



Summary of Meditations

Original book by Marcus Aurelius

Meditations, by Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, is one of the definitive texts on Stoicism. In *Meditations*, Aurelius shares his thoughts about the importance of logic over emotion and helps you to start training your mind to think rationally. By following Stoic teachings, you can live with purpose and die with dignity.

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1-Page Summary

Many scholars consider *Meditations*, written by the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, to be one of the definitive Stoic texts. Stoicism is a philosophy that originated in ancient Greece—its central idea is that **rational thinking can guide you through any hardship and allow you to endure any pain.**

Meditations covers a wide range of topics, but there are a few key points that it continually returns to and builds upon:

- Remember and obey *logos* (translated as reason, or rationality).
- See things for what they truly are.
- Recognize that outside forces can't hurt you.
- Gain perspective, and use it to understand your purpose.
- Remember that you'll die. That thought should be motivating, not frightening.

Remember and Obey *Logos*

Logos is the force that guides the universe. It ensures that every occurrence is the right one, as surely as if a scientist had measured every outcome and chosen the best possibility. Therefore, you should always act according to *logos*. **This one belief is the heart of Stoicism.**

Nature also follows *logos*. (In fact, it has to, because it lacks humans' ability to go against *logos*.) Therefore, whatever happens in the natural world must be the best possible thing that could happen. ***Logos*** ensures that you live on a healthy planet and that living creatures as a whole enjoy health and prosperity.

In spite of that, *individual* beings often suffer. This is because every organism exists to serve others, not to prevent its own suffering. Lower creatures exist for the benefit of higher ones; for example, plants are eaten by prey animals, which in turn are eaten by predators. Meanwhile, higher creatures (like ourselves) exist to support one another. Always remember that everything in the world is connected, just like those connections between different creatures. **All things exist in harmony with one another, and because of one another.**

With all of the above facts in mind, **accept that everything that happens to you is ordered by *logos*.** Consider each event—even events that seem negative, like illness or injury—as being prescribed by nature. Such events are no different from treatments prescribed by a doctor, so complaining about your own misfortunes hurts you just like refusing to take your medicine would.

See Things as They Are

You should always see things as they are: For example, a feast laid before you is nothing but dead plants and animals. Rich purple robes are simply sheep wool colored with shellfish blood. Making love is just rubbing organs together.

Likewise, as in the previous examples, you **should always be able to identify and define whatever you encounter.** Your observations should be reasonable and accurate, not based on emotional reactions or illogical superstitions. Furthermore, you should know what parts go into making the thing, what its purpose is, and how you should deal with it (or if you even need to).

Finally, you should know what gave rise to the thing or situation: for example, the will of the gods, random chance, or the actions of another person. In other words, before you respond to any thing or situation, you should make certain that you understand it clearly. **You should always proceed with logic, not emotion.**

When you observe things, always stop at your first impressions. For example, if a loved one is sick, that's all you need to consider—there's no reason to fret that he or she might die from the disease. If you simply accept events for what they are, rather than trying to figure out what they might *mean*, then you'll be at peace.

You should also appreciate the things that you have, but only for what they are; don't overvalue them. In other words, you shouldn't be so attached to your possessions that you're afraid to lose them.

Observe, Judge, and Adapt

You have access to Judgment and Adaptability. No matter what situation you might find yourself in, Judgment can see the truth of the matter. Then, Adaptability can figure out how best to make use of the situation. This is the essence of rationality.

Artistic works like music, paintings, dances, and so on can cause you to temporarily lose control of your reason and rationality. However, there's a simple technique that can prevent you from being swept away by such things: You can study each individual note of a song, or motion of a dance, or the smallest part of a painting you can observe. Then, for each tiny part, ask yourself whether *that* has any power over you—you'll find that it doesn't.

You can also apply that same technique to life as a whole. Looking at your entire lifetime might seem overwhelming, but **what power does any single moment have over you?**

Recognize That Outside Forces Can't Hurt You

You can endure any long-term pain, whether physical or emotional—unendurable pain, by definition, quickly ends itself.

If something damages the body, let the body worry about it. As you are a being of reason and *logos*, all that can truly hurt you is that which damages the mind, or prevents it from working properly. **The only thing that can hurt you is that which hurts your character.**

Similarly, **if you don't feel hurt, then you haven't been hurt.** Therefore, emotions like anger and grief are more harmful to you than whatever provoked them. If you decide to not be harmed, you won't be harmed.

For that reason, the thoughts and actions of other people can't harm you, either. In other words, what others do doesn't upset you—your *perception* of what others do upsets you.

That's not to say that people won't *try* to hurt you. They might even try to stop you from pursuing *logos*, which would indeed be damaging to your mind and character. However, obeying *logos* is natural and healthy, and nobody can stop you from doing what comes naturally to you.

Similarly, people can't stop you from tolerating them; from meeting their attacks with patience rather than anger. Growing angry with your fellow people would be as bad as giving up the pursuit of *logos* at their urging.

Reject Anger and Blame

Because others can't hurt you, it's possible to meet any mistake or misbehavior with compassion.

You can do this by remembering that others are also human, and that they act out of ignorance. Most importantly, remember that people who make mistakes usually haven't hurt you: They haven't damaged your mind nor your character.

When someone tries to hurt you, ask yourself why they've done so. What good (or harm) did he or she think it would do? If you find that the other person's sense of morality is close to your own, you must excuse what he or she did as a mistake. If it's not close to your morality, then you must conclude that the other person is misguided and deserves compassion rather than anger.

Blame is just as useless as anger. **Simply put, there's nobody to blame for anything**—the gods are infallible, and human wrongs are due to accident or ignorance.

When faced with someone else's mistake, remember that you've also made mistakes. Furthermore, you've probably avoided making some similar mistakes for bad reasons—such as fear of what others would think—rather than because your reason led you away from those mistakes. In other words, **you have the potential to make the same mistakes as the people you're upset with.**

For example, sometimes you get hurt while sparring. You don't get angry about that, blame your partner, or suddenly consider your partner a violent and untrustworthy person. You're simply more cautious when sparring with that person in the future. Bring that same mindset to other areas of your life: Forgive mistakes, and just be more cautious after one happens.

See Humanity as a Whole**When discussing people, consider them as if you were looking down from high above the world.**

Humankind exists as a harmonious collection of opposites: births and deaths, weddings and divorces, celebrations and mourning periods. When you accept the whole of humanity, with all of its diversity and apparent contradictions, you'll find that you're also much more tolerant of each individual member of humanity.

Given that humanity is such a collection of opposites, the world needs all different types of people. Therefore, when you run into somebody who's selfish, cruel, or dishonest, remind yourself that such people *must* exist, and that person just happens to be one of them.

Know That Perspective Brings Purpose

Always keep a sense of perspective. A tiny grape seed exists in infinite space. A single second exists as a part of eternity. Your body and your lifetime are no different from those things. You exist as a speck in infinity, as a moment in eternity, and—most importantly—as an individual in a community.

