

# Self-Calm

Life with less regret, sorrow, anger, and fear

- Based on Roman Emperor **Marcus Aurelius's** notes, traditionally titled *Meditations*
- Adapted, modernized, and expanded for this text by **Chris DeLeon**
- Made from **George Long** (1862), **A. S. L. Farquharson** (1944), & **Merici Casaubon** (1634) public domain translations, also checked against **Martin Hammond's** (2006) translator notes
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*This text is free, but cannot be sold. The audiobook comes with [Self-Command.com](http://Self-Command.com)*  
Hundreds of hours went into preparing the text version, but it's free as a contribution to our common understanding. Download the latest version from [Self-Calm.com](http://Self-Calm.com)

In memory of Judith Ann DeLeon, 1951-2020.  
She taught us how to patiently care for people.

<b>INTRODUCTION: What this is, and why it exists</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: The best traits I learned from other people</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: Keeping thoughts tranquil</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Acting with a sense of urgency</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: Focusing on what we can do</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: Doing right is its own reward</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: Peacefully accepting reality</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: Cooperation, collaboration, &amp; contribution</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: Dealing with the present as it is</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>CHAPTER NINE: Everything isn't on you to fix</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>CHAPTER TEN: Being calm, rational, and attentive</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>CHAPTER ELEVEN: Dealing with difficult people</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWELVE: Everyday practical philosophy</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>THE END</b>	<b>251</b>

# INTRODUCTION: What this is, and why it exists

## 0.1 What this is

Between 161 and 180 AD, Marcus Aurelius made notes to himself while he was emperor of the Roman Empire. This is a modern, plain-language adaptation of those notes.

Because this is two decades of notes, there is no plot to follow, or long-form arguments built up in a logical sequence. There's a lot of repetition and overlap on the same ideas in several ways. Had Twitter existed 1,850 years earlier, some of these could have been Tweets. The first chapter is unique—more on that in a minute—but other groupings are mainly of historical interest.

Most translations are broken into 12 chapter-sized “books,” and each point, from a sentence to a couple pages, is numbered as a “chapter.” For simplicity, instead of calling these 12 books, I've relabeled those here as 12 chapters, and titled each chapter from a major idea in it that stands out, to make them easier to remember.

## 0.2 Why I put together Self-Calm

The ideas in this text have been helpful to me in various intensely stressful periods of my life. About a dozen years ago, I went through a bad business deal that, when I discussed it with other people, they agreed could lead someone to practically turn inside out from justified anger.

Around that time, William B. Irvine published *A Guide To The Good Life*, about Stoicism. Though he's not as mainstream as

a contemporary voice like the professional marketer Ryan Holiday, in many ways that book helped put Stoicism back in modern discourse. The ideas helped me get back on track, and saved me from letting frustration about a past situation throw off my future.

William B. Irvine encouraged not being bashful about using the word Stoic in modern life, to identify openly with living by Stoic principles. For many years since, I've adopted Cheerful Stoicism as my "religious views" on Facebook (though it's not a religion, I'm otherwise secular), and I continued to work my way through more source material by Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and others. More than any other source, I found *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius my favorite, rich with observations and points that I could immediately see applications for in my life.

Eight years ago, I was working through a period of considerable uncertainty, grappling with fears about changing career paths. Here, again, and quite directly, *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius helped me think my way out of fears that weren't helping me. At a second major inflection point, my life would have wound up on a substantially worse track without the benefits of these ideas.

I continued picking up and reading different translations to compare, audiobook versions, summary books, detailed translator notes, and anything I could find about it. From years of revisiting it over and over in different ways, I was picking up on new things from it each time.

As modern Stoicism grew in popularity, I had friends and colleagues who knew me well asking which version of it I'd recommend to them, especially since many translations are

now old enough to be free, in the public domain. I was uncomfortable recommending the free editions for a number of reasons: dense and archaic wording, ancient references, and various snags that made it hard to dive into without first reading a whole different book about it. I wanted something I could point them towards without feeling like I was telling them to study for a philosophy minor. I needed something that could work as an accessible and practical introduction to Stoicism, while still remaining closer to the source material than a summary or discussion about it, or so that even if it's the only material they ever went through related to Stoicism, it'd be useful and understandable enough that they could immediately gain a lifetime of benefit from it.

Then two things happened that brought this idea from a backburner someday project into focus.

The first is that eight months ago a family member was diagnosed with an aggressive, late-stage terminal illness. I spent the next half year in a caregiver role, handling a combination of lingering uncertainty, staying alert, and an overload of difficult information, while staying grounded enough to help and to keep the other plates in my life spinning. We had no idea at any given time, even with expert input, whether we had 24 hours left, or a few more years. Each time we seemed to settle into this new situation with a reliable routine, we were promptly hit with new surprises upending our day-to-day again. I had to handle things one at a time, keep my head on straight, and focus only on what I could do, not on what I couldn't.

A lot of Stoic writing deals with death. Those points used to be abstract to me as a generally healthy guy younger than 40. In this new situation, I found these points immensely useful. As often has to be clarified about Stoicism due to confusion from

the modern use of the word “stoic” in lowercase, it’s not about denying, ignoring, or suppressing feelings, by not showing it or acting tough, it’s about sorting out our thinking in a way that helps prevent our impulses from overwhelming us in a way that could prevent us from doing the things we need and intend to do. I found myself drawing upon every strategy I knew of, many of which I first found in Meditations.

The second thing that moved this project into focus was the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this writing, more 80,000 people in the US alone (over 300k worldwide) have passed away from it. Every one of those is someone’s relative, someone’s coworker, someone’s neighbor, and I know there are a lot of people who are now dealing with a situation not unlike what I went through just prior. Even for people fortunate to have not been as directly affected by death, the necessary measures taken to slow its reach have added a tremendous amount of uncertainty and difficult challenges to many people’s lives.

This is based on material that has helped me endure change, stress, and uncertainty. I’ve specifically adapted to be easier to get through, so we can make sense of it even if we’re going through difficulties and temporarily less able to concentrate at our best. I put hundreds of hours into preparing this edition, but the text is being released free, in hopes that, even if it’s not a fit for everyone, it might more easily find its way to some people who can benefit from it.

0.3 How closely this material is “based on” or “adapted” from the original text

This is not a translation. Multiple English translations are old enough to be in the public domain. I assembled this text by

mixing those translations, updating wording to modern English, and referencing translator notes to fill in details where the text would be unnecessarily confusing for someone who isn't a scholar.

Stoics write plainly, and speak directly. We don't intentionally confuse or mystify to try to sound clever. In this text, Marcus Aurelius specifically warns against speaking elaborately (3.5, 8.30, 8.49), and encourages gently helping confused people see the cause of their misunderstanding (11.13, 11.18). Stoic writing is not meant to be like a zen kōan, as a cryptic paradox to ponder. Many translations, especially older public domain ones, are dense enough to be slow to make sense of in parts—because times and language have changed. I wanted to make this material as simple to understand as it might have been in his day. (To clarify a related mix up: a philosopher named Zeno founded Stoicism, and there's a set of famous puzzles called Zeno's Paradoxes. The Stoic founder is Zeno of Citium (~300 BC), the paradoxes are from Zeno of Elea (~450 BC)—two entirely unrelated people with the same name. Those paradoxes aren't from Stoics.)

References in the notes of Marcus Aurelius were frequently either about personal connections, people famous when he was alive, stories well-known at the time, or facts common about life then. I've adjusted the text so that rather than getting hung up on wondering about those details, the points can come across more simply.

The result is still close in many parts. In some sections, the match is sentence-per-sentence. In others, more changes are made, sometimes to ensure the point is easily understood, other times to reinforce it with new examples. This is not going so far as other books that act as a guided tour of the notes,



summarizing and cherry picking sections to highlight. I'm aiming for a Goldilocks compromise: not nearly as dense to wade through as the literal translations, but fit for people who want something mostly closer to the original text than summary commentaries.

Why are there new examples, and elaborations? Remember: most of these notes were not written to be published. If you jotted notes for yourself, even intending to turn those into material to share, think about changes you'd make before releasing them. You'd clear up or eliminate references that only made sense to you. You'd go beyond the initial point jotted down. You might rearrange it a bit to make the ideas easier to follow. Those match most of the changes I made.

Like someone restoring art, I filled in gaps to make the picture easier to look at. In the same way someone would for a painting, I based details on information elsewhere in the material, scholar commentary (here, translator's notes), or other related works (in this case, writing by other Stoics). But I shouldn't overly emphasize "art restoration" as the best way to understand what I did to this text, because this is based on, but not tightly limited to, the public domain material.

Unlike someone restoring art, my priority is to make the material accessible, interesting, and useful—not to faithfully remake the author's original intent. Many of the translations are suited for academic use by historians or philosophy scholars, but this is not for that purpose or audience. This is for everyday people who want a clearer idea of what all the fuss is about regarding Stoicism, and specifically, the way Marcus Aurelius thought about it.

Compare these 3 public domain translations I worked from, around 6.20 or 6.21—since where each translation splits the paragraphs varies—to the wording I came up with for Self-Calm:

Casaubon translation, 1634: *“If anybody shall reprove me, and shall make it apparent unto me, that in any either opinion or action of mine I do err, I will most gladly retract. For it is the truth that I seek after, by which I am sure that never any man was hurt; and as sure, that he is hurt that continueth in any error, or ignorance whatsoever.”*

Long translation, 1889: *“If any man is able to convince me and show me that I do not think or act right, I will gladly change; for I seek the truth, by which no man was ever injured. But he is injured who abides in his error and ignorance.”*

Farquharson translation, 1944: *“Suppose a man can convince me of error and bring home to me that I am mistaken in thought or act; I shall be glad to alter, for the truth is what I pursue, and no one was ever injured by the truth, whereas he is injured who continues in his own self-deception and ignorance.”*

Self-Calm (this) text, 2020: *“If someone can show me that I am making a mistake in how I think or behave, I am eager to improve my understanding and update my actions. My interest is in the truth, simply in reality as it is. Having a clearer understanding of it will not harm us. Real harm occurs when someone has the chance to know better, but chooses to carry on in their mistake, lost in self-deception.”*

In other places, the changes are more significant. Though this is based on the source material, and close to it in most parts, besides retelling this in my wording, I didn’t treat this text with sterile gloves as if it’s sacred, or as if I’m putting words in the mouth of a religious figure. These notes were never a holy text,

and I'm making full use of it being in public domain. In addition to being 1,850 years old, the English translations I referenced are also in public domain, as open to adaptation as Wizard of Oz (1900), Alice in Wonderland (1865), or Sherlock Holmes (1887).

Contrast Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the book in public domain, to the story in Disney's Alice in Wonderland, or compare a Wizard of Oz movie to the original story. Adaptations are clearly based on the originals, share most details, but are not shy about deviations or changes in an effort to make it more appealing, new, or different. Here, too, I'm going for a balance: my changes are less dramatic than a film adaptation, but especially in parts where translator notes admit the text was corrupted, referenced lost works, or left even the translators confused, I filled in a useful, fitting, and general idea from Stoicism. On points I find especially important, I freely built on it, even when doing so mixes in some ideas from later Stoics.

I kept the traditional numbering in this text, so if you're ever curious to find a literal quote from Marcus Aurelius, or to compare my text against translations, you can find the matching section (note: not every translation uses identical numbering, and some translations leave out entire paragraphs, but it can get you close). I do not recommend quoting words here as being from Marcus Aurelius, since I'm not a translator working from original text, and am not mainly focused on reconstructing his original message. Not every thought here is what he wrote.

0.4 The connection between this and the Self-Command productivity audiobook

The Self-Command audiobook covers techniques to better act on our thoughts. The practical thinking tips it covers are derived from Stoic ways of thinking, for example, focusing on one task at a time (3.2 in the text, or points like those covered in 8.22, 8.36), limiting worry to the things within your control (an early example is 5.5, with too many others to list here), wanting to find out when we have incorrect information (6.21), and handling tasks calmly (6.28, 8.50).

This text is widely available for free. It can be found at [Self-Calm.com](http://Self-Calm.com). An audiobook version is bundled and included with the productivity material at [Self-Command.com](http://Self-Command.com)

## 0.5 Why the title is changed from Meditations

Although most translations of these notes are referred to as “Meditations,” that title did not come from the author. Because these were notes not written to be published, there was not even a working title. Its usual label in Greek could also be translated “things to one's self.” Titles of translations include, “Marcus Aurelius Antoninus—His Meditations Concerning Himselfe” (Casaubon, 1634), “The Emperor Marcus Antoninus—His Conversation with Himself” (Collier, 1702), “The Thoughts of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus” (Long, 1862), “The communings with himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus” (Haines, 1916), and “The Meditations of the Emperor Marcus Antoninus” (Farquharson, 1944).

My reason for avoiding the usually recognized label, realizing this may lead to some confusion, are threefold: (1) the label does not say anything about the content, since notes to ourselves can be about anything, (2) the word “meditation” in a modern western context is often read as something along the lines of buddhist mindfulness, mystic centering, pondering

eternity or clearing your thoughts—and something like that is given only a short mention in this text (4.3, 7.28, 7.47, 7.59, and a few others, on retreating to tranquility in our thoughts, etc.), and (3) this text is expanded and adapted enough that, though heavily based on *Meditations*, as suggested earlier, these are not always the exact same examples or explanations Marcus Aurelius wrote.

The typical title's poor fit risks leading people who would appreciate the topics this material does cover—being calm and patient, dealing with anger and grief, contributing to the community—to miss out on it. Meanwhile, it sets itself up to disappoint people who might pick it up for guidance on meditation, or expecting to find historically accurate quotations from Marcus Aurelius.

#### 0.6 Note about the suitability of this material for younger audiences

Although the notes were not made with youth readers or family-friendly content in mind, I have removed a few potentially distracting topics, such as analogies involving slavery or gladiator violence, where they were not essential to a point being made. We have a different lens on these topics today. This text is mostly classroom safe, suitable to discuss with younger people.

One mature topic that could not be edited out, because it's so frequent and fundamental to Stoic beliefs, is casual and practical discussion about death. In many places where it comes up, the original text is surprisingly modern by framing a point in a way that applies whether or not spiritual beliefs are involved. Put another way, points made about dying do not

depend on religious belief, or a nonreligious perspective, it neither argues against, nor assumes the point.

## 0.7 What regions Marcus Aurelius led, and why that matters

If we weren't paying close attention in history class, it's easy to hear "Roman Empire" and think "the city of Rome, plus a little area around there." The Roman Empire was significantly larger.



*The Roman Empire (gray) after Marcus Aurelius (3rd century, not 2nd; close, but not identical). Includes regions that on a modern map cover Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Romania, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Turkey, Serbia, Israel, Lebanon, the southern half of the UK, part of Germany, as well as the northern coast of Africa from Egypt through Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. This image is based on:*

*[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roman\\_Empire\\_full\\_map.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_Empire_full_map.jpg)*

A friend of mine, upon hearing this, asked a reasonable question: "why should the guy's resume matter?" A few things make this particularly relevant.

First, the single most important source of Stoicism for Marcus Aurelius came from Epictetus, who, far from being an emperor over most of western civilization at the time, was born into slavery, lived with a lifelong physical disability at a time in world history where accessibility was not yet valued, and wound up banished. This is to say, the philosophy is not uniquely useful or relevant for someone who has a powerful position, resources, and an army to command. That it was a way of thinking that could have practical use to people in such strikingly different circumstances speaks well to its range of application.

The second part of what makes the context relevant is, yes, he was prepared to be emperor, so he had the best tutors, thinkers, and information money could buy in Europe at that time. Chapter One is different from the rest, in that it notes which people in his life he learned lessons and values from. While he was a smart person, less corrupted by power than many rulers, and a philosopher in his own right, he is also not like Socrates or Aristotle. He is more like Euclid, compiling and sharing what people before him figured out. He adds original thoughts, and draws from life experience, but most of these notes are reminding himself of, or pondering about, ideas he was taught by others.

Throughout this text Marcus Aurelius serves mostly as a conduit. In this first section, you'll get an overview of the people whose lessons, values and observations he'll be passing along.

## CHAPTER ONE: The best traits I learned from other people

*[I'm going to start here on a brief aside, off script or out of character, which I won't be doing often but it's important to clarify a couple of things about this chapter. It will be tempting to skip this entire first part—and if you find yourself wanting to do that, I encourage you to go ahead, since everything after it can make just as much sense without it. It'd be better to skip chapter one than to give up on the book before you get to the good material after it. To be honest, and why I'm adding this clarification: on my first attempts at reading Meditations, I probably alternated between quitting before I got past this part, or skipping it, figuring it seemed like a Special Thanks list in front of a modern book giving shoutouts to colleagues and family in case they see it later. That isn't what this is, though, and I encourage trying to tough it out through this initial part. What I've realized since is how useful this section can be in preparing us as an overview of themes and points made throughout the rest of the book. These are the author's traits he's most thankful for, and which hopefully, in the later sections, you'll become better equipped to develop in yourself. That's the end of this aside, and again, I promise there won't be many interruptions like this. From here forward "I" is more Marcus Aurelius's perspective than Chris DeLeon's, though here in my version of what he wrote.]*

I've learned what I know about living from many good influences. I don't claim to be the sole originator of the ways of thinking I'll be sharing.

1.1 I learned my morals and anger management from my grandfather.



1.2 I learned modesty and bravery from my father.

1.3 I learned reverence, giving, and restraint from my mother, in relation to both thoughts and actions. She also taught me simple living, how to live without being beholden to the habits common to wealthy people.

1.4 I learned from my great-grandfather the value of investing in the best education I could.

1.5 I learned from my teacher not to become caught up in public entertainment, or the spectacle of sports. I also learned from him to endure hardship, to need very little, to work with my hands, stay out of other people's business, and not hunger for gossip.

1.6 I learned from my art teacher how not to waste time on unimportant things, not to believe those who claim they work miracles or drive away demons, not to harm animals for sport or feel excited by such activity. I learned to accept plain speech, to give serious attention to philosophy and wisdom shared by thoughtful people, to write from an early age, and to be grateful for even basic necessities.

1.7 I learned from a contemporary Stoic elder that I had to work actively on developing my character and discipline—that knowing what to do is not enough. I learned not to get caught up in arguing for argument's sake, not to lose myself in speculation, not to show off or do acts of kindness with the purpose of bringing myself attention. I learned not to wear fancy clothing simply to be around home. I learned to keep my writing to the point. I learned to be quick to forgive people who wronged or upset me, to return to peace if they will. I learned to

read carefully, not to settle for first impressions or automatically accept interpretations by others. I learned from him the importance of writing by Epictetus, which became the greatest influence on my thinking.

1.8 From my Stoic teacher, I learned to focus on my purpose, to act with certainty regardless of how chance might result in misfortune, to trust only in my reason. I learned to be consistent as a person, unchanged even when I'm in pain, going through the loss of a loved one, or living with lasting sickness. I've learned by his example it's possible to be passionate yet compromising, and patient in explaining things to others. I learned to accept favors by others, without either coming to rely too much on them, or taking them for granted.

1.9 From a professional philosopher and lecturer, I learned to keep a kind manner, to help my family be brave, to live consistent with what nature requires. I learned to be somber without trying to impress others by unnecessary show of it. I learned to care for my friends, and also how to tolerate ordinary, ignorant people who form their views from insufficient consideration. I learned from him how to be agreeable and readily accommodating to anyone, to be enjoyable to speak to without resorting to flattery, to earn the respect of the company we keep. He showed me that life principles can be discovered and put in order. By his example, I saw how to avoid giving off anger, and to be free of passion's control, while still being affectionate. I learned from him how to show acknowledgement without it becoming excessive or showy. He demonstrated it's possible to know a great deal without needing to flaunt it.

1.10 I learned from another tutor not to waste time on nitpicking imperfections, and not to argue with or correct people who speak in an inappropriate or incorrect way, but instead to

naturally work back into conversation the better way to have said it. I learned to keep in focus the topic itself, not to get lost on the wording or semantics in our discussion of it.

1.11 I learned from my speech coach to understand how dangerous jealousy, whim, and hypocrisy are in leaders. He showed me that many people well-off through family fortune wind up lacking when it comes to caring about people.

1.12 I learned from a diplomat to never consider it a point of pride either to lack rest, or to brag and complain about being busy. He taught me not to use being busy as an excuse to fall behind on responsibilities to others.

1.13 I learned from a lecturer not to be dismissive of criticism by friends, and that even if I determine their feedback isn't actionable, I should remain on friendly terms. I learned to speak kindly of my instructors, and to genuinely care for children.

1.14 I learned from my brother to appreciate family, truth, and justice, as well as to be understanding of people who gave their lives for those causes. I learned to appreciate equal treatment of law for everyone, free speech, and to respect citizen freedoms. I learned from him my unwavering commitment to philosophy, the will to do right by others, to give when I'm able to, to be thankful for good times, and to believe people when they speak kindly to me. I also learned from him how to be frank, even in disagreement, simplifying communication to save others from needing to guess to make sense of my thoughts.

1.15 I learned from a senator the importance of self-control, not to allow my focus to be swept up by outside distractions. I learned from him to be cheerful, even when I'm sick. He showed me how to be kind without being trampled on, and to

tend to my responsibilities without complaining about them. I appreciated the way his ideas and words were consistent, that he was well intentioned, and that he stopped himself from making poor decisions due to panic. He didn't needlessly hesitate or put off what needed to be done. He didn't become overwhelmed or downtrodden, but also made no efforts to conceal or make light of something he didn't understand. He made a point to help others, to be quick to accept apology, and to speak truth. He earned a reputation that he would not be led astray, or corrupted from what he saw as the right thing to do. He did the right thing not only when he had to, but also because he chose to. No one felt he hated them, or got any impression that he thought of himself as superior to them. Atop all this, he maintained a healthy sense of humor, in such a way that he did not offend or alienate others.

1.16 I learned a lot of my demeanor and perspective from my adoptive father, who served as the emperor of Rome before I did.

He remained calm, was difficult to upset, seemingly impossible to throw off balance. When he made up his mind to do something, having done the work to make the right decisions about what to do, he persisted and followed through on the decision, unwavering until it was done.

He didn't concern himself with vanity over awards and honors. He was industrious and determined. He listened when others had input on what to do better for the common interest. He was firm in boundaries and fairness.

My father knew which situations called for intensity, and which others called for being gentle. Despite his position of authority, he thought of himself as no better than anyone else. He didn't

impose his company on others, or become angry if they couldn't see him when he was traveling through their area, and was equally understanding of those passing through his city who were unable to make time to catch up.

I noticed how my dad was especially thorough about informing himself in order to make better decisions. He didn't assume his first impressions were true. I noticed he was patient with others, and didn't act bored of the people in his life, but at the same time did not overdo his expression of excitement upon seeing them. He remained content, and cheerful.

He anticipated what would happen, and prepared accordingly. He helped people in need without making a show of it.

My father understood the decision that would be most popular with people was not always the best thing to do for them. He was careful to not be influenced by flattery.

In his professional duties he was mindful, responsible, and accepted routinely being on the receiving end of blame as just another part of the job.

My dad did not concern himself with trying to win the favor of supernatural beings, or with trying to get on the good side of either powerful people or common people by telling them what they wanted to hear.

He kept a cool head, stood firm, and was not cruel.

He resisted the allure of novelty, dismissing anything that would make human life seem cheap, interchangeable, or expendable. In times of life when he had means, he showed no pride or

shame in their use, but in times when he was without means, he did not feel lacking or fixated on what he could not have.

No one could accuse my father of speaking to manipulate others. He was not a fraud or a poser. He learned from experience how to manage issues, his just as much as anyone else's.

He learned to respect people who have real wisdom, but he did not waste his time and effort arguing with people who mistakenly acted and imagined as if they had wisdom—also not falling for their mistaken views.

I learned from my father to be sociable and show a sense of humor, without taking either too far. He was responsible with his health, minimizing the need—to the extent it was in his control—for additional doctor appointments or more medicines. He did this not out of an obsession with appearances, or from a fear of death, but to take decent care of the only body he had.

My father demonstrated the importance of deferring to people who specialized in a field other than his, such as law, or local customs. He worked with them constructively, accepted their help, without feeling threatened by them, or in competition with them. In regard to local customs, he acted respectful and consistent with institutions and traditions where he went, without making an unnecessary show over it, but simply to blend in without having out-of-place behaviors distract from his purpose or message.

I learned from him not to feel compelled to make changes just for the sake of doing so. He didn't mind staying in one place, tending to the same things again that he already determined to be a good use of his time. If illness or other circumstance

briefly got him off routine, once he recovered he picked back up where he left off.

He didn't keep many secrets, except the ones that for his work had to be kept confidential among politicians and military leaders, for the public good. When it came to spending collected taxes, he stayed modest about funding spectacles or civic buildings, focusing on what's the right thing to do, instead of prioritizing the impact on his reputation or people's feelings towards him.

My dad didn't get caught up in obsessing about his appearance, over nicer or newer homes, craving extravagant foods or expensive fashions. He lived down-to-earth and frugally, even when he had the means and position to have finer things.

He never came across as harsh, hostile, or violent. He didn't seem to get stressed or hurried, but went about his responsibilities calmly, clear-headed, methodically, as if he had plenty of time to do things right, and tended to things with steady determination.

As has been said of Socrates, my father had the strength to handle moderation, to be equally fine with or without participating in vices many other people seem to end up addicted to or swearing off entirely.

1.17 I feel fortunate to have had so many good role models among my grandparents, parents, teachers, associates, peers, and sister. I am grateful not to have unintentionally offended them or set them against me. Given how I've acted some years, I'd probably have been the one to blame, if we had such disagreements.

I believe it has been beneficial for me that I didn't get more into romance early in my youth.

I appreciated the example set by our emperor, and my father, in how, though he lived in a palace, he didn't need to surround himself with impressive bodyguards to emphasize his status, to be around only finely dressed other people, or living with extravagant decorations. He was not so insecure about himself as to need to make a show of distinguishing himself from common citizens. On the other hand, he behaved consistent with the responsibilities of the role, to better look after the well-being of his people. He didn't let his informal dress or decor translate into careless thoughts or laziness about his duties.

It was my brother who showed me the importance of taking decent care of myself, besides which, I always enjoyed his company and respect.

I've had many advantages, which I do not take for granted. I am fortunate my children were born healthy. I have benefitted, in a way, simply by not having enough early success or signs of promising talent in creative fields, law, or other time-consuming disciplines as to have sunk a large share of my life and focus into working at mastery in them. I had ways to grant positions of honor to the people who tutored and helped me, and I am glad to have done so sooner rather than later. My path has been immensely better off from my having the opportunity to learn directly from politicians, professors, and philosophers.

It has helped me that I've gained an increasingly clear sense of how to live my life in a way consistent with nature and reason, and though I have not been perfect in adhering to this



knowledge, I at least have not had barriers preventing me from the option to do so.

I am thankful for my bodily health over so many years, and that I have successfully avoided a lifestyle that could have risked my health needlessly.

I consider myself cured of excessive romantic passion, and its warping effect on reason.

Though I do still find myself angry at times, it never reaches a point of doing or saying anything I've felt it appropriate to regret.

My mother passed away at a comparatively early age, but I'm grateful she and I were able to be together near the end of her time.

How remarkable it has been that, owing to my lot in life, any time I've wished to help a specific poor person, I have had options for ways to do so, or, likewise, when needing help myself, I did not have to endure the challenge of lacking financial means.

My wife has been agreeable, kind, and supportive.

My kids have had access to good tutors and caretakers.

With regard to my health, my instincts and simple rest seem to have served me well.

When I became interested in philosophy, I am thankful I didn't wind up led astray by someone manipulative or confused, lost on documentation of trivial historical details, solving arbitrary

puzzles for their own sake, or speculating about what is unknowable, instead finding first some useful, practical ideas in philosophy.

## CHAPTER TWO: Keeping thoughts tranquil

2.1 Begin each day reminding yourself: today I will meet with people who are nosy, ungrateful, arrogant, aggressive, manipulative, jealous, malicious, and just plain difficult to deal with. They are the way they are out of ignorance. They would probably not want to be that way, if they knew they were, understood how to be otherwise, and the benefits of not being like that.

We all share part of the same existence. To act ugly toward one another is wrong. We are usually not harmed by someone else's confusion or misunderstanding. We can't force them to be otherwise, just as they can't control what's right or wrong inside of us. We should not become angry at them over their faults, any more than one body part should be upset with another.

Should your hand be angry with your foot over its injuries or imperfections? Whatever happens to one, happens to both. The same is true among people. We exist to cooperate, like top and bottom teeth. To fight one another is to fight ourselves. It doesn't make sense to fight yourself. To be angry, harmful, or dismissive towards other people is to turn your back on yourself.

2.2 What are we? We are meat and organs, we are borrowed air, and we are a mind to guide that stuff around. Forget, for a moment, the distractions around you, and imagine you are going to die soon. In this situation, how concerned are you with what will become of the meat and organs—your blood, bones, and veins? The air inside you has never been yours for more than seconds before you gave it back. When your body is

done, you will likewise breath back out the life you started with, which will free your mind of the body's cravings, frustrations, and fears.

2.3 The world becomes stable through the interconnectedness of its parts. Nothing is separate, everything is woven together. Whatever helps connection, then, helps perpetuate stability, which helps us all. Let this be your guiding principle. There's no need to go searching for what to do from essays, trivia, or news of the day. Contribute to connection and stability in the world—happily, honestly, and with gratitude.

2.4 Think about how long you've put off doing what you know is the right thing to do. How often have you had an opportunity to do it, only to let the opportunity pass by, unused? It's time to accept this is the universe you live in, and that you have only a finite chance to act in or upon it. If you don't get your thoughts in better order you will continue to miss your chances to act, until your last opportunity to do what you have been meaning to do passes you by.

2.5 Give your full attention to the task at hand, plainly, and with dignity. While you're doing it, consider its impact on other people, checking, "is it the right thing to do?" If it is, then commit to the action by clearing your thoughts of all other distracting and unrelated ideas, giving your total concentration to here and now.

You can benefit immensely by taking on tasks as if, while you're doing it, it was your last, or only, task. While you're doing it, let go of the thoughts that led you to do it. They served their purpose. Ignore, until it's done, how it might make you look, or may benefit your situation. Forget any frustrations you feel

about the lot you've had up to this point in your life, because those aren't going to help you do it any better.

Notice how few skills need to be mastered to live a peaceful and calm life, quietly mindful like a monk, priest, or similar role committed to a simple and upright life. When you learn this single, easy, basic skill—how to clear everything from your mind but what you are doing this moment—nothing more will be needed or asked of you.

2.6 Regardless of how much life you have left, make use of it as if it was nearly over. Do this by focusing not on yourself, but instead on the impact you leave that will carry on with others. To do otherwise will be missing your short opportunity to do right, and will take a toll on how you feel.

2.7 Are you distracted by outside events? Make time to learn something new. This will ground you firmly against even dizzying winds. It is also important not to wind up too far in the opposite direction, lost in doing something merely to do something, without consideration for finding a purposeful way to use it. Learn to do something. This affirms you're capable. But don't let your capability go to waste by settling for something that amounts to being busy for its own sake.

2.8 It's not possible to read the minds of others, and it makes no sense to become unhappy over what's impossible to do. We can, however, choose whether we will pay attention to, or ignore, our own minds—that is: read our own thoughts, consider where they're going, and why. Anyone who doesn't read their own mind is stumbling through life ignoring vital information.

2.9 Stay focused on the nature of reality, on your own human nature, and the relation between these two. No one can stop

you from living in a way consistent with the nature of the universe, because you are part of the universe.

2.10 A botanist, and successor of Aristotle, claimed that unjust acts committed from desire are more blameworthy than ones done due to losing control of rage. A person acting from anger is usually responding to an injury, or perceived injustice to themselves. Such a reaction clouds their thinking, and though it should still be avoided or prevented if possible, it doesn't involve the same premeditation, deliberate intention, and likely drive to do it again as something done mainly out of a weakness to cravings.

2.11 You might die at this, or any other, instant. Keep this in mind. But death is not something to be afraid of, and this is a fact regardless of anyone's religious beliefs. Either the divine will protect us from evil and harm, or else there is no evil and harm to be protected from.

You have everything you need to avoid falling into evil acts in this life. So does everyone else.

Something can only make your life worse if it can somehow make you a worse person. If you live right, and are judged in an afterlife, the judge will see how you lived. If there is no afterlife, then you still lived right.

Either way, death, like life, happens to everyone, good and evil alike. Since it happens to everyone, death is not a condemnation of your life. That it will inevitably happen does not make you worse off. Passing away is as normal as coming into life, and that we all will do so has been a certainty since the moment we each began.

2.12 Everything will vanish soon enough, both in a material sense, and also in being forgotten from our collective memory. This is not a problem to try to fix, it's a property of everything decent and natural. Apply this understanding, especially, to those things you feel drawn to or afraid of, or famous events and people that currently seem well-known. How cheap they all are, of such low quality, and how short a time anything lasts before winding up gone forever. Until you see this truth, you are not seeing things as they are.

Who are these people, anyway, that we feel drawn to care about praises or complaints from?

An analytical mind can look at death separate from cultural traditions, without letting imagination run wild, separate from the weight we give it when we talk about it. It is the most natural, unavoidable event. Only a child could dread what is known to be inevitable, as if by worrying enough it would somehow never happen. An adult can see that only wastes more of our short time with feeling worried, before we then still wind up dying, anyway.

Death plays a necessary and beneficial role in nature. It also helps us to be our best selves, knowing our opportunities to do right are finite.

2.13 It's sad when a person goes digging for clues about the thoughts and opinions of other people. Our focus should be on our own thoughts, not on guessing about the thoughts of others.

It is not enough to observe our thoughts passively. We can tend to them like a garden, weeding out irrational impulses before they grow, carefully protecting our thoughts from

invasive distractions, fencing out all the hopeless frustrations over issues that are outside our control.

When the universe does something, either from nature or cause and effect, it deserves our respect as an inseparable part of this world we inhabit. This is our home, it's always changing, and it always has been changing. If it didn't keep changing, you and I wouldn't exist.

When people, rather than the universe, do things, they deserve our respect as people in our family. Even if something bad is done, we owe sympathy to them, for their confusion about right and wrong. If they weren't confused, it would not have happened. Be thankful you have something they lack, clarity of knowledge to discern right from wrong, in the case of that action.

2.14 It wouldn't matter if you could live for 100 years, 200 years, 3,000 years, or 30,000 years. In the end, you still lose only the one life you have. No one gets an additional life to lose.

The time people lose is also the same. The only time we have is this present moment. Your memories of the past and speculations about the future are here in the present. We cannot lose the past or future, because we do not have them. It's impossible to lose what we don't have.

People who live the longest lose the exact same thing as people who die the soonest.

2.15 Everyone's thoughts, even rational ones, are adrift on a sea of opinions.



2.16 People choose to be frustrated when they allow themselves to develop a dislike for what cannot be changed. It would be like being at a social event, spending the entire time impatiently complaining about wanting to go home, except in life that social event is the only thing that exists, so there is no other home to leave for. You can decide to be unhappy about what you can't change, but the only thing that's going to change is your level of happiness.

Another way people choose to be frustrated is by turning our backs on other people, or entertaining thoughts of intentionally doing them harm. Either requires holding on to anger. Anger harms us more than it harms the target. We'll suffer the anger all day, for who knows how long, while they remain unaware. If they do know, and they don't like us, they may even take pleasure in knowing we are tied up in unhappy frustration, and that they get some credit for it.

We set ourselves up for more frustration when we let irrational impulses for cravings, or reflex to find quick ways out of temporary discomfort, make our decisions for us, contrary to our reason.

Increasing the distance between ourselves and reality is another common source of frustration. This happens when we say something we know isn't true. Our dishonesty may or may not harm others, but it will always harm us. Telling lies separates our thoughts from the reality we live in, and when we lose that connection we are less able to respond in a grounded, successful way.

The last cause I'll cover here on how we frustrate ourselves is by taking actions that are purposeless or random, without a well-considered reason for doing it, or thought about where it

leads. Even small actions should be in service of an intentional purpose. Deliberate actions are what make us rational animals. Living like an untamed beast is sure to lead to frustrations.

2.17 Life exists at only one point of time, with the body's materials changing over the years until used up like candle wax. Our senses lose detail, our abilities gradually decay, until our thoughts drift. Our experiences with luck and popularity will also come and go.

