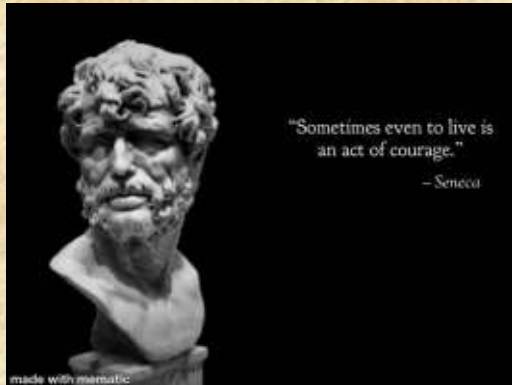


HAPPINES vs. CONTENTMENT

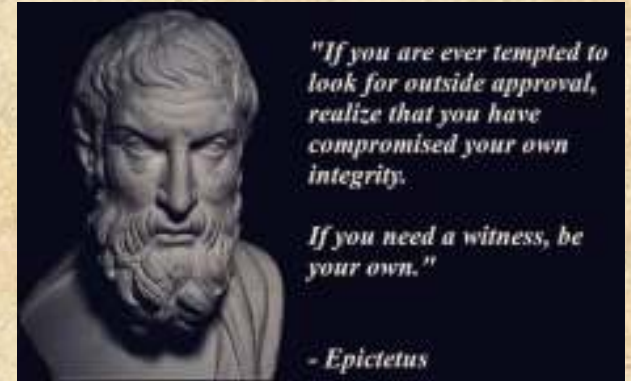




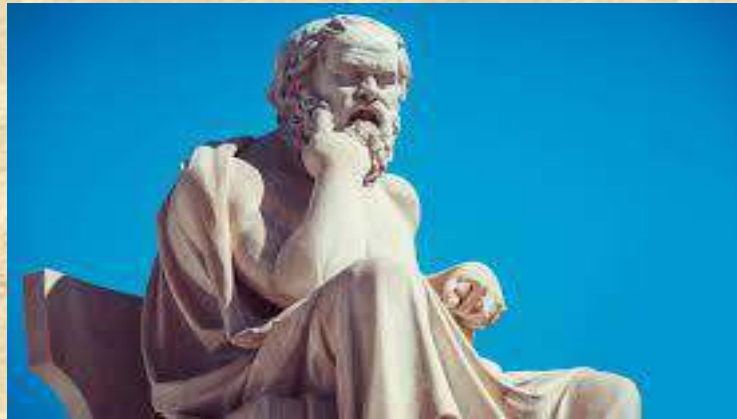
Sometimes even to live is an act of courage



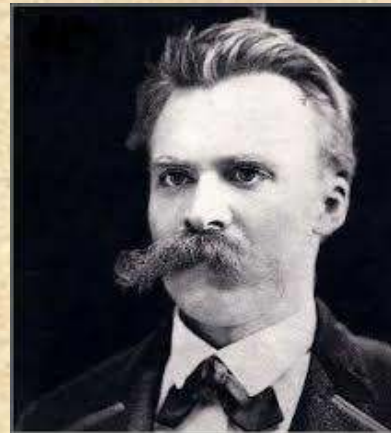
The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts



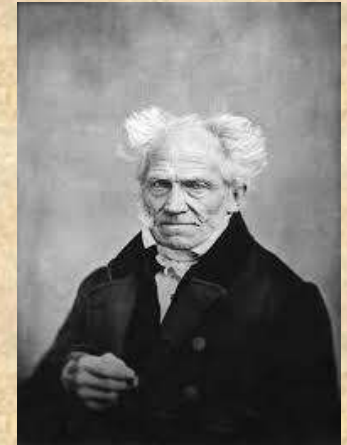
"You become what you give your attention to."



"The secret of happiness is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less" — Socrates



"Once You Are Awake, You Shall Remain Awake Eternally."



"Happiness belongs to those who are sufficient unto themselves. For all external sources of happiness and pleasure, are by their very nature, highly uncertain, precarious, ephemeral and subject to chance."



Do you want to be happy? Be!

“There is one road to peace and happiness (keep the thought near by morning, noon and night): renunciation of externals; regarding nothing as your own; handing over everything to fortune and the deity.” –Epictetus

Epictetus was telling about the combination of peace and happiness, which equals contentment or Joy.

