

Just a few individuals in history have succeeded to stand the test of time to get worldwide recognition. Views on historical people usually transform from one generation of scholars to the other. Still, Marcus Aurelius has usually been seen as one of the most famous Roman emperors.

However, Aurelius is seen as more than only a great ruler; he's recognized as well as an extraordinary thinker and one of the vital thinkers in the philosophical school of Stoicism. Different from other Roman emperors, Aurelius had a quite easy and consistent way to the life that assisted him to live virtuous even during periods of difficulty and emotional stress.

By knowing about the foundations of Marcus Aurelius's way to Stoicism, you can start to reason like a Roman emperor and maybe rethink your own way to life's several difficulties.

## Chapter 1 - Stoics believe in leading a wise and virtuous life in harmony with nature.

Just like every other philosophy, Stoicism has foundational doctrines. If you had any prior understanding of what the phrase "stoic" signifies, you may have thought that it was the same with having a "stiff upper lip." However, that's just an aspect of what it entails to be a Stoic. If you were to boil down the doctrines of this olden philosophy into once notion, the meaning would be this: To lead a fulfilling life is to live in agreement with the natural way of things.

According to the Stoics, living in harmony with nature was the reasonable and sensible thing to do. Nevertheless, you originate from nature and ultimately will go back to it. Therefore, while you are still living, the wise and virtuous thing to do is to act in agreement with nature.

According to a Stoic, a significant aspect of living in harmony with nature is admitting fate as it is, not as it ought to be or might be. Men such as Marcus Aurelius assumed that the life they were dealt with was only as good as any other life for which they could hope. To reason otherwise would be irrational and unreasonable.

This doesn't signify that Stoics experience life without having favorites. A Stoic, just like every other person, would choose to be healthy instead of being sick, and rich and resourceful instead

of being poor. But, the Stoics assumed that everyone, whether rich and strong or sick and poor, has the exact same nature flowing through them and must live wisely and virtuously regardless of their current situations.

As a matter of fact, it's usually the rich and successful individuals who don't live virtuously. A fact that didn't leave Marcus Aurelius, as well as other ancient Stoics, is that rich and powerful individuals usually wasted their lives running after pleasures that eventually made them sad. Barely virtuous living.

However, according to Stoicism, what precisely is virtue? Also, what is the reason why it is significant to live virtuously in the first place?

## Chapter 2 - Forming a connection with virtue offers you a consistent behavioral compass on which to depend on, regardless of what life throws at you.

The majority of the people would most likely choose to live a virtuous life. But, the actual idea of virtue is not just difficult to pinpoint but can as well be very hard to stick to on a daily basis.

When you check olden Stoic writings, you'll see that they describe four cardinal virtues which are wisdom, morality, courage, and moderation. These virtues are what lead you to a harmonious life where you embrace yourself and other people as citizens of the world; also, where you gracefully embrace the external situations you can't control.

Sounds easy enough, right? Actually, in practice, these principles are very difficult to accomplish, particularly if we're thinking about society as a whole and prolonged times of stressful situations.

And still, these are the actual doctrines upon which Marcus Aurelius meditated and the tenets on which he lived his life. From a really tender age until his final breaths, he used these doctrines as a guiding light, and this was done through intentional cultivation as well as practicing.

The Stoics believed that one could form a sense of virtue and, with ongoing training, embrace the preferred positive features. You don't have to be perfect because every Stoic will agree with being fallible. However, that doesn't signify that we can't keep on trying to be better and focus on those ideals.

Therefore, how can a person practice and train to be a good Stoic? It can be hard; however, it's essentially about selecting the right direction when the situation occurs. Usually, we're given the chance to decide, and the practice comes in proceeding to pick the behavior that is wise, moral, courageous, or moderate – this is the way of the Stoic.

Through practice, you can form the habit of picking self-restraint and delayed gratification over fast and simple pleasures. Marcus Aurelius took this philosophy of active virtue very seriously and used it to his day-to-day actions and his administrative choices. As we'll get to know in the following chapter, he did this as part of a search for authentic happiness, and there is nothing to stopping you from doing the same.

## Chapter 3 - Authentic happiness will naturally follow if you understand your passions.

Life is usually likened to a roller-coaster ride – and for good cause. At times we're riding high and feeling unbeatable; some other days, we're depressed in the dumps, feeling depressed, annoyed, or even cursed, as if the world were out to get us.

