

# Epictetus on Stoa

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## Reason first and foremost

The life of wisdom is the life of reason.

The virtuous life depends on reason first and foremost. If you safeguard your reason, it will safeguard you.

People who subordinate reason to their feelings of the moment are actually slaves of their desires and aversions.

What is a good person? The one who achieves tranquility by having formed the habit of asking on every occasion, "What is the right thing to do now?"

## Things within and outside our control

Happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one

principle. Some things are within our control, and some things are not ... Within our control are our own opinions, aspirations, desires, and the things that repel us ... Outside our control, however, are such things as what kind of body we have, whether we're born into wealth or strike it rich, how we are regarded by others, and our status in society.

#### Things do not disturb us

When something happens, the only thing in our power is your attitude toward it; you can either accept it or resent it ... It is not things that disturb us, but our interpretation of their significance.

#### People cannot hurt you

Except for extreme physical abuse, other people cannot hurt you unless you allow them to ... Don't consent to be hurt and you won't be hurt - this is a choice over which you have control.

#### It has been returned

Inner peace begins when we stop saying of things, "I have lost it" and instead say, "It has been returned to where it came from." Have your children died? They are returned to where they came from ... The important thing is to take great care with what you have while the world lets you have it, just as a traveller takes care of a room at the inn.

#### How to win freedom

Freedom is the only worthy goal in life. It is won by disregarding things that lie beyond our control ...

If it's freedom you seek, then will nothing and shun nothing that depends on others, or you will always be a helpless slave.

#### Ship in a harbor

There is time and place for diversion and amusement, but you should never allow them to override your true purposes. If you

were on a voyage and the ship anchored in a harbor, you might go ashore for water and happen to pick up a shellfish or a plant. But be careful: listen for the call of the captain. Keep your attention directed at the ship. Getting distracted by trifles is the easiest thing in the world. Should the captain call, you must be ready to leave those distractions and come running, without even looking back.

#### Life as a banquet

Think of your life as if it were a banquet where you would behave graciously. When dishes are passed to you, extend your hand and help yourself to a moderate portion. If a dish should pass you by, enjoy what is already on your plate. Or if the dish hasn't been passed to you yet, patiently wait your time.

#### Don't allow them to pull you down

If you find yourself in conversation with someone who is depressed, hurt, or frustrated, show them kindness and give them a sympathetic ear; just don't allow yourself to be pulled down too.

Many people who have progressively lowered their personal standards in an attempt to win social acceptance and life's comforts bitterly resent those of philosophical bent who refuse to compromise their spiritual ideals and who seek to better themselves. Never live your life in reaction to these diminished souls. Be compassionate toward them, and at the same time hold to what you know is good.

Why then do you feel no shame in giving your precious mind over to any person who might wish to influence you? Think twice before you give up your own mind to someone who may revile you, leaving you confused and upset.

#### Safeguard your mind

Your life is too short and you have important things to do. Be discriminate about what images and ideas you permit into your mind.

Be careful whom you associate with. It is human to imitate the habits of those with whom we interact. We inadvertently adopt

their interests, their opinions, their values, and their habit of interpreting events.

Just because some people are nice to you doesn't mean you should spend time with them. Just because they seek you out and are interested in you or your affairs doesn't mean you should associate with them. Be selective about whom you take on as friends, colleagues, and neighbors. All of these people can affect your destiny.

#### Prepare beforehand

There is a place for prudent planning and for making provision for situations to come. Proper preparation for the future consists of forming good personal habits. This is done by actively pursuing the good in all the particulars of your daily life and by regularly examining your motives to make sure they are free of the chackles of fear, greed, and laziness ...

Cultivate the habit of surveying and testing a prospective action before undertaking it.

If some pleasure is promised to you and it seductively calls to you, step back and give yourself some time before mindlessly jumping at it ... If, in calmly considering the pleasure, you realize that if you indulge in it you will regret it, abstain and rejoice in your forbearance.

Instead of averting your eyes from the painful events of life, look at them squarely and contemplate them often.

#### On getting rich and powerful

If I can get rich and powerful while preserving my own honor, faithfulness to family, friends, principles, and self-respect, show me how and I'll do it. But if I have to sacrifice my personal integrity, it's stupid and silly to urge me on.

#### Celebrities are not necessarily happy

Don't make the mistake of assuming that celebrities, public figures, political leaders, and wealthy, or people with great intellectual or artistic gifts are necessarily happy. To do so is to be bewildered by appearances ...

Everything has a true price

You will never earn the same rewards as others without employing the same methods and investment of time as they do. It is unreasonable to think we can earn rewards without being willing to pay the true price.

Don't babble

So many people feel compelled to give voice to any passing feeling, thought, or impression they have. They randomly dump the contents of their minds without regard to the consequences. This is practically and morally dangerous. If we babble about every idea that occurs to us - big and small - we can easily fritter away in the trivial currents of mindless talk ideas that have true merit ... When we blather about trivial things, we ourselves become trivial.

Let your deeds speak

Only the morally weak feel compelled to defend or explain themselves to others. Let the quality of your deeds speak on your behalf.

Live in harmony with nature

Respect your body's needs. Give your body excellent care to promote its health and well-being. Give it everything it absolutely requires, including healthy food and drink, dignified clothing, and a warm and comfortable home.

Your possessions should be proportionate to the needs of your body, just as the shoe should fit the foot.

When you carry out your tasks, such as taking your bath, do so - to the best of your ability - in harmony with nature. When you eat, do so - to the best of your ability - in harmony with nature, and so on.

## Comport yourself with dignity

No matter where you find yourself, comport yourself as if you were a distinguished person ... If you find yourself in a public event, remain rooted in your own purposes and ideals.

## On spiritual progress

As you think, so you become.

First, say to yourself what you would be; then do what you have to do.

Know first who you are and what you're capable of. Just as nothing great is created instantly, the same goes for perfecting of our talents and aptitudes ... Still, don't kid yourself: If you try to be something or someone you are not, you belittle your true self and end up not developing in those areas that you would have excelled at quite naturally.

It is one thing to wish to be a champion or to do something skilfully; it is another to actually do it and to do it with consummate skill. Different people are made for different things.

Spiritual progress requires us to highlight what is essential and to disregard everything else as trivial pursuits unworthy of our attention ... Refrain from trying to win other people's approval and admiration. You are taking a higher road.

One of the best ways to elevate your character immediately is to find a worthy role models to emulate.

## Start living your ideals

There is a big difference between saying valuable things and doing valuable things.

Grow up! Who cares what other people think about you! Create your own merit ... You have been given your own work to do. Get to it right now, do your best at it, and don't be concerned with who is watching you.

Now is the time to get serious about living your ideals ... How long can you afford to put off who you really want to be? Your

nobler self cannot wait any longer. Put your principles into practice - now. Stop the excuses and the procrastination. This is your life! You aren't a child anymore. The sooner you set yourself to your spiritual program, the happier you will be. The longer you wait, the more you will be vulnerable to the mediocrity and feel filled with shame and regret, because you know you are capable of better. From this instant on, vow to stop disappointing yourself. Separate yourself from the mob. Decide to be extraordinary and do what you need to do - now.

Glavni vir

Epictetus: *The Art of Living*.  
Harper Collins, 1994.