Because you exist as part of a much larger whole, whatever selfish desires you have are trivial. Therefore, instead of chasing your petty desires, you should accept whatever you're given with integrity and humility and work tirelessly for the common good. Your **purpose in life is to do good for others.**

You should help others without any thought of reward. Be like vines producing grapes, or bees storing honey: doing good almost unconsciously, simply because it's what you do.

If you ever feel reluctant to help others, remember that everything is connected through *logos*. **Therefore, in helping others you also help yourself.** How could you ever object to doing something that helps you?

Remember That Purpose Allows You to Live Well

To live in a consistent way, you must have a consistent goal. However, since individual people are so changeable, the only way to have a consistent goal is to work for the good of *all* people. By devoting your energy toward such a goal, you can be sure that you're always consistent in your thoughts and actions. In other words: You should never take action without a purpose, and that purpose should never be anything except the common good.

There are two steps to living a peaceful and purposeful life:

1. Don't worry. Remember, nature and *logos* control everything.
2. Stay focused on your tasks—and remember that your job is to be a good person, to do good things for others.

Remember Death, but Don't Fear It

You could die at any moment. That thought should guide your actions every day. Consider how long you've been putting off the things you mean to do and realize that your time to do those things is quickly running out.

Approach every task as if it's the last thing you'll ever do and the final thing you'll be remembered for. Spend every minute focused on what's in front of you, doing your work with sincerity and care.

However, this doesn't mean that you should fear death. Death is a natural and necessary process and there's no reason for a rational person to be afraid of it. You can be sure of this because the gods have given you the intelligence, skills, and tools that you need to avoid harm; therefore, if death were harmful, they would have given you a way to avoid it.

Furthermore, the gods and nature don't act randomly, letting good and bad things happen to good and bad people alike. However, everyone experiences life and death. Therefore, you must conclude that these things are neither good nor bad. They simply exist.

Don't Wish for a Long Life

Additionally, **there's no intrinsic benefit to living a longer life.** All that a person ever has is the present moment, and that moment is all that's lost upon death. If I were to live 50 years and you were to live 5,000 years, our lives would amount to the same thing: Collections of moments that fade to nothing once they're past.

Therefore, worrying about how long your body will endure is a waste of time and energy. Sooner or later each of us will die, and you should face this with quiet dignity, as you would face anything else in life. The question of *when* it happens is irrelevant.

Even the greatest human life is insignificant; peasants and emperors both blow away like smoke on the wind. Knowing that you're so unimportant, why should you worry about your life or your death? **To live your short life righteously, in accordance with nature and *logos*, is enough.**

Ease Your Passing

To take a different approach to facing death, you could ask yourself what it is about life that you're so desperate to cling to. Breathing? Feeling? Speaking? **You don't need those things, and the fear of losing them is an obstacle to following *logos*.**

It might also make death easier to face if you recognize that, no matter how good and righteous you've been in life, at least a few people will be happy to see you go. When you recognize that you'll be making others' lives easier by dying, you'll be less reluctant to do so.

If the fear of death creeps in, you can look at whatever you're doing at the moment and ask: Am I afraid because I won't be able to do *this thing* anymore? **By repeatedly examining what you think you're afraid of, you'll realize that there's nothing to fear.**

Take a Bow

As a closing thought, theater has a lot to teach about how to live and how to die:

- Tragic plays exist to remind you of what can and will eventually happen to you. If you enjoy watching tragic events in the theatre, they shouldn't upset you when they happen in real life.
- After Tragedy came Old Comedy, which taught equally valuable lessons in a different way—by speaking plainly, with a simple honesty that cuts through pretenses and false beliefs.
- Following Old Comedy came Middle and New Comedy. These forms only strive for technique; they have no messages behind them. The shows might be enjoyable, but what's the point of them? No one should seek to live like that—pleasantly but without purpose.

Finally, like the curtain coming down at the end of a play, death will eventually come for each of us. Actors don't get to choose how long a play is; the playwright made that decision long before they ever stepped on stage.

Therefore, like an actor bows and leaves the stage at her appointed time, **leave this world with humility and grace—the same grace that you received all throughout your life.**

Book 1: Dedications

Many scholars consider *Meditations*, written by the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, to be one of the definitive Stoic texts. Stoicism is a philosophy that originated in ancient Greece—its central idea is that **rational thinking can guide you through any hardship and allow you to endure any pain.**

Meditations covers a wide range of topics, but there are a few key points that it continually returns to and builds upon:

- Understanding that *logos*—reason—controls everything that happens in the world and ensures that whatever happens is for the best
- Being strict with yourself: Constantly focusing on your business and working to cultivate healthy and logical thoughts
- Being patient with others—their thoughts and actions aren't your responsibility, nor your problem. Therefore, there's no reason to become angry or upset with other people.
- Related to the last two points: your insignificance as an individual, and the importance of the larger community
- Facing hardship, pain, and death with rationality and grace

The first book of *Meditations* is devoted to important lessons that Aurelius learned from people in his life. These lessons are the foundation for the ideas he shares in the rest of the book.

(Shortform note: *Meditations* refers to its sections as books, rather than chapters.)

Giving Thanks

Aurelius begins his dedications by thanking his family for teaching him self-control, honesty, strength, and piety. Those principles are what will go on to guide the rest of this work.

Aurelius thanks his great-grandfather for encouraging him to hire private tutors instead of attending public schools, and for telling him to consider the costs as a good investment. Also on the topic of education, he thanks his first teacher for teaching him to do his work and mind his own business. He also thanks the teacher for training him to endure discomfort and not to be demanding.

Aurelius credits many of his other tutors as well. He thanks Diognetus for teaching him not to be fooled by charlatans or taken in by fads, as well as for encouraging him to practice philosophy and study hard. He recognizes Apollonius for teaching him independence and stoicism, and Sextus for teaching him kindness and humility. He thanks Fronto for teaching him to recognize that power corrupts the people who hold it. He thanks Alexander, a literary critic, for teaching him to always debate ideas instead of pouncing on people's phrasing or grammatical errors, and he thanks a different Alexander for encouraging him to be honest and to face his responsibilities.

Aurelius has lengthier praise for his teacher Rusticus. He credits Rusticus with training him to remain focused on important matters and not to be distracted by rhetoric or abstract questions. Furthermore, Rusticus taught him to write simple and straightforward letters and to avoid sermons, poetry, and speechifying. Finally, he thanks this teacher for encouraging him to read things thoroughly, rather than being satisfied with a quick skim to get the general ideas.

Giving Thanks to Friends and Family

Aurelius next thanks his friend Catulus for teaching him to always take his friends' anger seriously, even when he (Aurelius) doesn't think the anger is justified. He thanks another friend, Maximus, for the example he set: Maximus always displayed self-control, optimism, confidence, a sense of humor, and a positive attitude, even during difficult times.

