn with the desire for fame? Remember how soon everything is forgotten. Consider the eons of time on either side of the present moment, the emptiness of applause, and the fickleness of fashion.

If so much is transitory and fleeting, what is worth doing? Retreat into your inner sanctuary. Here, away from strain and distraction, you are free to observe the world and your reactions objectively.

Nothing touches the soul; it can't be harmed by anything external. When you are upset, it is your own opinion that upsets you.

The universe is constantly in flux. Your experience of life is determined by how you look at it.



All humans share a common reason. Reason leads us to the path of virtue, telling us what we should do and what we should not do. Thus, there is one moral law common to humanity, and under that law we are all fellow citizens. Our political and geographical differences are secondary—we all comprise one great human nation.

Where does our common reason come from? What gives us this capacity for discernment, right action, and law? All things must come from somewhere. Our bodies are made of elements that come from the earth and are hydrated by the earth's waters. Reason, too, must have a Source. This is a profound mystery.



Death, just as much as life, is a mystery of nature. Our arising from the elements and decomposition into the same—this is not something to be ashamed or afraid of. It's not contrary to reason, but part of our nature.



To change your experience, change your opinion. Stop telling yourself that you're a victim and the pain goes away.

What truly hurts you is what makes you a worse person. Don't say you've been harmed if your reason and character are untouched. And no one can muddy your reason and mar your character but yourself.



Always follow these two rules:

1. Act in accordance with reason. Do only what your inner guide tells you is useful and beneficial.
2. Think in accordance with reason. If your opinions cause you distress, change your opinions. Don't change them to match what's fashionable or popular, but to align your mind with truth.



Your life has been a growth of nature. Eventually you'll disappear back into it, returning to the Source from which you came. Whether sooner or later makes no difference. Live well, in accordance with reason, for as long as you have the chance.



Much trouble can be avoided by not worrying about what your neighbor thinks, says, or does.

Be concerned only that your own thoughts, words, and actions are just and generous. In the race of life, stay in your own lane and focus on the finish line; don't gawk at the missteps of others.



Beautiful things are beautiful in themselves. They are not beautiful because they are admired. Praise adds nothing to beauty, and scorn can't detract from it. Just think of the things that are considered beautiful by the vulgar.

Beauty does not need the support of praise, or anything else. The same goes for truth, justice, and goodness. Do any of these depend on popularity contests? Can any of them be discredited by insults?

Does a clear, fine-cut gem lose its luster when it isn't praised?



If souls can be neither created nor destroyed, does the air around us contain the souls of all who have lived before and all who are yet to be born?

When bodies die, they decompose into elements that eventually are transmuted into new living bodies. Perhaps souls, too, are diffused and absorbed back into the creative intelligence of the world. And from this Source, fresh souls emerge into the world. This is one hypothesis.

Think of how many people have died, and how many more animals have been killed and eaten by humans and each other, yet the Earth is not overflowing with corpses.

Life continually renews itself.



*Everything is harmonious to me
that harmonizes with you, O Universe.
Nothing is too early or too late for me
if it is according to your timing.*

*You bring forth different fruits
in different seasons, O Nature.
All things are from you.
All things are in you.
All things return to you.*



Some philosophers say, “If you wish to be tranquil, limit your activities to just a few things.” But isn’t it better to say, “If you wish to be tranquil, act in accordance with reason”? For this includes not only limiting your activities but doing them well, and making sure they benefit the community. For reason says that we are social animals with responsibilities to each other.

Much of what we do is unnecessary, unfocused, and unhelpful. How much time can you gain by pruning these activities?

First, get your thoughts in order. Fruitful actions will follow.



Some say the universe is rational and well-ordered, others say it’s meaningless and chaotic.

You are a part of the universe. Are you a rational being? Can you find meaning and create order in yourself?

If order and intelligence exist in one part of the universe—*you*—they exist in the All.



Love your philosophy and live it out. Be content in all circumstances, entrusting your soul to the gods. Don’t be the tyrant or slave of anyone.



Look at the era of Vespasian, and you'll see people marrying, raising children, farming, feasting, boasting, flattering, suspecting, plotting, grumbling, loving, warring, seeking wealth, desiring status, growing sick, and dying. Their lives are no more.

Next, look at the era of Trajan, and you'll see people doing the exact same things. And they, too, are no more.

In all times and places, consider how many people were born, made great efforts, and returned to the earth from which they came. Consider how many others whittled their time away on frivolous pursuits and idle distractions.

This exercise will help you keep your own activities in perspective. Focus on what's important. Give great attention to great matters, and little attention to little matters.



Words spoken in centuries past, eloquent and inspiring in their time, now seem antiquated. The names of great leaders—Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, and the rest—have likewise lost their power.

All things pass away into the realm of memory, story, and finally into oblivion. (I'm speaking of those whose lives shine brightly. The majority of people aren't celebrated in stories and legends—they're forgotten as soon as they are buried.)

Even if it were possible for you to be remembered eternally, what is remembrance worth to you? Nothing.

What, then, should we strive for in life? Right thoughts, beneficial actions, honest speech, and a cheerful disposition.

These things are in harmony with, and flow from, the eternal Source of all.



Look around you and see that everything that happens is the result of *change*. The universe loves nothing more than to change things, rearranging their elements to create new things.

Everything that exists now is a seed of what is to come. Nothing around you is in its final form.



In evaluating a person, always look for their ruling principles. What do they pursue? What do they avoid?

Don't judge others based on outward circumstances and appearances. Difficult circumstances can befall anyone—what is telling is how a person responds to their circumstances. Their body may be maimed, dirtied, and disfigured, while the light of reason burns bright within.



Picture the universe as one great, living being, with one substance and one soul. Seen from this perspective, all its parts are moving together as one, evolving together, co-creating what comes next.

Reason does not separate us from the universe. Our ability to sense, perceive, and understand is itself a power of the universe. You are a part of the universe, perceiving itself.



Time is a river carrying all events. As soon as one event happens, it's carried away and another takes its place. Then it, too, is swept away.

Life is not disjointed but logical. Everything that happens is the consequence of what came before. Just as creatures in an ecosystem evolve in adaptation to each other, events are not random, but arise and intertwine in harmony.

When the day brings events that seem strange and unusual, remember: the universe is ruled by reason.



Pass through this life peacefully, in harmony with nature. End your journey contentedly, like an olive that falls from the tree when it is ripe, blessing Mother Nature and thanking the tree upon which it grew.



Be the stone cliff against which the waves constantly break, standing firm against the fury of the sea.

Am I unhappy because of what happened to me? No. I remain happy because, regardless of circumstances, I am free—neither crushed by the present nor afraid of the future.

Storms befall everyone; but not everyone can stand firm against them.

Why call this event unfortunate? From another perspective, it may be considered lucky. The only true misfortune is when a person leaves the path of wisdom, ignores reason, and violates the laws of nature.

Will this circumstance prevent you from being just, generous, honest, or prudent? Can it keep you from the free use of your reason? If not, don't wallow in self-pity, bemoaning your misfortune.

It is your good fortune to be able to bear this nobly.



Another tool for overcoming the fear of death: Consider those who tenaciously cling to life, despite infirmity and impairment. What more do they gain, in comparison to those who die earlier? We will all be buried, sooner or later. What does it accomplish to struggle against the inevitable?

Look at the immensity of time stretching out behind and before us. On this scale, all human lives—even the longest—are infinitesimally short. What is the difference, then, in living three more days or thirty more years?



