

# BEYOND THEORY

an Old and New Stoic Practicum



written by

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# INTRODUCTION

*The first and most necessary topic in philosophy  
is the practical application of principles.....*

Epictetus, *Enchiridion* #51

When I was in the US Army Infantry Officer's School at Fort Benning, Georgia, I was in a new and experimental training program the Army spent years to develop. It was unlike any other program they ever had. In short, they gave us the answers to every examination in every field procedure right at the beginning. If you had to disassemble and assemble an M-16 rifle in x-number of minutes, they showed exactly what you had to do to pass. We practiced the procedure until we got it down, then we took the test. It was brilliant, quickly paced, and it worked. In four months, a fresh-faced Second Lieutenant could do everything a grizzled Sergeant of 25 years could do—or so they assured us.

As the name of this book implies, there is something that comes before which cannot be denied. These exercises and practices presuppose a background in Stoic literature, including general theory and readings in the three Romans. Without the foundational material, reading *Beyond Theory* is a bit like getting to take a look at the final exam on the first day of class. If you are beginning your studies with this work, that's OK. Sometimes it's good to know where you are going before you begin. Read on and see if you want to stay with us. You may not understand all of this practicum, but if you keep this by your side as you go through your other studies, you will be able to see where you are going and will pass with flying colors.

If you have read *The Book of Doubt* and are still reading, then you are a seeker of wisdom to be reckoned with. You will not be disappointed. If you survived the brilliant attacks of the skeptical philosophers, then you know that our familiar world may not be what we think it is. Or, it may. I believe a better way to see the phenomenon of existence is to realize that it is what we think it is – and so much more. If the attacks of the skeptics have left you wavering and unsure if you even want to go on, I understand. I left Stoicism and became a Pyrrhonian skeptic for several years before coming back to the Stoa. I came back, because although real skepticism is smart and offers a point of view that is both thoughtful and open-minded, it isn't grounded. It offers neither discipline nor devotion. It doesn't ask you to be the best that you can be. It doesn't ask for justice, altruism, or a noble character. Stoicism does.

It is part of the Stoic tradition to examine the possibility that other schools, such as the Sceptics, may be correct. Even if they are, it doesn't matter. If the skeptics are as correct or incorrect as the Stoics, we would still prefer to live as we do. As Marcus Aurelius said,

*The universe is either chaos and randomness; or it is unity, order, and providence. If it is the former, why should I wish to remain in such confusion and disorder? And why should I wish for anything other than*

*returning to the earth? And why am I disturbed, the dispersion of my elements will happen no matter what I do? But if the other supposition is true, then I venerate, and I am firm, and I trust in the god of Nature who governs.*<sup>1</sup>

If you have read *The Path of the Sage* and the *32 Principal Doctrines of the Stoa* in addition to *The Book of Doubt*, then you have both a solid foundation in Stoic thought and the kind of objectivity you need to be a contemporary philosopher. It's perfectly reasonable to allow that the world may not be what it appears to be and still embrace Stoicism as the best promise of living well. But now is time to go beyond all this theory, which means you need to exercise and practice. As Epictetus said time and time again: practice, practice practice. In Stoic philosophy, practicing our principles is profoundly important. There really is nothing more important.

You already *know* what a Stoic is. Now you can experience *being* the noble character our philosophy promises. If the real world is your only testing ground, the only place where you can practice, then it's going to be quite difficult for most, and many will fall away. That is not the best way to acquire even an elementary skill, let alone the master of all skills, the art of living. Whether you are an athlete training for the Olympics or a soldier training for combat, in order to be at your best you must exercise and practice *before* the contest or conflict. In *Beyond Theory*, that's what we learn to do.

There are two parts to this book: Part One summarizes theory and recommends two exercises; Part Two offers a new kind of practice. It was felt that a condensed recap of theory was necessary before jumping right into the exercises. The exercises of Part One require the usual analytical and logical effort, the left brain in action, while the “new” kind of practice of Part Two is meditation, real meditation, the one that clearly engages the silent, intuitive mind of the right brain. I'm guessing you are already familiar and comfortable with the former, the left-brain analysis, but some of you may be feeling a little anxiety right now about the latter. I have corresponded with many Stoics and would venture to guess that 90% of them are left-brain oriented people—and proud of it!

Virtually all of this book comes down to us from antiquity, but only Part One is from the western side of our ancient world and the left side of our ancient brain. Socrates *may* have achieved perfection by the use of reason alone, but we don't really know. That was more than two millenia ago. The Stoa is capable of expanding and evolving. It must be. It either evolves or it ossifies and dies. Without change, it becomes nothing more than an intellectual artifact, an academic curiosity. All existence is in a state of flux, as Heraclitus said, and our philosophy can be no exception. Seneca said, “Truth will never be discovered if we are content with discoveries that have already been made.... Truth lies open for all; it has not yet been monopolized. And, there is plenty of it left even for posterity to discover.”<sup>2</sup> If Stoicism isn't gaining in wisdom, then it's either senile or dead, and we are either studying a living philosophy or a dead one.

It's true, virtually everything in classical Stoicism is left-brain reasoning, and we don't have to abandon the past just because particle physicists currently occupy

the scientific throne. It only means that we have to learn a new set of rules. It's a quantum world we are living in, which makes our philosophy more exciting than ever, because now we have an opportunity to write a new chapter in our history. It's not that we have to give up our left-brain world view. On the contrary, this orientation is quite handy actually, and we still need it every day. However, it's not the only description of life in our familiar world.

In Part Two, for the first time in Stoic history, meditation no longer means left-brain cogitation practiced in a quiet corner. At last, Stoic meditation can take on a new and greater meaning. Now we can do real meditation, what the mystics and sages of the Orient have been doing for millenia, but in our case we can practice without their antiquated and unnecessary prejudices and expectations. Baggage. We now have a Stoic meditation that is clear, straightforward, and one that can nurture and strengthen the right brain. We have always been in possession of both sides of the brain, but now we can actually *use* both of them. Isn't it time Stoics learned how to appreciate *all* of what Nature has given?

But first, Part One.

\* \*

# Part One: Theory & Exercises

## INTRODUCTION

I received an email from an unhappy member of the Stoic community who wanted his name removed from the registry of New Stoa. He was looking for a job and didn't want his association with us to compromise his employment prospects. He was an unemployed or underemployed philosophy teacher and wanted a better situation. I tried to reason with him about how a Stoic would approach this problem, but he angrily told me not to preach to him about Stoicism, he had read all the books, and he didn't need my advice. Then he ended our correspondence with this comment. This is an exact quote: “*But I really do have obligations and these must take precedence before stoic principles—just as my Christian duties take precedence before pagan philosophy.*”

Frankly, I was floored and left speechless—for about one minute. I almost answered his ridiculous comment, then thought better of it. Not because I didn't have an answer, but because it is against my policy to argue with anyone who wants to leave the Stoic community. We are not a cult. It's his life, and he can do with it what he chooses.

What I really wanted to say to him is that for a Stoic, *nothing* takes precedence before Stoic principles! Nothing. But, then, he is obviously an academic Stoic, not a practitioner. He is a clear example of the difference between an academic and a real Stoic, all theory and no practice, which was anathema to the classical Stoics. For this disgruntled philosophy teacher, Stoicism is an intellectual parlor game, not a way of life. But he doesn't end there. Here is his final misunderstanding: “my Christian duties take precedence before pagan philosophy.” Not only does he fail to understand the whole purpose of being a Stoic, he clearly states that his *religious faith* is more important than the *reasoning mind* of the philosopher. And in case there is any doubt about his meaning, he refers to Stoicism as a “pagan philosophy” as if it is inferior to his religion.

How unfortunate. How misguided. If you forget everything you ever learn about Stoicism, I hope you remember one thing: being a Stoic is not an intellectual abstraction; it is not a game; it is a way of life. A Stoic's principles take precedence before *everything*. It *is* everything. It is how we live life—and live it well. We do *not* take second place to someone's religious myths and wishful thinking.

One way to insure that you are not misled into believing our philosophy is some kind of distant, abstract, ancient world-view that doesn't have anything to do with the *real* world we live in is to begin to live like a Stoic right now. You can do that first by understanding and holding tightly to essential Stoic doctrine, then adding specific exercises that bring life and strength to what you know. The following is a summary of that Stoic doctrine condensed into the briefest possible language. This reference point in Stoic thought is the basis for the

exercises that follow. If the theory is understood and the exercises are practiced with an open mind and sincerity, you will quickly acquire an insight into what it really means to think like and *be* a real Stoic.

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## A. *Mneme*: “Recitation of the DOE”

The greatest tribal warrior who ever lived was probably illiterate, a master of the keen memory and oral tradition that has been with us for all of human evolution. Genghis Khan's 150,000 cavalry warriors didn't move as a single massive column, as was common in his day, the 12th century, but were broken into many units and spread out over great distances. The difficulty in managing such an army was in communication. Virtually all of his soldiers were also illiterate, including most of the officers, which meant that all messages had to be communicated orally. As we all know, the further you are from the source of any oral communication, the more it gets distorted. To prevent misunderstanding, all laws, codes of conduct, and battle orders made by the Great Khan were composed in a commonly known Mongolian poetic style, set to music, and sung by the men as they rode on horseback.<sup>3</sup>

What follows is written in the form of verse for the same reason: it's easier to remember and less likely to be distorted with repetition. It's meant to be memorized. *Mneme*, or memory exercises, were very much a part of a classical Stoic's education. What you will find here is an extreme synthesis of the Discourses of Epictetus (the DOE), organized and composed into a common poetic style, blank verse. The endnotes that identify Epictetus's various points of theory in this verse, even though numerous, are not all that can be found but are some of my personal favorites. If you have any doubt about the dogma of this *mneme*, I encourage you to look up the references provided. *The DOE* is *mneme*, a memory exercise that can begin each day and/or as often as needed when one wishes or needs to remember Epictetus's marching orders for life.

### “The DOE”

One rule to unite us:

*live in agreement with Nature.*<sup>4</sup>

Two maxims to guide us:

*Good is virtue that evil lacks;*

*all the rest is indifferent.*<sup>5</sup>

*Good and evil are in the will;*

*only will is in our power.*<sup>6</sup>

Three studies abide us:<sup>7</sup>

*Judgments and the inner discourse,*

*Desires and the rising passions,*

*Actions and the noble duties.*

Hear the sage inside us:

*practice, practice, practice, practice.*<sup>8</sup>

\* \*

## ONE RULE

One rule to unite us:  
*live in agreement with Nature.*

*Epictetus remarked that it was a rule in life ... to do what was in accordance with nature. For, if we desire in every matter and on every occasion to conform to nature, we must on every occasion evidently make it our aim .... Philosophers, therefore, first exercise us in theory, which is the more easy task, and then lead us to the more difficult [1:26].*

The actual heading of this chapter of the *Discourses* is entitled, “What the Rule of Life Is.” About this there can be no doubt. From Zeno to the end of the classical period the Stoic motto, which is said a number of ways – in harmony with nature, in agreement with Nature, conformably with nature – all mean the same thing: there is one rule that unites all Stoics and all aspects of Stoic philosophy. This is so important that Epictetus even matter-of-factly states that anyone who does not live by this rule “...will wander up and down, entirely deaf and blind, supposing himself to be somebody, while he is nobody.”<sup>9</sup>

It's important to remember that living in agreement with Nature does *not* mean living by tooth and claw and survival of the biggest, strongest, and fittest among us. That would be a better description of the other creatures in the forest. No, our unique ability given to us by Nature is not bigger teeth and muscles, but bigger brains. Using reason is our way, or should be our way. If there is any doubt in your mind about the one rule of life, read Epictetus.

## TWO MAXIMS

Two maxims to guide us:  
*Good is virtue that evil lacks;  
all the rest is indifferent.  
Good and evil are in the will;  
only will is in our power.*

### The First Maxim:

*The essence of good and evil is a certain kind of moral purpose. What are things outward, then? Materials on which the moral purpose may act, in attaining its own good or evil. How, then, will it attain good? If it be not dazzled by its own materials; for right principles concerning these materials keep the moral purpose in a good state; but perverse and distorted principles in a bad one. This law God hath ordained, who says, “If you wish for good, receive it from yourself.”<sup>10</sup>*

Epictetus

The first maxim is a continuum, and the second maxim is a polarity. This one, the continuum, connects the good on one end and evil on the other with

indifferent things in the middle. “Some things are good, some evil, and some indifferent. Now the good are the virtues ... the evil are vices ... the indifferent lie between these, as riches, health, life, death, pleasure, pain.”<sup>11</sup> In order to understand what it is we are memorizing, the following will analyze this *mneme* line by line.

*Good is virtue that evil lacks.* What does this mean? We have already seen from our general principals that the good and only good, is virtue. “Only that which is good and can never be used for undue gain and immoral purposes qualifies unequivocally as good. Only the virtues are good in every situation and on every occasion, and therefore qualify for the name that must always be honorable, the Good.”<sup>12</sup>

So, the good is virtue. The cardinal virtues, as you will recall, are wisdom, justice, courage, and decorum. *Virtue that evil lacks* means that evil is simply a lack of virtue. That's what evil is. That's it. Evil is a lack of virtue. It has nothing to do with committing a frightful sin whispered into your ear by a Prince of Darkness that is calculated to bring about the wrath of a vengeful god. That's a children's story. If evil is a lack of virtue, then it is the *absence* of wisdom, justice, courage, and decorum.