Aurelius thanks his brother Severus for teaching him to love his family and the ideals of truth and justice. He credits Severus for giving him the idea of a society governed by just laws, ruled by people who respect their subjects' freedom above anything else.

He thanks his adopted father for teaching him to treat everyone fairly. His adopted father taught Aurelius to ignore titles and honors and to listen sincerely to anyone who had a contribution to make. The man was always at ease, and he put those around him at ease. He knew when to push someone on a subject, and when to back off.

Aurelius also thanks his adoptive father for being a good role model. He was a faithful friend and a steadfast ruler, neither obsequious nor arrogant. He was only concerned with doing what needed to be done and not with the praise he'd get for doing it—therefore, his public works spending was always reasonable. Finally, he was always sober and in control of himself. The man never overindulged, but he was still able to enjoy the pleasures of life.

Giving Thanks to the Gods

Aurelius's last dedication is to the gods. He thanks the gods for giving him such an excellent family and such good role models. He thanks them for the good fortune he's enjoyed throughout his life (and continues to enjoy) and for not making hard times worse than they were. He also thanks them—in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner—for not giving him any great talent at poetry or debate; if he'd been better at these frivolous pastimes, he might have wasted more of his life pursuing them.

Books 2-3: Examine Life and Death Rationally

Now that we've covered Aurelius's dedications, in Books 2-3 we'll begin introducing some key concepts of Stoicism. We'll start by discussing how to observe every object and event clearly and logically, without being distracted by popular beliefs about those things or the false importance that people create around them.

Then, we'll take our first look at the topic of death. **Facing death calmly and with dignity is a key aspect of Stoicism and is a subject that we'll return to several times throughout *Meditations*.** For now, though, we'll simply discuss how mortality can be motivational, rather than frightening.

See Things as They Are

You should always be able to identify and define whatever you encounter—every object, person, and situation. Your definitions should be reasonable and accurate, not based on emotional reactions or illogical superstitions.

Furthermore, you should know what parts go into making the thing in question, what its purpose is, and how you should deal with it (or if you even need to). Finally, you should know what brought you into contact with this thing: for example, the will of the gods, random chance, or the actions of another person.

In other words, before you react to anything, make certain that you understand it clearly. Always proceed with logic, not emotion.

Understand Yourself

You can even apply the principle of seeing things as they are to yourself and so come to understand yourself better. **You're made of flesh, spirit, and intelligence.** These are the things that come together to give you life, and when you die they merely separate again, with no harm done to any of them.

Of those three elements, the flesh is by far the least important. You shouldn't concern yourself with your physical body, which is nothing more than a messy tangle of blood and bone. Your body is just a vessel, and you'll throw it away when you're done with it.

The Stoics call spirit *pneuma*, and it's considered to be the "breath of life." Put simply, spirit is the force that animates you. However, although necessary, spirit is really nothing but air; and never the same air twice. You endlessly recycle your spirit as you inhale and exhale.

Intelligence, however, is by far the most important element of these three: You're ruled by your intelligence. In the end, the mind is all that matters—your mind is what you really are.

Remember That You'll Die

You could die at any moment. That thought should guide your actions every day. You should consider how long you've been putting off the things you mean to do, and realize that your time to do those things is quickly running out.

Approach every task as if it's the last thing you'll ever do and the final thing you'll be remembered for. Spend every minute focused on what's in front of you, doing your work with sincerity and care.

To remain focused, avoid distractions and throw away possessions that might distract you. For example, if someone finds himself drawn to frivolous books for entertainment, he should get rid of those books so he won't be tempted by them.

If you find yourself getting constantly distracted, make time to learn new things and enrich your life, rather than letting yourself get pulled every which way by passing fancies. **People who work without focus, who have no direction in life, are wasting their time even when working.**

Therefore, you must discipline your mind. Be in the habit of examining your thoughts and weeding out anything irrelevant to the task at hand. Additionally, always rid yourself of any thoughts that are selfish or malicious. **Your thoughts should be so straightforward and selfless that if someone asks what you're thinking about, you can answer immediately and honestly.**

Finally, a major distraction that everyone should forego is worrying about what others think or do. Examining other people is a waste of time and energy and will only bring you grief. **Instead, mind your own business and focus on yourself.** The one exception to this is when you're concerned about other people for the common good—for example, you should be concerned if someone's behaving recklessly and endangering those around them.

Decide How You'll Live Your Life

Consider the question: Will you follow *logos*, or do something else with your life? Make your decision clearly. **Make that decision only once, and stick to it for life.** Anything else is a waste of your limited time.

Someone who lives by *logos* doesn't get swept away by pleasure or pain. He has no concern for what others do or think. He keeps his composure no matter what happens to him, because he knows that worrying is both unnecessary and unhelpful.

If you find something better than living by this rational logic—the logic that drives you to honesty, discipline, courage, and justice—then it must be something really extraordinary. Embrace that better thing fully.

However, if you can't find something more important or more meaningful than *logos*, then there should be no room in your life for anything *but logos*.

Don't Fear Death

You should live with the knowledge that you'll eventually die and use that knowledge to stay focused on your work. **However, that doesn't mean that you should fear death.**

Death is a natural and necessary process, and there's no reason for a rational person to be afraid of it. You can be sure of this because the gods have given you the intelligence, skills, and tools that you need to avoid harm; therefore, if death were harmful, they would have given you a way to avoid it.

Furthermore, the gods and nature don't act randomly, letting good and bad things happen to good and bad people respectively. However, everyone experiences life and death—along with pleasure and pain, and success and failure—so you must conclude that these things are neither good nor bad. They simply exist. If death isn't bad, then there's no reason to be afraid of it.

Nobody knows what happens after death, but there's no reason to fear that, either. If you go on to another life, then that place must surely have gods as well. They won't allow any harm to come to you. If, however, there's nothing after death, then it means you'll be free of pleasures and pains; free of the

concerns of your failing body. Neither possibility should scare you.

Let Go of Longevity

As you contemplate the prospect of death, remember that there's no intrinsic benefit to living a longer life. All that a person ever has is the present moment, and that moment is all that's lost upon death.

If I were to live 50 years and you were to live 5,000 years, our lives would amount to the same thing: collections of moments that fade to nothing once they're past. Therefore, worrying about how long your body will be able to contain your spirit, or exactly when you'll die, is a waste of time and energy.

Furthermore, as you age, you may find that your faculties start slipping away. The older you get, the more likely you are to lose your reason and logic. Without a healthy mind, you can't properly determine what your duties are and how to make the most of your time. In other words, you can lose your ability to live *well*, even before you stop living. This is another reason why longevity isn't a boon.

In short, in each moment you should decide to do what's best for you, while you still can. By doing so, you'll make the most of whatever life you have, and won't be concerned about the length of that life.

