

REGISTRY REPORT

a bimonthly eNewsletter
for the Stoic community

Stoicus communitas:Stoikos koinonia



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THE NEWS

This month we have an unusually large number of new members to welcome into our community. Please take the time to read each of the entries below to get some idea of the life quality and enthusiastic support we have received.

You may have noticed a little number at the bottom of the Registry home page. That's the number of visits the web site has received since the first of May. It's now over 1000, which means that we are getting more than 500 visits per month.

On another note, you may have noticed that the email addresses of the members of the Registry have disappeared. They're not gone. The webmaster and I both have backups carefully locked away, but we believe that for privacy reasons, including web crawlers and soapbox orators, none of us want or need unsolicited attention.

If you are interested in contacting any member of our community, just drop me an email with your request, and it will be forwarded promptly for you.

PEOPLE

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:

John Barnett (1953-) discovered Stoicism by accident, only to find he had been practicing certain Stoic ideas for many years. He decided to become a *prokopton* and try to make progress towards becoming a Stoic. He says Fate gives him many opportunities to learn and practice being a Stoic. He lives in Florida and is involved in the research field.

Jesse W. Caban (1974-) lives in Illinois, USA, where he received his Bachelor's Degree from Columbia College, Chicago. He currently works as a Sergeant for the Sheriff's Department. He said, "Stoicism spoke straight to my heart. It changed my life; from my actions, behavior, and thinking. I take Stoicism seriously, and therefore trained for real life, not the academic life. My training in Stoicism began first with Keith Seddon's Correspondence Course, then with Capt. Thomas Jarrett's

Stoic Wisdom Counseling & Coaching. I now continue my study of the Stoic classics. I think The Stoic Registry is a great place to meet like-minded people and ask that other members of the Registry feel free to contact me.”

Jose Crespo (1963-) lives in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and works in the field of Human Resources for the Ministry of Environmental Affairs. Mr. Crespo, who has a B.A. in Psychology, and a M.Sc. in Educational Technology, said, “Philosophical and religious inquiry have been my lifelong passion (since the age of 15). Throughout my life, I have tried to find systems of thought that work for me in terms of fostering my growth as a human being. Seneca is one of my favorite authors of all times. To me, it is a pleasant surprise to know of so many people who are in sympathy with the Stoic philosophy, which provides such a great foundation for right living without the shackles of superstition and fanaticism.”

Michel J. G. Daw (1966-) is a Training Manager living in Gatineau, Québec, Canada. He said, “It is not enough to have merely lived the length of your life, for as Groucho Marx said, 'Anyone can get old. All you have to do is live long enough.' I want to live the depth and breadth of it as well. In Stoicism, I have found that it is not the length of life that makes it long, it is how you live. As Seneca said, 'Life, if you know how to live it, is long.'”

Pamela Lindley-Daw (1966-) is a Sales Coordinator (by day) and Seamstress/Writer who lives in Gatineau, Québec, Canada. She said, “To live in harmony with nature is my life governing principle. The daily struggle is how to balance that principle within the mundane aspects of every day life in our modern society. My life long goal is to constantly refine myself and my activities to be in harmony with nature. This goal has taken us through many pathways lately, becoming more eco-conscious and less material focused. Life is certainly a journey and learning is a process. Looking forward to finding community here.”

Paul Lanagan (1955-) is an engineer by profession who lives in Melbourne, Australia. He said, “Many years ago as I was leafing through a book on military leadership a sentence jumped out at me. It said the reader would do well to study the works of the ancient stoic philosophers. This stuck in my mind for almost 20 years until I came across Keith Seddon's correspondence course on Stoicism. When I finished that course I was convinced that Stoicism as a way to live made great practical sense and offered a consistent and comprehensive world view. I continue to try to make progress each day in moulding my character using Stoicism as a guide.”

Aurélien Louche (1986-) lives in Paris where he is a student at the Sorbonne. He said, “I have discovered Stoicism with the reading of *The Handbook* of Epictetus. It was one of the greatest moments of my life. I love Stoicism because this philosophy wants to be actual, modify the life of its followers. I think contemporary Philosophy has forgotten this dimension. That's why I want not only to have a bookish learning of Stoicism but I wish to live this doctrine.”

Michael Perry (1962-) is a Military Officer who lives in North Carolina, USA. He said, "I do think there is something to be said for the 'School of Hard Knocks' and lessons that students of such an institution can provide. I've had the fortunate opportunity to pursue virtue in a life of eclectic experiences ranging from divorce, combat, to the deaths of comrades and dear family members. I grew up in a traditional Christian family and oddly enough I didn't start understanding the teachings of Christ until I began studying the Stoics."