Always take the shortest path—by which I mean the direct, natural route to your goal. Keep in line with reason and stay clear of all distractions, troubles, conflicts, deceptions, and ostentatious displays.

BOOK FIVE

When it's hard to get out of bed in the morning, remind yourself: I am rising to resume my life's work. How can I be unhappy when I have another opportunity to do what I was born to do?

But it's so comfortable here.

Were you born for this—lying in bed under a warm blanket? Life is meant for action and exertion. Consider the ants, bees, and birds, working to bring order to their corners of the universe. Are you unwilling to do the work of a human being?

But I worked yesterday; today I need to rest.

Rest is for recharging, not for indulgence. Take only what is sufficient for your health and vitality. Too much rest—like too much food or drink—defeats its purpose, weakening the body and dulling the spirit.

But I should love and care for myself.

If you truly love yourself, love your nature and your vocation. Those who love their work become so absorbed in it, they don't even think of stopping. Do you love your work the way a dancer loves dancing and a painter loves painting? If not, why is your work less important to you than theirs is to them?



How easy it is to change your thoughts, wipe away the opinions causing your worries and troubles, and immediately find peace.

Dwell on thoughts that are in harmony with nature and her laws, and act accordingly. Don't let yourself be pulled off course by the insults or injuries of others. Let them go their way and you go yours, continuing on the path of reason. This is not selfish or antisocial on your part—far from it. Your individual reason is not opposed to the common good, but in harmony with it.



Lean on Mother Nature and find rest. Notice your breath, sending out air and then drawing it back in. Lie on the grass and think of how the earth feeds and sustains you, just as your mother nursed you when you were a child.



“People don't find me a witty conversationalist,” you mope. So what? Focus on improving your character, not worrying how others perceive you. It's completely in your power to develop greater sincerity, generosity, persistence, strength, and contentment in all circumstances.

If your speaking skills need work, by all means work on them. But it's better to be honest and straightforward than merely witty and clever.



When one sort of person does a good deed, they mark it down as a favor to be repaid. Another sort of person doesn't seek a

reward, but they take satisfaction in knowing that they've acted generously. A third sort of person doesn't even know what they've done; they bear good deeds as a vine bears grapes—naturally, without thinking about it.

Like a horse after running a race, or a bee after making honey, a good person doesn't stop and look around for applause or rewards. They go on to produce another good deed, as a vine produces more grapes in season.



A doctor prescribes different things for different patients, suitable to their condition—outdoor exercise for one, bedrest for another; soaking in cold water for one, sweating in a sauna for another; and so on.

Likewise, the universe prescribes different things for different people, suitable to their destiny.

What makes an event suitable to you? How you use it.

Imagine a stonemason building a wall: the mason takes a given stone, shapes it as needed, and artfully fits it to the stones already laid down. All stones are suitable to the skilled mason.

Fate prescribes events, but it's up to you to accept and act upon that prescription. A doctor's prescription may be distasteful, but you take it in hopes of building health.

Accept everything that comes your way, trusting that it's part of the universe's grand design, for the greater good of all.



Don't be discouraged if you fail to live up to your principles all the time. When you stumble, get up and keep going.

Return to philosophy gladly, out of love for wisdom; not with your head hung low, like a servant returning in fear to a harsh master. Philosophy seeks your highest good and asks only that you live according to your nature.

Unnatural pleasures lure you from the path of reason. But what is more pleasurable than wisdom? Peace and happiness flow from the understanding and practice of philosophy.



Everything is in flux, including philosophers and their ideas.

Where, then, can I find rest? On these two bedrock principles:

First, nothing can happen to me that is contrary to the nature of the universe, for everything in the universe is a part of the whole.

Second, that it is always in my power to think and act in harmony with nature—both my own nature, and the nature of the universe. No one can force me to do otherwise.



In every activity, ask whether your soul is engaged. Is reason at the helm or asleep? Are you following a guiding principle or groping blindly?



I am composed of matter and energy, which can't be destroyed—only transformed.

The elements that form me didn't appear out of nothing—they were transmuted from other things. And when I die, they will transmute into new combinations. Every part of me will become part of something else, and so on, forever.



Don't pin your happiness on anything that isn't part of your rightful inheritance as a human being.

Whenever you find yourself desiring something, ask: This thing I desire—does human nature include it? Promise it? Require it? Is it essential to my development and fulfillment? Or would patiently going without it make me a better person?



Your character is simply the sum of your thoughts over time. The soul is dyed by thoughts. Immerse your soul, then, in thoughts like these:

Wherever you live, you can live well. Even if you must live in a palace, you can still live according to your principles.

Humans are social beings. It's good for us to live in community.

Everything is being carried towards its end. Your end is essential to your nature, and so must be to your benefit.

To desire the impossible is madness. Accept what is.

Reason is a gift—live by it.



Fate can't give you a challenge that nature has not equipped you to bear. No matter what comes your way, you can find an example of someone who has gone through the same experience and stood strong, emerging with their spirit unharmed.

For events and circumstances don't touch the soul—not in the least. Only the soul shapes the soul, as it responds to the things it encounters.



Other people may try to impede your actions, but they can't impede your thoughts and disposition. Using your reason and imagination, you can find a way to turn any impediment to your advantage.

When you come upon a stumbling block, use it as a stepping stone.



Reverence the best thing in the universe—your reason. For it is the light by which you see all things, make use of them, and direct your life.



In the stream of life, nothing stands still. How quickly things arise, pass by, and disappear.

How foolish it is, then, to puff yourself up with pride or berate yourself with worry. Think of the boundless abyss of the past behind you and the infinite future stretching out ahead. From this perspective, how small are your achievements—and how petty your troubles.

Instead of boasting or moaning, rest content knowing that you are a small part of the universe, and treasure the moment of eternity that you have been given.



Did someone do me wrong? That's their problem—they harmed their own character, not mine. I will stay focused on my own thoughts and actions.



In making decisions, rely on reason and refuse to be swayed by bodily sensations of pain or pleasure.

This isn't to say that you should repress your feelings. Accept all sensations as part of nature—just remember that pleasure and pain reveal nothing about whether something is ultimately good or bad for you.



Live with the gods.

How? By happily accepting your given role in life, and following the divine spark within. That divine spark is your reason and understanding.



So you are angry with someone because his armpits stink, and upset with another because she has bad breath. What good does your anger do you?

His armpits, and her breath, are outside your control. It *is* within your power to gently admonish them, letting them know that their odor is offensive. Let your reason appeal to their reason, and they may go clean themselves up.

Either way, it's no use to be angry.



Imagine your ideal future and how you will feel when you've "arrived." It's in your power to feel that way today—to think the same thoughts and have the same attitude that you would if your surroundings were ideal.

Nothing short of death can prevent you from thinking, feeling, and acting as you choose. Choose to live according to your nature as a rational and social being, in harmony with the universe.

Live such that, when your life is at its end, you may look back and recall how many beautiful things you've seen, how many pains you've patiently endured, how many pleasures you've passed by to stay on your path, and how many disagreeable people you've treated kindly.



Soon, you will be only ashes and a name—and a name is but a sound, an echo. The things people most value and pursue in this life are all passing away. All their acquiring, pursuing, and quarreling—it's as pointless as dogs chasing each other.

What is of lasting value? Goodness, faithfulness, justice, and truth—these will “rise up from the earth to join the company of the deathless gods” (Hesiod, *Works and Days*).