Recognize What's Best for You

What's best for you is what benefits you, personally. **As we said before, what benefits you most is probably *logos*.** Living by *logos* and philosophy is what sets a good person apart from others.

Someone who calmly welcomes whatever fate brings, who clearly sees and understands each situation as it arises, and who lives simply, humbly, and cheerfully, is someone who lives a good life. When the end of that life comes, the person faces it with acceptance and serenity. Nothing could be more beneficial than that.

Finally, **any action that hurts others doesn't benefit you**—we're all connected through nature, so harming others will harm you as well. Thoughts that drive you to mean-spiritedness, hypocrisy, or deception are similarly damaging, because they affect your character.

Face Life and Death With Philosophy

Practicing philosophy is the key to living a simple, focused, and fulfilling life. Philosophy allows you to keep your soul pure, unaffected by good or bad times. It also ensures your integrity and keeps you honest.

Like a doctor keeps his instruments ready in case of emergencies, you should keep your philosophy ready to analyze and understand whatever situations arise in your life. Remember that you need to clearly understand something before you respond to it.

Keep in mind that spiritual practices (like philosophy) and physical practices are connected. You shouldn't take any actions that aren't in line with your philosophy—however, philosophy is useless if you don't act on it. Neither type of practice should exist without the other.

Finally, when the time comes, **philosophy will let you face death cheerfully.** Dying is just one more situation that you must analyze with philosophy and respond to accordingly.

Books 4-6: Reflect on Logos, Duty, and Suffering

Books 4-6 of *Meditations* reinforce some important concepts that we covered in the previous sections and introduce several new concepts. First, we'll discuss the importance of remembering *logos*. Next, we'll consider our duties in life; duties that arise from *logos*.

In this section, we'll also discuss how to avoid suffering using rationality. In short, we do this by observing the things that we think are hurting us and realizing that they're not actually dangerous.

Finally, we'll apply that same concept of avoiding suffering through rationality to interactions with other people. We can meet any insult or annoyance with patience and kindness, simply by recognizing that what others think and do isn't dangerous to us—in other words, it isn't our problem.

By following all of these guidelines, we can find peace in life—a concept we'll discuss at the end of this section.

Always Remember Logos

Logos ensures that every occurrence is the right one, as surely as if someone had measured every outcome and chosen the best possibility. **Therefore, you should always act according to *logos*.**

Nature also follows *logos*. (In fact, it has to, because it lacks humans' ability to go against *logos*.) **Therefore, whatever happens in the natural world must be the best possible thing that could happen. *Logos*** ensures that you live in a healthy world and that living creatures as a whole enjoy health and prosperity.

In spite of that fact, *individual* beings often suffer. This is because nature isn't selfish. Lower creatures exist for the benefit of higher ones; for example, plants are eaten by prey animals, which in turn are eaten by predators. Meanwhile, higher creatures (like ourselves) are meant to support one another. Everything is connected and related—**all things exist in harmony with one another and because of one another.**

With the above facts in mind, you can accept that everything that happens to you is ordered by *logos*. Consider each event—even events that seem negative, like illness or injury—as being prescribed by nature (which, remember, is driven by *logos*). Such things are no different from treatments prescribed by a doctor, and complaining about those misfortunes hurts you as surely as refusing to take your medicine would.

However, don't show off and gloat about your obedience to *logos*. Be secure and comfortable in your actions, knowing that you're doing what nature demands of you.

Finally, there will be times when you fail to remember *logos*. When that happens, don't get discouraged—instead, simply pick yourself up and continue with your work. Celebrate being human, including the flaws that come with humanity. Your own shortcomings are just more seemingly-negative events for you to accept.

Know Your Personal Nature

People who don't understand *logos* often celebrate their good fortunes or bemoan their bad fortunes. They don't realize that good fortune is something you create for yourself through good intentions, actions, and character. **In short, a good nature will lead to good fortune.**

As we've noted, *logos* drives nature, which determines everything that happens in the world. However, you

also have your own personal nature, which influences your actions as surely as the nature of the world does.

To understand your own nature, you must question yourself. Try to find out what kind of person inhabits your mind: a child? A tyrant? A predator, or prey? Once you know that, you'll better understand what your nature drives you to do.

If you're not pleased with what you find, you can work to change your nature. What you think about determines the condition of your mind—your soul reflects your thoughts. Therefore, focus on positive ideas, such as the knowledge that you can lead a good life no matter what your personal situation may be.

Do Your Duty

Your work—your duty—should be doing good for others. This is a crucial point and one which we can prove logically, as follows:

All humans have thought and reason. The reasoning that determines what you should and shouldn't do is shared between us all, and therefore we have a common, natural law (separate from any written laws). Having common laws makes us citizens of the same thing—to encompass all of humanity, that "thing" must be the world.

Therefore, as surely as you obey the laws of your own land and support your countrymen, you should obey the natural laws of *logos* that connect us and tell us to support one another. **This is your duty as a rational being.**

If you're not convinced, then consider this: You'll be nothing but bones and ashes soon. Since that's the case, whatever you might seek for yourself in your short life is empty and unimportant. **You might as well seek to work for the common good.**

Don't Pursue Fame

Many people seek fame and posterity. They long to be admired by people they'll never meet. This is a pointless endeavor—they might as well wish to be heroes to distant ancestors who died before they were born.

Fame is useless because everyone who remembers you will die. Even if they tell their friends or children about you, eventually those people will also die. Sooner or later, there will be no memory of you in the world. Entire civilizations now lie dead and forgotten.

Even if your memory *could* live forever, what good would it do you? In life, praise does nothing except make you feel slightly more comfortable. After you die, it has no meaning at all.

Don't Pursue Wealth

Similarly, pursuing wealth and material possessions is pointless. Consider the traditional meaning of "goods"—which is to say, possessions. Should you really accept that as the definition of goods? What "good" does wealth do for your mind, your soul?

None at all; material objects have no effect on your soul, because there's no way for a physical object to reach a soul. Souls act for themselves—they observe the world and interpret it as they see fit.

Now, consider things such as courage, discipline, justice, and so on. Those are things that you could actually

say are good, because they *do* benefit your soul.

Only Pursue a Good Life

Therefore, you shouldn't work for material goods, but only for a good life. You can pursue such a life through selfless actions and honesty, and through a commitment to following *logos* by accepting whatever happens as right and necessary.

You should help others without any thought of reward. You should be like a vine producing grapes, or a bee storing honey—doing good in the world simply because it's what you do.

Your only concern should be living well: being patient with others, being strict with yourself, and always remembering to honor the gods and *logos*. (We'll discuss these concepts further in Books 7-9.)

Love Yourself, Your Nature, and Your Work

You may sometimes find it hard to get out of bed in the morning. **This kind of laziness comes from a lack of love for yourself, and for your own nature.** People doing what they love—that is, following their natures—will become so obsessed that they forget to eat and bathe. They'll rest only when they absolutely must and rise again as soon as they're able to.

