

Meditations: The Bro Version (Books 1-5)

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Book I: What I Learned from My Crew (And Reality)

Alright, gotta give credit where it's due. Here's the rundown of who taught me what:

1. **From Grandpa Verus:** Learned how to be a decent dude and keep my cool. Basic good character and not losing my temper over dumb stuff.
2. **From my Dad's Rep (and memory):** Humility and being a solid, reliable man. No BS, just quiet strength.
3. **From Mom:** Respect for the spiritual side of things, being generous, and steering clear of not just bad *actions*, but even toxic *thoughts*. Plus, keeping life simple, not needing all the flashy rich-guy crap.
4. **From Great-Grandpa:** Dodging the hype of big-name schools. Getting solid teachers at home was key, and realizing you gotta invest properly in good education.
5. **From my Tutor/Handler:** Not getting sucked into pointless team rivalries (like those chariot races or gladiator factions – basically, don't lose your mind over sports teams or politics). Also learned to grind, need less, do my own work, stay out of other people's drama, and ignore gossip and slander.
6. **From Diognetus:** Don't waste time on trivial crap. Ignore the snake oil salesmen, magic tricks, and superstition talk. Avoid dumb, aggressive hobbies (like fighting quails – yeah, weird). Value straight talk and getting into philosophy. Heard some solid thinkers (Bacchius, Tandasis, Marcianus). Tried writing serious stuff young. Got into that simple, tough Greek lifestyle (basic bed, minimal gear).
7. **From Rusticus:** Got the wake-up call that I seriously needed to work on myself. He steered me away from showing off intellectually, writing fluff pieces, giving cheesy motivational speeches, or making a big show of being disciplined or generous just for looks. Cut the fancy talk, poetry, and overly polished writing. Stop strutting around the house like you're on parade. Write simple, straight-up letters (like he did). Be ready to squash beefs and reconcile quick when someone messes up but wants to make it right. *Really* read stuff, don't just skim. Don't just blindly agree with loudmouths. Huge debt to him for hooking me up with Epictetus's teachings from his own stash – game changer.
8. **From Apollonius:** Owning my choices and staying laser-focused on my goals. Always, *always* default to Reason, even for a second. Stay steady – through intense pain, losing a kid, long sicknesses. Saw in him a living example: you can be hardcore determined *and* flexible, and teach without being a cranky dick. Saw a guy who knew his real value wasn't just his smarts or teaching skills. Learned how to accept favors or help from friends without feeling weirdly indebted or just blowing it off. Handle generosity with grace.
9. **From Sextus:** Genuine kindness. Saw how a family should run – like a good dad runs it. Got the blueprint for living aligned with reality (Nature). Seriousness without being fake. How to genuinely look out for your friends. Patience with people who don't know stuff or jump to conclusions. He could connect with *anyone*; hanging with him was better than any fake flattery, yet everyone totally respected him. Dude had a knack for figuring out and organizing the core principles for living, smart and methodical. Never saw him lose his temper or get emotional – totally level-headed, but also super caring. Gave props without being loud about it, knew a ton but never showed off.
10. **From Alexander the Grammar Nerd:** Don't be that annoying guy always correcting people's minor mistakes in speaking. If someone messes up a word, don't jump on them. Just smoothly use the right word yourself in your reply, or focus the conversation back on the actual *point*, not the nitpicky details. Offer correction subtly, if at all.

11. **From Fronto:** Learned to spot the toxic traits in bad leaders (tyrants) – the envy, the two-faced crap, the hypocrisy. Realized that a lot of the "elites" (Patricians) are often seriously lacking in basic human decency and care.
12. **From Alexander the Platonist:** Don't constantly tell people "I'm too busy," either in person or writing, unless it's actually unavoidable. Stop making lame excuses about being "too busy" for the basic duties you owe to the people in your life.
13. **From Catulus:** Don't brush off a friend's criticism, even if it seems unfair. Try to get things back on track with them. Speak well of your mentors (like people remembered Domitius and Athenodotus). Genuinely love your kids.
14. **From my Bro Severus:** Love your family, love truth, love justice. Through him, learned about the real heroes (Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, etc. – guys who stood for principles). Got the idea of a fair society: same rules for everyone, equal rights, freedom of speech, and leaders who prioritize the people's freedom above all. Also learned from him: consistency in sticking with philosophy, being proactively good, giving freely, staying optimistic, and trusting that your friends actually like you. With him, there was no guessing game – you knew where he stood, especially if he disapproved of someone. Total transparency.
15. **From Maximus:** Self-mastery, not getting easily distracted. Staying cheerful through everything, even sickness. Having that perfect mix of being approachable/kind and having serious presence/dignity. Doing the job in front of you without whining. Everyone knew he meant what he said and never had hidden agendas. He was never shocked, never rushed, never delayed, never confused or down, never used laughter to hide being pissed off, and wasn't paranoid or overly emotional. Dude was a machine of doing good deeds, quick to forgive, zero falsehood. He wasn't someone *trying* to be good; he just *was* fundamentally solid, couldn't be bent from what's right. Nobody felt looked down on by him, and nobody dared think they were better. Also had a great sense of humor, used it well.
16. **From my Adopted Father (Emperor Antoninus Pius):** Observed his chill temper, but absolute rock-solid resolve once he decided something thoughtfully. No ego tied up in titles and honors. Loved the work, kept grinding. Listened carefully to anyone with ideas for the common good. Always fair in giving people what they deserved. Knew from experience when to push hard and when to ease off. Saw he was completely over any weird sexual hang-ups. Didn't act like he was better than anyone else. Didn't pressure friends into mandatory dinners or appearances; if they missed something for legit reasons, he treated them exactly the same later. Saw his deep-dive approach to decisions – always investigating fully, never satisfied with first impressions. Loyal to his friends, didn't get bored of them, but wasn't overly clingy either. Content in all situations, always positive. Planned ahead, handled details without making a fuss. Shut down fake applause and flattery instantly. Always focused on what the Empire *needed*, managed money responsibly, and took the heat for it patiently. Not superstitious, didn't try to buy popularity with gifts or pandering. Just sober, firm, never petty or obsessed with novelty. He used the good things life offered (comforts, resources) without arrogance or making excuses – enjoyed them when he had them, didn't miss them when he didn't. Nobody could call him a show-off intellectual, a spoiled brat, or a stuffy academic. Everyone saw him as mature, complete, immune to flattery, capable of handling his own shit and everyone else's. Plus, he respected genuine philosophers but didn't attack the fakes (or get fooled by them). Easy to talk to, pleasant without being fake. Took reasonable care of his health – not obsessively, not vainly, just enough that he rarely needed doctors. Super willing to yield the spotlight to experts (in law, speaking, ethics, whatever) and helped them get the recognition they deserved. Always followed tradition but without making a show of it. Not restless or flaky – liked stability, routine. Even after bad headaches, bounced right back to work. Kept very few secrets, and only crucial state matters. Prudent and responsible with public spending (games, buildings, donations) – focused on the *need*, not the applause. Didn't do things at weird times (like bathing). Wasn't obsessed with building fancy houses, food, clothes, or attractive staff. His style was simple, practical (like his gear from his country villas). Remember that time he calmly handled the annoying tax guy at Tusculum? That was him – never harsh, never holding a grudge, never explosive, never pushed things to a breaking point. He looked at everything piece by piece, like he had all the time in the world, calmly, methodically, strongly, consistently. That famous line about Socrates fit him perfectly: he could enjoy things *or* abstain from them, unlike most guys who either can't resist or can't enjoy moderately. Being strong enough for both restraint *and* sober enjoyment? That's the sign of a truly solid, unbeatable soul – like he showed when Maximus was sick.
17. **To the Universe/Gods/Fate:** I owe thanks for having awesome grandfathers, parents, sister, teachers, buddies, family, and friends – almost everything good. Also, thanks that I didn't majorly screw up with any of

them, even though I had the potential; circumstances just never pushed me that far (lucky break). Thankful I wasn't raised longer by my grandpa's side piece; kept my youthful innocence; didn't rush into sex, even waited. Thankful I had a ruler and father (Antoninus) who knocked any arrogance out of me and showed me you can live in a palace without needing bodyguards, fancy clothes, or statues everywhere – that a leader can live almost like a regular dude without losing authority or slacking on public duties. Thanks for a brother (Severus) whose character pushed me to keep myself in check, while also being respectful and affectionate. Thankful my kids weren't born stupid or deformed. Thankful I didn't get **too** good at rhetoric, poetry, etc. – might have gotten completely lost in them if I'd seen too much early success. Thankful I acted fast to honor my mentors, didn't put it off. Thankful I knew Apollonius, Rusticus, Maximus. Thankful I got clear, repeated hits on what "living according to Nature" actually means – so, as far as the universe and its help goes, nothing stopped me from living that way **right now**, even though I still fall short (my own damn fault for not listening to the hints and instructions). Thankful my body's held up this long living this kind of demanding life. Thankful I never messed around with Benedicta or Theodotus (dodged those bullets!), and got over past infatuations. Thankful that even when I was pissed at Rusticus, I never did anything I regretted later. Thankful my mom, though she died young, spent her last years with me. Thankful that whenever I wanted to help someone, I was never told "sorry, no funds" – and that I never **needed** to take handouts myself. Thankful for my wife – so loyal, loving, and straightforward. Thankful for plenty of good teachers for my kids. Thankful for guidance through dreams (like remedies for spitting blood and dizziness...). Thankful that when I got into philosophy, I didn't fall for some slick guru, waste time on trivial academic debates, or get lost in pointless theories. All this stuff needs cosmic help and good fortune.

