



CHAD HOWSE'S

12 VIRTUES OF MANLINESS

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The Essentialist simply has clarity. This clarity isn't innate. It's not something he's born with but he's come to the understanding that it's something he needs to live a flourishing life, and a flourishing life isn't one of mere financial success or emotional success or a life lived with a purpose, but everything, all of the above.

To flourish is to have a body that is flourishing, a mind that is flourishing, and a spirit that is flourishing. To experience life and to live a flourishing one, you must give your time to those things that aid you in your quest – even if your quest is simply to be a badass – and remove those things that pull you away from your goal.

We live in a society that distracts almost as a profession. Are our intentions truly ours or are they motivated by something we saw on TV or on Facebook or an image we saw on Instagram? We walk down a busy street in a busy town and images bombard us instantly telling us what we need to have in order to feel good about ourselves when the reality is that we need none of it.

What we need is to be of value. We need to be proficient at something. We need to become great. We need mastery. We need relationships and the wisdom that can only come from living far beyond our zones of comfort.

To break free from the chains that confine you to a life of weakness you first have to understand what those chains are.

This is where you spend an entire day reflecting, thinking. The simple act of thinking is something we do very little of in our society. We work, then we pop our headphones in or turn on the stereo and noise immediately invades our lives, our thoughts, and thinking clearly is no longer a possibility.

Thinking, is essential in whatever quest you have, be it to master a skill or to be a great father, you need time away from noise, in silence and solitude, to actually learn the lessons that failures and victories in your life have taught.

Think More

Thinking is a lost art as distractions have become our focus. Think about the last time you stepped outside in silence and just thought. No headphones, no cell phone, just silence and thought.

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Well, thought used to be something humans did a lot, and every day. We did it when we walked into town or home from the farm. There were no portable music boxes nor devices by which we can call other humans in a far off land. We were relegated to where we were.

Think about that.

We were relegated to where we were. Imagine being forced to be present! Imagine the problems you can solve in your own life if only you'd root out the noise that claims so many of your thoughts and worries.

I've started blocking time and dedicating it purely to thought. I walk my dog 4 times a day, and I don't bring my music box. It's just me, the pup, and nature. We walk out of my house and down into a park. The stream runs, I run, he runs, we all run, and my mind doesn't. My mind stays calm because the distractions don't make me stressed, the silence forces me to confront those things in my life that I need to confront.

I ask things like, Am I really working hard enough? Do I deserve what I want? What more can I do?

I've come up with far more articles since I've brought more silence and thinking time into my life. Thinking has allowed me to think bigger, to solve the problems that would turn into worries and fears and unnecessary stress.

We do not think as much as we once did. We're told to work, but work is simply implementing solutions, how are we supposed to be at our best if we're not allowed to think about what the best way to do it is?

Thinking grounds you. It allows you to learn the lessons from your failures and it allows you to put everything in perspective. Your thinking time will allow you to take the right action in response to the call to action that is to man up!

Task: Schedule 30 minutes of reflection and thinking time at the end of every day. Make this your habit. Do not miss a day. Write in your journal, read a book, go for a walk, just spend 30 minutes in silence.

You cannot be the man you want to be nor the man your wife and kids need you to be if you're not on point. Silence and reflection will enable you to be present and to be at the top of your game.

REFLECTION

I've taken up the habit of walking to the gym rather than driving. Sure it takes more time, time that could be spent working, but without this 15-minute walk I would have no silence in my day, no time to reflect and work out in my mind what's going on with my work or life or even to ask life's bigger questions.

Without this time in silence where I'm not simply stagnant I'd live my days with my head down, working, without ever stepping back and thinking. I'd be doing, but what I'd be doing wouldn't be thought out or planned or questioned, it would simply be done.

It seems insignificant, spending 30 minutes a day walking rather than driving, but it's a necessity.

We've Killed Reflection

Last year at this time I was in a small town in Italy called Sorano. It's a tiny, ancient town nestled atop a canyon that was built more as a defense outpost by the Roman Empire than a cozy place for humans to live. It's isolated. Without a car you're stuck there, but being stuck there is a wonderful thing.

