

JONAS SALZGEBER

The art of living the good life

How to live a good life?

This classic philosophic question stands at the origin of the primary concern of Stoic philosophy: How to live one's life, or how to master "the art of living."

Stoic teacher Epictetus compared philosophy to artisans: As wood is to the carpenter, and bronze to the sculptor, so are our own lives the proper material in the art of living.

Philosophy is an essential craft for everybody who wants to learn how to live (and die) well. Every life situation presents a blank block of marble that we can sculpt and train on, so that over a lifetime we can master our craft.

That's what Stoicism is here for: It teaches us how to live well, how to face adversity calmly, and how to sculpt and enjoy a good life.

And what makes someone good at the art of living?

It's simple: If you want to be good at something, you must practice, learn, and grow.

Just like someone who wants to be good in music must study music, someone who wants to be good at living, therefore, must have good knowledge of how to live.

Makes sense, right?

A "philosopher" literally translates from the Greek into a "lover of wisdom," someone who *loves* to learn how to live, someone who *wants* to attain practical wisdom concerning how to actually live their life.

Philosophy, then, is really a matter of *practice*, of learning how to sculpt our

lives. Thinking and philosophizing about the blank block of marble won't teach us how to skillfully use chisel and mallet.

The primary reason to study philosophy is to put it into practice.

As a student in the art of living, we must remain open-minded and willing to learn.

Throw out your conceited opinions, for it is impossible for a person to begin to learn what he thinks he already knows."

Epictetus, Discourses, 2.17.1

Whenever you think you already know, pause and remind yourself to remain open-minded. Maybe what you think you know is outdated, maybe you're mistaken, maybe you're acting on bad information.

And maybe you're right. But the danger is that if we think we already know, we won't even listen to other opinions. We're close-minded and unwilling to learn something new. Do you seek the truth or do you seek to be right?

Again, the Stoics are marvelous role models. As Marcus said,

If anyone can prove and show to me that I think and act in error, I will gladly change it—for I seek the truth.

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, 6.21

As we're willing to learn, we should actively make time for it instead of just leaving the remnants of time for it.

Leisure without study is death; it is a tomb for the living man.

Seneca, Moral Letters, 82.3

We're here to learn and grow. Most of our experiences are learning experiences. All the challenges we face in our

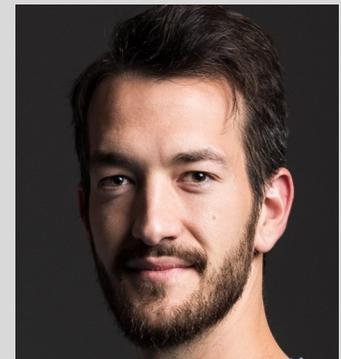
lives are there for us, so we can learn and grow.

If you didn't learn these things in order to demonstrate them in practice, what did you learn them for?

Epictetus, Discourses, 1.29.35

When we remain open-minded and learn new things, we should also put them to practice. Whatever you know, as long as you don't put it into practice, it's useless. And without practicing what we learn, we'll soon forget it. By practicing it, on the other hand, the new-found knowledge becomes part of our blood and flesh.

In that sense, let's master the art of living. It's what we're here for.



Jonas Salzgeber of jonas@njlifehacks.com is an author. At the core of his actionable philosophy lies the goal of leading a happy life even—and especially—in the face of adversity. He is the author of *The Little Book of Stoicism*.

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