

# [It us. however, despite the indisputable need](https://assignbuster.com/it-us-however-despite-the-indisputable-need/)

Ithas often been said that the ability for humans to exhibit and perceiveemotions is a part of the human condition. The capability of demonstratingemotional responses is not exclusive to humans but is shared all across theanimal kingdom. Its purpose, seemingly obvious at first, may not be as apparentas one thinks. Emotions are vital for everyday living because it helps us tocarry out many of our daily activities such as communication and respondingaccordingly to the events and issues around us. However, despite theindisputable need for emotions, like many other essentials in our lives, it maybecome hard to manage or understand the extent to which it crosses a boundaryof being beneficial, to becoming a burden. If you’ve ever been in a situationof someone bawling over the death of their pet goldfish or on the contraryhaving no emotion at all? These are all scenarios that manifest the ancientphilosophy of Stoicism.  In light of someof the recent events in our world, I decided to explore whether Stoicism andsome of its greatest thinkers might offer some ideas we can use to live a goodand smart life.

The fundamentals of ancient Stoic philosophy are oftenmisinterpreted, however through a fair analysis and practice of this philosophyI believe individuals will gain insight into leading a life composed ofstability and equanimity, both of which will influence a happier and healthierlife. First a little history. Individuals who were considered the greatest mindsof their century and three of the most famous leaders of the philosophy includeMarcus Aurelius, Epictetus, and Seneca.

Though, the roots of this philosophy beginwith a man named Zeno of Citium. He was a prominent Greek physician in theRoman Empire and at one point “ suffered the loss of all of his work and books”(Daily Stoic). This tragedy one would assume caused an excessively distressingand emotional response.

Nonetheless, his response was quite unexpected andrevealed the beginning of the Stoic philosophy. He said “ the fact that, afterthe loss of the totality of my pharmaceutical remedies, the totality of mybooks, as well as these recipes of reputable remedies, as well as the variouseditions I wrote on them, in addition to so many other works, each one of whichexhibits that love of work that was mine my entire life; the fact that I feltno pain shows first the nobility of my behavior and my greatness of soul” (DailyStoic). With a strong emphasis on virtue, justice, duty and reason, the Stoicsbelieve that a life of self-control and moderation is a path that leads to agood life.             Manytimes in our life we will encounter situations that make us uncomfortable ordistressed. These issues are inevitable and something each individual of thehuman race will experience, and for thousands of years across centurieseveryone from politicians to philosophers have attempted to find a logicalpractice that will help individuals cope with such issues.

I strongly believethat we have found the answer for this obstacle by following one of thefundamental teachings of Stoicism.  TheStoics valued, among few other things, self-control and the practice oftemperance. This idea encourages individuals to develop a rational way ofthinking and believing that we have the power to control our judgments andemotions. When individuals do not keep these two behaviors in their own controland learn to manage them it borders on the line of irrationality and in thelong run is not behavior that will promote a happier life. As a result, Stoicphilosophers have said “ the power of rational judgment is the only true powerthat we possess in life” (Raynor).

The ability comes from our rational nature: our power to think critically about our experiences and to change ourperspective on them. All other powers that we possess –can be derived fromexternal and materialistic desires including money, roles in society andpossessions can be taken or lost in an instant. The Stoics argued even if thesematerialistic items were taken away we still have the innate power o maintain arational mind.

. This intrinsic power is an essential feature of our humannature. However, despite these benefits there have been minor criticisms of thetemperance that Stoic philosophy advises. Take for example, a situation thatmany of us have encountered or will in the future. You’re driving on the roadand a driver completely oblivious to your vehicle cuts you off and thenproceeds to roll down the window and yell out some derogatory language. In thistraffic incident a Stoic approach dictates that we should question thesituation and would conclude that rationally it is not a situation worth gettingupset about because realistically nothing can be within our abilities. Nonetheless, others would argue that they do not deserve to be the victim of such abuse.

Theill-mannered actions of the other driver would be deemed unjust and deserving ofpunishment. Additionally, by not responding to this accident and informing thedriver of their wrong-doings, we may be condoning their actions and ultimatelyan endless cycle of injustice. Nevertheless, a Stoic would respond that if youwere truly in search of happiness and in a pursuit of developing yourselfcontrol the right thing to do will be to accept the incident for what it is andnot let it manifest in your mind for a second longer because ultimately you arethe one that will face the anger and effects of the negative emotions. “ Controlyour state of mind and you can be happy on the rack, the Stoics used to say. Itis a grim teaching, but effective” (Raynor).

