

# New Year's resolution: Respect yourself

“You don't depend on other people or circumstances for a good life. Instead, you possess the inner resources to find joy whatever you are doing.”



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## Deep and lasting joy

We don't often make the connection between joy and self-respect, but one of the best places for a Stoic to start on the path toward eudaimonia (deep and long-lasting joy) is with self-respect. That's because joy is a by-product of virtue (human excellence), and virtue results from living in agreement with our human nature. In other words, we become happy by bringing out the best in our nature. And, as Epictetus puts it,

*What is our nature? To be people who are free, noble-minded, and self-respecting. - Epictetus, Discourses 3.7*

It's no coincidence that Epictetus links inner freedom to self-respect. When you respect yourself, you believe in your own ability to withstand hardship, to make good decisions, and to find happiness in your own good character. You don't depend on other people or circumstances for a good life. Instead, you possess the inner resources to find joy whatever you are doing.

## Happiness isn't subject to interruption or obstruction

*Now nothing characterizes happiness better than the fact that it isn't subject to interruption or obstruction. - (Epictetus, Discourses, 4.4, 5-6*

I'm now called away to do something or another. I'll go off at once, taking care to observe the standards that ought to be maintained, so as to act with self-respect, with sure purpose, and without desire or aversion with regard to external things.

Unfortunately, many of us fall into the trap of letting other people's opinions determine our own sense of self-worth. (I am definitely guilty of this, although I am slowly getting better, thanks to my Stoic training!) We have been taught to see ourselves reflected in other people's eyes, and we become dependent on their approval to feel good about ourselves. If other people like us or give us positive feedback, we feel validated and valued; if

other people don't like us or criticize us, we feel deflated and worthless. As Marcus Aurelius observed,

*I have often marveled at how everyone loves himself above all others, yet places less value on his own opinion of himself than that of everyone else...So much greater is our respect for what our neighbours think of us than what we think of ourselves! - Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 12.4*

The solution is – to borrow a phrase from Seneca – *to learn to be a friend to yourself* (*Letters*, 6.7). There may be times in your life when you have no other friends, or when you face the disapproval of the crowd, or an unfair boss, or a toxic relationship. None of this is necessarily a reflection of your actual character. When you are a friend to yourself, you are strong enough to withstand other people's unjustified disapproval without allowing it to diminish your standing in your own eyes. With your self-respect intact, you can carry on doing what you believe is right, no matter what other people may think.

## Self-respect check-up for the New Year

As we begin the new year, take some time for a self-respect check-up. You might want to use the following prompts as the basis of a reflective conversation with yourself:

*Do I treat myself the way I would treat a friend? Am I overly critical of myself, or perhaps too lenient?*

*Do I take care of my mind, body, and spirit?*

*Do I spend too much time thinking about other people's opinions of me?*

*Do I trust myself to handle difficult situations?*

*Do I believe that I deserve to be happy?*

If you intentionally cultivate self-respect, you will find that inner peace, freedom, and even happiness follow closely behind. Remember to be a friend to yourself, and you might find that 2022 is the year that brings you closer to contentment and joy.