We can use *bad* and *evil* interchangeably. “What we commonly call bad (*kakon*) is not really bad. Sickness, poverty, and exile are the *indifferents* to the wise. Even death, because it is the inevitable and natural process of change, is neither good nor bad and must be one of the indifferents. There is no evil in Nature, only in human beings when they act without virtue. Just as virtue is the only good, so it is that the acts of persons who are lacking in virtue are the only sources of evil in this world.”<sup>13</sup>

Now we come to the end of the first maxim: *all the rest is indifferent*. This is one of the most important concepts in Stoicism, and one we must all learn, remember, and return to time and again. These are what Epictetus constantly refers to as “externals.” Good and evil come from inside, internal, not from outside of us, the externals. The externals are matters that belong to others as well as the inevitable consequences of Nature. “All those things we *commonly* call good or bad [see above] are neither good nor bad and are only indifferent. Only virtue is good, and only the lack of virtue is bad.”<sup>14</sup> So, except for wisdom, justice, courage, and decorum, or the lack thereof, all the rest are indifferents. What *are* indifferents? What does that mean exactly?

For years I placed little value on the indifferents, simply because I didn't really understand them. The Epictetus quote about the indifferents as materials upon which the moral purpose may act, finally sunk into my thick skull and rearranged my thinking on the matter altogether. In looking over what I have written on the subject in the past, I could see I was saying all the right words, but not really knowing them in my gut. It's so easy to gloss over the indifferents when you learn that you must be indifferent to everything but your ethical behavior. That's what I did, and that's not what it means at all.

To isolate virtues *without* indifferents is to exist in a vacuum, which is impossible and absurd. Without the indifferents to work on, you have no virtues.

In fact, you don't even exist. Indifferents give you something to *do* in life. They *are* your life. Everything that happens *to* you is an external, an indifferent, and what you *do* with everything is what defines your character as noble or ignoble, good or evil. To say you're not going to have anything to do with externals is ridiculous. You really don't have a choice. You're only choice is *what* you do with them, and *how* you act upon the materials you have been given.

*In order for good to be always obtainable, or an evil always avoidable, they must depend exclusively on man's freedom; but the only things which fulfill these conditions are moral good and evil. They alone depend on us. Here, 'everything else,' which does not depend on us, refers to the necessary linkage of cause and effect, which is not subject to our freedom. It must be indifferent to us: that is, we must not introduce any differences into it, but accept it in its entirety, as willed by fate. This is the domain of nature.*<sup>15</sup>

Epictetus

It's like the potter sitting at his wheel. The indifferents are like the clay. How can the potter be indifferent to his clay? Without the clay he has nothing to do but watch the wheel spin around. The potter *cares* about his clay. The skill of the potter in working with his hands to form a beautiful and useful vessel from this lump of clay is like the skill of the Stoic in working with the cardinal virtues in forming a noble character. The Stoic's clay is made up of the indifferents. Without the clay and without the indifferents, the potter and the Stoic have nothing upon which to practice their skills. Don't be afraid of your clay, the indifferents; don't avoid them. Use them, enjoy them, work with them. Practice, practice, practice.

*The principle of all Stoicism is, moreover, precisely indifference to indifferent things. This means, in the first place, that the only value is moral good, which depends on our freedom, and that everything that does not depend on our freedom—poverty, wealth, sickness, and health—is neither good nor bad, and is therefore indifferent. Second, it means that we must not make any distinction between indifferent things; in other words, we must love them equally, since they have been willed by universal Nature.*<sup>16</sup>

Pierre Hadot

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## The Second Maxim:

*Seek not good from without; seek it within yourselves, or you will never find it.*<sup>17</sup>

Epictetus

To keep the first and second maxims from being entangled with each other, it may be helpful to remember that the first maxim is a continuum and the second is a polarity. In the continuum, Epictetus is saying that good and evil are at opposite ends, and the indifferents are in between. In the second maxim, good and evil are not at opposite ends of a polarity, they are together at the same end

with our will. They are choices of our will. At the other end of this polarity are the externals, the indifferents, those things not in our power. So, we now have a polarity of internals and externals. On one side are the choices of the will, what things are in our power; and on the other side are those things that are not in our power, everything else. If this isn't entirely clear, perhaps the following discussion will make it so.

*Good and evil are in the will.* Stoics believe we choose either good or evil by exercising the power of our will. In fact, not only do we have this choice, it is our only *real* choice, and it is our choice alone. Friends, enemies, tyrants, no one, not even a god can take away the power of choice to do good or evil that we have in the will. As Epictetus said of tyrants, “You will fetter my leg, but not even Zeus himself can get the better of my free will.”<sup>18</sup> Such a great power we have. Think about that. Think about what a great discovery the Stoics made about the power of the will to choose to do good or evil.

Before we go on, perhaps we should make sure we know what our will is. When in doubt, we can always consult a dictionary. Here's what mine says:

**1.a.** The mental faculty by which one deliberately chooses or decides upon a course of action; volition. **b.** The act of exercising the will....<sup>19</sup>

When we say that virtue and the lack of virtue are in the will, we are talking about the “mental faculty by which one deliberately chooses or decides upon a course of action.” When we say that only will is in our power, we are saying that good and evil only exist in our mental faculty as a choice, and *only this choice between good and evil is in our power* – nothing else. That's where our power ends. Everything else is either in the will of another individual or in the Will of Nature.

*But now, although it is in our power to care for one thing, and apply ourselves to one, we choose rather to care for many, and to encumber ourselves with many—body, property, brother, friend, child, and slave—and, by this multiplicity of encumbrances we are burdened and weighed down....<sup>20</sup>*

*What, then, is to be done? To make the best of what is in our power, and take the rest as it occurs. And how does it occur? As God wills.<sup>21</sup>*

Epictetus

Is that right? The one power that we have seems right, but do we not have *any* power over anything else? I mean, what about the potter and his clay as a simile for the Stoic working with his indifferents, the externals? Don't I have some power over my health, for example, if I eat right, exercise, avoid destructive habits, et cetera? Statistically, my chances of living a long life increase if I take care of my health, right? True, but you could be struck by lightning, get run over by a truck, or die of lung cancer at the age of 30 without ever smoking (as my wife's friend did a couple of years ago).

One of the first surprises you discover when you are in the medical profession, or close to someone in that profession, is that people at the peak of health can acquire disabling physical conditions and can die at all ages of diseases that they should never have gotten. Or so we commonly believe. The truth is that we

*are* able to take care of ourselves, and prudence says that we *should*, but in the end, a life of good health and the proximity of death are *not* in our power.

The same can be said of all other externals. People who have amassed a fortune want us to believe it was done by their own power, by their superior intelligence and exceptionally hard work. That's just a form of denial and lack of self-awareness. Fate and destiny work twice as hard in the accumulation of wealth as any individual, and it can work to put an end to that wealth overnight.

To begin with, people are born with certain talents that others do not possess. They didn't create these innate talents any more than a genius is responsible for his or her superior intellect. They were born with certain talents as certainly as one child is born into crushing poverty and another is to the manor born. Even of those born into poverty one will struggle night and day to rise above his station and another will succumb to the first drug dealer that knocks on his door. Why? We are born into certain environments and with certain talents that tell much more about us and what our future holds than any other factor.

Here's a story to illustrate my point. Aristotle Onassis, a Greek shipping magnate, amassed one of the greatest fortunes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was also born into poverty, but he was born with a special talent: he somehow got the best of every deal he made. When he was a small child he would find one marble and trade it for two. Then he would take his two marbles and an old, discarded pair of gloves and trade them all for a broken tricycle with a missing wheel. And so on, until he ended up with the finest bicycle in town. It was always like this for Ari, as his friends called him.

When he was a teenager, his parents moved to a Latin American country, and they could no longer afford to send him to school. So, where did Ari go to work? As an office boy in a trading and shipping company. Before he had been there a year, he overheard a deal that he believed could make him rich. Only, it would require some capital, and he had none. Did that stop him, as it would have stopped 99.9% of the office boys in his city? No. Did he have boundless courage and energy that aggressively put together the capital he needed? No. Actually, he was a bit shy, and didn't really impress anyone as being especially hard-working.

(Albert Einstein was told by his graduate school physics professor that he was very bright but so lazy he would never amount to anything.)

Ari sought out the name of the richest man in town and got his address. Then he went to the man's house and found out at what time he left his estate for work each day. Every morning, Ari stood just outside the man's gate and quietly watched as the rich man's chauffeur-driven limousine turned out of the gate on its way. He made no motion to stop the rich man; didn't beg, didn't call out, just stood there watching as the limo drove by. At first, the man ignored this strange teenager standing there looking at him every day, but then his curiosity got the better of him.

He told his driver to stop, and he asked the boy what he was up to. Ari told him of the great deal he had heard about at his trading company and that he would

need two ships to make it work. If the rich man would lend him the money, he would make the deal and split the profits with him. The rich man was convinced, and the Onassis fortune and legend was born.

The choice of good and evil is in the power of *our* will – and ours alone. Everything else is in the will of Nature. We are responsible for one thing; fate is responsible for everything else. Was Aristotle Onassis wasting his time working with all those indifferents that made up his colossal shipping empire? No. Was he bound to be evil in managing all those externals that were not in his power? Of course not. Nature made Aristotle Onassis. Nature gave this poor and shy boy an extraordinary talent. It also gave him the same thing it gave each of us: absolute power over one thing, the choices of the will. If Ari employed virtue to consistently choose good over evil in his work with indifferents, then he was able to build both great wealth *and* a noble character with what he was given.

### THREE STUDIES

Three studies abide us:

*Judgments and the inner discourse,  
Desires and the rising passions,  
Actions and the noble duties.*

*There are three fields of study in which he who would be wise and good must be exercised: that of [1] desires and aversions ... [2] pursuits and avoidances, and in general, the duties of life ... [and, 3] whatever belongs to the judgment.*<sup>22</sup>

Epictetus

You'll notice the order in which these class notes were written down by Arrian places desires first and judgments last. Assuming Arrian wrote them down in the given order, Epictetus apparently believed that the thing he needed to emphasize to his students was, first and foremost, the desires. Then, it naturally followed that the actions would proceed from the desires. However, I have taken the liberty of beginning with the judgments that form in the mind, because that's chronologically more accurate. I'm more comfortable starting at the beginning of an event rather than in the middle, and we have seen time and again that what we think about a thing is where it all begins.

The passage above appears to be used by Epictetus for a specific teaching purpose, because as he points out elsewhere that desires and aversions *begin* in the mind. “Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of things. Thus death is nothing terrible, else it would have appeared so to Socrates. But the terror consists in our notion of death, that it is terrible.”<sup>23</sup> It is the judgment we have learned and reinforced with our inner discourse, what we tell ourselves about death, that creates the fear of death.

And from desire, action surely follows. An impression comes to the mind from outside stimuli, external or internal discourse, and a judgment is made. From this judgment, one feels desire or aversion, and the motivation for action has

begun. Epictetus knew this. Listen to what he says: “If what the philosophers say be true, that all men's *actions* [my emphasis] proceed from one source, namely feeling...”<sup>24</sup> And what is that feeling? Desire or aversion. We either desire something to be or we desire it not to be.

What Epictetus refers to as “pursuits and avoidances” we can more easily remember as *actions*. Just as we narrowed down the idea of desires and aversions to the single word, “desire,” so too can we encompass pursuits and avoidances with a single word. It is important to bear in mind that actions include acts of omission and acts of commission. As Marcus said, “A man does not sin by commission only, but often by omission.”<sup>25</sup>

If you have trouble with such changes, forgive me. I, too, am loathe to take liberties with the word of Epictetus, but such exercises as these require a certain amount of streamlining. Marcus did that,<sup>26</sup> and that's what we have done here. The meaning is the same; the words are variously translated according to the light of the translator, and in this case I believe we can safely follow Michael Chase's translation of Pierre Hadot's interpretation of pursuits and avoidance as *actions*,<sup>27</sup> which is how the third study will be represented henceforth.

Incidentally, according to Hadot, Epictetus was the first to divide Stoic thought into three studies – judgments, desires, and actions – but he was really just following the three parts of philosophy. He did this by pairing judgment with logic, desires with physics, and actions with ethics.<sup>28</sup> Marcus Aurelius apparently followed Epictetus in using the same tripartite division, and it was his focus on these three studies that made up the bulk of his writing exercises we now know as the *Meditations*.<sup>29</sup>

## Judgments:

*Take away the complaint, “I have been harmed,” and the harm is taken away.<sup>30</sup> The habits of your thoughts will become the character of your mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts. Dye it, then, with thoughts such as these: wherever one lives, one can live well—even if he must live in a palace.<sup>31</sup>*

Marcus Aurelius

**1. Judgment, Logic, and the Inner Discourse.** Clearly, the inner discourse, what we tell ourselves about our world, is one of the most important themes in all of Stoic literature. Hadot believes it is the very essence of being a Stoic. He says, “Everything in an individual's life depends on how he represents things to himself—in other words, how he tells them to himself in inner dialogue.”<sup>32</sup> As you can see from the quotations above, much of the actual work of becoming a Stoic begins with *judgments and the inner discourse*.