(Written) Among the Quadi tribe by the Granua river. (Basically, out on military campaign duty).

Book II

(Written out near the Gran river, probably freezing my ass off with the Quadi tribe nearby)

1. **Morning Pep Talk: Dealing with Assholes** Wake up and tell yourself: Today I'm gonna run into people who are nosy, ungrateful, arrogant, sneaky, jealous, and downright unpleasant. They're like this because they're clueless about what's actually good and bad. But **I** get it. I've seen the beauty of Right and the ugliness of Wrong. I also see that the dude doing wrong is fundamentally built like me – not blood-related, but we share the same basic wiring, that spark of the divine (Reason). Because of that, none of them can **truly** mess with me, because nobody can force me to be a shitty person. And I can't stay pissed at my own kin or hate them. We're all here to work together, like feet, hands, eyelids, or rows of teeth. Getting in each other's way is totally unnatural. Getting annoyed or turning your back on someone? That's basically declaring war on the team.
2. **Know Thyself (The Core Components)** This thing I call 'me'? It's basically three parts: Meat-sack (flesh), Spark (vital breath/spirit), and the Boss (your mind, the Governing Self). Forget the meat-sack – just blood, bones, a tangled mess of nerves and tubes. The spark? Just air, constantly cycling in and out, never the same. The third part, the Boss – **that's** the key. Ditch the books for a sec, stop getting distracted, that stuff isn't the real you. Think like you're dying right now: You're an old man. Stop letting your Boss-mind be a slave. Stop letting it get jerked around by selfish whims like a puppet. Stop bitching about your current situation or worrying about the future.
3. **Trust the Process (Gods, Fortune, Nature)** The work of the Gods (or the Universe, whatever) is driven by pure Order (Providence). Even random shit (Fortune) isn't totally separate from Nature or the grand plan woven by that Order. It all flows from that source. Plus, there's Necessity, and it all contributes to the well-being of the whole damn universe, which you're a part of. Here's the deal: what's good for the whole system (Nature) is good for **you**, the part. And the system stays healthy through constant change – things combining, breaking down, elements shifting. Let that be enough for you. Make these your core beliefs. And seriously, ditch the desperate need to read **everything**. Aim to die without whining, genuinely chill and thankful to the powers that be.
4. **Stop Procrastinating, Clock's Ticking** Dude, remember how long you've been putting this self-improvement shit off? How many extra days the Gods (or Fate) have given you, and you **still** haven't used them? It's way past time to realize what kind of Universe you're in, who's running the show (the Governor you stem from), and that your time here is limited. If you don't use this time to get your head straight and find inner peace, the clock runs out, **you** run out, and the chance is gone. Forever.
5. **Hourly Check-In: Act Right** Every single hour, commit – like a solid Roman, like a real man – to doing the task right in front of you. Do it with precision, real dignity (no faking), genuine kindness, freedom, and justice. And give yourself a break from all other distracting thoughts. You **can** do this, IF you tackle each action as if it were your absolute last. Free from random goals, free from willfully ignoring Reason, free from pretending, free from self-obsession, and free from bitching about what life hands you. See? It's just a few key things you need to nail to live a smooth, decent life. The Gods themselves wouldn't ask for more than this.
6. **Stop Self-Sabotage** Yo, Soul! You're doing violence to yourself, man! Real violence! And you won't get a second shot at honoring yourself properly. Life's short for everyone, and yours is almost done. Show some self-respect already! Stop putting your well-being and happiness in the hands (or minds) of other people.
7. **Focus! Ditch Distractions & Aimlessness** Is outside stuff constantly pulling you off track? Carve out some quiet time to learn something genuinely good and stop drifting aimlessly. But watch out for another trap: being busy but having no real **point**. Those people who are dead inside while alive, with no clear target for their efforts or thoughts? They're just screwing around, wasting time with actions as much as words.
8. **Know Your Own Mind First** You rarely see people truly screwed over just because they didn't obsess about what's going on in someone else's head. But people who don't accurately track the movements and state of their **own** mind? They are absolutely **guaranteed** to be screwed. Know yourself first.
9. **Core Reminders: Keep These Handy** Always remember:
 - What's the Nature of the Big Picture (the Whole)?
 - What's **my** nature?

- How does my nature relate to the Big Picture?
 - What kind of part am I, of what kind of Whole?
 - *Nobody* can stop you from saying and doing what aligns with the Nature you're part of.
10. **Temper vs. Appetite: Which is Worse?** My man Theophrastus hit it on the head when comparing screw-ups: Giving in to your *appetites* (desires) is worse than losing your *temper*. Think about it: the angry guy is fighting Reason, feeling pain, spasming internally. The guy chasing pleasure (appetite) is willingly seduced, acting more deliberately weak and kinda pathetic in his wrongdoing. So yeah, Theophrastus was right, philosophically speaking: doing wrong for pleasure deserves more blame than doing wrong out of reactive pain. One guy feels wronged and snaps; the other *starts* the problem, letting desire pull him into screwing up.
 11. **Facing Death & What's Truly Bad** Act, speak, and think *always* as if you could check out any minute. Leaving humanity? No big deal if Gods exist – they wouldn't let real harm touch you. If they don't exist, or don't care? Then why bother living in a world without gods or providence? But listen: they *do* exist, they *do* care about us, and they put it entirely in *our* power to avoid *real* harm (i.e., becoming a bad person). As for everything else? If something external was *truly* bad, they'd have made sure we could all avoid it. (And how can something that doesn't make *you* a worse person make your *life* worse?) The fundamental Nature of the Universe wouldn't overlook this stuff out of ignorance, or lack the power to fix it. It wouldn't make such a massive blunder as letting supposed 'goods' and 'ills' fall randomly on good and bad people alike. Stuff like death, life, fame, shame, pain, pleasure, wealth, poverty – these hit everyone, good or bad. They aren't inherently right or wrong. Therefore, they are neither truly good nor truly bad.
 12. **Seeing Things Clearly (Transience, Death)** Notice how fast everything vanishes? Physical bodies disappear into the Universe, memories fade in Time. Think about sensory stuff – especially things that lure you with pleasure or scare you with pain, or get hyped up by vanity. How cheap, pathetic, dirty, breakable, and ultimately dead it all is. That's a job for your reasoning mind. Also, consider: what kind of people are these whose opinions grant 'honor'? What *is* death? Look at it directly. Mentally strip away all the bullshit stories we attach to it. You'll see it's nothing but Nature doing its thing. If you fear Nature's work, you're just a child. And death isn't just Nature's work; it's part of its *well-being*. Also, think about how we mortals connect with the Divine/God – through what part of us? And when is that part of us in the right state for it?
 13. **Focus Inward, Not Outward** Nothing's more pathetic than the guy constantly running around, trying to figure out everything external, 'searching the bowels of the earth' (like Pindar said), guessing what neighbors think. Dude, chill. It's *enough* to stick with the Divinity *inside* you and serve it honestly. That service means keeping your inner self clean from emotional freak-outs, pointless distractions, and whining about what comes from Gods or other people. Respect what comes from the Gods (it's excellent). Love what comes from humans (we're kin). Pity them sometimes too, for their ignorance of good and evil – that ignorance is a worse handicap than being physically blind.
 14. **The Only Time You Have is Now** Even if you were gonna live 3,000 or 30,000 years, remember this: nobody loses any life other than the one they're living *right now*. Nobody lives any other life than the one they're losing *right now*. So, the longest life and the shortest life basically amount to the same thing in terms of loss. Why? Because the *present* moment is the same for everyone. What's passing is the same. So what you lose is just a tiny blip. You can't lose the past (it's gone) or the future (it ain't here yet). How can someone take what you don't have? So, two key takeaways: 1) Everything repeats eternally, like reruns. Doesn't matter if you watch the same show for 100 years, 200, or infinity. 2) The guy who lives longest and the guy who dies earliest lose exactly the same thing: the present moment. Because that's all anyone ever truly *has*, and you can't lose what you don't possess.
 15. **Perception is Reality (Mostly)** "Everything is what you judge it to be." That comeback to Monimus the Cynic is obvious, yeah. But the saying itself is useful, if you grab the core truth: Your *perception* shapes your experience.
 16. **How Your Soul Screws Itself Over** A person's soul messes itself up, most fundamentally, when:
 - (a) It isolates itself, becoming like a tumor on the Universe. Fighting reality, rebelling against what happens – that's cutting yourself off from the Nature that connects everything.
 - (b) It turns against another person or pushes against them with the intent to harm (like when people get enraged).

