

AN INTRODUCTION TO STOICISM

**Day 2: The Stoic Art
of Journaling**

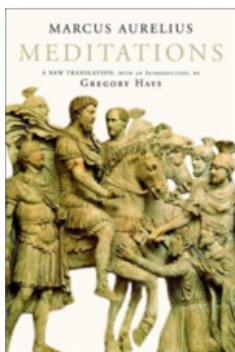
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The starting point of any new pursuit is critical. Stoicism is no difference. Picking up the wrong book can derail even the most interested student.

So where should someone start with Stoicism? Which philosopher? Which translator? Which edition? Are there good books *about* Stoicism? Good articles? Is the free stuff on the internet any good?

We've got you covered.

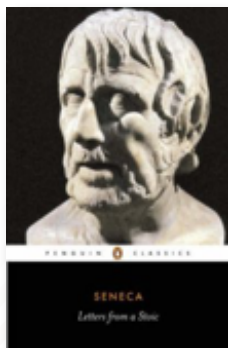


Meditations by Marcus Aurelius — Meditations is perhaps the only document of its kind ever made. It is the private thoughts of the world's most powerful man giving advice to himself on how to make good on the responsibilities and obligations of his positions. Trained in Stoic philosophy, Marcus stopped almost every night to practice a series of spiritual exercises—reminders

designed to make him humble, patient, empathetic, generous, and strong in the face of whatever he was dealing with.

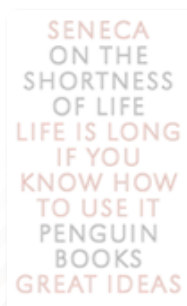
Well, now we have this book. It is eminently readable and perfectly accessible. You cannot read this book and not come away with a phrase or a line that will be helpful to you next time you are in trouble. Read it, it is practical philosophy embodied.

Make sure you pick up the Gregory Hays translation from Modern Library. It is the most accessible edition—completely devoid of any “thou’s” and “shalls”. (We have also put up an extensive list of lessons and great quotes from *Meditations* here).



Letters from a Stoic by Seneca — Seneca, like Marcus, was also a powerful man in Rome. He was also a great writer and from the looks of it, a trusted

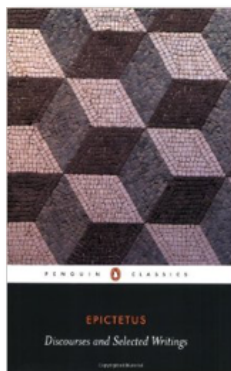
friend who gave great advice to people close to him. Much of that advice survives in the form of letters. Now we can read those letters and they can guide us through problems with grief, wealth, poverty, success, failure, education and so many other things. Seneca was a Stoic as well, but like Marcus, he was practical and borrowed liberally from other schools. As he quipped to a friend, “I don’t care about the author if the line is good.” That is the ethos of practical philosophy—it doesn’t matter from whom or when it came from, what matters if it helps you in your life, if only for a second. Reading Seneca will do that. The Penguin translation is fantastic, both for this collection of letters (which are more like essays than true correspondence) and the next recommendation.



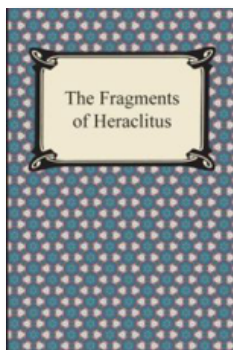
***On the Shortness of Life* by Seneca** — This collection of three short letters—essays, really—might actually be the best introduction to Seneca. The main

one, *On the Shortness of Life*, is a stringent reminder about the non-renewability of our most important resource: our time. One of his most famous quotes comes from this writing and is worth reflecting upon: “It is not that we are given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it.” Just like his letters, make sure to pick the Penguin edition. This one, part of Penguin’s Great Ideas series, is small and perfectly fits in your back pocket.





Discourses and Selected Writings by **Epictetus** — Of the big three (Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus), Epictetus is the most preachy and for many, the least fun to read. That doesn't mean he isn't brilliant. On many occasions he expresses something so clearly and profoundly that it will shake you to your core. Personally, I prefer the Penguin translations, but I've tried a handful of others and found the differences to be relatively negligible.



***Fragments* by Heraclitus** — This is as ephemeral as the Stoics get. While most of the other recommendations are bent towards hard, practical advice, Heraclitus might seem a bit poetic. But those beautiful lines are really the same direct advice and timeless, perspective-changing observations as the others.

“Try in vain with empty talk / to separate the essences of things / and say how each thing truly is.”

“Applicants for wisdom / do what I have done: / inquire within.”

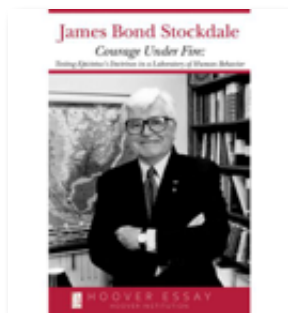
“Character is fate.”