So, what does this have to do with logic? The ancients believed that the truth of the judgments that form in the mind could be *proved* by formal logic, syllogisms. However, it's more important to remember that logic is made up of both syllogisms *and* rhetoric. The rhetoric part, essentially the clarity and accuracy of our reasoning with words, the stuff of our inner discourse, is what we emphasize here. There is danger in getting bogged down and sidetracked by

analysis, and it's been going on for millenia. Both Seneca and Epictetus caution us against it.

*One is led to believe that unless one has constructed syllogisms of the craftiest kind, and reduced fallacies to a compact form in which a false conclusion is derived from a true premise, one will not be in a position to distinguish what one should aim at and what one should avoid.*

*It makes one ashamed that men of our advanced years should turn a thing as serious as this into a game.*

*'Mouse is a syllable,  
and a mouse nibbles cheese;  
therefore, a syllable nibbles cheese.'*

*Suppose for the moment I can't detect the fallacy in that. What danger am I placed in by such a lack of insight?... What childish fatuities these are!*<sup>33</sup>

Seneca

*...our present philosophers, leaving the first [desires] and second [actions] topics, employ themselves wholly about the third [judgments]; dealing in the logical subtleties.... Is this really, then, the thing you need? Have you mastered the other points?'<sup>34</sup>*

Epictetus

Our first study is the inner discourse and how it forms our judgments. As we have already seen "... death is nothing terrible ... the terror consists in our notion of death, that it is terrible."<sup>35</sup> Shakespeare said the same thing more concisely and poetically in *Hamlet*. "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."<sup>36</sup> It is the judgments we form in the mind that inflame or cool the passions, the emotions that have run amuck. If we were not afraid of death or great pain, we would not know fear even in the face of a raging lion.

Of course we do feel fear in such circumstances because of the primary impulse of survival, and that's OK. It's more than OK; it's ordained by Nature. Stoics are not retarded. We know there is a place for adrenalin. We are *supposed* to be energized by such emotion – in this case, be prepared to fight or flee.

In addition to facing danger, there are many other kinds of judgments we form with the thoughts of our inner discourse. In fact, virtually everything. Where else can the feelings of desire and aversion come from? We desire one thing; we don't desire another. Why? Because of what we have been told and/or told ourselves about this thing. And there's another source: the body. It also enters the inner discourse with it's own feelings of hunger, fatigue, dis-ease, and other physical complaints of the body.

However, it is what we do with this information, all information from all sources, that matters. The mind acquires an impression, makes a judgment, then desires something to be or not to be: a large bowl of yummy food – without a hair in it; a different president – one that's thoughtful, strong, and kind; a new wife that is rich – and good-looking. All of our desires imply aversions, and vice versa.

## Desires:

*Of these [three studies] the principal and most urgent is that which reaches the passions; for passion is only produced by a disappointment of one's desires and an incurring of one's aversions. It is this which introduces perturbations, tumults, misfortunes, and calamities; this is the spring of sorrow, lamentation, and envy; this renders us envious and emulous, and incapable of hearing reason.<sup>37</sup>*

Epictetus

*Observe the courses of the stars as if you were to run those courses with them; have constantly in mind the changes of the elements into one another, for such thoughts sweep away the squalor of life on earth. And when you talk about men you should look upon things on earth as one who looks from above on things below...<sup>38</sup>*

Marcus Aurelius

**2. The Physics of Desires and Aversions.** The Stoic's desires and aversions are studied so that we can bring them into alignment with the will of Nature. This is an expansion of our motto, *living in agreement with Nature*. In the first place, we use our chief attribute designed for us by Nature, our reason. When we use reason, we see that there is only one good, virtue. Evil, then, is the lack of virtue. Both good and evil are in the will, and only the will is in our power. Thus, living according to Nature means desiring the good, virtue, and desiring to avoid evil, the lack of virtue. This is the one power that Nature has given us, the choices of the will. The right use of reason and will power are the desires of a Stoic.

There is a subtle but significant difference between the use of 'desire' by Epictetus compared to that of Marcus Aurelius. Epictetus teaches that we should desire only that which depends on us, the will, while Marcus Aurelius speaks of aligning our desire with the fate of universal Reason. That is, we should desire that *our* will is the same as the *divine* Will.<sup>39</sup> However, this is the stuff of scholarship, and not being a scholar I can only appreciate both points of view without insisting on one being more correct or more orthodox. I can't even imagine ignoring one in preference for the other. I believe we should consciously study to align our desire with both the individual will and with the greater Will of Nature.

## Actions:

*The next topic regards the duties of life. For I am not to be undisturbed by passions, as a stature is; but as one who preserves the natural and acquired relations—as a pious person, a son, a brother, a father, a citizen.<sup>40</sup>*

*Duties are universally measured by relations. Is a certain man your father? In this are implied taking care of him; submitting to him in all things; patiently receiving his reproaches, his correction.*

*“But he is a bad father.”*

*Is your natural tie, then to a good father? No, but to a father. Is a brother unjust? Well, preserve your own just relation towards him. Consider not what he does, but what you are to do, to keep your own will in a state of harmony with nature.*<sup>41</sup>

Epictetus

3. Actions, Duties, Ethics, and Oikeiosis. Our desires and aversions depend upon judgments we have made and become motivation for ensuing action. If we want a new car we have to find the money to pay for it. Epictetus doesn't dwell on the mere mundane of our actions but on how they become our duties – the duties of life. The evolution from the Primary Impulse of self-love to other-love, *oikeiosis*, is the work of a Stoic philosopher. They are his duties. Mature adult, socialized behavior is exemplified by the noble character, the lofty spirit, the Stoic philosopher, the sage. This process is one of the great principals of ethics.

If our desires and aversions are aligned with Nature, we are burdened with only one responsibility, the good and evil in the will. The proper exercise of that responsibility shows in our actions as a pious person, a good son, a good brother, a good father, a good citizen. A Stoic is the cornerstone of civilized society in that we *preserve* the natural and acquired relations. All of our actions are oriented to that preservation. To a Stoic, these are the noble duties of life. They are *noble* duties because they clearly show the true nature of our character.

What about being a pious person? What *is* a pious person? The first definition of 'pious' in my dictionary says that a pious person is one having or showing a dutiful spirit of reverence for god or an earnest wish to fulfill religious obligations."<sup>42</sup> How do we do that? Are we supposed to be religious? No. It's true, the classical Stoics believed it was appropriate for a person to attend the religious devotions of the society in which you live. If you were a Roman you honored the Roman gods: Jupiter, Venus, Mars, et cetera. If you were Greek, you honored the Greek gods: Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, et cetera. Did they believe in these gods as actual living, immortal deities? No, Stoics believed they were merely names for different aspects of the One, the Logos, Nature.<sup>43</sup> Being pious meant honoring the divinity in Nature in a manner harmonious with the time and place in which you live.

Then how can we be pious? I think it's more difficult to answer this question today for a couple of reasons. For one, many Stoics today are atheists, many more are skeptics or agnostics. Does that mean a Stoic should be a Buddhist in Japan, a Hindu in India, a Muslim in Iraq, a Jew in Israel, and a Christian in Canada? Perhaps, but in no way could such a one take on the absolutist mindset of the fundamentalist. That would require forsaking reason for faith in old myths and prophets who claim to speak for God.

Does that mean a Stoic can be a bit of a jellyfish and a hypocrite, one who goes along to get along and makes a show of belief that isn't genuine? Isn't that basically dishonest? Yes, I think it is. There may be only one form of piety that can satisfy the honesty of all kinds of earnest Stoics—atheists, skeptics, and deists alike. That is, a piety and devotion to Nature, our environment. Nature is, after all, our god. Reverence for Nature is a piety we can honestly respect.

We may be a Greenpeace militant, a tree-hugger, a surfer, a camper, or a mountain climber. Whatever way is right for you personally is probably right. It's an individual matter. However, I hope you notice that I did *not* include hunting or fishing on that list, because I do not consider it to be an ideal form of piety. I don't believe that hunting and fishing for food is wrong; I just don't think killing for "sport," is the best way to show reverence for our god.

## HEAR THE SAGE

Hear the sage inside us:

*practice, practice, practice, practice.*

*...philosophers advise us not to be contented with mere learning, but to add meditation likewise, and then practice.... If, therefore, we do not likewise put into practice right opinions, we shall be nothing more than expositors of the abstract doctrines of others.<sup>44</sup>*

Epictetus

Practice. That's what we are doing.

\* \* \* \*

## B. *Hypomnemata*: The Philosopher's Journal

### INTRODUCTION

No one knows exactly what Marcus Aurelius was doing when he wrote his so-called meditations. The work itself was never titled, and there is no indication it was intended for publication. These thoughts were found among his papers after his death, and it can only be surmised that they survived for so many centuries because he was an emperor. If they had been the writings of a lesser figure, these scattered and disorganized notes would have undoubtedly perished.

It is Hadot's thesis that these "meditations" were actually Stoic exercises written by the emperor as notes to himself to keep Stoic doctrines freshly in mind. Personal notes such as these were not at all uncommon in his day, and there was even a name for them, "*hypomnemata*," giving them some credibility as a literary form. Hadot points out that the often tedious repetition of certain themes one finds is evidence of his use of these *hypomnemata* as exercises, not as work in preparation for publication.

Hadot traces these Stoic exercises back to Epictetus and the three studies he recommends,<sup>45</sup> which Hadot claims are unique to Epictetus.<sup>46</sup> Here we have an emperor doing writing exercises as taught by a former slave. (If there is any doubt about the egalitarian nature of the Stoics this should put it to rest once and for all.) These three studies – judgment, desire, and action – Marcus returns to repeatedly, except for the first chapter which he devotes to acknowledging the

most important influences of his life. The three studies themselves, which Epictetus also calls “three acts of the soul,”<sup>47</sup> he further relates, as we have seen, to logic, physics, and ethics, respectively.

Today, such personal notes would likely be called a diary, log, or journal, a record of events, feelings, and ideas. That's why this exercise is called, “Philosopher's Journal.” This was the work of an emperor-philosopher. And, we may not be an emperor, but we can be a philosopher.

*As he wrote the Meditations, Marcus was thus practicing the Stoic spiritual exercises. He was using writing as a technique or procedure in order to influence himself, and to transform his inner discourse by meditating on the Stoic dogmas and rules of life. This was an exercise of writing day by day, ever-renewed, always taken up again and always needing to be taken up again, since the true philosopher is he who is conscious of not yet having attained wisdom.*<sup>48</sup>

## Getting Started

We have already done the “horizontal” work, amassing a considerable quantity of information that makes up the body of Stoic thought. Now, we're going to proceed “vertically.” That's what Marcus did. We do that by looking at a single piece of information, or bit of dogma, from several points of view. So far we've been learning largely from one perspective, because there is so much to learn. Now we're going for depth.

If you recall from your readings in the *Meditations*, Marcus often examined one theme repeatedly, sometimes to the point of exhaustion. If we read a passage that sounds familiar and wonder if we have read that before, we probably have, more than once. (Recall how often he examines the theme of death.) With repetition comes experience, depth, and another kind of learning. Ideas become a part of consciousness, and we *know*. That's the value of the *hypomnemata* exercise. That's how Stoic principals stick with us wherever we go.

From my own experience I have found that the easiest way to get started in your “Philosopher's Journal” is to start paying more attention to your life. Before long, you will habitually note anything that made an impression on you that day. You don't have to write it all down immediately. If pressed for time, just make a note and come back to it when you can set aside an hour to develop your observation. If your life is especially boring these days and you're having trouble finding anything in it that you want to examine, what about the actions of someone in the news?

It doesn't have to be a specific event, however; it can be a general theme. Basically the difference between dealing with a subject specifically or generally is in the distance from which you remove yourself from it. I'm not talking about measurement. For example, consider the emotional impact of a death in the family, yours or someone else's. That's a death as it relates to a specific person and situation. To consider death as a general subject, you turn away from a specific death and explore the subject of the death of all humans, or pull back even further to consider the death of all living things?

For your journal, you can take either approach, or both in combination. You can also approach the *hypomnemata* exercise as Marcus Aurelius did. Look back to Epictetus and his three exercises for the “wise and good.”

1. **Judgments.** Simply writing in a journal takes care of the first study, *Judgments and the inner discourse*. The act of transforming the inner discourse into the personal notes of a journal examines one's judgment and what you are telling yourself about your world. Exploring and expressing thoughts of your life or life in general with regard to what you know about Stoic dogma is what this is all about. Virtually everything in our familiar world touches upon Stoic philosophy. *Writing anything about anything can be analyzed for Stoic content*. If you are unsure of what a Stoic believes about your chosen topic, first go back to your mneme, *The DOE*. If the answer isn't obvious to you there, try the *32 Principal Doctrines*.
2. **Desires** and the rising passions represent *wanting what you don't have or having what you don't want*. See the Epictetus quote immediately under the section on “Desires.” There is nothing wrong with desires and aversions as long as you keep your equilibrium and remember that the only good is virtue and that what you are desiring is an indifferent. Indifferents exist for the purpose of exercising the virtues – wisdom, justice, courage, and decorum. If you remember that virtue is the most important and can avoid being “dazzled” by the indifferent, then the passion doesn't rise to the level of distress. Remember Chrysippus' advice: walk, don't run down hill.
3. **Actions** and the Noble Duties are represented by *oikeiosis*: from Primary Impulse to altruism. As we mature we learn to evolve from the most infantile self-interest to the gradual understanding of nobility in the duty we have to family, friends, country, and whatever you define as piety. If in doubt, reread the section on “Actions” above.