Everything we consist of materially is coming and going, like water in a stream. Everything we consist of non-materially, in our thoughts, is like a dream, or hallucination. To be alive is to be a visitor in a hostile foreign land. Existence is temporary, but non-existence is forever.

How are we to find our way through all this? There is one answer: calm thought. Calm thought requires us to keep our mind and body safe, controlling our actions better than if they were left to instincts and impulses, acting with reason to achieve deliberate ends. To maintain calm thought we need to keep our actions consistent with our best understanding of reality.

We'll disturb the tranquility of our thoughts if we excuse bad behavior or poor choices based on what other people do or fail to do. That will lead to chaos, and shallow thinking, from reactions to behaviors of whoever happens to be around us, until we gradually become a product of our surroundings, instead of the other way around.

To keep calm in our thinking, we have to accept that everything which happened did so the only way it could. We were born

into whatever happened before us, and so is each new moment.

If we're serious about calm thought, not merely putting on a show of it to impress others, then our thoughts about our own death, which awaits each of us, should be peaceful, even cheerful. Death is nothing more than separation of the material ingredients, a final endpoint for the spark we were born from, like the death of any other plant or animal.

Everything is always changing. Why should we feel any fear or stress, then, over the simple fact that we are a part of everything, so we'll be changing, too?

We know with certainty that every living thing will die. Death is an inseparable part of how the universe works. To decide to label as evil anything that there is no alternative to would make that word meaningless. We might as well decide it's evil that the sun rises, the moon changes phases, or that gravity pulls things back to earth.

## CHAPTER THREE: Acting with a sense of urgency

3.1 Not only is it the case that at the end of each day you have one less day left to live, but even if you do live a very long life, you may not retain the same degree of clarity and command over your thoughts that you currently enjoy.

Illness may be a factor, and when that's the case, there may be nothing more we can do about it. More often, this loss of clarity seems to happen first from disuse or misuse of our mind, or giving up control too easily and too fully to whatever our body feels drawn to do, or not to do.

The body will go on just fine sweating, digesting, and eating. The mind will probably never lose its capacity to idly daydream, when it's not given some other purpose. As for our ability to use our thoughts to create a difference, to follow through on our intentions, and to reliably fulfill a responsibility given to us—including the ones we give ourselves—none of that is a given for the remainder of our life, especially if we don't keep our thoughts sharp from practice.

We also stand to lose our ability to see through deceptive first impressions, to make sound decisions on topics we consider important, or even to tell whether our decisions became worse. If we could tell when we lose our ability, we would either still be making better decisions, or else deferring the big decisions to someone else. Because it can sneak up on us, we have to stay vigilant about remaining ahead of it, to whatever extent we are able to. If we don't, and sometimes even if we do, we might lose our ability to reason and make clear decisions, long before we die.

3.2 Let this add to your sense of urgency—not panic, but calm, constructive urgency—to do what you can that you should, while you still can.

Not only will you someday die, but someday much sooner you may no longer have the option to do the things you now mean to do. It would be a mistake to guess your lifespan, and then to interpret that as having that much time left to do it in. Besides there being no certainty you'll live beyond today, even if you do, there is even less certainty on when your mind or situation may change to become less fit to do what you intend.

Though our thoughts are mostly used to make decisions, we can also use them for appreciation. Notice indirect details we can find enjoyment in, even if the reason for those details is separate from the intention behind making them, such as a side effect of what we did for another reason. Take, for example, when we bake bread. Our reason for baking bread is to make food. We do not bake bread specifically to cause patterns of cracks on its surface, but we can still appreciate these or other side effects, such as its scent, as aesthetically pleasing.

When fruit breaks open, we can recognize the beauty in that, separate from the main reason we grow fruit.

Ripeness is, to nature, nearest to rottenness. Though we don't describe it that way, I wonder if that's what draws us to it: wanting to eat it because we can tell we're running out of time to?

There are so many things we can appreciate the beauty of, even where beauty was not its main reason to exist: plants, animals, or even signs of decay. We ordinarily regard decay

not only with indifference, but feel compelled to avoid it—though when we see how the stages all fit together, we can discover a hidden appreciation of the beauty in what the universe is doing, and how.

When we bring this perspective to everything, we see how our thoughts can be an instrument to cheer ourselves up, by looking to find the secondary beauty that's always there. Learn to see in every animal and environment the same beauty as a painting or sculpture that skillfully depicts it. Elderly couples see no less beauty in one another than younger couples do, but it may be in a different way. Keep that as a simple reminder for us that there are many types of beauty to see.

Do not be at the mercy of what would please or cheer up any other person. When you put in the thinking to become familiar with the world as it is, going beyond noticing what you have to, and past whatever effect you narrowly intend to accomplish, you will gain more options to lift your feelings, and more rich choices when deciding what to concentrate your thoughts on.

3.3 People who routinely work with life and death—medical experts, scientists, religious leaders, political and military rulers—all of them will die someday, too, the same as anyone else. They have more facts and ideas about what happens, but it doesn't change that it's going to happen.

Small things can kill us. Small people can kill us. Death does not distinguish status, roles, or accomplishments.

Death is no more complicated than if you were on a boating trip, moving through fog with low visibility, and the boat drifted onto a beach, it would then be time for you to get out of the boat.

If there is an afterlife, you will be better off there. If there is nothing but a return to non-existence, then you will be free from all pain, struggling, or irrational desires—the worst parts of existing—which have been fighting daily for control of you while you’ve been living.

Your mind is reason and dreams. Your body is mud animated, by animal instinct if you’ll let it, otherwise directed by your goals and thoughts.

3.4 Don’t waste what short time you’re alive on being absorbed with worrying about what other people think. Direct your attention, instead, towards goals that benefit the common good. There are better uses for your thoughts than throwing them away on what is inconsequential, and doesn’t help anyone.

Commit to never fretting again over what somebody else is doing or why, what they are saying or thinking, or what they are planning. You can do little or nothing about that, any more than somebody else has control to determine your actions and reasons, what you say or think, or your plans. You’d resist them, and double down if anyone tried. The same is true about them.

All time and effort you pour into thinking about what someone else should do draws your time and effort away from thinking about what you should do. No one except you can be responsible for what you do. What other people do is not up to you, but can be a deep well of frustration.

Not all thoughts are equally worth thinking. Weed out the ones that are directionless, dead ends, nosy gossip, or uselessly hostile. We should keep our thoughts prepared such that if a

person suddenly asked us what we're thinking about, we could always answer honestly and immediately, without shame. If people could look in our thoughts at random times, they should discover our minds are consistently uncomplicated, well-wishing, and earnestly cooperative.

We can choose for ourselves anything we want to think about. Similar to what we feed our bodies, it will fall to decay if we develop and feed an appetite for junk-like easy pleasures, spectacle for its own sake, rivalry, jealousy or looking for blame. Any sensible person should be ashamed to admit allowing those kinds of weak, small thoughts to take control over their mind.

An immediate reaction might begin from your body's instincts, but whether that turns into bad action, festers and grows harder to stop, or slides off, depends on what you do with it next.

If this sounds monkish or priestlike, well, it's no coincidence that clean mental habits are recommended for these people who dedicate their thoughts to what they see as a topic and purpose of the utmost importance. Here, the topic and purpose is whatever we decide to do with your mind. You can serve your purpose in the same way they do. Imagine the effect of being incorruptible by distractions, undeterred by discomfort, unaffected by insults, never lost in destructive scheming, fighting only in battles worth fighting. Picture having strong enough character to never be overwhelmed by excessive passions, to root your power in doing what's fair, calmly accepting and making the best of reality. You can be as purposeful as them, about whatever you choose.

There is one exception for when we should give more than a passing thought to what someone else says, does, or thinks:



when it will affect the common good. There are two important caveats to this. First, most people are not doing enough with their thoughts to meaningfully affect the common good, so a lot of confusion isn't worth anyone's time to clear up. Second, we should, as in all matters, concern ourselves only with what we are in a position to do anything about. If you don't know someone well, aren't in a position of authority they have to listen to, or they don't otherwise respect you enough to consider your input, then it is a waste of your thoughts to be worrying about their thoughts. They won't let you fix it, even if you can see that it's wrong. You might as well try disagreeing with a bear over how it's eating.

The vast majority of our thoughts should be used only on matters that are mostly up to us. What we say, do, and think, are almost always up to us to determine—consider what severe measures someone else would have to take, and who they would have to be in your life, to change what you were otherwise going to say, do, or think. Other people are no less stubborn than you are. You have no more say in what they do, than they do in what you do.

The fundamental purpose of thought is to make decisions. Don't carelessly misuse your thoughts on matters that are not up to you to decide. It's like how the main purpose of food is nourishment, but if instead of eating it, you threw it at someone, you're not nourishing them, you're wasting it. Throwing your thoughts at someone who you can't change is wasting it, too.

Weigh your choices based on what is fair and right. Accept that what we have available to work with in this moment is good enough for us to work with, for now. What we have in the present is all we ever have, so there is never any option besides to do what we can, with what we can, whether we

waste our thoughts being unhappy over that, or not. We can't change the past.

Our situation in life goes with us where we go. Though we can work to change our situation, we usually can't run from it. If we do, we'll just remake it for ourselves wherever we end up next.

Every rational living being is our ally. Care for, and about, other people. But be careful not to be concerned with the judgments and opinions of people who do not live and think according to reason. This is not to condemn or dismiss them, but accepting and working with how they are, seeing that their influence on your own direction would be, at best, arbitrary, like their own path through life. Don't even value praise from such people, tempting though it is to enjoy the attention and compliments, because they've given no consideration to why they praise, or what their praise will lead to. They may not even have clear enough reasons yet to understand which of their own actions they should be holding in high regard, or why. At no fault of their own, their feedback risks polluting and randomizing anyone unwise enough to listen for their approval.

3.5 Avoid actions that would be in disagreement with your principles, or what you intend to do. Leave roles that put you to work without contributing anything to the common well-being. Hold off on starting tasks if you haven't yet considered in enough detail whether it's worthwhile. Be on guard against work that, though it may feel productive, in the big picture merely exhausts, disrupts, and distracts you from projects that you know are important enough to do better.

Don't talk too much, stay too busy, or try to impress people by using fancy words.

Protect yourself from spreading your efforts too thin across unrelated things, or from building up anxiety over things you can do nothing to help. Giving in to either not only hurts us, it also hurts the things we were in position to do something about, by pulling our attention away from them.

Stand straight. Serve your post. Get yourself into a position worth fighting for, then fight for it. When life comes to its end, be ready, knowing you served as best you could from the position you had, without concern for anyone else's judgments about it.

Through all this: stay cheerful. Using any combination of thoughts, keep yourself cheerful.

Others may lend us their strength, or find ways to calm us, but when they are not or cannot be there for us, we need to be our own source for strength and calm. When we can shape our thoughts to meet our own needs, then whatever strength or calm others can share with us will elevate us beyond what we can do alone, instead of becoming reliant on them to keep filling in for what we failed to develop.

3.6 If you discover something more important than fairness, truth, self-command, and courage—something superior to being in control over your mind's relation to reality and reason, shielding it from distractions you can't do anything about—then, by all means, abandon instantly everything I have said here, and go instead towards what you have found.

If, however, you can't find something more important than this, than being grounded, and free from the influence of irrational impulses, being empowered to choose what to do and doing it, then stop wasting your limited number of days and thoughts on

other things. Choose your priorities deliberately, disregard the tricks our instincts play on us, and find a way to serve a better role in elevating our common well-being.

Once you are in control of yourself, it will be easier to maintain that control. If you give up self-control, whether to other people, to the environment, to possessions or cravings or anything else outside yourself, letting something other than your mind dictate your actions, choices, and thoughts, reclaiming command will be hard. Not only is the outside force unlikely to move you towards independence, it may even sabotage it, upon noticing you are starting to get away. The best way forward is through it, using the situation as an opportunity to practice not allowing anyone else's opinions or judgments about you to take precedence over your thoughts and will.

When you have command over your actions and thoughts, you can use them on whatever you decide to be right. If, instead, you let your direction be thrown about by the praise of strangers, such as the opinions of less reasonable people who happen to be in positions of authority, or in your audience, leaving you chasing after the mirage of material rewards or their approval, these are likely to lead you down an entirely different direction than what you understand to be right.

A person can be your friend, but a crowd never will be. Such people might praise you one minute, but many because of jealousy, and at the first opportunity would readily gang up on you or proclaim you a bad guy if it helped them. If you slip and make one mistake in front of them, will they really help you up, or will they jump to take over while you're still down?

Don't do anything because I, or anyone else, says to. Do it only if you see the reason behind the suggestion, since then you're

freely choosing what you consider the best from ways you know.

Anything that seems useful only in an irrational or impulsive way is usually a trap. If the single decision itself isn't a trap, then there's a worse one: making a habit of bypassing your reasoning will rob your life of sound judgement. Maintaining your judgment isn't arrogance, it's a minimum baseline to ensure you can trust your assessment of options. Whatever improves your ability to live rationally keeps you in a good position to decide for yourself what is useful, and what is not.

Acts that erode your trust in your own character will always be destructive. Take with a grain of salt input from anyone doing the following: acting in a way that pressures you to be dishonest, hating or wishing harm on anyone, seeming always suspicious, acting against their principles, or wanting anything to happen they would feel ashamed of if it didn't stay hidden. Listening to their input will make you more like them, until you'll have to take your own input with a grain of salt, due to losing so much self-respect.

To prioritize your mind, and self-command, is to reject the life of drama, useless complaining, or insatiable yearning to get lost in crowds, either to avoid everyone else, or to avoid yourself. It means accepting with indifference the inevitability of death, disregard for how long or short our life may be, and that if we find out any instant that our time is up, we will be as ready to go in that moment as we would be to do anything else ordinary and necessary, peacefully with dignity.

3.7 Having kept our thoughts consistent with reason, and our actions contributing to the common good, there is no regret in our thoughts or deeds. We haven't polluted anything we did,

and feel no shame or fear about what may be revealed. Let death catch us ready to leave when it's our time, like actors leaving a stage, aware the play continues even after our last scene.

3.8 There should be nothing about us which is either shamefully low, or arrogantly elevated. We should not create, maintain, or even allow any reliance on us that we're too entangled with to be replaced in, because that risks leaving people who count on us in trouble. We shouldn't separate ourselves excessively from participating in ordinary life, because we can't contribute to the common good from a mountain hideout. We should do nothing intentionally malicious that we could rightly be blamed for, and keep no major secrets we'll always worry might come out.

3.9 Treasure your ability to make choices. Choices put you in control of whether your thoughts will be carried away until detached from reality, obsessed over what you can't change, or staying several steps ahead to avoid reacting out of desperation. Choices enable us to be deliberate, and act on reason. Choices also ground our relationships with other people.

3.10 We can discard most concerns. Everyone lives only in the present, since the past is gone and the future is uncertain. We see only a narrow slice of history, and a tiny part of the universe. Even most famous people are soon forgotten. When dead people are remembered, it's only by strangers who see equally little time and space. Most people die before they even learn about themselves, let alone making time to learn inaccurate tales about strangers who are long gone.

3.11 When a thought comes to mind, give that idea form, such as writing or drawing, so you can look upon it as something outside of yourself. By doing this, we see the idea more as it is, safely separate from our delusions about how good it seems while it's still unrealized in our imaginations. We can then better inspect it, refine it, reject it, or connect it into a larger plan.

It's good for our thoughts to carefully examine all our experiences, within us and outside of us. Looking closely, we can better understand the use of any object, seeing clues in it that offer hints about how the whole universe works, how we work, and how the universe relates to us.

To carefully examine a thing, whether it's in nature or our imagination: turn it over in thought, consider what it is made of, guess how long it will last, or remain relevant. Decide which virtues or states of mind it would best fit: gentleness, bravery, honesty, loyalty, simplicity, independence, or otherwise. Each thing came either from nature, us, or people who are not so different from us. We should appreciate, and never take for granted, the role of chance and circumstance that leads us to something, it to us, or it into our thoughts. With regard to things and ideas from other people, be kind and fair in recognizing they're coming from fellow imperfect beings. Remember that a thing is separate from its maker, and that your opinion of it is not an opinion about them.

3.12 Once you master giving your full focus to your current task, you can lead a calm life. Life is one task followed by another, meaning if you choose the right thing to do—which is another task to focus on—and can tend to it without worrying about what you've decided you're not doing, you can be free of worry. Not to worry about what we can't change means, in the narrowest sense, not to worry about anything you aren't doing,

because you can't change something you aren't doing. No one can take away from you that you apply reason, follow through on what you intend to do, and remain above distractions. There is happiness in holding only a single task in your thoughts, advancing on it as if at any moment it could be yanked away without warning, so that you'd still feel right about how far you got it. Learn to focus like this, going about your current action without expectations, without fear. Be content to act in a way consistent with your ordered thoughts, doing what you can here and now, without concerns about what you aren't doing. The things you aren't doing but could will always outnumber the single thing you can be doing, so you might as well free yourself from choosing to be stressed out over that.

3.13 In the same way doctors keep their instruments ready to use, you have your principles and values ready to use. Instead of surgery, your instruments are used to carefully work out the relation between your thoughts and your actions. Everything you do well with your actions begins from your thoughts, and what you do well in your thoughts is informed by your actions. Ensuring a healthy connection is maintained between them is necessary to keep both right.

3.14 No longer tolerate aimless meandering from one thing to the next, without finishing any. Are you ever going back through the random notes you're accumulating? Will you get around to reading these books and articles you're still piling higher, telling yourself you're going to get through someday? Is that what you imagine you'll do with your old age, if you even have it, when you'll be more aware your time is limited, you're going to read the then outdated things you specifically decided weren't worth your time today? If you are going to do something, hurry up and get to it. Finish it and move on, or don't start. Stop pretending,



because it's throwing away your dreams. You're only fooling yourself about getting around to these things someday.

It is better to do one thing today, or even a part of one thing today, than to promise to get around to two tomorrow. Tomorrow is never a given, besides which, it tends to be a lot like today.

Come to your own rescue, while you still can, if you care about any of the things you've put off.

3.15 People who don't know any better, who harm themselves by their evil acts, or who keep themselves pretend-busy by doing unfinished things, cannot see what to do better or differently. They have not learned how to see it, and how to do things in a better way, or else they would do so. They need pity, and help to see clearly, not anger over their poor decisions. Teaching is difficult work, but there is no shortcut to explaining the benefits of effective, purposeful action.

3.16 We are made of material, a spark of animal instinct, and our thoughts. Our body senses and experiences, our instinct stirs our reactive impulses, but our thoughts guide our actions from our principles. Our body probably senses and experiences not all that differently than an animal body. Our instinct pulls on us, likewise, the same as the instincts of wild beasts—this much is obvious from depraved people who let their instincts make their decisions. You might assume our thoughts are somehow always a voice of our principles, but keep in mind that this same intelligence is used by people for crimes, acts of treason, and hiding dark secrets from society.

In other words: all three of these parts are as present in good people, as in bad. What sets a good person apart is accepting

what they can't change, instead of building frustration from it. What we can't change includes anything that has already taken place. Excess of frustration over things we can't benefit from being frustrated over might tip our control from rational thought to irrational instinct. A good person keeps their mind peaceful, focused on reality and fairness, unpolluted by trivial nonsense, and not habitually snacking on carelessly disorganized ideas.

It doesn't matter if other people have trouble believing, or accepting, a good person who lives a simple, modest, and cheerful life. There is no reason to be angry at these people over their confusion. Don't be mad at them over the lack of better examples in their life up to this point. Their confusion is also not a reason or excuse to shift from living the right way. If you are living right to impress other people you're missing the point. The answer is clearly not in making the same kinds of mistakes others make in how they live. It is best to remain pure, calm, and accept what we can't change—including the fact that we must be ready to depart at any time.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Focusing on what we can do

4.1 The only way we can give our full attention to what we're doing is to spare ourselves from unnecessary distress over what we're not doing. Then we can better handle the present.

We can hope for special circumstances to give us an advantage, or we can give ourselves the advantage, by grounding our thoughts in reality, acting with a purpose, and guarding against distractions. The mind can find a way to advance towards seemingly any goal, but only if we give it one. Whenever anything stops us, if we're focused on the goal we'll find a way to use the obstacle as an advantage, or go around what someone else would be stuck on as an excuse.

A small flame is easily stopped by a barrier. A bigger fire will consume that same barrier, not only going through it, but growing stronger by using it as fuel. An already strong fire gains power from everything thrown at it, making it even harder to contain. If reason would have stopped you, at least make your new reason to overcome that reason, then nothing can stand in your way.

When none of your thoughts are wasted on what you can't do, and you commit all your thoughts to what you can do, you won't see obstacles anymore—just more options for ways to advance.

4.2 Every action should be done for a purpose. The purpose can be a human one, related to what you or someone else needs, but that's still a purpose. Sticking to this will test, affirm, and clarify your principles. Without this, what good are principles, except as trivia to argue over?

4.3 People want to get away, such as by traveling to the country, visiting the lake, or lodging in the mountains. I find myself wanting to do that, just like anyone else. But there is something brutal and unnecessary about it, because we can retreat, at any time, to inside our thoughts.

No place on earth can be more quiet, more free, and safer from trouble, than our thoughts. It takes care to maintain our minds as peaceful, grounded in reason, accepting reality we're in, and free of disturbances over what we can't do. Tranquility requires a well-ordered mind.

If you prepare your mind for this use of it, then don't do it, you'll still have a well-ordered mind.

Practice giving yourself this escape, to renew yourself, and to improve at it every time. This place of mental retreat should consist only of plain thoughts about how you intend to be, to keep your mind free of outside noise. Don't get lost or discouraged by worrying over details like rules or steps to do it correctly, or perfectly. Pause to apply this technique at any time, to rinse away resentment or discontentment, then you can return less distracted to doing what you need to do.

What is behind vague, general resentment people feel? That all people are imperfect? That we act, often unknowingly, against even our best interests? People exist to help one another, and to support one another. Be patient with people's mistakes and confusions, without getting flustered. That's a requirement to do anything. Most people do wrong because they don't know better. They would rather not cause everyone, themselves included, unnecessary frustration.

Would you rather understand something useful, and live among other people who don't? Or would you want to not understand something useful, and live among other people who do? To be annoyed because you know something other people don't know is to accept being unhappy with the better position to be in, it's to overlook your failing to help them understand the better way, and it's to ignore that they likely know some things you don't but that you, likewise, can't see.

How many people see life as a struggle against hostile forces, under constant pressure to prove themselves, fighting for a place, giving attention to people who disagree with them? Sometimes burial or cremation is a person's first relief from all that. Don't settle for thinking that way. Each of us chooses whether or not we'll live distracted with dissatisfaction about what we started with, or mad over what other people don't know, complaining instead of doing what we can to change it.

Most people can agree the universe is working one of two ways: either it is purposeful, or it's unguided. Either your lot in life was set up for you by some deity for a reason, who you'd be a fool to blame, or else, it was a result of random chance, in which case, there is no one to blame.

All people are neighbors. Is your role in the community about your body, or about your thoughts?

Once our thoughts are matured enough to operate independent of our impulses, and we've found or formed a situation reasonably free from immediate bodily needs, although pain and pleasure can still happen to the body, they will no longer need to happen in our thoughts.

Will you let popularity contests wreck your life? Notice how everyone who is famous in one instant is already forgotten by the next, or they wish they could be forgotten but won't be, or they want to change but people still see them the same. Time stretches infinitely before and after this moment, and for nearly all of that, no one will speak of us. Applause is empty—it means nothing, and it achieves nothing. Even if we go out of our way to please people, they can't be kept for long, because tastes are fickle and people are mortal. What looks like praise can't be trusted, as it's often people pretending, following social customs, being polite, or caught up in a moment.

Let go of wishing for more visibility or status for its own sake. This whole earth is but a point in space. How tiny a corner each life takes place in, and how few people we really share it with. Think about the kind of people who could praise you—why should you care to impress them?

4.4 Retreat, anytime you need to, to that recovery space within your thoughts. Give yourself the calm and peace you need. Resist the urge to, instead, give yourself new distractions, or to stew on some different source of stress as if it can be a relief for you from other stress. Your mind is yours, and yours alone. Your thoughts can only be mastered by yourself. Only you can choose how they'll be used. Govern your thoughts as a person seeking to contribute, intent to live right, kind to others, and who understands time should be used because you are going to pass away.

These two truths can serve you well. Keep them close, and ready to use if you're overwhelmed.

The first truth is that the outside world can't directly affect your thoughts. Your thoughts are separate from your body, have no

location, and can't be moved from the outside. Frustrations, worries, and disruptions to your mind's calm come only from within. The world may prod you to do these things to yourself, as self-inflicted punishments, but you cause them. You give that pain to yourself by your opinions, about the stories you tell yourself, about what you observe or hear that someone else claims to have observed, which is several layers of separation from what happened. Most of those steps happen within you. If you stop it at any one of these steps, there is nothing for your thoughts to experience pain over.

The second truth is that everything is always changing. Even while you look at something it's already becoming unlike how it was moments prior, gradually shifting or decaying to a form it never had before. That things today are not like how they ever were means that tomorrow things will never again be how they were today.

Keep in mind the countless changes you've witnessed. Change is not unusual. The whole universe is made of and from change.

Similarities in our capacity for reason makes people fundamentally the same. We also share a partial sense of what we should and shouldn't do. The capacity for reason combined with that sense for wrong formed the basis of laws everywhere. The laws we have in common make us neighbors, to the degree that we hold one another to a shared standard.

Outside that basic expectation, where and when we live will shape our thinking. Like the body is made of material from around us, our thoughts are, likewise, largely assembled from the ideas around it. But, also like bodies, regardless of where

the material they're made out of came from, most still have far more in common than their differences.

4.5 Death, like birth, will always be mysterious, and unknowable. The materials we are made of were drawn together for so many years, but thereafter, go separate ways, to decompose. No one should feel shame over dying. To pass away is a part of the universe's order. It happens to every living thing, and to expect our own lives to work differently would be a rejection of reason.

4.6 Death follows every life as naturally as apples follow from apple trees. If you plant an apple tree, will you be surprised it bears fruit? For every life started, there's no surprise that it will end.

It's not all bad. Any time you feel drawn to argue hopelessly with another person, keep in mind that soon enough you and they will both be dead, and your arguments forgotten, along with each of you. Do you still care to win that argument? Do you still care to have that argument?

4.7 Until you see and acknowledge that you were harmed—telling yourself a story about your harm—the harm itself is less severe on its own. If you take your thoughts off of it, much of the harm can be taken away, too. Everything that happens in your mind is determined by your mind.

4.8 When something you perceive as bad happens, ask yourself: can this cause you to become a worse person? No? Then it will not make your life worse, and it has not really harmed you.



4.9 Every time nature forces something to happen, it does so for the good of everything else. If we pay close enough attention, we'll sometimes see how something useful is coming from it.

4.10 Most of what happens takes place in a fair way. I mean this not only in the logical sense, that what happens follows cause and effect from what happened before, but also in the sense of justice. Events often seem to us as if they were doled out by intention. Whether or not they are, this is a useful perspective to have, so that when you do things, go about them right, as if they will be rewarded, even if they may not. Picture what a good person would do, and then do it.

4.11 Don't change your opinions to suit people who mistreat you. If they want you to think about certain things, don't, or at least don't do so for their benefit. Even if you think exactly like they do, they'll still mistreat you. At minimum, they'll continue to pull you away from thinking on your own. Stay grounded, work with reality as it is, and shape your own thoughts.

4.12 Two rules of thumb to keep ready: one, let your reasoning be the basis for what you see as right and worthwhile—not what anyone else says is or isn't—and two, change your opinion when you discover information that shows your previous conclusion was incorrect. Favor becoming more right, every time, over childishly wanting to feel like you already always were.

There is another side to the second point: new information that reveals your past mistake is the only reason to change your opinion. It is never right to change your opinion just to seem more likeable to certain people, to manipulate anyone, or in an effort to raise your status.

4.13 Do you have the ability to reason? You do. Put it to good use, then. When you reason well, what you get out of it is a better outcome. There's no need for thanks, pats on the back, or credit from people seeing you did it. If you receive any of that, slow down to double check you're actually reasoning, and not caught up in meaningless praise from people not worth impressing.

4.14 You've always existed as part of something greater, both as thoughts within a community of understanding, and a body within the physical universe. When you run out of time, you will dissolve back into the universe. You will no longer be a separate individual, but your parts will remain, scattered across time, in your lifetime of contributions back into our evolving collective understanding, and by freeing up whatever material your body borrowed and wove together.

4.15 If we have enough of something to lose, all of which will eventually be lost, then it does not make a major difference which of it we lose sooner, or later. This is true for drops of candle wax, grains of salt in the shaker, or even our individual places within an ongoing culture.

4.16 People who look down on you now could soon find a new respect for you, in as little as a week or two, as soon as you make up your mind to live consistent with what you think and say.

4.17 Don't act or think as if you have ten thousand years. Death will come sooner, and we can't even know how much sooner. While you are still alive, and you can do right, do right.

4.18 So much pain and trouble can be avoided by not concerning ourselves with what other people are saying, doing, or thinking. Concentrate only on your actions, and your own thoughts. Be concerned with whether what you do is fair, innocent, and free of malice, not what others do.

Don't destroy your thoughts in the fires of what other people do wrong. There is so little you can do to change that. Keep acting right, and being reasonable. That's all that's within your power.

4.19 A person who craves attention from strangers has missed, somehow, that every fan will soon pass away, or even sooner simply move on. If people who remember us could live forever, why should we care? It will make no difference to us after we're dead. It likely won't make much of a difference for us while we're still alive, either. To fixate on popularity is to put ourselves at the mercy of other people's opinions, to tie our happiness to what we generally can't change.

The value of applying reason doesn't depend on what anyone says or knows about us doing so.

Is there any good in awards or attention, except to whatever limited role they have in achieving some other specific end—which is to say, not ever as a worthwhile end in themselves?

4.20 Anything truly great has its greatness within itself. Greatness isn't from the outside. Good quality is not caused by people's praises. A thing can't be made worse or better by what's said about it. Many people have poor tastes, questionable judgment, and bad principles. That applies equally to commonly held, popular opinions. Whether people say something's great, or not, is separate from if that's true. Who and what is great doesn't need anything external for

validation, because greatness exists independently in reason, reality, and actual benefit to society.

Awards can't make something great, and unhelpfully harsh criticism can't make it worse. Can we make an instrument sound worse by saying bad things about it? Or make a tool less effective this way? Will a flower or emerald be less pleasing to look at if spoken of poorly? If you are able to find yourself answering yes to this question about anything, reconsider why and how you ever thought it was any good in the first place.

4.21 In thinking about the mind, and the possibility of whether it could outlast the body, a natural question is where would it go? How could accumulation for eternity, across all history, not lead to a space problem? With a body, it will decompose once buried, giving up room for others. If we suppose that the mind similarly decomposes, to make room for others, then we wind up back where we started, with our mind not actually continuing for eternity, any more than our body.

Say, instead, that our thoughts and impressions wind up reabsorbed back into the whole, then wouldn't that still be a kind of change, and not an actual continuation of the original, individual self? For every thinking being to continue its thoughts into eternity, we would have to account not only for buried or cremated rational people, but also every animal eaten by us, or by any other animal. That must be a staggering number. Even animal bodies eaten become buried, as dissolved and redistributed in pieces within whatever body ate it, and so nature still decomposes that material on or under the ground. To make further sense of this, we would need a better way to differentiate the material itself from the spark of life that begins to collect and rearrange it.

4.22 Do not chase every whim. Commit to the actions you decide are worthwhile. Give your deeper understanding greater priority than surface-level impressions. That part of us which feels instinctively drawn to shallow appearances is no wiser than a wild animal, and equally easily tricked, trained, or manipulated. Would you entrust your day, let alone your life, to a rodent?

4.23 What suits the universe, suits us just the same. The timing is not wrong for us, if it is right for nature. Every season brings us different fruits to appreciate. Everything comes out of nature, exists as a part of nature, and will wind up returned to nature. Don't credit people in power for what happens. See the bigger role of universal nature that they emerged from—regardless of if it was intentional or random—especially the series of situations they grew in reaction to, in which, like anyone, they only did what they could, about the things they could, given what they learned.

4.24 Certain philosophers suggest we can find peace by doing as little as possible. Wouldn't it be better, though, to include at least a minimum of social interaction? By doing only a little, we still benefit from the peace of not doing too much, however, by adding in people, we gain a positive feeling of doing something worthwhile. We can't advance or defend the collective understanding, or serve to benefit the common well-being, without a connection to other people.

The majority of things people say and do are unnecessary. We should remove those, as soon as we can, to have more time, and less stress. For each thing you do, pause to consider, is this an unnecessary thing I do? At some time in the past, you clearly didn't think so, or you wouldn't have started doing it, but when was the last time you revisited the ongoing relevance of

this habit or role? Consider this not only about actions taken by your body, but also of potentially unnecessary habits in your thinking, especially the ones that might lead to unnecessary action.

4.25 Try and see how living as a good person suits you. Good, in this sense, is specific and simple: all I mean here is to be happy enough with what you have, to derive your satisfaction not in any part from your possessions, but instead from the fairness and rightness of your actions, and in maintaining a kind disposition inward and outward, in both your thoughts and your words.

4.26 Don't add unnecessarily to your worries. Everyone who does wrong is doing that wrong mostly to themselves. What happens to you is a part of nature, which some chain of events led to. This includes any inconvenience or pain to you as a side effect of anyone else's errors and misdeeds, like if a wild animal got in your home and hurt you. It's confused, afraid, and in its struggle, barely understands what it does. Life is short. Make the most of your present moment. Do something worthwhile with the time you have, living by reason, doing what you think is right.

Stay level-headed, because being worked up clouds our reasoning, prompts unjust action, and opens us to manipulation. Untamed anger is more likely to set us back than move us forward.

4.27 Either the universe was coherently put into order, or its order came about from chance combinations. Either way, it has order. You have order because the universe does, and you're a part of it. As you order yourself better, you also order the universe better. Most action in the universe is increasing or

maintaining the total order, even if we can't see it happening directly.

4.28 There are so many different ways people end up astray, not just by doing wrong, but also from weakness of character, unwillingness to learn, unchecked aggression, dishonesty, avoiding responsibility, being needlessly hostile, doing only what is most beneficial to themselves, or finding joy in exercising control over other people.

4.29 Are you paying attention to your community, and what's taking place in it? If you abandon interacting socially with other people, then you are hiding from these basic facts about reality. Without making and maintaining connections to other people, we can't use our minds well. Understand that connections and interactions we maintain purely out of necessity, for work or otherwise, do not cover what is meant here by social interaction.

A person who pulls away from other people becomes a problem for the community, is likely soon going to neglect their ability to reason, or waste their thoughts being angry about things they can't change. If it weren't for things too late to change, few of us would exist. A person who separates from the community causes harm by failing to contribute to the common good or shared understanding. We're all on the same team, but not everyone shows up to contribute.

4.30 What is the opposite of a person who becomes a problem for the universe? It's people who live by reason, even if they wear simple clothing, own very little, and don't eat luxurious meals. Our most important nourishment is the knowledge we gain, and our most important responsibility is to somehow give back through a right use of it.

4.31 Find your rest in the art of living according to reason. Accept what you cannot change. Go about what is left of your life cheerfully committed to benefitting the collective understanding that helped you become who you are. Be no one's master, and no one's servant.

4.32 Consider all the things that happened in the past: weddings and child rearing, sickness, death, fighting, feast, famine, bickering for power, or complaining about time. All those people have passed away. It hardly matters whose leadership, management, or corruption it all takes place under, since they all wind up gone just the same. The same might be said for whole nations, which struggle and strive, but will soon enough collapse back into pieces.

Think for a moment about people who distract themselves with unimportant matters, who neglect to do just acts they intend to do, feeling satisfied enough by their distractions. How much attention an act should get from us has to be in proportion to its value. To give more care to something than it reasonably ought to have is a sign that care is taken away from something else which needs it more, unless it plays a reasoned role within a larger plan towards achieving some more worthwhile end.

4.33 Today's tired clichés used to be sayings that were popular and new. Names that were thought of as fit for toddlers are now associated with an elderly generation. Everything as it exists now will become only an inaccurate story about the past, buried or lost under the sands of time. Stories will only be heard by some people, and even then only about the most well-known people, but for most of us as soon as we pass away no one may ever speak of us again. And why should we be concerned with being remembered after we're gone? That is empty vanity.