With that in mind, if you find laziness creeping in, you must ask why you love yourself—your nature—less than artists love their art, or less than misers love money. Those others tirelessly pursue their passions; you should have no less passion for your own work.

Recognize That Others Can't Hurt You

Note that there will be times when others try to stand in the way of your duty to help others and remember *logos*. In doing so, they'll try to hurt you (because *not* following *logos* and doing your duty is harmful to you and others). However, those people are irrelevant—they might be able to temporarily impede your actions, but it's impossible to impede your intentions.

Never compromise with those who try to take you away from *logos*. Consider how professionals can meet laypeople at a sort of halfway point: They can discuss what they do in simple terms, without compromising the sense of importance their craft has or their own pride in it. You should feel no less responsibility to your own *logos*—share it with those who would listen, but never compromise your ideals just to make them more palatable.

Ultimately, people who stand in your way can't hurt you: The only thing that can hurt you is that which hurts your character. Therefore, others' thoughts and actions can't harm you; only your own reactions to them can. If you decide not to be harmed, you won't be harmed. If you don't *feel* hurt, then you haven't been hurt. **All that matters is what your mind is doing at the present moment.**

Finally, if someone else has tried to hurt you, that's his problem and not yours. Remember: What happens to you is prescribed by nature, and how you respond is prescribed by your personal nature. In the same vein, what the other person did was dictated by his own nature—those actions reflect upon him, not upon you.

Don't think that any particular event, such as someone trying to hurt you, was unfortunate—rather, you should feel fortunate you weren't harmed by it.

Take Shelter In Your Community

We exist as part of a larger community. Something that doesn't harm the community as a whole can't harm individuals in that community—which is to say, you. Therefore, if you think you've been injured or hurt in some way, you can ask yourself whether your community has been damaged. **If not, then neither were you.**

However, even if the community *was* damaged, don't respond with anger. Instead, you should talk to the offender and show him what he did wrong. We'll explore the futility of anger in greater detail shortly.

Find Peace

There are many ways to find peace, and they all begin with rationality. A worried or troubled mind makes it hard to fulfill your duties and live well.

For example, perhaps you concern yourself with material goods or physical pleasures, and that concern takes away your peace of mind. There's an easy solution: By stripping away the legends and false importance around physical things, you can see that none of them are worth worrying about.

To that end, as we noted in Books 2-3, **always see things for what they really are:** For example, a sumptuous feast is nothing but dead plants and animals. Rich purple robes are simply sheep wool colored with shellfish blood. Making love is just rubbing organs together. Why should any of these things have any sway over your mind?

Similarly, what others think and do isn't worth worrying about; there's no reason to let anyone else disrupt your peace of mind. Instead, only concern yourself with what *you* think and do. Always consider whether your thoughts and actions in the present moment are fair and right.

Do Less, Do Your Duty, and Do Good Deeds

Another key to tranquility is to do less in life—to only do what's necessary. If you stop to think, you'll find that most of what you do and say isn't necessary. Many of your assumptions are unnecessary as well and lead to these unnecessary thoughts and actions.

These unnecessary thoughts and actions happen because it's difficult—often impossible—to make perfect sense of the world. Any determinations that you make are subject to change, because you are subject to change.

Note that while you should do less overall, **you should still stay focused on your duty, whatever it is that your nature drives you to do.** Love your work, and earn your living by doing it, if you can.

Doing good deeds with no concern for yourself will also bring you happiness and peace. Always do what needs doing, regardless of your own fatigue, pain, or illness. Furthermore, never assume that something's impossible because you find it hard at the moment. If something can be done by humans, then you can do it.

Reject Anger

Another important facet of finding peace is rejecting anger. **Anger is never helpful.** Imagine that someone asked how to spell your name. Would you respond by getting riled up and shouting the letters at him? That wouldn't help him to understand what you said and would likely provoke anger in return. Instead, you'd do the rational thing: Simply tell him how your name is spelled.

Any task can be broken down into steps, just like a name can be broken down into letters. Therefore, you

can approach every situation methodically and patiently, without anger.

When dealing with animals, objects, and situations, be patient and straightforward; anger won't help you to handle any of them. Remember that you're a rational being, and those things are not.

Getting angry at another person's misbehavior is equally pointless. **Remember, *logos* drives you to seek what you think is best for you.** Therefore, if someone misbehaves, it's because he's mistaken about what's best. It then becomes your job to show him how and why he's wrong, if you can—simply losing your temper won't solve anything.

If you *do* ever get angry, it's because you've forgotten two key points:

1. Nature ordains everything that happens.
2. You aren't responsible for what others do.

Reject Blame

Blame is just as useless as anger and will also disturb your peace. **Simply put, there's nobody to blame for anything**—the gods are infallible, and human wrongs are due to accident or ignorance.

When faced with someone else's mistake, remember that you've also made mistakes. Furthermore, you've probably avoided similar mistakes to those the other person has made for bad reasons—such as fear of what others would think—rather than because your reason led you away from those mistakes. In other words, **you have the potential to make the same mistakes as the people you're upset with.**

For example, sometimes you get hurt while sparring. You don't get angry about that, blame your partner, or suddenly consider your partner a violent and untrustworthy person. You're simply more cautious when sparring with that person in the future. Bring that same mindset to other areas of your life: Forgive mistakes and just be more cautious after one happens.

Also, just like you can forgive mistakes, you can meet any bad behavior with compassion. **All you have to do is remember a time when you behaved that way yourself.** What compelled you to act in such a way?

Now, realize that this other person is also under some kind of compulsion. If possible, remove that compulsion and thereby fix the behavior. If that's not possible, simply accept the behavior for what it is.

Final Thoughts on Serenity

You must have faith that there are order and a plan driving the world—that faith will bring you serenity. Nature is obedient, and the *logos* that rules it can do no evil.

Whenever you're jarred out of your serenity, there are two constants that you can always take comfort in:

- Nothing can be done to you that isn't decreed by nature.
- No one can force you to do anything that goes against your personal nature.

Books 7-9: Manage Your Relationships to Live Well

In this section of the summary, we'll further discuss how you should relate to other people and how you should treat yourself. In short, you should be patient with others and strict with yourself. **You must constantly focus on self-improvement, with emphasis on the self.**

Remember that what others do is neither your problem nor your responsibility. Each of us is only responsible for our moment-to-moment thoughts and actions.

Being strict with yourself and patient with others will keep your mind clear and peaceful and allow you to live a good life. We'll discuss living well at the close of this section.

Be Strict With Yourself

There's a lot of meaningless activity in the world. You can see it in everything from people marching in parades, to the frenzied action when you throw a bit of food into a fish tank. You're surrounded by this pointless energy, and you must accept it without judgment. At the same time, you must also remember that your own value is determined by what you use *your* energy for. **Thus, you must be strict with yourself and how you behave.**

You always have the option to humbly accept what happens, to treat each person as he or she should be treated, and to carefully consider your thoughts. It takes discipline to do these things at all times and in all places, but doing so is crucial to developing your mind and your character.

