

Stick with Your Own Business



Keep your attention focused entirely on what is truly your own concern, and be clear that what belongs to others is their business and none of yours. If you do this, you will be impervious to coercion and no one can ever hold you back. You will be truly free and effective, for your efforts will be put to good use and won't be foolishly squandered finding fault with or opposing others.

In knowing and attending to what actually concerns you, you cannot be made to do anything against your will; others can't hurt you, you don't incur enemies or suffer harm.

If you aim to live by such principles, remember that it won't be easy: you must give up some things entirely, and postpone others for now. You may well have to forego wealth and power if you want to assure the attainment of happiness and freedom.

Recognize Appearances for What They Really Are



From now on, practice saying to everything that appears unpleasant: "You are just an appearance and by no means what you appear to be." And then thoroughly consider the matter according to the principles just discussed, primarily: Does this appearance concern the things that are within my own control or those that are not? If it concerns anything outside your control, train yourself not to worry about it.

Desire Demands Its Own Attainment



Our desires and aversions are mercurial rulers. They demand to be pleased. Desire commands us to run off and get what we want. Aversion insists that we must avoid the things that repel us.

Typically, when we don't get what we want, we are disappointed, and when we get what we don't want, we are distressed.

If, then, you avoid only those undesirable things that are contrary to your natural well-being and are within your control, you won't ever incur anything you truly don't want. However, if you try to avoid inevitabilities such as sickness, death, or misfortune, over which you have no real control, you will make yourself and others around you suffer.

Desire and aversion, though powerful, are but habits. And we can train ourselves to have better habits. Restrain the habit of being repelled by all those things that aren't within your control, and focus instead on combating things within your power that are not good for you.

Do your best to rein in your desire. For if you desire something that isn't within your own control, disappointment will surely follow; meanwhile, you will be neglecting the very things that are within your control that are worthy of desire.

Of course, there are times when for practical reasons you must go after one thing or shun another, but do so with grace, finesse, and flexibility.

See Things for What They Are



Circumstances do not rise to meet our expectations. Events happen as they do. People behave as they are. Embrace what you actually get.

Open your eyes: See things for what they really are, thereby sparing yourself the pain of false attachments and avoidable devastation.

Think about what delights you—the tools on which you depend, the people whom you cherish. But remember that they have their own distinct character, which is quite a separate matter from how we happen to regard them.

As an exercise, consider the smallest things to which you are attached. For instance, suppose you have a favorite cup. It is, after all, merely a cup; so if it should break, you could cope. Next build up to things—or people—toward which your clinging feelings and thoughts intensify.

Remember, for example, when you embrace your child, your husband, your wife, you are embracing a mortal. Thus, if one of them should die, you could bear it with tranquility.

When something happens, the only thing in your power is your attitude toward it; you can either accept it or resent it.

What really frightens and dismays us is not external events themselves, but the way in which we think about them. It is not things that disturb us, but our interpretation of their significance.

Stop scaring yourself with impetuous notions, with your reactive impressions of the way things are!

Things and people are not what we wish them to be nor what they seem to be. They are what they are.

Harmonize Your Actions with the Way Life Is



Don't try to make your own rules.

Conduct yourself in all matters, grand and public or small and domestic, in accordance with the laws of nature. Harmonizing your will with nature should be your utmost ideal.

Where do you practice this ideal? In the particulars of your own daily life with its uniquely personal tasks and duties. When you carry out your tasks, such as taking a bath, do so—to the best of your ability—in harmony with nature. When you eat, do so—to the best of your ability—in harmony with nature, and so on.

It is not so much what you are doing as how you are doing it. When we properly understand and live by this principle, while difficulties will arise—for they are part of the divine order too—inner peace will still be possible.

Events Don't Hurt Us, But Our Views of Them Can



Things themselves don't hurt or hinder us. Nor do other people. How we view these things is another matter. It is our attitudes and reactions that give us trouble.

