



Meditations

by Marcus Aurelius

Penguin Classics © 2006

304 pages

The Big Ideas

Historical Context

& Intro to Stoicism

A Surplus of Time

What do you do with it?

Visions of a Lifetime

Don't confuse yourself.

The Opinions of Others

Forget them.

Retire Within Yourself

In the midst of the crowd.

Being in Tune

With every note...

Time Is a River

Flow with it.

For What...

Were you made?

Your One Delight

To be of service.

The Equanimity Game

Recover your balance!

Your Power

To choose your response.

I Seek the Truth

You?

Do It Right

Or don't do it.

Soak Your Mind

In right thoughts.

The Bond

That unites all...

“Your mind will be like its habitual thoughts; for the soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts. Soak it then in such trains of thoughts as, for example: Where life is possible at all, a right life is possible.”

~ Marcus Aurelius from *Meditations*

Not only is Marcus Aurelius one of my heroes, he's also one of history's leading Stoic Philosophers. Stoic philosophy. You know, one of the classic Hellenistic philosophies—right there with Epicureanism and Cynicism.

Huh?

Whether or not you've heard of Stoicism, you've probably met one of its leading thinkers: Marcus Aurelius—he's the old emperor in the movie *Gladiator*. :)

In this Note, we're going to take a quick look at the historical context in which Aurelius wrote *Meditations* and the Stoic philosophy that influenced his thinking. From there, we'll jump into some of my favorite Big Ideas from the classic Emperor-Philosopher's journals.

Historical Context

It was in the 2nd Century, during battles against Barbarian tribes in the Danube region near Hungary (not unlike the opening scene of *Gladiator*), when Aurelius wrote *Meditations*.

Imagine the powerful Roman Empire: encompassing vast territory from England to Spain and Africa, to Egypt, Arabia and Turkey. This is the Empire that Marcus Aurelius defended from barbarians and pestilence and plague at every border. Now, you can imagine Aurelius, the Emperor of this vast empire, trained in the Stoic philosophy, reminding himself to live the philosophy during some of the most trying times of his rule--in the battlefields of war.

Interestingly, the literal translation of the title is “To Himself”—as Aurelius was simply jotting notes to himself in his private journal. His intention was not to publish anything; rather, he used his journal to remind himself of the lessons he learned as a young nobleman being groomed to one-day rule the empire. The book is broken down into bite-size nuggets of wisdom that you can enjoy a few minutes at a time. I highly recommend you start enjoying!

[Note: I love Aurelius. I fell even more in love with him when I was in Budapest and ran