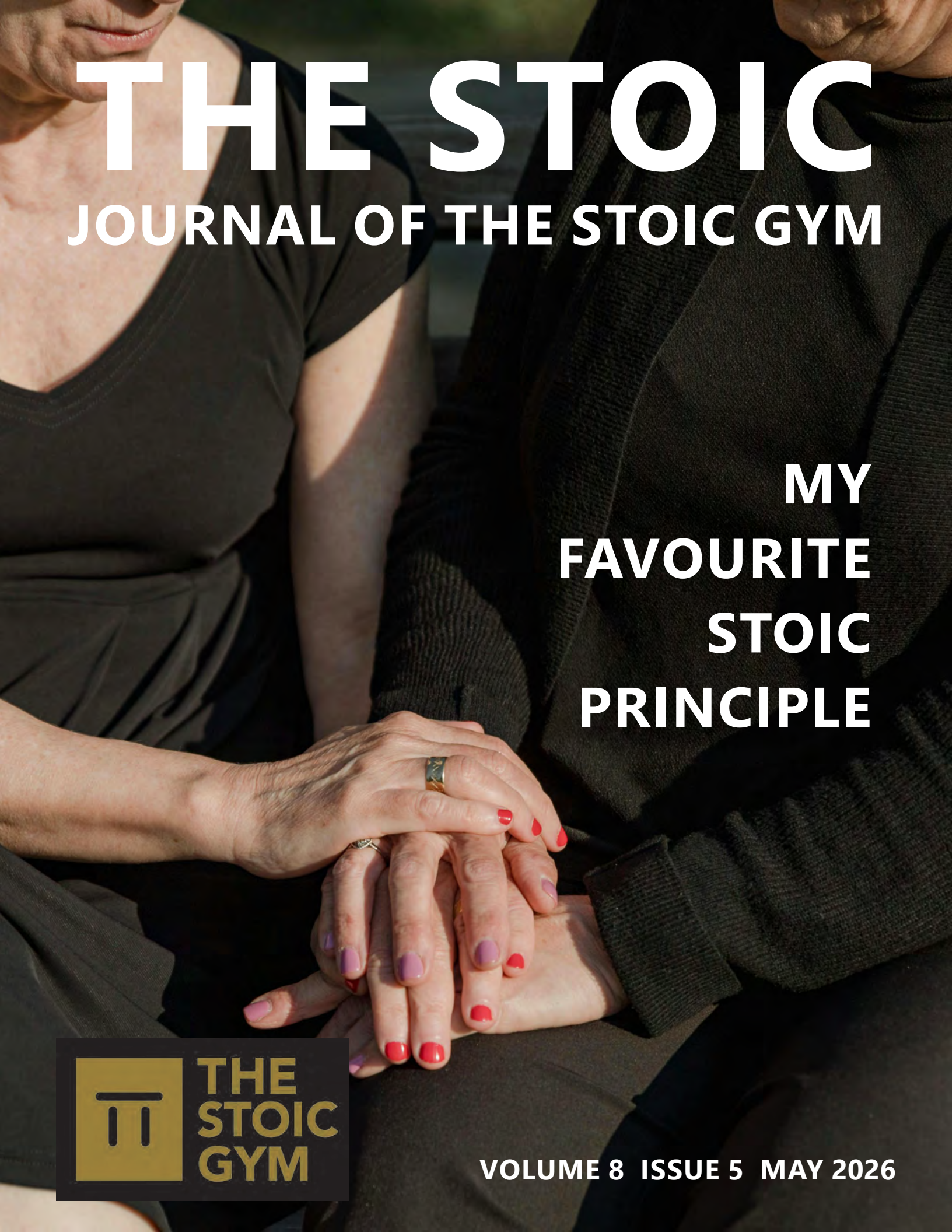

THE STOIC

JOURNAL OF THE STOIC GYM

MY FAVOURITE STOIC PRINCIPLE

THE STOIC GYM

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 5 MAY 2026

THE STOIC

JOURNAL OF THE STOIC GYM

Favourite Stoic principles

DR. CHUCK CHAKRAPANI

THE STOIC PROMISE

If you will listen to me, whoever you are, and whatever you are doing, you will not feel suffering or anger, or compulsion, or hindrance. You will pass your time without worries.

EPICTETUS

THE STOIC

Journal of The Stoic Gym
Volume 8 Issue 5
MAY 2026

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What is your favourite Stoic principle? Ask a hundred people this question and you'll get a hundred answers—well, maybe not a hundred, but certainly many. People encounter Stoicism at different moments in their lives, and the ideas that helped them most at the beginning often matter more than the rest. Not that the other principles are any less weighty, but what appeals to us is what helped us when we needed help. By understanding which Stoic principle appealed most to others and why, we can broaden our appreciation of Stoicism. With this in mind, I asked our contributing editors to tell us what their favourite Stoic principle is.

Dichotomy of control

Let me start with my favourite, the dichotomy of control: some things in life are under our control, and some things are not. Ignore what you cannot control and work on what you can. This simple, obvious principle has saved me from anxiety and worry when things looked bleak. When I ask myself whether something is within my control, the answer is usually no. So why worry about it?

Memento mori (Remember death)

We should remember that death is inevitable and is always stalking us. When we fully realize this, we become less petty. The reality of death reduces anxiety and fear, encouraging us to act with greater courage and authenticity. Learning how to die teaches us how to live, as each day becomes a finite and valuable opportunity. (Shirley Kwosek Sciacca).

The Stoic pause

When something happens, we are quick to react and perhaps regret acting that way. The Stoic pause asks us to pause for a moment and examine our first reactions (or impressions). It is simply the decision to wait a moment before responding, to create just enough space to observe what is happening internally as well as externally. We cannot help how we immediately feel, but we can pause and and act rationally. (Andi Sciacca)

The pause and how to use it

1. Give yourself time before responding—especially when a situation triggers a strong emotional reaction.

2. Ask questions—of others and of yourself. What am I feeling right now? Why am I feeling this? Could I be seeing this incorrectly? Why am I reacting the way I am?

