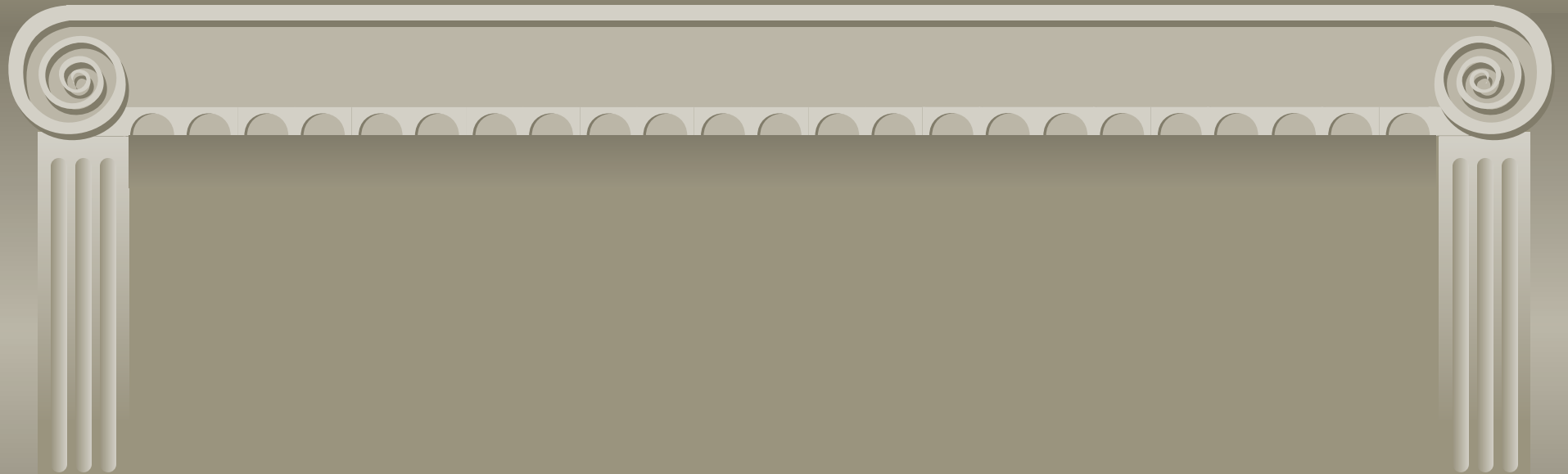


Stoicism



Historical Background

- ◆ Stoicism was founded by the Athenian philosopher Zeno (Ca. 335-ca. 263 n.c.).
- ◆ The school assembled on the Stoa (Greek for porch).
- ◆ It was aimed at happiness, but sought happiness through wisdom.
- ◆ It was inspired by Socrates, who had faced death with serenity and courage.
- ◆ Socrates' superb control over the emotions in the face of the supreme provided a model to follow.
- ◆ Stoicism created a following which lasted for centuries, including
 - Cleathes and Aristo in Athen, Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, and Emperor Marcus Aurelius in Rome
- ◆ Epictetus (ca. 55-ca. 135 A.D.), who was born a slave but gained his freedom, worked out many of the ethical implications of early Stoicism.

Main Ideas

- ◆ Behavior is rigidly determined by natural law.
- ◆ Face destiny with courage and dignity.
- ◆ Highest good in life is a life of virtue which could be reached through prudence, justice, and temperance.
- ◆ Fearing future events is useless, for they will happen regardless.
- ◆ It is possible by an act of will to control fear; therefore, one should not fear events.

Stoic Guidelines for Living

1. The "Summum Bonum" or "reason for living" is based upon using reason to control emotions. Happiness is found through wisdom.
2. **Concern yourself with what is yours and what is in your power. Respect the power and belongings of others and no harm will come to you.**
3. Do not attempt to avoid things which by nature are unavoidable. Also, do not desire what you cannot obtain.
4. **Keep the things you desire in perspective. Desiring too much will lead to disappointment.**
5. Reduce your expectations about future events. Keep a simple and straight attitude. Do not look forward to an event to the point where it will cause disappointment because your preconceived notions about the event did not occur.

- 6. Do not blame others for an act or an event. It is out opinion of the act which causes anxiety.**
- 7. Be happy with yourself. Take pride in what you do. Do not care what others think; take responsibility for your own actions.**
- 8. Don't let possessions rule you. If you must have possessions, be ready and willing to sacrifice them. Do not become consumed with appearances.**
- 9. Find happiness not in what you have but in who you are. There is no need for material goods. Material goods only make material happiness; only truth makes true happiness.**
- 10. Do not make excuses for physical shortcomings. Let nothing stand in your path. Even the blind can see and the dumb can talk. You simply need the right state of mind-that of unstoppable will.**

11. All problems are illusion, and each has its own proper resolution so that one might see through it. For lust, the resolution is abstinence. For pain or trouble, endurance is the proper resolution. For annoyance, patience is the solution.

12. Your loved ones are simply in transition. To say that they are yours would be wrong; they were given to you, and you should care for them as you would care for someone else's possessions.

13. Expecting less and being happy is better than expecting much and being disappointed. No one can make you happy but yourself.

14. Associate with many different kinds of people. You may be a governor or a waiter, but to think of yourself as either one of these things would be detrimental to the one thing that matters—yourself.

15. Do not worry about things over which you have no power or control. If you do, you become a slave to your desires.

16. Be patient about opportunities in life. Do not go after opportunities that have not been placed before you or that have passed you by. Wait for opportunities to come to you. When they do, accept them graciously and with humility.

17. Help others, but do not take their problems on as your own. Remember that it is only the way a person views a situation that makes it a problem and not the situation as a problem itself.

18. Do not attempt to be someone who you are not. Accept your situation in life as the situation in which you were meant to be.

19. Do not be upset by predictions because anything can be taken to be a sign of the outcome of certain events. Whatever the outcome may be, one should always try to benefit from it.

20. Do not become dependent upon other people for your happiness, because if those other people go away, you will be unhappy.

The Etruscan Messenger — A Stoic Hero

Plutarch's writings contain this very instructive historical episode. When the news reached Rome that the Etruscan king was planning an attack on the Romans, the latter sent a patrician, Mucius Scaevola, to the Etruscans. He tried hard to dissuade the Etruscans from making war on Rome, and promised to bring gifts to the warlike enemy.

But the Etruscan king was unmoved: "Rome must fall!" he said over and over again. Thereupon Mucius Scaevola, seeing that he had exhausted all his arguments, stretched out his arm over the bonfire and allowed it to burn to the bone.

The Etruscan king was so astounded by the strength of will of the Roman messenger that his resolve to attack Rome was shaken: he himself had seen how strong of spirit and how courageous were those whom he wanted to attack...'



The extraordinary fortitude that Stoicism could lead to is illustrated by the Philosopher Stilpo. After his city was sacked by the Macedonians, he was asked what he had lost in the catastrophe, noting that his house had been burned, his money gone, his wife and children scattered to he knew not where, yet he was serene and unperturbed in spirit. "My justice, my courage, my temperance, my prudence are still with me," he told the conquering General.



The End