What, then, should we commit our efforts to? It's simple: fair thinking, gentle action, truth and integrity in what we say, and a cheerful acceptance of every event as the only way it could have happened, understanding that what took place cannot now be changed, to view the flow of time as unsurprising and continuous, like water sprouting from a fountain.

4.34. Accept that, though you will do as best you can, there is only so much you can do, and to a large extent what is going to happen will happen. Rather than beat yourself up for what you could not do and who you did not help, give yourself credit for what you did. You can't do anything if you labor under an absurd impression that you should somehow be able to do everything.

4.35 Everything gets lost in time, not only the facts people remember, but also the people who remember.

4.36 Everything that happens takes place through change. Nature seems unable to resist constantly taking things as they are now and gradually replacing them with new things remade from what they were. Everything today is a seed for what it will become in the future, which itself sprouted from what it once unrecognizably used to be.

4.37 Our deaths will all be relatively soon, in the scheme of things. Given this, how are you not already living in a more honest way, more carefree, without made up fears of being harmed by unlikely outside things, or feeling twisted by your opinions of the opinions of others? How are you not already more agreeable to other people—since what good is bickering between people who will soon be dead? Mortality grounds us in

reason. Act according to it, and let go of all this noise which distracts us from seeing this most basic fact of life.

4.38 Watch for the principles people let guide their actions. Even among thoughtful people around us, we will often find the things they avoid or pursue are petty, or ridiculous. Do not assume, without intense, deliberate reflection, that you are necessarily any better in this regard.

4.39 That somebody else guides their actions from bad principles does not harm us. When your environment or circumstances change in ways beyond your control, that isn't wrongdoing. What form does wrongdoing take? It is in our self-inflicted opinions about those outside events. If we don't feed, reinforce, or defend such opinions, they'll give up bothering us. Even if the material world falls to pieces, burnt and rotten all around us, we can't allow it to dictate our thoughts. We must keep our mind calm, uncorrupted, and sheltered from the storms around us.

Nothing can be either bad or good which happens to bad and good people alike. If something is as likely to happen to people who live contrary to reason, as to people who live according to reason, then that something is not, in itself, either contrary to or according to reason.

Floods, illness, and other misfortunes can befall any of us equally. What separates bad people from good people is whether we let that chaos into our thoughts as anger and pain, leading to harmful actions, or accept what we cannot change and commit our focus to what we can do.

4.40 Think of the whole universe as a single living organism, all made up of a common substance—as in a way it possibly

appears to be—but also sharing one mind. Imagine each individual mind, then, as a mere part managing local perceptions for this one shared existence. Wouldn't living things move together as though coordinated, cooperating and reacting to one another in a collective cause of improving what can exist next, as a duty shared by every part?

We live in a web which is always being expanded and worked on, but it is always the same web.

4.41 The Stoic perspective of people is that each of us is mostly a mind leading around a corpse while it's still ripe, before it rots too much.

4.42 Change is not good or evil. What could that even mean? All that we can know is change.

4.43 Time works like a violent river, constantly carrying off the present, moving another moment instantly into its place, replacing that one with another still, and so on, indefinitely.

4.44 Everything that happens is familiar, and largely a repeated pattern from past events, like how the fruits in season are hardly a surprise. However good or bad something is—disease or death, arguments or betrayal, whatever delights easily amuse people—will feel new but it isn't, because it echoes out of history that long predates each of our individual experiences with it.

4.45 Things happen because of what took place before, not as a series of disconnected events, but instead as a logically linked chain of cause and effect. This same coherence we can observe in the connections between things as they exist and happen now has been there for all of time.

4.46 Each thing can only come about through changes made to other things.

People will inevitably argue about whatever they spend the most time with. There is nothing we spend more time with than the nature of the universe. Notice how we can experience it daily, yet most will never come to know it, since merely arguing about something does not lead to knowing it. We know it better by speaking calmly about it with others. In this way, when we contribute to the collective understanding, we contribute to our own understanding as well.

It is critical to bring actions and changes into reality, not to trick ourselves by daydreaming into feeling as if we're engaging with matters which, in truth, we're only having thoughts about.

There was a children's habit that helped us learn from our parents, which we must shed as adults: acting and thinking only as we observe other people doing. This was useful to get a coherent start, but it now limits you to never exceed the qualities and approaches of people you happen to meet. To accept responsibility for this is to accept responsibility for yourself.

4.47 Say you find out you are going to die tomorrow, the day after, or the day after that. How much difference would it make to you, a distinction between one day or three? How different is a distinction between dying fifty years from now, or tomorrow, especially if you don't use the time you have to live right? Either is short, and we cannot know which we'll get.

4.48 Knowledge of death does not stop it. Doctors spend their lives treating others, only to then still pass away themselves.

The same is true about thinkers who dedicate themselves to considering mortality. Fighters and military leaders who are in roles that require them to cut other people's lives short will shortly pass away, too.

Whole cities will die. For the ones that don't, their populations still pass away, many times over. Everyone we've known either has, or will. Civilization is a long, unbroken chain of dealing with deaths, before soon enough having their own deaths dealt with by people who come after them, all happening far closer in succession, and more quickly, than most people care to think about.

See how temporary our bodies are, how flawed they are as something to depend on. What was only this morning a moving, breathing, speaking person may, this evening, be a pile of ashes.

Spend this small slice of time you have in cooperation with nature, not wasting it all being mad about what you cannot change. Put yourself on course to end your journey content. If you can, always stay at peace with the chance your journey might end sooner than expected. We should be like a fruit when it falls from a tree, holding no anger towards the tree, instead seeing with quiet gratitude how this tree granted us the temporary gift of coming into being.

4.49 Picture an oceanside cliff, ocean crashing against it perpetually—not only does it stand firm, and nearly unmoved by each wave, it leaves those waves settled calm for having tried to disturb it. Practice standing firm when life throws unwanted changes at you, people who are acting from confusion or the tiny frustrations that sneak up then pile up. Let the disturbances wash right off you, remaining so centered and unmovable that

this chaos is not merely bounced to someone else, but is so broken into pieces that it has no energy left to crash against another's shore.

We should not say, "I am unhappy, because something unfortunate happened." We should say, "I am grateful, because although something unfortunate happened, I am able to be free of pain or sorrow over it—not overwhelmed by the present, and not fearful of the future." An unfortunate event could happen to anyone, but not just anyone will weather it without unnecessary pain or sorrow. This is not about suppressing feelings, or absorbing them without showing it. This is about understanding that all feelings beyond a moment's instinctive reaction are not from the event, but instead from within ourselves, in how we allow our thoughts to form about them.

On what basis, then, does it even make sense to say something is unfortunate or fortunate? If nature makes it inevitable, then it serves no purpose to decide it is unfortunate. Anything consistent with reason in our human nature is consistent with what nature as a whole requires.

Can anything that happens, outside of you, or even to you, stop you from being fair, generous, forgiving, reasonable, responsible, humble and truthful? Will anything that happens make you less trustworthy, or less free in your thoughts? These are most of what make us who we are.

Guard your mind by remembering that when anything leads you to sadness or pain: instead of seeing that event as misfortune, bear it nobly with courage, and see your good fortune in that.

4.50 A useful way of thinking about death is to consider those people who have held tight to life for much longer than anyone else. What have these people who lived longest really gained, when compared to people who passed away earlier?

The people who live longest even have to live through the most other people passing away.

But the difference is still minor. Even people who live the longest don't live for very long. Think about the various difficulties that all living entails: the flawed company we find ourselves challenged with keeping, and how fragile our body is as we wear it down through use. While there's no rush, there's no reason to see living longer than nature intended for us as a thing of great value.

Consider the boundless time before you existed, and that will continue after you expire. In this seemingly infinite span, what difference does it make if we live three days or three generations?

4.51 Always take the plain and direct path forward, like nature does. Everything you say and do should be checked against and aligned with sound reasoning. Doing this will save you from needless trouble, keep you out of avoidable fights, spare you from losing yourself to insignificant details of things not worth doing well, guard you against the bottomless distraction of worrying about what other people think of you, and keep you above winding up busy for its own sake.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Doing right is its own reward

5.1 When you wake up in the morning, and don't want to get up, remind yourself, "I'm waking up to live the life of a person. Why should I fight against going out to do what I exist to do?"

If what you're getting up to do is not what you believe you exist to do, then find a way, starting today, to move your life in that direction. You do not exist to lay about in pajamas. You might disagree, thinking that sounds pleasant—as if you wouldn't be bored of it by day three, and lost in restlessness by day five. Imagine, for argument's sake, it could remain pleasant—do you believe the purpose of your existence is to do whatever is pleasant for you, to feel good as much as possible, until you expire? There isn't anything about the world that you're here to improve, create, or defend with your actions? Even plants, birds, and bugs do more with their lives than lay about in pajamas. They bring order to their corners of the world, growing in ways that make them useful to other living things. You have your corner of the world, too. Are you unwilling to do the work of a person, less so than the ant which does the work of an ant? The work of a person is to do what is consistent with our nature and reason.

Rest is necessary. Get enough rest. But nature has set a limit on what is enough, and too much will make us worse off, just as there is a difference between having enough to eat, or having too much. Contrast that to an unnatural or unsatisfiable want about property or honors or other things which we only want until we have them, and will always want more of if we contrast what we have to what someone else does. Rest, like food, is a natural want, so it can and should be met by the right amount. Why crave what is beyond enough, given we



understand the downsides and discomfort that happen if we do? There are likewise bounds for how much action is insufficient, enough, or too much, but most people come up short on this measure.

If you love yourself, you should love the universe you are part of. Love what it asks of you.

Notice how artists and craftspeople at times obsess over their labor, exhausting themselves by forgetting to bathe, eat, or sleep. If they make too much a habit of that, it may be too much action, and not enough of other things. But do you value making progress on what you exist to do less than an artist cares about their art, than a craftsperson cares about their craft, a dancer their dancing, a businessperson their business, or a famous person their fame? Find something which you care more about than excess relaxation. If you cannot do that thing now, then use today to take real steps towards doing it. Are your intentions for how to better yourself, and to improve your community, less worthwhile to you than crafts to craftspeople?

If you're having trouble waking up, then wake up to look for something worth waking up for.

5.2 You can defend your state of calm by blocking or pushing out impressions that disturb you. This isn't nearly as difficult to do as we imagine it is. Our having tricked ourselves into thinking it is hard to do only contributes to it being hard. Remind yourself of this fact, then let yourself do it.

5.3 If a word and action suits human nature in a civil way, then consider that word or action available to you. Don't let other people's opinions limit you to only words or actions they expect from you. If it is a right thing to do or say, then it is a right thing

for you to do or say. Other people will speak and act according to their own principles, but you are unlikely to change that, so it has little to do with you, or what you can say or do. When your nature, and the nature of the universe—meaning what you see as suitable for you to do, and what it is possible for you to do—are in agreement, then you’ve found your way forward where these overlap.

5.4 Our path through life is always within the boundaries of what’s possible, set by reality and our lot in it, from birth until our last breath. We will then become part of the same earth and air everyone else came from, shared through life, and returned on their last breath.

5.5 Mental ability may hide within us, more difficult for people to notice than physical beauty or athletic fitness, but a major part of our mental ability seems formed for us by nature, and not fully our own handiwork to take credit for. Though we can learn more subjects and skills, we may be no more able to turn ourselves into a genius than we could work at becoming taller. Likewise, it doesn’t make sense for people with better mental potential by nature to speak badly of other people who were formed with less, any more than for tall people to disrespect short people. Taller people need to live in a world that has shorter people. Smarter people need to live in a world that has less smart people in it.

Focus, instead, on developing and applying internal qualities that are fully up to you: being sincere, trustworthy, honorable, determined, considerate, honest, independent, grateful for your situation, understanding, above simple desires, and not wanting excessive or showy things.

Notice how these positive qualities are instantly and entirely available to anyone. It may take time for others to see these as a pattern from you, but you didn't have to train in them rigorously since childhood to be proficient, they can all be yours, starting now, if you choose them.

Here, there is no excuse about differences in natural ability, or being unable, and yet so many people choose, contrary to what would be best for them and everyone else, to live below their ability in these aspects. People grumble with excuses, fixate on their qualities they cannot change instead of the ones they can, flatter to manipulate people to overlook their weaknesses, blame their body for what they will not do with their mind, and pathetically try to impress people who are not even worth impressing. You have the power to be nothing like those people, in any of these ways, beginning from this moment, if you decide and commit to being the way you mean to be.

If people are going to find fault with you, let it be with qualities you cannot fully choose.

Even then, whether it's about slowness or a mistake made in comprehension, you can, and should, practice to improve as much as you can at those abilities, too. There are things you cannot change, things you have direct control over, and a broad gray area in the middle where you can make the most of what you have, advance with effort, or progress over stages. Even a person born with great mental potential will achieve nothing of value with it if they do not develop, hone, and seek ways to apply it. Just like our path through life, we largely shape our mind by the path we take that overlaps where we choose to go and where we can go. But do not show pride or base your identity in settling for your current limitations, as if you are no longer able to learn.

5.6 Some people believe that when they do something kind for someone else, they are owed a favor in return. Other people do not express this attitude as openly, but inside, they think the same way about it, as though the person who was helped is now indebted to the one who helped. There is a third way to be, in which a person does kindnesses without any expectation of repayment at all, like a vine producing grapes because that's just what vines do, not because it wants something back. In doing good acts, we should go about them as the bee makes honey, not immediately calling everyone over to come see and praise us for it, but simply going on to do another constructive act, just as the vine continues producing grapes, and the bee simply goes back to producing honey.

You may object to the idea of not calling attention to good deeds—isn't it critical to our social experience that others be aware of good being done, since they can't model behavior they don't see? First, if you have that concern, you're considerate enough that you're not going to suddenly become an unsociable person once you stop tricking yourself into doing kindnesses on an unreliable, unstated sense that favors will be repaid. Second, whether other people care to notice or emulate it, is similar to whether someone may decide to repay a favor, and is not up to you, it's a choice that can only be made by the other people. Focus on the part you can do.

5.7 When you think about wanting good things to happen, don't want it only for yourself, or your immediate family and friends. Wish well for all people, for everyone to thrive, and everything to be better. Whatever helps nature or society, helps you since you are a part of each whole. Stand up for working to improve our common well being. This is the honorable way to be.

5.8 When a doctor prescribes a painful treatment to heal our ailments, we know that, while it may be unpleasant, it is superior to what is likely to happen if we don't follow the treatment. When nature and the universe put us through pain and suffering, whether our own ailment or that of a loved one, there is a similarly painful treatment recommended by nature: we must calmly accept the things we cannot change.

When we accept that patiently bearing the hardship is our prescription, all other things can begin to fit and conform around it, like a stone worker cobbling together a wall using irregular rocks.

Everything fits together in harmony. The universe, if it isn't all a single body, is made up of the sort of material bodies that interact within and towards a greater order. Everyone recognizes this in our common phrases, when we use expressions like, "it was meant to be," or "there was no other way"—or when we see people making the best of a situation they would not have chosen.

Accept the difficult things which happen to us, no differently than if they were prescribed for us by a doctor, and we should accept our best possible course of treatment, however unpleasant. It is better for us in the long-run than the alternatives: to detach from reality, to add mental anguish on top of bodily or situational issues, and to let the problem become worse as it affects more of life by neglecting to do what we still can do.

Society and the universe rely on interconnection to work. We harm that interconnection when we pull away from reality, instead of embracing it. Could anyone be so self-centered as to want to break the continuity of the universe? That is the thought

being entertained, whenever we resent the prescription given to us to endure what is inevitable according to nature.

5.9 Don't quit or become upset when you can't be perfect at living by your principles. When you fail, and deviate from the path you meant to be on, place yourself back on the path.

Give yourself some credit if much of what you do is consistent with how you intend to be. Let yourself feel good about returning to the path, for having noticed you strayed, and then done something to remedy that. If you are hard on yourself for getting off track, you'll teach yourself to not admit it to yourself next time, preferring to stay there to avoid more self-inflicted punishment.

Don't think about Stoicism as if you are its servant or student, as if it will be angry at you if you break its rules. It is another prescription. If you have an ankle issue, we learn from doctors that applying pressure or elevating it can help it heal. If you have an issue with living by your principles, we learn from Stoics not just to manage the symptoms, but also how to treat the underlying causes.

It is not a punishment or struggle to live based on reason, or to accept nature we cannot change. This is a source of restfulness, peace of mind—it's easier. The pain is only in fighting against the whole universe, as though that will make it work differently than how it does.

The prescription is not complicated. It will help you. The present is too late to change. Other people's opinions are rarely useful to think about. As long as you're angry about what you can't do, you aren't giving full attention to doing what you can. Be kind, but not to get something in return. Contribute to the

well being of other people and advance our common understanding.

Our instincts lead us to imagine what we crave materially will make life easier or better. But look beyond the present and consider how much better your whole future will be if, instead, you put your time and energy into your mind's simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. Sometimes we go to a doctor expecting, maybe somehow hoping for, a complex treatment, and get sent home with the answer that all we need is to drink more plain water.

Stop wanting a complex treatment, or imagining the simple treatment is complex. Drink plain water. Accept what you cannot change, do what you can, be kind, and do right.

5.10 Reality is complicated enough that its truths may be hidden from simple observation. Great thinkers find it impossible to understand completely. Our understanding changes over time, becoming better each time we learn enough to change our minds.

Notice how much thought, care, and work goes into material things that will not last, mean nothing, and have no real importance. Nearly any object could equally be in the possession of a good or bad person. Such an object, then, says nothing about the possessor. It will soon be gone, anyway, much like whoever possesses it.

Consider the character and principles of people you live with, and how difficult it can be to tolerate even the most considerate and cooperative of them, simply because you're around them all the time. It makes sense, then, that because we are always around ourselves, it's normal to find ourselves hard to endure,

even when we're living as best as we can. Don't let who and what is in your life lead you to be ungrateful for who and what is in your life, or you are setting yourself up to never be content.

With so much confusion, uncertainty, and change in life, it can be hard to see which pursuits will be worthwhile. It is on each of us to become calm enough inside to choose our next action. Remember, while there's no need to rush it, we are all going to run out of time, so pick a direction you'll feel right to have made meaningful progress in.

Bear in mind these two points: first, whatever your body eventually succumbs to, it will be as nature requires, and your role at that time will be to accept it calmly. Second, while your body is subject to the universe, it is in your control to never act against your mind and values. When you do an act, it is always you doing it—there is no one else to blame or credit.

5.11 We should frequently check ourselves with these basic questions: what purpose do you set your mind to lately? What principle is guiding this choice? It's harder to see in ourselves, so we can make this exercise easier by asking what kind of person would pick this purpose that we are now setting our focus on? Consider yourself from the outside, as best as you can. This is hard, but worth practicing to get better at. Are we thinking like a naive child, a resentful teenager, a person who would abuse power, someone weak, a tamed house pet, or perhaps a wild animal?

5.12 You can learn a lot about a population by observing what types of things the majority of their people consider good. The types of things that should seem good to our minds include fairness, self-control, courage, and autonomy, but don't we find these in short supply among most people around us? Keeping



these in our thoughts will help us not become distracted by actions other people have fallen into.

5.13 If we focus, instead, on the myriad of material things that most people regard as good, we will soon find ourselves at odds with reality. We all know that hoarding is a bad behavior, and yet most of us feel pulled to accumulate more, until we leave ourselves with nowhere to sit. We reject it instantly when we see it in others, yet allow it to creep up naturally and go too far in ourselves—if it weren't that way, how could there be so many other people we reject for doing it? It makes no difference whether it's accumulated trash, or the trappings of status and wealth; having more than we need or have use for is always too much, and will only get in our way.

5.14 Reasoning is self-contained: it declares its first principles, and which operations it respects as valid to combine those principles to arrive at a conclusion it will regard as consistent.

It would be unfair to expect from someone who lacks the same principles as their foundations, or the necessary skills for reason, to share your conclusions about which actions are right. What is fair is to hold ourselves at least to a coherent life, by aligning and checking our actions for consistency against the values we hold. This is as right a way forward as anyone can follow.

5.15 The things someone owns do not define the person, are not part of the person, do not make the person any better, and they are not indicators the person has lived right. Fancy things are not required. A person can go through life as a success without many possessions, and a person can go through life as a complete failure while owning a great deal of flashy things. If

we're not careful, the things we own will lose their value to us, or may even begin to own us.

The purpose for which each person exists is surely not to acquire material things. Don't be fooled into an impression which is only a step removed from this in one of two directions: first, as if a person's purpose is to acquire material things for someone else—this will not define or make them any better. Second, the purpose cannot be to have the experiences and connections to make acquiring nice material things easier, because what helps us towards a useless end cannot, in itself, be useful.

On the other hand, it would be unreasonable to despise or speak poorly of something just because we don't have it. This is simply another form of giving too much attention to material things. To put on a show about how much we don't want or care for certain things, rejecting what we could easily and reasonably use without harming anyone else doesn't help anything.

Here is the main place where reason relates to owning material things: if you lose something you had, or if you cannot obtain something, endure its absence casually. Keep a rational perspective. See how that material object is not essential for you. Possession does not make you who you are, increase your value, or raise your importance. This is the way to see it.

5.15 We are made up of thoughts, and a body. The body didn't come to exist out of nothing, but from arranging materials that already existed around it. Could the same be said of our thoughts? Similarly, the body's material remains after we pass away, albeit in an inert and dispersed way. If what our thoughts are made of remains behind, could it merely have become inert

or dispersed, too, perhaps inert in what we recorded, dispersed in what we said to other people?

Parts of us become parts of the universe through a continuous series of changes. Those same kinds of changes are what earlier enabled our existence, and that of our parents, and their parents, and so on.

Your mind is made of the things you repeatedly think about. Your character will be shaped by those same thoughts. Knowing this, do not leave to chance something so important as what your mind is filled with, because for better or worse your character depends on this. Go out of your way to commit your attention to thinking worthwhile thoughts, such as focusing on how no matter the material circumstances you live in, you can live rightly within those circumstances.

Commit to your mind and imagination that if you somehow wind up living in a palace, you can live in a right way there, not becoming corrupted by abuse of power, lost in selfish comfort, or wrapped up in the kinds of petty trivialities common among people of uncommon means.

Every being and every thing that exists has a purpose to fulfill. The purpose is to do what is best for everything, including itself—but not only for itself. Serving the advantage of the whole is a good way for any reasonable person to live. This is the basis of civilization. Though beings and things both have a purpose to fulfill in this sense, the living should, of course, take priority over the inanimate. Things are here for the sake of the living, and never the other way around.

5.17 Good people do not waste their time attempting what they are certain cannot happen. It wouldn't make sense. A way to

identify who is living in a bad way, meaning against the universe and out of touch with reality, is to watch for those trying to do what they know they cannot do.

5.18 The world has prepared us since birth to handle what the world can do to us. Some people make it through risky situations without even noticing, while others use sheer determination and will to power through adversity head on without being pulled down into it. How strange it is that someone being oblivious could produce the same end result as someone else who has fortitude: both survive more comfortably than a person who understands what is happening, and gives those unpleasant difficulties their full attention, without finding a better way to endure it.

5.19 Material things can't touch, change, or move thoughts. Thoughts are only moved by their own force. Thoughts change their positions once convinced by conclusions they deem sensible given the combination of details they have personally encountered through the body's senses.

5.20 Our lives are wrapped up in our interactions with other people. We do our best to be good to these people, or at least to tolerate them. But when other people become obstacles to doing what is good and right, and to fulfilling our purpose, it may be necessary to think about them in a different way: objectively, and logistically, as we would deal with disruptions caused by weather, illness, or untamed animals. Physical bodies can block your path, but they cannot otherwise affect your understanding, temperament, or choice of objectives. Those exist safely and solely beyond reach, in your thoughts.

By managing our thoughts, we can turn anything which works against us into an advantage. We can take what slowed us

down and use it to speed ourselves up. What someone else might otherwise mistake as a dead end, a calm mind grounded in reality will see as a landmark to orient, measure progress, or climb atop to use as a vantage point.

5.21 When our governing mind fulfills its purpose, we are serving the whole of society. When the parts of you serve their purposes, they are serving your governing mind. You are a part of society, just as you are a piece of the universe.

If your hands could act on their own, wouldn't it be in their best interest to cooperate with what your mind wants them to do, rather than completely ignoring you, going about on their own, getting lost in seeking whatever most pleases hands? You should be as good for society as you expect your hands to be for you. If you could see earth from far overhead, and assign each person to some coordinated purpose, what action would you send your particular body to do?

5.22 An individual can only be harmed by what harms the whole. Any time we feel we are being harmed, remember this perspective: if the whole is not harmed by this, then neither am I. When anyone does something which does harm the whole, instead of feeling anger towards them, try to show them how they are hurting themselves, too. This might end their harmful actions if they have enough reason and basis in reality to avoid knowingly hurting themselves. When someone's harmful actions have been done out of ignorance, the best first solution is to help them see and understand their mistake. If we fail at that, and we may, we did right to attempt it.

5.23 Never lose sight of how briefly all things come and go, how soon what is the case now will never be the case again. This constant change of material conditions is like a river, the

flow never lets up, and nothing remains in-place for long. Think about the infinite time before and after the present, during most of which nothing as you know it did, or will, exist at all.

How ridiculous it is for a person to be proud, obsessed, or upset over material things. Things don't last, just as we don't. It's not worthwhile to be stressed out over them.

5.24 Notice how out of all the material and time in the universe, what a remarkably tiny portion of either we have. This is true even for people who experience the absolute most possible of either. Your part in the big picture, like anyone else's, is incredibly small. Don't let that be cause for stress or sadness, but instead for calm relief. The pressure isn't on anyone to fix it all alone.

5.25 If someone does us wrong, that's mostly their problem. They have their mind, material, and actions, which they have decided to use poorly. We have ours, which we can decide to use well. Simply continue to do what you see as fulfilling your purpose to benefit the whole. Don't let their wrong acts towards you lead you astray from doing right towards society. Everyone together is a bigger consideration than either of you.

5.26 Guard your thoughts from being shaped by pleasure or pain. Keep your mind safely distant. Focus on how sensations are local to the area affected, like how a cut on a finger is all in that finger, but fortunately not the hand, arm, whole body, or your mind. You can perceive the sensation, without having to struggle against or exaggerate the experienced effect. We can recognize the signal of injury without interpreting that sensation as good or bad. Consider how pain from a doctor as part of a treatment is a good sign, whereas pleasure from a poison is a

bad one. So long as we respond appropriately, we don't need to categorize it either way.

5.27 Follow in the footsteps of role models who came before us. Strive to make yourself more like the best of them.

Find a way to accept and make the best of the reality you were born into. Obey your mind. Cherish your thoughts as a piece of society, and your body as part of the universe itself.

5.28 Would you get mad at a person because they smell bad, or have bad breath? Is anger in any way useful for these situations? The person has this body, and that mouth, and they have whatever state of bodily development causes such a smell to come out of either, or both.

This is a person, who, exactly like you, is capable of reason. They either don't know of, or they haven't found, a solution. They will care to know, if they don't yet, and would like a solution, if there is one suitable for their ailment. You have knowledge from your senses which they may not, however other people are likely sensing it, to this person's disadvantage. Engage your mind with how to work with this other person's mind, privately checking whether they're aware, and if you know of anything that might cure them of this complication, share it. If you make a good case, and they accept it, their issue might be resolved. This will help them, you, and everyone else around them. But anger has no role in this.

It's important for a person not to hold knowledge like this over the other person, who didn't, knowingly, do anything wrong. It is equally important not to make the mistake of telling this other person what we think they want to hear. We may tell ourselves

we do that for their benefit, but it's more likely to be due to our own selfish cowardice, avoiding an uncomfortable topic.

This extends to every unintended, distracting imperfection, which someone can be unaware of, even though everyone around them can't help but notice. Care about them, and advance the common good for everyone, by being someone willing to have the difficult conversations.

5.29 However you will live when you are near death, and however you wish to be remembered for how you lived, you have the ability to live that way now.

If other people won't give you the freedom you need to live the way you should, do what you can to change that situation, but in the meantime, don't stress over the limitation. It's senseless to be frustrated by only being able to do what you are able to do.

If you are in a room and see smoke, you will try to leave the room, if you can. But if you do not feel driven out by your circumstances, you are free to live the way you see is right. Use that freedom to lead a life consistent with reality, and with kindness towards other people.

5.30 The combination of all thoughts shared by cooperation becomes, in a sense, a shared mind. The shared mind, like any individual one, has to deal with tradeoffs and prioritization about what is best overall. Much as your mind drives the body to fulfill a purpose, the mind of the whole drives each mind towards a collective purpose. Living and nonliving things alike wind up brought together purposefully in harmony in this way.



5.31 How has your behavior been towards the people who helped and took care of you, such as your family, instructors, or people who work for you? Can you truthfully say this about your actions and decisions—that you have not, knowingly, wronged anyone through your actions and words?

Give yourself credit, as a foundation, for the things you have been through, which you found the strength to endure. Imagine, once your life has concluded, and your service to others is over, all the good decisions you will have made, the temptations to seek pleasure or avoid pain you stayed above and successfully ignored, the empty ambitions you quietly let pass you by, or the many unkind people you found some way you could be kind to.

5.32 Why is it that people who lack ability and practical knowledge waste the time of people who put the work in to develop both? The collective mind has more ability and practical knowledge than any of us, not only from the present moment, but from its long and unbroken history. Aren't we, in a way, wasting the time of the collective mind if we fail to respect the work that went into developing the accumulated skills and understanding from before us?

5.33 You will soon wind up either ashes or a skeleton. You will be remembered as a name, if at all, and if as a name, then maybe as nothing more than the sound. The material possessions people place so much value on are empty, disgusting, and insignificant. People fighting over them are no different than puppies nipping at one another, or children bickering between giggling and crying.

On the other hand, consider traits like consistency, honor, fairness, and honesty. People picture these sometimes as

unrealistic, as if requiring a level of perfection incompatible with being human. But the aim is not to attain them fully, or else give up. They are ideals to strive towards.

The world we perceive is always changing, our senses can make mistakes, and our thoughts are kept going by the movement of blood and air. It would be vain and empty to worry ourselves over our reputation in such an inconsistent, confusing, and fragile existence. Wouldn't it make more sense, instead, to wait peacefully for our end, regardless of whether it's truly an end, or some kind of change we experience? Up until that time, what do we expect to do? Why not be kind, generous, supportive of other people, patient and understanding of them? Rest calmly in your acceptance that what is outside the reach of your influence is not yours to be concerned about, because you cannot do anything about it.

5.34 If you go about life in the right way, it can be a continuous stream of happy events. Every person has the capacity for this, and we should never block anyone else from being able to freely experience it. This basis for happiness is twofold: first, acting in the way we know is fair—doing our part in ensuring people won't be mistreated by us—and second, not wanting more than we have any real need or use for.

5.35 It makes no sense to worry about decisions other people make, or the consequences of their decisions, except if they will harm the welfare of other people. But no harm is taking place if there is no harm to myself and other people, the harm is to the person making the decisions.

5.36 Be careful not to let yourself be swept up with emotions atop of what has to happen. Help people who need it, if you can, but if someone suffers the loss of someone close to them,

see how, as in most situations, the loss itself is not causing the most harm, but the excessive focus on that loss. How many people passed away before either of you existed, which you lived fine after, not becoming lost in sadness about? If the loss wasn't even close to you, it is an unnecessary habit to feel upset, as if this is a benefit to people who were close. Your pain does not help them, it can only hurt you. The same could be said, as well, about grieving our loss.

5.37 If someone else dwells on what reality makes inevitable, experiencing excessive pain from entertaining such thoughts, sharing that pain would simply double the mistakes made. It would not improve their situation. Your visible suffering might even extend or expand their pain.

If you would rather feel fortunate, you can. Anyone can feel fortunate by committing to honest thoughts, fair reasoning, and actions that improve the general welfare.

## CHAPTER SIX: Peacefully accepting reality

6.1 Physical reality is inert, so it moves only when moved, as in nature's unsettled cause and effect. The inanimate parts of the universe have no capacity for evil—they don't have opinions, and are deeply indifferent. Don't get angry at objects. It doesn't make any sense to wish for simple cause and effect to work differently than it does. Because nature doesn't have intent to do harm, nothing done by nature is evil, and what happens because of nature is not harmful. Nature is no less or more responsible for unwanted events than it is for good events. Don't project credit or blame onto things. Those concepts only make sense when there's behavior we want to encourage or discourage, which doesn't work on nature, or cause and effect.

6.2 If you are doing the right thing to be doing, it doesn't make a lot of difference if you are warm or cold while you take care of it. It likewise shouldn't be important, up until it affects your ability to do it right, whether you are, at that moment, fully well-rested or a bit tired, being judged positively or negatively by other people, or how much or little time you have left before you'll pass away. Speaking of which, dying is as essential a stage of life as any other, and so when it becomes the right thing to be doing, go about it in the most composed and correct way you can.

6.3 Take a moment to look inside yourself. Don't take for granted your good qualities. Notice and be grateful for how useful many of your qualities have been for your life.

6.4 Everything that exists now will soon change, dissolve into air, or disperse into pieces.

6.5 Any collection of minds have a combined character, an overall direction, and some shared knowledge of their work. Though nature has split us apart materially as individuals, our collective thought spans not just between bodies in the present, but also between minds over time.

6.6 The best way to show someone is wrong is to never be like them.

6.7 Find your cheerful peace in going from one act of service for society straight to the next, keeping your focus on what you believe will be most beneficial for our collective understanding.

6.8 The strongest power is whichever will raise itself and find a way to adapt, surviving by changing to become more as it should be. It makes the best of any change, whichever way things go, so from outside it's hard to even tell what was hoped, planned, or intended to happen. You can't tell if everything went its way, because of how well it went with the way things went.

6.9 Everything that happens is according to the rules of nature, as they play out in the present. Nature will not, since it cannot, try to understand us, but we can try to understand our place in it.

6.10 The universe is either chaotic randomness, just a mess of atoms, or else coherent, ordered, and operating with a purpose. These are the two possibilities.

If it's the former, then why stress out over things, or fret about what we can't understand, before we eventually return our parts back to the nature we borrowed them from? Death will happen to us all, inevitably. In that case, why become upset

over what cannot be avoided? We don't help anyone by spending more of our time unhappy than we have to.

If, instead, the latter is true, meaning the universe is coherent, then there is nothing for us to be afraid of. In that case, we should respect it for the way it is, accept the place we belong within it, and trust matters to work out as best as they can, even for reasons better than we can see.

6.11 Whenever a situation successfully provokes you to feel distressed or wound up, return to your calm, grounded state as soon as you are able. There is nothing gained by staying out of sorts, and off balance any longer than the instinctive impulse that first prompted it. Practice this skill of quickly returning to harmony. Mastering this one skill can make you unshakeable.

6.12 For most people who have both a step-mother, and their own mother, though they'll respect the step-mother, they will be closer to their own mom. This same two-tiered relation can apply to our thoughts during ordinary dealings in life, compared with Stoic practice. Stay closer to your practice of philosophy, because when compared to ordinary day-to-day thinking, Stoicism is the one you can go back to which will help you regain your tranquility. Philosophy can help make what happens in the other parts of life more tolerable for you. Like a good mother, Stoicism can help you become more tolerable in other parts of life for everyone else.

6.13 When we're looking at meat, and feel compelled to indulge in it, we can overcome this by inserting conceptual distance. Do this by focusing on the fact that this is the corpse of a fish, dead body of a bird, or remnants of a pig. This is not limited to flesh—even fancy wine is old, stepped-on grapes, and high-priced fashion is little other than cloth dyed with crushed bugs or

rotted plants. Mentally take apart what this thing is made of, and see what it really is. This prevents its shallow impression from penetrating us more deeply. What people most lust after easily breaks down this way, once it's laid bare: skin rubbing, stimulated nerves, and body fluid.

This same technique applies in any area of life. If something, on first impression, seems it may overwhelm your clear thinking, stop to spread it out like parts on a table. See how worthless it is disassembled. Separate this thing, as well, from whatever is said about it by unwise people.

Putting too much trust in outward appearances tends to pollute our ability to reason clearly.