- (c) It lets itself be controlled by pleasure or pain.
- (d) It acts fake, saying or doing things falsely or with pretense.
- (e) It acts without a clear goal or conscious purpose, just flailing randomly. Even the smallest actions should aim towards the ultimate End. And the End for rational beings? To follow the rules and order of the most awesome City and Government (Reason, the Cosmos).

17. **Life's Breakdown & The Only Lifeline** Quick rundown of human life: Time = a blink. Existence = a river flowing away. Senses = unreliable, cloudy. Body = constantly decaying junk. Spirit = a chaotic swirl. Fortune = unpredictable. Fame = quickly forgotten. Sum up: Body stuff is like a river, gone. Mind stuff is like a dream, hazy. Life itself is a battle, a brief stay in a foreign land. Afterlife fame? Oblivion. So what the hell can guide us through? One thing and one thing only: Philosophy. Real philosophy means: keeping your inner spirit unharmed and untouched, master of pains and pleasures, doing nothing randomly, nothing fake; not needing others to do (or not do) things for your well-being; accepting what happens (your assigned lot) as coming from the same Source you came from. And through it all, calmly waiting for death, seeing it as just a release of the elements that make up every living thing. If the elements themselves aren't harmed by constantly changing into each other, why should *you* freak out about the change and breakdown of *your* elements? It's natural. And nothing natural is truly evil.

Book III

(Scribbled down in Carnuntum, wherever the hell that is. Probably deployed.)

1. **Your Brain Might Go First - Hurry Up!** Okay, listen up. It's not just that life is burning down day by day, leaving less in the tank. You also gotta consider this: even if you *do* live longer, there's no guarantee your mind will stay sharp enough to actually *understand* shit – the deep stuff about life, the universe, everything. Your body might keep chugging along (breathing, eating, feeling basic urges), but the stuff that *matters* – using yourself correctly, making precise judgments about duty, analyzing what your senses are *really* telling you, knowing if it's time to gracefully exit, all that complex decision-making – that stuff starts fading *before* the body quits. So, get moving! Not just 'cause death is closer, but because your ability to process life and adapt properly might already be on the decline.
2. **Find the Cool in the Cracks** Pay attention to the details, man. Even the side effects of natural processes have their own kind of rugged beauty. Like when bread bakes and cracks open? Those cracks technically mess up the baker's perfect plan, but they *look* cool, make you want to eat it more. Figs splitting open when ripe, olives getting that slightly 'overripe' look that's actually perfect. Corn stalks bending low, a lion's furrowed brow, foam on a boar's mouth – lots of stuff isn't 'pretty' up close, but because it's part of how Nature works, it adds character, a certain badass appeal. If you really *feel* and *understand* how the Universe operates, almost everything, even the small background details, will seem kinda awesome in its own way. You'll dig the real jaws of a wild animal as much as some artist's statue. You'll see a kind of vibrancy even in old age. You'll look at the people who work for you with clear, objective eyes. Lots of moments like this happen, not for everyone, but for the guy who's genuinely gotten in tune with Nature and its works.
3. **Everyone Punches Out** Hippocrates cured tons of people, then got sick and died himself. Astrologers predicted futures, then their own clocks ran out. Alexander, Pompey, Caesar – leveled cities, killed countless soldiers – they eventually bit the dust too. Heraclitus talked fire and brimstone cosmology, then bloated up with fluid, covered himself in cow shit (weird!), and died. Lice got Democritus; different kind of parasite (bad people) got Socrates. The point? You got on the boat (born), you sailed (lived), you reached the port (dying). Time to disembark. If there's another life? Cool, gods are everywhere, even there. If it's just lights out (unconsciousness)? Then you stop feeling pain and pleasure, stop being a slave to this meat-sack vessel which is way inferior to the thing *using* it (your mind, your inner divinity). One is Mind and God-spark, the other is just clay and blood.
4. **Mind Your OWN Business (Seriously)** Stop wasting the rest of your life obsessing about other people, *unless* it directly contributes to the common good. Why rob yourself of time you could use for your *own* growth? All that energy spent wondering "What's he doing? Why'd she say that? What are they thinking/planning?" – it just pulls you away from keeping watch over your *own* governing self (your Reason). Cut out the random, pointless thoughts. Especially ditch the nosiness and negativity. Train yourself so if someone suddenly asked, "Whatcha thinkin' about right now?" you could answer instantly and honestly, "Just this simple, kind thought," revealing you're a decent, social being, not hung up on selfish pleasures, petty rivalries, envy, suspicion, or anything else you'd be embarrassed to admit was rattling around in your head. A guy like that, who stops delaying and steps up to be truly excellent? He's like a priest, serving the gods, using that inner core correctly. He keeps himself untainted by chasing pleasure, untouched by pain, unharmed by wrongs, unaware of petty wickedness. He's a wrestler in the ultimate match – refusing to be thrown by passion. Soaked in justice, welcoming *everything* that happens and is assigned to him. Rarely thinks about others' business, and only when absolutely necessary for the collective good. He's focused on *his* work, *his* contribution, constantly mindful of his assigned role in the Whole. He perfects his part, trusts his lot is good. Because that inner spirit (daemon) assigned to you? It guides you, carries you. Plus, remember all rational beings are related. Caring for all humans fits our nature. But cling to the opinions only of those living *in accord with Nature*. As for the others? Keep in mind what they're *really* like – at home, out and about, day and night, the crap company they keep. Don't waste energy on praise from people who don't even like *themselves*.
5. **Stand Up Straight (Metaphorically)** Don't act grudgingly. Don't act selfishly. Don't act without thinking it through. Don't have conflicting motives. Don't let fancy words or appearances cover up sloppy thinking. Don't be a motormouth or a busybody meddler. Let the God *within you* be the guardian of a *real man* – mature, civic-minded, Roman, a leader who's taken his post like a soldier waiting for the signal to withdraw, ready to go, needing no external validation or witness. Have a cheerful face. Don't *need* help from outside or rely on others for your peace. You should stand upright *on your own*, not be propped up by others.

6. **Find the Best? Grab It. (Spoiler: It's Inside)** If you find anything in life better than justice, truth, self-control, courage – better, basically, than your own Reason being satisfied with itself when it guides you to act rightly and accept fate calmly – if you see something **higher** than that? Turn to it with everything you've got and enjoy that supreme good. BUT, if nothing shows up that's better than that divine spark **already seated within you**, the one that keeps your impulses in check, examines your thoughts, detaches from knee-jerk reactions (like Socrates said), aligns itself with the gods, and prioritizes caring for others... if you find everything else is smaller and cheaper than **this**? Then give no room to anything else. Because once you lean towards those other things (popularity, power, wealth, pleasure), you lose the ability to consistently honor what is uniquely **yours**, your own true good. It's just wrong to set up rivals (like fame or fortune) against the good of Reason and the Community. Those other things might seem okay for a bit, but they quickly take over and drag you off course. So, I'm telling you: simply, freely, choose the higher path and **stick to it**. "But higher means advantageous!" Yeah, if it's advantageous to your **rational** self, lock onto it. If it only benefits your animal side, fine, admit it, but stick to your decision without making a big show. Just be damn sure you make a choice that won't screw you over later.
7. **Integrity Over Everything** Never, ever value something as 'advantageous' if it forces you to break your word, lose self-respect, hate someone, be suspicious, curse others, fake it, or desire things that need secrets and cover-ups. The man who prioritizes his own Mind and inner Divinity, and the sacred practice of its excellence? He doesn't make a scene. He doesn't whine. He doesn't **need** to hide away in solitude **or** be constantly surrounded by crowds. Most importantly, he lives without desperately chasing things **or** desperately avoiding them. He doesn't give a damn whether he gets a longer or shorter time using this soul-in-a-body setup. Even if he has to check out **right now**, he'll go as smoothly and decently as he'd do any other task, focused his whole life on just one thing: keeping his understanding aligned with what it means to be a rational, social being.
8. **Clean Inside, No Need to Hide** Look inside the mind of a disciplined and purified person. You won't find any festering wounds, no rot, no hidden infections under the surface. Fate doesn't catch his life unfinished, like an actor leaving the stage mid-play. There's nothing slave-like or fake about him. He's not dependent on others, nor cut off from them. Nothing to make excuses for, nothing that needs a dark corner to hide in.
9. **Respect Your Judgment** Revere your power of judgment. Everything depends on it – keeping your governing self aligned with Nature and the needs of a rational being. Good judgment promises deliberation, genuine connection with others, and walking in step with the gods/Universe.
10. **Life's Tiny, Fame's Tinier** So, throw everything else away and hold onto just these few core ideas. And remember: you only live **right now**, this tiny moment. The rest is either already lived or totally uncertain. Tiny life, tiny corner of the earth you live on, even the longest-lasting fame is tiny and depends on a chain of flawed mortals who'll be dead soon anyway and don't even know themselves, let alone some dude who died ages ago.
11. **Break It Down: Analyze Everything** Add this tool to your kit: Always make a mental sketch or outline of whatever impression hits you. See its core essence, naked, whole and in parts. Name it specifically, name its components, name what it will eventually break down into. Nothing builds mental greatness like the power to systematically and truthfully test **everything** you encounter. Always look at it thinking: What purpose does this serve in **this** kind of Universe? What's its value to the Whole? What's its value to **me**, a citizen of the highest City (the Cosmos), where all other cities are just households? What **is** this thing making an impression on me right now? What's it made of? How long will it naturally last? What virtue do I need to deal with it (kindness, courage, honesty, simplicity, self-reliance, etc.)? Therefore, for everything, say: "This came from God/Fate." Or: "This came from the interconnectedness of events, the cosmic web, coincidence." Or: "This came from my fellow human, my kin, my comrade, who just doesn't know what's truly natural for him." But **I** do know. So I treat him kindly and justly, according to the natural law of fellowship. While still aiming for what's truly deserved, especially in matters that are morally neutral.
12. **The Simple Path to a Good Life** If you tackle the task at hand right now, following Reason – seriously, powerfully, kindly – and don't get sidetracked, but keep your inner divinity pure and strong, like you might have to give it back this very second... If you lock this down, expecting nothing, avoiding nothing, just content with **present action** aligned with Nature and heroic truth in what you say and mean... you **will** live a blessed life. And nobody can stop you from doing this.
13. **Keep Your Principles Ready** Just like doctors always have their tools ready for emergencies, you need your core principles (doctrines) always ready. Use them to understand the divine and human connection,