Therefore even death is no big deal in and of itself. It is our notion of death, our idea that it is terrible, that terrifies us. There are so many different ways to think about death. Scrutinize your notions about death—and everything else. Are they really true? Are they doing you any good? Don't dread death or pain; dread the fear of death or pain.

We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how we respond to them.

No Shame, No Blame



If it is our feelings about things that torment us rather than the things themselves, it follows that blaming others is silly. Therefore, when we suffer setbacks, disturbances, or grief, let us never place the blame on others, but on our own attitudes.

Small-minded people habitually reproach others for their own misfortunes. Average people reproach themselves. Those who are dedicated to a life of wisdom understand that the impulse to blame something or someone is foolishness, that there is nothing to be gained in blaming, whether it be others or oneself.

One of the signs of the dawning of moral progress is the gradual extinguishing of blame. We see the futility of finger-pointing. The more we examine our attitudes and work on ourselves, the less we are apt to be swept away by stormy emotional reactions in which we seek easy explanations for unbidden events.

Things simply are what they are. Other people think what they will think; it is of no concern to us. No Shame. No Blame.

Create Your Own Merit



Never depend on the admiration of others. There is no strength in it. Personal merit cannot be derived from an external source. It is not to be found in your personal associations, nor can it be found in the regard of other people. It is a fact of life that other people, even people who love you, will not necessarily agree with your ideas, understand you, or share your enthusiasms. Grow up! Who cares what other people think about you!

Create your *own* merit.

Personal merit cannot be achieved through our associations with people of excellence. You have been given your own work to do. Get to it right now, do your best at it, and don't be concerned with who is watching you.

Do your own useful work without regard to the honor or admiration your efforts might win from others. There is no such thing as vicarious merit.

Other people's triumphs and excellences belong to them. Likewise, your possessions may have excellence, but you yourself don't derive excellence from them.

Think about it: What is really your own? The use you make of the ideas, resources, and opportunities that come your way. Do you have books? Read them. Learn from them. Apply their wisdom. Do you have specialized knowledge? Put it to its full and good use. Do you have tools? Get them out and build or repair things with them. Do you have a good idea? Follow up and follow through on

it. Make the most of what you've got, what is actually yours.

You can be justifiably happy with yourself and at ease when you've harmonized your actions with nature by recognizing what truly is your own.

Focus on Your Main Duty



There is a time and place for diversion and amusements, but you should never allow them to override your true purposes. If you were on a voyage and the ship anchored in a harbor, you might go ashore for water and happen to pick up a shellfish or a plant. But be careful; listen for the call of the captain. Keep your attention directed at the ship. Getting distracted by trifles is the easiest thing in the world. Should the captain call, you must be ready to leave those distractions and come running, without even looking back.

If you are old, do not go far from the ship, or you might fail to appear when you are called for.

Accept Events As They Occur



Don't demand or expect that events happen as you would wish them to. Accept events as they actually happen. That way peace is possible.

Your Will Is Always Within Your Power



Nothing truly stops you. Nothing truly holds you back. For your own will is always within your control.

Sickness may challenge your body. But are you merely your body? Lameness may impede your legs. But you are not merely your legs. Your will is bigger than your legs.

Your will needn't be affected by an incident unless you let it. Remember this with everything that happens to you.

Make Full Use of What Happens to You



Every difficulty in life presents us with an opportunity to turn inward and to invoke our own submerged inner resources. The trials we endure can and should introduce us to our strengths.

Prudent people look beyond the incident itself and seek to form the habit of putting it to good use.

On the occasion of an accidental event, don't just react in a haphazard fashion: Remember to turn inward and ask what resources you have for dealing with it. Dig deeply. You possess strengths you might not realize you have. Find the right one. Use it.

If you encounter an attractive person, then self-restraint is the resource needed; if pain or weakness, then stamina; if verbal abuse, then patience.

As time goes by and you build on the habit of matching the appropriate inner resource to each incident, you will not tend to get carried away by life's appearances. You will stop feeling overwhelmed so much of the time.

