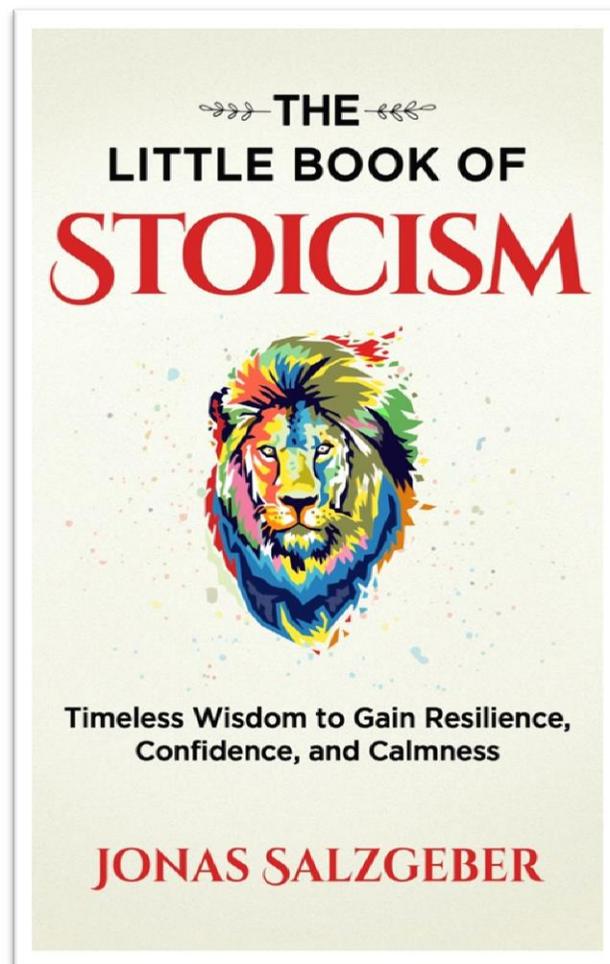


5 SAMPLE PRACTICES FROM THE LITTLE BOOK OF STOICISM



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Introduction

It's not about spending a few bucks on the full book... You want to know if it's worth spending your precious time reading the book. At least, that's what I want to know before I order a book.

This free sample provides an insight into the second part of the book. *The Little Book of Stoicism* is divided into two parts. The first part is all about the philosophy of Stoicism, its promises, the most influential teachers, and its theory presented in a simple framework. The second part is about how to apply the philosophy in your own life; presented as 55 easy-to-use practices.

In the following pages, you will find 5 of those practices.

If you find them helpful, it is very likely you'd feel the same about the other 50 practices.

Enough talking, it's time to dive in.



-Jonas

Practice 12

Stoic Aphorisms: Keep Your “Weapons” Ready at Hand

“Doctors keep their scalpels and other instruments handy for emergencies.
Keep your philosophy ready too.”
– Marcus Aurelius

The Stoics often summarized their main principles in succinct statements. We’ve encountered some of them in this book: Living with areté / living in agreement with nature / of things some are in our power, and others are not / preferred indifferents.

They’re similar to modern maxims such as shit happens / lies don’t travel far / actions speak louder than words.

Now, why did the Stoics use such aphorisms?

They knew that our thoughts dye our character. As they wanted to be the best they could be, they tried to counteract irrational thoughts and judgments with opposing, rational beliefs. They observed irrational thoughts popping up in their minds and wanted to be ready so they could replace those irrational thoughts with more positive and helpful ones.

That’s where their aphorisms entered the game. In order to have positive beliefs ready at mind, they had to formulate their fundamental principles extremely simple and clear—precisely so that they were memorable and always remained accessible to the mind. That’s the only way their principles could be applicable to the chaotic and rapidly-changing reality.

These laconic statements were used as reminders and aids in everyday life to guide behavior when in doubt. They can be thought of as “weapons” of the mind to fight off disturbing thoughts and judgments. Marcus Aurelius uses a distinct comparison: “The model for the application of your principles is the boxer rather than the gladiator. The gladiator puts down or takes up the sword he uses, but the boxer always has his hands, and needs only to clench them into fists.”

Just like a boxer his fists, try to have your principles ready at all times.

That’s similar to Epictetus’ *Enchiridion*: It’s a tiny summary of the most important principles from the *Discourses*, and translates literally into “ready at hand”—always available to help you deal with life’s challenges.

The Stoics were obviously interested in the practice of their principles, that’s why they tried to compress them into memorable statements that could be used when needed most—out in the real world when struggling. They wanted to make progress and actually apply what they learned in the classroom.

So, if you’re anything like them, then create and memorize such easily accessible statements that remind you of how you want to behave in the world, and who you want to be. Ask: What are my core values? What do I want to stand for?

Know this: The statements you formulate will be indispensable weapons in the fight between you trying to be the best you can be and the hellfire of reality that gets in the way. Ultimately, these weapons decide upon life or death—a happy and smoothly flowing life or a miserable and unfulfilling one.

Practice 18

Win at What Matters

“You are winning affection in a job in which it is hard to avoid ill-will; but believe me it is better to understand the balance-sheet of one’s own life than of the corn trade.”