As you wait for the end to come, what should you do? Be grateful to the gods, do good to people, master yourself, and let go of everything that is outside your power.

If you think and act in the right way, you'll sail through life and arrive at your destination in even-keeled contentment.



Don't be swayed by how things appear. In the wake of a perceived loss, it's easy to feel disappointed and discouraged. If your head is hanging low, you'll miss the opportunities hidden in “misfortune.”

But if you remain steady and unbowed, you'll make your own fortune. For good fortune consists of a good attitude, good thoughts, and good actions.

BOOK SIX

Reason is free from hatred, has no desire to harm anyone or anything, and will never direct you to do evil. Reason works to the benefit of all things.



As long as you are doing your duty, pay no mind to whether you are comfortable or uncomfortable, well-rested or drowsy, praised or insulted, feeling pleasure or pain.

Dying is one of the acts of life. When your time comes, perform it with the same intention, determination, and dignity that you put into all your actions.



What is the best way to avenge a wrong? If you retaliate in kind, returning evil for evil, your attacker succeeds in dragging you down to their level.

Instead, take the insult or injury and transform it into a means of becoming a better person. This is the only true vengeance.



The world does not shape the soul so much as it is shaped by it. For as your interior faculties change, the world around you changes in exact proportion.

As your eyesight improves, everything becomes clearer; as your reason grows, everything becomes more orderly.



Is the universe a hodgepodge of disparate parts, or one harmonious unity?

While every part of the universe has its individual nature—rock, tree, person, cloud, sun—each shares in the nature of the universe as a whole. No individual can have a nature or purpose at odds with universal nature. Everything is related and connected to the Whole.

Reason leads me to reverence this ruling, universal order.



Look past appearances to the core of things. At a lavish banquet, pause and think: “This is the dead body of a fish; this is the dead body of a pig; this fine wine is only fermented grape juice; my purple robe is sheep’s wool stained with the blood of a shellfish,” and so on.

Take the things that are so praised and prized, and strip them of the words by which they are exalted—then see what they really are. In this way, you will not be fooled into treasuring petty things.

Above all else, treasure your rational soul.



Change and motion continually renew the world. Things are hurrying into existence, and things are hurrying out of it. In the rushing stream of time, how can you attach yourself to some particular thing? It's like falling in love with a certain sparrow as it flies by—now it's already gone, never to return.

In breathing, we draw in air for a while, then give it back to the atmosphere. So with living—we draw in life for a while, then give it back to the universe.



What is worth valuing in life? To be greeted with applause and cheers? This is nothing more than the slapping of hands and flapping of tongues.

When you give up the desire for fame, what remains? To live according to your nature. This is the worthy aim of all occupations, arts, and activities.

The horse master trains his horses to reach their full potential; at the same time, he is developing into his own full potential. The gardener cultivates her vines to reach their fruitful maturity; at the same time, she is growing into her own fruitful maturity.

All things find fulfillment in actualizing their nature. You needn't seek anything else. If you pin your happiness on anything beyond this, you can't be free—you will be a slave to that which you desire. When you don't have the thing you

want, you'll be jealous of those who do; when you *do* have it, you'll be suspicious of those who might take it away. At all times, you'll be plotting to acquire it or to protect it. Your mind will never be at peace.

The way to peace is to be content with yourself, honor the light of reason within, live in harmony with others, and be grateful to the gods for the universe and your role in it.



The atoms that make up the universe are everywhere within and around us, yet they are invisible to the eye. Virtue is invisible, too. Is it an element? Does goodness subsist in tiny particles?

No, it is something more divine. Virtue will never be seen under a microscope, yet it is real and enduring.



Desiring to be remembered and praised by generations after your death—how silly! Why wish for words you'll never hear from people you'll never see?



Suppose, during a wrestling match, your opponent scratches you and slams your head against the mat. After the match, do you act upset and offended? Do you call him a traitor? No, you simply shake hands and walk away.

Apply this to every arena in life. Give it your best effort, respect the competition, and—whatever the outcome—walk away in peace.



I do my duty, and disregard all else.

But if someone shows me where I'm acting wrongly, I will gladly change. For I seek the truth, and the truth never harmed anyone. Continuing in error is what causes injury.



It's right to use objects, plants, and non-reasoning animals for our benefit. But it's wrong to use other people for our personal ends. As rational and social beings, humans are meant to cooperate together in harmony—not exploit each other.



It's a shame when the body holds onto life after reason departs, as in senility.



Don't inflate yourself—or let the people inflate you—into a Caesar, a god on earth. In the role of emperor, remain simple, generous, just, kind, free from pomp and pretense. Be reverent to the gods and strive to help people.

Stay true to philosophy—no matter what your role or title, the goal is the same: to live in harmony with nature.

Follow Antonius' example. In all circumstances, he was calm, evenhanded, and undaunted. He acted deliberately, after examining an issue from all angles. He believed in freedom of speech, and ignored his critics rather than silencing or accusing them. He welcomed correction and new ideas. In food, clothing, and lodging, he was content with very little. He revered the gods without being superstitious.

Perform your duties such that you, too, will have a clear conscience in your final hour.



When a nightmare disturbs your sleep, it takes a few moments to return to your senses and realize it was only a dream.

The same thing can happen during the day. When something scares you, it is really your beliefs about the thing that are scaring you. Release your beliefs, and the fear dissolves.

Worries and troubles are nightmares that we entertain while awake.



I consist of body and soul—my soul being my rational understanding.

Apart from my soul, my body is useless—it can't move in a particular direction or distinguish one thing from another. On its own, my body is indifferent to all things.

My soul has power over my body and mind—it controls my thoughts and actions. But it can't control external events or the thoughts and actions of others. Moreover, my soul has power only in the present moment—it can't change the past or know the future. So, it is indifferent to those things.

Exert your efforts within your sphere of power, and be indifferent to everything else. (By “indifferent,” I don't mean apathetic, but *accepting* of all that Fate gives you.)



Great artists stay true to the principles of their art, and even non-artists can appreciate the purity of their work.

The best doctors respect and follow the principles of their discipline, too, and their patients are grateful for the results.

The same is true for every skill and trade: there is a set of principles that must be learned, honored, and practiced.

With the same dedication, I will respect and follow the principles of reason.



Asia and Europe are tiny corners of the cosmos; the ocean is but a drop; and all present time is a pin point in eternity. In the universal scheme, everything you can see—including yourself—is small, in flux, and will soon be gone. Nothing visible is unchanging and everlasting.

And yet, nothing is lost or out of place in the universe. Everything that exists is a temporary emanation from the Source of All.



Often pause to contemplate the harmony and ultimate unity of all things.

Everything is connected; everything is dependent on everything else; everything comes and goes in order; and everything is made from the same substance.



Every tool, instrument, or vessel has a purpose intended by its creator. Each human-made object is judged by how well it fulfills its intended purpose, even when its creator is far away.

Natural objects and living beings are different. They are created and sustained by nature, and the power of nature is within them at all times. They are never separate from their creator.

How fitting it is to reverence this power, and to live and act according to its intended purpose. Reason is our connection to the universal intelligence, our guiding light.



Should the sun try to do the work of the rain? Should the nose try to do the work of the hand? No—everything has a separate part in the universal harmony.

If all things performed the same role, it would be like an orchestra where every instrument played the same note continuously—there would be no movement, no creation. When

different instruments play separate but harmonious parts, the result is a symphony.