I have listed below a wide variety of themes that relate to Stoicism in daily events around us in our external world. They are the same kinds of themes that Marcus dealt with in his journal. How many themes you explore and the style you employ is entirely up to you. It doesn't have to be in prose, you can include poetry if that helps you develop your idea. If you are a haiku master, you will explore one theme: Nature. Your journal could be a book of haiku. It's up to you.

Or, you could focus exclusively on the indifferents. An astrologer once told me there were three reasons why people came to her for consultations: money, health, and love, romantic love. For our purposes, romance is too narrow, a subset of the larger category, relations. When you think about it, money, health, and relations do cover most of the concerns people have in life – and that includes everybody from every socio-economic strata of society. To a Stoic they are the indifferents, the externals of life upon which we practice the one true and ultimate concern: the good. These three categories of the indifferents could contain all the themes of a philosopher's journal.

## Themes & Style

### Doctrines:

Living in agreement with Nature:	Nature	God	Logos
The Good, the Virtues (the Internals):	Wisdom, Justice, Courage, Decorum		
The Bad, Evil:	The lack of Virtue		
The Indifferent (the Externals):	<u>Money</u> career poverty prosperity ambition possessions greed	<u>Health</u> body death afterlife disease pain habits	<u>Relations</u> family friends neighbors country bosses workers
What is in our power:	The Will: Choice between Good & Evil Nobility of character		
Three Studies:	<u>Judgment</u> logic discourse	<u>Desire</u> physics objective	<u>Action</u> ethics duties

### The Style of Marcus<sup>49</sup>

- |                         |                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| -the well-turned phrase | -paradox                            |
| -variations on a theme  | -enigmatic brevity                  |
| -the memorable saying   | -aesthetic sensitivity              |
| -view from above        | -imagine the universe <sup>50</sup> |

Style will come with perseverance. Many years ago, I studied stone carving with my uncle, Don Wilson, a great sculptor and teacher. He said that if there was a heaven he hoped it would be a large planet with nothing but stones, then all he would need was a hammer and chisel. He also told me that style comes with perseverance. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Talent doesn't matter; perseverance does." He said he had watched many budding artists with great talent go nowhere and fail because they lacked perseverance. He also saw others who he thought had little talent prove him wrong, because they wouldn't quit.

Although I agreed with him about a heaven of Indiana limestone and Carrara marble, I proved to be one of the talented who went nowhere. More brain than brawn, I guess. That was *my* excuse. My elbows couldn't take the pounding, and my career as a stone sculptor ended before it began. But enough about me. What are you going to do?

## Details

How often? Everyone's life must necessarily be arranged individually to add any new effort, such as keeping a journal. Some work better with a schedule; others prefer to squeeze it in when time allows. The problem with the latter approach is that it encourages procrastination. There's always plenty to do without adding another kind of exercise. So, is a schedule best? Well, in truth, sticking to a schedule can also be difficult. Ask anyone who adopts a new physical fitness routine. I have found it best to do a combination: make notes spontaneously when they occur, then set them aside until you can develop them more fully on a scheduled time or day of the week.

Keep your philosopher's journal handy. You could enter all your ideas directly into a computer file, but sitting down at a computer and waiting for a great idea is a tough way to do this kind of work. Ask any professional writer. Take your journal with you wherever you go – home, school, work, in the car, on vacation. Or, buy several notebooks and leave them in locations where you are most likely to want one handy – by your easy chair, on the night stand, in your desk, and so on. You never know when a brilliant idea will appear. (And, you may not even know *where* it came from or *why* it entered your consciousness.)

Once you have your notebook(s), I suggest that you start as soon as you can. You can pick a schedule you know you can live with to fully explore all these brilliant ideas you have spontaneously scribbled in your journal. If you don't already set aside one day a week for rest and regeneration, you may consider doing so. Everyone deserves a day off for contemplation, rest, and play. The Philosopher's Journal is an exercise of contemplation for most of us. For the literary talents, it could be play—serious play. If you are a master of aphorisms, another Oscar Wilde, then you too can astonish the world with such wit as, “What is a cynic? A man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.”<sup>51</sup> The rest of us must be contented with earnestness and good intentions.

How long is each entry? Take a look at the *Meditations*. Many of Marcus's hypomnemata are no more than a line or two. One is four words in length: “Accept modesty; surrender gracefully.”<sup>52</sup> Don't be fooled by quantity. A four-word entry can take an hour if you have a desire to perfect it. Marcus did. In any case, make this a challenging and rewarding exercise or it will quickly become drudgery. You should be looking forward to developing your own *hypomnemata* style. Do this exercise as often as you can to bring and keep your philosophy alive at the forefront of your consciousness.

It will make you a better Stoic.

\* \* \* \*

# Part Two: The Practice

## INTRODUCTION

*It is the action of an uninstructed person to reproach others for his own misfortunes; of one entering upon instruction, to reproach himself; and of one perfectly instructed, to reproach neither others nor himself.*<sup>53</sup>

Epictetus

And how do we practice being a Stoic? With meditation. Epictetus said, "...philosophers advise us not to be contented with mere learning, but to add meditation likewise, and then practice,"<sup>54</sup> but he was probably not talking about *real* meditation. So far as we know the Indian yogic meditation discipline was not incorporated into any school curricula of ancient Greece (with the possible exception of the Pythagoreans). To meditate in those days meant to quietly think about what you had learned. More like contemplation. You can still do that, but now with the common acceptance and availability of meditation worldwide we have a new opportunity.

If we can overcome our reluctance to change, the practice of meditation, particularly Stoic meditation, is a far more effective way to make the transition from thought to action than mere contemplation. Part Two introduces you to a form of meditation that lets you sit down quietly alone, and practice being a Stoic.

Let me be perfectly clear right from the beginning: this is not meditation to attain Nirvana or other form of mystical experience or enlightenment. This is not daydreaming. This is Stoic meditation. You will *not* be learning to meditate to escape from life but to live more fully, actively, and exceptionally in it. The kind of meditation proposed here does not require you to become a Hindu or Buddhist or adopt any other philosophy. What you will learn is a form of discipline that specifically strengthens your will and ability to be a Stoic and is based upon an important statement made by Epictetus. I suggest you reread the opening quote at the top of the page. Commit it to memory if you can. This statement when adapted to meditation is a powerful new tool in the practice of a Stoic.

*Human life is but a point in time, and the substance of it is constantly changing....*<sup>55</sup>

*Throw away everything but this: everyone lives only in this present time, which is an indivisible point, and all the rest of that life is either in the past or in the future.*<sup>56</sup>

Marcus Aurelius

Attention (*prosoche*) is considered to be the fundamental attitude of the Stoic and the key to his exercises. Marcus refers to this state of mind repeatedly. Pierre Hadot expands our appreciation of what this means: "By encouraging

concentration on the minuscule present moment, which, in its exiguity, is always bearable and controllable, attention increases our vigilance... allows us to accede to cosmic consciousness, by making us attentive to the infinite value of each instant, and causing us to accept each moment of existence from the viewpoint of the universal law of the *cosmos*.<sup>257</sup>

There is no evidence that Stoics practiced concentrating on the “minuscule present moment,” but this is exactly what meditation does. If that were all of the benefits possible from meditation it would be reason enough to practice, but there is more. The meditation proposed herein, also strengthens the will, which, as you must know by now, is the very center of all choices we make for good or for evil.

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I recently spoke to a middle-aged man who practices a form of meditation known as Transcendental Meditation (TM). I was curious to find out about their technique. It costs serious money to practice TM, which is all I knew about it. I don't know why the TM organization charges so much. Perhaps they do this to weed out the poor, the misers, and the dilettantes. There are those who believe that the more you pay for something the more you value it. Perhaps the TM people subscribe to that philosophy. I don't know. Anyway, this man I spoke to about his experience with TM told me that years ago he paid a woman practitioner \$200 to give him a mantra, a couple of Hindi words, and was then told to focus on this mantra by repeating it over and over while he sat upright in a chair and emptied his mind. That's it. Two hundred dollars, please.

The magic of mantras, of course, is not in the power of foreign and exotic-sounding words; it's in the *belief* in the power of foreign and exotic-sounding words. Here's an idea: if you need a mantra, something you can really believe in, just use the name of a favorite plant. You can use the Latin botanical name to make it sound special. Try something like *rosa bracteata* (an evergreen climbing rose), say it over and over while you empty your mind of all other thought. Do this sitting upright in a chair, back straight, hands in your lap, and your feet flat on the floor. About twenty minutes should do it. There, I've just saved you over two hundred dollars. (With inflation, TM is more expensive now than it was when this fellow paid his fee.)

Stoic meditation is not TM. You won't need a mantra. It's considerably more sophisticated, and it's offered to you for the price of the effort you have made in reading this book. That's enough. I have no interest in creating a money-making racket. I should warn you, it's also considerably more difficult, but then you should expect a Stoic meditation method to have a bit more heft to it. The fellow who learned TM has since modified his practice considerably. He threw out the mantra and makes no effort to empty his mind, which he considers impossible and a myth. (It's not.)

Now, he just sits back in a comfortable chair with his feet up, closes his eyes, and daydreams. His daydreams tend to center around success at work or romantic fantasies, but he doesn't limit them to any subject, whatever comes to his mind is OK. He does this for twenty minutes twice a day, then gets up and goes on his way.

Frankly, that's daydreaming. Meditation is *not* the same as daydreaming. Anyone who thinks it is simply doesn't understand it. Meditation is work: constructive, disciplined, and purposeful. (For the Buddhists among us who disagree with the purposefulness of meditation I would be happy to enter into that debate, but at another time and place.) If you were hoping to budget a little daydreaming time into your day, take a walk or turn off the TV and stare out the window. If you're tired and need a rest, take a nap. You will not be able to practice becoming a Stoic by relaxing in an overstuffed chair for twenty minutes and having a romantic fantasy. Sorry.

\* \*

I've been meditating off and on much of my adult life. While in my twenties, I briefly studied a Hindu technique with the Ananda Marga Yoga Society in Portland, Oregon. I made the mistake of meditating after dinner near bedtime, and I could never stay awake long enough to get anything out of it. When I was 38 years old I got serious about meditation. At the time, I was teaching English in Nishikiwa, Japan, a small fishing village on the Inland Sea in western Honshu, the main island. My practice was motivated by isolation, alienation, and culture shock. To compensate, I meditated every morning at 6 AM when the nearby Buddhist temple bell tolled. I meditated every morning in my nightshirt that autumn and winter, often in temperatures below freezing in the shack where I was living. The cold helped me focus my mind. On nothing.

For many years I deliberately avoided instruction in meditation. I had a profound aversion to becoming a victim of the guru cult phenomenon of the 1960s and 70s. I read a few things, heard a few things, and adopted the half lotus position I learned from the Ananda Marga Yoga Society. I practiced a kind of meditation that can be summed up in a single sentence: Sit still and stop thinking. With insights from experience based entirely upon that foundation, I gradually became more knowledgeable in my approach.

It wasn't until I was 60 years old that I subjected myself to extensive formal instruction and practice. The meditation I studied was the Vipassana technique taught at a Theravada Buddhist retreat near Fresno, California. The unofficial name for it was "Meditation Boot Camp." For ten days, about 200 of us lived in absolute silence – no words read, written, or spoken – meditating 11 hours a day.

It was a thoroughly unpleasant experience. When it was over most of the participants admitted it was the hardest thing they had ever done. I did not like the Vipassana meditation method, and I do not agree with the Buddha's Four Noble Truths, beginning with the first one, but what I learned did help strengthen my own commitment to Stoic philosophy and eventually helped me realize how meditation could be used to actually practice what the Stoa teaches.

#### Vipassana Meditation

The Epictetus ideal as described in the passage at the beginning of this chapter can be practiced as a meditation method. Frankly, it was only after having read that passage for the umpteenth time that I had an *aha* experience and realized that one and one could equal more than two. What Epictetus said about *one perfectly instructed, to reproach neither others nor himself* was the essence of the Vipassana method. This method can be summed up in a single word,

*equanimous*. Perhaps I can best elaborate on that single word by the following excerpt from an essay I wrote about my Vipassana education shortly after boot camp was over and I could put pen to paper.

**excerpt from Vipassana essay**

Group meditation that afternoon began at 2:00 PM instead of the usual 2:30. Despite only two or three hours sleep last night, I was perfectly awake. I had brief naps at the breakfast and lunch breaks, and I was ready. In his rich operatic baritone, Goenka [head of the worldwide Vipassana movement] started off with a long chant, then began the instruction.