Simply by pausing and challenging the impressions, we can arrive at better decisions. (Glenn Citeroni)

The discipline of action

Act rightly, and let go of what follows. You don't control whether the world rewards you for doing the right thing. But you do control whether you do it. And that's the discipline of action: doing something because it is right rather than looking for rewards. (Brandon Tumblin)

Cultivating excellence (areté)

Everything has its own excellence or areté. The areté of an acorn is to become a thriving oak. The areté of your phone is to let you call others. As humans, we should strive fo excellence as human beings. (John Kuna)

Every choice has an impact on our lives

Your choices matter. Every choice you make makes you better or worse as a person. Be careful about the choices you make in life. (Greg Sadler)

Premeditio malorum to get rid of fears

What if the way to deal with fear is not just learning to "manage" it? What if we could eliminate most worries instead of accepting them? What if we could neutralize the causes instead of treating the symptoms? *Premeditio malorum* addresses just this issue. (Philippe Belanger)

Chuck Chakrapani

THE STOIC

JOURNAL OF THE STOIC GYM

FAVOURITE STOIC PRINCIPLES

REGULAR FEATUES

THE STOIC GYM

VOLUME 8 ISSUE 5 MAY 2026

Memento mori: Focus on what is important

When we accept that time is limited, we are less inclined to rush toward the future or dwell on the past, and more able to savour the present.

SHIRLEY KWOSEK SCIACCA

You fear death…You wish to live; do you know how? You fear to die; what of it? Isn't the life you are living a kind of death? That is the answer to give to those people who would be better off dead: You fear to die; are you alive now? - Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, Letter 77.18

Life is for the living

"Life is for the living" is a common phrase emphasizing that we should enjoy life and create meaning rather than dwell on loss or the dead. Yet we often live as if we have an unlimited amount of time, an unconscious but common human error.

Through fear of death, we can become enslaved in life. Seneca argues that death is not a future event we are slowly moving toward, but a process happening right now. The time that has already passed belongs to death. We are, in fact, dying daily, every minute, which makes it crucial to stop postponing life and to live with urgency in the present moment.

We fail to cherish life

What do we spend our time on? When we put it in perspective, do we waste so many of our precious minutes that we fail to cherish life, or the people we love, while we still have them? For many, anxiety fuels this fear. Yet we are the only species aware of our mortality, and that awareness can be something we confront rather than avoid, whether sitting in a hospital waiting room or waiting to board a flight.

Acknowledge that the person you were yesterday is gone, allowing you to begin again today unburdened. View the time that remains as a bonus, a second chance to live according to nature and virtue. By accepting your mortality, you cease to waste time. This approach helps shed regrets, ignore trivial worries, and focus more fully on living.

Remembering death, *memento mori*, serves as a powerful catalyst for appreciating life by highlighting its fragility and finitude. This awareness reduces our focus on trivialities, clarifies priorities, and fosters gratitude, helping us live more authentically and intentionally in the present moment. It shifts our attention away from fleeting pursuits such as wealth or status and toward what is meaningful, personal growth and relationships.

Reflect on impermanence

When we accept that time is limited, we are less inclined to rush toward the future or dwell on the past, and more able to savour the present. The Stoics taught that reflecting on the impermanence of life fosters gratitude and helps prevent us from taking daily experiences for granted, cultivating a deeper appreciation for simple pleasures.

Confronting the reality of death can also reduce anxiety and fear, encouraging us to act with greater courage and authenticity. Learning how to die, in this sense, teaches us how to live, as each day becomes a finite and valuable opportunity. This perspective dispels the fear of death by accepting it as a present reality rather than a distant, terrifying event.

There was a time in my life when I faced a physical challenge, spinal injections, severe pain, and a loss of mobility. Sitting, standing, and walking became difficult, and I was forced to experience that struggle directly. I had to work through who I wanted to be and how I wanted to live, choosing not to see the disability as a failure or focus only on what I was losing.

Accept what cannot be controlled

The Stoic approach calls for acceptance of what cannot be controlled, not as passive defeat, but as an active acquiescence to reality. By surrendering to what is, we conserve energy for what remains within our control: our response, our mindset, and our character. In that shift, obstacles can become opportunities for growth. I remember thinking of a much younger colleague who had died and realizing, at least I am still alive. Now make the most of it.

What is essential, and what is inessential? You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think. Are there moments in your life where you have not communicated as you intended? Can you reconcile now? We often dwell on regrets, chances not taken, paths not pursued.

When moments remain unaddressed, they can linger like thorns in the mind, better faced and resolved than carried indefinitely. We can always find the occasion to become caught in loops of thought, but the Stoics offer a way to interrupt those loops and ask: "Is this in my control?" If not, we can choose to train ourselves toward indifference, returning our attention to living, and choose to live!

Shirley Kwosek Sciacca is a writer, living in the midwest, seeking wisdom and resilience through lifelong learning and the practice of Stoic principles.

Suspending judgment: Taking a Stoic pause

That pause can be small, but the impact is rarely insignificant—and that can make all the difference.

ANDI SCIACCA

We form impressions quickly

Most of us don't realize how quickly we decide what something means.

A comment lands a certain way, or an email reads shorter than expected, or a conversation takes a turn we didn't anticipate. And almost without noticing, we move from what actually happened to what we believe about it. What was said becomes what was intended. What was observed becomes what is assumed.

That shift happens quickly, and once it does, everything that follows tends to align with the meaning we have already assigned. By the time we respond, we're no longer responding to the moment itself, but to the version of it we have already constructed.

We have a role in interpreting impressions

The Stoics paid close attention to this process. They understood that while we can't control what initially appears to us, we do have a role in how we interpret it. Before we agree with an impression, we perceive it. And in that first moment of perception, there is an opportunity, however brief, to pause.

That pause is easy to overlook. In moments of tension, it can feel almost inaccessible. But it is there. In conflict, it's also where things either escalate or begin to settle. Not necessarily because of what was said, but because of how quickly meaning is assigned to it. A delayed response begins to feel like a lack of care—a shift in tone is taken as disapproval—a brief comment is interpreted as something more pointed than it may have been.