Everything and everyone in the universe is working and moving together, though few are aware of it. Even while they sleep, people are cooperating in the cosmic order.

Some people rebel against nature and Fate, fighting to change the way things are. Yet they, too, ultimately are cooperators in the unfolding drama of existence. The universe gives birth to rebels to prevent stagnation, just as it uses fire to burn away dead wood and make room for new growth.

What is your role? With which group of workers do you belong? The universe will use you regardless, but it's better to be a conscious collaborator than an unconscious tool.



Do the gods plan our lives? Do they determine everything that will happen to us in advance? I don't know. But whether it directs my individual life or not, I'm sure that there is a fundamental intelligence guiding the universe as a whole. And so I should accept everything that happens to me and around me, as it unfolds.

What if there are no gods? Even if that's the case, I can still be certain of this: By nature I am a rational and social being; as a particular person, my city is Rome; and as a human being, my home is Earth. Thus, I should think and act in ways befitting a rational and social being; and anything I seek for myself must also be good for Rome and the Earth, or it is not good for me.



When you need to cheer yourself up, list the good qualities of people you know. Note the generosity of one, the courage of another, the humility of a third, and so on.

Nothing delights the mind as much as virtue—especially when we see it embodied in the life of a particular person. This is why stories of bravery, self-sacrifice, and heroism never grow old.



Are you dissatisfied because you weigh only a hundred-and-fifty pounds, and not a thousand? Then don't be upset that you may only live a few more years, and not a thousand.

As you are happy with the amount of matter nature has assigned to you, be happy with the amount of time. More is not necessarily better.



When others block your path, try to persuade them to move rather than using force. Be peaceful and patient. If they still don't budge, find another virtue to draw upon.

Whether or not you reach your original goal, you'll gain a deeper and stronger character than you would have had otherwise.



Put all of your attention, care, and effort into your own actions.

If you chase fame, you're actually valuing the actions of others (their praise, blame, applause, or insults) above your own, denigrating and diminishing your sphere of power.

Respect yourself.



Listen carefully when others speak. As much as possible, imagine yourself in their shoes and see things from their perspective.



What is good for the bee? That which is good for the hive.



To the jaundiced, honey tastes bitter. To those bit by rabid animals, water is terrifying. To a child, it's a great tragedy when a toy ball is lost.

Why am I angry? It must be I'm entertaining an opinion about something, or an interpretation of an event, that is disturbing my peace.

Things themselves don't have the power to determine our opinions about them. *We* form opinions. And negative thinking warps our perceptions as much as jaundice or rabies.



Everything that happens to you is from the hand of nature, according to the will of the universe.

Nothing can force you to violate your own nature; and no one can make you think or act against your own will.

BOOK SEVEN

Principles can't die; they can only be forgotten.

I resolve to remember my principles, to dwell upon them, and to fan my thoughts into a fire that will not be blown out by the winds of circumstance.

My thoughts, opinions, and interpretations are all in my power to choose. Why, then, am I continually entertaining worries and fears?

I will not allow things outside my mind to affect my mind. I will not let external events shake and shatter my inner peace. I will not waste my energy on things outside my control.

I will return to my principles and renew my life.



Celebrities, fashions, plays, spectacles, gladiatorial fights . . . how often people remind me of flocks of sheep, herds of cattle, dogs fighting over bones, and puppets pulled by strings.

Even so, keep a sense of humor about these things, not an air of superiority.



Can you understand and execute the task at hand? If so, do the work. If not, find someone with the necessary skills.

Don't be too proud to ask for help. Think of soldiers surmounting a high wall—one alone can't do it; another must lift him up.

People are social beings who need each other.



Don't worry about the future. By doing your best today, you'll build the strength and resources to handle whatever tomorrow may bring.



Everything is connected in a great web of existence, and the bonds are sacred. Nothing can evolve on its own. Everything develops together as the universe unfolds.

There is one universe comprising all things; one divine power from which the universe arose and by which it is sustained; one set of laws governing all natural phenomena; one life shared by all living beings; and one reason shared by all thinking people.

Physical things arise and decompose, returning to the elements from which they were formed. We humans borrow life and reason for a time, then return them to their unfathomable, inexhaustible, universal Source.



To act according to nature, or to act according to reason? Because you are a rational being by nature, these are two ways of saying the same thing.



Just as heart, lungs, kidneys, and other separate organs are united in one body, individual people are united in one community. We are made for cooperation.

This will become clearer the more often you remind yourself that all people share the same reason, though not all use it to the same extent or develop their full capacity for understanding.



If you trip and fall, your hands and knees will feel pain. Let them complain if they wish. But *you* are not injured unless you choose to view your fall as a terrible, unfair, unfortunate event inflicted upon you. Your opinions and interpretations are up to you.



“It is noble to do good and be insulted for it.”

—ANTISTHENES

Does gold change to lead under pressure? Does an emerald turn from luminous green to dingy brown when it’s insulted?

Of course not. Neither can a virtuous person be sullied by stress or slander.



The light of reason, the divine spark within you, is self-sufficient. It needs nothing, wants nothing, and can be harmed by nothing outside itself. Only your own wrong opinions, mistaken ideas, and negative thoughts can hide its light.



Does change make you anxious?

Tell me, what would ever happen without change? How does nature work, except by changing things?

Can you digest food without changing it? Can you build a boat without changing a tree? Can *anything* useful be done without change?

It's the nature of the universe—all things must change, including you. Embrace it.



How fast the river of time moves, swallowing everything and everyone in its torrent. It has already taken Socrates, Crysippus, Epictetus, and countless others like them—do you think it will make an exception for you?

Only worry about this: living according to your nature.



Love all people, including those who do wrong. They may be acting unintentionally, out of ignorance. Even if they are acting intentionally, they can't harm you—that is, they can't make you a worse person than before. Only you can harm yourself, by fanning the flames of hatred and resentment.

When someone wrongs you, identify the mistaken ideas that motivated their behavior. Then, instead of being angry, you'll pity them.



From the fundamental elements, the creative power of the universe builds a horse, then breaks it down. It uses the same materials to build a tree, then a person—each form subsisting only for a short time.

There is nothing to fear or bewail in this process. Nature is like a potter, shaping one thing from clay, returning it to the pile, then shaping another.



The human face is handsome and welcoming by nature. But if a person frowns often, their countenance is distorted into a permanent scowl and all loveliness is extinguished.

Frowning is contrary to our nature.



Don't long for things you don't have; instead, be grateful for the things you *do* have. Imagine how desirable they would seem if you didn't already have them.

At the same time, don't become so attached to your possessions that you would be upset if they were damaged or lost.



In turbulent times, take refuge inside yourself. Find peace and contentment in contemplating the light of reason.



Stop with your idle daydreaming. Focus on the present. Perform the task at hand. Separate reality from your opinions, or how things appear. Don't carry grievances—leave them in the past where they belong.



All the rules of morality boil down to this: Love people and revere the gods.



Look at those who strive for fame. It's as if they're competing to gather the largest pile of sand; tomorrow, the wind comes and blows it all away.



“In the grand scheme of the universe—all time, all space, all existence—is the length of one human life important?”

How could it be?

“From the same perspective, is death very frightening?”

No, not in the least.

—SOCRATES



“You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that anyone worth their salt would calculate the risk of death before doing what they know to be right. Their only concern is whether their actions are just. . . .