and then do *everything*, even the smallest stuff, remembering that link. You won't do human stuff well without relating it to the divine perspective, and vice versa.

14. **Stop Preparing, Start Living** Quit wandering off track! You're not gonna get around to rereading all those notebooks, those histories of Rome and Greece, those quotes you saved up for 'old age'. Get to the damn goal! Drop the wishful thinking. Help *yourself*, right now, if you care about yourself at all, while you still can.
15. **Seeing Beyond the Surface** Some people don't grasp the real meaning behind things like 'theft', 'sowing', 'buying', 'resting', 'seeing what needs doing'. True understanding isn't just about physical eyesight; it requires a different kind of vision – insight into the principles.
16. **The Mark of the Truly Good Man** A person shouldn't treasure any of those things that don't belong to a human being *as a human being*. They aren't requirements of our nature, our nature doesn't promise them, and they aren't completions or perfections of human nature. Therefore, our ultimate purpose (end/telos) doesn't lie in them, and certainly not the 'good' that fulfills that purpose. Besides, if any of those external things (wealth, fame, etc.) were truly part of our essential portion, it wouldn't make sense for us to disdain them or resist them. The person who achieves independence from them wouldn't be praiseworthy, and the person who deliberately takes less wouldn't be considered good, if they were *really* 'Goods'. But as things actually are, the more a man strips himself of these things, or bears it patiently when they're taken from him, the *better* a person he is.

Book IV

1. **Your Inner Boss is Adaptable Like Fire** The command center inside you, your core Reason? In its natural state, it faces whatever happens by instantly adapting to what's actually possible and presented. It doesn't get obsessed with one specific outcome or material. Instead, it approaches goals with a crucial 'plan B' mentality (*with a reservation*). Then, whatever obstacle gets in the way? It turns *that* into fuel for itself. Think of fire: a tiny candle gets snuffed out by a pile of stuff, but a roaring blaze takes whatever you throw on it, consumes it, and leaps *even higher* because of those very obstacles. Your Reason can do that too.
2. **Act With Purpose, Live With Skill** Don't launch into anything without a clear purpose. And don't do it any other way than according to the core principles that perfect the art of living. No random shit, only deliberate, skilled action.
3. **The Ultimate Retreat is Internal** People hunt for quiet spots – cabins, beaches, mountains. You feel that same urge sometimes, wanting to get away. Totally normal. But it's kinda rookie-level thinking for a philosopher, because you can retreat *anytime you want* just by going inside your own head. Seriously, nowhere is quieter or more private than your own mind. Especially if you've stocked it with solid principles. Just look inward, and bam – instant ease. And by 'ease,' I mean *good inner order*, being well-behaved internally. So, keep giving yourself this mental retreat. Make it a regular thing to repair and reset yourself. Keep it quick: focus on brief, fundamental truths. They'll be enough to wash away the stress and send you back to deal with life without resentment. What's making you resentful? Other people's bullshit? Remember the core judgment: we rational creatures exist for each other. Patience is a part of justice. People screw up unintentionally (out of ignorance). And think how many people – after all the drama, suspicion, hatred, and fighting – ended up laid out dead and turned to dust. That should give you pause. Okay, maybe it's your assigned 'lot' in life that's bugging you? Refresh the basic options: either there's a guiding Plan (Providence) or it's all just random atoms colliding (and even then, patterns emerge). Remember all the evidence suggesting the Universe is like one big, interconnected community (Commonwealth). Still letting physical stuff get to you? Remind yourself that your understanding (mind), once it gets its act together and knows its own power, doesn't get tangled up in the body's ups and downs, whether things feel smooth or rough. And finally, recall everything you've heard and agreed to about handling pain and pleasure rationally. Alright, what about chasing fame and glory? Is *that* distracting you? Look at how fast *everyone* is forgotten. Think about the infinite abyss of time stretching behind you and before you. Consider how hollow applause is, how fickle and clueless most 'praisers' are, and how tiny the stage (your circle, your world) really is. This should make you stop and think. The whole Earth is just a speck. Your home? A tiny corner of that speck. The people who might praise you there? So few, and frankly, pretty insignificant in the grand scheme. So, final point: remember to retreat into this 'little domain' – *yourself*. Most importantly: don't get stressed out or feel tortured by external stuff. Be free. Look at things like a man, a human being, a citizen, a mortal creature. And out of all the truths ready at hand, keep these two front and center: **One:** External things don't actually *touch* your mind; they just stand there, outside, unmoved. Disturbances come only from the *judgment* you make inside. **Two:** Everything you see is changing right now and will soon cease to exist. Constantly think about how many changes you've already witnessed. The Universe *is* change; life *is* your perception and judgment (opinion).
4. **We're All Connected by Reason** If Mind (the capacity for reason) is common to all of us, then the Reason *by which* we are rational beings is also common. If that's true, then the Reason that tells us what to do and what not to do is also common. If *that's* true, then the fundamental Law is common. If that's true, we are all citizens. If that's true, we share in one single system or constitution. If *that's* true, the Universe is basically one big Commonwealth or City. Because what other shared government could possibly include the entire human race? And it's from this Common City – the Cosmos – that we get our very mind, our reason, and our sense of law. Where else? Just like the earthy part of me comes from *some* earth, the watery part from *some* water, the air/spirit part from *some* source, and the fiery/hot part from *its* own source (because nothing comes from nothing, and nothing vanishes into nothing), so too the Mind must come from *some* universal Source.
5. **Death = Birth = Natural Mystery** Death is basically like birth – just another one of Nature's mysteries. It's elements combining (birth) and then dissolving back into the same elements (death). Generally speaking, there's nothing shameful about this. It doesn't contradict being a rational creature or the fundamental principles of our design.
6. **Expect Figs to Have Juice (Expect People to Be People)** Certain outcomes are the natural and necessary result of certain kinds of beings. Someone acting like an asshole? That's what assholes *do*. Wishing it

wasn't so is like wishing a fig tree didn't produce its sharp juice. It's pointless. Just accept the nature of things. And always remember this: in a very short time, both you and that person will be dead. And a little while after that, nobody will even remember either of your names.