These interpretations feel immediate and convincing. They rarely present themselves as possibilities, and they often arrive as prebaked conclusions. And yet, they are still perceptions.

Using the Stoic pause

The practice, then, is not to eliminate these impressions, but to meet them differently and to notice the moment when a perception begins to take shape and to pause before allowing it to solidify into judgment. This is where something simple becomes meaningful.

The Stoic pause is not elaborate, and it doesn't require removing yourself from the situation. It is simply the decision to wait a moment before responding, to create just enough space to observe what is happening internally as well as externally. When we do this, questions begin to emerge almost naturally: What am I reacting to right now? What am I assuming? Is this what actually happened, or is it what I think it means? The answers aren't always immediate, but they are powerful.

A brief interruption is enough

That brief interruption is often enough to prevent unnecessary escalation. When we allow a perception to pass through a moment of examination, it loses some of its urgency. What initially felt personal may begin to feel less so. What seemed certain may open to other possibilities. The conversation itself has a chance to unfold differently.

This also becomes important during periods of transition, when the interpretations we form begin to shape how we understand larger changes. When something shifts, especially something familiar, the mind often moves quickly to define it. Change becomes instability, and uncertainty becomes risk. The absence of a familiar structure is interpreted as a loss. But these are still perceptions, and like all perceptions, they are not neutral. They carry assumptions that influence how we move forward.

As roles and structures evolve, it would be easy to assign meaning too quickly, to interpret change in narrow terms and respond accordingly. But the Stoic pause offers another way of engaging with what is happening. It allows for a moment of observation before interpretation, and for interpretation before judgment. This doesn't eliminate difficulty or uncertainty. It does, however, create a measure of steadiness within it—which offers support in the face of change.

Becoming more attentive

The Stoics did not suggest that we disengage from our experiences, but that we become more attentive to how we meet them—–and perception is where that meeting begins. It's the first point of contact between ourselves and the world around us, and it's also the place where we retain the greatest opportunity to influence what follows. Over time, the practice of taking a Stoic pause becomes less about intentional effort and more about ongoing awareness and a willingness to remain present with something without immediately defining it.

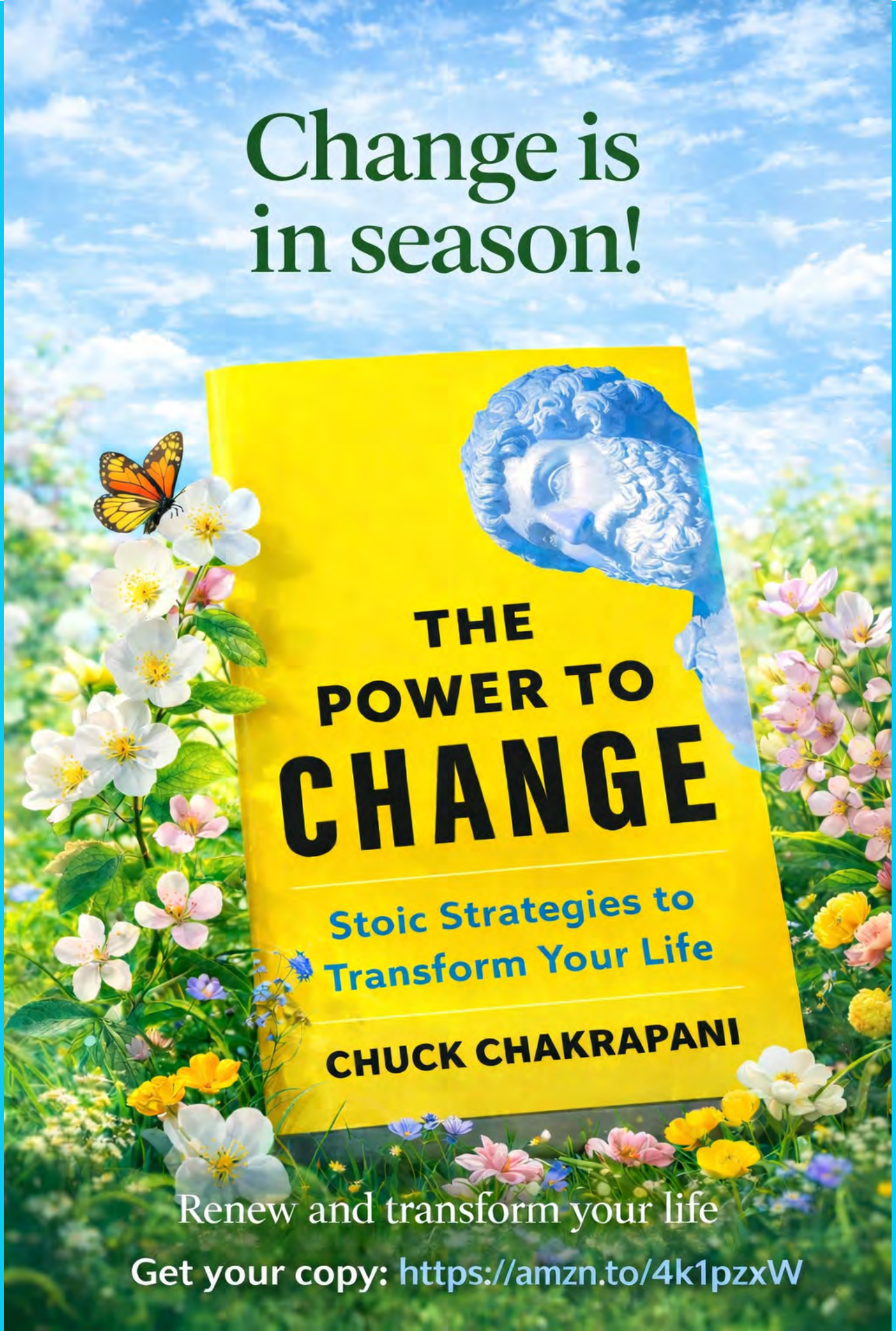
We may not control what appears before us, but we do have a role in how we see it. And in learning to pause before we decide what something means, we begin to move through our lives and our relationships with greater clarity and care.