“If someone takes a position, reasoning it to be true, they should stand there like a soldier assigned to a post, and not abandon it—even under threat of death. . . .

“After all, virtue is not to be confused with saving your own skin. In these situations, we must entrust ourselves to Fate. As the oracles say, no one can escape their destiny. The only question is how best to live in our remaining time.”

—SOCRATES



At night, look up at the stars in their courses. Imagine yourself moving with them, calmly and rationally, in harmony with the cosmic order.

This will cleanse your mind of the day's trifles and troubles,
and refresh your soul.



Plato was right: To see things on earth in their correct relationships and proportions, we must look at them from far above. Up close, we see only the chaos of animals and soldiers; from above, the orderliness of herds and armies.

Births and deaths, marriages and divorces, days of mourning and celebrations, people of different nations—seen from above, they resolve into a harmony of opposites.



Study the past and you will know the future. Political movements rise and fall in cycles, while human nature remains the same.

To experience human life for forty years is the same as to experience it for ten thousand. What more will you see?



*That which grows from the earth, to the earth returns;
That which springs from heaven, to heaven returns.*

—ANAXAGORAS

At death, the physical body returns to the elements, while life and reason return their Source. Perhaps we're aware of this

transition to a new state, or perhaps consciousness disappears. Either way, there's nothing to fear. And so,

*With the heavenward breeze at your back,
Row cheerfully till you reach the far shore.*

—EURIPIDES



Everywhere and at all times, it is in your power to accept your present circumstances, be kind to those around you, and cultivate true and useful thoughts.

Stick to these ruling principles. Don't look at how others behave and try to imitate them; look straight to where nature and reason lead you.

Don't be pulled off course by the desires of your body, either. Reason was made to rule over the body—not the other way around.



All that you've done before, or failed to do, is of no account. The past is dead and gone. Why carry yesterday's regrets on your back?

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Live now according to your principles.



Gratefully accept whatever Fate gives you. This is your destiny, so embrace it. What other way is there to live?

When “misfortune” befalls you, think of others who have experienced the same thing. Remember how they cursed and complained—what good did it do? Where are they now? Will you follow their example, or use this experience to your advantage? Can you turn this obstacle into a stepping stone?

Look within. If you dig deep enough, the spring of peace and contentment will bubble up.



Life is more like a wrestling match than a dance. Plant your feet and brace yourself for every sudden, unexpected challenge.



When you're in pain, remember this—bodily pain can't harm your ruling reason.

Most pains are local and limited. Let the injured body part voice its displeasure, but don't let it dominate your thoughts and become the center of your attention. When imagination is added to pain, it seems infinite and everlasting.



Don't treat inhumane people the way they treat others, lest you become inhumane.



How do we know that Telauges wasn't superior in character to Socrates? It isn't enough to know that Socrates was more adept at philosophical dialogue, and died a more noble death. We would need to peer into both men's souls and compare their contents—which we can't.

It's possible for someone to be a saint, yet never recognized or celebrated for it.

You may be lacking in debate skills and academic knowledge, but don't let this keep you from pursuing philosophy. These things may garner praise and respect, but they have nothing to do with living a good and happy life. The true measure of a person is inward and unseen.



You have the power to be free and peaceful of mind, even while the whole world screams against you—yes, even while wild beasts tear your body apart.

For these externals can't touch the mind. What upsets your mind is your *opinion* of what's happening.

Use reason to see through all opinions, including your own.



Live each day as if it were your last. Fill it with activities that are in line with your principles—be neither lazy, nor hurried, nor hypocritical.



The gods have watched over humans for millennia without tiring of them. But you—after just a few years, you’ve grown sick of people, even though you’re one of them!

How ridiculous to despise others for their faults and failings, while indulging and excusing your own.



When you reach out to help another, once the other receives your help the act is complete. Don’t seek a third thing—praise or a reward in return.

As a social being, it’s in your nature to help others. And living according to your nature is your purpose in life. That’s why helping others is its own reward.



The Source of All created the universe and set it into motion. Since that beginning, everything has come about by consequence or continuity.

Everything follows a ruling principle; everything is connected. Keep this in mind, and you’ll remain peaceful in all circumstances.

BOOK EIGHT

You can't go back and relive your life as a philosopher; but you *can* live as a philosopher from this day forth. True, your occupation prevents a return to the academy, and you'll never earn a reputation as a philosopher at this point. So what?

Forget about what others think, and live the rest of your life according to nature. You've seen all that this world has to offer, and you know that happiness is found nowhere outside of living your philosophy. It's not found in syllogisms, disputations, lectures, professorships, awards, or anything else.

Happiness is a byproduct of thinking and acting in ways that are just, generous, resolute, purposeful, and free.



You could be angry till your head explodes, but it wouldn't change how other people behave.

To cool down, remember: First, all things proceed from nature and fate.

Second, in a short while, the people you're upset with will be gone—and so will you. Do you wish to spend these days stewing in anger?

Third, focus on your own work—to be a good person, which includes having a good disposition.



Everything is content when it fulfills its nature. A person is content when their thoughts are in harmony with reason (clear, purposeful, truth-seeking, just); when their actions are beneficial for themselves and others; when they limit their desires and dislikes to what is within their sphere of power; and when they accept all that Fate gives them.



Your responsibilities leave you little time for reading books and studying philosophy, it's true. But you have ample time for *practicing* philosophy.

You have all the time in the world to cultivate humility, listen to reason rather than pleasure and pain, and learn to love everyone, including the ignorant and ungrateful.

Be grateful, yourself. Stop complaining about the demands of court life.



We need to repent not just for the bad things we do, but for the good things we *don't* do—such as helping a person in need when we have the opportunity. But we never need to repent for *failing to indulge in pleasure*. This is because pleasure is not a good in itself, but a side effect of things that may be good or bad.

When faced with choice between following reason or pursuing a questionable pleasure, remember this: If you follow reason, you'll never regret it in the morning.



Look at each thing before you and ask: What is it made of? Where did it come from? What is its purpose or use? What holds it together? How long will it last?

This is the application of philosophy, ethics, and physics.



Whenever you meet a person, ask: What do they believe to be good or bad? What are their desires and dislikes? What do they think of pleasure and pain, fame and obscurity, life and death?

If you know their ruling principles and motivations, nothing they do will surprise you. After all, are you surprised when a fig tree produces figs, and an olive tree produces olives?



It is no virtue to be steadfast and consistent in defending a false idea. Welcome correction, and change your thinking to fit reason. Don't twist reason to fit your opinions.



If something undesirable happens outside of your control, who do you blame—the universe or the gods?

It's foolish to blame either. If there's anything you can do to help, do it. If not, your anger is pointless. All of your thoughts and acts should be directed to a purpose.



Everything that comes into being has a purpose, a role, a place in the web of existence. A horse, a tree, a stream, the grass, the sun. . . .

What is your purpose—to enjoy pleasure? See what reason and common sense have to say about that.

Nature doesn't just create and sustain things; it also directs them to their purpose.



Focus on the task at hand and give it your full attention, whether you are acting, speaking, reading, or thinking by yourself and forming an opinion about something.



The communal baths disgust you because they're full of sweat, oil, dirt, and filthy water. Well, get over it. Bodily life is inherently messy.



You have three relationships: First, to your own body; second, to the divine Source of all life and existence; third, to your fellow human beings.