As best I can remember it went something like this: *With a clear and equanimous mind, clear and equanimous mind, equanimous mind, starting at the top of the het [the head], top of the het, starting at the top of the het, at the soft place on your het when you were a baby, move down to the skull, move down to the skull, down the skull, feeling for any sensation, any tingling sensation, any warm or wet sensation, perspiration, wetness or dryness or coolness, pulsing or throbbing, prickling or itching, anything, anything at all, anything at all. If you feel a sensation of dampness or swelling or contracting or extending, if you feel pressure or lightness, a pleasurable sensation or painful sensation, if you feel anything that has no name, don't try to name it, don't try to name it, just be aware, be aware, be aware, be aware, aware and equanimous, aware and equanimous, uniture, uniture uniture.*

I had no idea what *uniture* was, and I must have heard it four or five hundred times before I figured that maybe it was Pali for 'change, arising and passing away'. He continued, *Let your mind move down to your forehead, your forehead, feeling for any sensation, any tingling sensation, any warm or wet sensation, perspiration, wetness or dryness or coolness, pulsing or throbbing, prickling or itching, anything, anything at all, anything at all. If you feel a sensation of dampness or swelling or contracting or extending, if you feel pressure or lightness, a pleasurable sensation or painful sensation, if you feel anything that has no name, don't try to name it, don't try to name it, just be aware, be aware, be aware, be aware, aware and equanimous, aware and equanimous, uniture, uniture uniture.*

Then he went down to the eyes and nose and upper lip and chin and each part of the rest of the body, "part by part, piece by piece." And after each part and piece of the body he went through the entire litany of possible sensations we could feel. It took 1½ hours to describe what should have taken ten minutes, at most, and about the time he got to the knees I was calculating my exit. It would probably take me about seven hours to get back to San Diego. It was now 3:30, I could be on the road by 4:00, that would get me to LA by 8:00 or 9:00 and the tail end of the rush hour, so I could be home by 11:00, or a little after. I was ready to stand up and walk out when I remembered: I'd only had a couple of hours sleep last night. This would be suicide.

I stayed.

\* \* \*

## Origins of Meditation

Before we go on, let's go back even further. Way back. I want to spend a few minutes back at the beginning of meditation. Usually, when you read about meditation, the author avoids the origins of where meditation came from, either because he or she doesn't know when and where meditation began, or isn't interested, or both. As you may have noticed, when I get involved with something I like to go back to the beginning to see how it evolved. That's important to me for some reason, and meditation is no exception. I won't be long.

First, we can speculate that human beings have been meditating in one form or another for many thousands of years, probably since the domestication of fire, about 800,000 years ago. Anyone who has sat before a fireplace or a campfire will recognize the trance-like state that is quickly assumed when looking into a fire. The mind is calmed and the senses are relaxed as we watch the flames dancing before our eyes. The euphoria of that state is similar to the feeling one achieves in meditation. The same is true for the hunter. Tribal people living a hunter-gatherer lifestyle even today become silent and still, in body and mind, in the focus of stalking game.

This form of meditation is what we would call mindfulness. Whether we first “naturally” learned to meditate in front of a cave fire or in stalking game, the association of that experience with religious feeling is first recorded, not surprisingly, in India. My source for this digression is Thomas McEvilley's magnum opus, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*.<sup>58</sup>

Approximately 3000 years ago in India, at about the same time as the beginnings of a belief in reincarnation, a new spiritual ritual was developed by the *brahman* priests called the “interiorization of the sacrifice.” The belief at the time was that there were two paths to the afterlife, the Way of Fire and the Way of Smoke. Fire, the preferred way, represented the Sun and smoke represented the Moon. It appears the distinction of who went one way or the other was based principally on how much was paid to the priests for their performance on the seeker's behalf. In any case, the sacrifice of which we speak was the performance of a complicated and lengthy set of incantations and rituals by the priests.

The performance was so complex that while one priest performed the routine another priest, sitting to one side, went over the same ritual simultaneously but silently in his mind. If anything was omitted or done incorrectly by the performing priest the silent priest corrected the “sacrifice” inside. Hence the name, “interiorization of the sacrifice.” A bit complicated, I know, but how and where one arrives in the afterlife was serious and expensive business there as it is in many parts of the world today.

Eventually, the performance of this silent part of the ritual in the early Upanisadic communities was taught to especially devout members by the priests. In time, the Way of Fire came to be seen as an interior spark of divinity that existed throughout the whole life of the spiritual seeker (not unlike the spark of divinity Stoics believe we all possess inside). Anyone who properly performed the silent rite, the interiorization of the sacrifice, was said to gain

three times as much credit as he would if he simply paid a priest to do the work.

To follow the Way of the Fire became the Way of the Gods; the Way of the Smoke became the Way of the Fathers. Smoke never went any higher than the moon, which meant that after death the individual would return to earth as rain, becoming food that was eaten and transformed into semen, which was ultimately deposited in a womb, and the unfortunate individual of the Way of the Fathers was reborn. That is the how meditation began, and how it became entwined with reincarnation. By uniting the spark of fire or divinity within through silent meditation, the spiritual seeker could unite with the greater fire and enter the Way of the Gods to the sun, never to return, and thus ending the cycle of reincarnation.

We're not going to teach or practice any of that. Meditation has evolved, and regardless of how it came to be, it is one of the truly great inventions of humanity. Meditation's value is affirmed by many millions, even billions of people who have voluntarily embraced it for so many millenia. Why? Part of the answer may lie in the physiology of this practice.

### **Meditation Physiology**

Unfortunately, the study of meditation from the standpoint of physiology is just beginning to become available for two reasons: scientists have only recently become interested in the subject and the activity of brain waves in meditation is a comparatively new technology. Willard Johnson, a professor of Religious Studies at San Diego State University, discusses the earliest studies in this field where much of what meditators have claimed about relaxation and regeneration is confirmed in the laboratory. "...meditation reduces usual levels of bodily activity, like oxygen consumption, heart rate and respiration, as well as the electrical resistance of the skin, an indicator of stress....even after a fairly short time of practicing meditation, a person's central nervous system changes, and that person can better handle stress."<sup>59</sup>

#### **Brainwaves**

At this point, it may be useful to understand something about our brainwaves. Electroencephalograph (EEG) readings of human states of consciousness appear in four different waves, ranging from Beta waves, the tightest, to Delta, the loosest or most relaxed. We go through each of these stages twice a day: when we go to sleep at night and when we awake up in the morning. Here they are:

- Beta: fully active, awake conscious state. A tight wave length pattern.
- Alpha: light and deep levels. Lighter stage associated with relaxation and day dreaming; the deeper level is associated with silence, serenity, and the centered, present consciousness of meditation. Looser wave length.
- Theta: deep meditation and the "twilight" state we all experience every night just before losing waking consciousness and entering Delta. Even looser wave length pattern.
- Delta: deep sleep, with and without dreaming. A loopy wave length pattern.

Notice that as we progress from Beta to Delta the increasingly loosening wave length pattern of each state becomes a true reflection of how we feel – physically relaxed and mentally serene.

Professor Johnson goes on to examine results of the brainwave studies during meditation. As indicated above, the meditator's brain waves were especially pronounced in Alpha and Theta. What was even more interesting is the *synchronization of the right and left hemispheres of the brain*. The brain waves of one who does not meditate shows less activity in the right hemisphere and higher beta activity overall, attributes of tension and nervousness. While meditating, the two hemispheres of the brain come into synchronization, mirroring each in phase and as a harmonious whole. This is becoming seen as having increasing value for overall mental strength and health.

### Brain Hemispheres

The most primitive part of the brain is right at the top of the spinal cord, and we call it the brain stem. The brain stem supports our most basic and automatic or autonomic life functions, such as breathing, heart rate, digestion, and so on. We don't have to think about these functions, the brain stem does it for us. Above that is the cerebellum controlling coordination, balance and posture. Above that is the limbic system which handles the most primal urges and emotions, such as sexual desire, anger, fear, and hunger. The limbic system is there to assist us in basic survival and self-preservation. Then we get to the cerebrum.

The cerebrum is the outer layer of the brain that makes it look like a big, gray walnut. Its the convoluted gray matter known as the cortex that is the source of conscious thought, sensory perception, voluntary movement and will. This cerebral cortex is divided into two halves, or hemispheres, and each of these hemispheres has different functions. Much of what follows on brain functions has been excerpted from the amazing lecture given February 2008 by Harvard neurobiology scientist, Jill Bolte Taylor, "A Powerful Stroke of Insight (see [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com) )."

The left side of the cerebral cortices is responsible for analytical work such as mathematics, logic, language, word comprehension and speech. Without it we lose our ability to talk, walk, read, write, and remember. It takes details of the past moment, organizes and categorizes from all that we have learned in the past and projects it into the future. The left hemisphere is the voice that says to me, "I am."

The right hemisphere deals with spatial relationships, color, visual reasoning, musical aptitude, and intuitive comprehension and expansion. The right hemisphere is all about the present moment—right here, right now, and all information that comes to the right hemisphere is processed as immediate present. According to Dr. Taylor, "In this moment we are perfect, we are whole, we are beautiful." There is no sense of self; there is no me; there is only the *all*. Between the two hemispheres is the corpus callosum, a thick cable of neural strands connecting the two sides in constant communication.

So much for brain anatomy 101. There's much more, of course, but that's enough to make my point. If we Stoics really live by the motto, *live according to Nature*, then to deny one side of the body or the other is to deny the intelligence that created us. Would a right-handed person show contempt for his left hand by cutting it off or tying it up so that it was immobile? Of course not.

It is equally as ridiculous to do that injustice to either side of the brain. Just because we value reason is no reason to ignore, and thereby cut off, the wisdom and support the right brain was created to give.

### **The Paradox**

Quieting the chatter of the left brain in meditation strengthens the will; immersion in the silent present of the right brain strengthens our appreciation of all life. Increasing the synchronization of both hemispheres is the work we are doing. It's hard work, but it does have its rewards, and it makes us better Stoics by knowing what is going on inside our heads and having the ability to calmly direct that activity. We are what we think—and what we don't think. If our thoughts are dark and turbulent, that becomes our character; if they are bright and well-meaning, then that is the character we form. Meditation makes it possible for us to choose which manner of being we are, and thereby will become. We become the internal thoughts that direct our being, our character, and we are better able to understand those thoughts, and thereby guide them, by the strength of will and mind developed in meditation.

So, how do we meditate, exactly? Here's the paradox. *We strengthen by letting go.* Meditation is the greatest preparation for death that there is. It's one thing to always have death over your left shoulder, as a native American shaman might say, or to always have death before you, as the Stoics do say, but it's quite another to be able to actually practice the act of death. How do we do this? By simply letting go. Sounds simple. It's not. The grip most people have on whatever they hold dear is fierce. You can tell yourself that you are going to die from morning until night and your brain won't really believe it. Human consciousness was programmed by Nature to refuse the finality of death. Perhaps it's part of the Primary Impulse. I don't know. And don't you believe a word the atheists tell you. They want to be immortal as much as you do. Be that as it may, we can't pursue this argument any longer, because that's a whole field of study in itself.

#### *The act of meditation is the act of letting go.*

When you let go of the activity of the left cerebral hemisphere, you are letting go of your habitual dependence upon the constant analysis and verbalization that makes up the story of your life. You are letting go of the past and the future and existing solely in present consciousness. As Marcus Aurelius said in his *Meditations* (Book 3.10): “Throw away everything but this: everyone lives only in this present time, which is an indivisible point, and all the rest of that life is either in the past or in the future.” We do only live in the present time, but we don't know it because the mind is so busy racing backwards and forwards and everywhere but in that present. That's why it appears to be an indivisible point. It isn't, actually, as you will experience in meditation when you let go of all that mental racing around and enter the indivisible point, the present instant of existence.

#### *The act of meditation is not doing.*

Meditation is not only letting go, it's not doing. For those who are obsessed with busy-ness, constant action and goal-oriented behavior, letting go and not doing can be downright painful, if not impossible. Unfortunately, like it or not, if this describes you, then you need meditation as much or more than the rest of us.

For those who are in a constant state of doing, which describes most of us, the very edifice of civilization is built upon all this doing. Doing is rewarded; not doing is scorned. We are constantly urged to keep busy, do more, increase output. The reward system we all live by, both financial and psychological, only praises the doers even as it ridicules those who are not doing, or not doing enough. The only time the enforcers of busy-ness will allow not-doing is for sleep, and even that is suspect if you do more of it than what they consider right and proper. “You sleep eight hours a day? My God! I only sleep four or five, tops.” Which one was just scorned? The lazy slob who confessed to sleeping eight hours a day. Too much not doing.

Until you actually experience the benefits of the meditation paradox of strengthening the mind and will by letting go and not doing, you will have to just approach this activity with an open mind. I would ask you to just trust me, but I've learned to never trust people who say that. So, just try it and see for yourself.

\* \* \* \*

## A. Pneuma Meditation

### The Chrysippus Argument

*We live and breathe by the same thing;  
we breathe by means of pneuma;  
therefore we live by pneuma;  
but that by which we live is soul.  
Therefore the soul is pneuma.<sup>60</sup>*

I would like to draw your attention to the miracle of breathing. The ancients, both East and West, were so impressed with breathing and the air that we breathe, they gave it a special honorific and made it divine. In the East, the Hindus called it *prana*; in the West, the Stoics called it *pneuma*. Beyond the obvious observation that without oxygen we all die within minutes there is much more that can be said. The reason most of us don't give it the profound respect it deserves is because it is so common. That's why diamonds are more highly valued than cut glass, even though most of us can't tell the difference to look at them. Rarity. However, if oxygen were suddenly taken away from us, all the diamonds of the world would be worthless by comparison. So let's take a moment to think about just how wonderful breathing really is.