Even a small pause is significant

That pause can be small, but the impact is rarely insignificant—and that can make all the difference.

Andi Sciacca serves as the Chief Academic Officer and as the Director of Accreditation & Assessment for the European Graduate School. She is also the Environmental Sustainability Program Coordinator for the FEED MKE Program for the City of Milwaukee.

Change is in season!



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Act cleanly, accept the mess

Act cleanly, and accept the mess that follows. Not because the mess is good. But because it is often the byproduct of not bending. Of holding your ground. Of choosing character over convenience.

BRANDON TUMBLIN

Act cleanly, accept the mess

Stoicism is a holistic philosophy. Many—if not all—of its tenets are valuable. But in practice, we tend to gravitate toward the principles that meet us where we are. And that changes.

At one point in life, you may need discipline of perception—learning to see clearly. At another, discipline of desire—wanting less, or wanting differently. And at another, like the phase I find myself in now, one principle rises above the rest:

The discipline of action—with detachment from outcome. Put simply: act rightly, and let go of what follows. I've come to phrase it this way: *I do what I think is right, and that's enough.*

Detachment from outcomes

It's not a direct quote from the Stoics, but it's aligned with them. Epictetus reminds us to focus only on what is within our control—our choices, our actions, our judgments.

Marcus Aurelius echoes this in his own way: do what is just, and accept whatever comes. This principle sounds simple. It is not easy. Because in real life, doing the right thing does not reliably produce good outcomes.

In leadership, you make a decision you believe is correct—and people push back. In organizations, politics distort what should be straightforward. In relationships, integrity can cost you comfort, reputation, or even connection.

This is where the friction begins. You think: I made the right call. So why does this feel like it backfired? Why am I the one carrying the cost? That tension feels like failure.

But it isn't. It's the philosophy working exactly as intended. Stoicism never promised that good actions would lead to good outcomes. It promised something more demanding: that the only thing truly "good" is the action itself—the character behind it. Everything else is outside your control, and therefore not yours to claim or rely on. That's a hard truth to live. Because it means you can do everything right and still lose.

And you have to be okay with that.

Enduring discomfort

There's another layer to this that reveals itself over time. The endurance of discomfort is often the price of alignment.

When you step into a new role, a new environment, or a higher level of responsibility, there's often an uneasiness that follows. You feel out of place. Unsteady. What many call imposter syndrome. But that feeling is not a sign that you don't belong. It's a sign that you're carrying weight you haven't fully adapted to yet.

I think of it like a heavy squat. Your knees shake. Your body strains. And yet—you're still strong enough to lift it. Strength and instability can exist at the same time.

The Stoics understood this. They practiced what we now call voluntary hardship—not because suffering is good, but because discomfort is not something to fear. It is something to endure, and at times, to use.

This doesn't mean chasing pain. It means not interpreting discomfort as a signal to retreat. Don't leave just because it's hard. Stay, if staying is right.

The paradox

There's a paradox at the center of all this. If you attach yourself to outcomes, you will eventually compromise your standards. You'll soften decisions. Avoid conflict. Bend where you shouldn't—because you're trying to secure a result.

But if you detach from outcomes, something else happens. You absorb more short-term pain. You take the harder path. The one without guarantees. The one where integrity is maintained, but rewards are uncertain—or delayed.

And that path is not appealing to most people. Because it asks for something rare: to act with integrity, without needing anything back. No validation. No immediate success. No assurance that it will "work out." Just the action. Just the standard. Just the decision to stand where you believe you should stand.

Closing remarks

That's where I've landed, at least for now. Not in perfection—but in orientation.

Act cleanly, and accept the mess that follows. Not because the mess is good. But because it is often the byproduct of not bending. Of holding your ground. Of choosing character over convenience.

You don't control how others respond. You don't control how events unfold. You don't control whether the world rewards you for doing the right thing. But you do control whether you do it. And in Stoicism, that is enough.

Brandon is most well-known for his podcast, The Strong Stoic Podcast, *where he discusses philosophical ideas both solo and with guests. He also coaches individuals to help them be their best selves, writes articles, plays music, manages projects, and several other things.*

Seeing through the first impression

Our first impression should not be accepted without examination.

GLENN CITERONY

There's something wrong with the world today. I don't know what it is. Something's wrong with our eyes. We;re seeing things in a different way. – Aerosmith from the song "Living on the Edge."

Our cataracts

My grandmother developed cataracts in her 80s and needed surgery to remove them. Cataracts cloud the lens of the eye, and for those who have them, seeing can feel like looking through a fogged-up window. She was a sweet soul who wore thick glasses just to make out the world around her.

I've come to believe that we all have cataracts—not in the literal sense, but symbolically. We see life through our own lenses, shaped and often distorted by our experiences. It's easy to think, "I see clearly. I can separate truth from fiction. Others may be biased—but not me." In an age of social media, where algorithms often reward speed, outrage, and certainty, our ability to see reality and nuance can become even more clouded.

With a little humility, we begin to realize that we all carry these lenses. The Stoics called them impressions—the immediate interpretations we form about what we experience.

Examining our impressions

These impressions quickly turn into judgments, and from there, into the stories we tell ourselves.

Don't allow yourself to be carried away by the rapidity of the impression, but say, 'Wait a little for me, my impression; let me see what you are, and what you represent; let me test you.' - Epictetus, Discourses, 2.18.24

The Stoic principle that has helped me most is learning to question my first impression.

My initial take on a situation—what I think is happening—is often incomplete or distorted. Yet I can move quickly to treat it as fact, as if I'm typing out a story that is entirely true.

"Not so fast," I have to remind myself. The story I'm telling is likely filled with assumptions, half-truths, and misperceptions. It takes effort to slow down, to examine what I'm feeling and seeing, and to carefully pull apart the narrative I've already begun to write in my mind.