And so you have three responsibilities: First, to use your reason to master your body and make right judgments; second,

to gratefully accept all that happens in the universe; third, to treat all people with justice and generosity.



Whether you are addressing the Senate or a servant in your own home, use the same manner of speaking. Be simple, direct, humble, and honest.



If you earn or inherit money or property, manage it wisely, without arrogance. If it is lost, stolen, or otherwise taken away, let it go without tears.



Have you ever seen a hand, foot, or limb severed from the body? That's what a person is like who acts antisocially, severing himself or herself from humanity.

Thankfully, even if you cut yourself off from the community, you have the power to return and rejoin it. A severed hand isn't so lucky.

So be grateful to the universe—from which you can never be separated—and to the human family, with which you can always be reunited.



If something blocks the path of evolution, the unfolding universe will absorb it, transform it, and use it for its own purposes.

So we, as rational children of the universe, have the ability to encounter an obstacle, absorb it into our understanding, and transform it into a stepping stone.



Stop thinking of everything that ever hurt you in your life, and all that might yet hurt you. Take troubles as they arise—one at a time.

When you are disturbed, ask—is this pain unbearable and everlasting? Or is it manageable and temporary?

Remember—you can't hurt in the past or future, only in the present moment. Limit your pain to that moment and it will be bearable.



Does Panthea still weep by the tomb of Verus? Does Chaurias still weep by the tomb of Hadrianus? Of course not.

Suppose they went on grieving for the rest of their lives. Would the dead be aware of it? Would they be pleased? And when the grievers die, should *their* loved ones spend the rest of their lives grieving, too?



Focus your efforts on the needs of the present day. Those who strive for posthumous fame, erecting statues of themselves and such, don't consider that the people of tomorrow will be exactly like the people of today—mortals.

What does it matter to you if someone a thousand years from now should utter your name, or have an opinion about you?



However much my boat is tossed about on the seas of life, reason stands firmly and serenely at the helm.



If you're upset by something outside you, it's not the thing itself that upsets you, but your opinion of it. And it's in your power to wipe away that opinion immediately.

If your own thoughts are causing you pain, who's keeping you from changing them?

Or, do you feel ashamed because you aren't doing what you know you ought to be doing? Then do it.

Is there an obstacle blocking your way? Make it part of your plan and turn it to your advantage.

What if it kills you? Then you'll leave this world contentedly, as someone who pursued a worthy goal to the end—not as a coward who gave up and stopped trying.



Reason is invincible. It only does what it chooses to do—make sound judgments—and it can't be forced to do otherwise.

A mind ruled by reason—deliberate, objective, and just, free from prejudice and delusion, unswayed by temptation—is a fortress. Take refuge within its walls and you'll be safe and free.



See things as they are, and don't let your imagination blow them out of proportion.

Suppose you hear that someone has spoken poorly of you. Are you hurt by this? It's only a report about some words. Don't let your imagination concoct a drama based upon it.

Suppose your child is sick. Do you fall into despair? Limit your thoughts to the illness and how to treat it—don't let your imagination add anything more.



This cucumber tastes bitter. Throw it away.

There are thorns in my path. Walk around them.

That is enough. Don't add, "Why do these things exist? Is the universe out to get me?"

Such thoughts betray an ignorance of nature's works and ways.



Others may insult you, injure you—even kill you and cut you to pieces—yet they are powerless to harm your character. Nothing

can defile your mind or force you to be unjust, outside of your own will.

A person can stand by a mountain stream and insult it all day long—the stream remains pure. Even if they throw dirt into it, the dirt is quickly dispersed and carried away.

Let your soul be like that stream—flowing freely, simply, and contentedly.



The more you learn about nature and the universe, the more you learn about yourself.

For without knowing *where* you are, you can't know *who* you are, or the role you have to play.



The sun pours out light continually in all directions, yet it is never emptied.

What's the nature of a sunray? You can observe one passing through an opening into a dark room. It doesn't wander around the room—it extends in a straight line. It doesn't flicker like candlelight—it's steady as long as it's unobstructed. When it falls upon an object, it doesn't push it over—it illuminates it.

Like sunrays, let your thoughts extend from your mind, steady and straight, illuminating everything they touch.



You breathe in harmony with the air around you, taking it in and exhaling it out. In a similar way, you can *think* in harmony with the universal reason surrounding you. There's an intelligence pervading all things, and you can draw it into your mind if you desire.

BOOK NINE

As social beings by nature, people are meant to live together in harmony. To intentionally hurt another person, then, is an offense against nature. Because each person bears a spark of divinity, it's also an affront to the gods.

Lying is also an offense against nature, for the universal nature is truth.

Acting on the idea that pleasure is always good, and pain is always evil, is another offense. People with this false belief will see wrongdoers enjoying pleasures while the virtuous endure pains, and they will conclude that the universe is unfair—or that it's better to be a wrongdoer.

Nature is impartial in doling out pleasure and pain, honor and dishonor, wealth and poverty, life and death. None of these things are good or bad in themselves. So, you should treat them impartially, too—accept them when they come; let go of them when they leave.



It would be a blessed life, indeed, to pass through this world without experiencing deceit, hypocrisy, violence, greed, or pride.

Sin is the corruption of reason. That's why humans are capable of such evils, while unreasoning animals are not.



Accept death as a natural process, a necessary part of your life's cycle.

Think of all the transitions you've passed through already—from childhood to adolescence, youth to maturity, becoming a father and a grandfather. Doesn't each transition entail the death of what came before? Yet change is nothing to fear and resist.

As an expectant mother waiting for her child to leave her body, be ready for the moment your soul leaves your body.



When others try to hurt you, they hurt themselves. When they cheat or steal from you, they impoverish their own character.

Leave wicked deeds where they happen. Don't pick them up and carry them forward in the form of resentments.



All creatures share the same life, and all people share the same reason; just as all things on Earth share the same earthly nature, breathe the same air, and see by the same light.



Like tends to like. Everything earthy returns to the earth; everything liquid flows together; everything areal flies in the sky.

Bees swarm, cattle gather in herds, and birds flock. People form families, associations, communities, and nations. Even the stars in the sky—however far apart they are—move in relationship to one another.

Only people have conflicts, separate from each other, and try to live alone. But nature is strong—sooner or later, the communal instinct will prevail.



Today, I freed myself from trouble. Or rather, I wiped it out—for my trouble was caused by my opinion of things, so I changed the story I was telling myself.



Outside things, people, events, and circumstances are just that—*outside* us. Do they carry preconceived opinions and judgements, which they insert into our minds? No!

Our minds alone are responsible for our judgments, opinions, and interpretations. Don't be fooled by how things first appear—examine everything in the light of reason.



As you are part of a community, act in ways that benefit your community. To act selfishly, against society, is mutiny.



You have suffered infinite troubles and tragedies in your own imagination. Enough of worrying!



The universe moves ever onward, from age to age. Does a universal intelligence guide its every step? Or did a first cause set the universe into motion, then withdraw to let things go as they may? Is there someone (or something) in charge, or is it all chance?

If there is a guiding intelligence, put yourself in harmony with it by following your reason, which is your connection to the universal intelligence.

If there is no rule but chance, order your own life by living according to reason, lest you be tossed about by chaos.

In other words, your path is the same either way: Follow reason.



It's in your power to act now—so get moving. Don't wait for the perfect time, the ideal environment, or a crowd of onlookers to cheer you.

Put your best effort into the task at hand, no matter how small. Work simply, humbly, consistently. Success builds upon success.