What we call Happiness depends on the external things that are in a constant flux. Constant change is a main quality of life. Happiness is not Joy. It is a temporal state, which is usually replaced by the opposite when the conditions that have caused it disappear and it is regularly substituted by depression. One has to apply the philosophical approach to the concept of happiness fully realizing its conditional existence. Mostly, it is based on the sensorial experience or mind created.

Happiness relates to the conditions, factors and events, while joy is an inner state notwithstanding the conditions of the outside world.

“Wealth consists not in having great possessions but in having few wants” Epictetus

Don't judge the success of your live on the basis of the opinions of others. You alone determine that and live with this.

The bible story about a man falling from the paradise is the fact that the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is eaten and the man has discovered the distinction.

Understanding this distinction is a cause of our psychological sufferings, as our perception classifies the life events as such.

This discriminating between good and bad is a cause of human suffering.

Happiness

We are striving to achieve happiness while realizing that contentment (acceptance of what is) is hard to achieve. We always try to attain something, have more possessions, comparing with others as we want to exceed them, stand out giving huge importance to impression we make on them and their opinions. We expect that these achievements will deliver what we call happiness hoping it will last, rejecting the inner understanding that it may not and rather will not. Thus, by not accepting what is, no matter how it looks and feels like, we build illusions, self-deceit, call it happiness (or unhappiness, as the case may be) allow our mind to create a story upon story of our life situations built exclusively on our perception and labeling of things.

“I am rising to do the work of a human being. Why then, am I so irritable if I am going out to do what I was born to do and what I was brought into this world for?” -Marcus Aurelius

Striving to exist peacefully in all circumstances doesn't mean that the wise person doesn't seek to alter them for the better, or in such a way that frees their energies to be used more productively, to thoughtfully affect that which **can** be changed (read: improved).

Much of life is learning to be content with the inevitable discontent that will permeate certain days or periods of our lives.

True contentment comes from a deep-seated belief that things are okay, that you have both more and less control than you realize, and that your interpretations and judgements are completely, entirely in your control.

If there were ever a state worth desiring, this would be it—not just tolerating your life, but loving it; deeply believing that every experience, setback and triumph alike, was uniquely and meaningfully assigned to you. Seeing life this way is weighty and challenging and wonderful. It's also the definition of true contentment.



Happiness and freedom begins with a clear understanding of one principal. Some things are within your control and some things are not. Epictetus

When all our material and biological needs are satisfied, a state of sustained happiness will still remain a theoretical and elusive goal, as Abd-al-Rahman III, Caliph of Córdoba in the tenth century, discovered. He was one of the most powerful men of his time, who enjoyed military and cultural achievements, as well as the earthly pleasures of his two harems. Towards the end of his life, however, he decided to count the exact number of days during which he had felt happy. They amounted to precisely 14.

Happiness is a human construct, an abstract idea with no equivalent in actual human experience. Positive and negative affects do reside in the brain, but sustained happiness has no biological basis.

When we suffer or experience negative emotions we consciously and subconsciously try to get rid of them and achieve a better state. This appears a driving force of the human evolution.



"Live with the gods. And he, who does so constantly shows them that his soul is satisfied with what is assigned to them."

Marcus Aurelius

Happiness, by nature of it's ambiguity, comes in waves, only recognizable once its passed. **Contentment** is something we can immediately identify. You know right now whether or not you're content.

Contentment is a sustained inner peace regardless of circumstance!!!

Doing what you *love* won't save you.

But even more than loving what you do, **you have to love just being.**

Being is wonderful and miraculous and we've become all-too lackluster about it. Trillions of cells came together and formed you. Specifically, **you**. Why would we dishonor the miracle that is our existence by deciding to be discontent?

True contentment is being satisfied with just being. We can't choose what happens to us but we can choose how we feel about it. Why would you want to feel depressed? *Amor fati* (a love of fate) is the response."

“There is one road to peace and happiness (keep the thought near by morning, noon and night): renunciation of externals; regarding nothing as your own; handing over everything to fortune and the deity.” –Epictetus

Contentment means acceptance of what is, understanding that only our interpretation of events or rather our idea about the nature of event affects us, not the event itself. Contentment leads to tranquility, which is a piece of mind notwithstanding the surrounding conditions.

Contentment is therefore understood as a fulfilling relationship with the self and society. It is generally defined as a longer lasting, but a deeper feeling of satisfaction and gratitude.