7. **Drop the Judgment, Drop the Hurt** Get rid of the judgment, "I have been harmed." Once you do that, you get rid of the **feeling** of having been harmed. Get rid of the feeling, and you get rid of the harm itself. It lives in your judgment.
8. **What Doesn't Make You Worse, Doesn't Harm You** Whatever doesn't make **you** a worse person (less just, temperate, courageous, wise) cannot make your **life** worse, and it doesn't truly harm you, externally or internally.
9. **Nature's Benefit is Necessary** It's a law of necessity that what is naturally beneficial **had** to happen this way for the good of the whole system.
10. **Everything Happens Justly (If You Look Right)** "All that comes to pass, comes to pass with justice." If you watch carefully, you'll find this is true. I don't just mean 'in the right sequence,' but according to fundamental fairness, as if distributed by someone assigning things based on true worth or cosmic balance. So, keep observing as you've begun, and whatever you do, do it with this in mind: act with **goodness**, the specific kind of goodness that defines a truly good person. Preserve this quality in everything.
11. **See Reality, Not Their Spin** Don't look at things the way the person doing wrong sees them, or the way they **want** you to see them. See things as they **actually are**, in truth.
12. **Two Prep Steps: Act Right, Be Correctable** Always be ready in these two ways: **First**, only act as Reason (your inner king and lawgiver) dictates, specifically for the benefit of mankind. **Second**, be ready to change your course **if** someone corrects you and guides you away from a mistaken notion. But—and this is key—that correction must come from a conviction of **justice** or the **common good**. Don't change your mind just because the alternative seems pleasant or popular.
13. **Got Reason? Use It!** "You possess Reason?" "Yes, I do!" "Then why the hell aren't you using it? If this faculty is doing its job, what else could you possibly need?"
14. **Part of the Whole, Back to the Source** You came into existence as a part of the Whole. You will eventually vanish back into that which gave you birth. Or rather, you'll be taken up and transformed back into its creative, generative Reason through the process of change.
15. **Incense on the Altar** Imagine many grains of incense tossed onto the same altar. One falls and burns up first, another falls later. Is there any real difference between them? Nope. Same with life and death.
16. **Ten Days to Godhood (Metaphorically)** Stick to your core principles and maintain reverence for Reason (the Logos/Word) consistently. Within ten days, even those people who currently see you as a brute or a fool might start looking at you like you're some kind of god. Transformation happens when you get serious and stay consistent.
17. **Live NOW, Not Later** Stop acting like you're going to live for ten thousand years. Fate hangs over your head. While you're alive, while you still **can**, become a good person. Do it now.
18. **Inner Focus Brings Peace** Think how much hassle and mental energy you save when you stop obsessing over what your neighbor says, does, or thinks, and focus **only** on what **you yourself** are doing. Make sure your own actions are just and holy, aligned with the conduct of a good person. Don't get distracted looking at "black characters" (bad examples). Run straight toward the finish line, stay balanced, don't flail about.
19. **The Joke of Posthumous Fame** The guy freaking out about his reputation after death fails to realize that every single person who remembers him will **also** die very soon. Then the person who remembers **them** will die, and so on, until the entire memory is extinguished like a line of candles blowing out one by one. Okay, let's pretend the rememberers **and** the memory somehow last forever. So what? What does that have to do with **you** now? And I'm not just saying it's useless to the dead; what good is praise even to the **living**, except maybe for some practical advantage (like networking or getting a promotion)? By chasing fame, you're foolishly neglecting the **real** gift of Nature right now – your own inner worth – which doesn't depend on anyone else's testimony.

20. **True Beauty Needs No Praise** Anything that is truly beautiful or excellent is so **in itself**. It finds its completion in itself. Praise is not part of its essence. Whatever gets praised doesn't become better or worse because of it. This applies to things commonly called beautiful too, like materials or works of art. What does something **truly** beautiful lack? Nothing. It's complete. Same goes for Law, Truth, Kindness, or Self-Respect. Is any of these beautiful **because** it's praised, or ruined **because** it's blamed? Does an emerald become less valuable if nobody compliments it? What about gold, ivory, purple dye, a lyre, a sword blade, a flower bud, a small plant? Their quality is inherent.
21. **Cosmic Recycling (Souls & Matter)** Someone asks: "If souls persist, how does the atmosphere hold them all eternally?" Counter: "How does the earth hold all the bodies buried over ages?" Just as change and dissolution make room for new bodies on earth, maybe souls in the air also change, dissolve, get poured out, and reignited—absorbed back into the Universe's generative principle (creative energy)—making room for the next batch. That's one possible answer, **if** souls persist. But consider not just buried bodies, but all the animals eaten daily by us and other creatures! A huge number get consumed, effectively 'buried' in the eaters' bodies. Yet there's room because they transform into blood, air, heat. How do we investigate this? By distinguishing between the material aspect and the causal principle (the 'what' and the 'why/how').
22. **No Aimless Wandering (Mental or Physical)** Don't drift without purpose. In every impulse to act, ensure it aligns with justice. In every thought and imagination, maintain clear understanding and accurate perception.
23. **Alignment with the Universe** Everything that is fitting for you, my Universe, is fitting for me. Nothing that happens in your good timing is too early or too late for me. Everything your seasons bear, Nature, is fruit for me. All things come from you, exist in you, return to you. The poet might sing, "Dear city of Cecrops (Athens)!" Will you not say, with even more feeling, "Dear city of God (the Cosmos)!"?
24. **Do Less, But Do What Matters** Democritus advised: "Do few things, if you want peace." Maybe it's even better: Do the **necessary** things, the things that the Reason of a naturally social creature dictates, and do them **as** Reason dictates. This brings peace not only from doing things **right**, but also from doing **fewer** things. If you cut out most of the unnecessary stuff we say and do, you'll have more leisure and fewer interruptions. So, on every occasion, ask yourself: "Is this **really** necessary?" And remove not just unnecessary actions, but unnecessary **imagination**s too, because pointless thoughts lead to pointless actions down the line.
25. **Test Drive the Good Life** Try it out yourself: See how well the life of the good man actually works. The man who is pleased with what the Universe assigns him and is content with his own just actions and kind disposition. See how that feels.
26. **Quick Summary: Keep It Simple** You've seen all that external stuff. Now focus on this internal stuff: Don't trouble yourself. Make yourself simple. Someone does wrong? They do wrong **to themselves**. Something happens **to** you? It's fine; it was all woven into your destiny by Universal Nature from the beginning. The bottom line is this: life is short. Use the present moment profitably, with reason and justice. Be sober (clear-headed) without making it a huge struggle.
27. **Order In You, Order In the Whole** Is it an ordered Universe (Cosmos) or just a chaotic jumble thrown together – which, even then, still has **some** kind of order? Or, is it possible that there can be order **within you** but disorder in the **Whole**? Especially when everything is so clearly distinct, yet also interconnected and interacting sympathetically? Doesn't compute. There's an underlying order.
28. **Profile of a Bad Character** A "black character" (a corrupt heart/mind) is weak, stubborn; like a beast of prey, a brute, or a spoiled child; it's foolish, sneaky, vulgar, greedy, tyrannical.
29. **Who's Lost in the Universe?** If someone doesn't recognize the fundamental nature of the Universe, they're a foreigner in it. No less a foreigner is the person who doesn't recognize what **happens** in it (the natural processes). A fugitive is someone who runs away from the rational law of our shared City (the Cosmos). A blind man is someone who closes the eye of his mind. A beggar is someone who always needs something from others and lacks self-sufficiency for life's essentials. A tumor on the Universe is someone who rebels and cuts himself off from the reason of our common nature just because he's unhappy with events (remember: the Nature that produced you also produced these events). A fragment cut off from the City is someone who severs his own soul from the single soul of all rational beings.
30. **Hypocrisy Check** Here's a philosopher without a proper tunic, another without books, another practically naked. One says, "I have no bread, but I still stand firm by Reason (the Word/Logos)." And **I** have all this nourishment from my learning, yet **I** don't always stand firm. Ouch. Self-check needed.

31. **Love Your Craft, Trust the Gods** Love the art, the skill, the role you were taught. Set up your resting place right there. Go through the rest of your life as someone who has committed everything that is truly yours (your choices, your will) with your whole heart to the gods/Universe, and in your dealings with people, make yourself neither a tyrant over them nor a slave to any of them.
32. **History Repeats: Focus on Your Role Now** Think back, for example, to the time of Emperor Vespasian. You'll see the exact same things happening: people marrying, raising kids, getting sick, dying, fighting, feasting, trading, farming, flattering, being arrogant, suspecting others, plotting, praying for someone else's death, complaining about the present, being horny, hoarding wealth, desperately wanting promotions and power. Now... where is that life of theirs? Gone. Completely vanished. Okay, move on to Emperor Trajan's time. Again, exactly the same patterns. That life? Also dead. Do this exercise with other historical periods and entire nations. See how many people struggled intensely, then quickly fell and dissolved back into the elements. But most importantly, review the people **you personally knew** who got distracted by pointless vanity, neglecting to do what matched their own constitution (their nature and role), failing to just hold fast to **that** and be content with **that**. And here's a key point: remember that the attention you give to each action has its own proper value and proportion. Only by understanding this will you avoid feeling dejected if you're occupied with smaller matters, as long as you're giving them no more attention than is appropriate.
33. **Fame is Fleeting, Virtue Endures** Words that were common back then sound archaic now. Same for the names of heroes once praised to the skies – Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, Dentatus; a bit later, Scipio and Cato; then Augustus; then Hadrian and Antoninus. They're becoming historical artifacts. Why? Because all things fade quickly, turn into myths, and then get buried completely by oblivion. And I'm talking about the ones who shone like superstars! The rest? As soon as they breathed their last, they were "unnoticed and unwept." And what, after all, is "everlasting remembrance"? Utter vanity. So, what **should** a person genuinely focus their efforts on? This one thing: right understanding, treating others decently (neighborly behavior), speech that is never false, and a disposition that welcomes everything that happens as necessary, as familiar, as flowing from the same source and fountain as oneself.
34. **Surrender to Your Fate** With your whole will, surrender yourself to Clotho (Fate). Let her spin your destiny into whatever web of events she chooses. Accept it fully.
35. **Rememberer and Remembered Both Vanish** Everything is ephemeral, lasting only a moment: both the one who remembers and the one who is remembered.
36. **Nature Loves Change: Everything is Seed** Continuously contemplate how **all things** come into being through change. Train yourself to think that Universal Nature loves nothing more than to change the things that exist and create new things similar to them. For everything that **is** now is, in a way, the seed of whatever will emerge from it. You probably think 'seeds' are just the things you put in the earth or a womb. But that's a very unscientific, limited view. Change itself is the seed process.
37. **Still Not Ready? Get Simple.** You're going to be dead very soon, and yet you are still not: simple, untroubled, free from the suspicion that external things can hurt you, genuinely well-disposed towards all people, nor yet convinced that wisdom consists **only** in acting justly.
38. **Even the "Wise" Chase Trivia** Look closely at the guiding principles even of people considered wise. See what petty things they avoid and what trivial things they pursue!
39. **Your Evil is Your Judgment, Not Events** Your 'evil' or 'harm' doesn't exist in someone else's controlling mind (governing principle), nor in any change or alteration of your environment. Where is it then? It's in the part of **you** which **forms judgments** about evil. Let that part stop making the judgment, and all is well. Even if what's closest to it – your physical body – is cut, burned, festering, or dying, let the part that **judges** these things remain at peace. That is, let it decide that nothing is truly good or evil if it can happen indifferently to both the evil man and the good man. Because whatever happens equally to someone living contrary to Nature and someone living according to Nature, that thing itself must be neutral – neither according to Nature nor contrary to it.
40. **The Universe as One Organism** Constantly think of the Universe as one single living creature, containing one substance and one soul. Consider how all things are absorbed into this single perception; how it does everything with a single impulse; how all things are co-causes of everything that happens; and the intricate, wonderful web and interconnectedness of it all.

