



THE STOIC

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<https://bit.ly/3aVVmeY>

Can you do Stoicism the easy way?

CHUCK CHAKRAPANI

Stoicism and life hacking

In a recent *Washington Post* (June 1, 2021) article, Nancy Sherman declared that “Stoic practices are life hacks for self-help” is one of the five myths of Stoicism. She is not alone in this. I am often told by people I respect that Stoicism is a serious philosophy and not a set of life hacks and we should not reduce it to a few tricks that we can use.

I’m not here to dispute this opinion; but neither am I so dismissive of the ‘life hacks’ use of Stoicism. I would like to suggest that there is value in practicing any principle of Stoicism, as long as the idea is not distorted. Serious Stoics may want to plod through Stoic texts, discuss the meaning of different passages, practice spiritual exercises, and try to cultivate virtues. Such pursuits may be of great value. But there is also value in pursuing a limited number of Stoic ideas – maybe just even one – that are relevant to one’s life’s situations.

The importance of Stoic principles

I am not convinced that one should understand and practice the entirety of Stoicism to benefit from Stoic principles. One does not even have to understand the complete framework of Stoicism to benefit from a simple insight like “Some things are up to us and others are not,” or that when we hurt others we hurt ourselves indirectly. In fact, non-Stoics have been discovering and rediscovering such ideas without ever being exposed to Stoicism.

There is nothing wrong in practicing any aspect of Stoicism because it makes your life better even if you are not interested in Stoicism and don’t consider yourself a Stoic.

The entire purpose of Stoicism (or any other philosophy of life) is to enhance one’s life. Whether this is achieved by a lifetime of study and practice or by a causal insight gained from being exposed to a single Stoic idea is of little importance. You don’t have to strive to become a chef if all you want to do is fix a meal for yourself now and then.

The simplicity of great ideas

I am also struck by the observation that great ideas are simple to understand and to explain. Questions and assertions like “Is there anything at all you can do about what is bothering you now?” or “It is what it is.” are based on the core principles of Stoicism. Yet to understand and benefit from them one does not have to be a Stoic or study Stoicism. Neither should we dismiss them as a “Stoic hacks”.

At the risk of sounding blasphemous, I think that someone who understands these simple ideas and applies them to her life is as Stoic as anyone who has done a thorough study of such principles and can demonstrate their connection to Stoic physics.

Stoicism, the easy way

In this issue of THE STOIC, our contributors offer simple ways of practicing Stoicism. Here is a sampler:

Stoicism is about flourishing. But how exactly do I go about achieving it? How do I change myself?

Through taking tiny steps. Point your mind towards worthy things. Accomplish small though valuable objectives. This is how we change. This is how we get better: a small conscious shift in where we let our attention land. (Sharon Lebell)

I have so many problems, Some have occurred in the past and some may occur in the future. How do I cope with them all?

Can you do Stoicism the easy way? (Contd.)

Don't try to tackle your life all at once, Don't worry about the past or the future. Instead, whenever something happens just ask yourself, "What is so unbearable about this?" If that's all you take away from Stoic philosophy, and if you bring enough mindfulness into your daily life, then you'll benefit greatly. (Jonas Salzgeber)

Sometimes I start to become angry, or anxious, or just overwhelmed by everything I have to do. My body tenses, my mind starts creating pictures of how awful this thing is. My emotions begin to take over, and I will soon be past the point of no return.

One of the best ways to stop creating negative mental pictures for yourself is to substitute a beautiful image instead... Whenever you confront your selected challenge, you know what to do: introduce your fine and noble impression and cast out the impure one. Go back to that uplifted mental zone you created for yourself. You are just getting back to where you belong – you are bringing out your natural nobility of spirit. (Brittany Polat)

Stoicism is too difficult to practice because it emphasizes logic and avoids emotions.

Stoicism does not imply emptying oneself of all feelings... You question your responses to your reactions, seek out the sources of your thoughts and emotions, and check whether you really want to "assent" to them. Do you want to let knee-jerk reactions guide your every decision? Or do you want to take back the driver's seat, and shape your thoughts and actions according to your ethical principles? (Meredith Kunz)

I am worried about how others see me.

Don't worry, you are the only one who sees the difference between it went great and it went bad ... And the past is out of control already (remember the dichotomy of control?). If we did it, we did it. If we didn't, well, we didn't. There is nothing else that we can do about the past. Hence, focus on the present moment. And don't worry.

Even in the bad scenario you will probably be better off than you think. (Poitr Stakiewicz)

Isn't practicing virtue difficult? What is the best way to practice it?

By realizing what is in our control and what isn't, we can do our part to strive for prudence, justice, courage, and temperance, instead of giving into panic, fear, hoarding, misinformation, or selfish actions at the cost of our loved ones and our neighbours. (Leonidas Konstantakos)

There is no need to tackle every problem at the same time, with the same intensity. Let's do it in our own pace. Even the ancient Stoics conceded that no one is ever a sage. All we can do is all we can do. That is good enough when we keep moving toward excellence. And that's all Stoicism asks of us.

TheStoicGym.com . New Blogs . July 2021

FEATURED BLOG OF THE MONTH

(<https://thestoicgym.com/blogs/view/the-stoic-perspective-on-anger-was-marcus-aurelius-wrong>)

The Stoic Perspective On Anger: Was Marcus Aurelius Wrong? - Ronald W. Pies, MD.

June 30th

Stoic Foundations: Epictetus' Ten

<https://bit.ly/3w2VP9S>

Saturday, July 3

Ten Stoic Choices of Epictetus

<https://bit.ly/3x0Fi7m>

Wednesday, July 7

12 training methods of Epictetus

<https://bit.ly/3zXHBds>

Saturday, July 10

Ten Marks of a Free Person

<https://bit.ly/35QPxz8>

Wednesday, July 14

How to be Happy — Seneca's Dozen

<https://bit.ly/3jlUYxY>

Saturday, July 17

How to be Tranquil: Seneca's Sixteen

<https://bit.ly/35RjXBp>

Wednesday, July 21

How to Deal with Worries

<https://bit.ly/3zYWrAw>

Saturday, July 24

How to Deal with Insults

<https://bit.ly/3xL5UcG>

Wednesday, July 28

How to Deal with Betrayal

<https://bit.ly/35POjV9>

Saturday, July 31

How to Deal with Guilt

<https://bit.ly/2SXzg93>