If we make the commonly made mistake of assuming contentment to be synonymous with happiness, we'll never be able to just, be.



“You become what you give your attention to.” -Epictetus

The quality of your attention determines the quality of your life.

What we watch, what we read, who we're around... Whatever consumes our attention **consumes and shapes us**. If you expose yourself to enough negativity, all that you see and do will be colored as such.

Attention is a finite resource that begs for our diligent allocation and reservation.

In essence, we have two choices: become masters over our attention, or be mastered by the forces that fight for it.

“...isn't it the height of folly to learn inessential things when time's so desperately short!” –Seneca

“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” -Albert Einstein

How do we go about changing our thinking? By changing the inputs, or rather, the things to which we give our attention.

To be **content**, identify, pay attention to and pursue what is meaningful to you, not what you love, as love is a fickle but **meaning** is the only thing that persists and remains.

Virtue in all things: Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, Justice



*"Loss is nothing other than change, and change is the delight of universal nature, according to whose will all things come to pass." -
Marcus Aurelius*

Everything is always changing; this is one of those truths that can be both completely terrifying and completely freeing—terrifying because all good things do come to an end (be it by our own causes or natural ones), and freeing because no singular circumstance (or your perspective) will stay the same.

And at every moment we have the only question: “Am I to enjoy or endure?”

Stoicism

Stoicism is a philosophy based on the transcendence of destructive emotions; the utmost ideal being to transcend so successfully that one never even feels discontent, but worthy-still is encountering the emotion but quickly moving forward. We acknowledge the source of our discontent and waste no time in doing something about it, it can be done and must be done.

“You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.” Marcus Aurelius

One of the defining characteristics of the Stoics was an unwavering commitment to focusing only on what was in their direct control—their will, their actions, their effort.

The Stoics believed that it was not the attainment of any external goods, be it fame, good looks, power over others, or wealth that were key to a good life, but rather a mastery of the mind. External things, the Stoics noted, can come and go due to factors outside of our control so if we stake our happiness on any of these things we give up control of our lives.

What separates Stoicism from much of the classroom philosophy we traditionally associate with the field is its emphasis on practical application. To be practical is to be prepared—to decide in advance what you will do, or what you’ll need to have done, should something undesirable take place. Hence the fear is accepted as a justified mental preparation for unexpected.

“The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts.” Marcus Aurelius

Can you be content if negative emotions are present?

The question is: “How to achieve joy”? Doesn’t it mean being content, accept the adversity of life and often the adversity of co-workers, even family members for your non-conformance to the standards and norms of society created to suppress the individuality?

Key to the Stoic way of life is the idea that what is most important to our well-being, and conducive to a tranquil existence, is not what happens to us, but the inner discourse that accompanies the events of our life. As Marcus explains:

“You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.”

External things are not the problem. It's your assessment of them.

Which you can erase right now.” — Marcus Aurelius

The Stoics believed that we should take control of this fact and use it to our advantage. We must realize that when we suffer a loss or someone treats us poorly we are not required to react with sadness or anger, but instead can learn to reframe how we interpret such events thus minimizing the impact of negative emotions.

We could control the way our mind interprets, the events of our life.

When something happens there is no single way to interpret it; there are too many stimuli, and too many alternative ways of looking at it.

Whether we are aware of it or not, in a sense we construct the manner in which we present the happenings of the world to ourselves.

One of the main things that disrupts the quality of thoughts is the inability people to live in the present. Instead they too often dwell on past events or worry about future. A technique Marcus used to increase his appreciation for each moment was one he learned from the great philosopher-slave Epictetus.

“There is a limit to the time assigned you, and if you don’t use it to free yourself it will be gone and will never return.” Marcus Aurelius

While some may see this as morbid, the Stoics thought that people needed to be more conscious of the transitory nature of all things.

This technique, which is now referred to as negative visualization, entails reflecting on the transitory nature of all the external things in our life.

Marcus also used negative visualization to help him live more in the present by reflecting on the fact that his own death could come at any moment.

The Stoics believed that as one became more aware that their life could end at any time they would be more likely to live in the most intense manner possible, and strive to take advantage of each moment, realize the relative triviality of so many of the things that most people worry about.