One way you must be strict with yourself is in your use of Judgment and Adaptability. **Judgment and Adaptability are keys to rationality**, so use them at all times and in all places. No matter what situation you find yourself in, Judgment can see it for what it is. Once you understand the situation, Adaptability can figure out the best way to make use of it.

Likewise, be disciplined in how you react to problems. When things go wrong, external things and events are never the problem—**the problem is how you respond to them**. If you can fix things, then you should do so. If they're beyond your power, then they're not your problem. Either way, you can walk away satisfied, because you know that you've done all you can.

On the topic of satisfaction, **you can be satisfied as long as you're making progress at improving yourself**. Though you should always be critical of yourself and strive to improve your mind, don't waste energy worrying about perfection.

Don't Seek Out Pleasure

Another sense in which you must be strict with yourself is in your approach to pleasure. You have the innate ability to keep your soul free of lust, confusion, and all manner of evil things. For example, you were given self-control to counteract your desire for pleasure. However, you *weren't* given any virtue that counteracts your desire for justice—so, logically, **nature must mean for you to shun pleasure and seek justice**.

Another rational argument against pleasure-seeking: You feel remorse when you miss an opportunity for something that would have been to your benefit. However, for something to be truly beneficial, it must be a good thing—something that a *good* person would be concerned about. No good person would feel remorse over missing an opportunity for personal pleasure. Therefore, pleasure must not be beneficial or good.

Another type of pleasure that you might seek out is popularity, or approval. This is as useless as any other sort of pleasure. **We can be good people without anyone else noticing, or praising us for it.**

Ultimately, your life is short, so there's no time for leisure activities or pleasure-seeking of any kind. However, you always have time to overcome your concerns about pleasure and pain and to let go of ambition.

Don't Submit to Pain

A final way in which you must be strict with yourself is in your approach to pain. Remember that you can endure any long-term pain, whether physical or emotional—unendurable pain, by definition, quickly ends itself.

However, it's true that imagining living with that pain for your entire life can be overwhelming. Instead, you should focus on whatever situation is at hand—that is, ask yourself why *this moment* is so unbearable.

You'll often find that you have no good answer.

Also, pain frequently disguises itself as illness or tiredness. When you're suffering from such things, remind yourself not to give in to that pain, either.

You can sustain your clarity of thought through pain, fatigue, and sickness by remaining centered in rationality. If something damages the body, let the body worry about it. As you are a being of reason and *logos*, all that can truly damage you is that which damages the mind, or prevents it from working properly.

On that subject, never do anything to harm yourself—that is, to prevent your mind from working normally. After all, you'd never intentionally harm someone else, so why should you treat yourself any differently?

You might be tempted to ask why there's so much pain in the world; why you have to train your mind so much to move beyond it. **However, there's no sense in demanding to know why unpleasant things exist.** If a cucumber is bitter, you throw it away. If there are brambles in the path, you go around them. In short, you deal with the problem and go on about your life, and that's exactly what you must do with anything that causes you pain.

Have Compassion for Others

Now that we've discussed how to treat yourself, let's look at how you should treat other people.

As a human, you have the unique ability to love people even when they make mistakes. You can do this by remembering that others are also human, and that they act out of ignorance. Most importantly, remember that people who make mistakes usually haven't hurt you: They haven't damaged your character nor your community.

When someone tries to hurt you, ask yourself why. What good (or harm) did he or she think it would do? If you find that the other person's sense of morality is close to your own, you must excuse what he or she did. If not, you must conclude that the other person is misguided and deserves compassion rather than anger.

When you deal with people, you should always ask yourself what that person considers to be good and bad. If you understand someone's morality, then that person's actions can never surprise you. In fact, each person has no real choice but to take the actions prescribed by his or her morality and nature. Therefore, a person's actions shouldn't surprise you any more than a fig tree producing figs.

Furthermore, when discussing people, consider them as if you were looking down from high above the world. Humankind exists as a harmonious collection of opposites: births and deaths, weddings and divorces, celebrations and mourning periods. When you accept the whole of humanity, with all of its diversity and apparent contradictions, you'll find that you're also much more tolerant of each individual member of humanity.

Given that humanity is such a collection of opposites, the world needs all different types of people. Therefore, when you run into somebody who's selfish, cruel, or dishonest, remind yourself that such people *must* exist.

Remember that, for every defect in humanity, you have a positive quality to counter it. For example, you can meet an unkind person with kindness.

Give and Receive Help Willingly

Knowing and acknowledging when you need help is part of being strict with yourself—it means letting go of pride. Similarly, knowing when and how to help others is a key part of compassion.

When faced with a task, you should honestly consider whether you're up to it. If so, then you should do the task immediately and without complaint. If not, then you should turn it over to someone better suited. However, if you're not up to the task and there's no one else who can do it, then you must simply do the best you can.

If you do find yourself stuck with a difficult task, there's no shame in asking for help with it. Like a wounded soldier who needs help to climb over a wall, there will be times when you find your abilities insufficient.

This guideline applies to intellectual matters, as well. Sometimes you'll need help understanding something, or you'll realize that you've made a mistake. Remember that you're always free to change your mind and accept corrections—this is another form of accepting help.

When it comes to helping others, you should remember that everything is connected through *logos*. Therefore, in helping others you also help yourself. How could you ever object to doing something that helps you?

When helping others, choose your words and tone carefully. You must speak plainly and accurately and not come across as overbearing.

Live Well

In this final section of the chapter, we'll discuss how to live well. To begin, you can follow two simple principles to ensure that you live a good life:

Principle #1: Stay focused on your tasks, and remember that your job is always to be a good person who helps others.

Principle #2: Don't think about running away from anxiety or other unpleasant feelings—they're inside you, and you can't run from them. Instead, think of throwing those feelings away. The shift in perspective is helpful.

Someone who's living well will be consistent in his or her thoughts and actions. However, **to live in a consistent way, one must have a consistent goal.** Since individual people are naturally changeable, the only way to have a consistent goal is to work for the good of *all* people.

Ultimately, it doesn't take much to live happily. Even if you've given up on your dreams of being a great scientist or philosopher, you should never give up on helping others, serving the gods, and seeking inner freedom.

Let Go of Anxiety

Anxiety prevents you from living a good and peaceful life: Therefore, you need ways to let go of your anxiety. Here are some ways to do that.

First, consider this: **Either all things are driven by logos, or everything is completely random.** If the former is true, then everything can and must work out for the best. If the latter is true, then what you do can't possibly matter—there's no way you can control events to make them better or worse. Either thought should bring you peace.

Second, **always stop at your first impressions.** If a loved one is sick, that's all you need to consider. There's no reason to fret that he or she might die from the disease. If you simply accept events for what they are, rather than trying to figure out what they might *mean*, then you'll be at peace.