When you feel highly confident that you are doing the right and worthwhile thing, that level of certainty may be a signal you were already fooled. Let go of the vanity of certainty. This change can save you from becoming trapped out of fear over how other people may judge your choices. Holding tight to confidence, or fearing how people will react to changing, will stop your growth.

6.14 The two simplest bonds are material, either solid or as grown by nature—such as brick or lumber, fruit or vegetable matter. A more impressive bond is held together less tightly by communal activity, like animals flocking or herding together. Better still are the bonds reasonable people form by being fair to one another, mutually benefitting one another, like when we share our complementary skills and expertise, or trade to better fill one another's needs. But, best of all, is the bond rational minds share, simply by independently aligning actions and thoughts to reason and reality, there is inherently cooperation with everyone who shares this as a priority. When we each join

the team that reason is on, we all wind up on the same team, too.

6.15 Some things rush into existence, and others rush out. By the time something has come into existence, it is already on its way out. Movement and change are constantly refreshing the world, replacing the old with the new. It always has, and always will.

In these raging rapids, where no one can hold still for long, and nothing will slow anything else down, which things we quickly pass should we get attached to? Any will be, at best, like falling in love with a bird as it flies past, practically already gone from sight by the time we see it.

This is what life itself is like, soon leaving from us like the air we breathe. Just as we breathe in one moment and out the next over and over again throughout life, at birth we breathe in deeply from the universe one time, gaining our ability to breathe at all, then upon our death we finally exhale returning that ability back to nature.

6.16 Plants transpiring and animals breathing have no inherent value, any more than sweating, perceiving things with the senses, being moved by our desires as if pulled by puppet strings, or eating. People treat dining as valuable, but is it any more so than when it leaves the other end?

What should we value, then?

To receive praise and favorable attention? No.



To be widely talked about by the general public? Absolutely not. Besides, the praise or support of most people is no deeper than applause.

If you stop caring for approval and about being celebrated by people, what else is left to value?

It's simple: act, and withstand distractions while acting, according to your values. See how a person strives to do well at what their position requires, how the gardener tries to garden well, or the dog trainer tries to train dogs well? Your primary position is to be a person—so try, primarily, to be a person well. This is the real aim of teaching youth, because without it, whatever else they may learn to do could make them more dangerous, but with it, they will figure out all the rest.

Make this the same aim for teaching yourself, then, if your elders failed you on it, because perhaps they were badly taught, too. If you succeed at being a person meaning to live every day and every action by your values, you won't need much else. If you continue to place value in things other than living right, that may only decrease your freedom, preventing you from being independently content, chaining yourself back up to desires for things of no real value.

If you want what other people can take away from you—and it's the same whether it's material possessions, or their opinions—you are on track to wind up envious, jealous, and suspicious of them. You are positioned to destroy yourself, scheming on how to get back from them what you chose to give them, or decided to lock up inside those objects: your happiness. These other people and inert objects will control you if you place more value on them than on living right.

Any person who settles for desiring these things beyond their control is left entirely vulnerable to living a tumultuous, unstable, sad life, and will soon be cursing the universe in a failure to see their own role in it, twisted and mad for wanting things to be different than they could be.

If, on the other hand, you have complete respect for your own mind, and truly understand that contentment comes only from your own thoughts, in what you value and what is worth thinking, you will feel a greater harmony not only within yourself, but also with all other people. You will no longer feel angry or threatened out of fear for what you will no longer enable them to do to you. More importantly, you will live in a way consistent with reality, not basing happiness on what is beyond your control. You will be acting and thinking in the full freedom of what you can do.

6.17 Nature has movements above us, below us, and beside us, but the movements thought and virtue guide our body's actions through are richer and more interesting. Going the right way is harder to see, invisible to many people, and so more complex than how natural movement either comes to a stop, continues once started, or relays cause and effect. Acting right might mean doing what no one else has done, advancing where there is no path to follow.

6.18 How bizarre, the way people avoid saying kind things about people who are still alive, yet place great importance on what people will say about us after we die. We will never see or know what those people say. It makes no more sense to care about this than it does to care about the many people alive before us who didn't say kind things about us either. People born in other times aren't somehow any more worth impressing than the ones we're alive at the same time as.

6.19 Just because you are unable to do something alone, don't assume that it's impossible, or even difficult, for people together.

Anything another person does, you are capable of doing, too.

6.20 If, during an intense athletic contest, you get hurt in an honest accident, we do not hold that against the other person. We aren't confused about how it happened, we don't take offense, and we shouldn't think less of them. All the same, we may rightly exercise extra caution around them next time, not because they're evil, and not suspecting them of trying to cause us harm, but it is nevertheless reasonable that we might give them more space in which to make their mistakes.

That is how we should think about, and relate to, most people from whom we experience some harm, outside of sports, too. We understand they might not hurt us deliberately, but we do not need to hate them, or even blame them. Remain in a good mood, while making a point of avoiding them.

6.21 If someone can show me that I am making a mistake in how I think or behave, I am eager to improve my understanding and update my actions. My interest is in the truth, simply in reality as it is. Having a clearer understanding of it will not harm us. Real harm occurs when someone has the chance to know better, but chooses to carry on in their mistake, lost in self-deception.

6.22 Do not become upset at things that are thoughtless: frustrations with inanimate things, animals that lack reason, or even people who ordinarily should have reason but have lost their way for now, and in a moment of drunkenness, lack of

relevant ability, or otherwise, are unable to act rationally. If these don't interfere with your ability to uphold your responsibilities, ignore them; if they do, then do something to get past them, but staying upset or frustrated will only tie you into a tighter knot, or distract you from what your thoughts should be on.

6.23 Living things—plants or animals—that you're certain have no reason can be used to serve creatures that do have reason. They could not knowingly help us, or be convinced to in exchange for something they want, and so far as we can understand, appear to be indifferent either way. With people, however, or any living thing you suspect to have reason, act in a considerate and cooperative way.

Spending three hours well is no less important than spending three years well. The latter is largely just the former repeated.

6.24 The most and least powerful people all wind up the same when we pass away. Either the spiritual people are right for both, or both dissolve into nature and go back to non-existence. Either way, the body's material remains are of no practical use, and whatever air or water they used while alive is already back into circulation going through the rest of us.

6.25 Notice how many things happen at the same time in your body, or the countless mental events competing every moment in your mind. Recognize that this happens inside of everyone else, too. Consider, further, beyond bodies or minds, into all things taking place in the universe simultaneously. Everything that happens does so at the same time as uncountably many other things taking place. You can't give your finite thoughts to all of it, certainly not with equal share, so the decisions you

make about what, how, and why you think about will matter greatly.

6.26 If someone asked you to write out a name, would you strain in anger over the request, shaking with annoyance with each letter you write? What purpose does this kind of anger serve? Surely, instead, you'd keep your composure as you write it out one letter a time. In the same way, every responsibility you have is made up of smaller, specific steps, which you can observe attentively without being disturbed from it, without adding your anger to situations where it isn't useful, because more anger will be counterproductive and wear you out. Go on your way, methodically and calmly, one letter at a time, until you complete your current duty.

6.27 How wrong it is—cruel even—to stop other people from trying to achieve things they believe to be in their best interests. Yet that is exactly what we are doing when we show disapproval of someone doing something in a way we see as wrong. They would not be doing it that way unless it was what they believe to be in their best interests. If they are wrong about it, teach them what you see that they do not. Help them understand, without becoming angry at them simply for acting as they thought best from their experiences. Otherwise, if the mistakes they'll make are recoverable, or if you can't help them, then let them try, and they'll learn on their own.

6.28 Whatever else it may be, death is at minimum an escape from our senses, no longer pulled by the strings of our impulses, from cautious overthinking, and working to satisfy bodily needs.

6.29 It wouldn't be right to have your thoughts give up before your body does.

6.30 Be careful not to wind up thinking the way that so many powerful people do, thinking so highly of yourself as if you're part of a royal family. People like to imagine they would never become like this, but everyone who is like this thought that, and yet these people exist. Instead, stay simple, good, pure, somber, truthful, fair, and put effort into the right things in the right ways.

So long as you want what other people can keep from or take away from you, not only in property but even including their approval, you will lead your life the way they want you to. When you no longer need or want what they can control, they will no longer have control over you.

Strive to live in a way consistent with reason, reality, and values. Respect nature and the inevitable, while doing what you reasonably can to help other people.

Life is short. We each get only one harvest season. Ground your character, and be considerate. Take seriously the responsibilities of whichever roles you end up in.

Put energy into what you do. Be reasonable, and remain calm, but do it with enthusiasm.

Don't care for honors, or for pleasing people who want you to please them. These're both empty.

Strive to understand things. Though everything will pass you by, examine each closely before it does. Accept the fact that people will blame you for things that aren't your fault, without feeling a need to turn that around into blaming or having anger

towards them. Take time to do things right, never in a panic, just calmly do something about it.

Don't give any attention or thought to the false things other people say about you.

Pay attention to other people's actions, but do not show them when you disapprove. If you wouldn't have done what they're doing, anyway, you'll be better off remaining clear-minded; turning your thoughts sour won't cause someone else to change what they're doing.

Fear or suspicion, likewise, might be better acted on, than felt. If you've decided not to act on it, then stop giving your mind to it. The tension is between what you are doing and what you think you should be doing.

Don't try to seem clever. If you catch yourself doing that, others will, too.

Learn how to be satisfied with little—a safe place to rest, functional clothing, and simple food.

Strive to be industrious, yet patient.

Eat enough, but not too much. Paying attention to what amount keeps your energy highest.

Be reliable and consistent with friends.

Have patience for the opinions of people who disagree with you. Celebrate when someone shows you a better way.

Respect nature, not to gain some underlying benefit by doing so, but simply as it is.

Living in these ways will keep your conscience clear, free of regrets in your final hour.

6.31 Imagine you will pass away tonight. What kinds of thoughts would you think about then?

Actually take time to do this. Pause for a moment, and try to imagine that you are going to expire tonight, you've woken up your last time.

Think of it as if you've already had your last time alive at each hour that has passed today.

What will you think about? What will trouble you then?

Things you pictured as troubling you then are, so far, only a dream, as now will be to you then. See the future you're headed towards, to change it in the present, before it becomes your past.

6.32 Each of us is only a body and thoughts. To the body, everything is indifferent, since it can't think on its own. To the mind, everything material should be indifferent, since it has no access to the world except through the body. The only thing we should not be indifferent to is our thoughts, because the mind creates and maintains them. The mind operates best when it is mainly kept in the present, including how the present may affect the future or learn from the past, but accepting that it cannot act in the past or future.



6.33 Pain felt in the hand or foot is not evil, and unavoidable in many circumstances. It is most tolerable so long as the foot can still do what a foot is for, or the hand does what a hand is for, secondarily when it can at least return to what it is used to do. In the same way, when a whole person goes through hardship, as long as we can continue what we see as our purpose, the hardship can't harm us. Getting through the adversity is the only way forward, so get through it.

6.34 Awful people enjoy pleasure, too. What does this tell us about the meaning of pleasure?

6.35 A skilled craftsperson who has honed advanced skills will entertain ideas from an untrained person up to a point, but they will not compromise the principles of their craft. Architects and physicians similarly defend and uphold the values underlying the important work they do. All of us should demonstrate this same unwavering adherence to core principles in our role of being a person, allowing discussion up to a point, but doing what is right in navigating our decisions.

6.36 Compared to the universe, Asia and Europe combined are less than a grain of sand, and all the oceans combined form barely a drop. Time is only the present, a single instant of history. Everything is small, bound to change, and on its way to perishing. This change and perishing is how all new things are able to come about. Lions, poisons, thorns—all the dangerous things came about as byproducts of the entire universe. Harmful things are not the opposite of what you like, or even all that different; they are of the same kind, and come from the same source.

6.37 By knowing the present, you know all the time there is. Only one moment exists, shared briefly by everything that has

ever taken place, to be shared again by everything that ever will.

6.38 Keep in mind how connected everything in the universe is. Each thing is woven into all the others. Everything and everyone is on the same side. Each event follows another, physical forces driving movements of material, stirred by our thoughts, shaped by our words. Nothing exists independently. Everything is related to the rest.

6.39 Adapt to whatever situation chance puts you in. This includes the people that chance puts in your life. Adapt to find a way to care for them. If you are unable to do that, care about them.

6.40 A tool is most effective in the hands of a person who knows it well enough to make it, and yet we tend to find tools without the maker around to help. This is not true about the tools made by the universe, and the shared knowledge of society. The thoughts of other people, within the possibilities of nature, made you the way you are—but the tool makers are still very much here. If you learn to see what your tool makers consider a suitable use of your abilities, you'll become more effective by leveraging the broader perspective of your tool makers.

This is one way of understanding what it means for our actions to conform to nature and reason: when we act with a conscious awareness of what we were created to do.

6.41 If you give your thoughts over to anything outside your control and things wind up going poorly, even through no fault of your own, you will end up angry at the universe, cursing

reality, or blaming other people. So much harm and damage originates from this kind of confusion.

If, instead, the only actions we consider as either good or bad are those which are ours to guide, then we no longer have a reason to become upset at the universe, or nature, or to hate people.

6.42 We are all working together. This is true whether we know we are, or if we mean to or not. Some people see exactly how their efforts contribute to the bigger picture, others do not. Nonetheless, all are still contributing to the same big picture with their thoughts, words, and actions.

Even people who attempt to destroy, hinder, complain about faults, or place obstacles in the way of others, they also, are contributing to the shared project. They add value to the universe by making us become more resistant, refined, and robust, like trees made stronger by harsh winds.

Though everyone contributes to our common understanding, it is up to you to decide which of the three roles you will play. Are you oblivious to what you are doing, are you destructive to what you are doing, or are you aware that you are contributing to what you are doing? Whether you know it or not, and whether you meant to or not, you are building part of the same shared house that everyone else is always working on too.

6.43 Does the sun try to do the same work as the rain? Does a doctor do the same work as a farmer? Every star's position is unique from every other's, but if this were not true, the night sky as a whole would be less useful, and less interesting.

6.44 If people who have some power over us have a purpose for us, it wouldn't make sense for them to harm us, because they would be damaging what could otherwise be used in their favor.

If the people who have some power over us have a purpose for the overall group, but not for us specifically, we should see that what is best for the group will be best for us individually as a member of that group, and to be content with our place in that bigger picture.

If, however, no one has any power over us, or if they aren't giving any thought to exercising that power towards any specific purpose, then it is up to each of us individually to find and decide on a purpose for ourselves. We can determine what is useful to us by considering what is agreeable with reality, fitting for our character, consistent with reason, and considerate of others.

The other people we should be considerate towards are not determined by made up political borders. Though politically I am a citizen of Rome, as a person, I am a citizen of the world. Anything that is helpful and good for the community I am in is helpful and good for me.

6.45 Anything which everyone goes through is for the benefit of the universe. That is easy to see. If you look more closely, you'll also observe that what benefits any person also benefits everyone. "Benefits" here means practical usefulness, which is not good or evil on its own.

6.46 Even great spectacle will blur together if we see the same ones over and over again, one show after another, one sporting event to the next. This same thing happens in life as a whole.

Everything, everywhere, is more closely similar and repetitive than we're ready to admit. Before we know it, we're each wondering for how much longer the repetition will go on.

6.47 Think of the people, projects, and nations that are now gone. All we have left of them are stories. The most influential, well-known, or accomplished people, regardless of their fields or accomplishments, are all buried or ashes just the same, no matter whether that happened for them a long time ago or only yesterday. Why should accomplished people dread the inevitable? Why should anyone feel any different, even people whose names will be remembered by no one? The only thing which has real value is to live the life you have, in a way consistent with truth and fairness, being kind towards all people, even those who are dishonest or misbehaved.

6.48 When you want something to be happy about, consider the amazing qualities of other people who are alive at this same time as you. Think about one's energy, another's humility, someone else's generosity. These traits don't need to all be in one person—how often are they, at the extremes?—to still be a source of good that inspires us. Nothing can cheer us up more than seeing virtues in the character and actions of people alive today. Presentation of these good traits is abundant each day, if you'll only look for it. Keep an eye out for those.

6.49 Does it make sense to weigh how much you do, and not twice as much? Then why should we be unhappy to live for only so many years, and not twice as many? If you can be content with the amount of substance you have, be just as satisfied with the amount of time you have.

6.50 Do what your principles demand. Make a case to persuade others if they disagree, but be ready to act in spite of their disagreements. If someone uses force to stop you from doing what you should, find your calm, and then look for freedom in an action you can take for a different virtue.

Remember that your attempt would only have had an imperfect chance of working out. You know better than to aim at what is impossible. The energy you were going to use to do the right thing is only wasted if you give up on reassigning it to another good use.

Give yourself credit for initiating your correct course of action. Accept that to follow through further on doing it is outside your control in this case, which makes it no longer a valid next action. When that comes up, you've achieved acting on what you deemed worth acting on, even if it didn't happen.

6.51 People differ in what they see as good for them. Someone wanting to be a celebrity thinks about what other people want them to do, to get their attention, and this is their main measure for what makes an action good. Someone else, craving pleasure, sees as good the way each thing relates to their sensations, flavor or otherwise. But for an intelligent person, who understands the nature of reality, what makes an action good is if it was done to benefit the common good.

6.52 You have the ability to form no opinion of something. You can choose to give something no thought. You often decide, in the first place, what you will let in to pollute your thoughts. Material things outside you cannot, on their own, compel you to form any opinion of them, or make you think about them, or cause you to feel in any particular way. You do those things.

6.53 Being an attentive listener is a critical habit to develop. When you listen well, it is as if you are inside the speaker's mind, able to think how they think, seeing their reason and character.

6.54 What is bad for the hive is bad for the bee.

6.55 Would a ship's crew be mean to their captain? Would sick people be cruel to the doctor? It is reasonable to take into consideration how your actions and words affect the actions of people you currently depend on for your health and safety. Figure out some way to get along with those you have to get along with. You need their help, and they need your cooperation.

6.56 How many people who were born around the same time as you have already passed away?

6.57 If you're sick, even sweets may taste bitter. If you catch rabies, you'll avoid water. Among young kids, a ball can be a source of endless entertainment. Seeing how our condition affects our judgments, what is there ever to be angry about? Could misinformation, confusion, or lack of relevant knowledge be somehow less influential on a person's tastes than illness or childhood?

6.58 No one can stop you from living by your principles, in a way agreeable to your character. What the universe does to you is often unavoidable, but what you do about it is up to you.

6.59 What kind of people are impressed by popularity, who are giving their attention to someone based mostly on how many other people already gave their attention, first? These are

followers, of followers, of followers. What acts get approval from such crowds? The star soon has to follow their followers.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: Cooperation, collaboration, and contribution

7.1 When you encounter evil, or even what is mildly bad, recognize how familiar it is, similar to so many other things you've seen come and go before, learned about in history books, or stories that have always been a part of ordinary life. You knew to expect this, in a way, and you know that it won't last for long.

7.2 Your principles live through your thoughts. They only die if you stop thinking about them. It is up to you to keep breathing life into them, fanning the flames before they're too lost to be fanned.

You can decide what to think about, and what opinions to form. Given this, what is there to be troubled by in your thoughts? Anything outside your mind has no direct access to it. Master this, and stand tall.

It is in your power to reclaim your life. If your principles have weakened from disuse, recover them by thinking about how you looked at things before, and look at them that way again.

7.3 People can be measured by the things they do to stay busy. If what someone focuses on serves their own vanity, that has no more value to society than a dog chewing its bone, a fish feeding, or ants carrying bits about—which might actually benefit other ants. It is your responsibility to find or create clarity in all this noise, and, without too much pride, seeing to it that you busy yourself by doing something worthwhile.

7.4 In every conversation, listen closely to what other people say. Pay attention, as well, to what you and other people do, and look for the underlying reasons.

In discussion, think about the real objects that can be impacted by these words. See as a part of the dialog any material result that is likely to happen, if you don't somehow intervene. Talking about things, any time it's not just idle chatter, often leads to consequences outside of words.

In watching what people do, look beyond the immediate movement. Read human action like a form of speech. See through it to the meaning and significance behind each action. What it means may, or may not, be what the person actually intended to say or admit to.

7.5 Do you understand enough to be capable of the task at hand? If so, use your understanding like an instrument, to make right what needs to be fixed. If your understanding is lacking, then either you should get out of the way to leave it to someone who better prepared, or else do it as best you can for now, learning what you can as you go and turning to available help, driven by principle to do whatever you can—as long as you feel it will be more useful to the common good than if you were to instead not attempt this at all. All anyone can do is the best they can for now. How do you think the people who are better prepared became better prepared than you?

7.6 Think about how people who were once well-known celebrities have since been lost to oblivion. The countless people on the other side, cheering and adoring fans, all departed long ago too, just the same.

7.7 Don't be ashamed of seeking help, or letting someone help. Your task is to ensure your objective is complete. It shouldn't matter to anyone whether you do it alone, or if you're the one doing it at all, so long as it gets done, and done as well as it needs to be. If you're a soldier and have to defend a wall, whether that happens with another's help, or by finding someone better suited to do it, either way is infinitely preferable over your attempting to do it on your own and failing.

7.8 Do worry about hypothetical issues. Some will become real issues, soon enough, and when they do, you will have the same clarity and capacity to reason through them as you have now for dealing with the present. Do not add future problems which may or may not happen, if you cannot yet do anything about them, atop the present problems you can do something about. (Where the present affects the future, these are real problems in the present, not hypothetical.)

7.9 Everything is woven together, and connected somehow. Even things that are far apart are related by that distance as part of the universe's order. There is one universe, with everything in it, made from one pile of materials colliding and combining. There is one collective intelligence divided among rational beings coexisting in this single, present moment, which we all share.

7.10 Anything that exists as material will soon dissolve back into the distributed, undifferentiated substance that makes up the entire universe. Any cause that drives our actions, likewise, will soon dissolve back into our collective thoughts. Every memory of what happens, every thought that drove our actions, will soon enough wind up buried by time.

7.11 For a reasonable person, action should be consistent with reality—not wasted on a futile effort to change what can't be changed, or to show vain dissatisfaction with what is inevitable.

7.12 Stand tall on your own or someone else will have to hold you up.

7.13 When reasonable people are bound together in cooperation, we are like parts in a shared body. Picture yourself as a member of a system made up of all fellow rational people—not just the ones you know or interact with directly. You can fight for the same side in a war as people you'll never know. When you do good to benefit others, you help the entire system, the whole body of which you are a part. When you do good for others for the right reasons, and not merely from a mechanical sense of duty, unwanted obligation, or merely for its own sake, then you are also doing good for yourself.

7.14 Whatever happens outside of us, beyond our control, will happen the only way it can. Some people will complain over this, or try to find fault and blame, even in situations where fault finding cannot affect whether it will happen again, and even when no one is to blame. Unless we choose to see the inevitable as a deliberate evil, to judge as wrong what can't be any other way, then we aren't harmed by it. It went as well as it could have. It is in our power to accept this fact.

7.15 No matter what other people do or say, I must be a good person. That is up to me alone. Picture if gold had to actively try to keep its color and value, reminding itself to continue being gold. This is the way it is for us, in that the only way we will retain what makes us good to others and ourselves is by continual striving, and renewing our efforts. No one can do this for us.

7.16 A healthy governing mind should not disorder itself, panic itself, or give itself unnecessary discomfort. Though outside people or events may seem to provoke its sense of alarm and pain, it is only with our consent and active cooperation that these momentary, impulsive reactions are able to take hold, persist, and grow worse in our thoughts. Where the body is concerned, take care to reduce its suffering if you can, but most conceptual pain, such as fear, exists only in the mind, and only when we hold the door open for it to enter. The mind cannot be restricted or caged in the same way as the body, except to the extent it invents demands to hold itself to. The only obstacles that affect our freedom of thought are our other thoughts. Whether we place those in our way, or remove them, is up to us.

7.17 Happiness is a good thing—so why do our imaginations do to us what they do? Say goodbye to the part of your thoughts that see your positive current reality, then try to crowd that out with a negative future hypothetical. There's no need to feel anger towards that side of the mind; simply tell it that it is being dismissed from its place in shaping your mental guest list. You're removing its say in which thoughts to invite in or allow to stay.

7.18 So many people fear change of any kind, even change for the better. Tell me, though, what has ever happened without change? What is more foundational to the nature of reality than change? Can you take a bath without water changing? Can you eat a meal, without the food changing, before, during, and after you consume it? Can you enjoy any benefit of life, or anything else useful, without change being involved? See and embrace change then, because it is essential, unavoidable, and

necessary for your benefit, just as it is for the nature of the universe.

7.19 Each of our bodies is made up of the same substances as everything else in the universe, and so are carried through time in the same way, as if moved by rough river rapids. How many innovators, thinkers, and teachers have already been dispersed on time's rocks in the waves? Keep this in mind about every person, every animal, and every object. Why allow yourself to become upset over anything or anyone that is certain to wind up lost to complete oblivion soon?

7.20 There is only one possibility I am seriously concerned about: whether I will attempt to do something that is inconsistent with my principles and values. What could happen to confuse my intentions, leading to me doing something I understand is the wrong thing, or at the wrong time?

7.21 You will, soon enough, forget everything. Everything will, soon enough, forget you. This is not cause for sadness, or celebration. This is inevitable, just a part of nature.

7.22 We love people, even when they do wrong or make mistakes. This reminds us how much we all have in common. We all do wrong when we don't know better, behaving contrary to the way we intend, trying to do right but later finding what we thought at that time was wrong.

The person doing wrong unintentionally and the person wronged by it will both be dead soon.

Until then: as long as your ability to determine your actions, and reason about reality, is not somehow made worse than it was before, you have not been wronged or harmed.

7.23 The same materials wind up as part of a horse, then part of a tree, part of you, part of something else, in-between being part of many inanimate objects. Each arrangement is only temporary. The substance not only persists, but is itself as fully indifferent to coming apart, as it is every time some mix of it comes back together.

7.24 To be visibly annoyed or angry goes against the universe. If we make a habit of that, we end up not only forgetting how to show happiness, but maybe also forgetting how to experience it, for real, inside of us. In this way, you'd be forfeiting a tool from your arsenal of ways to get along cooperatively with others, so it is unreasonable to scowl all the time.

Are you visibly upset because of what you can't change or because of what you can? If it's the former, you're choosing to add an optional negative on top of one that will be the same either way. If it's the latter, you're only making it harder for yourself to do anything constructive about it.

Do what you can do, based on your principles. Unhappiness would be appropriate only if you were doing wrong, so do what you consider right, and then there's no reason to be unhappy.

7.25 Nature will turn everything you now see into other things. It has already done so. That's why you see things the way you do now. It's why you're here, at all, to see it. All material will continue being torn apart and reused, to keep the universe refreshed, up to date, and renewed.

7.26 If a person does you wrong, or offends you, see what a poor understanding that person must have of good and evil for them to have acted as they did. Feel sorry for them, instead of

being confused or mad about it. Similarly, when you make mistakes, it is because you do not know better based on your particular past experiences. Forgive them, as you should forgive yourself when you err due to what you did not know at the time. When you understand these acts arise from ignorance, and not malice or evil, it will help you be more kind to the people who wrong you and make mistakes that affect you. This kindness can help them more openly receive knowledge they need to see, so they won't make the same error again with someone else. Your patience with understanding and helping them grow is a contribution to the community.

7.27 Don't focus on what you don't have, but on building from what you do have. Practice gratitude with this simple exercise: focus on the facts in your life that you appreciate most, and consider how much you might have wanted them, if they were not already your reality. Be cautious, though, not to become so attached that you'd be disturbed and upset if these facts suddenly changed. Learn to be glad while you have it, and then to be glad you had it in the time you had it, without mourning when you no longer do as if you are worse off for having had it. The only thing that makes this unpleasant is the choice to be ungrateful for having once had it.

7.28 Learn to turn inward to rest, in the peace of your own thoughts. If this sounds unrealistic, because your thoughts are not calm, then there's work to be done. You can settle your thoughts. This is more straightforward than most people assume: do what is right and fair, limit your attention to what you can directly affect, and you will have a more tranquil mind to retreat to.



7.29 Stop using your imagination to stress yourself out over things that aren't really happening. Only you can tug on those strings, and only you can stop doing that to yourself.

Limit your attention to the present: what is happening now, and what you can do in this moment.

Distinguish what is happening to you, from what is happening to other people, because you can act the way you should, but you can't act for someone else the way you feel they should.

Separate in your thinking who is involved in an event, but also, what is the interplay of their roles, distinct from the specific individuals in them.

Consider what you're doing now from the perspective of how you'll think of it in your future.

If someone wrongs you, leave that wrong where the wrong took place, with the person who did that wrong. Do not pick it up and carry it with you everywhere you go. Let the person who committed the wrong be the one to bear it; they—and not you—are the one most harmed by it. They created this weight. It is up to you whether you will lift it, then complain about doing so.

7.30 Focus your thoughts on the people who are present, what they are each saying, what action is being taken, and which people are the ones doing it.

7.31 Carry yourself with simplicity, self-control, and fairness. Don't bother with strong opinions about whatever is neither a virtue nor a vice. Care for other people. Make yourself into who you want to be. Whether reality is more subject to laws of physics or providence, we can all agree we live in a world ruled

by law. It's a mistake to overcomplicate how we live—it is so much better to focus on a few simple rules we can know and follow, than on so many we can't keep any of them in mind.

7.32 Death is either a dispersal of our material parts, and with that the annihilation of the mind and its thought, or merely a change in location. Whichever it may be, there is nothing to worry about.

7.33 Injury, if it's severe enough, removes us from life and our ability to feel it. Any injury that lasts, then, is necessarily an injury we can bear. The tranquility in our thoughts is largely separate from most conditions of our body. Our ability to choose our actions by reason and justice is unharmed by bodily discomfort, and so it does not make our minds worse. The parts of us injured by pain are plainly harmed by such conditions, but the pain is nothing more than the body informing our thoughts about what is going on, making its local opinion of what's happening known to our mind, for us to do something about if we need to and are able.

7.34 Fame is like a message written in sand, quickly lost to wind and waves. Imagine the thoughts of people who most want fame, consider what they're like, what they must seek or avoid in life—and see that it is probably not a way we should strive to be, not even temporarily.

7.35 Plato taught us that our best thoughts should be about what is timeless, infinite, and about the universe as a whole. He explained that thoughts shouldn't be wasted on reacting to one immediate concern after another. Does our lifespan seem so great and important, on the scale of infinity? In our best thoughts, then, our own death cannot seem to be a great evil.

7.36 A leader's job is twofold: first, to do good for those led, and second, to absorb their blame.

7.37 Notice how the face is so easily molded by our thoughts, sometimes even revealing what we didn't intend, so that if we intend to be in control of our expressions we have to be careful about what we think. Our minds are even more easily warped by our thoughts than our faces, and so if we intend to prevent them from winding up in certain ways, we need to be at least as careful about our thoughts as we are to avoiding smiling in a gravely serious setting.

7.38 Don't get mad at inanimate objects. They can't care what you think in order to please you, and by allowing your frustration to fester, you're more likely to fumble it again, and worse. Your frustration with an object is not with the object itself, but yourself, and your rushing. Slow down.

7.39 Contributions we make to the thoughts shared among all people are not limited to expanding or editing books filled with facts. Contribute joy back into our common thinking, in a way that increases happiness for other people and for yourself.

7.40 People are born, and people die, like the sowing and reaping of corn.

7.41 Our collective understanding will find meaning anywhere we look for it, even in your loss.

7.42 Ally yourself with what is good and right, and you'll have the best people on your side.

7.43 When others are sad and grieving, you will not help them by feeling sad, too—that will only increase the total sorrow felt.

When others become wound up with excitement, don't follow them into their fervor—it will help everyone, including them, for someone present to be thinking clearly.

7.44 Plato explained, around 550 years ago, that a great person should not be concerned over their own personal life and death, but instead, with the question of whether each of their actions are fair or unfair, the deeds of a right person, or something an evil one would do.

It would be a mistake to begin by assuming we are good people, and so therefore whatever we do must be the act of a good person. To truly be good, we have to continually consider how we would judge someone else if they did what we are thinking about doing.

7.45 Plato continued, explaining that regardless of how we wound up in our current situation, whether we got ourselves into it or were assigned by a leader we follow, it's best to stand our ground, to serve our objective as best we can. He said this should be a greater concern even than danger to ourselves or our reputation that could come from seeing our intentions through.

7.46 Plato insisted that a life which is good and virtuous does not necessarily benefit from being extended arbitrarily, if, for example, to do so would involve losing those very traits. He said we each live only for a finite time, a limited duration no matter what we do, that there is nothing inherently good in longer life, or still being alive for its own sake. The question he felt we should prioritize is how to live the time we do have as best we can, and not merely how to live longer.

7.47 I recommend stargazing, and not just looking up at night, but giving them your attention, for so long that you can see their movements across the sky, as if you're moving with them. As you do this, remember everything is always in flux, one thing becomes another, or several others. These kinds of thoughts can help us momentarily escape our small, day-to-day problems.

7.48 Plato even expressed a thought similar to that, saying when we consider the problems of people, it helps to do so from an imagined place high above everyone, looking down. See their organizations, missions, workplaces, families, politics, births and deaths, relationships, dinners, morning routines, all from above. Even though this is in our imaginations, it helps us think of the issues differently than we do from a ground-level perspective, at a greater conceptual distance.

7.49 Think about the political overthrows and upheavals in the past. We sometimes seem to fool ourselves into thinking those are old history, as if it's now all sorted out and stable, but the future will continue to have these kinds of things happening, too.

It's easy to become too comfortable by assuming the future will be exactly like the present. The amount of change taking place over any span of time ahead of us will likely resemble the amount of change that took place during a similar length of time in the past.

Moreover, studying human life for 40 years won't show you many different situations than you would see in human life from ten thousand years. Whatever else changes, every action on the scale of society and politics is simply people being people. How could we be any other way?

7.50 As a prolific playwright and early philosopher of Athens said, “What comes from the ground, returns to the ground. What comes from the sky, returns to the sky.” Things dissolve back into their smallest pieces, coming apart until they soon become parts of different things.

7.51 The Athenian continued, “With fancy meals, expensive drinks, and dazzling entertainment, we search to find some way out from this stream that carries us towards death. Whatever way the wind blows in our lives, it is on us to withstand it. We have to find a way to do what needs to be done, and without complaining about it.”

7.52 Someone who is expertly skilled at an athletic contest is not necessarily more expert in any other way than a typical person—not in sociability, humility, discipline, readiness to handle life’s surprises, or in being patient with people’s imperfections.

7.53 When you’re able to do things in a way that is consistent with the best of our collective understanding, then there is nothing more to worry about. You will likely benefit from living in a way agreeable with your character, but do not feel any guilt from living right, or have any fear about what other people might say or think about your doing so.

7.54 It is always in your power, only up to you, whether you will find a way to be content in your present situation, acting in a way that is fair to others, and paying close attention to reality as you see it happen around you. Once you have mastered your ability in these aspects of thought, nothing unwanted from the outside will be able to work its way into your mind, unless you let it.

7.55 Don't worry over whether other people are living as they should. Look only at whether you are living as you should and always moving in the direction of your character. Is your life worse off because of what wildlife is doing that can't talk into doing otherwise?

Every living thing has to follow its own reasons and intentions. That is all any living thing can do. But whereas the impulses of non-rational beings will primarily serve themselves, we rational beings exist for the sake of one another, and we have reason to benefit one another.

The first principle for people is to be considerate and gentle with others. The second principle is to disregard the body's destructive desires and impulses, instead, guiding our actions using our ability to reason about the future. Though we have some traits in common with wild beasts, it's up to us whether we give priority to our intelligence or to these animal instincts. Which we allow to overpower the other will affect other people, and so we have a social responsibility to ensure our wilder impulses are tamed and secondary. The third principle in reasonable people is to avoid acting out of panic, to take steps to guard ourselves from becoming easily tricked into wrong thoughts or actions. Our thoughts should hold on firmly to these principles, like reins, to keep our lives from straying off the straight path.

7.56 Take this moment to imagine you died, right now, nearly instantly. Don't think of it as a far off, impossible hypothetical. This happens, even to people who seem healthy—autopsies find causes of death that routine doctor visits can't see. Imagine the life you were leading is ending.

What were you doing lately, or going to do, that if you die no one will take on in your absence?