You ask the gods to give you what you desire and deliver you from what you fear.

I don't know whether the gods hear and answer our prayers, or not. Either way, why not pray for the strength to let go of your desires and fears? Wouldn't it be better to be content with what you already have and to fear nothing?

Try praying this way—for an inner change, rather than an outer one—and see what happens.



Epicurus says, “When I was sick, I didn't carry on about my bodily sufferings. When people visited me, we talked about philosophy and the nature of things, just as before. I was especially interested in how the mind, while participating in the body, can remain separate from what pains the body, free to pursue its own good. Also, I didn't let my doctor fret and frown at my bedside.”

Follow Epicurus' example: Don't desert philosophy under any circumstance, no matter what befalls you. And, if possible, surround yourself with thoughtful, encouraging friends.



Whenever you are offended by another's shameless words or deeds, ask: Is it reasonable to demand a world with no brazen wrongdoers? Will my being upset help bring about utopia?

No. Don't ask the impossible or get upset with the world as it exists. There *are* shameless people in the world; there are also hot-tempered, ignorant, and untrustworthy people. If you remember that these categories of people exist, you won't be surprised and upset when you come across such an individual.

It's also helpful to remember that nature provides a virtue to counter every wrongful act. Counter unkindness with kindness, dishonesty with honesty, and so on.

Besides, how have they harmed you? If you look, you'll find they've done nothing to degrade your character or disturb your mind.

When you meet a person who's gone astray, either try to teach them, or simply tolerate them. It's no wonder that someone has gone astray if they've never been taught to follow the right way. If you expect an ignorant person to act like a knowledgeable one, that's your mistake.

BOOK TEN

My soul, will you never be simple, serene, and satisfied? Will you never enjoy a kind, generous, sunny disposition?

Will you never be happy with life as it is, desiring nothing more? Will you never stop seeking entertainment and longing for pleasure?

Will you never be grateful for all that exists and occurs, knowing everything comes from nature and the gods? Will you never live in harmony with others, without finding fault in them?



Remember, nature has endowed you with the strength to endure everything that happens by nature's hand.

Whatever happens to you is the result of causes set into motion from the beginning. The thread of your destiny is woven into the universal tapestry, inseparable from the fates of all.

So, remembering that I am a part of the cosmos—that my life belongs to it, and that whatever happens to me is for the benefit of the whole—I will be content with my lot.

Also, remembering that I belong to the human community and couldn't live without others, I will act in ways that benefit all people.



It's ridiculous to suppose that death is evil, or contrary to nature.

The parts of the whole must die—or, rather, *change*—for the continued growth and good of the whole. This isn't an evil for the parts; what's good for the whole is, ultimately, good for the parts.

If there were no death and renewal—clearing away the old and bringing forth the new from its elements—the Earth would stagnate. Indeed, the whole universe would grind to a halt.



Rationality is the quality of seeing past appearances to discern the true nature of things. We call a person *rational* who is even-handed and unprejudiced.

Equanimity means the calm acceptance of all that exists and all that happens.

Magnanimity means greatness of spirit, unmoved by the lure of pleasure, the lust for fame, and the fear of death.

If you strive to be rational, equanimous, and magnanimous—not merely to be publicly called by these adjectives—you will completely transform your life.



Every day, unexpected events, interpersonal conflicts, and bone-tiredness conspire to pull you away from your principles. But every time you respond by drawing on reason, its flame grows stronger within you.



The person who follows reason is simultaneously active and peaceful, cheerful and resolute.

Stop wasting energy in fear and procrastination. Your job is to see what needs to be done and then do it. If you see the way forward, proceed without looking back. If you are unsure which way to go, stop and find a trustworthy guide.

If something blocks your way, make that obstacle a stepping stone on your journey. If you fail or die, it will be in pursuit of a worthy goal—there's no shame in that.



Stop talking about what makes a person good. *Be* a good person.



Things come into being because the universe loves them and wants them to exist. As children of the universe, we have the power to love, too. Shouldn't we love everything the universe creates?



It doesn't matter whether you're on a mountaintop, at the seaside, or in the middle of a city—your interior landscape

remains the same. Wherever you go, there you are—the same person, with the same patterns of thought.

As you improve your mind and disposition, your surroundings become more interesting, beautiful, and inspiring—no matter where you are.



A man deposits some fluid in a womb, and nothing more; then hidden forces go to work within the woman, forming a child. A human being, sprung from such a substance!

The child suckles milk and eats her first foods—again, hidden forces go to work, transforming food and drink into bone and brains, strength and intelligence, movement and life. Astounding!

Notice how even great things have small beginnings, and how unseen, imperceptible forces are the most powerful of all.



All creatures must follow whatever nature and Fate decree. Even if they kick and scream, still they must follow.

Irrational creatures follow blindly; only human beings have the power to embrace their nature and destiny, and follow willingly.



Whenever you are offended by another person's words or deeds, look inside and see whether you have the same fault. You may be disgusted by gluttony, greed, or pride in another, while these same vices are hiding in your own heart.

Focus on improving yourself—others are outside of your control, after all—and you'll be more sympathetic and tolerant of your fellow humans.



The more things you examine in the light of reason, the stronger your reason grows—just as feeding more wood to a fire makes it burn brighter and higher.



Everywhere and always, you have the power to think rationally and act in harmony with nature.

Don't take this gift for granted. A wheel doesn't have the power to move and steer itself, and neither does any other unreasoning thing. Once put in motion, irrational things are easily stopped, but intelligent beings can find their way around any obstacle in dogged pursuit of their aim.

These obstacles may hurt your body, but they can't make you a worse person. In fact, courageously facing challenges and patiently enduring suffering are ways of *improving* your character and disposition.



Ponder the leaves—brought forth in spring, fallen and scattered in fall, replaced by new ones next season.

Hold everything lightly. Don't cling to some things and run from others as if they—or you—were everlasting.



Healthy eyes enjoy seeing all colors; healthy ears hear all sounds; a healthy nose takes in all scents.

To see only green, hear only violins, or smell only roses would be a severe disability, or a symptom of a serious illness.

A healthy mind, too, perceives all things, accepts all things, and makes use of all things.



No matter how good a life you lead, you won't please everyone. Someone will be glad to see you go.

Even when Socrates died, there were those who thought, "Phew—now I can breathe freely. Maybe he didn't criticize me directly, but I always felt small and stupid in his presence."

So give up this futile pursuit of being liked by everyone. Simply live according to your principles. Then, when the time comes, you'll be ready to depart this world in contentment and peace.



Watch how people act and ask yourself, “Why did they do that?”

Start by examining your own behavior: Does your body move by itself and do what it wills? No.

What’s pulling its strings? An invisible power, hidden within. It is life; it is intelligence; it is *you*.

BOOK ELEVEN

Here is what the rational soul does: It sees, analyzes, shapes, and directs the self. It bears fruit in rational thoughts, words, and actions.

It makes goals and devises plans to achieve them. It brings order to chaos, fits pieces into patterns, and makes the incomplete whole.

It surveys the entire universe, and sees backward and forward in time. It embraces all the stages of life, including death.

It seeks truth and justice, and loves all people as brothers and sisters.



What is my job? To live according to my nature as a rational and social being.

Have I done well? Then I have my reward, and desire nothing more in return.



