
September 14th

A DIFFERENT WAY TO PRAY

"Try praying differently, and see what happens: Instead of asking for 'a way to sleep with her,' try asking for 'a way to stop desiring to sleep with her.' Instead of 'a way to get rid of him,' try asking for 'a way to not crave his demise.' Instead of 'a way to not lose my child,' try asking for 'a way to lose my fear of it.'"

—MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*, 9.40.(6)

Payer has a religious connotation, but in life we all find ourselves hoping and asking for things. In a tough situation, we might silently ask for help; or, after a tough break, for a second chance from above; during a sports game, we might sit on the edge of our seat wishing for some outcome. "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon," we say. "*Please . . .*" Even if it is to no one in particular, we're still praying. Yet it's so revealing in these moments, when we're privately, powerfully yearning for something, just how nakedly selfish our requests usually are.

We want divine intervention so that our lives will magically be easier. But what about asking for fortitude and strength so you can do what you need to do? What if you sought clarity on what you do control, what is already within your power? You might find your prayers have already been answered.

September 15th

A GARDEN IS NOT FOR SHOW

"First practice not letting people know who you are—keep your philosophy to yourself for a bit. In just the manner that fruit is produced—the seed buried for a season, hidden, growing gradually so it may come to full maturity. But if the grain sprouts before the stalk is fully developed, it will never ripen. . . . That is the kind of plant you are, displaying fruit too soon, and the winter will kill you."

—EPICTETUS, *DISCOURSES*, 4.8.35b-37

After all you've read, it might be tempting to think: *This stuff is great. I get it. I'm a Stoic.* But it's not that easy. Just because you agree with the philosophy doesn't mean the roots have fully taken hold in your mind.

Fooling with books so you can sound smart or have an intimidating library is like tending a garden to impress your neighbors. Growing one to feed a family? That's a pure and profitable use of your time. The seeds of Stoicism are long underground. Do the work required to nurture and tend to them. So that they—and you—are prepared and sturdy for the hard winters of life.

September 16th

**ANYONE CAN GET LUCKY,
NOT EVERYONE CAN PERSEVERE**

“Success comes to the lowly and to the poorly talented, but the special characteristic of a great person is to triumph over the disasters and panics of human life.”

—SENECA, *ON PROVIDENCE*, 4.1

Perhaps you know people who've been extraordinarily lucky in life. Maybe they hit the genetic lottery or have skated through classes and careers with ease. Despite never planning, making reckless decisions, jumping from one thing to the next, they've somehow survived without a scratch. There's a saying: “God favors fools.”

It's natural to be a bit envious of these folks. We want the easy life too—or so we think. But is the easy life really that admirable?

Anyone can get lucky. There's no skill in being oblivious, and no one would consider that greatness.

On the other hand, the person who perseveres through difficulties, who keeps going when others quit, who makes it to their destination through hard work and honesty? That's admirable, because their survival was the result of fortitude and resilience, not birthright or circumstance. A person who overcame not just the external obstacles to success but mastered themselves and their emotions along the way? That's much more impressive. The person who has been dealt a harder hand, understood it, but still triumphed? That's greatness.

September 17th
DEALING WITH HATERS

“What if someone despises me? Let them see to it. But I will see to it that I won’t be found doing or saying anything contemptible. What if someone hates me? Let them see to that. But I will see to it that I’m kind and good-natured to all, and prepared to show even the hater where they went wrong. Not in a critical way, or to show off my patience, but genuinely and usefully.”

—MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*, 11.13

When someone has a strong opinion about something, it usually says more about *them* than whatever or whomever the opinion happens to be about. This is especially true when it comes to resentment and hatred of other people. (It is a sad irony that the prejudiced often harbor secret attractions to those they so publicly hate.)

For this reason, the Stoic does two things when encountering hatred or ill opinion in others. They ask: *Is this opinion inside my control?* If there is a chance for influence or change, they take it. But if there isn’t, they accept this person as they are (and never hate a hater). Our job is tough enough already. We don’t have time to think about what other people are thinking, even if it’s about us.