From now forward, your life is a bonus. You could have just died, but you didn't. Use this gift of extra time to live better, more consistent with truth, fully accepting of what you can't change.

As for what no one would carry on or finish after you're gone: are you getting enough out of it that you should still keep carrying it on for yourself? Is there something else someone would pick up, if they could, but you haven't yet put it in good enough order for them to be able to do so?

7.57 Whatever life sends your way, appreciate it. Find a way to love what you are responsible for taking care of. As the person in that role, no one could be better suited to do it than you.

7.58 In each thing that happens to you, give attention to how this same thing played out for other people it already happened to. This does not mean to respond the same way they did, but instead, to consciously notice how their response to the situation worked out.

Did they treat what happened as a cause for sadness, puzzled that it was not what they hoped would happen, wasting their breath complaining about how they wanted it to go differently? If so, what good came from all their sadness, frustration, and confusion? None could.

Will you give in by reacting to the things beyond your control in the same bad way they did? Are you going to kick and scream against things that could not have gone differently? Doing that is picking the losing side in a fight against reality itself. There



could not be any course of thinking and action more fully against the ways of nature than deciding to reject the universe as it is.

When we give our thoughts over to what it is too late to change, we pull them away from making sense of what we can do.

Turn your contingency plans into your main plans. Adapt so well that whatever events, connections, and resources you have will seem as if you planned for them. If events beyond your control give you wood and a hammer, you could sit frustrated that it's not stone and chisel, or you could make things of wood to sell and buy some stone tools. Use what life gives you to work with, instead of telling yourself and others that you would do something if only you had been given some other start. A person who settles for that thinking would complain, all the same, if they had a stone and chisel. Build something other than excuses.

Your action is what matters, regardless of the context it's in. Action is the only way to change your context. Be careful of thoughts that will only prevent you from acting in the way you intend.

7.59 Look deep inside yourself, you will find a well of what is right. You can draw from this well anytime you need to, as many times as you need to. If you don't see it, then keep digging deeper. You'll find it, even if you temporarily lost it under other things. Everyone has one.

7.60 Body language, not just in how we converse or gesture, but also in how we sit up, stand up, or carry ourselves when we walk, is as expressive and meaningful as our facial expressions.

People should be able to tell from how we handle and use our body that we are intentional, deliberate, thoughtful, and aware enough of customs to be considerate of what others read into what we do, and how. On the other hand, we have to manage this without overdoing it, putting on some vain show of it, or coming across as unnatural due to trying too hard.

7.61 The art of living is more like hand-to-hand sparring than it is like a choreographed dance. To dance we learn steps, time it with music, and practice to anticipate what our partners on stage will do, being able to count on exactly when. With boxing or wrestling, we enter a contest ready to adapt, firm in our footing, but doing our best to remain unsurprised by our adversary's attempts to surprise us. We are expecting and braced for surprises. We act deliberately, with intensity, knowing that if we don't take action while we still can, we'll lose our chance to do so.

7.62 Who are the people you try to impress? Have you thought about what their guiding principles are? This is crucial, because whether you receive someone else's praise depends on your actions fitting their principles, not yours, whether or not yours and theirs are aligned.

When you look at their motivations and priorities, not only their opinions but why they formed the opinions they hold, you can break free from caring to impress them. Taking this exercise further, seeing the desires that drive them, can also make you more forgiving of the harm they cause unintentionally from their mistakes, seeing it as an ailment they live with, not an evil to fight.

7.63 No one wishes to be ignorant. Even if someone does seem to celebrate it, that harm originates from a level of ignorance they would be better off without. Each of us has only a partial, necessarily incomplete view of reality. Because of that, any given person may lack a sense for fairness, how to be reasonable, or being considerate of other people. Their failings are often involuntary. Wrong behavior must be caught and stopped, but if the underlying aim is to reduce the chance they'll do wrong again, you'll find the gentleness and patience of a teacher will better address ignorance than positioning them as your enemy.

7.64 Whenever you experience pain, remind yourself that there is no shame in it. Do not add mental discomfort, such as feeling embarrassed or anguished, as extra pain atop the physical discomfort. Most physical injury does not injure your ability to think rationally, or to keep your actions reasonable and fair. Philosophers who think about happiness have pointed out that pain is not intolerable, or forever, as long as you don't extend it in your thoughts to be longer than it already is. Many sensations serve a similar function as pain, prompting us to react to reduce injury, but aren't painful directly: drowsiness, being too warm or cold, or the pangs of appetite. Recognize these as another kind of pain, and conventional pain as being not all that different from mild feedback sensations like these.

7.65 Take care not to wind up hating people who feel hate towards other people. Maybe their own failure to live by this is what led them to become the way they are. Being more like them will not make them any less that way.

7.66 What should we consider when comparing the quality of character of two people? Is it who makes sacrifices for a more honorable cause? Could it be who argues most effectively for

what they believe in? Does it come down to who bears the greater difficulties with less complaining, or has put up a bigger fight against acting on orders they see as wrong?

Figure out what they base their happiness on. Is it grounded in whether they are fair to people, and considerate to others? Consider whether this person wastes their limited thoughts and short time by stewing over misdeeds and mistakes made by other people. Do they put themselves at the mercy of someone else's ignorance and confusion, becoming complacent in that situation instead of working to address or escape it? Is the person easily distracted, and regularly disoriented by what happens outside of their control? Do they act and speak as if what we know to be inevitable and unavoidable is intolerable—do they actively resist reality? Do they allow their body's impulses to direct their actions, rather than being guided by their reason?

7.67 Although all things are connected, and nature has intermixed you with the world, this does not prevent you from drawing a boundary to separate yourself, and what you can be accountable for, from the rest of the whole universe, which is not yours to be responsible for.

Remember that it is possible to be an upright person, living justly, thinking and making your choices well, and yet not have even a single person notice or take note of this. Someone seeing you live right is not the point. Bear in mind how much better it would be to live right for your whole life, even if you are never recognized for it by anyone, than to live unwisely and yet have people mistakenly praising you all that time, thinking you are better than you really are.

Very little is necessary to live a happy life, materially or in meeting our other needs. Living well is not subject to your success in a given field. It does not make any difference at all whether you succeed as a celebrity, a scientist, an athlete, or an artist. Do not use unrelated difficulties in these, or any other field, as an excuse to give up living right. It is up to you, and no one else, whether or not you will act with integrity, fairness, simplicity, courage, and consideration for other people's needs. This has nothing to do with your skill in any contest, it has to do with who you choose to be.

7.68 Live your life free from outside pressures. Be calm and content in your mind. If other people speak badly about you, or insult you, it's up to you to ensure they are wrong. If wild animals attack you, is your main concern correcting them, or getting to safety? Even if we are mistreated, keep a grounded perspective and internal tranquility, knowing you have been fair and just in your own decisions. This will give you the clarity of thought to see if there is a way out, or if there is not, then to accept calmly what can't be changed.

The common opinion most people discuss is often different from what is actually happening. You should be able to think about what's happening well enough to see through that confusion, to things more as they truly are. That perspective is easiest when we can think about a situation with some distance from it, and when we are careful not to allow ourselves to be concerned over the opinions other people may have about the way we make sense of things.

When any event happens, our response should be, "This is what I needed to happen. I needed new raw materials to exercise my virtue and reason, and now I have them to do so."

Whatever happens to nature or people, nature or people will manage. There's nothing more difficult than what we have survived before. If it seems new to you, it is still a variation of the past, but you missed it the last time. We are suited to what happens, and what happens is suited to us.

7.69 Perfection of character amounts to this: live each day as you would if it was your last, don't let yourself become so wound up that it leads you to say or do anything which you don't mean, don't be apathetic to what is going on and your ability to do something about it, don't let your words and actions disagree, and don't give other people a false impression of who you are.

7.70 In our stories about deities who never die, they never seem confused about people being the way people are, flawed, with so many who are basically bad. We know from our oldest stories that people have always been this way, it is in our nature as people, and it would be absurd to wish or expect it to be otherwise. We may have all improved considerably across the ages, but the starting point was so low that we're still this great mess we see today.

In spite of all that, immortals in our stories care for people however they can. They see the problems, and lend their powers to help. Yet here you are, with a short lifespan in which you have to endure people as imperfect as yourself, so much shorter than any deity would have, and only smaller abilities to give—will you claim to be more worn down by people's faults, giving up on the effort to care and help them however you can with your mortal skills? We expect deities to help beings like us who are so unlike them, but here you're the same type of being as the ones who desperately need your help. Guard against being too worn down to help them.

7.71 Anyone can break free from their faults, with work. It would be absurd not to try. No one can break free from the faults of other people with any amount of work. It would be absurd to try.

7.72 When you prioritize your mind's abilities, you are giving precedence to thinking rationally, making deliberate decisions, and cooperating with others. Everything else is below these.

7.73 After you have done a good act, and someone benefited from it, why wait for a third or fourth good thing to happen? The first good thing was you did a good act. The second good thing is someone benefited from it. Do you demand your reputation benefit from having done a good thing, or will you insist you receive a favor in return, and otherwise it undoes these two good acts? Don't be dissatisfied that two good things happened, instead of four. It is enough that you did right, and someone benefited from it. Go do another good act.

7.74 No one should grow tired of what is beneficial to them. Don't grow tired, then, of the benefits you gain from acting according to reason, and coming to terms with what you can't change.

7.75 Begin each day with tranquility remembering: everything came into being from nature or our collective thoughts, so what follows is either the next step in an intentional plan, or else there is no rational endpoint that this is all moving towards. Either it is in good hands, or you are completely and totally free. Either is a good reason to be calm.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: Dealing with the present as it is

8.1 Most contests for status are with people there's no reason to be concerned about our status with, except out of vanity. That attention is not worth having, let alone wanting, or working for.

It is too late to have lived your whole life the way you see as right, but starting now, you can make better use of the entire remainder. It is obvious to other people, as it is to you, when you are living in a way that falls short of the way you think you should live.

It's not helpful or realistic to daydream about living so rightly that you would be known for doing so. That isn't how living right works. Your career and life plans likely conflict with that anyway.

Throw away whatever concerns you have about what other people notice, think, or say about you. Be content to live the rest of your life wisely, accepting what you cannot change, in a way agreeable to your principles. Trust your ability to reason when you're choosing your actions. Don't let anything, or anyone, distract you from doing what you judge to be right.

You have wandered far and wide searching for the good life and happiness, but not found it anywhere—not in studying, money, attention, or simple pleasures. A life is not made good from those.

Where do we find a good life? Find it in this: having firm principles you live by in your thoughts and actions. These



principles should help you be more fair, self-controlled, courageous, and independent, rejecting immediately anything that will hinder the exercise of these traits.

8.2 Consider how each action you take will affect your self-respect. Are you going to regret and apologize for this later? Not long in the future, you will be dead, and everything as you know it will no longer exist. All we can be concerned with is whether in this present moment the actions we take are consistent with reality and considerate of others.

8.3 When we compare wealthy people and famous figures to more common people, what do we discover? Having so much to lose leads many powerful people to act badly, from insecurity over the risks to their fragile position, wealth, or social affairs. Even though they have the most potential to self-determine their actions, their positions often pressure them to care for more and flashier things, until they wind up frustrated—servants to their own possessions and ambitions. There is nothing wrong with nice things, so long as we don't become so attached that we grow anxious over fear of losing them, as if they defined us. Though they appear to bring a practical advantage by impressing people, anyone impressed by extravagance isn't worth impressing.

8.4 Realize that no matter how angry or upset you become over what other people do, they will keep doing the same things. Our instinct to get upset only works, if ever, with people who care about us—but strangers won't care if your heart bursts from your frustrations with them.

8.5 Here is what is most important: do not let people or events perturb you. Until we get this right, we are unable to think and act according to clear-minded reason. Before long, you will

cease to exist at all, becoming no one and being nowhere, exactly as has happened to every person before you. Until that time, fix your attention on being a good person. Take care not to lose your way by accident or from failing to pay attention.

Say what needs to be said, but always do so with a constructive tone, while maintaining your integrity and calm. Ensure you're living by the same standards you speak to—we can't give what we don't have.

8.6 The universe takes this present reality and turns it into a different one, by facilitating changes, and picking up what is now here to move it over there. Everything is a gradual recombination of what came before. The material is preserved, but in a new arrangement. Because of that, everything is familiar. There is no reason to feel the dread of uncertainty about a seemingly new experience since it's merely another mixture of the experiences you've already had, another variation of what has always happened.

8.7 Each living thing is fulfilled when it fulfills its purpose. As rational living things, our purposes are to defend our thoughts from anything false or misleading, to direct our actions to benefit other people, to keep our wants and concerns focused on what we can do anything about.

Just as the nature of the leaf is in the nature of the whole plant, the nature of a person is in the nature of society. Though a plant lacks the senses or reason to bypass obstacles in its way, as rational creatures we have the power to overcome whatever blocks our way.

At birth, nature and society together gave each of us whatever time, material, circumstances and experiences they could. It is up to each of us to put our share of it to its best use.

8.8 Even if we don't have much time for leisure, we don't need any free time in order to restrain our arrogance, to rise above the influences of simple pleasure and discomfort, and to break free of craving empty attention. We shouldn't be affected by people who are unkind and rude, except in trying to care for them, helping them to become kinder and gentler, if we can.

8.9 Don't ever blame your privileges, or find faults in advantages you have that others don't.

8.10 We experience regret when we blame ourselves for letting something good pass us by. We consider something to be good if it is useful. No one should regret missing out on a material pleasure. We're more likely to be glad we didn't eat what we shouldn't, or didn't end up in a compromising situation we shouldn't be in. On the other hand, we would regret having given in, feeling worse for doing so on top of the consequences. Because we don't regret when pleasures pass us by, pleasures are not useful, and what is good must be useful so pleasures are not even good.

8.11 Think about these questions whenever you encounter something: what's it made of, how did it come to be the way it is now, what is its purpose, what function does it serve, and how long will it exist or remain relevant? You could think of these, as well, about the people you encounter.

8.12 When you find it hard to get out of bed in the morning, remember it is consistent with your nature as a person to see, each day, what you can do to improve the lives of others.

Sleeping too much is something even irrational animals can do. The best of our nature is in doing what we can that they can't. There are plenty of bears, so let's leave the hibernation to them.

8.13 Whenever possible, pause to question your initial, surface-level impressions against what you know from natural science, psychology, and logic. These tools aren't only for a classroom.

8.14 Every time you meet a person, consider what their principles are. The only opinions of other people useful for you to know are their opinions of what is good and what is evil. Once you know a person's thoughts on pleasure and discomfort, status, or morality, it will be no surprise how they act, think, and speak. We can see why they might feel compelled to do what they do.

8.15 It would be absurd to be surprised by a grapevine producing a grape. It would be similarly nonsensical for a doctor to be frustrated by a person with a fever showing up, or a boat captain becoming annoyed by uncooperative winds.

Find a way to be content with the kinds of challenges you prepare and position yourself to be trusted to handle. Every role deals with difficulty, you mostly only see the difficulties in yours because people in other roles are handling the other difficulties before they reach you.

8.16 If you change your mind, based on new information that shows you your mistakes, that is exercising your freedom. Other people don't force your thoughts to change, they add to your information, and you then use your judgment, based on your updated information. Stubbornly defending being wrong is a trap that can only prevent you from becoming more right.

8.17 If there's something you wish wouldn't happen, and you can determine whether or not it will happen, don't let it happen. If something shouldn't happen, but it is not up to you to determine, who is there to blame? Should we direct our anger at the laws of physics and chemistry or at another person's confusion which results from their inadequate past experiences? Do people who see the world spiritually blame what they believe in for allowing it to happen? None of those options make any sense. Blame no one.

If you are able to, correct the confusion responsible for the unwanted action, or find a way to interrupt the cause and effect leading up to it. If you cannot prevent it from happening again in the future, at least do something about this specific occurrence. If you cannot even do that, what good will it do for you to spend unhappy thoughts and anxious heartbeats finding fault and pointing fingers? That would be a careless waste of your short time.

8.18 When something dies, it's still in the universe. The parts, elements, and spark all came from here, were always here, and will remain here forever. Nature changed it, and in the same way it changed what was not alive into life, it can change what was alive into what is not. We dissolve back into the same ingredients the universe brought together for us to borrow. These elements continue to change, and even if most will never breathe or speak again, some parts may find a way back into being part of what else is alive.

8.19 Each thing exists for some purpose: it's as true of a horse as it is for a vine. Even the sun, forever unreachable in the skies, plainly has a purpose. Ask yourself: what is your purpose? Is the horse's purpose, the vine's purpose, or the

sun's purpose simply to enjoy pleasure and avoid discomfort until it dies?

8.20 Nature does not place special importance or disregard on any part of its process. The end is not more significant than the beginning, or any moment in the middle. When someone throws a ball up in the air, is it more important that it's thrown, caught, rising, or falling? Is any part of that harmful, or helpful? It is simply what happens. Is it more good when a bubble stays together, than when that bubble bursts? Does the universe prefer a lit candle over an unlit one, or care whether a cloud is forming or dissipating?

8.21 Put the body you have to good use. Test it, within reason, to figure out what it's made of. Don't settle for only knowing it while you're young, only to ignore it later. As it grows old, see how it changes. When you become sick, look and listen to discover things about it you usually miss.

Life is short. This is true for people who are famous, and people who are fans. It's true for people who are remembered, and the people who remember. We'll only see a tiny area of the world, since even if we travel, our tiny area moves with us.

Not everyone can find each other agreeable. We may not even find ourselves agreeable.

The whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space.

8.22 Give your whole focus and attention to the task at hand. Whether you're thinking, acting, or speaking, put all your concentration into what you're doing, for as long as you're doing it.

If you make up your mind to endure today well, you'll wake up stronger tomorrow.

8.23 If I am doing anything, I should do it for the benefit of people. If I am experiencing an unfortunate accident, I should accept it, recognizing it as an act of the universe, which is behind everything that has ever happened.

8.24 Picture your bath water at its worst: oily, sweaty, and dirty. We get into it foul, then to become clean, we leave our filth in it. Look at your past like used bathwater. It looks disgusting? That filth is what washed off. What you left behind is why you got out better than you went in.

8.25 Each of us helps bury others, until it is our turn to be buried. We see others to their graves, until it is time for others to see us to ours. This is how it has always been, for everyone, for all of human history. It happens to the clever and to the proud—everyone will die the same as everyone else.

Some people are not remembered, even for a very short time. Others are long-remembered, if inaccurately, as heroes in tales. Consider how many wind up in fables, and still manage to be forgotten. Just as your body will be scattered back into nature, your essence will also be extinguished, no longer whole.

8.26 What to do to be content: help others, disregard the allure of easy pleasures, be fair and reasonable in your judgments, and seek to learn about what goes on in the universe.

8.27 Consider these three relations to yourself: the environment in relation to your body, the collective thoughts

from society's past in relation to your mind, and the lives of people around you in relation to your own life.

8.28 If pain is an evil to the body, then the body will signal its complaints. We have the power in our thoughts to remain tranquil, to see pain not as evil, but as mere communication from your body to your mind. All your opinions, impulses, desires, and struggles with rejection exist only in your thoughts. Evil cannot get into your thoughts unless you let it in, or grow it there.

8.29 Reduce your anxious thoughts by reminding yourself you have the power to protect your thoughts from excessive passions and vices, or any other disturbance. You can see things for what they are by looking closely, and then regard or disregard each according to your own assessment of their worth. This is the greatest power we're all born with.

8.30 Whether you're speaking to powerful people or common people, either way, speak plainly. Do not try to impress people with what you say. Use language to convey your point.

8.31 When you think back to someone in history who passed away, keep in mind that not only they, but everyone they knew all passed away, too. In many cases, there were no descendants at all, ending a line that traced all the way back—the first and last without a successor.

8.32 You have a responsibility to act deliberately, one action at a time, accepting that each action might come out imperfectly. If you earnestly attempted the act you intended to, doing it as well as you could, then be satisfied.



No one can get in the way of you doing what you intend to do, as well as you can do it. “But,” you may counter, “can’t something block me from taking action?” Nothing can interfere with your actions when you remain fair, calm, and considerate. You may still wonder, “couldn’t my activity literally be stopped?” When you get to that point, and see clearly that is happening, with a calm mind, you’ll realize it has to be worked around, wasting no effort on pushing against what cannot be moved, instead spending your same effort to find or create another way forward.

8.33 Accept gifts, wealth, and good luck without boasting or pride. But be prepared to lose them.

8.34 How shocking, and less useful, a hand, foot, or head is if it’s cut off from the rest of the body? It is the same when a person severs themselves from reality by hating circumstances they have no hand in or by acting uncooperatively and unkindly towards other people.

We are born crying due to rejecting every fact of reality which we are helpless to do anything about, but grow into part of civil society as we shift more of our attention from worrying over what we cannot do, to what we can. If you become detached from reality or society, you can rejoin us as soon as you are ready. The collective door is always open, allowing you to be a part of civilization’s collective thoughts again, and to regain your footing by directing your decisions usefully. In this way, it is, thankfully, unlike most separations, since rarely can dismemberment be undone by rejoining. Recognize this major difference, and act on this opportunity by deciding to reconnect with society and reality the moment you realize your behavior has created distance.

8.35 This is among our best powers: to turn who or what stands in our way into an advantage, converting them, or it, into a part of what we're doing. We share this power with nature's devastating abilities; it's exactly what we see in tornadoes, volcanos, and wildfires, except whereas we see those as causing disorder, we can use it to bring order where it's needed.

8.36 Don't stress out thinking about your entire life. Anyone can be overwhelmed by trying to confront every trouble they've ever had and every trouble they might ever have. Our abilities are suited for dealing with the present, and only with a tiny part of the past or future to the extent we can relate those from the present moment.

Ask yourself this about anything that happens to you in the present: can you tolerate it? Can you endure it? You'll find you can, in this moment, and the next, for every moment that remains.

Everything happens only in the present. When you can bear the present, you can bear anything. The past and future can't hurt you, unless you choose to imagine something like them into the present. The more you bring your attention to bear on here and now, keeping it there, the freer you'll be from the burden of what falsely feels as if it's the past and future weighing on us. The past and future don't exist—those are thoughts you've chosen to have about the past and future.

8.37 When someone passes away, should everyone else they knew spend the rest of their lives grieving in a graveyard, next to their tombs, holding their ashes? Of course not. That's absurd.

If living people did this, could the dead even be aware of it? Even if the dead could be aware of it, is that what we think they want the remainder of their loved ones' lives to consist of? Dwelling on it? Doing it will not help the dead, but it will cause lasting harm to the people who are still living. If we could ask the dead what their wants are, doesn't it seem more likely they would prefer their loved ones to keep on living their lives? What do you want life to be like for the people who help bury you? If deceased people need the short time left in people's lives to be spent visiting their remains, what about the infinitely long stretch of time after their last mourner passes away, too?

The body, after our mind is done with it, is little more than a flesh sack of blood and bones, dust packed together by tight wrappings, soon then long after having a foul smell. Admitting this is not an insult to the person to whom it belonged, because that corpse is not the person. To deny this or to insist otherwise, that is the insult and error, mistaking that leftover gathered material for a person.

8.38 If you can get accurate and comprehensive information, do so, and then use it. Always remember, though, that information alone is not enough, and it cannot make decisions for you. You can have all the information, and it can all be correct, but you will still need to apply your careful reasoning and judgment to make sense of what it shows, and to choose your actions.

8.39 Actions that contribute to the common good are usually the best to pursue. Personal pleasure does not hold up as an end in itself—and it runs contrary to the virtue of self-control.

8.40 If you can avoid thinking about your pain, not constantly reforming and feeding into frustrated opinions or unpleasant

judgments about it, you can protect your mind from it. If there is an unsightly view out your window, tying up your thoughts and words daily to complain about it will not make it more pleasing, but it will make one problem into two.

You may object that there is more to you than your thoughts, because after all, you have a body to deal with, too. That is true, but that is exactly what this is about: if a part of you is injured, allow that part to form its own judgments and complaints, leaving it at that. You aren't helping it get better by adding more and other kinds of pain to yourself by giving your thoughts to it. If your foot hurts, and you've already done what you can about it for now, then you are better off with a hurting foot and your mind thinking as clearly as it can about other things, than a hurting foot and your mind obsessed by thinking over and over, "this is not fair, my foot shouldn't hurt, I should not have done what I did, why me, I wish this wasn't the case right now."

8.41 Anything that blocks an animal's senses to perceive, or constrains its ability to move about freely however it wishes to, is doing evil to it. We might even think about unnecessary obstacles limiting a plant's growth as the same sort of evil. For a reasoning person, too, what interferes with our ability to reason and to act on our reasoning is this same sort of evil against us.

Equally importantly: whatever does not do this is not evil against you.

Does discomfort or desire for simple pleasures affect your ability to reason, or to act on your reasoning? Perhaps to a limited extent, but mostly to whatever degree you help them to. Remember, also, this important difference between animal

nature and an intelligent person's nature: most things that would hinder an irrational animal are, at most, a brief inconvenience for a reasoning person. If you are physically blocked from a destination, your animal nature might instinctively see this as an evil to struggle against angrily, to the point of self-harm—but, when you calm down to apply your reasoning to the same barrier, and have mastered the acceptance of things you cannot change, then you have not been injured or even truly impeded. You won't panic into yanking or thrashing against restraints you can't break, instead saving or redirecting all of that energy to what you figure out is most likely to put you on the other side of it.

Whatever jail cells or restraints people devise, no one can hinder the basic use of your thoughts. Hazards, weapons, politicians, and insults don't have access to your mind. Only you can control the boundaries of what you'll welcome to trouble you. It's up to you whether you will choose to invite into your sphere of concern anything you are powerless to do anything about.

8.42 Have you ever intentionally caused someone else pain? Surely, some people have, but most reasonable people have not, with one significant exception: the pains that we cause ourselves. On what basis have you formed this opinion that you somehow deserve unnecessary pain, seeing as you wouldn't treat anyone else in your life as deserving of it?

8.43 Different things make different people happy. What makes me happy is to feel firm in my self-control, not turning my back on people I am reasonably able to help, giving the benefit of the doubt by assuming good intentions, making the best of the surprises life throws my way, and being ready to adapt each

situation to what I need it to be—as well as adapting myself into what life needs me to be.

8.44 Look at the present moment as a gift to yourself.

People who are concerned about whether they'll be known after death miss that people alive after us will be no better than the contemporaries we can hardly stand now. Everyone after us is going to pass away, too. Why should we care at all what people will say of us after we expire?

8.45 No matter where the stormy waves of life carry you, find a way to keep your mind tranquil. This is best achieved by keeping our actions consistent with our intentions, and our intentions consistent with the character and principles we decide on for our thoughts.

Is finding ourselves in another place or situation enough to justify being unhappy, feeling ill, or out of sorts? Should something as trivial as where our head is physically located cause our thoughts to darken, crave, struggle, or fill with fear? There is no reason for any of that. Respect your mind by allowing it to have the same thoughts regardless of your head's place or situation—especially if the place or situation came about from factors beyond your control and choosing. Your body has to be someplace, but your thoughts are not confined to only thinking about that place.

8.46 Whatever happens to a human is in line with human nature, much as whatever happens to an ox is compatible with the nature of an ox, or what happens to a rock is compatible with the nature of a rock. Given whatever happens to anything is as usual, and consistent with its nature, what is there to

complain about? The universe can't bring anything you are unable to bear.

8.47 If something external is harming you, remember that the majority of your trouble is not from the physical event happening to your body, but from tangling up your mind over the unfairness of it. You are able to free yourself from those destructive thoughts the moment you decide to.

If, on the other hand, what is hurting you begins from inside, about your mind and character, what is stopping you from changing the way you think for the better? No one else can see it happening, but even if they somehow could, no one but you would be able change it.

If what troubles you is that you are not taking a certain action, failing to follow through on what you decided to be your best course of action, how can complaining about that difficulty possibly take up any less energy than starting to do the action itself instead?

Maybe you see something as stopping you from proceeding, a challenge you think is too great to overcome at this time. When that's the case, there's nothing to be unhappy about or to blame yourself for, because then you are not the reason why it isn't happening—it can't, yet.

Even if you feel something is so important that it should be your top priority, if you are certain you are not ready to overcome the obstacles to doing it and cannot see how to become more ready, then go on about other things. You should feel just as satisfied as someone who is able to do more about it and is doing it. You are each doing everything you can to help. For many people, and for many unfortunate events in the world, the

amount we can do might be nothing. When we find the strength to truly accept that, we become free to do what we can about something we can do something about.

8.48 Your mind is untouchable. It can be calm and collected within itself, doing what it chooses. One of the few risks to it, which you must always be vigilant to catch, is if your mind starts to focus on what is unreasonable for it to do. No one else can see you doing this, or save you from it even if you tell them it's happening. Only you can detect it, only you can fix it, and the sooner you catch and resolve it, the easier it will be to address. For your thoughts to have a firm and useful foundation, your judgments have to be well-informed by reason and grounded in reality.

Extreme passions are a common cause leading us to attempt what is not going to work. This is why a mind that doesn't give up control to passions makes for a safer bunker to retreat to. If you invite such a powerful enemy to come into your shelter, and allow them to essentially live there or come and go as they please, then you have left yourself with nowhere to escape.

Anyone going through life who has not heard or figured out this point is missing a valuable lesson. Anyone going through life who does know it, yet fails to make use of it, is even more unfortunate, because they know how to make themselves safe, but have chosen not to.

8.49 In picking the right words to use, even in speaking to yourself, say only what objectively happened, leaving out interpretations, elaborations, and exaggerations that could amplify the harm. When used carelessly, words can make an already bad situation unnecessarily worse.



If you find out someone says bad things about you, leave it at that. Do not add onto it a grand story about how this hurt your feelings, is part of a grander scheme to somehow sabotage you, or imagine that they said all sorts of things which they did not actually say.

If you see your child is ill, that is what you know, and that is all you should say. Do not become swept up with theories about how your child might be in mortal danger, or even say the child is suffering, if that is not exactly what you directly observe. Focus on what you know to be the case. Do not add more to it from your imagination, playing out worst-case scenarios.

You can calmly seek expert input, and take steps to better prepare for worsening conditions, without throwing yourself into a panic. This also ensures you're able to answer expert questions with actual facts they need, with a clear mind, not polluting their information with your being flustered, or defeatist. To spiral into distress can only impair your ability to navigate this situation as well as you are otherwise able to. Things rarely get worse than we observe, except to the extent we make it worse in our thoughts. If we replace those thoughts with reasonable action to be ahead of the risk, we can lessen even our rational fears about events catching us unprepared.

Would it help matters, in any way, to tell the child, "you are very ill," over and over? Would it help, likewise, to tell yourself this, as a parent of the child? Do what you can about it, at each stage dealing only with what you observe. Recognize that calm action will help the outcome better than stewing in possibilities that have not happened. If you handle it with a clear head, and the outcome is not what you wanted, you will know you did what you could, but this was beyond what you could have handled better.

*[Outside note: there's an important connection drawn here in the book How to Think Like a Roman Emperor: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, by Donald J. Robertson: in modern Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) practice, the problem described here of exaggerating a negative story to ourselves is referred to as "catastrophizing." It refers to thinking, speaking, and dealing not with what actually is happening, but with unintentionally added dramatic details to a story we tell ourselves and others, which in turn increases the severity or likelihood of consequences to interpersonal relationships, career challenges, our habits, and more. Donald Robertson even presents a case in his book documenting a connection between Stoicism and the origins of practices that led to CBT. If nothing else, I see it as encouraging that mental health professionals incorporate a similar way of thinking to their research-backed recommendations for people dealing with anxiety, addiction, depression, marital problems, and a variety of other common issues. Disclaimer: while I plainly believe philosophy can be practical and useful, I do not recommend thinking about it as an alternative to, or replacement for modern, licensed therapists.]*

8.50 If you bite into food and find it rotten, toss it out. If you're walking and find thorny weeds in your path, step around them. That is enough. You do not need to pause and complain aloud or get stuck pondering the unfairness of these inconveniences in the world.

Accepting how reality works is as simple as taking in that food goes bad, and thorns grow freely. These rough things in life happen for the same reason the woodworker's shop fills with sawdust, shavings, and scraps, that is, without them, the parts we do want couldn't exist. A carpenter, at least, has

somewhere to dispose of the mess, but there is no place outside of nature for leftovers to go, so instead we witness decay and other processes to disperse or repurpose every single bit of what we'll experience in life.

This is why nature does not need more things added to it, and also does not need its decay carried away someplace else. The universe is composed of what it has always worked with, is working with all of it at once right now, and these are the same materials it will always have.

8.51 Don't drag your feet when it comes to taking action, don't ramble without an intended point to communicate, and don't spend too much time thinking without directing it towards a purpose. Don't hide yourself from the world, but on the other hand, also don't let yourself bubble over into exposing too much, as though everyone else wants to learn every detail about you.

Take care not to become or stay so busy as to have no time left for leisure. If you have to make tradeoffs or compromises to maintain some leisure, the tradeoffs will be worthwhile.

If people hurt you, get in your way, or say bad things about you, don't let that change your mind about being cooperative, thoughtful, self-controlled, and just. If someone stands by a spring of drinkable water and swears at it, can that make the water coming out of it any less pure or safe? If someone throws mud into it, the mud will promptly be dispersed and carried off, leaving it unpolluted. Consider how you can be like the spring with the resilience of your best qualities, limitless and continuously outpouring, not like a standing well which could be ruined by simple poisoning. Reinforce your best traits by exercising them continually, hourly, undisturbed by any

attempts at interrupting them—doing this simply, humbly, and freely, as the only way you can be.

8.52 If you don't know about the reality of the universe then you can't know about yourself. You are not only in the universe, and from the universe, you are a part of the universe, no less than anything else. If you haven't considered the purpose of civilized society, then you haven't considered your own purpose, because in the same way, you are not only in and from it, you are an equal part of it. What can we say about people who don't know themselves or their purpose and yet seek praise from crowds of people who, also, do not know themselves, or their purpose? If you know the right thing to do, then you do not need their approval. If you don't know the right thing to do, then their approval can not make up for that. They can't answer this for you, or save you from the consequences of never figuring it out. You don't need their approval, and getting their approval is not the same as doing the right thing.

8.53 Would you care about receiving praise from a person who insults themselves three times each hour? Are you worried about gaining the respect of people who don't respect themselves? People who regret everything they do don't respect themselves—consider how common this is.

8.54 Much as you draw breath from the air around you, let your thoughts draw intelligence from our collective knowledge. When our ideas are in harmony with thoughts that came before us, we pick up where others left off, benefit from lifetimes of refinement, and can reach a point which is more useful to contributing back into shared knowledge. Our collective learning is distributed in other people's thoughts, everywhere, all around us, ready to be taken in, like the air we breathe.

8.55 Most bad behavior can't harm the universe at all. Nature is resilient, and indifferent to what we can do to it. Most of what we casually refer to as harming nature is, in reality, a concern over how a change could harm, inconvenience, or otherwise affect people, with nature used carelessly as a weapon or a compromised resource. The universe and earth do not care.

Most evil doesn't harm anyone else, because it's unable to compromise another person's ability to think and act according to their reason and virtues. The person most harmed is the one who has violated their reason and virtues to deliberately act unsocially. They can release themselves from this self-destruction at any time, just as soon as they decide to use their short time better.

8.56 My self-control is as separate from anyone else's as my body is separate from theirs. Though we exist to help one another, moving forward what we know together, someone else's evil action is not my evil action. Tranquility in your thoughts from living according to reason and virtue does not depend on who else, or even if anyone else, is living right, too.

8.57 Sunlight spills onto earth continuously, its light carving sharp shadows, passing easily through the smallest cracks. Anything in the way, blocking the light, catches its glow and heat exactly where they meet. The light never slides off or slips past.

Your knowledge should be like the sunlight: extended straight to where it meets the world, but not pushing, not violent or forceful where it reaches opposition. At the same time, and in the same way, when what you know reaches the limit of where it can shine, don't stop shining fresh light on the edge, but also don't, any more than sunlight would, slip to the side with a

mistruth, or fake what you know, to slide past into where there should be shadows. Let it illuminate what it finds. If someone hides from your light, they are robbing themselves of it. Recognize that someone else's shine might reach places yours does not.

8.58 Anyone fearing death fears either ceasing to exist, or a different way of existing. If you cease to exist, you will not feel harm. If you exist in a different way, you will not cease to exist.