I'd start every day with a couple espressos made on an old gas stove with my trusty espresso pot then head out for a hike through the canyon. I'd stick my head into one of the many caves built a few thousand years ago by the Etruscans, continue walking or running until I looped back to the town and got to work on the 500 year old desk that the fella had restored in the wee little home that I was staying in whilst there.

When I walked my phone was left inside, as was my music. I was visiting another continent, and who knows, one that I may never return to. To give my time to technology rather than absorbing this history, these moments, seemed like lunacy.

I worked through a lot on these walks, and on the daily hikes I'd embark on in the north of Italy where I stayed on Lake Como, or walking through the streets of Rome. Sure, I was surrounded by history with churches that have stood for centuries that begged me to ask bigger and more meaningful questions, but it was the act, the walk, the movement and the silence, not necessarily the surroundings that taught me so much.

It was in these ancient cities that I truly came to grips with just how much we've killed reflection.

When these cities were built there was only silence. You traveled not by car but on horseback or on foot. The act of getting from one place to another took effort. Your work

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was done in silence and without distraction – as I write this on a computer with about 10 tabs open all begging me to click them.

In developing wonderful ways to communicate with one another, like the phone or Facebook or Twitter, we've removed the conversations with our soul and made nearly every conversation trivial.

When we once wandered from town to town on foot, asking ourselves things like "why am I here?" or "who do I want to be?", we now check our phones to see how many likes our image has received or look with envy at the lives that others are living.

We are no longer here.

Our lives are no longer about being but about looking elsewhere, to what others are doing or showing others what we'd like to show them we're doing.

We've killed reflection, the daily opportunity to ponder.

The clarity I received on those walks has yet to be recreated now that I'm home.

Yesterday, as I walked from home to gym and gym to home I pulled out my phone to check my email and all of a sudden I realized that in the run of a day I am no longer alone, I am no longer thinking or reflecting, but living on the terms of something else that isn't me nor where I should be living. So I shut off my phone, and I walked a different, longer route.

Without Reflection There Is No Learning

We read and we study; we try and we fail. It's all done to learn lessons, yet the lessons we aim to learn cannot fully be grasped unless we step back and reflect.

The logic is sound; *if I'm not working hour after hour I cannot build what I want to build*. The problem is that the lessons I need to learn from the work I'm doing and the failures I'm going through cannot be learned as effectively if reflection isn't the companion of the work.

Great men like Marcus Aurelius and Seneca, Christ, Confucius, and Epictetus, all knew the profound importance of reflection. They saw the value in purposeful work, but without reflection we cannot understand our place in this world; we cannot discover why we are here.

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Without reflection we cannot learn. Without reflection we won't know what questions we should be asking nor what lessons we should be learning.

Reflection seems to have been systematically attacked by innovation. I love innovation, but to get something you must also give something up.

This is a barter I am not willing to make, and it's taken a while to realize just how important our solitude is. And it's becoming even more apparent how important *working* in solitude and silence is, and not the kind of work done at a desk but the kind where your hands get dirty and your brow is sweaty.

Reflection is Best Done, Not Thought

The best kind of reflection comes on a walk or a long hike, it's created as we work in the yard not on the computer.

You have control over your life and you have power over your reaction to everything that happens in your life. You can create time to reflect, understanding its importance, though, is a tough one to explain, hopefully I've at least in part managed to do that here.

Though your life may be filled to the brim with responsibilities and work and your kid's sports, you will not be the man nor the father nor the husband you can potentially be if you don't allow yourself time every day to reflect.

You will not be the businessman you can potentially be if you do not allow yourself time to reflect.

Work in your yard everyday. Walk when you could drive. Get to the gym when it's silent and train. Hike.

The more I write the more I see the value in living in rural areas, the access to silence that we don't have in a city where we've been taught that solitude is loneliness when its in solitude that we become most connected with our Maker, with ourselves, where our true inner voice is finally able to be heard.

Reflection, like Lazarus, can be resurrected. It's on your shoulders to resurrect this lost art and bring it into your life so you can find those answers to the questions you may have not yet asked.