– Seneca

His father-in-law lost his position as person in charge of Rome’s granary when Seneca sent him this reminder that it’s not too bad.

Who cares? Says Seneca, now he can spend time with what’s truly important, “The love and practice of the virtues, forgetfulness of the passions, the knowledge of how to live and die, and a life of deep tranquility.”

It’s more important to understand the balance-sheet of one’s own life than that of the corn market, stock market, or our office.

But what do we do? We invest our working time in getting better at topics necessary for our (future) jobs, and our leisure time in mindless activities to numb ourselves.

We become experts at fantasy series, video games, sports, celebrity news, and effortless jobs—unaware that none of these things will teach us anything about how to listen to our friends, how to become self-disciplined, and what to do with anger or grief.

We confuse getting better at stuff with learning how to live, and how to be a good person.

“At the end of your time on this planet,” Ryan Holiday asks you, “what expertise is going to be more valuable—your understanding of matters of living and dying, or your knowledge of the ’87 Bears? Which will help your children more—your insight into happiness and meaning, or that you followed breaking political news every day for thirty years?”

Wow, right? It’s clear what’s more valuable. So let’s actually use this understanding and set the right priorities and make sure we invest in what truly matters.

There’s nothing harder to learn than how to live, says Seneca. It’s about time to get started. Forget about acing tests, climbing the career ladder, and learning everything about cryptocurrency—what’s the point of winning at those things but losing in the game of being a good mother, sister, and friend?

Look, there’s definitely time and space for those things, but not at the cost of improving as a person. That’s what we’ve just decided to be more valuable.

Don’t envy the colleagues who shine bright at the office, as their success comes at the cost of life. The father who puts in eighty hours a week might be a hero at work, but he probably neglects his wife, son, and health.

Successful is a broad term. This father might have been employee of the last three months, but in this time he never listened to his wife, never saw his son’s soccer games, and he was cranky due to his sleep deprivation.

Again, what’s the point of winning at a career but losing at the effort to be a good husband and father?

Let’s get better at what matters. Let’s learn how to deal with depressive thoughts, how to be a good listener, how to stay calm in the face of adversity, and how to be a good spouse, parent, and friend.

That’s our inward transformation nobody knows about. And it’s much more important than the superficial outward transformation. Who you truly are inwardly is way more important than who people believe you to be.

Your most valuable asset is your character.

It will help you win at what matters.

Practice 28

The Equanimity Game

“When force of circumstance upsets your equanimity, lose no time in recovering your self-control, and do not remain out of tune longer than you can help. Habitual recurrence to the harmony will increase your mastery of it.”

– Marcus Aurelius



We all get caught off guard from time to time. Not just by major events, but also by minor, often unexpected, occurrences. The train doesn't arrive on time, your bike gets stolen, your friend cancels the date at last minute.

Such insignificant situations can knock us out in weak moments. We lose balance and become irritable and grouchy. It's totally ok to get thrown out of balance sometimes, it happens to the best of us. What matters is to get back on track as soon as possible.

Don't be knocked out any longer than necessary. Get a hold on yourself and get back up! Return to balance.

Modern philosopher Brian Johnson calls this the “equanimity game.” The rules are simple: (1) notice when you're off-balance, for example, when you start to lose your patience with the traffic, your spouse, or a colleague, then (2) see how fast you can catch yourself and correct yourself—bringing yourself back to equanimity.

He says *equanimity* is one of the greatest words ever. From the Latin: *aequus* (even) and *animus* (mind), the word means “balanced mind.”

So we should catch ourselves whenever we get thrown off-balance by some event, and then get back to a balanced mind as quickly as possible. Setbacks happen, we won't always be our best. The wise person knows this and their main goal is to recover as quickly as possible. Like a punching ball that rebounds whenever you hit it.

We want to live with areté and express our highest self at all times. So when we catch ourselves lagging behind, let's try to recover and get back on track. We can collect turn-arounds in this game. And we'll get better the more often we catch ourselves and get back in balance.

“Habitual recurrence to the harmony will increase your mastery of it,” as Marcus teaches us.

Always remember: Obstacles and challenging situations make us stronger, they're an opportunity for growth. We want to be warriors of the mind who don't retreat but try to be fully present in the face of life's challenges—well aware that these challenges will make us stronger.

Earlier, we said that a fire uses obstacles as fuel. They only make the fire stronger. Now, let's look at another fire metaphor: The wind fuels a fire and extinguishes a candle. The wind is the obstacle; it extinguishes you if your commitment and perseverance are weak, but it fuels you when you accept the challenge and don't give up with the first difficulties.

If you blow at a candle, it extinguishes. If you blow into a campfire, it might seem to extinguish at first but it comes back stronger. You want to be the fire that always comes back stronger.

So whenever life hits you, notice what knocks you down, and then see how long it takes you to get back up. Observe yourself and find out what helps you find your balance. You can play that game all day, every day.

What helps me most are the Stoic ideas to focus on what you control, to accept reality as it is, and to take responsibility for my life as it's always within my power to choose to respond with virtue.