Jason Sherman (1981-) is currently with the US Air Force Security Services stationed in North Dakota, USA. He said, "I like to think of myself as sitting on the fence between Zen and Stoicism, although the fence seems to get narrower as time goes on. I'm active duty military and found Stoicism during my time in and allowed it to reshape my life into an introspective model. I don't want to call myself a Stoic or to call myself a Buddhist. Instead I prefer to say that I practice Zen, and I look at myself through Stoic practice and questions."

Chris Spaide (1988-) is a college student in Connecticut. He said, "I have spent the last few years reading the works of many philosophers, but it wasn't until I read Epictetus' handbook that I knew I had found a philosophy that I could live by. Ever since I read that I have spent most of my free time reading the works of other ancient Stoics and am now interested in learning about the modern Stoic community."

SPOTLIGHT

on Lee Hughes

In a country where a headscarf can topple a government, Lee Hughes, Englishman and Stoic, lives and works and remains unflappable through it all. We go now to the city of Istanbul for an interview with Lee, world traveler and English teacher to the Turks. This is what he looks like and how he describes his life.



Lee Hughes

I was born in Bury, England, on the 14th of March 1978. My family, and much of my extended family, is what would be called “working class” in the North of England where I'm from, all of them living in the Manchester area. The most obvious quirk about my family history is that my great-grandfather (on my father's side) was Japanese, who came over to England during the First World War. My mother's side of the family has Irish heritage.

I'm an only child (in fact, adopted). My education was fairly unexceptional, and I went to university in Birmingham, England, where I studied Criminology. While there, I went to study in Norway for a semester in my second year, and a year after graduating I went traveling around Europe for three months. The experience

I had abroad brought me, indirectly, to English teaching, initially as a good way of furthering my travels. Since then, I've been teaching for four-and-a-half years (with the occasional stopgap) and have worked in Istanbul for the last two-and-a-half years.

THE INTERVIEW

ERIK: I'd like to get a better image in the mind's eye of how you live in Istanbul. Do you live in the city, in a house, a flat, with roommates, a wife, a partner?

LEE: I live in a flat I share with a group of other people (also teachers). In fact they're all British, which for me is something of an oddity as I'm not used to living with my compatriots. In the past I've shared with other teachers from, for example, the USA, Canada, the Caribbean, but haven't lived with British people for a few years. In a way, coming home to the flat sometimes can feel like coming home to a little British bubble!

ERIK: I'm guessing that most of the readers have never been to Istanbul and are likely to think of it as being rather exotic and maybe a little strange. Is it? What is it like to live there from your perspective? How would you compare it to other cities you've seen or lived in, such as London, Paris, or wherever?

LEE: You're right to mention that Istanbul invokes in many people some exotic images, and this was true of me before I came here. In fact, I wasn't disappointed in terms of the exoticness of the city - the only surprising thing was how that "exotic-ness" differed from what I saw in my mind's eye. It has the obvious historic areas, but also many parts are conversely ultra-modern (some areas wouldn't look out of place in California, for instance). Simply, and not to over-use a cliché, Istanbul is lots of things to lots of people. It has a varied nightlife that compares, and in some ways surpasses, the best Europe has to offer. The city is a huge metropolis of 12-15 million people (I like to think of it as London facing Paris across the Bosphorus, to give an apt comparison), with nightmarish traffic to match. And yet, there are places of tranquility and beauty to be found without real difficulty.

ERIK: Why did you choose Istanbul over, say, Tokyo or Hong Kong where there's also a demand for your profession?

LEE: Well, I'd wanted to go to Istanbul for a couple of years before I actually came here (in 2004). Like many people, I always had some vague sense of what Istanbul might be like. Then I heard from a few people who actually went on holiday there and described it in reverential terms. To be honest, I didn't know exactly what to expect when I came and was surprised (in many ways very pleasantly) by what I found. I've long held an interest in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East, perhaps because in my eyes I saw those places as being such an unusual soup of ideas, history and cultures.

Japan is a place that interests me and perhaps I could teach there in the future. I could go into more detail about my ideas about Japan and Britain (in some ways I think they are oddly similar), but that could be for another time.

ERIK: I'm curious to know if you plan to return to criminology after tiring of world travel?

LEE: I'm not at all tired of world travel! Yes, I enjoyed my degree quite a lot, but consider that as a stage/chapter in my life leading to this one. And in this one, in many ways I am extremely happy with how my life is going.

ERIK: Also, I guess the obvious question many are asking themselves right now is how you as a British citizen are treated by a so-called secular Muslim country that appears to be moving towards the conservative or fundamentalist world view.