It will take a bit of courage to remove yourself from what has become the norm, but if you'd like to remain relegated to mediocrity and a life that can only be measured in comparison to others, then by all means remain in the norm. If, however, you want

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clarity, you want greatness, you want happiness, true and deep internal happiness, have the courage to create more reflection time. And do it often.

THE BEAUTY OF SOLITUDE

Solitude is something most people run from. They run from it by turning on music first thing in the morning so they're not forced to face their own thoughts, afraid as to where they may lead. They run from it by constantly checking their Facebook account or their phones for messages from other humans. They run from **solitude** by posting and picture-taking, by calling and visiting, yet this never truly fills the void because in this quest to avoid feeling alone they fill it not with substance, but with things that only contribute to their loneliness.

If you rely on companionship to make you feel as though you're not alone and a part of something, you'll always rely on said companionship. You aren't self-reliant, but rely on something other than yourself to be happy, to feel as though you're connected.

If you rely on noise or on messaging or Facebooking, posting about your life so others can see that you aren't alone at all or looking at the wonderful lives others are living to feed this self-pity, you're no longer self-reliant, but dependent on something else to sustain you.

Some may see this as a necessary means to help you limp along through life, to sustain you, but it's something worse. By not allowing the void – or the wound – to fully be exposed, you're not giving it the opportunity it needs to heal. You're keeping it covered up, not allowing oxygen to scab it and start the healing process.

You need to open this wound. You need to expose it.

What's completely missed in this quest to feel as though we're a part of something, to feel connected, is the value of solitude, and not only that, the greater value in solitude vs the value of companionship and connection when it pertains to creating something and becoming something.

Solitude shouldn't merely be embraced, but used and forced upon one's Self. It's within solitude that we craft our purpose. It's within solitude that we find clarity, a vision. It's within solitude that our excuses, our reasons for not working or hustling or using our time to the best it can be used gain no validity, where they're exposed for what they are, meaningless and useless.

Great men have always found the benefits of solitude, of being alone. It's where they're able to focus and create.

When you're alone, your time is completely yours. Sure, it's selfish, but it is, so make the best of it. With your time being yours it must be used to make you better, to

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experience, to grow, and to live. When you're alone your choices become much clearer as to where and what you give your time to.

Are you wasting it or are you using it to become better, to improve? When you're alone wasting of your time is easier to define, as is using it with purpose.

Your comfort in being alone won't come unless you're doing something *while* you're alone. It's those who are constantly working or reading or *living* that don't have time to pay attention to this feeling nagging at them. It can't be there if their mind doesn't go there.

Don't flee from solitude. Don't search for something to fill the void in your life. Take to it. Make it your own. Use it.

If you want to be truly happy your happiness and meaning can't be completely dependent on other people or things. Sure, your wife and your kids will make you happy, but this happiness has to be able to thrive and live with or without them.

Self-reliance isn't only a matter of being able to take care of yourself, it's about being strong and confident and happy on your own. It's when you're strong on your own that you can be strong for others. It's when you're able to be happy and purposeful on your own that you're able to be *truly happy* when you're with others, and this is the mark of a leader.

A leader can't be dependent on the group for happiness nor meaning. He can get both *from the group*, for sure, but when they aren't with him he needs to be on this continual path to greatness, to becoming better, to reaching his potential, regardless of their involvement.

Finding a Purpose

It's easy to feel alone when you don't know what to do with yourself. This idea that all of us are acutely aware of our purpose and you're the only one who has no clue what he's doing here is nonsense. For one, we all have a purpose, yourself included, and if we don't know of one we can manufacture it.

If you don't have something you're training for, if you don't have a company you're building, a clear mission you're aiming to fulfill, your mission is simply to become better, to explore, to find that mission by trying anything and everything and discovering what you like and what you want.

Your mission is improvement, and there's not a moment that can be wasted on self-pity when your life is at stake, when your future self is dependent on your current actions.

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You should always be chasing the man you want to become. It's a relentless chase, not one that can withstand a day off. It needs your energy and your focus. Pity takes a lot of energy, *all of your energy*. Time can't be given to those things that hold you back. It can't be lent to things that suck your energy, make you unhappy or relegate you to mediocrity.