41. **Soul Carrying a Corpse** You are a little soul carrying a corpse around, as Epictetus used to put it. (A stark reminder of the mind/body distinction).
42. **Change Itself Isn't Evil or Good** In the natural process of change, nothing that happens is inherently evil, just as nothing that comes *into existence* as a result of change is inherently good. It's all just transformation.
43. **Time as a Raging River** There's a constant flow of things coming into being, like a river, and Time is a violent torrent. No sooner is something seen than it's swept away, and another thing is carried past, and that too will soon be gone.
44. **The Familiarity of Life's Events** Everything that happens is as familiar and predictable as roses in spring and grapes in summer. Things like sickness, death, slander, plotting, and everything that makes foolish people either ecstatic or miserable – these are all just standard, recurring patterns.
45. **Organic Connection, Not Random List** What follows in time is always organically related to what came before. It's not like a random list of unrelated items simply determined by necessity. It's a rational combination. Just as Being (existence itself) is arranged in a mutually coordinated way, so too the phenomena of Becoming (things happening) display not just bare succession, but a wonderful, organic interconnectedness.
46. **Heraclitus's Wisdom: Change, Logos, Wake Up!** Always remember what Heraclitus taught: "The death of earth gives birth to water, the death of water gives birth to air, the death of air gives birth to fire, and back again." Remember his image of the man who forgets which way he's going. And how "people are constantly at odds with the very thing they interact with most continuously (the Logos, the Reason that governs the Universe)," and how "the things they encounter every day seem alien to them." And again: "We must not act and speak like people who are asleep" (because even in sleep, we think we're acting and speaking). And "we must not be like children blindly accepting things from their parents," that is, accepting things simply as we've received them without critical examination.
47. **Tomorrow vs. Eternity: Tiny Difference** Just as, if one of the gods told you, "You will die tomorrow, or for sure the day after," you wouldn't make a huge fuss about that extra day unless you were a complete coward (because the difference is trivial). In the same way, count it as no great matter whether you live until some infinitely distant year versus just until tomorrow. Perspective matters.
48. **Everyone Dies: Doctors, Stars, Cities. Live Right.** Think constantly: how many physicians have died after all their worried frowning over patients? How many astrologers, after making grand predictions about other people's deaths? How many philosophers, after endless debates on death or immortality? How many great warriors, after slaughtering thousands? How many tyrants, after abusing their power over life and death with monstrous arrogance, acting as if they themselves were immortal? How many *entire cities* have effectively died: Helice, Pompeii, Herculaneum, countless others? Run over the list, too, of people *you* know, one after another. One person attended a funeral, and then was himself laid out for burial; another followed him. All in a short time. Here's the whole point: Always see how ephemeral and cheap human affairs are – yesterday just a bit of mucus, tomorrow ashes or a mummy. Therefore, make your passage through this short span of time in obedience to Nature, and lay down your life gladly, like a ripe olive falling from the tree, blessing the Nature that produced it and grateful to the tree that gave it life.
49. **Misfortune vs. Good Fortune: It's How You Bear It** Be like a rocky headland against which the waves crash relentlessly. It stands firm, and the swirling waters calm down around it. Don't say, "How unlucky I am that this happened to me!" No, say instead: "How *lucky* I am that, even though this happened, I continue free from sorrow, neither crushed by the present nor afraid of the future!" Because look, something like this could have happened to anyone, but not everyone could have endured it without breaking down in sorrow. So why is the event itself more 'misfortune' than your resilience is 'good fortune'? Do you generally call something a person's 'misfortune' if it doesn't contradict human nature? And do you think something contradicts human nature if it's not opposed to the will of that nature (i.e., Reason)? Okay, you know what that rational will is. Can this thing that happened possibly prevent you from being just, high-minded, temperate, prudent, deliberate, trustworthy, self-respecting, free, or possessing any of the other qualities which, when present, allow a person's nature to achieve its full potential? So, finally, in every situation that tempts you toward sorrow, remember to use this principle: *This event is not a misfortune, but to bear it bravely is good fortune.*
50. **Clinging to Life is Pointless** Here's a rough-and-ready (unscientific, maybe, but helpful) support for overcoming the fear of death: Review the cases of people who clung desperately to life. What *more* did they

really gain than those who died earlier? They all ended up buried eventually: Caedicianus, Fabius, Julianus, Lepidus, and all the others like them, who carried many people to their graves and then were carried out themselves. Generally speaking, the difference in lifespan is small, and this small difference is often bought through great struggles, dealing with difficult people, and living in a frail body. So don't count that extra time as some great prize. Look at the abyss of time behind you and the infinite time stretching ahead. In that vastness, what's the real difference between an infant who lives three days and a legendary old man like Nestor who lived for three generations? Practically nothing.

51. **Nature's Road is Short and Straight** Always run the short road – and Nature's road **is** the short road. Therefore, say and do everything in the most sound, rational way. Sticking to this kind of purpose delivers you from troubles, conflicts, from every unnecessary care and excessive bullshit.