Oxygen is the most abundant element by mass in the earth's crust, the third most abundant element in the universe, and is nearly 21% of the volume of air in our atmosphere. Common. In nature, free oxygen is produced by the splitting of water during photosynthesis, plant life absorbing sunlight for food. Green algae and certain bacteria in marine environments account for 70% of the oxygen and the rest is produced by the exhalation of the plants around us. We are not breathing some abstract chemical formula isolated and organized into a so-

called table of elements; we are breathing *the living breath of Nature*.

\*

For the ancient Stoics, *pneuma* is a First Principle matter: God, the Whole, the Logos, the One. It holds the same place in the Stoic cosmos that *prana* holds for the Hindu. According to McEvelley, in virtually all aspects *prana* and *pneuma* are “remarkably parallel.”<sup>61</sup> *Prana*, the breath of the cosmic being, *brahman*, is usually air but sometimes fire, and is “...the substrate from which forms arise and into which they return...the inner cohesive force running through all phenomenon and holding them together.”

For Zeno and Cleanthes, the Logos was conceived as a rarefied fire; for Chrysippus it was *pneuma*, a mixture of fire and air, hot and cold respectively. According to the scholar Josiah Gould, Chrysippus maintained that the *logos* was present in all things and its mode of existence was *pneuma*.<sup>62</sup> Further, it was a binding and penetrating substance holding together the universe and everything in it, giving quality, shape, and movement to all things. It was the life-giving force, the soul. The highest form of human *pneuma* was the *hegemonikon*, the ruling faculty, which moves as a vibration either in harmony or out of harmony with the cosmic *pneuma*. The soul of a Stoic sage was said to vibrate in *perfect* harmony with the cosmic soul. Essentially, *pneuma* and *prana* are different names for the same thing.

*Don't limit yourself to breathing along with the air that surrounds you; from now on, think along with the Thought which embraces all things. For the intellective power is no less universally diffused, and does not penetrate any the less into each being capable of receiving it, than the air in the case of one capable of breathing it.*<sup>63</sup>

Marcus Aurelius

So, are we supposed to believe all this cosmic stuff? No need. It doesn't really matter for our purposes whether you believe it or not, but we do need to be clear about an ancient disagreement among Stoics that will likely continue indefinitely. If we accept a pantheistic god, and all Stoics do, is the god of nature's processes conscious or unconscious?<sup>64</sup> Most of the evidence we have from the beliefs of both Greek and Roman Stoics indicate that the majority of the ancients believed in a conscious and providential god in Nature, which actually makes the orthodox position pantheist.

Diogenes Laertius said that some later Stoics, such as Boethus of Sidon, did not believe that the cosmos was conscious and animate, which would make them atheists. Be that as it may, before we go any further it is essential to know that members of our community can be Stoics in good standing as either atheists or deists, and the same can be said for the practice of our meditation. *Regardless of your beliefs about nature or Nature, your point of view does not affect Pneuma Meditation's value as a tool for strengthening the will and increasing Stoic consciousness.*

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John Rist points out in *The Stoics* that, “The wise man feels pleasures and pains; what he does not feel are those pleasures and pains which are mistaken judgments.”<sup>65</sup> This is important, so let me repeat it for emphasis: “The wise man does not feel those pleasures and pains...which are mistaken judgments.”

According to Margaret Graver in *Stoicism and Emotion*, "... a single mental event, such as the recognition of a threat, is analyzable on two different levels, a physiological level, as investigated by the neuroscientist, and an intentional level as investigated by the cognitive psychologist."<sup>66</sup> (*Intentional level* can be scholar-speak for the belief system, such as Stoic philosophy, that explains and guides an emotion in contrast to the purely physiological response.) This is basically a rehash of what we learned in the section on ethics, "The Stoic's Emotions," where it was said that, "Human emotions have two parts: the physiological activity of the brain and the belief system of the mind. Aristotle was the first to note this difference, but it was the Stoics who first developed this understanding (Part One: Ethics)." And what are the beliefs of the mind? The judgments. Please reread *Part One. B.1. Judgment, Logic, and the Internal Dialogue* if this paragraph is not clear.

*To God all things are fair and just, whereas humans have supposed  
that some things are unjust, other things just.*<sup>67</sup>

Heraclitus

*All our pains hang on opinions...Opinion is what we are sad for.  
Each of us is as wretched as he believes.*<sup>68</sup>

Seneca

*There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*<sup>69</sup>

Shakespeare

*The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n.*<sup>70</sup>

Milton

The key to Pneuma Meditation, then, rests in the two parts of emotion discussed above, which is an illustration of the dichotomy or polarity of mind and body. In Pneuma Meditation, the physiological reaction of fear, anxiety, grief, et cetera, can be viewed dispassionately by the belief system of the mind, because as a Stoic I understand what is in my power and what is not in my power. I know, for example, that the certainty of death is not in my power; mortality is a condition of being born and living in the familiar world of people, places, and things; and that all things are in a constant state of flux; all things arise, live for awhile, then pass away. *Uniture, uniture, uniture.*

Knowing this, I can observe the body and with kindness and understanding can know that just as all things arise and pass away, so too will the grief that now possesses me. This is true in all things great and small. This polarity between my mind and body is also present when the mind observes the itch on my left shoulder, the ache in my right knee, and the whole host of emotions guided by the limbic system and the physical brain. The mind in Pneuma Meditation observes with *equanimity* these itches and emotions as they arise, stay awhile, then pass away. *Remain equanimous.*

\* \*

Being Dispassionate. During meditation, there will inevitably be opportunities to practice one's Stoic skills of detachment. These will come from two sources:

internal and external, from the mind and the body. Unbidden thoughts will come into the mind and numerous bodily impressions will come from outside of the mind. Each type, indeed, all sources, must be accepted with equanimity, a calm detachment, with neither desire nor avoidance, watching them arise, stay for awhile, then letting them pass away. This is not easy and requires practice – as much in meditation as in your interaction with the rest of the world. One remains motionless in meditation. *Resolve* not to move your hands or feet, then mentally prepare yourself for many challenges to that resolution.

### Monkey Mind

You may have heard the expression, “monkey mind,” when someone is describing the difficulty of emptying the mind of thoughts. As you know, or may have guessed, that's an Asian expression made by those who grew up in cultures where monkeys ran wild and were never far away. The antics of these animals, constantly chattering and poking into things like a misbehaving three-year-old, is readily identifiable when their living example is always nearby. But in Occidental cultures we only see monkeys in zoos and on nature shows, and the expression may be less likely to be apt and bring a smile.

There's another reason why that expression is not entirely appropriate for the Westerner, and this is really the main reason why I don't like it. As a Stoic, I have a lot of respect for the mind, and calling it a monkey mind is both negative and demeaning. Not that I have anything against monkeys or their minds, but just because the mind is flooded with thought, even when you would rather not be thinking, does not make it any less amazing. Calling it a monkey mind is just a put-down of the left cerebral hemisphere and its constant analyzing, categorizing, and rationalizing everyone and everything, including itself. That's what it does, because that's what it's *supposed* to do, and it's very good at it.

I've also heard meditation gurus say we are all quite mad. If you stop and actually make a note of the activity of the brain, you might be inclined to agree. Thoughts that come into the mind while meditating may follow a chronology something like this: “My nose itches. It's cold in here; I'm going to stop eating fried eggs for breakfast. The acid. Coffee's OK. I need to wash the car today. Fred's really pissing me off. How come he.... It might rain. The cat box, I can smell it all the way in here. I have to remember to.... Is that the paper? I have to stop these thoughts. I wonder how long I've been sitting here?”

Probably less than a minute.

That's what the left brain does and how it dominates our life, but that's not a bad thing. There's no reason to question your sanity or call it names just because it's in a constant state of motion. We put it into such a state because life requires it to be constantly alert and ready to be assigned to any task at any second. We can be thankful for that, but while we are in meditation we must give the left brain a rest and give the right brain its due.

### The Itch

So, are you allowed to scratch when some part of your body itches in meditation? Under more normal circumstances we can go for hours without itching or scratching, at least we think we do, because the activity of

itch/scratch, itch/scratch goes on without our conscious awareness. In meditation we quickly become aware of the itches of life like never before. As soon as we sit still, body parts seem to have just been waiting for this moment to send a message to your brain that it wants attention. And the brain, not having anything else to think about suddenly finds itching and scratching really interesting and important.

Itches come in all sizes from little to big and from mild to urgent! Consider these different sizes the level of your challenge or test. The little ones are fairly easy to ignore and go away in a few seconds. In degrees of difficulty they are like addition and subtraction problems in math. Then the problems get a little harder: multiplication and division, fractions and percentages, moving on to algebra and geometry, followed by calculus, the big and ferocious itch that drains all your resources and never seems to go away. So, what do you do?

Well, scratch of course. At the beginning of your meditation practice, scratch the big ones, maybe even the middle-sized ones. Don't worry about it, you can handle the little ones. So, how exactly do you *handle* them? It's the same for one as for all, big and small. See them for what they are: matters of indifference: remain dispassionate. Don't get mad; don't get frightened. Frightened? Yes, having an itch that won't go away can transform the emotion of anger into anxiety or fear that it will never go away. Once that fear sets in you're one step away from giving up and giving in. Not just to scratching the itch but to giving up meditation practice altogether. "To Hell with it! I hate it!" And so on. Persevere, remain calm, and eventually you will not need to scratch at all.

Can there be any remaining doubt about the value of meditation for a Stoic? Meditation strengthens the mind and will in the same way athletic games and exercises strengthen the body, and both are the ideal preparation for combat. When a soldier goes into the Army, he's toughened up for combat by pushups, situps, running with heavy boots on his feet and a pack on his back. Meditation does exactly the same for the mind and will power, and both prepare the individual for the combat of life – in the marketplace, at home, at school, on the job with a difficult boss, obnoxious coworkers, noisy neighbors, an alcoholic mother, a juvenile delinquent son, sickness, pain, and the list goes on and on.

How does meditation help with all this? It makes you strong, but in a way that's very different from lifting heavy weights. It makes you strong and unflappable, maintaining an even keel when difficulties, great and small, come your way. And come they will. While meditating you will be aware of the itches, the barking dog, the cold in the room, the car door that slams again and again, the skunk walking through the back yard, the crying baby, the garbage truck lifting and dumping your trash can. All of these sensory impressions plus the many thoughts that come to your mind with or without these impressions, all of them are what they are: matters of indifference, really. Remain equanimous.

It's important to remember that remaining equanimous is not the same as repression. Repression is stopping the mind from thinking about whatever it is that annoys you. What you do in meditation is exactly the opposite. It's acceptance, not rejection, not repression. You are accepting an irritant, either external or internal, either desired or disturbing, accepting it for what it is,

neither good nor bad, but indifferent. If you can do that for a half hour in meditation, you will be more mentally prepared for all the ups and downs the rest of your day.

With this new strength of mind and will, suddenly you realize that you can choose your reactions to events, you can choose the thoughts that create the judgment of an impression. And, if you can choose your judgments, and if you know as a Stoic knows what matters are good, what are bad, and what are indifferent, then you can know the serenity of the Stoic sage. Even if you can only manage this serenity during meditation, however long it is, at least you will know what it is to be a sage for that period of time. And to know that feeling will inspire you to want to know it all day every day, for always and forever on the path of the sage.

\* \* \*

### In Summation

*It is the action of an uninstructed person to reproach others for his own misfortunes; of one entering upon instruction, to reproach himself; and of one perfectly instructed, to reproach neither others nor himself.*<sup>71</sup>

Epictetus

How this idea applies to meditation is this: one who is perfectly instructed reproaches neither others nor himself, which includes being tolerant of the wandering mind, the itches and aches, and the emotions that come your way. This is being “perfectly instructed.” The physical itches and tickles, aches and pains are viewed dispassionately. This feeling of fear in my gut or grief in my heart is neither good nor bad; it just is. It was born, it will live for awhile, and it will pass away.

A Stoic can gradually achieve great skill in the art of living. This is an idea developed by the later Stoics in contrast to the founders of our school. The original concept, as proposed by Chrysippus, et al, is that we are all fools until we achieve the god-like status of the Stoic sage. Then and only then, we become perfect in all ways. The image commonly used was of a man drowning – he could drown in a few inches of water as readily as in many fathoms. To their credit, the later Stoics said this was nonsense and that we could improve gradually with practice.

Appearances to the mind elicit responses in the mind. These may initially be emotional responses before the ruling faculty has had time to pass judgment on them. The judgments of the mind are based upon our beliefs about the appearance of the information coming into our mind. Our belief system is Stoic: we know what things are good, what are bad, and what are indifferent. There is a very specific method for actually practicing the Stoic belief system we have learned. It's called *Pneuma Meditation*.