The Stoics believed that with training, we can come to see reality clearly—a concept they called *katalepsis*, a firm grasp of what is true. Not all philosophers agreed. Cicero, influenced by skepticism, argued that while reality exists, our minds may never fully grasp it with certainty. At best, we arrive at what seems most likely.

Whichever view we take, the practical lesson is the same: our first impression should not be accepted without examination.

Practical ways to examine impressions

How does this work in practice? First, pause. Give yourself time before responding—especially when a situation triggers a strong emotional reaction.

Second, ask questions—of others and of yourself. What am I feeling right now? Why am I feeling this? Could I be seeing this incorrectly? Why am I reacting the way I am?

Sometimes the best response is simply to be—to sit with whatever arises, whether it's fear, jealousy, or frustration, without immediately acting on it.

This requires effort. It requires temperance—a level of self-discipline that allows us to resist immediate reactions and choose a more thoughtful response.

When I first became a sales manager, I inherited a team with individuals of different skills and experiences. From the previous manager—a former colleague—I was told that one employee lacked motivation and was mediocre at best.

I made a conscious effort not to accept that impression at face value. Instead, I took the time to understand his territory, his aspirations, and the challenges he faced. Over time, trust began to form. As he saw that I was willing to give him a fair opportunity, his performance improved. Eventually, he was promoted into another sales role.

Had I accepted that first impression, I might have limited his potential—and my own ability to lead well. That experience reinforced something simple but powerful: my first impression is not the truth—it is only a starting point.

All of this takes practice

Like my grandmother's cataracts, the way I initially see things can be clouded. The work is not to eliminate impressions, but to examine them—to pause, question, and refine them before acting.

This takes practice. It requires patience, humility, and self-discipline. But over time, you begin to see more clearly—not perfectly, but better than before.

The Stoics didn't expect us to get this right every time. They simply asked us to slow down long enough to ask: *Is this really what's happening—or just what it looks like at first glance?* We all carry figurative cataracts. The task is to recognize them—and to take the time to see things as clearly as possible.

Glenn Citerony is an Executive Wellness Coach who employs Stoic concepts to help improve people's lives. He is passionate about Stoicism and its relevance to addressing today's challenges. Glenn can be reached at glennciterony.com.

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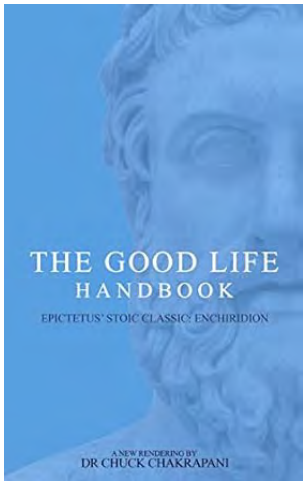
THE GOOD LIFE HANDBOOK: EPICTETUS' ENCHIRIDION IN PLAIN ENGLISH



The Good Life Handbook is a rendering of Epictetus' *Enchiridion* in plain English. It is a concise summary of the teachings of Epictetus, as transcribed and later summarized by his student Flavius Arrian. The *Handbook* is a guide to the good life. It answers the question, "How can we be good and live free and happy, no matter what else is happening around us?" Ancient Stoics lived in a time of turmoil, under difficult conditions, so the solutions they found to living free were well-tested.

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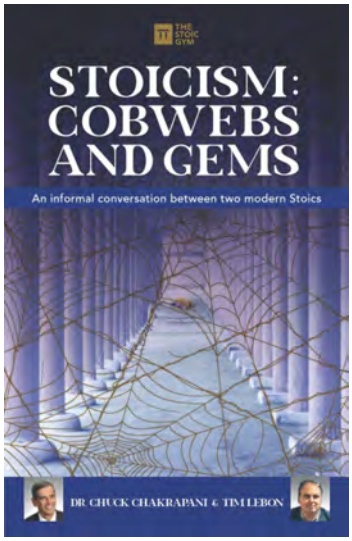

STOICISM: COBWEBS AND GEMS

In 2020, two modern Stoics, Tim LeBon and Chuck Chakrapani, exchanged a series of letters on Modern Stoicism to discuss which ancient Stoic concepts are still useful and which aren't. This book is an expanded version of those letters, with references, to decide which concepts are "cobwebs" and which are "gems".

Tim LeBon is an accredited CBT psychotherapist counsellor with a Stoic Life Coaching practice in London, UK. Chuck Chakrapani is the editor of THE STOIC and PROKOPTON, and the author of many books on Stoicism.

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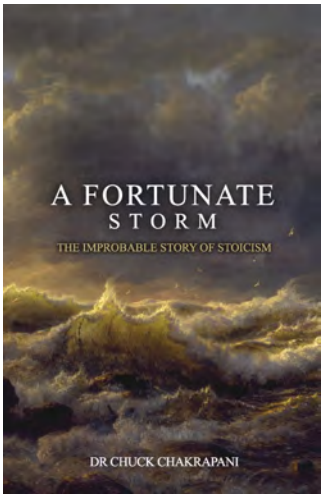

Strive for excellence

Your individual potential is in many ways up to you to decide. If you feel content with yourself, then your potential is achieved.

JOHN KUNA

My favourite thing and my most challenging thing in Stoicism are one and the same. Virtue, the central aim of Stoic practice, is at once highly clarifying and highly flexible based on situations and circumstances. It's also nearly impossible to achieve true virtue, and that has felt demoralizing. But the deeper I've read into the ways that virtue has evolved over the years, the more I've found the original concepts laid out by the Early Stoa to be more helpful and more useful in my practice—which is aretḗ, or excellence.

What is excellence?

