

EPICTETUS
NO MAN
IS FREE
WHO IS
NOT MASTER
OF HIMSELF

2000 years-old guide to peaceful living



DESTEK PUBLISHING: 1607
PHILOSOPHY: 73

EPICETETUS / NO MAN IS FREE WHO IS NOT MASTER OF HIMSELF

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Includes sayings of Epictetus.

Privilege Owner: Destek Yayımlar Prodüksiyon Dış Tic. A.Ş.

Editor in Chief: Ertürk Akşun

Senior Editor for the Philosophy Series: Özlem Küskü

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Cover Design: Sedat Gösterikli

Page Layout: Cansu Poroy

Social Media-Graphics: Tuğçe Budak-Mesud Topal-Meltem Kökboyun

Destek Publishing: June 2022
Publisher Certificate No. 13226

ISBN 978-625-441-676-7

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Printed at Deniz Ofset Deniz Ofset – Çetin Koçak
Sertifika No. 48625
Maltepe Mahallesi
Hastane Yolu Sokak No. 1/6
Zeytinburnu / İstanbul
Tel. (0) 212 613 30 06



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DESTEK
Yayınları

In memory of Sammy Ray...

Who is Epictetus?

Epictetus was born around AD 50, presumably at Hierapolis, Phrygia. (Present day, Pamukkale, Turkey) He spent his youth as a slave in Rome to Epaphroditus, a wealthy freedman and secretary to Nero.

Early in life, Epictetus acquired a passion for philosophy and, with the permission of his wealthy master, he studied Stoic philosophy under Musonius Rufus. Becoming more educated in this way raised his social status. At some point, he became disabled. Origen wrote that this was because his leg had been deliberately broken by his master. Simplicius, in contrast, wrote that he had simply been disabled from childhood.

Epictetus obtained his freedom sometime after the death of Nero in AD 68, and he began to teach philosophy in Rome. Around AD 93, when the Roman emperor Domitian banished all philosophers from the city, Epictetus moved to Nicopolis in Epirus, Greece, where he founded a school of philosophy.

His most famous pupil, Arrian, studied under him as a young man (around AD 108) and claimed to have written his famous *Discourses* based on the notes he took on Epictetus's lectures. Arrian argued that his *Discourses* should be considered comparable to the Socratic literature. Arrian described Epictetus as a powerful speaker who could "induce his listener to feel just what Epictetus wanted him to feel." Many eminent figures sought conversations with him. Emperor Hadrian was friendly with him and may have heard him speak at his school in Nicopolis.

He lived a life of great simplicity, with few possessions. He lived alone for a long time, but in his old age, he adopted a friend's child who otherwise would have been left to die and raised him with the aid of a woman. It is unclear whether Epictetus and she were married. He died sometime around AD 135. After his death, according to Lucian, his oil lamp was purchased by an admirer for 3,000 drachmae.

What is it that humanity seeking? What is the ultimate point to this life? Money, health; to love, to be loved... Isn't there only one reason for people to want all this? Don't we try to reach happiness and peace? But then, does happiness come with having things or by not wanting anything? Maybe this is the value we are supposed to be taught since the day we are born. To be cleansed of the desire to possess. If only it could be that easy.

Now imagine yourself dressed in your shoes on, a bag in your hand, wallet in your pocket, an umbrella if it's a rainy day, and maybe a car key in hand.

And now, imagine that you let them go one by one. Put the car key on a table close by. Come on, do it. Let go of your umbrella. Take your wallet out of your pocket or purse and throw it away. Don't even turn around and look if it's still there. This is the first concern you must get rid of. Next, take off your jacket, your clothes, and your shoes. Get undressed, layer by layer. Imagine that an invisible hand reached out, took them away and disappeared. Now, there is only you. And your thoughts.

This is -more or less- what Epictetus is trying to do. To strip you of all the things you possess. Not only in body,

but also in spirit. That's what he's done. He lived in a small cottage without any belongings. Of course, I'm not telling you to leave your house right this minute, and move to a cottage, but here is where you can start: Turn around, look at your home and be happy with what you have. Consider why you want more.

Is it your ego? It is, according to Epictetus. Your sense of self. Our sense of self. What do others have that I don't? Nothing. They are not better than you, but also you are not better than them. You might think that you would be better off if you had more things. However, you are wrong! Someone who has purified himself from all the desires is happier than you.

This won't happen in one instant; maybe you won't be able to even collect your thoughts. You'll have to force yourself not to want anything, and you'll want to quit more than once. You are going to say, "why would I do this? Why wouldn't I want more?"

The book you are holding right now is going to show you the way. Whenever you're about to quit, just open a page, and wherever that is, you'll see that it's going to inspire and refresh you.

You are going to be surprised to see how relevant Epictetus' sayings are, even though they were said two thousand years ago. Maybe realizing humanity's troubles have always been the same, will make you feel better. You are going to feel that you're not alone today, and you've never ever been alone also. In short, you are going to see

that you're not crazy or the only one with problems and that this war kind of a life is really hard to survive.