Everything by which people set so much store in life is emptiness, putrefaction, pettiness; little dogs nipping at one another; little children who laugh as they fight, and then suddenly burst into tears.” Marcus Aurelius

In addition, being overly concerned with opinions of others would not, according to Marcus, lead to a satisfying life, but rather one of frustration, dissatisfaction, and anger bringing to deep unhappiness.

And now a very profound saying by Marcus:

“I have often wondered how it is that every man loves himself more than all the rest of men, but yet sets less value on his own opinion of himself than on the opinion of others.” And more

“There is a limit to the time assigned you, and if you don’t use it to free yourself it will be gone and will never return.”

This should make us think deeply. Being dependent on the opinions of other is like putting yourself in chains voluntarily and being extremely scared of them being removed.

“Suffering is essential to life, and therefore does not flow in upon us from outside, but everyone carries around within himself its perennial source.” Arthur Schopenhauer

While all animals suffer in the present due to deprivations or injuries, humans are alone in their capability to create suffering in the midst of external comforts. We ruminate on the past and worry about the future, and as Kierkegaard put it, we know that “terror, perdition, annihilation, dwell next door to every man” (Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread).

“The discipline of suffering, of great suffering - do you not know that only this discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, persevering, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness—was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? (Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil)

“Indeed, from the bottom of my soul I am gratefully disposed to all my misery and sickness, and to whatever is imperfect in me, because such things leave me a hundred back-doors through which I can escape from permanent habits.” Nietzsche

According to Nietzsche, suffering is a way to liberation and contentment as a final destination.

Profound suffering proves to be an indispensable ingredient in self-transformation. Just as a forest fire burns away all the dead and worn-out material to make room for new life to grow, so too Nietzsche believed those able to suffer profoundly know how to use pain as an impetus to burn away all that is weak and superfluous in them. All of us have emotional tendencies, neuroses, and habits we would be better off burning away, but when things are going well we think little of making changes. When mired in a prolonged state of suffering, enacting radical changes in our way of being proves to be much easier.

Nietzsche felt that what we call **happiness** was an ephemeral, fleeting condition that could end at any moment...and it does. But **contentment** could only be found in having vital strength and a fighting spirit against all of the obstacles that limit liberty and self-assertiveness.

“Our search for happiness is a sign that we don’t have it” André Gide

When we become old and frail, we ask ourselves: “What we have achieved? What have we been striving for?”, we begin to live by the past emotions, by remembering those fleeting happy moments which in reality blocked our way to contentment, and joy. To some, the life achievements in various fields of science or literature do indeed create a sense of satisfaction, that the life wasn’t wasted, while not allowing ourselves to admit that all this was just our story, vanity and ultimately an illusion.

As Nietzsche writes in “Untimely Meditations”:

“A traveler who had seen many countries, peoples and several of the earth’s continents was asked what attribute he had found in men everywhere. He said: “They have a propensity for laziness.” To others, it seems that he should have said: “They are all fearful. They hide themselves behind customs and opinions suppressing their individuality and staging their life drama. In his heart every man knows quite well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once and that there will be no second chance for his oneness.

“Contentment could only be found in having vital strength and a fighting spirit against all of the obstacles” Friedrich Nietzsche

“Any human being who does not wish to be part of the masses need only stop making things easy for himself. Let him follow his conscience, which cries out to him: “Be yourself! All that you are now doing, thinking, desiring, all that is not you.” - Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations

Unfortunately, in our most formative years we are thrown into an institution designed to breed collectivized and obedient workers, not individuated individuals. Like Pavlov’s dogs, our behavior is conditioned by whistles and bells. We are rewarded for regurgitating information, for standing in line when commanded and for affirming the status quo. Day in and day out, our schooling feeds our herd instinct and starves our impulse for independence, and so when we emerge into adulthood we lack the cognitive resources required to individuate and go our own way. We perceive life through the lens of whatever worldview our society deems natural and sane. We do not assume the role of the hero in our drama, but that of the non-playable character passively observing the passing of days.

“The fear of finding oneself alone – that is what they suffer from – and so they don’t find themselves at all.” – Andre Gide, The Immoralist

“Our happiness is heavily dependent on the societal norms and demands” -

The herd doesn’t like individuality and our deviations that contradict the established model of sanity may cause us to be ostracized by this society and, therefore, causes isolation” - Ernest Becker, *Angel in Armor*

And finally: “To be yourself in a world that is always trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment”. – Ralf Waldo Emerson

Contentment remains the unachievable goal if you surrender your individuality!