Practice 42

Forgive and Love Those Who Stumble

“Whenever you meet someone, say to yourself from the outset, ‘What are his assumptions concerning what is fundamentally good and bad in life?’ When someone acts like your enemy, insults or opposes you, remember that he was only doing what seemed to him the right thing, he didn’t know any better, and tell yourself: ‘It seemed so to him.’”

– Epictetus

Stoicism calls for forgiveness.

The Stoics remind themselves of the ignorance of the wrongdoers. They don’t do wrong on purpose, but what they do seems to be the right thing in their situations.

It’s our special privilege says Marcus, “to love even those who stumble.” He reminds himself of four things: (1) that the stumbling people are relatives, (2) they do wrong involuntarily, (3) we will all be dead soon anyway, and (4) we can only be harmed if we choose so.

Therefore, it’s within our power (and duty) to love even those who stumble. Seneca likewise says, “Bestow pardon for many things; seek pardon for none.”

He’s well aware that others do what seems true to them and, therefore, he freely pardons them. And at the same time he knows that if they don’t pardon him, it’s because it doesn’t seem necessary to them.

Be forgiving, even if others aren’t. You lead by example, knowing that they don’t see what you see.

In a sense, the Stoics view stumbling people as misguided and lacking in wisdom, more like children than malicious people. They fail to recognize that what they're doing isn't even in their own best interest. They are blind to see. It's like an illness.

They don't see what they're doing. And because they're ill, it's not like they had a choice in that matter. So who are we to blame them? Let's not resent what they do, because that's like resenting their illness.

The only appropriate response is compassion and forgiveness.

Marcus makes a neat comparison: He says wishing for the unknowing man not to do wrong is like wishing for a fig tree not to produce figs, babies not to cry, and horses not to neigh. These are inevitable things. They just happen by nature.

Don't wish for people not to do wrong, rather wish for the strength to be tolerant and forgiving.

Imagine how much more forgiving you'd be if you could see other people's missteps as inevitable, natural, or stemming from an illness? They got misrouted. It's not their fault.

Again, the only appropriate response is compassion and forgiveness. Also, try to help rather than blame those who stumble.

Attention: At all times, keep in mind that maybe you're wrong this time. Maybe you're the one erring.

Practice 46

Scratches Happen In Training

“When your sparring partner scratches or head-butts you, you don’t then make a show of it, or protest, or view him with suspicion or as plotting against you. And yet you keep an eye on him, not as an enemy or with suspicion, but with a healthy avoidance. You should act this way with all things in life. We should give a pass to many things with our fellow trainees.

For, as I’ve said, it’s possible to avoid without suspicion or hate.”

– Marcus Aurelius

See each day and every situation as a training exercise. You will accept things quicker even if they’re annoying—it’s just training.

Scratches happen. Don’t blame your sparring partner. Don’t blame the event. We’re all just training. Things go wrong. People act like jerks.

The stakes suddenly become much lower. We interpret mistakes more generously. We stretch a point an extra time. We’re way more resilient that way.

Imagine the opposite. Seeing every situation as the championship was on the line . . . You’d be on tenterhooks all the time, and react to every tiny thing. It’s much smarter to be easy and shake off minor blows with a simple nod. Just dust it off as training. Nothing happened. Move on.

You don't want to be the person who gets enraged over scratches. They take things so seriously it seems ridiculous from the outside. They think that barely visible spot ruins their looks, that dirty remark is worth a fight, or that leftover sip of milk is a reason to lose their mind.

Look, these things might be important to you, but that's no reason to blow a gasket. Remain calm, scratches happen. Smile and move on. And if appropriate, inform others about your opinion on how to eat ice cream, talk to people, and how much milk is fine to leave in the bottle.

“The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing,” as encountered in Chapter 1, “because an artful life requires being prepared to meet and withstand sudden and unexpected attacks.”

Marcus reminds us to be prepared for sudden slaps. All these hits and blows life throws at us are opportunities for practice. Each slap contains the chance to stay calm and strengthen who you want to be, but also the risk to go ballistic and become more of who you don't want to be.

You're a warrior. Nothing and nobody can throw you off balance easily. You're ready to deal with some punches and side-kicks. Such is life. Even better, knowing that these kicks make you stronger, you rub your hands together and look forward to them. They cannot come unexpected and hard enough.

You want to be strong. You want to handle yourself in the face of adversity. You want to be unshakable in the midst of a storm. You want to remain cool when others panic.

So you simply can't afford to turn your head to every scratch. It's just training. Smile and move on.

About the Author

I am a first-time author and write for a small army of remarkable people at NJlifehacks.com. On my quest to be the best I can be I stumbled upon Stoicism – and got hooked. At the core of this applicable philosophy lies the goal of leading a happy life even (especially) in the face of adversity.

My practical rather than academic writing style can help you with the most important step: to put the wisdom from book page to action. I share Stoic strategies so you can gain back your confidence and feel ready to deal effectively with whatever life throws at you.

I hope you found value in the Stoic practices from this sample.

And if you did, make sure to [check out the book](#).

Thanks for reading,

Jonas