Your actions and inactions have consequences. What you do and don't do is creating the man you are going to become, for good or for bad. This feeling of loneliness can be fed or it can be healed. You choose whether you feed this self-pity or whether you acknowledge its existence and make it a strength rather than a glaring weakness.

You're worth far more than the life you'll lead if you feed the feelings of loneliness that you're feeding if you're comparing your life to the lives of others or simply wasting your time by doing nothing of value, nothing that propels you to become better, nothing that makes you stronger, grittier, smarter.

Your purpose is to become the best man you can possibly become. Your purpose is to reach your true potential. If you're improving and working, a way to serve humanity will present itself. The world needs the best you, *you* are required to become the best you, and solitude is a wonderful place to craft this legendary persona.

Stop the Comparison

Feeling alone and down is, in a sense, self-pity and it's only your reality if you accept it as such and allow it to be. I do it, you're not alone in this feeling but there is a need to call out the weakness so you can make it a strength.

Most, however, feed the self-pity rather than accepting it for what it is. We do this by comparing our lives to the lives of others. Today, it's even easier to do so with the rise of social media. It only takes a click to enter into someone else's world. The problem lies in comparing our lives to a world that isn't at all real, but a fabrication, a lie. It's merely the world they *want* you to see. The world you post on social media is only the world *you* want them to see or that I want *you* to see. We post images and write updates when we're excited about something or have something to share.

This fact leads us to either intentionally or unintentionally convey an existence that is only a fraction of the truth, and as a viewer of someone else's life on social media you'd have to be pretty darn ignorant or even willingly so, to take what's up on Facebook or Instagram as the entire truth. I say willingly so because many of us *want to* think other's are living epic, grand lives, free from the feelings of loneliness that every one of us have, but not all of us feed.

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You don't *want* the entire picture. You only want to see how much better other's lives are so you can wallow in your self-pity. You don't want to see their pain or their lack of meaning. That would take away *your* excuses not to stand up, man up, and live.

It's your choice to compare. When you click you're making the conscious effort to see how others are living. This gives you an excuse for feeling down, for pitying your situation because they *clearly* have it better than you. Some will take this excuse and run with it. They'll cling to their loneliness and let its cloud hang over their life.

To remove this crutch you have to be aware of what you're doing. You must understand that your life is your life and no part of it can be compared to the life that another human with their different choices and circumstances.

If you want to remove this feeling of loneliness, choose to stop feeding it by comparing your life to the lives of others. Get off of social media. When you talk to someone, be happy that their life is going well and be aware and document how great your life is as well.

A Simple, Difficult Decision

The solution to the feeling of loneliness is simple, but not easy.

First, you have to claim it as yours and not dependent on other things or other people. Then you have to stop comparing your life to the lives that others lead or portray. Be happy for them, don't ever envy them. From there you have to understand that your purpose is to experience and to create, it's to become better and to aim to reach your true potential.

At the base of all of this is the understanding that your future self is dependent on and created by what you do in the present.

This sadness and self-pity will only lead to more in the future. So, work. Create. Live and learn.

Work on becoming a stronger individual regardless of relationships. Enjoy your friends, but don't depend on them. In freeing them from this dependence you're also going to enjoy them more and put less pressure on them to fill your void.

One of my teachers once told me that marriage isn't two halves making a whole. A *good marriage* is two complete individuals embarking on a life together.

That's how *life* should be. You should be improving, not looking outward for other things to *improve you*.

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Bring people into your life. You don't always have to be alone, but understand the value in solitude, know that it can be a source of strength and creation, a place where you improve. See other people as the beautiful humans they are, but don't see them as a piece to a broken puzzle. You control your life and where you end up and how happy you are, others can help bring in a different kind of happiness, they can be a great source of joy and meaning, but an alpha male and a leader also finds meaning in his suffering, he discovers his path and he makes his weaknesses his strengths.

Embrace solitude as many great men before you have. Use it to become stronger. If you're alone at this point in your life, use this time to become great. There's an opportunity here and it's up to you to seize it and use it. Don't let it slip through your fingers.