This technique is named after the *pneuma*, the fire and air of Stoic tradition that is the divine creator, the *logos*, the rational intelligence of the cosmos. Whether one believes in the *pneuma* literally or symbolically has no effect on the result of the practice of this meditation technique. One can be a Stoic in good standing

either as an atheist or a deist. This is meditation not to escape reality, the mystic's impulse, but to enter into it more fully, taking charge of your life as a Stoic and increasing your ability to do so.

*You strengthen the will by letting go and doing nothing.*

Pneuma Meditation fully engages the meditation paradox of strengthening the mind and will by letting go and not doing. Our practice is the perfect instruction of which Epictetus speaks when the judgment of the mind is one of equanimity, observing calmly and without reproach as all the stuff of life arises, lives for awhile, and then passes away. This is how we practice hour after hour, day after day, as we stiffen our spine at home, alone, before we enter the cacophony of the world.

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## B. Strengthening the Will

*I think there is an attraction to discipline that is desirable here. We're toughening, not softening, the will. It's the same with education or adventure or military training: if it's too easy you don't respect it. One's confidence and respect for any program goes up with the difficulty of attainment. That's why Army Airborne Rangers are a breed apart, and know it. That's true of virtually everything. If the streets were paved with gold you certainly wouldn't be wearing it on your ring finger.*

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*The key factor separating geniuses from the merely accomplished is not a divine spark. It's not I.Q., a generally bad predictor of success, even in realms like chess. Instead, it's deliberate practice. Top performers spend more hours (many more hours) rigorously practicing their craft.*

“Genius: The Modern View” by David Brooks, Op-Ed Columnist, *NY Times*, May 1, 2009

THE DECISION: If you choose to progress as a Stoic, then you must make time for it—much as a marathon runner arranges his or her life-schedule around running, or as an artist or writer reserves certain hours of the day for that work regardless of other obligations. Nothing can be more important than personal commitment and dedication. This is what we do, those of us who have made such life-orienting choices. This is who we are. One does not become a Stoic by reason alone; it also requires practice. Just as an athlete or an actor or any other skilled performer must practice, sometimes for hours every day, so does the Stoic benefit by practicing before performing in the real world. The most certain step one can take in progressing as a Stoic is the deliberate practice of meditation.

### The Four Ways

1. **The Discipline.** Just doing it, again and again, day after day, requires considerable discipline and perseverance through the ups and downs of any training.

2. **The Mind.** Letting go of thought and becoming Master of the Internal Dialogue.
3. **The Body.** Tickles and itches, hot and cold, aches and pains, and sagging.
4. **The Emotions.** Observing feelings and emotions in your heart and gut.

## 1. The Discipline

*We are a school of philosophy, not a school of fish*

The recommendations that I make here are to be thought of as suggestions, not as commands. When and where should you plan on doing your meditation? I recommend first thing in the morning before breakfast (when you *break your fast*), because you are more likely to be alert and rested, even as the mind is less active for not having eaten for 10-12 hours. Select a room and place in that room where you feel comfortable. You can think of this as your sacred space or your laboratory, whichever notion most appeals to you. You won't be making a lot of noise, so you are not likely to disturb anyone else in the house. If possible, go off somewhere you can be alone, which admittedly may be difficult in a crowded house. That's OK. There is no reason why you can't practice anywhere, even with your spouse sleeping three feet away. You'll find your space if you look and feel for it. Use earplugs if needed.

Prepare your meditation space as you would a sacred space. Choose an environment, furnishings, and implements that are meaningful to you. Think of it as an art form. Get a meditation cushion. You don't absolutely need a cushion. I meditated for years without one, but it is best for overall support. If you are in a hurry to get started in your practice and don't want to wait for a real meditation cushion, you can substitute with a couple of throw pillows. As of this writing a real meditation cushion, called a *kapok zafu*, retails for about \$50, sometimes less, and can be purchased from numerous websites on the Internet. They are also available from brick and mortar stores that specialize in Asian aesthetic and spiritual accessories. You will be sitting on only the first half, maybe 1/3rd of the cushion. Using the whole cushion makes sitting erect more difficult.

The Seating positions. The three most common positions are the Burmese, half-lotus, and full-lotus. I find the Burmese sitting position is best for young and old, for learners and for the experienced meditator (see photo). It is comfortable, balanced, centered, and supports meditation for long periods of time without strain. The half lotus is also good. The full lotus is good if you are young and naturally very flexible. Otherwise, it is of dubious value. Try it and see.



Burmese position

One thing you may notice is that the discomfort of the full-lotus does tend to focus the mind. I've done all three positions for extended periods of time and prefer the Burmese position. Sitting in a chair or on a stool is also acceptable for

those with physical or environmental difficulties. (Don't forget to sit with your back straight.) Simply sitting cross-legged is *not* recommended in that it tends to pitch you to one side or the other, not centered, not balanced, and quickly becomes uncomfortable.

Positioning your hands is as important as positioning your feet, but you will have to decide what is best for you. The most common positions are with hands in front of you, one on top of the other, placed in your lap, palms up, with thumbs touching. Another is with arms extended out to the area above the knees, palms up and thumbs touching the tip of the index finger. I have never seen a meditation position with palms down, but I have done it and find it to be very comfortable. I think it's a psychological hurdle for some who believe that with the palms up they are being more receptive to the divine. As a Stoic, I believe the divine is as present inside as it is outside and having my palms down resting on my legs just above the knee in no way excludes me from fully realizing the benefit of my meditation practice.

While meditating place the tip of your tongue behind your front teeth at the juncture between your teeth and the roof of your mouth. Begin focusing on your breath as you breathe through your nose with your mouth closed. Count silently backward from 10 to 0. Like this: Inhale—exhale, ten. Inhale—exhale, nine. Inhale—exhale, eight. And so on. Slowly, easily, silently. The goal here is to have an empty mind for a minimum of these first eleven breaths. That is your first goal and expectation. With that achievement you will be a meditator. Do not expect it to happen the first, or even the tenth time. It takes practice. When you reach zero, stop counting but continue to focus on you breath. Inhale, exhale. Your eyes can gently close down now, not completely closed, almost closed, just slits through which you should be able to dimly see the outline of your knees in front of you.

Counting down to zero is an introduction in your meditation to what comes before one. The nothing before existence is where you go in meditation. How does existence come from nothing? The same way one comes into being from zero – a deliberate act of consciousness. But this is the cosmology of physics; let's go back to meditation. After a time, you may or may not want to continue the countdown before you begin to meditate. Other details like that will change in your practice as you become more comfortable with the experience of meditation. You know your body and yourself better than I do. Listen to what it is telling you. We are a school of philosophy, not a school of fish.

Unless you are meditating with another person or persons, it's best to be alone in a quiet room or outside in Nature, preferably without external distractions such as TVs, radios, leaf blowers, ringing telephones, power lawn mowers, bouncing basketballs, low-flying helicopters, jumping skateboards, motorcycles without mufflers, and car alarms. This is a tall order if you live in a city, of course, but do what you can. In time, you will be less annoyed by such distractions, but at first it's better not to be inundated by them.

If it's impossible to eliminate the cacophony of noise pollution so prevalent in our cities today, use earplugs. The best way to avoid the noise is to meditate early, very early in the morning. The novice is also likely to feel more

comfortable, less self-conscious about meditating if the rest of his world is still asleep. If you've never done anything like this before it may seem a little odd, even weird. Think of it as a scientific experiment if you need to, an expansion of personal consciousness.

How long do you need to meditate? Individual needs vary. I recommend a minimum of 15-20 minutes, to start, and a maximum of one hour. Some days you will want to meditate longer, just as some days your meditation will be more meaningful than others. That's natural. Do not be concerned when you have a bad day, poor focus, everything itches, falling asleep, constant chatter in the mind. Even great athletes, artists, surgeons, and performers have an off day. The more skilled you become the less you will have them. When you have a really great day in deep meditation you are likely to wonder how that happened. Don't obsess over either good days or bad days. They come and go. There's seldom an obvious, rational, cause and effect reason for them.

Meditation strengthens the will in the same way we strengthen the body—gradually getting stronger, day by day. Wishful thinking doesn't do it. Work does. You will *not* be given a mantra, but you will have a point of focus throughout your exercise, your breath. The mind needs something to focus on while meditating, and by focusing on a single thing in the front of the mind, such as your breathing, the rest of the mind is freed from its effort and becomes quiet, calm. Every time you calmly resist the urge to scratch, every time you stop a thought in its tracks and return to focusing on your breath you get stronger and come one step closer to mastery.

How often do you need to meditate to benefit from this practice? This is not a one-answer-fits-all situation here. A Theravada Buddhist would recommend a minimum of two hours a day, one hour in the morning and another hour in the evening. More, when you can squeeze it in. That's not realistic for most of us. You do not need to meditate every day for the rest of your life. Try it for a half hour to an hour in the morning just after arising for three months, six months, or as long as you need the practice. Some mornings you won't be able to meditate. You may be sick, overslept your alarm, or your mother may be visiting and is using the spare bedroom where you normally meditate. No problem. If you need to take time off, don't worry about it. Come back when you're ready. You can and will benefit from your practice every time you meditate. *Just do it!*

## 2. The Mind

Stopping the Internal Chatter. Every time you stop the chatter inside your head and return to the silence within, even for a minute, you have exercised an act of will, and you become stronger.

*Who am I talking to when I talk to myself? And, who is it that is doing the talking when I tell my self to stop talking to my self?*

The brain is a very busy organ, constantly at work on matters great and small, usually small. The conscious mind, even without deciding to do so, will grab onto any thought that comes its way. We are so accustomed to this verbal activity, the internal chatter, coming unbidden to the mind that we usually aren't

even aware the thought is here until we have been thinking it for awhile. When you do realize that you have been thinking instead of *not* thinking, which is the point of meditation, you may be inclined to be angry or disgusted or disappointed. Don't be. This is not a bad thing.

In fact, on occasion it can even be a good thing. Not all thoughts during meditation are to be condemned and ignored. Some thoughts that come into the mind may be flashes of insight brought into your consciousness by your subconscious mind. I can give you an example of one such thought that came to me in meditation recently. The key to the *Philosopher's Journal* came to mind fully developed while in Pneuma meditation at 0550 on 29 Aug 09. After a number of days wondering how to approach this as an exercise, the answer suddenly became clear while I was simply listening to my breath far away from such concerns. I had not made a conscious effort to understand the matter since the afternoon of the day before. Your mind is not being bad by bringing thoughts to you, and there is no reason to reprimand it. *Remain equanimous.*

How does one strengthen the will in meditation? Every time you stop the internal chatter and empty the mind you strengthen the will. Over time, the will becomes stronger, and with practice the meditator can go for longer periods of time in complete internal silence. It is at this point that one begins to understand mastery of the inner discourse that one has with oneself, one's self. It is with an act of will that you become master of this inner discourse, not just in meditation but in all situations all the time. This is the practice that makes perfection not only possible but effortless.

Do you have trouble finding your mouth with a fork or a pair of chopsticks? No. Why? Because you practiced. That's all. This is not magic. You come closer to mastering the inner discourse every time you stop and dismiss or redirect the thoughts that come into the mind during meditation. And, if you can do this during meditation you can do it any time during the day. Any thought that comes into your mind that you evaluate and perceive to be inappropriate and unworthy of a Stoic you can stop and/or alter.

Stopping the mind and redirecting it at will gives you command of your thoughts and judgments. If you are in command of your judgments, if you are the one who decides what your judgments are going to be in every situation, then the slings and arrows of fortune, outrageous or otherwise, are mastered. You are free to exercise your will at any time, both during meditation and during normal active consciousness. And with this exercise, it is you who decides the emotional state that is appropriate. You know what things are good, what are bad, and what are indifferent, and with this understanding and with this strength of will you can preserve the serenity and joy that are the hallmarks of a noble character.

The internal chatter never goes away for long. When the Transcendental Meditation practitioner said that stopping all thought is a myth, he was partially correct. Sitting in meditation for 30 minutes without a single thought *is* a myth. It's not going to happen, and it doesn't need to. An experienced meditator can go without a single thought for about 11-12 slow breaths – the length of time of your initial countdown.

Eventually you will be able to hold your silence for longer, but how much longer I don't know. I personally counted 22 breaths without thought, but then I stopped counting. I didn't see the point. Meditation is not a contest or competition. 11-12 breaths is enough. You can do everything you need to do with that length of silence when you add them with all the other periods of 11-12 breaths in one meditation session.

Some thoughts are so fleeting as to be almost non-thought; some thoughts are lengthy and involved. Accept them for what they are, matters of indifference, and do this: if a thought is fleeting or has been going on for just a little while, simply go back to your breathing awareness. If it has been going on for a little while before you realize it and check yourself, you can remember who you are by saying, "Stoic philosopher," several times or as many times as you feel is required. If you have been off on a rather lengthy discourse or fantasy, repeat "the DOE," then Start counting backwards from five to zero, a briefer version of what you did when you began your session. Continue awareness of your breath.

### 3. The Body

Sitting still and erect and remaining equanimous towards the itches and tickles and aches and pains of the physical body requires an act of will. Sitting up straight without sagging will be a continual challenge. The inclination to relax and slouch will come back time and again throughout your meditation period. No harm done; just straighten up again. If it helps, think of lifting the trunk of your body upright with an imaginary string that runs through the top of your head to the base of your spine. Don't be rigid and strained or you will wear yourself out and get grouchy. Then you will have to deal with that feeling on top of everything else. If you aren't sure of why you need to sit straight, experiment. Sit with a slouch, your spine bent, then sit upright and erect. Pay attention to the difference in your *mind*. I'm not going to tell you what the difference is; you will see it for yourself.