Marcus Aurelius rejected to use his life being put between highs and lows such as this. During his early life, he was aware that he had some real anger problems, and he was also aware that terrible things occurred when he offered himself to those periods of rage. Luckily, he discovered a means to handle his anger issues with the Stoic philosophy.

The deeper Aurelius got into Stoicism, the stronger his hold on his anger –also, his other feelings– became. By the time he passed away, Marcus thought that through intentional practice, he'd gotten power over his emotional spectrum and achieved what the Stoics called

the authentic happiness. Instead of being deep-rooted in pleasure, good feelings, or contented desires, authentic happiness is derived only from the satisfaction of virtuous living.

If getting off life's emotional roller coaster seems pleasing to you, the good thing is that you can apply the exact same steps Aurelius used by learning how to be extra mindful of both your negative and positive feelings.

The stoic practice is related to what contemporary psychotherapists refer to as cognitive distance. Basically, it's the practice of consciously detaching yourself from your feelings—moving back in order for you to see your emotional reactions from a sensible, outside view. As soon as you are not blinded by your feelings anymore, you can start to make use of reason and logic to make better choices that aren't influenced by a tangle of chaotic emotions.

Therefore, when next you feel as if you are getting angry, impeding your ability to make rational choices, identify this feeling and detach yourself from it in order for you to see the circumstance as a dispassionate third party. When you recognize your anger as well as your passions as if they are owned by another person, you can desist to react rashly and rather react sensibly, at your own speed.

When you feel as if life's roller coaster is taking you for a ride, imagine yourself standing strongly on the ground, observing from a safe space. Visualize looking up and saying, "there is someone moving up and down," while letting go of the extreme emotions. The individual trapped on the roller coaster will respond to the shock and the pace of the ride. The individual on the ground will feel authentic happiness all the time.

## Chapter 4 - It doesn't make sense to wish for immortality since it's logically not possible.

Will you be remembered the day after you pass away? What of a year or a decade or a millennium later? Logically speaking, all the things in history, great and little, will ultimately be forgotten.

For some individuals, the reality that they will be forgotten one day is a great source of anxiety. Therefore, they will act unreasonably and go to extra and foolish miles in a pointless attempt to leave a permanent stamp on history and hence get immortal.

Aurelius and the Stoics used the opposite method. They knew the impermanence of life and also, how time is a great leveler; however, they didn't battle against these realities; they recognized them. Marcus Aurelius didn't make every effort to be remembered as a great emperor; he constantly thought about the impossibility of being remembered in any way.

Assuming you had to make ego-driven choices so as to attain immortality, you're certain to eventually end up disappointed. Having this in mind, Aurelius recognized his eventual death at an early age in life and allowed this reality to direct him to make rational choices. In most cases, he lived a good life due to that, not burdened by his ego.

However, the irony is, although Aurelius didn't have any interest in being remembered, he remains, over 1,800 years after, an illustration of one of the greatest leaders of the olden era. Hence, history reveals to us that leaders are the ones who are least influenced by an ego that stands apart from the rest.

You can't put a stop to the hands of time. Regardless of how difficult you may attempt to cheat death, all of us are led toward the exact same unavoidable end, one means or another. The Stoics, as well as Aurelius, were really aware of this and hence they thought of death together with all the other decisions they were given in life, as they could either die well or terribly.

With day-day practice, Aurelius progressively became at ease with the reality of life and death. He made use of meditations about virtue as well as goodness to see him through his day-day choices. It was made obvious by his writings that this type of practice is a thing anybody can do, not only emperors.

## Chapter 5 - The philosophy of Stoic is not about suppression or passivity, it's a situation of deciding on personal responses wisely and embracing reality joyfully.

There are many common misinterpretations about Stoicism. A lot of people believe that being Stoic entails concentrating on death and evading entertainment and pleasure. Also, some people believe that Stoics are all similar to Mister Spock: unemotional, logic-obsessed, and boring.

Part of these notions arises from the reality that a lot of the writings the Stoics have left behind have a tendency to be somewhat dry, with a matter-of-fact method that can feel passionless and repulsive.