The Greeks used the term aretḗ to describe the excellence of anything in the world. Every single thing has a form of excellence that it can achieve based on what it is—or who they are. We can think of aretḗ like we think of potential. The aretḗ of an acorn is to become a thriving oak. The aretḗ of a horse is to have a fine coat and gallop quickly. The aretḗ of your phone is to let you call others. Each of these examples demonstrate that aretḗ is not so much about total perfection as it is about living up to your natural potential. Chrysippus framed the good life around living according to nature—about achieving excellence. But nature has a few different meanings in Stoicism. There's the universal nature of the cosmos—reality itself. There's human nature—core traits common to us all. And there's your individual nature—the affinities and traits that make you who you are.

Universal nature

Universal nature is reality itself. It is the fundamental forces of the cosmos, the laws of physics, and every thing that exists and all things that happen. And, to the Stoics, universal nature is inherently excellent because reality is never wrong. It is always consistent with itself. They challenge us to accept and embrace this natural order for precisely that reason. Reality is never wrong, and you are part of reality. To deny it is to deny a part of yourself.

Moral excellence

The Stoics say that the aretḗ of humanity is moral excellence. By the time it reached the lectures of Epictetus or the journals of Marcus, that had become virtue. Looking at how the Stoics saw cosmic nature as excellent for its consistency, we can see human excellence as striving for moral consistency. We also are not the immutable laws of physics, but we have grown through them, and so I see moral consistency as less about perfect consistency than I see it as a constant growth. There is no perfect oak, but you know a good one when you see it.

Then there's your individual nature. Maybe you're naturally more agile than you are clever. Maybe you have a keen interest in the statistics of population demographics while another would talk your ear off about the statistics of professional tennis players. Whatever your natural gifts, talents, and interests, the Stoics would encourage you to cultivate them. And your individual potential is in many ways up to you to decide. If you feel content with yourself, then your potential is achieved.

Accepting reality, being morally consistent

When you embrace reality as it comes, strive to be morally consistent, and cultivate your potential to a point of personal contentment, you've lived a good life. That's it. That's the roadmap. It's not achieving moral perfection, becoming a sage. It's just taking life as it comes and trying to be a little better than the day before.

I'm sure a critic would say I've oversimplified Stoic moral philosophy. They may cite *katorthōmata*—perfect actions done in total harmony with nature. They may cite the arguments that virtue is either perfect or not virtue at all. They may cite Seneca, who explicitly spoke of perfection in the pursuit of virtue:

That which is short of perfection must necessarily be unsteady, at one time progressing, at another slipping or growing faint; and it will surely slip back unless it keeps struggling ahead; for if a man slackens at all in zeal and faithful application, he must retrograde. No one can resume his progress at the point where he left off. - Seneca, Moral Letters, 71, 35

The goal of aretḗ is to strengthen ourselves

I would argue that Seneca is needlessly myopic and austere. If virtue is like a muscle that must be trained, as Epictetus describes it, tell me: what does a perfect muscle look like? You can't because there is no state at which a muscle is perfect. It can only get stronger or weaker. And I think that the goal of aretḗ is simply to strengthen ourselves in accordance with who we are and our place in the world. If we want practical, I can think of fewer better places to begin.

John Kuna is a Stoic prokopton, writer, and dog lover. He likes digging deep into Stoic theory, but also writing accessible and inspiring Stoic content.

Dismantling your fears

What if we could eliminate most worries instead of accepting them? What if we could neutralize the causes instead of treating the symptoms?

PHILIPPE BELANGER MD

Seneca was a very strong man. Reading his *Letters to Lucilius* is truly a transformative experience, even after reading them ten or twenty times. At different stages of life, the principles he discusses with his friend Lucilius become relevant in different ways.

Dealing with imaginary fears

The most helpful principle Seneca taught me appears early in his letters (*Letter 13*) which deals with our imaginary fears and the Stoic exercise of *premeditatio malorum*, which is a complete method for dealing with fear, worry, and anxiety.

Let's first clarify what we mean by fear. Sometimes, when we read about fear, it doesn't feel relatable. We think: "Well, my life is kinda good. I don't feel fear. I have no reason to be scared." But if we look back on our lives, we realize that there are always small worries here and there, punctuating each day—blurry, unclear—combined with deeper anxieties about the future or different aspects of our lives. Career risks. Career choices. Relationships. Family conflicts. Physical symptoms. Financial risks. The fear of losing loved ones. Etcetera, etcetera.

Of course, we accept that it's normal to carry some level of stress, and that we must "soldier on." We think: "I'm a bit worried about X, Y, and Z, but I can't let anxiety bring me down. I'll push forward. I'll choose to be happy for now. I'll keep working on solutions, and things will clear up someday."

That's often the subconscious script we follow. The "normal" life path—where we don't take time to reflect deeply on life as a whole.

But where does that "normal" path lead us?

Anxiety is a pandemic in the 21st century, especially post-COVID. And it's going to keep spreading. In Canada and the US, anxiety is substantially more prevalent in Generation Z than in any of the past three generations.

Managing vs. transcending anxiety

What are the modern solutions? We hear about "stress management." Relaxation techniques. Breathing exercises. Better time management. Psychotherapy. Medication. Are these the real solutions for fear?

Seneca offers a different approach.

What if the way to deal with fear is not just learning to "manage" it? What if we could eliminate most worries instead of accepting them? What if we could neutralize the causes instead of treating the symptoms?

Subtle, subconscious worries have already stolen too much of our lives. The way to freedom is through fear, not around it—that's what Seneca taught me in *Letter 13*.

Fears: How they arise, how they grow

When you actually take time to sit with your fear, face it, and dissect it, here's what you find:

1. *Imagination:* worry about a problem that won't happen;
2. *Exaggeration*: worry about impacts that won't be that significant;
3. *Anticipation*: worry about the arrival of a problem instead of using the present to find a solution—if it's in your control—or letting go if it's 0% under your control.

Investigate. Even if it seems likely that something bad is coming, that doesn't mean it will. So many things we feared never happened. So many things we never saw coming hit us out of nowhere. So even if the worst is coming—why suffer early? When the pain comes, you'll deal with it. In the meantime, give yourself a break. There's no glory in living in fear. At best, you waste time. At worst, you make your life miserable for nothing. - Seneca, Moral Letters, 13

How to eliminate fears

But how do we truly neutralize fear?

