

NOTES FROM: *Letters from a Stoic*, by Seneca

SUMMARY: Seneca was one of the richest, most powerful people in ancient Rome, and yet *he* didn't make it out alive either. Even while he *was* alive, his riches didn't protect him from psychopathic predators, hardship, and death. *But Stoicism did*, and Seneca became one of that philosophy's most famous practitioners.

Incidentally, Seneca was the tutor of the sadistic Emperor Nero, and while he tried to teach him *some* of what it meant to be a good person, Nero ended up ordering that Seneca commit suicide by drinking poison, after the Emperor came to believe that he had been caught up in an assassination plot.

The Stoic principles Seneca taught didn't penetrate *Nero's* consciousness so much, but they were preserved in this series of letters, which reads like a diary or manual of philosophical meditations. Hopefully we can assimilate them better than Nero did!

“What man can you show me who places any value on his time, who reckons the worth of each day, who understands that he is dying daily? For we are mistaken when we look forward to death; the major portion of death has already passed. Whatever years be behind us are in death's hands.”

“While we are postponing, life speeds by.”

“If you really want to escape the things that harass you, what you're needing is not to be in a different place but to be a different person.”

“Everywhere means nowhere. When a person spends all his time in foreign travel, he ends by having many acquaintances, but no friends. And the same thing must hold true of men who seek intimate acquaintance with no single author, but visit them all in a hasty and hurried manner.”

“The more a mind takes in the more it expands.”

“Time is the one debt that even a grateful recipient cannot repay.”

“I do not regard a man as poor, if the little which remains is enough for him.”

“It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, who is poor.”

“No man can have a peaceful life who thinks too much about lengthening it.”

“There are more things, Lucilius, likely to frighten us than there are to crush us; we suffer more often in imagination than in reality.”

“You will suffer soon enough, when it arrives; so look forward meanwhile to better things.”

“Even bad fortune is fickle.”

“The fool, with all his other faults, has this also, that he is always getting ready to live.”

“He who needs riches least, enjoys riches most.”

“When you think of the ambitions ahead of you, think also of the ones behind you.”

“The treacherous goods of our ambitions look better to those who hope for them than to those who have attained them.”

“When you are traveling along a road, there must be an end point, but when you don't know where you're going or why, the wanderings are limitless.”

“In every age, what is enough remains the same.”

“Until we have begun to go without them, we fail to realize how unnecessary many things are. We've been using them not because we needed them but because we had them.”

“To gain riches, don't add to your wealth, but subtract from your desires.”

“If you live in harmony with nature you will never be poor; if you live according to what others think, you will never be rich.”

“Nature brought us into the world without desires or fears, free from superstition, treachery, and other curses. Go forth as you were when you entered!”

On Death: "What is baser than to fret at the very threshold of peace?"

“Men do not care how nobly they live, but only how long, although it is within reach of every man to live nobly, but within no man's power to live long.”

“We must make it our aim always to have lived long enough.”

“Our days are shared between ourselves and death.”

“I would prefer to lack success than to lack faith.”

“None of our possessions are essential.”

“Leave it to death to determine what progress we have made.”

"My country is the whole world."

“Live as if you have survived your own death.”

“Who is not near death? It is ready for us in all places and at all times.”

“You will wake up when you see how many men have been working for your benefit.”

“Praise only that which is in the man himself.”

MK: We often spend our *time* on things that we wouldn't pay money for.

“How few men actually own themselves.”

“Why do you care to receive praise from men who you yourself would not praise?”

“Let death test me. For I have long tested death.”

MK: Death is the same state as before we were born, and there was no discomfort then, so whatever comes after is something we've already successfully dealt with.

MK: If there was any suffering in the state before birth, we have transcended that.

“A friend retained in the spirit can never be absent.”

“Every visible object accompanies time in its flight.”

“The shortest cut to riches is to despise riches.”

“To me, the thought of my dead friends is sweet and appealing. For I have had them as if I should one day lose them; I have lost them as if I have them still.”

“Let us greedily enjoy our friends, because we do not know for how long this privilege will be ours. We have lost too much of their time while they were still alive.”

“Whatever can happen at any time can happen today.”

“Every honorable act is voluntary.”

“Regard not what you must suffer, but what you must do.”

“Life keeps no one against his will.”

“You were born to carry burdens.”

“Let us see to it that all our time belongs to us.”

“Fortune gives us nothing which we can really own.”

“As long as you live, keep learning how to live.”

“Whithersoever I am summoned by honor, I will go.”

“Never measure the pedestal along with the man.”

“There is no life that is not short.”

“There is no sorrow in the world, when we have escaped the fear of death.”

“It is according to opinion that we suffer.”

“A man is as wretched as he has convinced himself that he is.”

“In order to discover one grateful person, it's worthwhile to sift through many ungrateful ones.”

“The wages of a good deed are to have done it.”

“Virtue does nothing under compulsion.”

“You can more easily remove vices than control them.”

“The happy man prefers no other man's life to his own.”

“There is nothing left for a happy man to wish for other than what is.”

“The man who is less happy is not happy, since that word admits of no diminution.”

“Wisdom does not advance to meet us, and we are each responsible for its acquisition.”

“In the midst of things which have been destined to die, we live!”

“We know nothing about death, and it's foolish to condemn that of which you are ignorant.”

“We are in the power of nothing when once we have death under our own power.”

“Nature has made the provision that none shall go unburied.”

“Do you find it fairer that you should obey nature or that nature should obey you?”

“We have had the joy of learning the truth about the universe.”

“What does it matter for how long a time you avoid that which you cannot escape?”

“Whoever imitates God is worshipping him sufficiently.”

“The road to vice is not only downhill, but steep as well.”

“The punishment of crime lies in the crime itself.”

“The joy which entered from without will someday depart.”

“Lose everything else with equanimity, because you must lose your life also.”

“To have may be taken from us, but to have had, never.”

“Much has been overcome by others; therefore, let *us* overcome something.”

“He who is privileged to be born, is destined to die.”

MK: Compared to eternity, every life is exceedingly short.

“Begin at once to live, and count each day as a separate life.”

“Death is the birthday of your eternity.”

“If you set a high value on liberty, then you must set a low value on everything else.”

“Everyone approaches courageously a danger which he has prepared himself to meet long before.”

“No matter what trouble you mention, it has happened to many.”

“Each new day is the best of our entire lives.”

“In training the excellence of another, the helper must necessarily train his own.”

“See clearly for yourself what is necessary and what is superfluous.”

“We have food, we have shelter; let us compete in happiness with Jupiter himself.”

“You must crave nothing, if you are to compete in happiness with God.”

“Someone who doesn't want anything can never be poor.”

“Would you rather a lot, or enough?”

“Enough is never too little.”

“Hunger doesn't care what food brings it to an end.”

MK: If you care about what cup your drink comes in, then you are not thirsty.

“What nature requires is gathered easily, but what luxury requires brings with it wretchedness and anxiety.”

“Every hour of time thrusts us on towards the precipice over which we must someday fall.”

“The last hour reaches, but every hour approaches death.”

“A free mind subjects other things to itself and itself to nothing.”

“What progress, you ask, have I made? I have begun to be a friend to myself.”