However, if you look past the formal writings and take a look at Marcus Aurelius's letters to friends and family, you'll have a hint into a person who has a positive view on life and is really full of joy and humor. Also, we should not forget that this is also the view of someone who lived a difficult existence that has a lot of unwanted responsibility, political disorder, physical illnesses, and the death of people he loved. However, those who were close to Marcus still talked about him as cheerful!

As it is shown by personal writings, being a Stoic didn't entail that Marcus Aurelius held back his emotions. Instead, he didn't allow himself to be controlled or influenced by them. As a matter of fact, the Stoics understood the exact same thing that contemporary psychologists agree upon nowadays— that it's psychologically destructive to hold back your emotion.

Therefore, when you ponder about a person who's a Stoic, don't picture a person who is emotionless, dull, boring, and obsessed with personal virtue. Rather, imagine a person who is authentically contented with life and free from the worries of desire or overindulgence.

Also, bear in mind, that just because a person might be practicing acceptance of death doesn't essentially signify that they're dark or miserable. It basically signified that they are attempting not to be in denial of a thing that's totally natural.

## Chapter 6 - With controlled practice, it is likely to make peace with physical pain.

Nobody wished to live life in a state of regular pain; however, some individuals aren't really given an option. However, the human body isn't impervious to illnesses, and some illnesses can be long-lasting or chronic.

Marcus Aurelius, as it occurs, wasn't a person you'd refer to as a healthy man. As a matter of fact, most times in his life, he went through painful illnesses. He had chronic chest and stomach pains during the later phases of his life and was known to be particularly frail.

However, instead of being in conflict with this pain all the time, hence letting it influence him, he used the Stoic philosophy to embrace the situations he didn't have any control over. By doing this, he could successfully control how he responded to these situations. By dealing with pain management logically, he didn't allow his illnesses to have any impact on his relationship with the world that surrounds him.

There are a lot of wild and notorious accounts of Stoic philosophers and pain. There are some rumors that mention that the Stoics would hug frozen statues when it is winter or roll in the hot sand when it is the summer. Even their mode of dressing showed their conditioning to pain, as they would leave expose their shoulders, even on very cold days, as an indication of endurance.

The Stoics didn't intend to inflict injuries on themselves or put permanent wounds. Instead, they were slowly protecting themselves against painful situations that were certain to appear, be they external situations such as the weather or internal situations such as sickness and old age. Everything was a means of embracing the natural elements and coping with pain instead of hiding from it or allowing it to control them.

Also, Aurelius was well known for meditating on the geography of his pain. This entailed that if he was feeling pain in his foot, he would deliberately "keep" the pain his foot and not allow it to infect or affect the remaining part of his body or his mind.

Epicurus who was the olden Greek philosopher summarizes the Stoics' relationship to pain quite well when he indicates that pain is usually bearable since it is either acute or chronic; however, never both. Therefore, it's either short-term and tolerable or long-lasting and manageable. Regardless of which pain you feel, you can endure it, particularly if you abide by the way of the Stoic.

## Chapter 7 - You'll relish the good things in life more when you understand the value of voluntary hardship.

Although physical pain can be one of the most difficult distresses in life, hardship can appear in various different kinds over the course of a lifetime. The Stoics, as well as Aurelius, were aware that it was part of the human condition to desire things that were pleasurable and simple to achieve. Still, Aurelius could notice that individuals were not contented with their lives for the basic idea that it's unsustainable to continue thinking that things should be pleasurable and convenient all the time.

This is the point where the practice of voluntary hardship comes to play. A soft bed, a house, warm water, and food may be fixtures in your life now; however, that doesn't signify that you have to take them for granted or think that they'll be there the next day. This is one of the causes a contemporary Stoic might routinely use cold showers even when there is hot water.

Volunteering to feel hardship when there is comfort may seem unreasonable. However, for the Stoics, it is a really sensible thing to do, as it is possible that pleasure, as well as convenience, won't present all the time; therefore, you might as well get accustomed to it!

One of the most direct means to nurture virtue and grow your character is through voluntary hardship. Just like how practicing cognitive distance is a vital means to stay in charge under emotional pressure, voluntary hardship will assist you to do the exact same thing when, from every now and then, life gives you even more hectic situations. Due to this, Stoics are well known for making use of their spare period as a chance to practice staying calm in the face of disorder.

