

MEDITATIONS BY MARCUS AURELIUS | BOOK SUMMARY

Meditations by Marcus Aurelius is an eye opening read about the guiding principles of how to live a happy and fulfilling life. Marcus Aurelius, was the emperor of Rome from 161 to 180AD and was the last of the five “good emperors”. Drawing on stoic philosophy, Marcus writes notes to himself on self-improvement and the lessons that have stuck with him.

In *Meditations* there aren’t really chapters as such. The book is broken up into “books” which are the pieces of parchment that Marcus wrote on. The numbers below correspond to a book number followed by a passage number. e.g. 1–10 refers to book one, passage 10.

For this summary I have picked out my favourite passages from *Meditations* that I have found to be the most influential and actionable.

1–10 “Not to be constantly telling people (or writing them) that I’m too busy, unless I really am. Similarly, not to be always ducking my responsibilities to the people around me because of “pressing business.”

1–12 “Not to be constantly correcting people, and in particular not to jump on them whenever they make an error of usage or a grammatical mistake or mispronounce something, but just answer their question or add another example, or debate the issue itself (not their phrasing), or make some other contribution to the discussion—and insert the right expression, unobtrusively.”

1–15 “Self-control and resistance to distractions.”

1–15 “Doing your job without whining.”

2–1 “When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly. They are like this because they can’t tell good from evil. But I have seen the beauty of good, and the ugliness of evil, and have recognized that the wrongdoer has a nature related to my own—not of the same blood or birth, but the same mind, and possessing a share of the divine. And so none of them can hurt me. No one can implicate me in

ugliness. Nor can I feel angry at my relative, or hate him. We were born to work together like feet, hands, and eyes, like the two rows of teeth, upper and lower. To obstruct each other is unnatural. To feel anger at someone, to turn your back on him: these are obstructions.”

3–5 “How to Act: Never under compulsion, out of selfishness, without forethought, with misgivings. Don’t gussy up your thoughts. No surplus words or unnecessary actions.”

3–9 “Your ability to control your thoughts—treat it with respect. It’s all that protects your mind from false perceptions—false to your nature, and that of all rational beings. It’s what makes thoughtfulness possible, and affection for other people, and submission to the divine.”

3–12 “If you do the job in a principled way, with diligence, energy and patience, if you keep yourself free of distractions, and keep the spirit inside you undamaged, as if you might have to give it back at any moment— If you can embrace this without fear or expectation—can find fulfillment in what you’re doing now, as Nature intended, and in superhuman truthfulness (every word, every utterance)—then your life will be happy. No one can prevent that.”

4–2 “No random actions, none not based on underlying principles.”

4–7 “Choose not to be harmed—and you won’t feel harmed. Don’t feel harmed—and you haven’t been.”

4–8 “It can ruin your life only if it ruins your character. Otherwise it cannot harm you—inside or out.”

5–2 “To shrug it all off and wipe it clean—every annoyance and distraction—and reach utter stillness. Child’s play.”

5–34 “You can lead an untroubled life provided you can grow, can think and act systematically.

Two characteristics shared by gods and men (and every rational creature):

- i. Not to let others hold you back.
- ii. To locate goodness in thinking and doing the right thing, and to limit your desires to that.”

6–6 “The best revenge is not to be like that.”

6–19 “Not to assume it’s impossible because you find it hard. But to recognize that if it’s humanly possible, you can do it too.”

6–48 “When you need encouragement, think of the qualities the people around you have: this one’s energy, that one’s modesty, another’s generosity, and so on. Nothing is as encouraging as when virtues are visibly embodied in the people around us, when we’re practically showered with them. It’s good to keep this in mind.”

6–53 “Practice really hearing what people say. Do your best to get inside their minds.”

10–35 “A healthy pair of eyes should see everything that can be seen and not say, “No! Too bright!” (which is a symptom of ophthalmia). A healthy sense of hearing or smell should be prepared for any sound or scent; a healthy stomach should have the same reaction to all foods, as a mill to what it grinds. So too a healthy mind should be prepared for anything. The one that keeps saying, “Are my children all right?” or “Everyone must approve of me” is like eyes that can only stand pale colors, or teeth that can handle only mush.”

11–21 “If you don’t have a consistent goal in life, you can’t live it in a consistent way.” Unhelpful, unless you specify a goal. There is no common benchmark for all the things that people think are good—except for a few, the ones that affect us all. So the goal should be a common one—a civic one. If you direct all your energies toward that, your actions will be consistent. And so will you.”

11–39 “Socrates: What do you want, rational minds or irrational ones? —Rational ones. Healthy or sick? —Healthy. Then work to obtain them. —We already have. Then why all this squabbling?”

12–4 “It never ceases to amaze me: we all love ourselves more than other people, but care more about their opinion than our own. If a god appeared to us—or a wise human being, even—and prohibited us from concealing our thoughts or imagining anything without immediately shouting it out, we wouldn’t make it through a single day. That’s how much we value other people’s opinions—instead of our own.”

12–20 “To undertake nothing.

i. at random or without a purpose;

ii. for any reason but the common good."