After the dissection, we force ourselves to fully face it—and make peace with the worst possible outcome. That is the Stoic shortcut to freedom. That is p*remeditatio malorum*, the "rehearsal of hardships." Here's how Seneca puts it: "Imagine the worst-case scenario. Look it in the eye. And say: 'Let's see who wins.' Maybe it even happens for you. Maybe the loss gives you dignity. Maybe death makes your life great.

That poison made Socrates legendary. That blade made Cato a symbol of liberty. Take away the blade from Cato, and you strip half his glory. Refine your courage. This is your path, brother—the path of Stoic mental toughness."

Vale. Take good care, Stoic friends.

Philippe Belanger MD is a practicing physician with a passion for Stoicism. He is a translator of Stoic Classics, including the best-seller Seneca – Letters from a Stoic Master: Complete Letters to Lucilius Adapted for Modern Readers.

Every choice also changes your core

How are you going to be any better the next time you start to feel anger? You just strengthened one already bad habit, and perhaps a second one, precisely that of making that sort of excuse.

GREG SADLER

Stoic principles don't work in isolation

It's tough to say which single Stoic principle has helped me the most in the time I've been engaged with Stoicism in a more than casual manner. Stoicism is, after all, a systematic philosophical perspective, where the principles don't work to anything like their full potential in isolation. There's also the difficulty of trying to recall and weigh against each other the myriad times I've in one manner or another used, recalled, or relied upon a Stoic principle.

So it is with a bit of reluctance that I zero in on one of them in particular, a reticence that stems not from the usefulness, and perhaps even necessity of that principle for myself and likely for others, but rather from a concern with truthfulness about and fidelity to my experience. That said, what principle is it?

Every choice makes you better or worse

It's not one derived directly from one single passage from classic Stoic texts, though it does tie into a number of them. It's this: with each choice or prioritization, each action or emotional response on your part, you are doing something that matters with the manifold of your habits. Put more simply: each time, you're making yourself better or worse as a person, within the lasting but also changeable core of who you are.

Epictetus, who identifies this "what you are" as *prohairesis*, the "faculty of choice" (3.1) also stresses at many points that we need to attend closely to our habits, and be ready to put in the work to change them from worse to better.

Virtues and vices, main aspects of our moral character for Stoics, are not (as some mistakenly believe) only types of knowledge (*epistēmai*), but are identified also as habits or dispositions (*hexeis, diatheseis*) at multiple points in Stoic texts. That should be rather unsurprising, given that nearly all ancient schools of virtue ethics held some similar views. What's particularly important here for this principle is that, when we are in real-life situations, where we choose, prioritize, act, or feel, what we do must be understood as feeding into our habits in one way or another, and as bearing upon our character, the virtues or vices we possess or are possessed by.

The cumulative effect of our choices

It is not as if by simply doing one thing wrong we fall immediately from virtue into vice. Nor can we similarly transform ourselves from vicious to virtuous just by choosing one uncharacteristic good action. We should think of moral aspects of our character as cumulative results at any given time of what we have previously accustomed ourselves to. So the principle that every moment, every choice, every action does matter to our moral formation or degeneration, even when it seems a small or trivial thing, is a reminder that many of us need.

We might be tempted to say, when we do something that is in some small way making us worse off, that it's really not a big deal. Epictetus recalls a time when he said something like that to his teacher Musonius Rufus. It's just a mistake in a syllogism. It's not like I burned down the capitol (1.7). Rufus responds (paraphrased): Buddy, that mistake you made? It is this that is burning down the capitol.

Foolishness of making exceptions

Another common way of fooling ourselves is, while admitting that what we're doing is the wrong thing, we justify it just in this particular case. We make an exception for ourselves, just this one time (it won't be the only time!), or in these unusual circumstances, or because right now I'm pressed for time, or have a lot on my plate, or. . . Pick whatever reason you like, it doesn't change the fact that when we give in like that we strengthen a habit we ought to be working to root out.

Sometimes we recognize habit's cumulative force, but we mistakenly think we can balance matters out. Sure, I'm giving in to anger right now, but next time around, I'll react differently, and that will make up for this time. Doubtful! How are you going to be any better the next time you start to feel anger? You just strengthened one already bad habit, and perhaps a second one, precisely that of making that sort of excuse.

Every instance matters

As someone who has struggled with the vice of irascibility, I've certainly benefitted from this principle of treating every instance as the moment that genuinely matters for my moral character. Quite likely applying it would pay off well for you as well.

Greg Sadler is the president of ReasonIO, a member of the Modern Stoicism Team, an APPA-certified philosophical counselor, and teaches at Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

prokopton

Practice like a Stoic – Starting now!

What is Prokopton?

Prokopton is a program designed for those who would like to practice Stoicism in a systematic way. When you join the Prokopton community, this is what you can expect to receive:

- *A monthly Stoic lesson, with examples and suggested readings, and a Stoic exercise of the month to support your daily practice.*
- *An email every weekday with the thought for the day, commentary, and the action plan for the day.*
- *Occasionally, you may also receive free ebooks and audio-books.*

When you subscribe to Prokopton, you don't just subscribe to a monthly magazine and a weekday email but join the *Prokopton* community – a community of people who actively practice Stoicism.

Prokopton's emphasis is on practice, not on theory. Its aim is to help us handle our lives better: What to do when we are late for a meeting, lose our job, don't get a raise or a promotion; how to handle betrayal, personal loss, and so on.

But it is not just about coping with our daily problems. Stoic practice shows us how to enjoy life as well. How to be happy, how to be free, how to develop the special skills of wisdom, courage, restraint, and justice.

In short, when we are in charge of our own joy and sorrow, we achieve a freedom that is not possible when we constantly go after more money, a better job, a better house, or a better car. While all these can make us happy for while, the happiness will not last unless it is based on a strong foundation. Stoicism provides that foundation, and *Prokopton* helps you to practice it systematically.