The first step to takingself-control the Stoic way is to affirm one’s power of rational judgment. To maintaintranquility and a balanced state of mind we need to nurture our inner stretch andpower. Another reason I strongly suggestthe discipline of Stoicism is in the interest of learning to cope with theminor and major inconveniences that life may present us with.  This may range from a break-up to the loss ofyour house in a flood and the sole idea these issues or tragedies will have incommon is how you respond to them.

Stoic philosophy advises individuals to notbe troubled by realms that are out of their control but solely focus on thingsthat stem internally and can be managed by oneself. In our daily lives we faceconundrums that are presented to us through fate and it is in our best interestto face these issues in way that that will be of least harm and consequences forourselves, and to do this we must follow the wise words of Epictetus. He proclaims” that our most importantchoice in life is to decide whether to concern ourselves with the external orinternal”.

The suggestion here is that matters that are external including actionsof others is not something we should concern ourselves with. An important wayto practice this idea is through asking the question: do I have control overthis? If you do, stop worrying and get to work. If you don’t have control, thereality is worrying won’t make it better. Furthermore, going back to the firstpoint, it might be a good idea to ask yourself what your belief is that’scausing all this worry, is there a rational reasoning for it? (Pigliucci) Thisjustifies that sadness, anger and worrying are irrational responses and possiblyare not the most effective way to overcome an obstacle. Nonetheless, I wouldargue that by recognizing there are many things we cannot control, we actuallygain a greater feeling of control over our lives, as we come to terms with faterather than bashing our heads against it.  Conversely, somesuggest this idea implies passively abiding by fate with no expression of theirown input. If one is “ accepting” and learns to compromise with events then we loseour sense of free will and choice. If one accepts that everything that happensto them is a matter of fate, how are we able to tolerate all of the injusticethat occurs in the world? An example of such is women gaining the right tovote.

By complying that women were just not worthy enough or any of the otherirrational reasons behind not giving them the power to vote we would never havegained this right. Without a firm stance on what needed to be done and notallowing beliefs to be as they always have been, we would not inspire changeand improvement in our world.  Thesecontrary ideas portray an interesting perspective on the role of fate in ourlives. The implication being that there is some sort of perfect balance thatmust be sought, similar to Aristotle’s idea of the golden mean. It would befoolish to think that you could control everything in life, yet having no senseof control would impede on your personal development.

This seems to relate tothe dichotomy of humanist ideals vs. anti-humanist ideals, as the formerrevolves around the idea of us having the power to manipulate our environmentso as to allow us to develop, while the latter preaches the idea that there isnot a whole lot we can do.            Finally, to truly reinstate why I believeStoicism provide good advice on how to live I allude to a mental exercise that expertsrecommended in the practice of this philosophy. This exercise goes by the nameof “ negative visualization”(Daily Stoic) and has its roots from the phenomenon of Hedonic Adaptation.

Thisconcept refers to the means that we constantly get used to the things we haveand then begin to take them for granted.. Stoics base this negativevisualization technique off of a quote by Marcus Aurelius: “ Do not indulge in dreams of having what you havenot, but reckon up the chief of the blessings you do possess, and thenthankfully remember how you would crave for them if they were not yours.

“ Negativevisualization does not rely on negative emotions; in fact, it is intended tohelp prevent them. Negative visualization means imagining unwanted outcomes andhow we would deal with them in a virtuous way, so that we are not caught offguard if they do happen. Ryan Holiday the bestselling author of The Obstacle isthe Way portrays the purpose of this exercise quite eloquently:  “ if it comes as a constant surprise each andevery time something unexpected occurs, you’re not only going to be miserablewhenever you attempt something big, you’re going to have a much harder timeaccepting it and moving on to attempts two, three, and four.

The onlyguarantee, ever, is that things could go wrong” (Holiday). The only thing wecan use to mitigate this is anticipation, because the only variable we controlcompletely is ourselves. It also reminds us of what we do have so we are gratefulfor it, not out of fear of its loss as such, but simply through understandingthat we may not have it in the future.            To sum up Ihope you have gained insight into why I strongly believe thatthe sooner we start practicing healthy thinking, during both times of ease andtimes of challenge, the better equipped we can find ourselves to handledifficult events of varying degrees. What I recommend is the embrace of thevariety of non-debilitating human emotions, both pleasant and less pleasant.

Additionally, to realize that it is not circumstances that will create what we feel, but theperspective we choose to take about those circumstances that will do so. Themore we practice mindfulness, thinking about our thinking, and choosing tothink in healthy ways which create healthy and non-debilitating emotions, theeasier it can be to remain steady, stable and alert during times of concern. Forthese reasons, I stand by my argument that Stoicism provides good advice on howto live.