“What eyes witness / ears believe on hearsay.”

“The crops are sold / for money spent on food.”

Heraclitus is considered as a key influence in Stoic

thought and this is evident in the numerous references to Heraclitus that are seen in *Meditations*. As one scholar put it in explaining Heraclitus's influence on Stoicism, Marcus considered Heraclitus “as one of the great sages.”

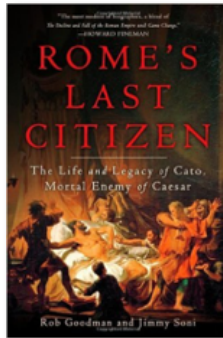


COURAGE UNDER FIRE: Testing Epictetus's Doctrines in a Laboratory of Human Behavior by James Stockdale — United States Navy fighter pilot James Stockdale was captured by the North Vietnamese in 1965 where he remained a POW for the next seven years; two of which were spent wearing leg irons in solitary confinement. Years later, Stockdale would write and lecture extensively on Epictetus's *Enchiridion* which he credits for providing the mindset and strength necessary to endure years of torture. Stockdale's exemplary behavior during imprisonment is an embodiment how Stoicism can provide us with a

framework for dealing with extreme adversity and the obstacles that come in our way.



***The Inner Citadel* and *Philosophy as a Way of Life* by Pierre Hadot** — Both of these are academic, yet fascinating books. *The Inner Citadel* is a biography of Marcus Aurelius, which should be next on your list if you loved *Meditations*. *Philosophy as a Way of Life* explores different ‘spiritual exercises’—ideas and thought exercises from philosophy to help you make better decisions and live a better life. Don’t let the academic aspect scare you—Hadot’s books are incredibly readable and the ideas will stay with you.



***Rome's Last Citizen: The Life and Legacy of Cato, Mortal Enemy of Caesar* by Rob Goodman and Jimmy Soni** — Marcus Cato has certainly earned his place in the history books—he was the Stoic senator who led the opposition against Julius Caesar who then killed himself rather than live under a dictator. Cato was a soldier, a politician, a thinker and most important, an example. His unassailable place in Roman culture is best seen in the old proverbial expression used to make excuses: “We’re not all Catos.” There’s a lot to learn from a politician who couldn’t be corrupted. A philosopher who refused to write. A millionaire who lived among his soldiers and people. He is Marcus Porcius Cato, a man of a different epoch—some two thousand years passed—but a man, who we, without a question, are better off knowing. (See our [interview with author Jimmy Soni here](#)).



Marcus Aurelius by Matthew Arnold (essay)

— Matthew Arnold was a Victorian scholar who fell in the category of ‘sage writers’—the type of writer who instructs and chastises the reader. This is a fantastic essay on Marcus, who as he remarked in 1863, was a man who held the highest power and most powerful station in the world—and the universal verdict of the people around him was that he proved worthy of it.

Of course, you are also welcome to check out some of the most popular interviews, articles and lists on **DailyStoic.com**:

Stoic Exercises

[6 Stoic Rituals That Will Make You Happy](#)

[Stoicism at TED — Defining and Overcoming Your Fears](#)

Doing the Work Is Enough: Stop Letting Others Dictate Your Worth

10 Insanely Useful Stoic Exercises

Stoicism Reveals 4 Rituals That Will Make You Happy

100 Things I Learned in 10 Years and 100 Reads of Marcus Aurelius's Meditations

The Philosophy Of Stoicism: 4 Lessons From Antiquity On Self-Discipline

3 Stoic Exercises That Will Help Create Your Best Month Yet

Interviews

An Interview with the Master: Robert Greene on Stoicism

David “DHH” Heinemeier Hansson: The Entrepreneurial and Unstoppable Stoic

Kevin Rose on Fasting, Cold Showers and Loving One's Craft

The School of Life: An Interview With Alain de Botton

Tim Ferriss on Cultivating Resilience, Favorite Stoic Practices and How To Shun Comfort

A Stoic Response

[A Stoic Response to Anger](#)

[A Stoic Response to Fear](#)

[A Stoic Response to Rejection](#)

[A Stoic Response to Bad News](#)

Stoicism Books

[28 Books On Stoicism: The \(Hopefully\) Ultimate Reading List](#)

For other short essays, articles and online resources we recommend the following:

[Stoicism for Modern Stresses: 5 Lessons from Cato](#)

[On The Shortness of Life: An Introduction to Seneca](#)

[The Practicality of Pessimism: Stoicism as a Productivity System](#)

There is also [Stoicism and the Art of Happiness](#) which is a fantastic blog, the [Stoicism community on Reddit](#), author Jules Evans' [Philosophy for Life blog](#), and of course there is also [New Stoa](#) (an online Stoic registry).