Book V

1. **Get Out of Bed, Do Your Job** Crack of dawn, alarm goes off (or someone calls you), and you really don't want to get up? Have this thought ready: "I'm being called to do **human** work. Why am I bitching about going to do the very thing I was born for, the reason I was put on this earth? Was I made just to snuggle under the covers and stay warm?" "Yeah, but this feels nicer!" "Seriously? Were you born for **pleasure**? For **feeling** good, instead of **acting**? Look at the plants, birds, ants, spiders, bees – they're all busting their asses, doing their specific jobs, contributing to the order of the world. And **you're** refusing to do the work of a human being? You won't jump up and do what your own nature demands?" "Okay, okay, but people need rest too!" Fine, I agree. But Nature sets limits on rest, just like on eating and drinking. And **you** constantly go **beyond** those limits, past what's enough. Except when it comes to **actions** – there, you stay **inside** your potential, doing less than you could. Why? Because you don't truly love yourself. If you did, you'd love your nature and its purpose. Look at other guys who love their crafts – they wear themselves out working, skipping meals, not showering. But you honor your **own** nature **less** than the blacksmith honors his metal, the dancer his moves, the greedy dude his cash, the attention whore his fame. When **they're** passionate, they blow off food and sleep to advance their goals. But **you** think acts of teamwork and contributing to society are less valuable and deserve less effort? Weak.
2. **Wipe the Slate Clean** How easy is it to just reject and erase every distracting or messed-up thought, and instantly achieve perfect calm? Super easy. Do it.
3. **Own Your Actions, Ignore the Haters** Convince yourself you **deserve** every word and action that aligns with Nature (Reason). Don't let anyone's blame or gossip talk you out of it. If it's the right thing to do or say, don't second-guess yourself or feel unworthy. Those other people have their own internal drivers, their own agendas. Don't get sidetracked looking at them. Just walk your straight path, following your own Nature and the common Nature (of the Universe) – because ultimately, their path is one and the same.
4. **Walking Nature's Path Back Home** I walk the path Nature sets out until I lie down and rest. My last breath will go back into the air I draw from daily. I'll lie down on the earth from which my father got his seed, my mother her blood, my nurse her milk. The same earth that's fed and watered me day after day for years, that supports my footsteps and puts up with me using it for countless purposes (some probably not great).
5. **You Have Power, Use It - No Excuses** "Okay, fine, maybe my raw intelligence isn't super impressive." Granted! But there's a shit-ton of other qualities you **can't** say you weren't gifted with. So, bring forth what is **totally** in your power: honesty, dignity, endurance, resisting cheap pleasures, being content with your lot, needing little, kindness, freedom, simplicity, being reserved in speech (not gossiping), magnanimity (big-heartedness). Don't you see how much you **can** offer, where there's zero excuse about lacking talent or ability? And yet, you're still content playing in the minor leagues? Are you forced to complain, be greedy, flatter people, blame your body for your failings, suck up, brag, be mentally scattered **because** you weren't born a genius? Hell no! By the gods, you could have ditched all that crap long ago. The only possible valid excuse might be some slowness in understanding, but even **that** is something you can train and work on. Don't ignore your faults or get comfortable being dull.
6. **Doing Good: Three Levels** Type 1 guy: Does someone a favor, then immediately chalks it up like he's owed something. Type 2 guy: Doesn't explicitly ask for payback, but internally thinks of himself as a creditor and is very aware of the 'good deed' he did. Type 3 guy: Is almost **unconscious** of having done the good deed. He's like a grapevine that produces grapes – it just does its thing and asks nothing more once it's borne its natural fruit. A horse runs, a dog hunts, bees make honey, a good man does good – he doesn't even realize he's done it, he just moves on to the next right action, like the vine producing grapes again next season. You should aim to be like Type 3, the ones who act virtuously without even thinking about it. "Yeah, but," someone argues, "you **should** be aware! It's part of being social to recognize you're acting socially, and you should want your neighbor to recognize it too!" Okay, what you're saying has a grain of truth, but you're twisting the real meaning here. If you think like that, you'll end up like Type 1 or 2, fooled by plausible-sounding but flawed reasoning. If you truly understand the core principle (act virtuously for its own sake), don't worry – you won't accidentally stop doing good social acts just because you're not keeping score.
7. **Pray Simply or Not At All** The Athenians had a prayer: "Rain, dear Zeus, rain on the fields and plains of Athens." That's how you should pray – simply, directly, freely. Or just don't pray. No complex bargaining or whining.

8. **Accepting Your 'Prescription' from Nature** We say, "The doctor (Aesculapius) ordered this guy horse riding, or cold baths, or to go barefoot." Similarly, we should say, "Universal Nature ordered this person sickness, or disability, or loss, or some other difficulty." In the doctor example, 'ordered' means 'prescribed this as fitting for health.' In the Nature example, whatever happens to each person has been assigned to them as fitting for the universal order. We talk about things 'befitting' us, just like builders talk about squared stones 'fitting' together in a wall or pyramid, bonding perfectly. The whole universe is one harmonious system. Just as the physical world is made of matter perfectly connected, the chain of causes (Fate/Destiny) is one perfect, connected sequence. Even regular folks get this; they say, "It was sent to him," meaning "This was ordered/assigned for him." So, let's accept these 'orders' from Nature just like we accept the doctor's orders. Yeah, many of Nature's prescriptions are tough, but we welcome them hoping for health. Learn to see the fulfillment of Universal Nature's plan as **your** pleasure, just like you see following health advice as ultimately good for you. Welcome **everything** that happens, even if it seems harsh, because it leads to the ultimate goal: the health of the whole universe, the well-being of Zeus (the Governing Principle). Nature wouldn't 'send' something to an individual if it wasn't also for the good of the whole system – just like any governing principle only dictates what's appropriate for the thing it governs. Two big reasons to be content with what happens: **First**, it happened **for you**, was ordered **for you**, related **to you**, woven into your destiny from the most ancient causes. **Second**, what happens to each individual is a **cause** contributing to the welfare, completion, and very continuation of the Governing Principle of the Whole. The whole system gets damaged if you cut even the smallest connection or break the continuity of causes or parts. And you **do** cut it off, as much as you can, whenever you get pissed off and resistant – you're basically trying to destroy the system.
9. **Fell Down? Get Back Up. Love the Process.** Don't get disgusted with yourself, don't quit, don't get impatient just because you don't perfectly execute actions based on right principles **every single time**. When you stumble, get back up. Rejoice if **most** of your actions are worthy of a decent human being. Love the philosophy you're returning to. Don't go back to it like a kid grudgingly going back to a strict teacher. Go back like someone with sore eyes reaching for the soothing sponge and ointment, or someone applying a comforting poultice or fomentation. See it that way, and you'll realize obeying Reason isn't some huge burden; it's where you find **rest**. Remember: Philosophy only wants what your own nature wants. **You** were the one wanting something else, something out of sync with Nature. Because what's sweeter than being in sync? Doesn't pleasure hook us precisely because it's 'sweet'? Well, consider this: aren't magnanimity, freedom, simplicity, consideration for others, holiness even **sweeter**? And what's sweeter than Wisdom itself, when you realize the smooth, unbroken flow of understanding and knowledge it brings?
10. **Reality is Fuzzy, People Suck, Find Rest Inside** Realities are kinda veiled, man. So much so that plenty of smart thinkers (not just randos) thought reality was unknowable. Even the Stoics admit it's tough to grasp fully. All our perceptions, our 'assent' to things, are shaky and changeable. Where's the guy who's never wrong? Doesn't exist. Okay, shift focus to objects of experience – look how short-lived they are, how cheap, how easily possessed by degenerates, prostitutes, or criminals. Next, consider the characters of the people you live with. Even the best ones are hard to put up with sometimes. Hell, it's hard enough to put up with **yourself**. In such a fog and muck, in this raging torrent of existence, time, motion, and things moving – what can possibly be worthy of deep respect or serious pursuit? I honestly don't see it. Instead, you gotta console yourself by patiently waiting for Nature's release (death), not stressing about the delay. Find peace **only** in two things: **One**, nothing will happen to me that isn't in accordance with the Nature of the Whole Universe. **Two**, it is totally within my power **not** to do anything contrary to my own God and inner Spirit (Reason); nobody can force me to violate that.
11. **Whose Soul Are You Using Right Now?** "What purpose am I using my soul for right now?" Ask yourself this constantly. Examine: "What's going on in this part they call the 'governing self'? Whose soul do I currently have active? A child's? A teenager's? A woman's (stereotype alert!)? A tyrant's? A farm animal's? A dangerous predator's?" Be honest about your current mental state.
12. **True Goods vs. Fake Goods** You can spot what most people **think** are 'goods' by this test: Imagine someone possessing **real** goods – wisdom, self-control, justice, courage. Could that person seriously listen to that crude popular saying about being so rich you 'don't have a corner to take a shit in'? No way, it wouldn't fit. But if someone has their mind full of what the **majority** considers goods (wealth, luxury, status symbols), they'll hear that same saying from a comedian and laugh, thinking it's totally appropriate. See? Even the average person dimly senses the difference. Otherwise, the saying wouldn't be offensive in the first case (real goods) but accepted as witty in the second (fake goods). So go ahead, ask yourself:

should you really respect and consider things 'good' if, once you possess them, that crude proverb about having no place left to relieve yourself actually seems fitting?