September 18th
DEALING WITH PAIN

“Whenever you suffer pain, keep in mind that it’s nothing to be ashamed of and that it can’t degrade your guiding intelligence, nor keep it from acting rationally and for the common good. And in most cases you should be helped by the saying of Epicurus, that pain is never unbearable or unending, so you can remember these limits and not add to them in your imagination. Remember too that many common annoyances are pain in disguise, such as sleepiness, fever and loss of appetite. When they start to get you down, tell yourself you are giving in to pain.”

—MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*, 7.64

In 1931, on a trip to New York City, Winston Churchill was struck crossing the street by a car going more than thirty miles an hour. A witness at the scene was sure that he had been killed. He would spend some eight days in the hospital, with cracked ribs and a severe head wound.

Churchill somehow retained consciousness. When he spoke to the police, he went to great lengths to insist that he was completely to blame and wanted no harm to come to the driver. Later, the driver came to visit Churchill at the hospital. When Churchill heard that the driver was out of work, he tried to offer *him*—the man who had nearly killed him—some money. More than his own pain, he was worried that the publicity from the accident would hurt the man’s job prospects and sought to help how he could.

“Nature is merciful,” he later wrote in a newspaper article about the experience, “and does not try her children, man or beast, beyond their compass. It is only where the cruelty of man intervenes that hellish torments appear. For the rest—live dangerously; take things as they come; dread naught, all will be well.”

In the years to come, Churchill and the world would witness some of the most hellish torments that man could invent. Yet he—along with many of our ancestors—endured that pain as well. As horrible as it was, eventually all would be well again. Because like Epicurus says, nothing is unending. You just need to be strong and gracious enough to get through it.

September 19th
FLEXIBILITY OF THE WILL

“Remember that to change your mind and to follow someone’s correction are consistent with a free will. For the action is yours alone—to fulfill its purpose in keeping with your impulse and judgment, and yes, with your intelligence.”

—MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*, 8.16

When you set your mind to a task, do you always follow through? It’s an impressive feat if you do. But don’t let yourself become a prisoner of that kind of determination. That asset might become a liability someday.

Conditions change. New facts come in. Circumstances arise. If you can’t adapt to them—if you simply proceed onward, unable to adjust according to this additional information—you are no better than a robot. The point is not to have an iron will, but an *adaptable* will—a will that makes full use of reason to clarify perception, impulse, and judgment to act effectively for the right purpose.

It’s not weak to change and adapt. Flexibility is its own kind of strength. In fact, this flexibility *combined* with strength is what will make us resilient and unstoppable.

September 20th
LIFE ISN'T A DANCE

"The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing, because an artful life requires being prepared to meet and withstand sudden and unexpected attacks."

—MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*, 7.61

Dancing is a popular metaphor for life. One must be limber and agile and go along with the music. One must feel and follow and flow with their partner. But anyone who has tried to do something difficult, where there is competition or an adversary, knows that the dancing metaphor is insufficient. Nobody ever gets up on stage and tries to tackle a dancer. The dancer never gets choked out by a rival.

For a wrestler, on the other hand, adversity and the unexpected are part and parcel of what they do. Their sport is a battle, just like life. They are fighting an opponent as well as their own limitations, emotions, and training.

Life, like wrestling, requires more than graceful movement. We have to undergo hard training and cultivate an indomitable will to prevail. Philosophy is the steel against which we sharpen that will and strengthen that resolve.

September 21st

MAINTAIN COMPOSURE, MAINTAIN CONTROL

“When forced, as it seems, by circumstances into utter confusion, get a hold of yourself quickly. Don’t be locked out of the rhythm any longer than necessary. You’ll be able to keep the beat if you are constantly returning to it.”

—MARCUS AURELIUS, *MEDITATIONS*, 6.11

We’re going to get caught off guard from time to time. Not just by “black swan” type events—a terrorist attack or a financial panic—but also by minor, unexpected occurrences. Your car battery dies, your friend cancels at the last minute, you suddenly don’t feel well. These situations have a way of throwing us into confusion and disarray. We’ve made an assumption about the world and built plans on top of that assumption. Now that the assumption has collapsed, so too might our organization or understanding.

That’s perfectly OK! It happens. A line of infantrymen will face withering attacks—what’s key is that they don’t allow chaos to reign. Musicians will experience technical difficulties and lose their place from time to time. In both cases, it just matters that they get back into position as quickly as possible.

The same is true for you today. The order and the peace might be interrupted by a new circumstance. OK. Get a hold of yourself and find your way back.