Now you can expect to feel the tickles and itches and aches and pains. Simply observe them. Don't think about it, simply observe them with an empty mind. They arise, stay for awhile, then pass away. Just as in all things some will stay a short while and others will stay a longer while. Their life span is impossible to know in advance, just observe quietly, calmly, and with equanimity. This is the body's nature. This is life. This is what happens in the phenomenon of existence, in the dynamic continuum we live in. You are born; you live for awhile; then you die. And so does the itch behind your left ear.

Is the room too hot, too cold? Another challenge of the body. In time and with practice you can be comfortable in extremes of temperatures that would normally cause you to be quite uncomfortable. I routinely meditate in a room that is too cold for the light clothes I am wearing, but I no longer meditate in temperatures below freezing as I did in the winter of 1983-4. Discomfort and cold does tend to focus the mind, but it is unnecessary. **Important disclaimer.** Knowing these methods may tempt some to test themselves with extreme physical challenges. No need. Remember the wisdom of the Stoic motto: live in agreement with Nature. Nature gave us nerve endings and a rational mind in

order to avoid hurting ourselves. Be reasonable.

One brief story about the cold. In 1977, I was in Army Ranger School during my Infantry Officer training at Ft. Benning, Georgia. I really liked Ranger training, because it pushed your limits into areas most people never go. One December night, all night, we were on a training “mission,” crawling through the frost of the Georgia swamps, soaking wet and cold to the bone. At about 4 AM, the Platoon Leader gave several of us a few minutes rest before going on.

Hungry, exhausted, and freezing, I sat cross-legged and leaned against a tree to catch a few minutes of sleep. The whole time I hallucinated that I was dying – probably hypothermia kicking in. But before I was called back into action I had a deep gut realization about cold: the discomfort of cold is *fear*. When the fear is gone, the cold doesn't go away, it's still there, but it's more of a curiosity than an unpleasantness. It's the fear that makes it so unpleasant. Don't be afraid of the cold, but know what you are doing.

Certain meditation positions can be comfortable for awhile, then cause discomfort after a few weeks or months as an accumulation of a physical stress. The body is telling you to change positions. Change positions. Trying to sit through the pain will only cause more damage. Don't do that. Give the aching body part some time off and try a new position that doesn't hurt. There is no one position that must be maintained come hell or high water. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.” Take responsibility for the health and welfare of your body. Everything should be tested and found reasonable for *you*. The success of Pneuma Meditation is not dependent upon the cross-lotus, Burmese, half lotus, full lotus, three-legged stool, lawn chair, or any other seating position.

## 4. The Emotions

Observing any and all emotional states with equanimity and objectivity requires an act of will. From Margaret Graver's *Stoicism and Emotion* we find the key to how emotions arise. They are, in short, judgments that we make about the sensory data coming into us from our world. The emotion, then, is based upon an inner discourse with our self that makes a judgment based upon what we believe to be good, bad, or indifferent. Herein lies the key to the relationship between the practice of Stoicism and meditation.

*Meditation is the discipline that gives us practical experience in mastering our judgments about impulses that give rise to emotions. With practice we increase our ability to remain calm and serene in our reactions to incoming impulses that may lead to irritation or other rising passions.*

Anger, jealousy, sadness, arrogance, fear, and lust – all emotional states are treated the same in meditation as heat, cold, aches, pains, tickles and itches. Remain equanimous. Observe these states without desire or aversion. Simply observe what they are, how they feel. Allow yourself to feel them without judgment, perhaps even with a bit of naive curiosity as if you were an alien to the phenomenon of physical existence and were fascinated by all the strange

feelings that come with being alive and human. This is what it is to be here in the realm of the polarities, a sentient part of the dynamic continuum. It really is quite amazing.

Sometimes the feeling you have in your chest or gut while meditating is an emotion; other times it can be fatigue or just plain restlessness. Focus on it without conscious thought. Continue to be aware of your breathing. Observe the feeling with equanimity. Nature's creation of our ability to feel when combined with rational thought encourages ethical behavior. Sometimes it saves our lives. There are times when the feeling of fear and the desire to fight or run for our lives is exactly the most prudent course of action to take. Not all impulse to action is false.

Let's use a real world example of the kind of emotion that can arise during meditation. While at work yesterday you told your boss in rather blunt terms that he was mistaken about some project or idea that he was promoting. Obviously, he didn't appreciate your comment as you could tell by his body language and familiar scowl. He reacted angrily, stormed away, and now you can anticipate trouble after you finish meditating, eat breakfast, dress and go to work today. You *may* even deserve it, but that's not the point. The point is that you have been feeling a slow burn of anxiety ever since this confrontation, and now, while you are trying to meditate, that repressed anxiety is coming out front and center.

Do you think that the employee is the only one feeling anxiety now? Probably not. Both the employee and the boss are likely to be affected with the same or a similar emotional discomfort. Even mentally working through the incident several times is unlikely to take away that feeling of dread. I'm not just making this up. I've been on both sides of this kind of situation, and many of you have been, too.

Before long the feeling of dread becomes one of anger and resentment at the other person for having caused the feeling of dread in the first place. At this point, the original emotion is not being cooled down; it is being seriously inflamed. Do either of them like how this feels? No, of course not. Feeling anxiety, anger, and resentment all at the same time does not feel good. It does not increase our happiness.

Back to meditation. What do you do about it? When you have an emotion, or any combination of emotions, arising during meditation, bring it out and *feel* it. Don't analyze or examine it rationally or verbally. Don't repress it. Don't argue with yourself all the pros and cons of why you should or should not feel the way you do, simply be aware of how it feels. Allow it to exist within you, front and center stage. Hold it there without thought, without judgment, without any attitude at all. Simply let it be – just as if it were an itch or tickle on the end of your nose. Don't scratch it. Just observe. Remain equanimous. Remain objective in the present where the emotion is residing.

Be aware with equanimity, neither love the emotions nor hate them. Just let them be there, quietly, calmly, objectively, until at last they go away. And just like an itch or a tickle, sooner or later, they *will* go away. Both physical and

emotional states are given their staying power over you by your attachment to them. No attachment; no power. Emotional memories of the past or emotional expectations of an unpleasant future will not require prompting during meditation; they will arise unbidden. You can count on it. Continue awareness of your breathing as you feel the emotion arise. Remain objective. Remain equanimous. Breathe.

Allow yourself to feel this emotion, but not be attracted or repulsed by it. *Either attraction or repulsion will cause you to be attached to it, and as long as you are attached to it you will not be free from it.* Continue to be aware of the feeling for as long as it lasts. Breathing. Pretty soon, just as if it were felt as an itch on the outer edge of your right nostril, the emotion will lose its power, and gradually subside. Breathing. You can even wordlessly recall it if you like. If it's a particularly strong emotion some residual feeling may remain. Breathing. It may even take several meditation sessions to deal with an old or deep emotional scar. Observe with equanimity until it is completely gone, then you will return to serenity.

When you have finished your meditation, open your eyes. It's not comfortable to just jump right up and get busy. Sit for a moment longer, and if you are meditating first thing in the morning, consider the day ahead. You may have some vow or affirmation you may wish to remember now. I recite *the DOW* (see Part One A. *Mneme*) before I get up and begin my day. As a memory exercise, it's exactly the sort of thing that helps me keep Stoic principles at the forefront of my consciousness.

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*Virtue is not measured by the length of your beard.*

By quieting the voice that says *I am*, we realize the other, the *all*. Strengthening the quiet side, the right cerebral hemisphere, increases the synchronization of both right and left hemispheres of the brain. Unfortunately, most people let the right brain wither and atrophy from lack of use. As stated earlier, the brain waves of one who does not meditate shows less activity in the right hemisphere and higher beta activity overall, attributes of tension and nervousness. While meditating, the two hemispheres of the brain come into synchronization, mirroring each in phase and as a harmonious whole. If we as a people respect the mind, then doesn't it seem reasonable to take care of it, to develop its optimal functioning?

There's no excuse for right-brain ignorance or hostility, real or feigned. The Stoics of antiquity didn't understand the neurobiology of the cerebral cortices, but the new Stoic does. Or should. Let's stop pretending the right brain doesn't exist and has no useful purpose in our lives. We've had 2300 years to develop the analytical side of the brain, the left hemisphere, now it's time for the new Stoic to seriously explore the inner universe of the silent mind. *Pneuma Meditation* can be an important step in that direction.

## ENDNOTES

## Part One

- 1 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (Penguin, 1964), Book 6.10
- 2 Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (Penguin, 1977), XXXIII: 11
- 3 Weatherford, J., *Genghis Khan* (Three Rivers Press, 2004), pp. 88-9
- 4 Arrian, *Discourses of Epictetus* (Walter J. Black, 1944), Book I: 4, 6, 15, II: 2, 6, III: 3, 9, *Ench.* #13
- 5 *Ibid.*, Book I: 20, 29, 30, II: 10, 16, 19, III: 8, 11, 24, IV: 10
- 6 *Ibid.*, Book I: 1, 4, 6, 12, 22, 25, II: 2, 4, 6, 13, 19, IV: 1, 4, 5, 10, 12, *Ench.* #1
- 7 *Ibid.*, Book I: 17, 18, Book III: 2, IV: 1, 11, *Ench.* #5. I have modified the order that Arrian lists the three studies to more accurately reflect the chronology of events rather than what Epictetus identifies in one reference as the most important study (Book III: 2). I should also be mentioned that according to Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel* (Harvard, 1998, p. 83), Epictetus is the only Stoic to also identify these three studies as three activities of the soul. It should also be pointed out that although this author uses 'actions' to identify the 3<sup>rd</sup> study, the Epictetus translators most often uses 'pursuits and avoidances' and 'duties,' which is thought to be a bit of a muddle that can easily be avoided with the use of the single idea of actions.
- 8 *Ibid.*, I: 26, II: 10, 18, III: 10, 24, IV: 8, 6, *Ench.* #51
- 9 *Ibid.*, II: 24
- 10 *Ibid.*, I: 29
- 11 *Ibid.*, II: 19
- 12 *32 Principal Doctrines* XXI
- 13 *Ibid.*, XXII
- 14 *Ibid.*, XXIII
- 15 Hadot, P., *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Blackwell, 1995), p. 83
- 16 Hadot, p., *The Inner Citadel* (Harvard, 1998), p.71
- 17 *Discourses*, III: 25
- 18 *Ibid.*, I:1
- 19 *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 2042
- 20 *Discourses*, I: 1
- 21 *Ibid.*, I: 1
- 22 *Ibid.*, III: 2
- 23 *Ibid.*, *Enchiridion* #5
- 24 *Discourses*, I:18
- 25 *Meditations*, Book 9.5
- 26 Hadot, p., *The Inner Citadel* (Harvard, 1998), pp. 44-5
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 44, 70
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 82-4
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 83
- 30 *Meditations*, Book 4.7
- 31 *Ibid.*, 5.16
- 32 Hadot, p., *The Inner Citadel* (Harvard, 1998), p.50
- 33 Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (Penguin, 1977) #48
- 34 *Discourses*, Book 3:2
- 35 *Ibid.*, *Enchiridion* #5
- 36 Wm. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii, 259
- 37 *Discourses*, III: 2
- 38 *Meditations*, Book 7, 47-8
- 39 Hadot, P., *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Blackwell, 1995), pp. 196-7
- 40 *Discourses*, III: 2
- 41 *Ibid.*, *Enchiridion*, #30
- 42 *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 1474

- 43 D.L., vol. II, book VII, 135-8
- 44 *Discourses*, Book
- 45 Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, pp. 24, 30-4
- 46 *ibid.*, pp. 83, 232
- 47 *ibid.*, pp. 82-3
- 48 *ibid.*, p. 57
- 49 *ibid.*, pp.252-60
  
- 50 *ibid.*, p. 255
- 51 *Lady Windermere's Fan, Act III*
- 52 *Meditations*, Book 8.33

## Part Two:

- 53 *Enchiridion* #5
- 54 *Discourses*, II: 9
- 55 *Meditations*, Book 2.17
- 56 *ibid.*, 3.10
- 57 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 84-5
- 58 McEvilley, T. *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (Allworth Press, 2002), pp. 42-43
- 59 Willard Johnson, *Riding the Blue Ox Home* (Beacon Press, 1982), pp. 152-3
- 60 Josiah Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus* (SUNY, 1970), p. 102
- 61 McEvilley, T. *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, pp. 543-6
- 62 Josiah Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus*, pp. 99-102
- 63 *Meditations*, Book 8.54
- 64 John Sellars, *Stoicism* (California, 2006), pp. 91-5
- 65 John Rist, *The Stoics* (California, 1978), p. 52
- 66 Margaret Graver (Chicago, 2007), p. 16
- 67 T.M. Robinson, *Heraclitus Fragments* (Toronto, 1999), #102
- 68 Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (Penguin, 1977), 78.13
- 69 Wm. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii, 259
- 70 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, l. 253
- 71 *Enchiridion* #5