8.59 People exist to care for one another. If someone seems unclear about this, either help teach them the importance of this, if you can, or else find some way to tolerate them peacefully.

8.60 An arrow flies fast and straight, very differently from how thoughts tend to meander. If you concentrate, however, and are completely clear in deciding your exact current purpose—cutting off any other possibility—your thoughts can fly to the target faster and straighter than an arrow.

8.61 Leave the door to your thoughts wide open. Trust and allow other people to enter. Allow yourself to enter the thoughts of other people who are similarly brave, and who have a clear enough conscience to leave the door to theirs open as well.

## CHAPTER NINE: Everything isn't on you to fix

9.1 When people act in an unfair way, the unfairness extends beyond the people involved. The toll it takes on people affected directly impairs their ability to fulfill their roles in the community as well as they could, in turn affecting everyone else around them.

Remember: every rational creature exists to care for one another, to benefit each other, and never to deliberately cause hardship. Anyone going against this is going against civilization.

Dishonesty damages society in much the same way. Intentionally lying to people is, plainly, an outright defiance of reality. If we unintentionally spread a mistruth due to our own confusion, these words are still at odds with the universe, poisoning our shared thinking, doubly if we do so with confidence leading others to take our word for it. For this reason, it is vital for us not to speculate confidently on topics in which we lack relevant expertise and do not know with high certainty. If we must speak about them, then we must also clearly communicate the weakness of our information and the extent of our uncertainty.

How does this relate to a person who was misinformed and confused because they received bad information? It is on each of us to be vigilant, guarded against speaking or acting contrary to truth and reality, and that means checking our facts, and checking our sources. There is no one else who can bear the responsibility for this on our behalf. Nature gives each of us the powers to doubt, to verify, to untangle falsehood from truth, or to simply hold back on forming and sharing opinions until we're

appropriately confident we can speak correctly about the subject.

People who chase simple pleasures as good, and flee from all discomfort as evil, live contrary to what rational creatures exist to do. Such a person is sure to end up complaining, insisting on frequent disagreements with reality and the nature of the universe itself. They will get upset that some undeserving bad people wind up with more pleasures or fewer pains, while some deserving good people might go through more pains and have fewer pleasures. Worse still, they might take this wrong way of looking backwards, and assume who has more pleasures is good, and who suffers more pain is evil.

Deciding to frame discomfort as equivalent to evil has another downside: it makes a person fear many things that must happen in life. This amounts to choosing to be unhappy by picking an unwinnable fight against reality.

When a person equates pleasure to good they are trivially manipulated by rewards, no longer avoiding injustice through their own drive or reasons, but for medals and to avoid imprisonment. This makes for a weak person who has to be policed at all times, or else will stumble through a life of selfish chaos, hurting others.

We need to be indifferent to most of what the universe shows no preference over. Pleasure and discomfort would not both exist, if they didn't each have a place. They would not be distributed so arbitrarily and unfairly, independent of deserving or undeserving if they were raw good or evil.

It's wrong, then, to disrespect reality's need for discomfort, death, and even dishonor. The universe applies these



indifferently and unevenly, showing no preference for one side over the other. Cause and effect follow mechanically from the principles of the universe.

9.2 It would be nice, if it were possible, to go our entire lives without learning firsthand what it is like to ever be dishonest, hypocritical, proud, or wanting excess. The next best thing we can strive for is to develop a genuine distaste for these ways of being, before it's too late for us. Are you feeding your appetite these poisons, having failed to see them for the plague they are? These are pathogens of the mind, far worse than any bodily disease. The disease of bad character can spread not only from direct contact, but by seeing or hearing about living examples, conveying a sense it's justified, excused, and a normal way to be. Instead of decaying our body, it poisons the link from our thoughts to reality, reason, and the laws of nature.

9.3 Do not feel anger about death. Come to peaceful terms with everyone's death, including your own, because it is as certain as the sunset, unavoidably a part of being alive in the universe. Your chance to be both young and old, to learn and mature, to get teeth and gray hairs, to give birth or help other people grow, none of that would be possible if the countless people before us had not already dissolved back into the world. Death is an essential part of all this.

I do not mean we should be careless or impatient about death. We can dislike unnecessary violence. When there's a choice between living and dying, all else being equal, prefer life over death. But there cannot always be a choice and all else will not always be equal. As we prepare ahead of time for a childbirth, we can prepare ourselves for every life to become a death.

Consider the morality of most strangers we'll leave behind. There's no reason to despise or be offended by people as they are—gently help the ones you can, be tolerant of the ones you can't—but recognize that most people you're departing from aren't living by the same principles as you. Maybe, if all people lived and acted sensibly, and found peace with what they can't change, we might get wanting to extend our time among them all. We know enough of them better than that, and can see there is some burden in living with these people. When our time is up, passing away will free us from any concerns we now hold about somehow losing ourselves and winding up more like them.

9.4 When people do wrong, they're doing wrong to themselves. When people are unfair, they are unfair to themselves. Whatever we inflict on others will cause who we are to rot away.

9.5 It can be just as wrong not to do or say the right thing as it is to do or say the wrong thing.

9.6 Let it be enough that in this moment you guide your thoughts with honesty and reason, your kind actions can improve the lives of others, and you are at peace with what you cannot change.

9.7 Don't let your imagination get carried away, spiraling on fears about what isn't happening. Dismiss the natural instinct for insatiable, excessive craving, instead seeing how modest and reasonable your actual needs are. Always keep your mind fully engaged in how you direct your actions and which matters you choose to give your finite thoughts to.

9.8 Wild animals without reason can barely make sense of life alone, but among people—with a reasoning intellect and verbal communication—we draw from and contribute back into a single, shared mind. You can see this in how the community's accumulated thoughts you learned from gave you advantages compared to the ideas a person could draw from a thousand years ago.

Our own knowledge will soon be lost with us. Whatever we learned that we can contribute back into the collective mind, by documenting it or discussing it with others, will outlast us. We are not the endpoint for knowledge. We are more like ants bringing bits back to the colony to share, and so it can be drawn from who needs it. In the same way we share the same earth, the same sun, and the same atmosphere, everything we see, and even the way we see it, comes from the same common knowledge we work on together.

9.9 When we participate in something, we wind up drawn to others who are like us. If you play a sport, you'll meet others who share the traits and thoughts that led you to each play the same sport. If you make music, you'll meet people who share some parts of what led you to do that. If you take an interest in any particular skill, subject, or career, you will, again, surround yourself with people who are, in ways related to the shared situation, somehow similar to you.

This is also true at a higher level: everyone who contributes to our common knowledge becomes, through that participation, drawn to find one another. The more involved you are in this shared effort, or the more significant your contributions are to it, the more likely you will find others who are more like you in the ways which drew you to lend a hand.

This is no different than how animals, even without reason, form swarms, herds, and flocks. Like is drawn to like, then stays nearby when it finds it. This effect from bugs and beasts pulls our strings just the same, except we're far better equipped than they are to overcome obstacles, spot a fake or mistaken identification, and to change our circumstances by intention. Instead of swarms, we form political communities. Instead of herds, we form friendships, and extended families. Instead of flocks, we go to forums of people who share similar challenges.

This doesn't divide us into isolated islands, because each of us winds up in multiple groups. Additionally, as we gain experience, rather than shrinking how many people are like us, we expand the number and variety of people we can relate to with our experiences.

Although this is so natural that wild animals do it, like being drawn to like, many intelligent people lose this desire to find one another and come together. Most people who overlook or resist this drive will eventually be captured by it, going back sooner or later to the impulse to no longer be separated from people like them.

9.10 People, our collective knowledge, and the universe itself all bear fruit in season. We speak only about fruit growing from vines and trees, but it's not unique to them. Reason bears fruit, enough for itself, and to share with others. Just as we see from any fruit, with time and the right conditions, any of reason's seeds may grow into a source for another generation of fruit.

9.11 Help people who do wrong, if you can, by teaching them how to change for the better. If you can't do that, use this chance to practice your patience. We all benefit when society can be gentle in how we handle wrong actions that result from

honest confusion, or simple gaps in a person's experience. This creates the opportunity to learn and recover from missteps, to go on to thrive and succeed. Before the whole of society can catch up to being more like this, it is first and foremost solely up to each of us to lead the way with our own behavior.

9.12 Don't go about your efforts in life as if you're a frustrated servant, seeking other people's pity, or wanting other people's admiration. Even if your original motivations are unselfish, your intentions will soon grow to become selfish if you let yourself be concerned with other people's perception of what you do.

Hercules fought the lion at the orders of a lowly king. He was punished for succeeding: forbidden from re-entering the city and given even more demanding challenges. Yet, without overcoming this stage, he would never have become Hercules. Regardless of how cowardly a person gave the task, children of the town were still saved by the beast being slain. If the townspeople had not learned it was Hercules who saved them, would this deed have been less important? If this labor had not been assigned, or tied up in a promise of eventual reward, wouldn't everyone still be better off with it done? Wasn't he especially well suited to be the person to take care of it?

Do what you do because people need it to be done and because either you have, or can gain, the skills, connections, or options to do it for the benefit of others.

9.13 You can escape all your external troubles, today, by recognizing there are no troubles outside of us, only inside of us, in our interpretations and reactions to what is external.

9.14 Nothing today is all that different from the way it was for people buried long ago. It's the same world, our experiences are of the same kinds, and time passes the same. Things have no more real value now than they did then.

9.15 Material things and events exist outside us. They exist on their own unaware of themselves, us, or anything else. They have no judgments attached. Where are judgements of things located? Only within our thoughts. We project our troubled interpretations onto things, events, coincidences—then we fret about that trouble as if it's somehow radiating out from them.

9.16 Whether people are good or evil isn't about what they feel inside, or what they could do, but what they actually do. Success and virtues are in our actions, not in what we are or do passively.

9.17 There's no evil in a stone coming down after it has been thrown up in the air. There was nothing inherently good in it having been tossed in the first place. It is a mistake to assign meaning or value to mechanical cause and effect, or to the indifferent effects of any natural law.

9.18 Do you experience fear about anyone's judgment, opinion, and approval? Look within them at their guiding principles, then you will see what kind of people you're looking to for guidance, who you are conforming to. Pay particularly close attention to their opinions about themselves.

9.19 Everything is changing, always. Even you are changing constantly, mutating, and at the same time, undergoing a process of gradual destruction. Each day, it's like who you were yesterday has already passed away. The same can be said about the entire universe.

9.20 Your main responsibility in regard to someone else's wrong actions is to leave it alone where it is. The worst harm that will come from it will be to the people who did it. Even if you carry it with you everywhere, continually holding on to anger about it will not undo what they've done, or in any way prevent them from doing it again the instant you're gone.

9.21 When anything comes to a stop, such as an action or a thought, that is a kind of death, but there is plainly no evil in that. Think about when different phases of your life came or will come to an end: childhood, teenage years, early adulthood, and on up through old age. Was there anything to fear about these changes? Each was a death of who you were in the time up until then. Also consider these changes in your parents, guardians, teachers, and partners—through these changes, was there anything to fear, dread, or become angry about? We ought to feel no different about the end to our entire life—it is, likewise, nothing to be afraid of.

9.22 Pay attention to the functioning of three things: yourself, the universe, and your neighbor. You need to know how you function in order to gradually make it more right. You need to know something about how the universe functions, because you are a part of it. You need to know how your neighbor functions so you can tell whether their wrong behaviors are due to ignorance or if they know better and choose to persist the way they do. By getting to know your neighbor, you will also be better able to tell whether their principles are in line with yours.

9.23 You live, act, and think within a social context. Every action you take should fit this fact. Anything you do that does not either help people directly, or fit in a bigger picture of helping others, is pulling your life apart, removing you from the

common well-being we're born into, is a treason against the collaborative efforts of civilization which spared you a brutal, feral existence.

9.24 Just as children have their dolls bicker about dreamed up stories, we have our material bodies bicker about stories we dreamed up in our waking thoughts. Sooner or later, we outgrow playing with our figurines, and set our own body down for the last time.

9.25 Examine each thing in terms of what it is made of. Consider it detached from the circumstances in which you personally found it, or found out about it. Think about how long this thing will exist, still relevant or useful, in the form you presently know it as.

9.26 We've all had times in our past when we were frustrated and dissatisfied with our thoughts. Forgive yourself for that. You acted the best you knew, or were able to manage at the time. Do away with this useless regret, and instead move forward, doing better now than you did then.

9.27 When someone else places blame on you, hates you, or says awful things trying to cause you trouble, look at the kind of person they are. You will easily recognize that these people, like anyone acting that way, are not worth stressing over or changing yourself to please. You could become an entirely different person by reacting to their words and they would still reject you, possibly leaving you worse off for it. All the same, you should be kind and gentle towards them. You are still both parts of the same universe, and have both been assigned to the shared project of advancing our collective thought. They look after different things for the community than you. We



should want them to somehow attain their objectives, no matter how unlike ours theirs are.

9.28 The movements in the sky and major patterns of movement on earth are consistent, and have been for as long as people have known. It seems likely to stay the same for as long it will matter for us. Either they are constantly pushed to remain on track, or else they maintain their activity automatically and separately, without need for constant action or correction.

Look at that this way: if there is a spiritual entity making things happen, you have nothing to worry about because such a being will watch out for us, correcting our paths constantly; if, on the other hand, there is no supernatural force and yet these motions are stable, we can take solace in knowing our existence has a place in these stable patterns, which work without force.

Soon enough, we'll each be covered by dirt, or dispersed as ash. In the same way we'll each come to an end. The earth, too, will surely change, disperse, and become part of other things, forever. If we focus too much on such changes, on the way they crash down one after another like waves on a shore, we might feel disdain for things because they change and end—but that is an absurd, indefensible conclusion, because there is nothing in this whole universe except change. To be dissatisfied with things that change and end is to reject everything that exists.

9.29 Our cumulative knowledge is like a powerful river, carrying us all with it. How important, then, can any of us expect ourselves to be when it comes to affecting it? How tiny nearly every person's individual role is. This is equally true for people

who see themselves as engaged in politics, or who position themselves into roles and titles as expert thinkers or speakers. How meager their views are, and how narrowly self-serving their personal “philosophies” are. People who are most serious and certain that they have a massive impact on civilization’s shared thoughts, are tricking themselves. They are speaking to and reflecting ideas that were in motion long before them, and would exist even if they didn’t find some way to personally capitalize on the changing tide. Our individual role is tiny, our collective role in changing it is all there is.

Do what the community needs you to do, here and now. Set about tending to the actions that are possible for you, without wasting your finite time and attention to check whether others are watching, following along, or likely to give you credit for doing what you saw needed to be done.

Don’t hold on to the ridiculous thought that anything—you, your work, someone else, or society as a whole—is somehow only a few small fixes or tweaks away from perfection. We are each in the process of making all things, including ourselves, better by one small step at a time. Contributions that last, however tiny, are no small matter over time; indeed, a gradual accumulation of small tasks, each done right, is the only way anything ever becomes great.

Remember: cumulative knowledge is not a lifeless pile of books, buildings packed with inventions, or graveyards with bodies that were once wise. We could have all that, and still lose our collective thought by disregarding what we learned. All that could vanish in an instant, and our shared knowledge would not be lost. What we know together is spread across the thoughts of living people. To that end, seriously consider who changes people’s thoughts, and how?

If we can't resolve the confusion and gaps of thinking in others, it's not enough to instead compel them to act according to reasons they don't yet grasp or share. Forcing their bodies to play along, while their minds resist because they don't see the sense in the demands, will lead to them breaking the rules at the earliest opportunity that they think they can get away with.

Look at political decision makers, military generals, and civic leaders. They are only great if they treat reason as their compass, ignoring what they cannot change, to direct their action towards what they can. If they lack that? Then they're merely playing a role on a stage. What a waste it would be to become like them, irresponsibly going through the motions to look like we're doing our duty. People are counting on them to actually lead.

True progress in what we know together is usually simple, modest, and incremental. Don't be lured by the appeal of easy ways to get public attention, unearned pride, or empty flattery.

9.30 Look at the world from above. Visualize crowds, public spaces, people's adventures—both grand voyages through stormy seas, and quieter journeys accomplished by calm determination.

Watch, from this high perch, as if everything happened in an instant: beasts and people alike being born, living together, and dying. Don't just picture the world as it is today, but see also the countless lives lived before yours started, and so many that will start after yours is finished.

How many of these people, that you're gazing down on in your thoughts, live in completely different places, times, and

communities, sure to never meet or interact with you directly? Most will never know your name. People who do, will soon forget it, and then be forgotten themselves. Even people you do know, the ones praising or showing gratitude toward you now, could, on any day, turn their attitude around completely. Tomorrow they might be blaming you, finding fault, and rightly or wrongly, telling others to avoid you. That's not in you; that's in them.

Whether you are famous among these people, or forgotten by them entirely, after your death it will make no difference. How much difference does it make while you're still alive? How much of that difference is desirable compared to the alternative?

Can you see yourself from outside, far above, with the same separation you have from others?

9.31 Remain calm about things that happen to you which you can do nothing about.

In every action that is up to you, make an effort to ensure it is a right action to take.

The simplest way to tell if an action is right is to ask whether the result will benefit other people. Every person living in our shared civilization is responsible for weighing that question, every time. We each owe our existence as rational beings to other people's contributions, social actions, and kindness when we had nothing to offer. It's fair that others will depend on yours.

9.32 Most of the things that trouble you uselessly can only be removed by the same person who put them in your attention in

the first place: you. Other people cannot move out of your way what you have placed there, and if they somehow could, you'd put it right back. This applies mostly to your opinions, especially the ones you still hang onto about the things you can do nothing about.

Once you cut yourself free from the optional troubles you've been dragging around as if you had to, you'll find more space and agility to embrace the parts of reality that you can do something about. By focusing all of your thoughts only on what you can do, you'll comprehend more fully the things which matter most for you, which will be different for you than for anyone else. You'll find new appreciation in how it matters that you are here, now, between the infinity before you and that will continue after you.

9.33 Everything you witness will soon come to an end. Everyone else who witnessed these things will also come to an end. All that might remain, in some cases, is a record of it. Soon enough, the record and how to interpret it, whichever is first, will come to an end too.

The end we each arrive at is always the same, whether we die in our old age, or as an infant.

9.34 Look at these people's guiding principles, what unimportant things they busy themselves with doing. Consider what is underlying their character and priorities. It takes strength to see, admit, and tolerate their way of thinking, the way it truly is, without sugar coating or denying the problem to ourselves. Such people love to imagine they are harming others with their insults and disapproval, or granting advantages and blessings somehow by their praise, attention, and admiration. The vanity of all this is mind boggling. The only

people who are harmed by disapproval or who feel like they somehow gain from mere approval, are those who haven't yet figured out how they should be living. Audiences can only control people not worth controlling.

9.35 Loss is simply another type of change. Everything in the universe is driven by change. In a way, everything is change. Loss is a kind of change that gives more than it takes. On a long enough timeline, this kind of change works out for the best. It always has, and always will.

And yet, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, many people gripe as if everything that happens is bad, and has always been bad. They somehow believe all past efforts combined and the universe itself has failed to handle an endless chain of everything getting continually worse. Does that really seem more likely than their perspective being warped? They're right, while everyone else, along with everything in the universe, has always been wrong?

9.36 Everything is made out of rotten material. Plants grow from manure, animals consume fruits right before they go bad, and eat each other after their bodies expire. This is true even for non-living things: various stone building materials are formed from dead lake beds, and dirt under pressure while hidden from sunlight. Our clothes are made of hair from animals, dyed with the blood of dead sea life. Why would our thoughts be any different? Aren't they also made from repurposed decay, transforming what went wrong into different things going right?

9.37 Complaining all day is such a wretched way of living. Enough! What exactly is troubling you? What about the things happening is so new that you haven't figured it out yet? Is it

something in your mind? Face it. Deal with it. Stop hiding from it already. Is it your body? Then look at it, accept it, change what you can—if you can and must—but the fact is you're not going to get away from it. Besides your thoughts and your body, there is nothing else.

As a part of getting over your own mind and body, strive to become better in your service to others, and in improving the community. Whether we have one hundred years to dedicate to this, or only three, it's the right way to spend time.

9.38 If a person does wrong, then they harm themselves more than anyone else. Remember, however, that there is room for error in what you see or interpret as doing wrong. Remain open to the possibility that they did not do wrong. If they did wrong, they are harmed by it; if they didn't, they, and you, are unharmed by it. This isn't up to you, or on you, to determine.

9.39 Either all living things came from a single common intelligence, in which case each individual ought to have an interest in serving the overall collective, or else we're a slowly dispersing chaotic mess of the elements. In either case, what is there to be unhappy about? We are, can be, and must remain greater than animals, regardless. Whether we're each a part of a single greater perspective, or cooperating as rational peers acting independently within a social system, if we give in to corrupting pleasure, like wild animals do, then there's not much reason for us to exist.

9.40 If the spiritual people are right, and there's something like a deity, then either that deity has no power, or it is powerful. If it has no power, then what sense does it make to pray to it? On the other hand, if it is powerful, it'd be a misuse of prayer to hope we can avoid the things we fear, instead of praying for the

strength to not fear them. Too many prayers ask to obtain a desired thing, instead of praying to be free from desiring it. Why pray to stop something inevitable from happening—death being a common topic for such prayer, and plainly something we are all going to do—instead of praying not to be troubled and pained by it? If a deity has the power to help people, surely it would be within its power to help in these ways?

Someone could counter this by saying we can do that without bothering the deity over it, because we each already have the power to reshape what we fear, to temper our desires, and to decide what we will or won't let trouble us. That being the case, we might all be better off, us and the deity, if we made good use of the power we have over ourselves, instead of putting so much of our attention into asking for what we are unable to play any active role in changing.

It works out the same way, whether there is a deity with power to pray to or not. Most spiritual people will agree that the deity they believe in, if it's involved in our lives, can help us exercise the powers we are able to use on our own. If we pray for help in a war, contest, or business endeavor, we still train and put in our best work. Regardless, our way forward is the same.

Imagine a person who prays about their desire to be in a relationship with a certain person. Our thoughts might be better directed at no longer wanting to have a relationship with that person, or, at minimum, to ensure our happiness won't depend on whether this person, as someone entirely outside of our control, winds up choosing one way as opposed to the other.

Picture another person. This one prays about their desire to be released from a current situation. Our thoughts, again, might be better focused on coming to peace with the possibility we may



not be released from this situation. Changing our present situation, if it's possible to do, is going to involve sorting out hard problems and navigating tricky conversations. We're likely to be more successful in these maneuvers if we can remain calm and clear in our thinking, not stuck and unfocused by feeling restless, impatient, and frustrated.

Notice that coming to peace with an outcome does not mean we'll do nothing about it; it sometimes means we're better able to attempt a change since our mind is sharper when it isn't flustered, taking the pressure off by seeing that if our plan to escape can't work, we won't be broken by that.

For a more extreme case of this thinking: someone might pray about a desire not to lose their family member. Don't get the wrong idea here—we can, plainly, prefer to not lose a family member. But, given the countless circumstances and causes that are beyond your control and theirs, many with no one to blame and nothing more that could be done, aren't your thoughts better used to find strength to not fear losing them, to be prepared to hold your life calmly together if you do?

9.41 Just because we are ill, our illness doesn't need to be the only thing we talk about. Though it affects our body, and so might distract our mind with discomfort, the people we talk to mostly aren't interested in hearing a lot about our aches, and talking about it is unlikely to help us recover sooner. The part of your thoughts that remain functional can be used to think and speak about whatever you'd like. Even while sick, we can keep our discussion focused on the subjects that interest us most, even scientific principles, if that's what we choose. The mind is still participating in what the body is going through, but that doesn't mean it needs to let the body limit the subject matter for thought and speech. Keep living while you're alive.

This same rule applies, regardless of what other distracting circumstances and imperfections we may be going through: do not waste your thoughts by always complaining about whatever you're currently enduring. The topics most important to you should not be deserted, and could even become a source of comfort, or tranquility.

Other events are going to happen. If you allow your thoughts to become tied up in and dominated by whatever's currently happening, you'll become stuck treading at the same point, never making real headway. Do you imagine you can just wait until nothing else ever happens again, and then you'll quit talking most of the time about the discomforts you endure?

What we say, and what we think, can be limited by who you speak with. If you make a habit of conversing regularly about unimportant topics, just because other people bring those topics up, you'll be no better off than if you spent all your words complaining about aching from illness.

Another form of this is when, even if the topic may be of real interest, the people you're discussing it with have not put adequate effort into learning enough about it to discuss anything worthwhile about it. You may as well be talking about any trifling subject.

This same point applies, unfortunately often, to discussion with a person who hasn't yet learned to accept what they cannot change. So many of their words and thoughts wind up wasted on complaining about, or talking up, what they can do nothing about, or never directly affect. While they watch a parrot flying far off in the sky, they ignore another resting in arm's reach.

Decide, in clear terms, what is and is not a valid use of your thoughts, time, and words. You have finite opportunities to think, and a responsibility to use thought to do something worthwhile.

Give your full focus to what you are doing, here and now. Find a way to do things you see as worthwhile. As often as you can, think and speak primarily about what you consider worth it.

9.42 If you find yourself offended or annoyed by someone's behavior, ask this: could it be that no one in the world would behave like this person? That seems impossible, and it makes no sense to wish for what is impossible. See that this person is among those people who have to, out of necessity, exist in the world. This same thinking applies whether a person is shameless, dishonest, selfish, backstabbing, or otherwise.

When we keep in mind that people like this must exist someplace, it becomes easier to be kind and gentle towards each one as an individual. They might want to be different, in order to have a better life, if they only knew the difference it would make, and were capable of doing so.

Nature has gifted us with the abilities necessary to deal with these people. Sometimes we're able to help them discontinue their offensive or annoying actions. When we can't, we have a variety of other tools to help us calmly tolerate them the way they are. If someone is severely uninformed or misinformed, we can practice our patience. If someone is belligerent, we can practice our ability to defuse the tension they create, carefully untying the knots they leave. If someone made a severe mistake, but doesn't seem to know better, and may be embarrassed to find out, then we have within us the skill to navigate that uncomfortable conversation with care.

When you're able to make the time, it's nearly always preferable to teach the person how they went astray. This can help them not just with their present goal, for which it might already be too late to do any differently, but more importantly it will help them with every goal they pursue thereafter. The good we do is also multiplied far beyond helping only them, since it will also help everyone they ever work with—less anger, less distraction, and fewer knots left for them to untangle. The sooner we can help someone improve in this way the greater the cumulative benefit will be, since it will improve things for more people, on more teams, over a greater span of time, compared to the way things would have happened otherwise.

Consider: in their offense, annoyance, and misbehavior, have they injured you? Note that your irritation with them is not caused by their action, that is solely on you. What they've done is not capable of making your mind worse. They are not impairing your ability to behave in the right way, or to apply reason to determine what is the right way. If you grow frustration in your mind, and feed it so it persists, that is the evil which can disrupt your ability to think clearly.

How can we even act surprised or annoyed when a person who has never been shown a better way does something in the way it will be done by a person who has never been shown a better way? An uninstructed person will do what an uninstructed person will do. If you can see a better way, then you are in a position to show them, whereas they are unlikely to even be aware that there is a better way than they know. If they were aware, they'd already be doing it.

It's absurd to feel frustrated with someone over something no one ever explained well enough to them. Shouldn't the

frustration or blame, if there has to be any, be towards their parents, teachers, friends, colleagues, or classmates—people who failed to help them notice and address the shortcoming? All that is in the past, and we can't change the past. Here, you are the person who could better explain it—so, if there is any frustration to be felt, now it should be towards yourself, for not being more capable of explaining it. If you can't make a clear case for why your way is better, you might hold off, to instead second guess your confidence over whether the way you think it should be done is actually any better.

Any time people are involved, mistakes will be made. That's a certainty. Count on it. Plan for it. A leader doesn't blame their people for mistakes, because it is up to the leader to anticipate, leave room for, and put plans in place to catch and address how errors might happen. Don't be surprised, or act caught off guard, if someone makes a mistake. Be surprised if no one does.

When it comes to someone lying or intentionally being rude, the issue is more complex, and harder to address, than not knowing what to do, or how. It will be harder, in this situation, to make a case for why they should be different than they are. This is especially true if you're dealing with someone who lied to you directly, or who recently acted resentful and abrasive. In these situations, as in most, you can't control what someone else does, only what you do. Don't waste any more energy trying to change someone who is unwilling to. Focus on your role in it.

Did you place your trust in the wrong person? Sometimes that is the whole extent to which the outcome was within our control. In that case, learn from it what you can about who to

trust in the future, how to determine that, and ways to guard against repeating this mistake.

If this is a case of them being ungrateful, again, look only at your role in it—not because they weren't wrong, but because your role in it is the only part you can do anything about next time.

If you feel wronged because you did favors but these weren't recognized, rewarded, or reciprocated, then you overextended yourself. You gave more than you should. In the future, if there are conditions you will expect in return, then work out and communicate these in advance, doing more only once you both agree. It's up to you to keep your balance.

If it's a situation where thanks alone will suffice, then no thanks should suffice as well. When you do something to benefit others, you are helping society, looking out for our collective mind. That good has already taken place, by your direct action. Will you now be dissatisfied about your one good not always becoming a second good based on how the other person responds? The eye doesn't ask the rest of you to praise and reward it for enabling you to avoid stumbling. The feet don't ask the rest of you for recognition for moving you about. You can contribute without expecting something in return.

Just as a person who hurts other people is mostly hurting themselves, a person who helps other people is mostly helping themselves. Benefitting other people suits our social nature. What is good for a community is good for everyone who's a part of the community. By improving and defending what we know together, with better clarity, motivation and interconnection, we improve our own situation, as well, by

expanding what we are capable of accomplishing together, and the abilities of people around us.

## CHAPTER TEN: Being calm, rational, and attentive

10.1 What would our mind be like, without attachment to a body? It might be better, simpler, and purer. It would also never have any way to enjoy affection, or to know the world well enough to know what to love in it. Our thoughts would be different, without physical desires of any kind, nothing for us to long for, no objects or other people, no needs. Instead of needing to be careful about excess behaviors from taste or addiction, we'd not experience even the simple pleasure.

Without a body, would the mind still want more time and longer life? Do questions even make sense about our thoughts without a body such as could we still care about better weather, nicer places, or even the presence or absence of anyone else to live with?

Come back to your body. Even with flaws, aches, limitations, vulnerabilities, and needs, it shouldn't take long considering the alternative, before we should be satisfied and grateful with our great fortune to have one. It is imperfect and always dissatisfied, and because of that, it is well, and doing its part to present challenges to your mind. Without your body, how could you come to understand anything? Could you be generous, fair, or gentle without a body? Could you still help contribute to and play a part in holding society together?

If everyone was only thought, without a body, on what basis would we still find fault with them, or could we be condemned by them? Could we even still know or interact with others?



10.2 Pay attention to what nature requires for your body. Rest, water, adequate food, and so on. Tend to it. Nature presents us with a reality we cannot change, regardless of anyone's ignorance or denial of it. As living things, we still have to exist partly in the animal world, too. We are in no way made worse by doing what it is necessary to do to exist.

Nature also puts pressures on our rational thoughts. We can accept and listen to these pressures as well. Some version of this seems to be taking place in the minds of wild animals. But here, more so than nature's requests for your body, if you obey it too naively, it may leave you worse off for doing so. We can hear our instinctive thoughts, without always following them as an animal might, if they might go against our long-term and carefully reasoned plans. Your animalistic thoughts, for example, might see a near-term advantage in telling a lie, but we know long-term it generally won't serve us well to be dishonest. We are social animals and rational beings, relying on our honesty to connect thoughts between us. Our lives intersect in our politics and virtues.

10.3 One of two things must be true about anything that happens: either you are adequately prepared by nature to bear it, or you are not.

If what happens is something you are suited to endure, then endure it, without complaining about it. Depending on what it is, enduring it might include addressing it, shortening it, stopping or changing it, even ignoring it, but complaining will not help you endure it in any way.

If what happens is something you are unable to endure, then, do not complain about it. In this case, your complaints about it are the only thing keeping it relevant to you. It clouds your

thinking, leading to other mistakes, because you complain about it. It will do so for as long as you continue to complain about it—potentially continuing well after it is no longer happening. The only power you have to lessen its harm is to decide you will no longer complain about it.

If you are able to endure something, and must, don't just think of it as an arbitrary duty, but see also how enduring it well will benefit you. Practice and prepare your thoughts to remain balanced and even keeled, regardless of what happens, because calmly tolerating anything that happens is a skill the world will need from you repeatedly throughout the remainder of your life.

10.4 If someone else is wrong, kindly show them what they overlooked. If you are unable to do this, then either you are to blame, or no one is to blame.

10.5 Whatever happens to you, and around you, is mostly from the cause and effect chain that started back through all time, long before you existed. Everything happening to anyone, even you happening to your parents, is a consequence to that unbroken chain of events. To be upset about an event outside your control is no different than deciding to be upset because you exist.

10.6 You are not just a living part of a greater system, but of multiple greater systems. One is the system of nature, another is our shared collection of thoughts, a third is your great city of peers, a fourth is the universe of raw material. We are deeply connected to everything else in each system of which we are a part.

Whatever experiences you will have to endure, and in particular those you can do nothing more about, see how it's highly unlikely that any system guided by intention will do something with its parts to cause itself real and lasting harm. Remember that people in a system are only harmed by what harms that system. Be content, then, with your role in the bigger picture, and everything that goes with that.

You are connected to and drawn towards parts with which you have major things in common—living beings are more drawn to fellow living beings than to objects, people are more drawn to other people than to animals, masters of a craft tend to come together, and so on. Be considerate of others, help them if you can, and turn your efforts toward what's good for the common interest.

Your life will flow more smoothly if you'll do these things. The happiest people are the ones who find a course of action that will benefit their fellow citizens, while managing to remain at peace with what they cannot change.

10.7 Everything as you know it will perish. All this means is: the universe will undergo change. Without that change taking place, everything as you know it, including yourself, would not exist. To declare anything as evil that is necessary is a waste of that word. Notice how the universe as a whole is not what changes—it can't—instead, all of its parts do, in turn. This is how the whole continues operating: local changes, including perishing, to each of its parts.

Was nature ordered this way out of intention, or did it settle into this order despite being oblivious? Each possibility gives us a lot to think about. Either way, it doesn't make sense to acknowledge that change and perishing are a necessary part of

nature, and then act confused or surprised when it happens. Things continually changing, perishing, dissolving and winding up repurposed is not contrary to nature, that is nature.

Our bodies disperse as material back into everything else. Our thoughts, at least the ones we made time to record or convey, disperse into what still-living people know. Your body materials, like the air you're breathing out now, did not originate from you. You only recently borrowed these materials. The same is true for most of your thoughts.

Your body, also like your thoughts, is not made up mostly of what your mother gave birth to, but is instead largely the accumulated changes you've collected since. Even if the base you are adding to and changing keeps you connected to your birth, that doesn't conflict with the points made here. How much of your current body weight were you born with? An even smaller fraction of your current thoughts could have originated at birth. Most of what you know began as parts you borrowed from what other people knew and shared—which didn't start in them, either.

10.8 Go out of your way to earn, and reinforce your ability to see in yourself, labels such as kind, self-respecting, honest, attentive, calm, and rational.

It does not matter if anyone else ever recognizes it or calls you by these labels, or any others. You do not need to label yourself in these ways in speaking with people. What is important is that you act and think in a way that preserves your ability to see yourself as fitting these labels.

If you ever notice you have lost, or are losing, your ability to see any of these labels in yourself, correct your course swiftly

to begin recovering them. Do not be sorrowful or angry about it. Do not complain to others, such feelings will only punish you for making an important realization. When you notice that you're hungry or thirsty, lacking in food or water, do you become twisted up over it? No. You simply set about doing something to remedy it.

Let's clarify what is meant by a few of these labels. In particular, we'll focus on the last three: "attentive," "calm," and "rational." The exact word choice, or how we define specific words, is not what's important. What matters is we live in a way consistent with certain traits. If you find that different words would better match this meaning for you, then focus on those words, instead.

"Attentive," in this usage, refers to your ability to focus your thoughts on the right things—most often, the one thing you are doing here and now, and which is always something which you are currently able to do something about. It is also intended to suggest a second quality: that you reliably avoid negligence. It is not enough to focus on what you are doing, if you have a habit of letting yourself go by not thinking enough about what is the right thing to be doing.