I can hear you ask, how are we going to do this? How does it work? How are we going to feed ourselves and children? These are important questions and objections. Epictetus has an answer for that as well; if you want to live like a philosopher you have to forget the things you know first. One who claims to know everything cannot learn anything new. You must let go of your preconceptions and prejudices before you go on this path.

when you are done reading these pages, you might have opened the door to freedom slightly. This is the ultimate aim of Epictetus and the Stoics. And the only way to freedom is to let go of things in body and in spirit.

Of course, let's not forget that this is a long road. This book is only a beginning, a seed planted in your mind. Besides, you know everything that is written in this book, you feel them in the depths of your heart, but you cannot name or put them in sentences. But now you have a guide. When your thoughts and heart get entangled, just open this book and take a look.

I wish you success on this journey and, I hope you find the peace you're looking for.

Asli Perker

*“God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.”*

Stoa Prayer

"Try to enjoy the feast which is called life."

It might surprise you to hear that Epictetus, who did not own anything and had no dependency on anything, advise you to enjoy life. He had nothing to do with food or anything valuable, he didn't believe sleeping under a roof would bring you happiness; so how did he enjoy life and why did he call it a feast? Without doubt, he considers life from a different perspective and advised his students accordingly:

"Caretake this moment. Immerse yourself in its particulars. Respond to this person, this challenge, this deed. Quit evasions. Stop giving yourself needless trouble. It is time to really live; to fully inhabit the situation you happen to be in now."

For Epictetus, paying attention to the present moment and environment meant perceiving these at the highest

level. Dreaming about something else when you are here and now, is like ordering the only food which is not on the menu.

“Remember that in life you should order your conduct as at a banquet. Has any dish that being served reached you? Stretch forth your hand and help yourself modestly. Does it pass you by? Seek not to detain it. Has it not yet come? Send not forth your desire to meet, but wait until it reaches you.”

When we are at a dinner party, we take anything that is offered to us, right? It would be strange to ask for food that is not on the menu. However, we keep wanting things that life hasn't given. Although it has given us many other things.

Epictetus was talking about a full surrender. And the reward was peace now and later:

“Deal thus with children, thus with wife; thus with office, thus with wealth – and one day you will be meet to share the banquets of the Gods.”

He likened life not only to a dinner party but also to a fair. And he categorized people in two groups due to their reasons for being at that fair.

“Our way of life resembles a fair. The flocks and herds are passing along to be sold, and the greater part of the

crowd to buy and sell. But there some few who come only to look at the fair, to inquire how and why it is being held, upon what authority and with what object. So too, in this great fair of life, some, like the cattle, trouble themselves about nothing but the fodder. Know all of you, who are busied about land, slaves and public posts, that these are nothing but fodder! Some few there are attending the fair, who love to contemplate what the world is, what he that administers is."

Trying to understand "what it is all about" is only the beginning. When you live in the moment you have to forget where you live and be happy where you are. He was talking about an absolute forgetting, even the moment just before. A kind of dementia.

"If you are in Gyaros, do not let your mind dwell upon life at Rome, and all the pleasure it offered to you when living there, and all that would attend your return. Rather be intent on this – how he that lives in Gyaros may live in Gyaros like a man of spirit. And if you are at Rome, do not let your mind dwell upon the life at Athens, but study only how to live at Rome."

Epicetetus who was born as a slave, was also expelled as all the other philosophers had been by the Roman Empire and went to Nicople to live. Maybe that's why he did not care where he lived. He said:

“I depart to a place where non can forbid me to dwell: that habitation is upon unto all! As for the last garment of all, that is the poor body; beyond that, none can do aught unto me.”

Of course, this was hard to do: To be expelled, to leave everything behind. He didn't forget the hardships of this festival called life. But he also did not let those challenges take over. Instead, he focused on the solution and how it defines the person.

“It is the critical moment that shows the man. So, when the crisis is upon you, remember that God, like a trainer of wrestlers, has matched you with a rough and stalwart antagonist. ‘To what end,’ you ask. That you may prove the victor at the great games. Yet without toil and sweat this might not be!”

Besides, you are responsible for every action you have taken.

“When something disturbs you blame no one else, but yourself. An unlearned man blames others when he does wrong, mediocre men blames himself and fully learned person neither blames himself nor others.”

Thus, he invites you to live every moment of life, every sixty seconds of every minute and putting effort into it.

Hundreds of years later William Faulkner who might have been inspired by him said “given between the choice of nothingness and grief, I’ll take grief.”

The moments of grief enrich us. Epictetus also says:

“What you think had happened is not what happened.”

This stand -which is very close to Sufism- tries to convince us not to jump into evaluating, judging and deciding. Time is necessary. The same thing is true for the people we meet. He says:

“Someone bathes in haste; don’t say he bathes badly, but in haste. Someone drinks a lot of wine, don’t say he drinks badly, but a lot. Until you know their reasons, how do you know that their actions are vicious?”



“A man best grieves his enemy
by setting himself to live the noblest life himself.”





*“Circumstances
don’t make the
man they only
reveal him to
himself.”*