Third, **appreciate the things you have, but don't overvalue them.** In other words, don't be so attached to your possessions that you're afraid to lose them. As for things you don't yet possess, those might as well not exist—there's no sense in worrying about them either.

If anxiety does creep in, soothe yourself with prayer. **Prayers won't change the world, but they may be able to change you.** For example, instead of praying for something you want, you can pray to stop wanting it. Instead of praying that your loved ones will be safe, you can pray to be free of fear and worry for them.

Finally, understand that you only have three options at any given moment:

1. To continue living, which you're already used to
2. To end your life by choice
3. To die naturally, having fulfilled your duties

The fact that you always have those options—and only those options—is a good reason to be optimistic rather than worrisome. None of the options are harmful, and choosing the right one at any given moment should be easy. That's all you ever have to do.

Follow Nature and Logos

By definition, obeying the laws of nature and *logos* will ensure that you live a good life. However, many people don't do this.

There are several ways that you can go against nature and logos: Fighting against what happens to you naturally, separating yourself from your community, and acting selfishly all take you away from your natural state.

Going against *logos* and nature is a form of blasphemy. To resist nature is to resist the will of the gods. This type of blasphemy may appear as injustice, selfishness, or lying. Nature doesn't intend for those things to happen—remember, as a higher being, you exist to serve others.

Pursuing pleasure is another type of blasphemy, because it will lead you to selfish behavior and wrongdoing. Running from pain is similarly blasphemous, because doing so means that you fear nature and hate the perfect creations of *logos*.

When you're separated from *logos* and nature, you become like a severed limb—disconnected from the body, and therefore useless. However, you have one advantage over severed limbs: **You can reattach yourself by renewing your devotion to *logos*.**

Seek Out Teachers

Learning to read and write requires a teacher. **So does learning to live well.** Here are several possibilities to consider when choosing who might teach you to live well:

Epicurean writings suggest that you choose someone from the past who lived a good and virtuous life and use him or her as a role model—before you take action in any situation, think about what that person would do.

You could choose the Spartans as your teachers. They set a fine example at festivals by ensuring that their guests' seats were in the shade, but sitting themselves wherever there was space. In other words, they were generous to others and sparing with their personal comforts.

Pythagoreans suggest that you observe the stars. Stars do the exact same things each night, always in the exact same way. Stars are orderly and pure—they simply are what they are, and they never try to conceal their natures. You can aspire to those same qualities.

Another option is to learn from Socrates, who once said that popular beliefs are like monsters under the bed—only good for scaring small children. You can find that lesson, and many others, in the stories about him.

Exercise: Develop Compassion

Developing compassion for people who have wronged you is a difficult, but important task. Take a moment to think about someone you currently dislike and consider how you can feel compassion for them. While answering the questions, remember that the only things that can really hurt you are those that damage either your character or your community.

Describe someone who you dislike. Why do you dislike him or her? What has this person said or done that's *truly* hurt you?

What's one strategy that might help you feel more compassionate toward that person (for instance, can you think of a time when you've made a similar mistake, and remember what drove you to do it)? Why do you think that particular strategy will be effective?

Books 10-12: Live and Die With Dignity

In this final section of *Meditations*, we'll tie together the various concepts we've been discussing. We'll discuss how you can use reason—*logos*—to hone your mind and control your thoughts. **When your mind is strictly controlled, you'll never suffer from anxiety nor anger.**

Then, we'll discuss how, through rational thought, you can develop a sense of perspective. Seeing yourself as a tiny part of an infinite universe helps you realize how insignificant you really are and therefore how important it is that you work toward the common good instead of your own selfish ends.

Finally, we'll return to the topic of death one last time. **With your mind honed and calmed by Stoicism, you can face the end of life with dignity and grace.**

Cultivate a Strong and Healthy Mind

A healthy mind is like a perfect sphere in perfect stillness. It doesn't reach outward or retreat inward; instead, it simply exists and observes. By focusing only on your own thoughts, and only on the present moment, you can shape yourself into that sphere.

There are several characteristics of a strong and healthy mind, and you should always strive to uphold them:

- Sanity—that is, seeing and understanding every individual thing for what it truly is, not getting lost in stories and superstitions.
- Cooperation—willingly accepting whatever nature gives you, moment to moment.
- Disinterest—a lack of self-interest, or in other words, selflessness. You should always be driven by reason and intelligence, not self-centered desires or fears.

Furthermore, just like healthy eyes can see what's in front of them without straining or being overwhelmed, and a healthy stomach can digest whatever's put into it, **a healthy mind should be calm and prepared for anything.**

If and when the time comes that you're unable to uphold these characteristics—perhaps due to age, illness, or some other form of deterioration—you'll know that it's time to pass from this life. **Continuing to live without being able to follow *logos* will only harm you and those around you.** Therefore, you can depart with peace and satisfaction, knowing that you've done all the good you could do.

Train Your Mind

In his writings, Socrates asks whether you'd prefer a rational, healthy mind or an irrational, unhealthy one. Naturally, you'd want the former.

He then says that you have to work to achieve such a mind. Now, you might protest that you've already done that work. However, if you're already so rational, then why are you wasting time arguing? Truly rational people would just go about their business, with no concern for what others think or do. Thus, by claiming that your work is done, you prove that you have more work to do. **You need to train your mind.**

In training your mind to be strong and healthy, you should be like a boxer, not a fencer. A fencer can put down his tool and must pick it up again to use it. A boxer's tools are parts of him, ready to be used at any time. **Similarly, your rationality and philosophy must be readily available whenever you need them.**

Exercise your mind constantly. One exercise is to think about how each thing around you has changed, and is changing: What was it before? What will it become in the future? A related exercise is to try to understand the force that drives these changes. For example, there's an unseen force that turns an egg into a chicken, or food into strength and life. What exactly are those forces?

To further strengthen your mind, practice things that seem impossible. The left hand tends to be weaker and clumsier than the right because you don't practice with it. However, there will be things that it does better than the right hand also because of practice. You can develop the weak areas of your mind in the same way.

Recognize Unhealthy Thoughts

Part of training a healthy mind is recognizing unhealthy thoughts and working to overcome them. For instance, **an anxious mind is an unhealthy mind**. Generally, your anxieties come from pursuing some things and trying to avoid others. However, these things you're worrying about aren't seeking you out—all the effort of chasing or avoiding them comes from you. Therefore, stop worrying and simply let those things be. You'll find that you don't *have* to pursue them or run away from them.

On that same note, don't pursue other people's admiration or shy away from their scorn; such things should have no power over you. In pursuing these things, **you love yourself more than you love other people, yet you value others' opinions over your own**. That isn't rational.

You also shouldn't be awed by other people, no matter how powerful or famous they are. The gods see all of us for who we really are—they aren't distracted by our physical bodies, our possessions, or our fame. **You can learn to do the same and thus stop being unsettled by others' appearance, wealth, or celebrity**. Those things are no more upsetting than a set on a stage or a costume in a closet.