"Calm," here, means consistent, unwavering, complete, undistracted acceptance of what you cannot change. The things we cannot change come in many forms: factors which occurred before our birth but affect our lives, things that take place outside of our literal vision or reach, the behavior and words of other people, the weather, any act involving chance, certain injuries we cannot fully heal from, illness beyond a point, and so on. To the extent we can do something to slightly influence one or more of these things for the better, or to at least make the best of them, calm means we do so without

becoming frustrated or overwhelmed by what our actions cannot do.

What is intended here by “rational” is mostly about giving priority to your thoughts and reason, instead of allowing comfort and discomfort of the body, simple pleasures or pains, to be your main consideration. A rational person is able to recognize, acknowledge, and do the right thing even if it will require discomfort, passing on what seems like it would feel easier. Taken to its practical extremes, being rational should result in caring about far more important things than fame or death.

The words “fame” and “death” here also bear brief explanations.

Public attention and awareness should not be important, because it amounts to seeking validation from crowds, without regard for whose opinions we’re adapting ourselves to please. It leads to relying on reactions of strangers as an ongoing source of comfort, instead of finding tranquility in our own thoughts. You cannot control what other people think, or the quality of their thinking, and if you allow their opinions and judgments to control you by tying your happiness to them, then you cannot be calm, attentive, or rational. You’ll do whatever they pull your strings to make you do, until you are no longer leading your life, and you become a mere puppet in theirs.

Death should not be the most important thing, because if it is, we will too easily surrender our decision making to what is comfortable, or least painful. Severe discomfort and pain appear to exist mostly to help animals avoid death, and in the extremes serve much the same purpose in the animal-like thoughts the body presents to the mind. Unlike animals, we are better able to see a reason for temporary discomfort, or to

adjust our behaviors even when discomfort is absent. We can logistically make sense of injury or death separate from the severity of pain, recognizing good taste doesn't mean something isn't poisonous, and a numb sensation doesn't mean we're indestructible. We also must be able to change based on our thoughts, before something becomes painful. We should be in no rush, there is nothing to gain by dying sooner than nature intends, and we can prefer dying later over dying sooner—but there are many situations where discomfort, pain, or even our own death should not be our top consideration.

Let's return to the labels we should strive to earn in our own eyes: kind, self-respecting, honest, attentive, calm, and rational. This is not about being perfect or never making mistakes, it's about taking action to reinforce these labels, and returning to these actions if we lose our way.

The difference between living in this way, or not, can be night and day. It can be like living as a different person with a different life. If you've lived up until this time without actively working on these qualities, and you choose to continue on that path, you're facing a future where you may be vulnerable to being torn down by events you can do nothing about. Even if it doesn't come to that, that is the behavior of a person who may cling to a lifestyle not worth continuing, like a gladiator severely injured by a lion, concerned only about being bandaged back up well enough to go face that same beast and outcome again the next day. If we live life badly, making wrong choices for wrong reasons, we live like that gladiator, except we drag it out longer. Your life is likely to be the same length regardless of whether you decide to spend your short time living well—kind, self-respecting, honest, attentive, calm, and rational—or being torn up daily.

Notice this critical point about earning these titles: there is not a competition which only the best three people can win, earning them does not require any special talents or privileged opportunities, and it does not take years, months, or even weeks of training to be ready to use them in your daily actions. You can be kind, honest, and self-respecting starting now. You can raise your standards for attentiveness, calm, and rationality today. By acting and thinking this way, you can create and live in a paradise of tranquility here and now—not someday, and not dependant on how the winds of chance blow.

If you feel yourself falling away from these traits, unable to muster the self-control needed to live and think the way you intend to, it may be easier to find enough courage to retreat from the situation to a quiet corner, collect yourself, and recover your self-control. If you are unable to move your body, then practice calm by retreating within your mind while you regain your composure. It will be far better for other people to see you pause and think, than to see you unravel. There's no shame, if anything, a gentle pride, in someone seeing you patiently settle your anger, or quietly tame your passion, gaining a firmer footing on simplicity, independence, and self-control.

To remember these traits, keep in mind we do not live to be controlled by other people, and are not at the mercy of what happens to us from beyond our control. Who we are, what we do, and how we feel can, and should, be grounded only in our thoughts, decisions, and actions.

A grape vine does the work of growing grapes. A dog does the work of being an animal companion. A bee does the work of tending to flowers and honey. A person does the work of being kind, self-respecting, honest, attentive, calm, and rational.



10.9 Harsh reality will test your principles every day, and each day reality will fall short of how we want it to be. Consider most dishonesty and fighting, bad leaders and people who give up—these things do not emerge because someone intends for it to be that way based on conscious reason. Intention may have been involved, but to achieve some other purpose. This mess emerges from the unpredicted chaos of cause-and-effect, giving in to instincts, and people not knowing better because they had no way to know better.

We can raise our standard for how things should be to well above the level given to us from the past. This is not at odds with accepting what we cannot control, so long as we don't become bitter about the distance left to cover. Take action on the things we can do, but accept that it's a tougher issue than any one person can perfectly or permanently fix.

It is our duty to do better. Scrutinize what other people take for granted. Double check whether they are truly accepting what we cannot change, or if they wrongly drew that line to use as an excuse, or if what you are able to do may be different than what they can do. If you can't change their mind on what can be done, show them by doing it.

Do not measure yourself by the conduct and standards of other people, or you'll limit yourself to doing no better than them. Seeing other people get away with doing things a certain way is not a sign that is the best, only, or even an acceptable way to do it. Set your standards higher than people who don't have them, or who put no effort into living by the ones they claim to have.

Make a point to practice dealing with reality, as things really are. Exercise your ability to construct sense out of what you observe, but match your confidence on the level of knowledge you have from experience and scientific learning. That includes keeping your confidence low for topics of which you have no real experience or background in. Don't go out of your way to make a show of impressing others with what you know, but on matters where you do have relevant knowledge, don't hide it either. Problems arise for everyone when the people who know something best speak the least confidently or clearly about it.

No one can take from you the independence you will gain by acting and thinking simply and calmly, grounding what you know and say only in what you're sure is happening.

Consider what each thing is made of, what its purpose is in the universe, how long it will exist or remain relevant, and who, if anyone, can possess it. Think about the role these factors have in the relationship between our thoughts and the kind of action we need to take.

10.10 A spider takes pride in catching a fly, like the person who snares a rabbit, nets a fish, successfully hunts a bear, or among some soldiers, catches a human prisoner. If you look closely at their true motivations for these actions, we might discover most of them are no different than thieves, driven to take something that is not theirs, albeit on a bigger scale.

10.11 Much like the difference between passive hearing and active listening, distinguish between passive looking and active seeing. Involve your thoughts when you're seeing. Clouds that seem to be stationary and unchanging are, once you give them your undivided attention, revealed to be shifting, expanding, and dissolving. Pay this much attention to anything and you will

see all things in a constant process of changing into other things.

This connectedness isn't only about what is outside of us, it also applies to ourselves, and can release us from an insecure identification with our body, our property, or people's opinions of us. The material we are made of was not always ours, and will in time—no one knows how soon—be dispersed again to other uses. Everything we were, and anything we had, will be left behind. Recognizing that we are working with borrowed material, we may as well give ourselves fully to carrying out our duties, living out our purpose, leaving things better than we found them. This can help us accept what we can't do, seeing it's all the same material as us, in the same systems as we are, and that all that any person can do is what they are able to do.

Never be concerned about what other people say or think about you, or even what they do against you, beyond what is logistically relevant. Don't give them any of your thoughts. Act right, here and now. Even as you work to reshape your circumstances, find a way to be content with the responsibilities life has given you to handle in the present. Let go of the distractions, especially anything you've been doing to stay busy for the sake of staying busy.

Move straight towards your objective, as steadily and consistently as the motions of the stars. This is the ideal to strive for, but do not give up hope easily if you fail to do it perfectly. When you deviate or delay, gently and calmly course correct, finding your way back to advancing forward.

10.12 Only rarely do you need to wait for outside guidance, hints, or direct orders before you can act. Stop waiting to be told what to do. Instead, learn how to tell yourself what to do. If

you can't do something until you're told what to do and how, you're living a second life for whoever is telling you what to do. For most situations you can figure out what to do next. When you can see clearly what to do, set about doing it—unwavering, going slower or faster if it helps you see it through, but never giving up or turning back.

If a situation arises where you are unable to see how to proceed, find the best advisers you can. If something or someone outside of you is working against and limiting your progress, keep moving forward as well as you can, because it's better to advance slowly than not at all. Stay alert, act deliberately based on your own thinking, and stick to doing what's right.

If you are going to fail, at least fail at doing something worthwhile, and doing it the best you can.

By grounding our actions and thoughts on what reason leads us to see as the best course of action, we can be calm even while active, and cheerful even while staying composed.

10.13 Should you concern yourself with whether someone else does what is right? Should you concern yourself with whether other people slander you, even though what you are doing is right? No, and no, because what other people do is not up to you. Don't waste your thoughts.

The people who act wrong and speak wrong, have you ever considered what they are like? Observe what they do with their lives. The misplaced belief that their praise or disapproval can somehow affect what will happen is the full extent of their significance. Notice how they steal from others, not with their hands, or by taking material things, but with the part of their

mind that, if they would let it, could instead be producing kindness, self-respect, honesty, attentiveness, calm, and rationality. We all miss out on what they aren't contributing.

10.14 Everything we have and everything we are is borrowed from nature, and will have to be given back. A wise person says to nature, "give what you will, and take what you will." This is said not with frustration, but respectfully, accepting that it is not up to us to decide. Objecting to that fact amounts to fighting the universe itself, which will achieve nothing but self-destruction.

10.15 You do not have long left to live. Live the remainder of your life as if you have retreated to the mountains, separated from the immediate culture around you, ignoring how local people at this particular time in history pressure you to be. Be a citizen of the world, on your own terms.

It doesn't matter whether your body is here surrounded by society, or out there in the mountains. Close your eyes, imagine, then your mind can feel and do the same as it would someplace else.

Of course, you won't really retreat from the community. You're not exiled or secluded, and you shouldn't be. People are going to see you. Let them, but let who they see be an individual living right, accepting about reality what cannot be changed. If other people can't tolerate seeing you live by your principles, then it's better to let them disapprove of you, disagree with you, and even reject you, than for you to seek their approval by living how they do. As Socrates demonstrated, if it somehow came to it, it would be better to let them take your life than to be like them.

10.16 Don't argue with people about how a person should live. Demonstrate it by living right.

10.17 When your attention is free, because you aren't focusing it on a specific task, don't limit your thoughts to the present time and place. Consider all of time, and all of the universe, to the extent you are able. What is close in space and time feels most important, but will you still be thinking about it a week from now, or once you go someplace else? Be careful to not wind up lost in the pettiness of immediacy.

Don't think of the universe as if it's in disconnected moments and isolated objects. See how a seed becomes a tree, another tree comes from the seed of the first, then we get lumber from the tree, furniture from the lumber, the lumber becomes scrap, scrap becomes dust and the dirt where another seed might grow. The past is constantly dissolving into the future. Everything is always changing.

10.18 Look at everything around you, pick a few objects as they currently exist. Find in each some clues hinting at the processes it's undergoing, how each is gradually falling apart. We think as if all of history led up to things as they are now, implying they are finally in the last form they will ever take, but we will be someone else's history and by their time, these objects will be unrecognizably dispersed. All things are on their way to becoming other things, and not merely in a stage between first and last, because there is no last form.

10.19 When thinking about people, recall how similar we all are in our eating, sleeping, loving, using the bathroom, and all the other essential life activities which animals do, too.

Contrast that experience to how most people are when they have a position of power, quickly becoming arrogant and angry, nitpicking over meaningless details in an insecure show of authority. Such positions can make or reveal many people to be lower than we thought.

We see this change happening even if, maybe especially if, not long ago, the same person was on the other side of such behavior, pushed around and abused by others. Soon enough, most people with power wind up without it, back on the other side of the kind of behavior they exhibited when given the chance. To act fairly, make decisions in such a way that you wouldn't mind taking turns being on either side, or unable to predict which side of the decision you might wind up on.

Meanwhile, even if a person has power, we are all yoked to the same animalistic needs.

10.20 We can benefit from everything nature throws at us. If we handle it right, we can benefit from it immediately, right when it's brought to us. As you practice this skill, you can replace fear of what could happen with a confident readiness to transform anything into an advantage.

10.21 Nature's patterns reflect stability. Where it rains frequently, we find plants and animals suited to frequent rain, even though this is not why it rains so much. Find a way to love what nature does that you cannot control. Become well suited to the rain, or find a way to go to the desert where you will be better suited to what you cannot change there.

10.22 Either you exist here, making the best of living in this place, or you decide to go elsewhere to make the best of living there. These are the only options. Until you no longer exist

anyplace, you will be making the best of whatever imperfections and inconveniences a place has. You may as well be cheerful either way, content with where you are, or satisfied that you are making steps toward a situation you'd prefer.

10.23 Whether you stay where you are, or go somewhere else, you'll encounter similar problems. Other places and their people are not better, just different than the ones local to you now. You might as well be where you are. Life is not very different with a view from atop a mountain, living right next to a beach, or wherever seems special to you.

To actually flee away from civilization to a hidden, walled-off retreat, not merely in imagination but in body, will bring your worst traits with you. That would be abandoning the society that made you, shunning people who depend on you to uphold your part in advancing what we collectively know. Nothing is gained by what you die knowing but never bothered to share.

10.24 What thoughts are guiding you? What are you readying your mind to do? What purpose have you decided to use it for? Are you certain you're still putting your reason to use, and not just in the habit of assuming so, just to flatter yourself? Have you separated your thoughts from society—not entirely, but enough to be independent, and not merely echoing what you hear? Are you being vigilant to ensure your mind won't grow soft from a lack of demands placed on it, ensuring it won't merge into the body until it ends up pulled mostly by your animal impulses?

10.25 If we break the law, we are fugitives. To allow ourselves to become overwhelmed by regret, sorrow, anger, or fear, is to fail to accept, respectively, what we didn't change, couldn't



change, can't change, or won't be able to change. Everything we can't change happens according to the laws of nature. To live by those laws requires coming to peace with what happens that isn't up to us. To become carried away with excessive regret, sorrow, anger, or fear, then, is to be a fugitive from reality.

Use your actions to do right, within what you can do. Make the best of your lot. If you do what you mean to do, and feel right about how you decided what to do, then it makes no difference how anyone else responds, how it comes out, or what you think later. You're doing right.

10.26 The beginning of pregnancy is invisible, yet the cause once set in motion continues, until a child is born. It is no less impressive, though we witness and participate in it more often, that when we put food in our mouths, hidden processes begin inside us to consistently turn that material into our perception, motion, and continued existence.

We take these processes for granted, despite relying on them since the beginning of time.

Pay attention to see other behind-the-scenes processes that, once set in motion through a seemingly small act, lead to a result that would not be expected from outside observation. The forces at work in these cases are as reliable as gravity, but are invisible and more complex.

10.27 Things today are not that different from how they were in the past, or how they'll be in the future. When you study a particular situation from history, it's almost like seeing a long-running play, simply with different actors playing the same parts.

10.28 A person complaining is like a pig squealing at slaughter. It doesn't change the outcome.

A person who sulks alone over their present limitations is like a pig frustrated by its pen. It won't get them out.

But as rational creatures, we are not as helpless as pigs. We are able to comprehend what we can change, and how, from what we cannot. People, unlike pigs, can make the best of what is possible, even to release ourselves from unpleasant distress over what isn't.

10.29 In each act, pause to consider: will loss of this experience be any reason to fear death?

10.30 If you find yourself annoyed that someone is doing something wrong, reflect on times when your actions were similar. When you see the similarities between their mistakes and yours, you'll get how this person could feel compelled by their own experiences, and the limited, imperfect information they've been exposed to. Do they seem to see money, pleasure, or public attention as a good in itself? Do they allow that to shape their behavior? Can you say with certainty that you would know better, if you lived their life, hearing or reading what they did? If you are able to improve their knowledge, to address whatever compelled them to do wrong, then do so.

10.31 When we learn about people's failures in the past, that can serve as a warning to us. Learn how to see the present in the past, and the past in the present.

When you think about people from the past, think about where they are now. They are nowhere, or no one can know where.

When something changes, it might never again be exactly how it was, even across an infinite span of time. Yesterday will never happen again, but today won't, either. What is there to be troubled about in this? There can be nothing strange about constant change, because it happens to everything, always has, and always will. It would be much stranger if anything was somehow as permanent as it appears to us. Why not be satisfied to go through the world as it is in your short time, doing what you can, and accepting what you can't?

What circumstances are you thinking about fleeing from? Situations we didn't choose are a chance to exercise our reason, like a training school of discipline and willpower. This pushes us to more closely examine reality as it is, and not merely how we imagine it to be.

Persist, then, until you have mastered what you now experience as obstacles. Be like a raging fire, spreading by turning everything in the way into fuel to burn brighter.

10.32 Don't give people reason to say, with any shred of truth, that you are insincere, or unjust. You cannot stop people from making accusations. What you have the power to do is to make sure they are liars. No one can prevent you from being sincere and just. If you are going to continue living, you might as well live right. Reason can only help you if you are sincere and just—if you want to establish and maintain a tranquil mind, make this the cornerstone.

10.33 Always ask yourself: what is the best thing to say or do in this situation? Whatever that is, do it or say it. You might counter that this sounds obvious, but can't you think of situations that would have gone better had you paused to

deliberately answer this question first? Don't make excuses about what you can't do, because focusing on that will take your attention away from what you can do. If you let yourself stress about what you can't do, you will never stop having stress and complaining; no matter how much you can do, there will always be more you can't.

The only way to escape that trap is to train your mind to act in a way consistent with your character. Make this your single greatest priority. When you make your main source of enjoyment living by your principles, fully within what you can do, and accepting what you can't, your enjoyment will then be completely in your control, everywhere, in every situation.

When inanimate objects are in motion, they have no power or intention to bypass things in their way. Nearly anything can block or redirect them. Your body is an object, but with the guidance of your thoughts, you have the power and intention to go through or around nearly any obstacle—if not in this instant, then by figuring out and enacting a plan to do so.

Smoke rises to the ceiling, stones fall to the ground, wheels roll over and down a ramp, but then they come to a stop. Appreciate how different it is that your body will not come to a stop like this until you are dead and finished with it, until it's no longer your body. It would waste your energy, and change nothing else, for you to push as hard as you can against a wooden ceiling, stone ground, or a brick wall. Because you have a mind, and you can give it power over your body, you will stop yourself before the smoke, stone, or wheel could. You will stop before you waste any energy doing what you can predict will produce no effect. This saves your full efforts to be directed more effectively—provided, of course, that you don't instantly

replace the physical waste of effort avoided with a waste of your words and thoughts by complaining about it.

That is what it means to accept what we cannot do: we are smart enough not to waste what we can do on what we can't, or the fact that we can't.

Inanimate things are doomed to decay due to everything that happens to them, leading to either breaking, dulling, bending, or otherwise. Objects become worse through wear. People, on the other hand, in both our thoughts and bodies, become stronger, and more formidable, when we take the things that happen to us and find ways to turn them to our advantage, including by being better prepared for the next time it happens, or by finding a better way to avoid it.

Finally, bear in mind that nothing truly harms a person if it does not harm the person's society, and nothing truly harms a society if it does not harm its order, and yet, the majority of things we casually think of as individual harm have little to no effect on the order of society.

10.34 To someone with sound principles, even a basic reminder can often be enough to help us steer clear of becoming bound up in sadness and fear.

What form and focus might this reminder take? Remind yourself of how briefly you will exist, and that things are always changing. That is all you need to think about.

This won't last long, and the future will be different than now.

Much of our sadness or fear comes from either chasing or avoiding things we get hung up on. These things are even

more temporary than we are. We imagine them as if they go on forever.

Picture a pile of fallen leaves, scattered and cracking as they drag along the ground in the wind, as a crowd of people. The sound of their dragging might be thought of as cheering for you, or murmuring bad things about you, but you are famous among them, so they know who you are and they have opinions about you.

Does it matter if these dry leaves express these opinions now, during your lifetime, instead of someday later, after you pass away? Their sounds might turn out to have nothing to do with you at all, but to be about something else, if you failed to achieve a certain level of reputation among them—should you care, either way? How can you possibly care about what sounds dry leaves make when pushed around by the wind? Where will these crispy leaves be even half a year from now? They will have all disintegrated back into nature. They will only exist for one season. Should they waste their only season being anxious about how the other leaves crinkle, or fixated on what next fall's leaves will be making noise about?

10.35 You should be able to look at normal things around you without wishing they were all green. If someone expressed that thought, we would note this behavior as unhealthy, absurd, and problematic. Our senses to hear and smell exist to take in a variety of things around us. The stomach is used to handle food, just as the mill is used to handle grain. A healthy mind should be prepared to accept and handle all kinds of circumstances, without wishing they were always of a certain type or quality. To find yourself insisting that “nothing bad should ever happen to innocent people,” or “people should like

and praise everything I do,” is no different than deciding to be unhappy if your eyes look at anything that isn’t colored green.

10.36 It’s impossible to live such that when we pass away, there won’t be at least some people who, whether they would admit it or not, will breathe a sigh of relief.

Disapproval isn’t the only cause for that response. Even if a person was fair and upstanding, if they had authority over us—an instructor, manager, politician, even parent—we might feel some relief in release from past stress, even if we’re not happy about it. In our lives, as imperfect people, we will leave others with plenty of reasons to find a silver lining in our passing.

When your time is up someday, remember this to pass away more peacefully: the world you are losing is the kind where even some people you worked hard to help will be among those who will somehow be relieved by your life coming to an end. If you care about these people, then be content you will have reduced their stress one last time, or in some other way benefitted them. It will not benefit you, one bit, to pass away feeling anger towards these or any other people. Maintain your character, wish well for others, and think about how you worked to advance the learning and circumstances of still-living people, not of any thoughts about or inside of you.

There is no need to rush dying, but also no need to struggle longer than nature intends. When we can pass away contentedly, feeling ready to, the mind and body alike are more easily released. Don’t resist and wind up inevitably dragged, but instead go along without being forced. Death is fundamental to the nature of the universe, it’s a fact of life we can’t change—we will lose if we insist on fighting it too long, and will only be worse for the attempt.

10.37 Ask yourself about every action done by any person: “what seems to be the purpose of this action by this person?” What do they hope to gain, or achieve, by doing it, enough to have bothered? What is actually a probable outcome is secondary to what they think is probable, or of great enough value to them to be worth doing despite the chances. Consider this, when you can, about every action by every person—but start by asking this about yourself and your actions.

10.38 Don’t forget, ignore, or attempt to hide that part of your motivations and purpose is caused by the animal part of your mind, as bodily needs invisibly pulling your strings. When we speak here about reason, reality, and purpose, this does not somehow imply ignoring the reason, reality, and purpose that is fundamental to what it means to be a living thing. When you get up to relieve yourself, go out of your way to eat, or set aside time to rest, these are not optional, but are essential to continue doing anything else.

However, there is a world of difference between seeing and accounting for the tugs on these invisible strings, as opposed to letting them govern your every decision, taking such a level of priority that they override and interrupt conclusions you arrived at through reason.

The body is a tool for your thoughts to sense, learn, navigate, and act on decisions, but it is only that. Your arms are like axes you can’t put down, and so are your legs, your lungs, and your heart. It is reasonable for a lumberjack to take time to sharpen their axe, being mindful of handling it in a way that won’t cause it to break or lose effectiveness, but it would make no sense to let consideration for their axe choose which trees to strike because they’ll be easiest, to spend all their time sharpening



and no time using the tool, to quit after one tree in order to leave it in perfect condition, or, on the other hand, whether we should chop down tree after tree all day, every day, letting the tool determine our actions, rather than ever using the lumber.

What use is an axe without a person to operate it, and not just for the purpose of trade or a day's labor, but within the purpose of the material and effort for a person's life, and the place this activity takes within the great community project we share? We do not chop down trees merely because they are there, or because we can, and we do not build things out of wood just because they are not there yet. In every case we should have a purpose for doing what we do.

For some people, or for some span of any person's life, our tool may not be an axe, but instead more like a pen, a cart, or some other instrument. The relation to our body as a tool, maintaining and using it to serve purposes determined by our thoughts and reason, remains the same.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: Dealing with difficult people

11.1 These are the properties that make a mind rational: the mind is aware of itself, it pays attention to its own actions, and it changes its direction to follow an intended course.

A mind can change without being rational, for example, if it only changes in response to what happens to it, without intention, or self-reflection; a rational mind may even put itself into difficult circumstances for the purpose of getting through it.

An irrational mind gathering fruit will settle for whichever happens to be most convenient. A rational mind will instead decide which fruits it wants to gather, and then inconvenience itself to obtain them.

A rational mind finishes things. It sees objectives through to completion, leaving problems solved, and loose ends tied up. If a play is interrupted, the story for nearly all of its characters is left unresolved. In contrast, when a rational person is unable to continue, as much as possible is left wrapped up, whole and delivered, so they can say with confidence, "I contributed."

We shouldn't limit our thoughts to what is local and soon. We should want to find out what we can about the whole universe, history and the future, as much as we can. This helps us see through the shallow illusion that every moment is one-of-a-kind, enabling us to see patterns, cycles, and systems playing out before us that will continue to be the same long after us. By adulthood, if a person has been paying attention, they've witnessed or experienced a full sample of what most human behavior is like, which is applicable nearly everywhere, has

always applied in our knowable past, and in all likelihood will never change much.

Another sign of thinking rationally is caring about other people, recognizing the importance of honesty, fairness, self-respect, and integrity, seeing how these each fit into our duty in society.

11.2 We can lose interest in a song by overthinking it, dissecting it into one note at a time, pausing to consider each word in isolation. This dry analysis adds distance between you and the song's effect. The same technique can take apart a dance, breaking it down in thought to individual movements of limbs, joints, shifting weight, and mechanical forces. Even athleticism loses its spectacle when, instead of taking in a feat as a whole in the context of a contest, we reframe it as a useless strenuous action, exertion and struggle to run hard or jump far to achieve absolutely no real purpose, in a conflict we manufactured for our amusement.

If you find anything so alluring and intoxicating that it's competing with, or distracting you from, living according to your virtues, apply this simple technique to create separation between yourself and its effects. Take it apart, spread its bones out on a table in your thoughts. This exercise, or a version of it, can apply to anything we find ourselves wishing we valued less, even to our own body if we need to, as another way of coming to terms with our own mortality.

11.3 What it means for our mind to be prepared to pass away—which might happen at any time, with little or no notice, so it is best to always stay prepared—is that if we are extinguished, we will leave nothing unsaid or undone that should have been said, or could have been done by that point. We can prepare our minds by the consistent exercise of good judgment, since this

leads us to say what should be said and do what needs to be done. Some anxiety about the prospect of death is that it will catch us unprepared, so if there is something that you can say or do that will help you feel prepared, then doing it may relieve pressure about being caught off guard.

Disregard for death and pretending it will never happen will have no effect on its inevitability. This may even hasten death's arrival, and it plainly raises the risk we'll be caught at a bad time. Always saying and doing what you can to be as ready as you can for death isn't inviting or accelerating it, rather, this is how you break free from fear of death. The fear is largely that we'll not have said or done what we should have, so do so, and let the fear dissipate before you do. Then, when it is our time, we can model for others that it does not need to be a tragic event.

11.4 If you do something to improve the general good, advancing the state of what we know, or otherwise benefit society, then that worthwhile work being done is your reward for doing it. In a way, you are improving the home you live in. Keep this in mind, and never stop contributing what you can, how you can, within reason.

11.5 What craft is most important for us all to strive to perfect? To live right. We do this by adhering to our principles in our thoughts and actions, accepting the nature of what we cannot change, and consciously working on our character to become more the way it should be.

11.6 The first stories were made to remind people about things that happen to us. If you find the range of events in fiction entertaining, then find a way to derive a similar enjoyment in

the range of things that happen in true stories—starting with your own.

Stories show how things play out, and how one thing always leads to another. We see before us how something good can follow unexpectedly as a consequence of something bad, or the other way around. We see this happen even in stories where someone specifically tries to stop a bad thing from happening, but in doing so, sets off a chain of events that lead to it happening. This reminder about the profound indifference of cause and effect can help to free us from the unrealistic expectation that good acts always lead to good consequences, or bad acts always lead to bad consequences. This is why we measure good or bad on whether we take the right action, without interpreting the end result as a reliable reward or punishment for feedback.

Stories also present us with the author's insights. If something we don't want to happen does, we can see in stories how people give purpose to it, to make the best of what they cannot change. We find in good stories that material things, and things that simply happen, are not in themselves worth getting upset over. Many stories vividly remind us that lives do come to an end, as crops are reaped.

Comedies illustrate different points to us than dramas. Although comedy is presented as if it is mainly entertainment, in comedy we witness the consequences of vanity, in a more plain and accessible style, which helps warn the audience against consequences of behaving that way. This effect, in no small part, is why a nation or culture that appreciates comedy will cooperate better and function better, on the whole, than one without it.

Granted, we unfortunately don't gain these kinds of insights from all stories. Plenty of writers seem to be content to imitate the form of others, having either lost or never had a sense of the function. On the outside it resembles something better, but inside it is empty. A worthwhile point from a thoughtful storyteller can still find its way in from time to time, but that is the exception. Having deviated from the original purpose of comedy, I wonder whether such a newer story somehow now serves a different purpose, or has it decayed into being arbitrary?

11.7 Whatever your lot in life, however you started, and whatever situation you now find yourself in, you are in the most perfect situation possible for you to think about life from. This is because the situation you happen to be in now, for any now, is the sum up to that point of all that you have available to work with, and it is the situation you must work your way out of in order to work from any other one.

11.8 When you cut one branch off from another, you are also separating the branch from the whole tree. This is what happens when one person cuts themselves off from another. Any time we cut ourselves off from someone, we are also separating ourselves from the community.

When it happens to a branch, the branch isn't the one doing the cutting. When it happens to a person, it is our own action, or response to someone's action, that causes us to separate. Our decision to hate, turn away, or give up is what increases the distance between us and the other person, and so also between both of us and the rest of the community.

There is an important difference between us and a branch: after we separate from others, we have the power to grow back

together, if we choose to. Although, each time we separate, rejoining becomes harder to do. The repetition has the opposite effect we would assume of practice. Each time we separate we reinforce the expectation in ourselves and others that we will not stick around for long. It's never impossible to grow back together, and it's important, so we should not give up on it, although it might take more time and effort to repair each time we put ourselves, other people, and our community through it.

If we graft part of a tree successfully where it was detached, it's less likely to work than when people do it, but it is possible to reconnect and grow again. It can be roughly the same connection, but it won't be exactly the same; it will cooperate with the whole, but without necessarily becoming part of the whole. We may see this in people who get along well enough with people around them, despite not sharing their local community's beliefs, politics, or customs. This is not worse, necessarily, but it can be helpful to see how it emerges.

11.9 People will attempt to get in your way, even if all you try to do is live right, but they can't make you do wrong things. Don't even give them the power to make you feel or think harshly toward them. Cooperative spirit, gentleness, and wishing well for people is part of living right. Hold your ground anytime anyone tries to steer you towards being or doing otherwise.

Your anger won't change someone else for the better, but it can change you for the worse.

Allowing confusion and anger to well up inside, inspired by the trouble they cause, is a definite diversion from following the right course of action. Being concerned whether they can somehow impede you is already allowing them to do so, by making an obstacle or distraction out of fear.

To make your behavior worse because someone else's behavior is worse is to abandon reason. We should not resent people because civilization needs us to look out for one another as members of the same team. We should never base or change our actions on how we guess people are going to react to finding us doing what we believe to be the right thing to do.

11.10 The arts imitate, remind us of, or amplify features of, nature, but they can't be superior to it. Art serves us, and we serve our community.

How do we serve our community? With reason. To do this, our reason has to be grounded in fairness, making choices and taking actions with that foremost in our mind—not taking action mainly for pleasure or praise, health or wealth. When we behave fairly, most of the other virtues follow. If we fail to do so, by being careless, wasting our attention and time on trivial matters we should be indifferent to, or giving in to being easily deceived about what is worthy of our consideration, then we will be unable to live in the right way, in service of our community.

11.11 Most things that trouble us, no matter whether it's because we feel drawn to crave them or to avoid them, did not insert themselves in our way. We put them there. We go after them, we feed and regularly refresh our thoughts about them. We put ourselves in a position to get twisted up. If you quit bringing these things into your thoughts and your life, most will never come back, because they can't without your help. You can choose to stop renewing your attention to them.



11.12 Our thoughts, when well crafted, should be smooth and even all the way around, like a sphere, with no parts pulled away towards any outside object or event, no part dented inward by some unforgiven harm, no sharp irregularities from ongoing rejection of what can't be changed. A mind should be like the sun, and similarly a source of illumination, by its handling of reality.

11.13 Does someone despise you? Let them. This much is entirely up to them. There is nothing you can do to stop or change it. What you can do is ensure they are wrong to despise you. Act and think in a way that their contempt must be based on misinformation, confusion, or their own problems. This error will be their own loss, hurting them far more than it hurts you. People who know you well will see their error, but this rule is worth applying regardless of whether there are other people around to witness or know the truth. You will witness it yourself.

Do not make the easy mistake of despising the person over their confusion, even if you are the target of it. Be calm and patient with every person. Be willing to clarify the mix-up, if an opportunity arises and you believe the other party will be reasonable and open to it. Do not speak out of spite, or make a show of it, but instead kindly work towards restoring the potential for mutually-beneficial cooperation, if you can.

Being indignant and complaining will change nothing for the better, but doing so may invite new problems once you open that door. You might counter that such awful feelings will lead to necessary action, but here it is the action, and not being twisted up over it, that will cause the change. Like feeling stressed over work you know you need to do, you can do that work without tying yourself up into knots, and it will be done

better without that, not only for you but also for anyone else involved, and the work as a whole. If someone is wrong about you, and you can privately help them see their error, do so. If you can't, let them carry their own mistakes. No one gains anything if you choose to stew with frustration over their bad thoughts and flawed conclusions.

Are you being consistent in the application of your principles? Are you living in a right and virtuous way, being fair, serving to improve the communities you're a part of, and expanding what we know together? Then there is nothing wrong in what you are doing, regardless of who else sees that or doesn't. Someone else's limited view doesn't change reality.

11.14 It's surprisingly common to see a person resent other people, flatter themselves, climb over others to help themselves, who, in truth, see themselves as below other people. The larger someone seems desperate to make themselves appear, the smaller they feel, and are.

11.15 Be careful around anyone who says, "To tell you the truth." What were they doing up to that point? There should be no situation where this is useful to say. If you're telling the truth, let them see this by the connection between your words, your actions, and reality they observe.

What we say should remain close to what we directly, factually observe, and is already or certain to be true. If what you are going to say is uncertain, because you don't know details, your knowledge on it is secondhand, or it hasn't happened and could go differently than you expect, then make clear in your words the uncertainty and limits of what you are saying. It is always possible to tell the truth, without needing to always be right, predict the future, or limit what you discuss to only what

you are an expert in, by exposing the boundaries of what you know, or explaining openly how and why you came to what you now believe.

By speaking simply, it's easier to always remain truthful. Simple honesty can even be seen in our demeanor. It's easier to hide a lie as speech becomes more complex, even from ourselves.

We can take this further: honesty should emanate from a person everywhere they go, so plain spoken and grounded in reality that it encourages others to do the same, as impossible to ignore as someone wearing too much cologne or perfume. Anyone nearby should be able to tell this is a person who deals with reality as it is, accepts what can't be changed, and speaks with the intention of being easily understood.

Keeping our words plain, transparent, and fact-oriented fights off the formation of wolfish, self-centered friendships with people seeking favors, who seek to manipulate or benefit from being indirect, vague, or outright dishonest. Speaking simply on what you observe, admitting the limits of your certainty, leads such people to reveal themselves when they reflect your manner, or they'll remove themselves from your circle to conceal their misbehavior elsewhere, as soon as they figure out it isn't going to work on you.