Care for What You Happen to Have



Nothing can truly be taken from us. There is nothing to lose. Inner peace begins when we stop saying of things, "I have lost it" and instead say, "It has been returned to where it came from." Have your children died? They are returned to where they came from. Has your mate died? Your mate is returned to where he or she came from. Have your possessions and property been taken from you? They too have been returned to where they came from.

Perhaps you are vexed because a bad person took your belongings. But why should it be any concern of yours who gives your things back to the world that gave them to you?

The important thing is to take great care with what you have while the world lets you have it, just as a traveler takes care of a room at an inn.

The Good Life Is the Life of Inner Serenity



The surest sign of the higher life is serenity. Moral progress results in freedom from inner turmoil. You can stop fretting about this and that.

If you seek the higher life, refrain from such common patterns of thinking as these: "If I don't work harder, I'll never earn a decent living, no one will recognize me, I'll be a nobody," or "If I don't criticize my employee, he'll take advantage of my good will."

It's much better to die of hunger unhindered by grief and fear than to live affluently beset with worry, dread, suspicion, and unchecked desire.

Begin at once a program of self-mastery. But start modestly, with the little things that bother you. Has your child spilled something? Have you misplaced your wallet? Say to yourself, "Coping calmly with this inconvenience is the price I pay for my inner serenity, for freedom from perturbation; you don't get something for nothing."

When you call your child, be prepared that she may not respond to you, or if she does, she might not do what you want her to do. Under these circumstances, it doesn't help your child for you to become agitated. It should not be in her power to cause you any disturbance.

Disregard What Doesn't Concern You



Spiritual progress requires us to highlight what is essential and to disregard everything else as trivial pursuits unworthy of our attention. Moreover, it is actually a good thing to be thought foolish and simple with regard to matters that don't concern us. Don't be concerned with other people's impressions of you. They are dazzled and deluded by appearances. Stick with your purpose. This alone will strengthen your will and give your life coherence.

Refrain from trying to win other people's approval and admiration. You are taking a higher road. Don't long for others to see you as sophisticated, unique, or wise. In fact, be suspicious if you appear to others as someone special. Be on your guard against a false sense of self-importance.

Keeping your will in harmony with truth and concerning yourself with what is beyond your control are mutually exclusive. While you are absorbed in one, you will neglect the other.

Conform Your Wishes to Reality



For good or for ill, life and nature are governed by laws that we can't change. The quicker we accept this, the more tranquil we can be. You would be foolish to wish that your children or your spouse would live forever. They are mortal, just as you are, and the law of mortality is completely out of your hands.

Similarly, it is foolish to wish that an employee, relative, or friend be without fault. This is wishing to control things that you can't truly control.

It is within our control not to be disappointed by our desires if we deal with them according to facts rather than by being swept away by them.

We are ultimately controlled by that which bestows what we seek or removes what we don't want. If it's freedom you seek, then wish nothing and shun nothing that depends on others, or you will always be a helpless slave.

Understand what freedom really is and how it is achieved. Freedom isn't the right or ability to do whatever you please. Freedom comes from understanding the limits of our own power and the natural limits set in place by divine providence. By accepting life's limits and inevitabilities and working with them rather than fighting them, we become free. If, on the other hand, we succumb to our passing desires for things that aren't in our control, freedom is lost.

Approach Life As a Banquet



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

Carry over this same attitude of polite restraint and gratitude to your children, spouse, career, and finances. There is no need to yearn, envy, and grab. You will get your rightful portion when it is your time.

Diogenes and Heraclitus were impeccable models of living by such principles rather than by raw impulses. Make it your quest to imitate their worthy example.

Avoid Adopting Other People's Negative Views



Other people's views and troubles can be contagious. Don't sabotage yourself by unwittingly adopting negative, unproductive attitudes through your associations with others.

If you encounter a downhearted friend, a grieving parent, or a colleague who has suffered a sudden reversal of fortune, be careful not to be overcome yourself by the apparent misfortune. Remember to discriminate between events themselves and your interpretations of them. Remind yourself: "What hurts this person is not the occurrence itself, for another person might not feel oppressed by this situation at all. What is hurting this person is the response he or she has uncritically adopted."