Why do people enjoy watching tragedies acted out on stage? Because they remind us of things that can happen in life, and show us that these events are prescribed by nature and Fate. They give our imaginations practice in bearing them.

Comedies also serve a purpose; in bursting the bubbles of the powerful and pompous, they bring us all back down to earth. They use common speech to promote common sense.

Many excellent lines have been written by dramatists, such as these:

“Why be angry at the world?
As if the world cares!”

—EURIPIDES

“Life is like a crop of corn;
One stalk harvested, another sown.”

—EURIPIDES

“It is enough that goodness and justice are on my side.”

—ARISTOPHANES



Just as those who try to block your path can't stop you from acting according to reason, they also can't make you hate them. Your thoughts and feelings towards people, things, and events are in within *your* sphere of power, not theirs.

Remain calm in the face of those who try to hinder or harm you, so you can think clearly and find a way forward. If you become angry and hateful, you focus on the obstacle and lose sight of your goal.



The works of nature are superior to all human arts; for our arts are inspired by and imitate nature, not the other way around.



Let your soul be at peace—neither pursuing nor running from anything.

The peaceful soul is a perfect circle. If it stretches toward some object, or contracts away from another, it becomes distorted.

When illumined with reason, the soul is a shining orb. By its light, we can see clearly and truly.



Suppose someone despises me. That's their concern, not mine. My concern is to live in harmony with nature and reason, so that my actions won't be worthy of contempt.



When someone says “I’m going to give you what you deserve” or “I’ve decided to treat you better than you deserve,” you know they’re insincere.

There’s never a reason to announce beforehand that you’re going to be fair or generous—*do it*, and your actions will speak for themselves.

A person’s character is revealed in their eyes and written on their countenance. This is why we are drawn to the faces of truly kind, generous people.

When a rapacious person fakes kindness by batting their eyes and putting on a seductive smile, it may fool people for a time but eventually their ugliness will show though.

Far better to have an honest opponent than a false friend.



We're all human beings. Why hate anyone, flatter anyone, lord over anyone, or bow before anyone?



Speak what you really think, not what you think people want to hear.



In order to act well in this world, you must first accept it.

Justice, generosity, and gratitude flow from a mind that embraces all things, in harmony with our nature as rational and social beings.

Injustice, selfishness, and fear flow from a mind that complains about and fights against things as they are, straying from reason and society.



If you aim at one overarching goal and pursue it consistently, your life will have unity and coherence. Your separate, diverse actions will build on each other like the notes that add up to make a symphony.

What makes for a worthy goal? Not to chase things that are popularly considered good, like pleasures and fame, but to live according to your nature, following reason and benefitting society.



The Pythagoreans bid us to look up to the heavens each night and see how the stars go about their work, so that we may be inspired by their purity and perfection.



You can't set down rules for others until you have first followed them yourself.



“In a wicked generation, might makes right, violence is praised, and virtue is slandered.”

—HESIOD, *Works and Days*



“Each morning, remind yourself that this day may be your last. And when you tuck your children into bed at night, remember that they, too, are mortals who someday will die.”

But isn't it bad luck to say such things?

“If it's bad luck to remember nature's ways, we should never speak of wheat growing and being harvested.”

—EPICTETUS



“No one can rob you of your free will.”

—EPICTETUS



“Don’t bind yourself, with the chains of desire and fear, to things that are outside your sphere of control. This is a matter of sanity.”

—EPICTETUS



“What do you want, rational minds or irrational?”

Rational minds.

“What sort of rational minds, calm or disturbed?”

Calm.

“How can you acquire calm, rational minds?”

We already have them.

“Really? Then why are you squabbling among yourselves?”

—SOCRATES

BOOK TWELVE

You've been imagining how good you'll feel someday, if you keep following the path of philosophy. In fact, the blessed state you seek is available right now. Simply let go of the past, trust the future to providence, and live this moment in harmony with nature and reason.

Be grateful for all that's been given to you. Speak the truth freely and openly. Treat others justly and generously. If they misbehave or insult you, don't stoop to their level. Never sacrifice your principles to pursue pleasure or avoid pain.

Don't cling to possessions and other external things; cling only to the divine spark within you.

Then you'll be a worthy child of the universe.



We are ultimately judged on the contents of our souls—not on our bodies, much less our clothing and jewelry.

Look inside to check on your spark of divinity, on loan from the divine Source. Is it burning pure, bright, and strong?



You consist of body, breath (or life), and mind. Body and breath are yours to care for, while the mind is the part that does the caring. Mind is the gateway to your core self.

Remember that *who you are* is separate from outside events and circumstances, worries about what might happen in the future, your bodily ills and pains, what others do or say, and even what you yourself have done and said in the past.

Freedom consists in detaching from all these things that are not you, and letting them be whatever they will be. Then your core self will be like Empedocles' sphere, "Perfectly round, whole, and in joyous rest reposing."



I often wonder how it is that most people value their own lives above others, yet value other's opinions of them over their own self-opinions.



If the universe is justly ordered, mustn't the souls of the good be immortal? It seems unjust for a kind, pure, wise person—one who lives their life in harmony with the divine—to have their soul die with their body.

Whatever happens—whether souls are extinguished, recycled, or persist in a nonphysical dimension—it must be for the ultimate good of the universe, or else it wouldn't be this way.

Some things are beyond our ability to know. Be content with knowing that they're in the hands of the universal intelligence, from which all justice flows.



Even if you despair of ever mastering a skill, keep practicing.

Your left hand is clumsy at most things because you always favor the right. Yet look at how well your left hand controls the horse's bridle—that's because it's the one task at which you've given it practice.



Wield your principles like a wrestler, not a gladiator.

A gladiator depends on his sword—when it's knocked out of his hands, he's finished. But a wrestler's only tools *are* his hands—he needs nothing beyond himself.

In other words, internalize your principles so they become part of you.



May truth and justice shine from you as light from a lamp, for as long as you live.



Remember that everything is opinion, and your opinion is in your power.

When you wipe away a bothersome opinion, you're like a sailor who rounds a rocky promontory and passes from turbulent seas into a peaceful bay.



When an action reaches its proper conclusion, we don't say that it's been harmed—we say that it's complete. The act doesn't suffer by coming to its end, and neither does the person who performed it.

So with life, which is the arc of all our actions. When it reaches its natural conclusion, there's no harm done to life itself, or even to us.

Death is not an evil. It's nature's way of renewing itself and evolving forward. Everything in the universe arises for a season, then returns to its elements, which are then recycled into new forms.

Since death is good for the universe as a whole, it can't be evil for the parts that make up the universe.

This isn't to say that we should seek our own death or cause anyone else's—only that when death happens, accept it.



How brief the time assigned to our lives, compared to eternity. How minuscule the amount of matter comprising our bodies. How tiny the plot of land we call home, compared to the whole Earth. How meager the portion of universal intelligence we access in our minds.

In light of all this smallness, what should we consider important? Only living according to our nature and accepting all that Fate gives us.



How am I using my reason at this moment?

That's the key question. All else is smoke and ashes.



I've been privileged to live as a citizen of this great world for five decades. What does it matter whether I'm given five more hours, five more days, or five more years?

I entrust myself to Fate—whatever happens is just.

When an actor is called to leave the stage, it would be ridiculous for him to complain, "But I want three more acts!" That's up to the playwright, not the actor.

Our task is this: to play our role to the best of our ability, then depart in contentment and gratitude, praying only that that the Playwright is pleased with our performance.

FURTHER READING