Finally, to help stave off anxiety in awkward or uncomfortable situations, just remember Socrates going out in public wearing only a towel.

(Shortform note: Aurelius is referring to an anecdote that would have been well known in his time. Socrates's wife Xanthippe had borrowed his cloak and gone out, so Socrates went out in his underwear. Socrates (who was a Stoic like Aurelius) wasn't embarrassed or anxious about his situation. He believed that physical concerns like covering his body weren't important, and he wasn't worried about what others would think of him.)

Control Your Thoughts

A healthy mind is one whose thoughts are strictly controlled. As a rational being, you're uniquely able to gain that sort of control. Your characteristics as a rational being are:

- Self-awareness
- Self-reflection
- The ability to change
- Observation
- Understanding
- Honesty
- Humility

As a result of these characteristics, you can always take a moment to observe your thoughts before you express them. **This means you can learn to recognize unhealthy thoughts and dismiss them**. Here are several types of thought to avoid expressing:

- Unhelpful thoughts
- Harmful thoughts
- Thoughts that don't match your true beliefs
- Thoughts that stem from physical wants and self-indulgence

Don't Lose Control

Music, art, dancing, and so on can cause you to temporarily lose control of your thoughts. However, there's a simple technique that can prevent you from being swept away by such things.

Study each individual note of a song, or each movement of a dance, or the smallest parts of a painting you can observe. Then, for each tiny part, ask yourself whether *that* has any power over you. You can also apply that same technique to life as a whole. **What power does any individual moment have over you?**

Control Your Actions

Just as you should observe your thoughts before you express them, you should consider your actions before you perform them.

All actions deserve the question, "why is that person doing that?" **Your own actions deserve that question most of all.** Here's a train of thought to follow when deciding what to do in any situation:

1. What does nature want me to do?
2. Would doing that go against *my* nature as a living being?
3. If so, what does my nature as a living being want me to do?
4. Would that go against my higher nature, that of a rational being? (We must remember here that rational beings exist to help one another.)
5. If so, what action can I take that satisfies my rational nature?

In short: At each moment, consider what you can do or say that is most in line with nature—nature as a whole and your own personal nature. Then do or say it.

Finally, stop pretending that anything in the world can stop you from doing what nature demands. **Nothing can impede you except yourself.**

Embrace Nature and Fate

People who fight against nature are like pigs who kick and squeal on their way to the slaughter. Everything must submit to nature—but as a rational being, you can choose to do so voluntarily. True freedom is the ability to do only what the world wants and to accept whatever it gives you. **That frees you from selfish desires and anxieties.**

Live naturally, as if you were alone in the wilderness. Follow nature, follow *logos*, and remember that the whole world is your home. In order to do this, forget about the past, leave the future up to *logos*, and do your work in the present.

If others can't stand to see you living that way, then let them kill you like they killed Socrates—that would be better than living unnaturally.

Nature provides for you and takes away from you. Simple logic tells you that you should submit to this fact humbly and happily—as we've noted, resisting nature is futile. For example, don't expect figs in the middle

of winter, or children in your old age, because nature hasn't decreed those things.

Call it nature or call it fate, whatever happens to you has been waiting to happen since time began. **Be excited to help nature create what's yet to come.** All you need is what nature chooses to give you, at the time when nature chooses to give it.

Remember We're Each a Tiny Part of the Whole

To understand your place in nature, develop a sense of perspective. A tiny grape seed exists in infinite space. A single moment exists as a part of eternity. Your body and your lifetime are no different from those things.

When you realize how tiny you are compared to the universe, and how short-lived you are compared to eternity, you'll start to understand your own insignificance.

However, that's not meant to be discouraging—rather, **it should spur you to work for the common good, instead of your own inconsequential desires.**

Meet the End With Grace

Perhaps you admire the great heroes and emperors of the past. However, you must ask yourself: Where are those people now? The answer is that they're nowhere—they're gone, long since changed into something else by nature and time.

Even the greatest human life is insignificant; it blows away like smoke on the wind. Knowing that, why should you worry about life and death? **To live your short life righteously, in accordance with nature and *logos*, is enough.**

Remember: You're a mortal being, and your destruction—or rather, transformation—is unavoidable. If that transformation caused any harm to the parts of the world (such as people), it would cause harm to the world itself; it would be like a machine grinding its gears. It would be impossible for nature and the world to run smoothly under such circumstances. **Therefore, death must not be harmful.**

Furthermore, the gods would not have created such a fine world, yet overlooked the fact that people—even those whom the gods love most—would disappear forever upon death. Therefore, either there is something beyond death, or there's a good reason why you'll cease to exist. Either thought should be comforting.

A side note: People ask what evidence there is that the gods exist when nobody has ever seen them. However, the whole world is evidence. You experience the gods' work every moment of every day, just like you experience your own consciousness—you've never seen your mind either, but you know it exists.

Ease Your Passing

To take a different approach to facing death, ask yourself what it is about life that you're so desperate to cling to. Breathing? Feeling? Speaking? **You don't need those things, and the fear of losing them is an obstacle to following *logos*.**

It might also make death easier to face if you recognize that, no matter how good and righteous you've been in life, at least a few people will be happy to see you go. When you recognize that you'll be making others' lives easier by dying, you'll be less reluctant to do so.

If the fear of death creeps in, look at whatever you're doing at the moment and ask: Am I afraid because I won't be able to do *this thing* anymore? **By repeatedly examining what you think you're afraid of, you'll realize that there's nothing to fear.**

Take a Bow

As a closing thought, theater has a lot to teach about how to live and how to die:

- Tragic plays exist to remind you of what can and will eventually happen to you. If you enjoy watching tragic events in the theatre, they shouldn't upset you when they happen in real life.
- After Tragedy came Old Comedy, which taught equally valuable lessons in a different way—by speaking plainly, with a simple honesty that cuts through pretenses and false beliefs.
- Following Old Comedy came Middle and New Comedy. These forms only strive for technique; they have no messages behind them. The shows might be enjoyable, but what's the point of them? No one should seek to live like that—pleasantly but without purpose.

Finally, like the curtain coming down at the end of a play, death will eventually come for each of us. Actors don't get to choose how long a play is; the playwright made that decision long before they ever stepped on stage.

Therefore, like an actor bows and leaves the stage at her appointed time, **leave this world with humility and grace—the same grace that you received all throughout your life.**

Exercise: Train Your Mind

All of the goals of Stoicism begin with developing a strong, logical mind. To that end, try out one of Aurelius's recommended exercises for training the mind to be logical.

Begin by choosing one thing you can see (this could be an object or a living thing.) Describe what you've chosen to observe.

Where did that thing come from? In other words, what is it made of and how was it created?

What might this thing become in the future? After it decays, what will its parts go on to be?