The premeditation of adversity, also referred to as getting ready for the worst, was a means for Stoics to condition the mind for hardship. Also, although it might look like a morbid technique to use time, it will help you better deal with stress than a person who is completely not ready for a disaster.

You can try this now by volunteering for a cold shower. Can you summon your inner emperor and withstand a few minutes of chilly water just for the sake of developing a character?

## Chapter 8 - Marcus Aurelius understood that mentorship, as well as constructive criticism, brought about better personal accountability.

When you woke up this morning, you most likely didn't instantly begin to deliberate on what activities you could do in order for you to end the day feeling like a virtuous person. However, what is the reason why shouldn't you? Having a strong day-day concentration such as this is a big aspect of the Stoic philosophy and hence was a leading force in the life of Marcus Aurelius.

In his position as an emperor, Aurelius went really far to claim that he has a person in his inner circle to hold him responsible for his ideals. This reveals that he was very well aware of the blind spots everybody can have and that it is very easy to mention another person's error than it is to identify and call attention to your own.

From a tender age, Aurelius usually surrounded himself by individuals who would give constructive criticism. He would make use of this feedback day-day to ensure he acted well and never deviated from his main ideals, and his stated goals as well as duties. The outcome of this practice was a life of regular moral choices and rational political decisions.

However, what if you don't have anyone around you to provide constructive criticism? As he got close to the end of his tenure, Aurelius had lost his trusted sounding boards; therefore, he depended on a different method of Stoicism: the imaginary mentor.

In thinking about his deeds or choosing what to do, Aurelius would question himself what his imaginary virtuous mentors would say or do if they were in his situations. Would they agree with his behaviors or advice him to change direction? Even if you're by yourself, abstract exercises such as this can let you keep on soliciting the wisdom of the most virtuous individuals you can imagine.

Maybe, when next you see yourself in a stressful circumstance, use this method, by questioning yourself, "What would Aurelius do?"

## Chapter 9 - You can make use of counter-rhetoric to balance out conversations when people depend on feelings to prove a point.

Finally, let's examine one part of day-day life that just about everybody needs to handle in one way or another: words and communication. Just like a lot of great leaders before and because Marcus Aurelius was relatively the public speaker as well as a persuasive debater. These can be beneficial abilities to hone, particularly in this present day divisive political climate.

In the years leading up to Aurelius's position as emperor of Rome, he used much time to get ready for his future responsibilities. This comprised knowing about the value of rhetoric, which comprised of knowing how flowery as well as emotional phrases can be utilized to win arguments and fuel the passions of the multitude while really saying nothing of significance.

As a result of his belief in Stoic philosophy, Marcus rejected to study these advanced verbal methods in preference of learning counter-rhetoric or anti-rhetoric – the habit of making use of plain and basic language that is simple to know. Although the rhetoric is great for making conflict as well as competition, the counter-rhetoric Aurelius utilized soothed people and formed a neutral ambience of realities, truth, and commonality.

Eliminating the entire emotional triggers from his language entailed that he could talk with other people rather than being against them. Can you think of how significant it could be if present leaders started talking in this manner? Or how less demanding the internet would be if people

spoke to one another in manners that encouraged seeing each other eye-to-eye instead of butting heads?

The Stoic mindset is different from the overdramatic, disastrous thinking that is informing many of this present public dialog. A Stoic endeavors to talk objectively and wisely and without the verbal chaos or academic-speak that exaggerates or clouds the truth.

If you wish to reason just like a Roman emperor, it is beneficial to talk like one. For Marcus Aurelius, that entailed making use of phrases that solve conflicts instead of creating them. It was a vital aspect of his practice as a Stoic and as an individual who endeavored to do the accurate and virtuous thing every moment and day by day.

## How to Think Like a Roman Emperor: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius by Donald J. Robertson Book Review

Stoic philosophers are usually misjudged as low, dispassionate bores. However, the doctrines of Stoicism are not different from joy and positive thinking. Stoics such as the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius believed in making virtuous decisions, which entailed controlling the emotional desires that can make people opt for ease and simple pleasures. Rather, Stoics strives for choices and activities that fortify their character and are in harmony with natural fundamentals of life, as well as discomfort and death. The life, as well as writings of Marcus Aurelius, reveal to us that the day-day practice of Stoicism, as well as the search of authentic happiness and the usage of anti-rhetoric language, can bring about legendary leadership abilities.

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