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"I've loved your free posts so much that I decided to become a subscriber! Can't wait to hear your wisdom more regularly!" - Gavin

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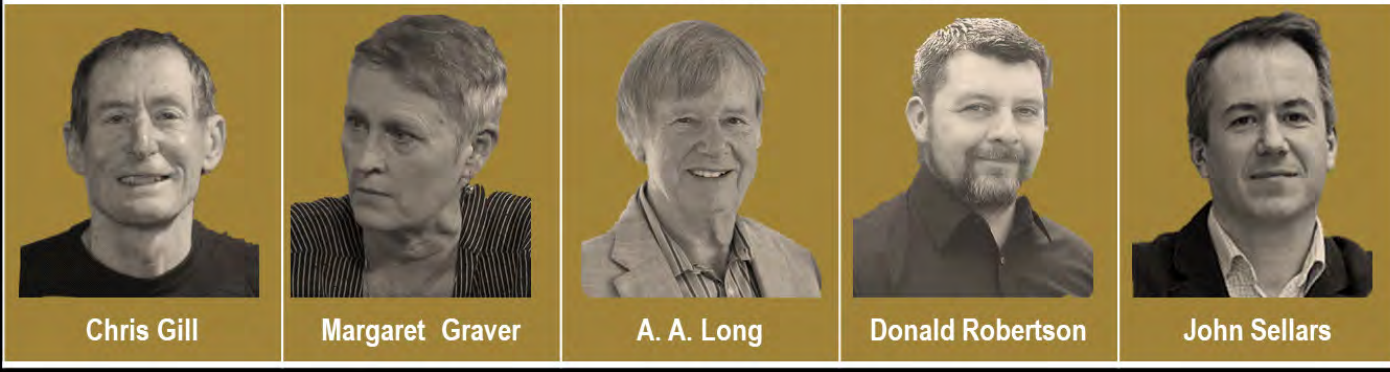

STOIC EVERY DAY

Stoic quotes for everyday of the month

1

The cost of the material things you give up—whether it is food or some furniture—is nothing compared to the goodwill you gain in return. [Epictetus, D 2.10]

2

Avoid grumbling. Be careful, considerate, and open. Speak and behave modestly. Carry yourself with authority. See how many qualities yours can be right now! [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.5]

3

You can be sure that the same is true of rich and poor people. Their suffering is equal. [Seneca, T 8]

4

If you are a councillor, remember the duties of a councillor; if young, duties of the young; if old, duties of the old … When you consider your title as you play distinct roles, it will become obvious what you are expected to do. [Epictetus, D 2.10]

5

Is it any lack of natural capacity that makes you quarrelsome, mean, fawning, railing at your health, cringing, bragging, and moody? … You could have got rid of these a long time ago. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.5]

6

No one can live happily who has regard to himself alone and transforms everything into a question of his own utility. — Seneca, Moral Letters 48

7

Each person is strengthened and preserved by actions that reflect their nature. [Epictetus, D 2.9]

8

When it comes to working, you are well below what you could achieve. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.1]

9

Nothing delights the mind as much as a faithful and pleasant friendship. [Seneca, T 7]

10

Do you have to lose money before you feel you lost something? Is that the only loss that counts? [Epictetus, D 2.10]

11

There are also people who don't at all think about what they have done—like the vine that produces grapes and looks for no more thanks. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.6]

12

Poverty can convert itself into wealth with the help of thrift. Let us avoid the outward show. Let's measure things by their uses, not by their outward appearance. [Seneca, T 8]

13

When our body or possessions are involved, we see harm. But when our choices are involved, we don't see any harm at all. [Epictetus, D 2.10]

14

If you pray at all, keep your prayers simple and innocent. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.7]

15

Let us moderate our pride, soften our anger, look upon poverty without prejudice. [Seneca, T 9]

16

When you come to study philosophy the right way, you begin by acknowledging your weakness with reference to important things in life. [Epictetus, D 2.9]

STOIC EVERY DAY

Stoic quotes for everyday of the month

17

In the case of the doctor, prescriptions are meant to treat the patient. It is so with nature too. Nature orders certain events to further our destiny. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.8]

18

Everything that is carried to excess is wrong. [Seneca, T 9]

19

We all start with agreed-upon principles, but we get into disputes because we apply them incorrectly. If you knew how to apply them correctly, then there would be no problem. [Epictetus, D 2.11]

20

Let's accept what comes our way like we accept a doctor's prescription. They may have a harsh flavour, but so does medicine. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.8]

21

No matter what type of life you choose, you will find delights, relaxations, and pleasure in it if you are willing to look upon problems lightly rather than with hate. [Seneca, T 10]

22

We cannot establish something is correct just because it feels correct to us. It is not enough evidence. [Epictetus, D 2.11]

23

It is not nature's way to bring anything upon you unless she manages it and it is beneficial to the world as a whole. [Marcus Aurelius, M5.8]

24

No one could endure misfortune if it continued to have the same force with which it struck us. [Seneca, T 10]

25

When a guide meets with someone who is lost, ordinarily his reaction is to direct him on the right path, not mock or malign him. [Epictetus, D 2.12]

26

Don't be distressed, don't despair and give up, if your practice falls short of principles. Return to your practice after each failure. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.9]

27

We are all chained to Fortune. For some of us, the chain is loose and made of gold, and, for others, it is tight and made of base metal. [Seneca, T 10]

28

Whenever I see someone who is anxious, I ask, "What does this person want?" Unless you want something that is not under your control, how can you be anxious? [Epictetus, D 2.13]

29

Philosophy is a remedy, like the sponge and egg white that are used to relieve sore eyes. It is not for public display but for private comfort. [Marcus Aurelius, M 5.9]

30

No condition can be so miserable that a balanced mind cannot find some comfort in it. [Seneca, T 10]

31

People want what they cannot have and try to avoid what they cannot escape. [Epictetus, D 2.13]

D=Discourses by Epictetus;

M=Meditations by Marcus Aurelius;

T=On Tranquility by Seneca

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https://stoicfellowship.com/contact

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