11.16 To live better, learn to always be indifferent to things and events that are inert.

The central point about inert things is that they do not insert themselves in your way; you put them there. Inert things do not cause you to obsess over them, or to argue with people over your opinions about them; you put those thoughts in your mind, and you feed their growth.

Things, as well as events beyond our control, are so profoundly indifferent that they lack any capacity for intention. They are even more temporary than we are. We choose whether or not to write any inert thing into our personal life story, and we can choose not to. When we give things authority over our thoughts, whatever they do in our thoughts is our fault for putting them in a position of influence. We can stop such thoughts at any time—so if we haven't, that's on us, too.

Life is short. Our window for thought and action is finite, and then will come to an end, forever. Mind what you're thinking about with your limited breaths, allotment of heartbeats, and nights of rest. Your thoughts affect what you will do, even if only by distracting your attention from it.

There is never a valid cause to get worked up over inanimate things. Things exist or happen according to nature. We can accept them, or celebrate them, but we have to admit that they are no more likely to change because of our stern disapproval than we can make the sun stop rising by being unhappy every time it does.

If your thoughts are focused on something you can change, and your principles direct you to do something about it, then waste not another minute wishing about it, or being upset that it's not yet how it should be; you have found your task, now set about doing the work to do it right.

11.17 Consider each thing you encounter: what is it made of, what will it be like over time, and what will it become? See how change is inevitable, doesn't harm it, and how, without this process, the thing would never have become the way you see it. This applies to yourself, as well.

11.18 Here are ten tips to keep in mind for dealing with people when they're being difficult. We might think of these as gifts from Apollo and the muses, since the focus is on healing, and inspiring people to recover from the bad states of mind they ended up in. This is important to study and practice, because when people's misbehavior is unchecked, or if it's wrongly handled, it recreates situations that will go badly for them, which perpetuates their destructive attitudes. This takes a toll on others around them, for the remainder of their years. You can't help every person who is misbehaving, but each one you can is a cumulative good for the community.

First, if you find yourself feeling offended by someone, remember: what is the purpose of our relation to other people? We exist to look out for one another. Any time we have the position and sufficient ability to watch over others, then we have a duty to, just as lions look after the whole pride. Holding on to anger about someone else's imperfections will not do us, or them, any good. If they won't let you look out for them, and they won't look out for you, then instead of using your energy to complain about it, spend that effort to find people who are cooperative enough that you will be able to look out for each other.

Second, consider this about people who offend you: what opinions have they picked up from their individual past experiences? See why they feel compelled to be the way they are, however disagreeable it is to you, because life has set them up to think in the way they now do. Can you be certain that you wouldn't be as difficult, in the same way they are, if you had lived through the same experiences, conversations, and situations they have?

Third, be open to the possibility that what they are doing that offends us is right, and there may be nothing for you to complain about. In that case, figure out a way to accept that. If what they are doing is wrong, then recognize that they do not see it that way, or they would do otherwise. The only way in which anyone willingly and knowingly does wrong, is by prioritizing a different sense of what right or wrong means. No mind has access to all the information relevant to any given act. See that the person who does wrong has been deprived of the experience you had that prepared you to make this judgment better—if, again, you are reasonably sure you are right, keeping in mind that they believe they are, too.

If we talk about someone who offends us behind their back, telling other people that they're unfair, inconsiderate, or selfish, they will resent discovering this, and reject our conclusion, without being open to any discussion of relevant details. Consider what may be different about their view of the situation which could be preventing them from drawing a better conclusion.

Fourth, remember that you, too, often do or think badly, or see things incorrectly—equally as unintentionally, every bit as unaware until later, and even then, only when someone else lets you know. When this happens, how did the other people let you know? Did they approach you in an earnest, non-confrontational, private way eager to help you? Or did they declare you an enemy, creating space and opposition between you and them? We are not going to change if it is our enemy who wants us to be different.

Everyone suffers from weakness in ways we wish we didn't. At times, we act or think less well than we want to because we give in to fear, insecurity, or desperation. This happens in the

same way no matter whether these emotions occur in relation to the physical health of our body, or social standing in our mind. Failing from these factors is not solely due to a lack of character, but can be the result of different circumstances which you take for granted: you may feel safer in your reputation, more secure in your ability to fend for yourself, or have benefitted from opportunities they never had. These circumstances do not remove their responsibility, or make it impossible for them to do better, but they can be important to see when we are considering the faults of others who are in situations different than our own.

Would you rather be in your shoes, temporarily annoyed by one person you can escape, or in theirs, a person being annoying, potentially suffering from it in every encounter for years, as it follows them everywhere they go? Be grateful that you see what they don't. Don't blame them for not yet having been helped by someone, especially if you aren't going to be the one to do it.

Fifth, sometimes we draw the wrong conclusions about someone's actions. Not only do you have different ideas about which outcome is likely, their reason for doing something may be different than you assume, or they may have reasons you'd have no way to know. We would need to know a lot of context to judge anyone else's actions.

Sixth, when you are most angry or sad, recall that none of us will be alive for long. Ask yourself whether dwelling on this adversity is worth any more of your short time than you've already given it.

Seventh, someone else's actions can't be what troubles us. It is only our thoughts about the actions that can trouble us. If we

abandon thinking of it as harmful, or can refrain from forming that opinion in the first place, we will not be angered by it. It can be as if we never knew anything about it. How can we break free of our disruptive judgments? We can remind ourselves that someone else's wrongdoing can't bring shame on us. Even if it was our misdeed, it cannot spoil our ability to make sound judgments, to continue living according to reason, or to ensure we are gentle and constructive in our words and actions.

Eighth, if you have difficulty fully agreeing that someone else's actions and words can't trouble us, try seeing it this way: what they did already caused enough pain, whether or not we then decide to pile on a far more painful and longer lasting combination of anger, distressed confusion, and wasted time. The act itself is often forgettable, like a minor scrape causing a scab, but if we don't leave that alone, it will last longer and might turn more severe. If you've been lightly wounded, stop digging your fingers in it, reminding yourself how bad it feels.

Nineth, being gentle is up to you. If you decide to pretend, faking a smile while seething with anger, or trying to manipulate them, none of that will work, anyway. When you are consistently gentle, you become nearly invincible to disrespectful speech. When rude people fail to get a rise out of you, in all but the toughest cases, you'll reduce the tension, de-escalate agitation, and take all the enjoyment out of their game simply by meeting their insolence with calm patience.

When you appreciate the extent to which their behavior is harming themselves, it will slide off you, leaving behind only genuine caring for their wellbeing. If you can help this person address the root of their confusion and stress, you will both benefit from the unwinding of their anger.



Even bees, for as simple and dangerous as they are, are more kind to one another than angry people are. Set the tone and pace to be gentle. Their behavior is more like an illness to be cured through proper care, than a contest to be dominated by coming across as even angrier.

In all this, the aim must not be to find pleasure in their hardship, or setting them up for any sort of deception. Care about them, and do what you can for them. Keep some distance, knowing there are limits to the extent to which they will allow you to help and to what you are the right person to help them with. The result can't be to lecture or condescend to them, to admonish them for the entertainment or spectacle of bystanders, or just to say what feels good to say. Talk, if at all possible, in a private space where there's no judgment of onlookers. If you must speak with them while others are present, then make sure you're talking the same way you would if you were alone, resisting any urge to speak for the audience.

The tenth and final gift from Apollo is to see that it makes no sense to expect bad people not to behave badly. This would be like expecting an apple tree not to grow apples. Sometimes you can't help them, they refuse help, and the problem is bigger than a mere misunderstanding. If they're going to be like this, all you can do is give them space, and keep them from getting into your thoughts. It's not as if you are somehow immune to a force of nature like this, their behavior will affect everyone. A storm cloud makes everyone equally wet.

When you apply these ten prescriptions, take care not to flatter, insult, or become angry towards the other person. Those mistakes can antagonize them, making everyone's situation worse.

If you find yourself being the aggressive person, remind yourself there is nothing tough about giving in to rage. Strength is displayed by remaining kind and gentle, demonstrating strength to control ourselves, to exert power over impulses that a strong beast couldn't tame. Power, courage, and independence of thought are demonstrated by a person who can remain tranquil, even-keeled, and unprovoked. Any child can lose their temper and throw a tantrum. Such behavior in an adult is pathetic, laughable, and more likely to set back their desired result than make any progress towards it.

The less say you give your animalistic instincts in determining your thoughts and actions, the stronger a person you are. Getting carried away in anger or grief is weakness. This isn't about denying it, or being unable to feel it, it is purely about whether we surrender control of our thoughts to it. It is possible to have an injury, acknowledge and treat the injury, without submitting to it, or making it bigger in our minds than it has to be.

11.19 There are 4 kinds of clues that our thoughts are about to lose their way. We should always be on alert for these, prepared to catch and address each as soon as we notice it:

1. I'm about to focus my thoughts on matters not worthy of my mind.
2. If I follow through on this action, it will disrupt the social unity of my community.
3. I'm about to express something I don't actually believe, as if someone else was speaking.
4. Cravings of my body may soon take priority over the decisions I'm making in my thoughts.

11.20 Living bodies and minds are made up of water, dry material, air we breathe, and energy that moves around in us for as long as we're alive. The water and dry material hold us down to earth, while the air in our lungs keeps us held up against it, and the energy in our nerves drives our motion. No other combination of water, dry materials, air, or energy does what life does.

Your body is subject to the same laws of nature as everything else. It remains at rest until it decays, or is pushed from the outside to do otherwise. What makes living things unique is how our governing thoughts can manage our air and energy to push the body from the inside.

Isn't it odd that your thoughts, which seem to exist to guide your body, are tempted to disobey by the body itself, as if it's discontent about following its own orders. No outside force can cause or constrain your thoughts. However, when your basic intention is to convert your thoughts into bodily actions, it sometimes seems to refuse the order, going beyond mere resisting, stubbornly ignoring commands, even doing the exact opposite.

Separate from any specific action, our principles can protect us by ensuring the actions we do take are consistent with our character: moving away from unfairness, vice, rage, grief, or fear.

When our mind wastes time being dissatisfied with anything that happens, unhappy about what it couldn't prevent or is too late to change, it is abandoning its duty to do what can be done. The responsibility of that post goes beyond looking out for ourselves, as it's also the position we're given to defend common interest, advance what we know, and care for other

rational beings so they can have the opportunity to do better. All that is required to hold this ground well is to come to terms with what you can't change.

11.21 When a person takes on more than one role over a lifetime or career, it may seem as if they will not always be the same kind of person. That misses the most important consideration: how or why does the person pick these directions?

Individually, we can disagree about what is best for each of us. There is less range to disagree about what is good for our common interest. In choosing the direction that suits us best for a given time in life, we should favor the direction that will contribute to the common wellbeing. Although the immediate direction may change from time to time, we will remain the same kind of good person throughout, so long as we look to our principles like stars for navigation, course correcting along the way, to ensure we keep moving forward in our intended direction.

11.22 A mouse living in the country has different problems and solutions than a mouse living in town. When considering the common good, keep in mind that what solves a problem for someone in one situation could worsen a problem for someone somewhere else.

11.23 Socrates used to say that most of what people say they believe amounts to little more than trying to scare immature people into acting better.

11.24 At sporting events, Spartans gave the comfortable seats under the shade to their visitors. This was not only to be polite, but also because they took pride in bearing discomfort better.

11.25 Socrates was careful to decline favors he thought he wouldn't be able to return.

11.26 Although we count Seneca among the Stoic philosophers, he brought to us worthwhile ideas he salvaged from thinkers who saw happiness as an end in itself. Among the ones we adapted for Stoicism: routinely remind yourself of the many people who lived before you and practiced virtue, helped one another when they could, and played their part in advancing the common good. We tell stories of epic kings and heroes, and we tell stories of horrible tyrants and thieves, but these seem to forget nearly everyone else. Don't miss just how many great people there have been, are, and will be. Being great is rare, but being good is common.

11.27 The Pythagoreans recommended looking at the sky every morning, to remind ourselves of the steady repetition in its movements, how it all does the same things each time, in the same way, going about its cycles, just as we do. The sky is pure in that it can never be hidden, so we can all look at it, confident we're not being deceived.

11.28 When the wife of Socrates wore his clothes to go out on her own, he went out in his underwear. This embarrassed his friends, who led him back inside when they saw him. When we consider what matters, it can be practical to consider what matters to people we care about.

11.29 You can't teach, meaningfully comment on, or demand of others, any skill you have not first done and reasonably mastered yourself. This is most true for the subject of how to live.

11.30 To act servile to others is to surrender control of your future to someone else's thoughts.

11.31 Unhappy thoughts are no substitute for taking action to affect matters.

11.32 If people criticize your virtuous actions, abusing you for living right while they are failing to, let them. But do not allow their criticism to change your actions to be more like theirs.

11.33 It wouldn't make sense to expect to see fruits growing out of season, or after a tree has fallen. It is no different to catch ourselves wishing to see a family member who passed away.

11.34 We learned from Epictetus, the influential Stoic, that when we tell a family member we love them, we should follow it by reminding ourselves this person might die tomorrow. It's normal to object, "that's a horrible thought, why jinx it." Anything nature does that cannot be avoided is not, "horrible." Is it horrible to talk about ears of corn being reaped, seasons passing, or generations of wildlife? Your acceptance that it will unexpectedly happen, and being ready when it does, will not hasten it, though it may lead to taking more seriously the short time we do have. Making a habit of denying reality, on the other hand, will surely cause harm.

11.35 From seeds, to vines, to unripened grapes, to edible grapes, to wine or raisins, everything is always changing. Rarely is the change into nothingness, instead, something becomes something else. We have a strange grasp on this, in that we see it as something now existing which didn't, and something which did, but no longer does. There were grapes but no wine, now there is wine but no grapes. Our words label

their form, but the material is the same. This applies to nearly everything we observe.

11.36 Epictetus, the great Stoic, taught as a main principle, that no one can take our agency, or free will, from us.

11.37 Epictetus further explained that it is up to each of us to set and maintain a high standard for what we will approve of or agree to. When it comes to what we say and do, we have to filter our choices to what best fits each situation and our principles, not simply reacting from instinct. Though we don't have control over what we feel, we do have control over what feelings we act on, and how. He taught us to weigh the value of our choices mostly by how well they advance community interests, and what difference they will make towards achieving something worthwhile.

When it comes to simpler desires, or situations that will benefit you personally but no one else, Epictetus warned us to be careful about allowing these to shape what we say, think, and do. If the only way we can do this is to avoid situations that could overwhelm us with temptation, then we must stay several steps ahead, to avoid finding ourselves in scenarios we can't control. We should leave where we are powerless, and go where we can make a difference—but if we can't change our circumstances at this time, there is no worry, guilt, or shame in what can't be changed.

11.38 When we concentrate our thoughts and actions only on what we can affect, then learning matters, action matters, and choices matter. Instead, to surrender our thoughts, words, and actions to what is not up to us, is to choose a life of hopelessness and frustrations we are powerless to change. Only by focusing on what we can do are we able to live a life of

agency, not helplessly adrift in waves that are too stormy to swim in. Epictetus noted that this distinction is not a trivial or theoretical matter, but determines if we can stay rational, or else will wind up lost to madness.

11.39 Socrates used to ask: “Would you rather be rational, or irrational? Would you prefer to live right, or badly?” Socrates would follow up, “Then why don’t you strive to be the way you would prefer to be?” They’d say they were already that way. “Well, if that’s true, how is there so much fighting and disagreement?” Don’t mistake knowing how you want to be with being that way.



## CHAPTER TWELVE: Everyday practical philosophy

12.1 The things you hope to do someday—which you believe you’re working towards being able to do—in many cases, you could be doing right now, if you’d only be fair to yourself. No one else can move you out of your own way.

Here is how to get out of your own way: stop distracting yourself with what’s too late to change, stop worrying over what can’t be predicted, and, instead, commit to acting and thinking in the present, giving each next task your full attention.

When you come to terms with what happened before you, and elsewhere, becoming more interested in making the best of what you can work with rather than complaining about it, you will discover that you are the right person to handle your particular set of challenges.

Staying on a good path means living without regrets. To do this, tell the truth, guide your actions toward the common good, and give every task time and attention in proportion to its importance.

Don’t get held up every time someone does something they shouldn’t. Giving in to that only leads to achieving nothing, because someone will always be doing something they shouldn’t.

Other people will have opinions about what you should do. You can consider those opinions, but what you can’t do is let their thoughts stop you from doing the right thing. You know more about what you’re doing than they do. You alone are

responsible for what you do, in the results and the consequences. Their judgments are only suited for directing their own actions, not yours.

The appeal of simple, immediate, and excessive pleasures can wreck your life if you're not careful. Check yourself even in your speech, the sort that feels good in the moment, but might be counterproductive. It takes time to build up what can be destroyed quickly.

If you have a physical injury, and you've already done what you are able to do about it, then let the harmed part of you tend to it. Giving your thoughts to the pain won't help it, and doing so will even increase the ways this injury harms you.

When you believe you're near the time of your death, you will let go of nearly everything except your mind and being true to it. The point of fear is to help us avoid an unwanted event, but since death can't be avoided, it doesn't make sense to fear it. Concern is better spent on whether you will have lived the right way before you died.

When you believe death is near, you will no longer care how many strangers know about you. You will not be surprised by what happens, or bother to keep up with the news. You will no longer be so easily obsessed or distracted by anything trivial.

The length of every life is unknowable. Even the longest lives are short. It's impossible to know how much time you have left, so for your thinking and priorities—without any need for panic or becoming morose—err in favor of the priorities you will have near the end of your life. You'll then be prepared for it if it catches you by surprise. If it doesn't, you'll simply have lived better: free from craving empty attention, without constant

anxiety over things you cannot change, and wasting no more energy on arguments about opinions of no importance.

12.2 What would your mind be like without your body's issues? What would be left of your guiding principles?

Remember that most of your thoughts did not originate within you. Most came from what was figured out and refined by society before, and outside of, you. When you give what you've learned back to the community by documenting or teaching it, you free yourself from the stress and unrest of holding it in. One reason people fear death is because of the hard-earned lessons that will be lost with them, or the thought that they are needed to do certain things in certain ways. When we pass what we found along to others, back into society's collective knowledge, we are released from that weight, which otherwise grows heavier year after year.

Do not be fooled into obsessing over the appearance of your body, with high fashion for status, how expensive a home you make shelter in, or over the amount of attention you attract from strangers. These are theatrics, and most of life happens off the stage. After you're gone, how much will these continue to matter? We cannot contribute our shallow appearances to society's lasting future. If there's a statue or painting made it will be flatteringly inaccurate, anyway.

12.3 You are made up of three things: a small body, limited intelligence, and the temporary spark that your breathing keeps renewing. The body and the spark are only yours in the sense that you are responsible for looking after them. Only your thoughts, then, fully belong to you.

Your thoughts will determine whether you live the rest of your life clear-headed, without feeling troubled by anything outside of you, and with the self-control to follow through on your intentions.

You can do this by, first, adding more distance between your principles and what you see or hear in the moment—form a shell of calm inside you, to protect consideration of your values from the hectic noise and stimulation which constantly batters your senses from outside.

Second: accept, at a practical level, what you can't change. This includes what has already happened. Do what you can in the present, which, for example, could include working with your memory of the past. Let go of unhappiness over unavoidable future events. Fear won't change them. Stop fixating on things that are unlikely to ever take place. If something unlikely in the future you've been fixated on actually does happen, you'll be just as able to figure it out then, as now—possibly better, since it will have your full attention, and you'll have the right details. If you can reasonably prepare for the possibility of it, that, too, can lessen your stress over it being out of your control whether it will happen or not.

Third, make your own decisions. Don't warp your thoughts in reaction to anyone else's opinions.

Fourth, let go of your past opinions. Forgive yourself of your past actions. You didn't know what you know now. If you met your past self, you wouldn't see eye-to-eye on your own judgments, and your present self has the clear advantage of seeing both sides. Why would you disrupt your thoughts over disagreement with someone who you know has less

experience, consideration, and insight than you do now—even if the someone is your past self?

Fifth, although you can take measures to care for your body, ultimately what happens to it is more likely the result of nature, and less likely to be the result of your will or choices. You should take precautions to avoid injury or illness, but either can happen at no fault of yours. Do what you can, but do not be surprised or upset if something happens anyway.

Your thoughts don't have to be at the mercy of what happens outside of you, unless you decide to let them. Focus what little time and energy you have on what you can do, instead of burning up in anger about what you can't. Your mind will be as clear as you make it, as free in what it thinks about as you'll allow, and will only make the decisions you determine to be right.

12.4 How can it be that, although most people trust their own judgments as best, on the subject of ourselves we give much greater emphasis to the judgments of others?

Imagine your instructor asks you, at a random time, to speak out loud about what is in your thoughts. Most people could not keep this up for even a day, without soon revealing they are more concerned with what other people think than about what they think. This includes worrying about what other people think of them, instead of forming their thoughts about themselves.

12.5 How can it be fair, or right, that every person, even the kindest and most upright, remain dead forever once they die? This is worth considering, because the reason can shine a light on answers to other questions related to accepting reality as it is.

If it should have been otherwise, so people who died should be able to rejoin us, then it would be that way. What else could “should” mean? If it were right for this to happen, it would be possible, because “what is right?” is always a question answerable only within the realm of what’s possible. If it doesn’t happen, and it isn’t possible, then it shouldn’t happen.

Do you intend to doubt nature, which has always existed, and without which neither you nor anything else would exist? Do you feel you’ve learned in your short life a better solution for the way the universe ought to be, despite not even having a way to argue with the universe?

Or, if you believe in a deity, are you prepared to dispute anything with it, let alone something so fundamental to life as the inevitability and permanence of death? If the deity was generous enough to entertain such an argument, and you were right to insist that death being temporary would be better, with more benefit than loss, this deity would have already made the universe the way you’re imagining it. Do you think you’ve thought of something it hasn’t, in your short time alive? Are you the first person in all of history to have, and bring up, this idea?

The central point is this, and holds true regardless of whether you are spiritual or not: when you find yourself in disagreement with the reality of the universe, first, consider there may be benefit to the way it is which you aren’t seeing. Look for it. For example, if the universe worked this way, with people living forever or coming back to life, would you have ever come into existence? How many other people would never have been born, for lack of room? How many outdated ideas would be kept dominant by people never moving from positions of authority?

Second, realize that you are not going to succeed in a fight against the universe or a deity. If ants could talk to you, would you put their ideas over yours? How much smaller and lesser are we in comparison to the universe or a deity than any ant is to us?

Third, move on to spend your finite thoughts, actions, and words on anything besides arguing with the universe or deities over how you would have it be. Having recognized that it should be the way it is, and that it is not going to change because of our request, this kind of question becomes little more than a vortex of unproductive effort.

Remember that what makes rational beings superior in our movement compared to the movement of inanimate objects is that when we identify an immovable barrier, we don't lose all our energy on pushing against it, but instead we turn our attention to going around it, turning the way it is into an advantage, doing something else, or resting calmly instead of exhausting our finite efforts on doing something that we know won't make any difference.

12.6 Practice things, even things that seem difficult to you. Notice there are some tasks your non-dominant hand can do well, even though it's generally less dexterous, because of simple practice and repetition. People who are more natural at doing something are soon overcome in competitions by other people who had to learn to practice, and made time to do so.

12.7 When you are nearly overtaken by death, surely you'll want your thoughts to be sorted, settled, and peaceful? Given the shortness and unpredictability of life, we can never know how much time we have left. Why not get your thoughts sorted,

settled, and calm sooner rather than later? Why should our minds only be that way in our final days?

If it helps to smooth the waves, pull back your view to consider the infinite abyss of time before and after you, reminding yourself of how temporary and small everything which exists really is.

12.8 Most pain we deal with comes into our lives because of our unchecked opinions. Such opinions take shape when we are untruthful with ourselves about our purpose, or don't look closely at the connection between our actions and what we think—but can't admit—we want.

If you are displeased by lacking attention that comes with social status, you created that problem by attaching your mood to the whims of others. What other people do is not up to us. Wanting to be a celebrity is another form of wanting what, for most people, we can't change. Even more likely, this is a version of wanting what we don't have, simply because we don't have it, and so we fail to see the downsides. The same person who wants to be well-known, if they were thrust onto the stage, would want privacy, and freedom from expectations.

No one can be blocked by another person, especially not in our thoughts, except to whatever extent we block ourselves and use others as our excuse for doing so.

Let their opinions be their opinions. Let your opinions be yours.

12.9 Keep with you at all times, ideally as a part of you, your governing principles, virtues, and right ways of thinking and doing.



Compare a wrestler to a fencer. Wrestlers can never be caught without the tools of their training. This is unlike the sword fighter, who picks up, lays down, may leave behind or even have their tools taken from them.

Philosophy for how to think and live cannot be like a sword that you sometimes have on you and are prepared to use only in rare, carefully arranged circumstances. It must stay with you, going with you everywhere you go, in every situation. Philosophy is not something you hold or can let go of. Like the wrestler, it is what you do with the body and thoughts you always have with you.

12.10 Do not gloss over what things really are, thinking of them only in the way they were explained to you, or losing appreciation for each individual object by settling for a surface-level familiarity which goes no further than awareness or how to make practical use of it. See what it is made of, why it has the form it does, what purpose it was created for, and what other purposes it could have.

12.11 It can be both a relief, and a source of power, to grasp that you don't have to do anything you can't, and so you have to come to peace with doing only what you can. Many people fail to recognize either point, and so spend a majority of their lives struggling unnecessarily.

12.12 Nature operates involuntarily, and it makes no sense to blame it. People, though we can be incorrect and make mistakes, usually will not knowingly do wrong—most of the harm we cause is involuntary, too. Nature doesn't see it, and the person doesn't see it, so often there is no one to blame. Or, since only someone who sees a wrong can do something to prevent it in the future, and you alone saw it, if it happens again

then the clearest case for blame may be with you for not having acted on what you saw.

12.13 Nothing that happens should be a surprise. For someone to be unable to connect what they see to its ordinary cause, they'd have to have lived until today as a stranger to the world.

12.14 Either what is going to happen is unavoidably set in motion like fate, and people will do something to improve it to the extent they can, or else what happens in the world is at a level of chaos that exceeds anyone's ability to deliberately intervene. Whichever of these it is, each person's main concern and responsibility amounts to keeping the right attitude about it, whether that attitude becomes the way to endure it, to do our small part in it, or to accept it.

12.15 If what's going to happen is unavoidable, what good will it do to resist, fear, or grieve it?

People who can do something about it, will do what they can to help. If you want to help, become a person they would be wise to bring in to help, and be sure they know where to find you.

If it's all simply a whirlpool chaos, so actions can't be counted on to affect the course of events in intended ways, then be grateful to at least have command over your thoughts as it happens.

If the waves pull you under, only let it drown your body and the borrowed breath now animating you, knowing it can't move your intelligence. Let the truth and clarity of your thoughts be like a candle, radiating fully until the last moment it's extinguished.

12.16 When it seems someone has done wrong, ask yourself: how can I even be certain that their act is wrong? If it is wrong, is it possible they have already realized this after doing it, are feeling guilty, and are beating themselves up over it?

If the person is simply evil, knowing it was wrong and not caring, realize that expecting an evil person not to do evil things makes no more sense than expecting a horse not to neigh, a baby not to cry, or a vine not to produce grapes. A person's actions reflect their character, and so evil actions will necessarily be done by people who have sufficiently bad character. If you can help cure their destructive confusion, and justify the amount of work necessary to do so, then do so.

12.17 If it's not right, don't do it. If it's not true, don't say it.

12.18 Pay close attention to what is actually happening, to what an object actually is, separate it from what it is in your imagination. Break it down in your mind, not just materially, but also conceptually, and see that like all things, it will be the way it is now for only a short time.

12.19 Your excessive passions and unconsidered desires will attempt to make a puppet of you if you'll let them. You have enough strength to overpower their strings. Notice when you feel the pull of fear, suspicion, or desire, since they take this form to work against your rationality.

12.20 Do not do things you have no reason to do. Do not do things without giving consideration to the purpose, and figuring out the likely consequences. Choose, direct, and defend your actions based on what you have reason to expect will best benefit other people.

12.21 Before long, you will be no one, and you will be nowhere. Everything that you see will no longer exist in the way you know it. Everyone you know will no longer be alive. All things created by nature—and all things are created by nature—undergo constant change, until they become something else entirely, or else dissolve back into the universe to make way for what's next.

12.22 Admit that most of what troubles you are mere opinions—when it isn't your own, it's someone else's, and you made the mistake of forming an opinion about their opinions. The responsibility for your opinions is solely with you. You alone choose the size of the waves that could capsize you. Take away your opinions, take away your emphasis on them, take away the power you gave them over you, and you will find only a calm, stable, waveless harbor remains.

12.23 When something good has come to an end, there is no reason to see that change as an evil. Appreciate that it was good in its time, and you or others were there for it, neither of which can be taken for granted. If you've done something good, but now no longer do, you have not caused or suffered any evil for having given only a finite amount of good back to society. This, too, is not something we can take for granted. Credit yourself for giving when and how you can.

In the same way, your whole life consists of such acts. You will come to an end after your proper time, no longer able to do the good that you could when you still existed. In the same way, there is no evil in this, that there will be no more good to come from you, after there is no more you. The time is usually up to nature to decide, not you, possibly in old age and rarely when we'd have chosen, but it comes for everyone. This is the

change that keeps the universe as a whole continuously young, rich with vigor, renewed, and not merely aging into decay itself.

Everything that is useful to the universal, with a place and time in the universe, is good for life in it. When you live in a community, what is good for the community is good for you.

The end of life is not evil. There is no disgrace or shame in something happening that we knew would happen since your very beginning. For each birth, another death is created with it, but that is not an argument against birth.

The time of our death is not a choice. Our death does not harm the common good—see that the good we did and left behind was more than there would have been without us, a net gain, without unexpected or avoidable loss. Generations decay like leaves after the fall, but like the seasons, we can't have warmth without cold, or new life without these cycles of change.

Knowing that we are going to die will help us benefit from life, and help us benefit others in life.

Just as tree branches remain after leaves fall, what you did with your time to improve the community remains after we're gone, enabling others to start better off than we could have.

12.24 Keep these three thoughts close at hand:

1. Act right in relation to what you can affect. Accept that whatever else happens from beyond your influence is a consequence of luck or fate. But do not blame luck or fate, since they aren't listening, don't have any way to care, and your time spent directing blame won't cause either to change.

2. See every person not just the way they are at this moment, but over the timeline of their whole life—all of their taking and giving back, from the moment of birth, through learning as children, honest mistakes made as adults, what they will someday do with what they learn, and what kind of people they will be by their end. Remember, in all this, that each person's body is soaking wet material, stirred into the wind by their breath, trained imperfectly by their equally flawed peers, up until they inevitably dissolve back into the earth.

3. If you could rise high up in the sky, looking down on human life from above, how small your problems would seem, and how minor everything would appear, so tiny and temporary. People rush about acting in life's drama as if they're the first to play their role, but these basic patterns arise time after time, for person after person. Is this what we are so proud of and clinging to? That we are discovering again what has been discovered countless times before, and will be discovered countless times again?

12.25 Let go of your opinions, of the importance you assign to them, and you can be free. Who is stopping you from doing this? Who have you given the power to hold you back from doing it?

12.26 Any time you find something difficult to endure, consider if you forgot that:

- a. Everything that happens is according to nature.
- b. When someone does wrong, that wrong is theirs—not yours.
- c. The things that happen now have always happened roughly this way, and likely always will.
- d. Our ability to collaborate isn't limited to who is family, but to who we accept in our thoughts.

- e. Each person's mind does the best it can with the pieces and versions of knowledge it carries.
- f. We possess nothing fully except our thoughts—not our body, things, or the breath we borrow.
- g. Most of what troubles us amounts to mere opinions, and often, they're our own opinions.
- h. Each person lives only in this present instant, and so this is the only time we will lose.

12.27 Think about people who complain greatly about anything and everything, in addition to people from a variety of situations: who had the highest highs, lowest lows, most misfortune, or best luck. Where are they all now? How did they wind up? They are smoke and ash, or under a grave, maybe with half-true stories a few people share about them—or not even that. How many people, alive at this same time as you, will you never know or ever meet? Notice how even more removed you are from people who lived before you, in just the same way as you can never know anything about the people who will exist after you.

Most people struggle for things out of vanity, but in real value, these things are extremely cheap.

How much wiser would it be for you, working with what you have, to live fairly, calmly, honestly, and simply. Of course, be careful to not wind up vain over how vain and prideful you aren't.

12.28 To people who wonder, "Can you see the collective understanding? Where is it?" We can, and it's shared in overlapping parts spread across everyone, with no single person having much of it, let alone all of it. If it didn't exist, we'd see each person having to start from scratch discovering

everything for themselves, with no knowledge beyond what can be discovered or reinvented in the span of a single lifetime, starting by each creating a language. Turn the question inward: can you see your knowledge? Where is it, what does it look like? You haven't seen it, you've seen its effect on the physical world. You may have a vague sense of where it is, knowing it goes where you go, but just so our common knowledge is divided across where any people go.

12.29 Learn to see each object as it is, stripped of the meaning and judgment you've placed on it. Look to know what it's made of, and what it causes. Learn to see yourself, stripped of the meaning and judgment you've placed on yourself. Look at what you're made of, and what you cause.

Put your whole self into doing right, and speaking plainly. For the remainder of your life, do one good act followed by another, filling every interval you can by contributing to the common good.

12.30 The sun produces only one light, but it might be chopped and shaped by buildings, mountains, and trees. The universe produced one common material, but it has been split and recombined into the variety of things we see. There is likewise only one spark of life, shared among us all, even though it has been split into so many different parts. Life comes from life. Wild animals, and even inanimate objects, share some real connection to one another, being of common origin, sharing many of the same materials, affected the same by gravity and the like. What we know collectively is superior to those kinds of unity, because shared knowledge can bridge across divisions, consistently caring for and welcoming back what was disconnected, reuniting faster than other forces can make things separate.



12.31 What more can you ask for? To live longer? To continue sensing and desiring? For more good times and bad? More time to speak and think? What have you been doing with your speaking and thinking so far which has you thinking other people should have more of it? If that is the case, teach others how to speak and think like you, making your case for why it's better, then it can continue without you, and after you. How much have you struggled? How many bad times? There's no need to rush to the end, but when nature decides we've had enough time, perhaps it isn't seriously worth wishing for more.

Think and act according to your reason. Contribute however you can to leave what the community knows better than it was when you first drew from it. To get caught up in placing importance on those other things, to be upset that death will end our ability to experience them, is an unhelpful distraction, at odds with living right and contributing what we can, while we can.

12.32 What a short window of time we're each allotted, out of the seemingly infinite time, in which ours comes and goes like an instant. What a small percentage of all matter we each consist of, ever see, or live around. Nothing is more important than pursuing what your principles guide you to do, to endure calmly and with a clear-mind anything that nature, including human nature, does outside your control.

12.33 What does your mind assign you to do? That is the main question. Everything else, whether it was your decision to do it or not, is idle busywork until we wind up ashes or buried.

12.34 People who gave the most thought to pleasure and pain—because they see these as the same as good and evil—said

little about death as either a good or evil. We can disagree with their claim that pleasure and pain are good and evil, respectively, while agreeing fully that to pass away when nature requires it is, at minimum, definitely not evil.

12.35 We can feel no terror towards our death. We do this by accepting what is in season, and that the passage of time requires change. Who will act rightly, when life gives us an opportunity to do so? When we act right, every time we are able, we no longer feel concerned or troubled by a sense of unfairness about whether it's fair for us to have a longer or shorter time to live.

12.36 You are a citizen of the world, a neighbor to everyone. What difference does it make if that is the case for five or fifty years? We share the same society, the same collective learning, and we each endure the respective parts of what we cannot change about the nature of the universe. There is nothing to fear about when your time is complete. The same showrunner who put on this whole play, and cast you to be on stage in your role, also decided the length of your part. What good is it to complain that you are on stage for only two acts, but would prefer to be on for three? The acts you are in, are the entire play for you. Beyond that, you need to make room for those who follow you on stage, because there's a whole production going on bigger than any one of us.

You didn't create yourself at birth. The opposite side of life usually isn't fully up to you, either.

Leave the stage when it's your time to do so, peacefully, satisfied that you played your role. Everyone who shared the stage with you, and will go on after, is grateful you had your part in it.

THE END