LEE: Oh, I could go on forever about Turkey's relationship to Islam! It's such a complex and twisted relationship. As a British citizen I have never had any problems with Turks because of my nationality. And I don't really think that Turkey is heading to fundamentalism. Any talk like this is very wide of the mark. Due to the history of the creation of the Turkish republic, Turkey could never be a 'real' Islamic state - mainly because the education system and the establishment is so geared towards the secular tradition. So, while the 'average' Turk is Muslim, he/she wouldn't be raised up to consider it in at all the

same way as, say, someone from Saudi Arabia. Though of course there are exceptions to this rule.

ERIK: Are you a Muslim?

LEE: No, I haven't converted! That said, my experience of Islam in Turkey has been a great eye-opener and I feel much more sympathy and understanding towards Islam due to being here. In many ways, because (from my understanding) the Muslim idea of God is basically conceptual (rather than actual or semi-corporeal), and I feel a greater link to Islam than to Christianity. This view also lines up with what I see as the Stoic sense of 'God' also, although I am aware that Stoicism and Christianity had some early spiritual links in the beginning.

ERIK: A little about the English classes you teach. Is it a school, a private agency, free lance tutorial? Do you teach only conversational English, or do you also teach grammar and composition?

LEE: I teach at a private language school in Istanbul. Both, though I am an EFL [English as a Foreign Language] teacher, which involves a certain method of allowing the students to learn through communication.

ERIK: Who are your students -- businessmen, students, media personalities? For example, when I was teaching conversational English in Japan, I taught Tokyo IBM engineers, high school students preparing for university exams, a famous movie star at his home, and bored housewives. Is it anything like that?

LEE: Yes, to all of the above, to be honest. We get all kinds of students, including bored housewives as well as big multinational corporations. So I know what you mean!

ERIK: And two related questions on Stoicism: 1) when did you first discover Stoicism; and, 2) how did you *know* you were a Stoic?

LEE: I first learned about Stoicism while working in a bookshop back home after I graduated. It was a good place to be curious, and so I looked in the Philosophy section one day and came across a book paraphrasing Seneca and the general philosophy. I realized that a great deal of its tenets (and Seneca's writings) were, in essence, things that brought the philosophical and spiritual together in an enlightened and positive way. I wasn't really religious at that time, but was open-minded to all angles and answers. Stoicism fit many of the holes that other religions and perspectives left, so it was more a kind of "Aha! Now I see..." moment.

THE PORCH

ERIK: Earlier you said, "... the Muslim idea of God is basically conceptual (rather than actual or semi-corporeal), and I feel a greater link to Islam than to Christianity. This view also lines up with what I see as the Stoic sense of 'God' also, although I am aware that Stoicism and Christianity had some early

spiritual links in the beginning.”

I would think this is very interesting to all of us, because we have both "religious" and "secular" Stoics in the Stoic community. It's always been that way. This was true in the classical community as well. Zeno and other early Stoics conceived of a conscious Stoic god in Nature (Cleanthes appeared quite devout), while Boethus of Sidon and other later Stoics should probably be called atheists.

LEE: Regarding the relationship between the secular and spiritual Stoicism, it seems a very personal issue from one Stoic to another, and perhaps depends in many ways on that person's previous background. My first encounter with Stoicism was through Seneca, so many of his teachings had the greatest effect. Apart from that, (and the more famously-published Marcus Aurelius), I had some contact with Epictetus' teachings, though I never got around to reading more.

ERIK: Where do you personally see the Stoic concept of a god in all this?

LEE: My encounters with Islam made me see a conceptual link between their idea of “Allah” and the Stoic sense of “Life-force.” This has always made much more sense to me than the Christian idea of God, borrowed in many ways from the Greek Zeus. What I also discovered was that in Islam, Mohamed's face is never shown to prevent false idolization (i.e., praying to the Prophet as though he were a saint). As I understand, to Muslims then, it is not important what Mohamed looked like, because it was the acts of the man that were more important than the man himself. Muslims (at least, non-fanatical ones) are easy to recognize that the Prophet was not infallible. This point compares quite markedly to the Christian view of Jesus (who is often even depicted as blond-haired and blue-eyed). This point also begs the wider question why Christians in the West feel the need to have a physical representation before them in order to believe in God.

ERIK: As you know, some of the Greek Stoics referred to their God by the name of Zeus. For example Cleanthes' poem, “Hymn to Zeus,” and other references, spell that out rather clearly. But, whether all of them anthropomorphized Zeus in the same way many Christians personalize their god is unclear because we have so little original work remaining. I wish we had more time and space for this subject. For now, thank you Lee. Your discussion of the Islamic world you live and work in has been of value to me and, I'm sure, to all our readers.

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Thank you for reading,

Erik