13. **Eternal Recycling: Form & Matter** I'm made of Form (rational principle) and Matter (physical stuff). Neither of these will vanish into nothing, just like neither came from nothing. So, every part of me will eventually be reassigned by change into some *other* part of the Universe, and that part will change into another, and so on, forever. My parents came into existence through a similar change process, and their parents before them, stretching back infinitely. No reason not to say this, even if the Universe operates in finite cycles of creation and destruction (the changes still happen within or between cycles).
14. **Reason is Self-Sufficient** Reason, and the process of reasoning, are abilities complete in themselves and their own operations. They start from their own proper foundation (first principles) and proceed towards their intended goal. That's why rational actions are called *kathōrthōseis* (right actions) – indicating the 'rightness' or 'straightness' of their path.
15. **Only Human Goods Matter** A person shouldn't treasure any of those things that don't belong to a human being *as a human being*. They aren't requirements of our nature, our nature doesn't promise them, and they aren't completions or perfections of human nature. Therefore, our ultimate purpose (end/telos) doesn't lie in them, and certainly not the 'good' that fulfills that purpose. Besides, if any of those external things (wealth, fame, etc.) were truly part of our essential portion, it wouldn't make sense for us to disdain them or resist them. The person who achieves independence from them wouldn't be praiseworthy, and the person who deliberately takes less wouldn't be considered good, if they were *really* 'Goods'. But as things actually are, the more a man strips himself of these things, or bears it patiently when they're taken from him, the *better* a person he is.
16. **Your Mind is Dyed by Your Thoughts** Whatever you repeatedly imagine, that's what your mind will become, because the soul takes on the color of its thoughts. So, dye your soul by constantly soaking it in thoughts like these: For instance, "Where it's possible to live, it's also possible to live *well*." "But it's possible to live in a palace." "Therefore, it's possible to live *well* in a palace." Or again: "A creature is made *for* the sake of that purpose for which it was created." "And whatever it was made for, that's what it naturally moves *towards*." "And what it moves towards, that's its ultimate *end*." "And where its end is, that's where its advantage and *good* lie." "Therefore, fellowship (community, social cooperation) is the good of a rational creature." We proved long ago we're born for fellowship, right? Wasn't it obvious that inferior creatures exist for the sake of superior ones, and superior ones exist for each other? But animate beings are superior to inanimate, and rational beings are superior to merely animate ones.
17. **Chasing the Impossible is Nuts** Trying to achieve the impossible is madness. But it *is* impossible for bad people *not* to do the kind of bad things they do. Expecting otherwise is the madness.
18. **What Doesn't Break Others Shouldn't Break You** Nothing happens to anything which that thing isn't naturally equipped to bear. The same challenging experience happens to someone else, and they stay calm and unharmed – either because they don't realize its 'severity' or because they show great character (greatness of soul). Isn't it weird if ignorance and simple acceptance turn out to be stronger than wisdom? (Think about that.)
19. **Things Don't Touch the Soul** External things, as such, don't touch the soul at all. They can't get access to it, can't turn it, can't move it. The soul *alone* turns and moves itself. And it makes whatever external data it receives conform to the judgments it deems itself worthy of.
20. **People: Help 'Em, Endure 'Em, Work Around 'Em** In one sense, other people are the closest things to us – we *must* do them good and tolerate them. But, insofar as they become obstacles to my specific duties or actions, they become as indifferent to me as the sun, the wind, or a wild animal. Yes, these things might *hinder* a specific action, but they can't hinder my underlying *impulse* and *disposition*, because I have the power of 'reservation' (Plan B thinking) and 'adaptation'. My understanding can adapt and reshape any obstacle to serve its purpose. A hindrance to a specific task can become a *help* (by testing virtue), an obstacle on one path can become a *furtherance* (by forcing a better path).
21. **Respect the Boss (Universal & Internal)** Revere the ultimate power in the Universe – the thing that uses all and directs all. Likewise, revere the governing power *in yourself*. It's the same kind of power. Because in you too, this is the faculty that uses everything else, and your way of living is directed by it.

22. **City Not Harmed? Citizen Not Harmed.** Whenever you imagine you've been injured, apply this rule: "If the community (city/polis) isn't harmed by this, then neither am I truly injured." But if the community *is* harmed, don't just get angry. Calmly point out to the person causing the harm what they've failed to see (their error).
23. **Everything Flows Away** Repeatedly reflect on how fast things that *are* pass by and depart, and how fast things that *come to be* also pass by. Substance is like a constantly flowing river. Actions are in continuous change. Causes have infinite variations. Hardly anything stands still, even what seems close. Think also about the infinite abyss of past and future time, where everything vanishes. So, isn't he a fool who gets puffed up, stressed out, or complains bitterly about things in this fleeting reality, as if he were stuck in some long-lasting, troublesome situation?
24. **Your Tiny Slice of Everything** Call to mind the entirety of Substance (all matter/existence), of which you possess a tiny fragment. Call to mind the entirety of Time, of which a brief, measured span has been assigned to you. Call to mind the Chain of Causation (Fate/Destiny), of which you are just one small link.
25. **He Screws Up? His Problem.** Someone else does wrong. What's that to me? Let him worry about it. He has his own disposition, his own actions. I have right *now* what Universal Nature wills me to have, and I am doing right *now* what my own nature wills me to do.
26. **Mind Over Matter (Literally)** Make sure the governing, sovereign part of your soul isn't diverted by the sensations (smooth or rough) happening in your flesh. Don't let your mind blend with those sensations. Keep itself separate, limit those feelings to the bodily parts. But when those sensations *do* inevitably get communicated to the understanding (because body and mind are linked), don't try to *resist* the sensation itself (it's natural). However, the governing part must *not* add its own judgment that the sensation is inherently 'good' or 'bad'.
27. **Live With the Gods (By Living Right)** "Live with the gods." How? By constantly showing them your soul is satisfied with its assigned lot and is doing what the *daimon* (the inner deity, the fragment of Zeus given to guide each person) wills. And that *daimon* is each person's own Mind and Reason.
28. **Dealing With Stinky People (Literally & Figuratively)** Are you pissed off at the guy who has bad breath or body odor? What good will getting angry do? He has a foul mouth, foul armpits – it's a necessary consequence of certain causes. "Okay, but the guy has reason! If he thought about it, he could understand why he's offensive!" Bless your heart! And *you* have reason too! Let your rational disposition engage *his* rational disposition. Point it out, remind him gently. If he listens, you'll cure the issue, and anger becomes pointless. You're not here to be a drama queen or a prostitute (reacting emotionally for effect or gain).
29. **Live Right Here, Or Leave Calmly** The way you intend to live when you eventually 'depart' (die)? That's how you *can* live right here, right now. If circumstances (or people) genuinely don't allow you to live according to your principles? Fine, then exit life. But do it calmly, as if you're suffering no great evil. "The chimney's smoking, so I leave the room." Why make a huge drama out of it? But as long as no such compelling reason forces me out, I remain a free citizen here, and nobody can stop me from acting as I will. And I will what aligns with the nature of a rational and social creature.
30. **The Universe is Social** The Mind of the Whole is inherently social. It definitely made inferior things for the sake of superior things, and it connected the superior things to each other. See how it has subordinated, coordinated, assigned each thing its proper due, and brought the ruling creatures (rational beings) into agreement with each other?
31. **Life Review: How'd You Do?** How have you conducted yourself so far towards: gods, parents, siblings, spouse, children, bosses, teachers, friends, relatives, servants? Has your track record with everyone up till now basically been: "Never intentionally harmed anyone or said anything unjust"? Remind yourself what kinds of challenges you've been through and what you've had the strength to endure. Realize that the story of your life is already largely written, your service mostly rendered. How many beautiful things have you witnessed? How many pleasures and pains have you looked down upon (mastered)? How many ambitions have you ignored? How many unkind people have you treated with kindness?
32. **Who Truly Knows?** Why do ignorant and unlearned people confuse men of real knowledge and learning? What kind of soul *has* knowledge and learning? The soul that knows the beginning and the end, and understands the Reason (Logos) that permeates all substance and governs the entire Universe through all eternity according to fixed cycles.

33. **Ashes, Echoes, and What Matters** In such a short time: ashes or a skeleton. Maybe a name, maybe not even that. If a name, just a sound, an echo. Everything prized in life? Empty, rotten, petty. Like puppies snapping at each other. Like little kids quarreling, laughing one minute, crying the next. And Faith, Self-Respect, Justice, and Truth? They've "fled to Olympus from the spacious earth." (Quoting Hesiod). So, what's left to keep you here? The physical world is constantly changing, never stable. Your senses are blurry, easily deceived. The soul itself is just an exhalation from blood. And a good reputation in these conditions? Vanity. What then? Wait peacefully – either for extinction or for transformation. Until that time comes, what's sufficient? What else but to worship and bless the gods, do good to fellow humans, bear with them patiently, and practice self-restraint? And as for everything that lies within the limits of mere flesh and breath – remember it's not truly yours and not in your ultimate control.
34. **Favorable Tides Through Right Action** You can *always* have a favorable tide (good fortune) if you can take the right path – that is, if you can consistently conceive thoughts and perform actions with rectitude (correctness/justice). Two things are common to the soul of God and the soul of man (and every rational creature): 1) Not being hindered by anything external (in terms of inner freedom). 2) Finding one's good in righteous disposition and action, and limiting one's desire to achieving that.
35. **Is the Universe Harmed?** If this event isn't an evil *caused by me* or an action *resulting from my own evil*, and if the Universe as a whole isn't injured by it, then why am I troubled? And what injury *is* there to the Universe anyway? (Hint: None that affects its fundamental nature).
36. **Help Appropriately, Don't Catch the Drama** Don't get swept away by surface appearances (imagination). Help people as best you can and as they deserve, even if their loss is just about 'indifferent' things (money, status, possessions). However, *do not* internalize the idea that this loss is a real *injury* to them (or you). That habit of thinking is bad. Be like the old man in the story: when he left, he'd ask for his foster child's toy top back, but he never forgot it was *just a toy top*. Act like that here too. So, you're up there lamenting dramatically (like on a stage)? Friend, have you forgotten what these external things are truly worth? "I know," someone says, "but they meant so much *to them*!" Is *that* a reason for *you* to make a fool of yourself too by adopting their flawed judgment?
37. **Defining Good Fortune** Someone says, "There was a time I was Fortune's favorite, wherever she went, I benefited!" Yeah, okay. But being 'Fortune's favorite' properly means *assigning good fortune to yourself*. And real good fortune means: good inner dispositions, good impulses (motivations), and good actions. That's it. That's true luck, and it's self-generated.