It is not a demonstration of kindness or friendship to the people we care about to join them in indulging in wrongheaded, negative feelings. We do a better service to ourselves and others by remaining detached and avoiding melodramatic reactions.

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

Act Well the Part That Is Given to You



We are like actors in a play. The divine will has assigned us our roles in life without consulting us. Some of us will act in a short drama, others in a long one. We might be assigned the part of a poor person, a cripple, a distinguished celebrity or public leader, or an ordinary private citizen.

Although we can't control which roles are assigned to us, it must be our business to act our given role as best as we possibly can and to refrain from complaining about it. Wherever you find yourself and in whatever circumstances, give an impeccable performance.

If you are supposed to be a reader, read; if you are supposed to be a writer, write.

Everything Happens for a Good Reason



As you think, so you become. Avoid superstitiously investing events with power or meanings they don't have. Keep your head. Our busy minds are forever jumping to conclusions, manufacturing and interpreting signs that aren't there.

Assume, instead, that everything that happens to you does so for some good. That if you decided to be lucky, you are lucky. All events contain an advantage for you — if you look for it!

Happiness Can Only Be Found Within



Freedom is the only worthy goal in life. It is won by disregarding things that lie beyond our control. We cannot have a light heart if our minds are a woeful cauldron of fear and ambition.

Do you wish to be invincible? Then don't enter into combat with what you have no real control over. Your happiness depends on three things, all of which are within your power: your will, your ideas concerning the events in which you are involved, and the use you make of your ideas.

Authentic happiness is always independent of external conditions. Vigilantly practice indifference to external conditions. Your happiness can only be found within.

How easily dazzled and deceived we are by eloquence, job title, degrees, high honors, fancy possessions, expensive clothing, or a suave demeanor. Don't make the mistake of assuming that celebrities, public figures, political leaders, the wealthy, or people with great intellectual or artistic gifts are necessarily happy. To do so is to be bewildered by appearances and will only make you doubt yourself.

Remember: The real essence of good is found only within things under your own control. If you keep this in mind, you won't find yourself feeling falsely envious or forlorn, pitifully comparing yourself and your accomplishments to others.

Stop aspiring to be anyone other than your own best self: for that does fall within your control.

No One Can Hurt You



People don't have the power to hurt you. Even if someone shouts abuse at you or strikes you, if you are insulted, it is always your choice to view what is happening as insulting or not. If someone irritates you, it is only your own response that is irritating you. Therefore, when anyone seems to be provoking you, remember that it is only your judgment of the incident that provokes you. Don't let your emotions get ignited by mere appearances.

Try not to merely react in the moment. Pull back from the situation. Take a wider view; compose yourself.

Spiritual Progress Is Made Through Confronting Death and Calamity



Instead of averting your eyes from the painful events of life, look at them squarely and contemplate them often. By facing the realities of death, infirmity, loss, and disappointment, you free yourself of illusions and false hopes and you avoid miserable, envious thoughts.

Implant in Yourself the Ideals You Ought to Cherish



Attach yourself to what is spiritually superior, regardless of what other people think or do. Hold to your true aspirations no matter what is going on around you.

The Pursuit of Wisdom Attracts Critics



Those who pursue the higher life of wisdom, who seek to live by spiritual principles, must be prepared to be laughed at and condemned.

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

When you begin your program of spiritual progress, chances are the people closest to you will deride you or accuse you of arrogance.

It is your job to comport yourself humbly and to consistently hew to your moral ideals. Cling to what you know in your heart is best. Then, if you are steadfast, the very people who ridiculed you will come to admire you.

If you allow the mean-spirited opinions of others to make you waver in your purpose, you incur a double shame.

Seeking to Please Is a Perilous Trap



In trying to please other people, we find ourselves misdirected toward what lies outside our sphere of influence. In doing so we lose our hold on our life's purpose.

Content yourself with being a lover of wisdom, a seeker of the truth. Return and return again to what is essential and worthy.

Do not try to seem wise to others.

If you want to live a wise life, live it on your own terms and in your own eyes.