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The Path to Freedom, Happiness, Or Is It?

Like many of the stoic philosophers enduring things that are beyond your control is one of the most important and one of the most valuable lessons to be taught and as well learned in philosophy. Other values include maintaining virtue in every situation by not over or under exaggerating a situation. Lastly, acceptance of loss, be it loved ones, property, or riches that we take for granted most times. Philosophers seem to force feed us the fact that we should accept what happens is supposed to happen. Philosophers believe that in doing this, one will achieve happiness and mental freedom. I wonder if this is truly all there is to it.

In lines 29-32 of poem, 'If', Kipling writes, "If you can fill the unforgiving minute With sixty seconds' worth of distance run, Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!". Kipling gives a lesson on enduring to become.

This advice helps to highlight the differences between stoic thought and modern life. Today people are encouraged to get out there and take what they can get. Many people spend their lives chasing wealth and status, trying to find the perfect relationship. Epictetus would call them slaves to the chase. In section 15 of 'The Handbook' Epictetus writes, "Remember that you must behave in life as at a dinner party. Is anything brought around to you? Put out your hand and take your share with moderation. Does it pass by you? Don't stop it. Is it not yet come? Don't stretch your desire towards it, but wait till it reaches you. Do this with regard to children, to a wife, to public posts, to riches, and you will eventually be a worthy partner of the feasts of the gods. And

if you don't even take the things which are set before you, but are able even to reject them, then you will not only be a partner at the feasts of the gods, but also of their empire. For, by doing this, Diogenes, Heraclitus and others like them, deservedly became, and were called, divine"(2). The advice to behave as at a dinner party is based on focusing only on what we can control, and desiring only what we control. His advice to take these things as they come is based on a recognition that wealth, status, marriage, and children are pleasant things. No harm in having them. But if we take it further and reject what is offered, then we might even be considered divine by future generations.

Remain Virtuous. In lines 25-28 of poem, 'If', Kipling writes, "If you can walk with crowds and keep your virtue, Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch, If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you, If all men count with you, but none too much" (1). Kipling is saying whether you move with common people or Kings we should maintain virtue, treat all people the same. He reminds us that it is important to be able to bounce back from disappointment or pain. One must not dwell on his enemies or the hurt a loved one could potentially cause. In section 24 of 'The Handbook' Epictetus writes, "If I can get them with the preservation of my own honor and fidelity and greatness of mind, show me the way and I will get them; but if you require me to lose my own proper good that you may gain what is not good, consider how inequitable and foolish you are" [2]. Epictetus is urging us to strive to be honourable not honored. Don't lean on what someone may say because we have no control over what they may say or feel about our decision to be that way.

Accept loss, its only borrowed. In lines 17-20 of poem, 'If', Kipling writes, "If you can make one heap of all your winnings And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss, and lose, and start again at your beginnings And never breathe a word about your loss" (1). He's saying, if you lose

everything, you must be willing to begin again. Not only that, but you must also be willing to forget about the loss and not dwell on it. In section 16 of 'The Handbook' Epictetus writes, "When you see anyone weeping in grief because his son has gone abroad, or is dead, or because he has suffered in his affairs, be careful that the appearance may not misdirect you. Instead, distinguish within your own mind, and be prepared to say, "It's not the accident that distresses this person., because it doesn't distress another person; it is the judgment which he makes about it." As far as words go, however, don't reduce yourself to his level, and certainly do not moan with him. Do not moan inwardly either"(2). We should practice allowing ourselves to not get too attached to things, money, people, or even places. Things are constantly changing and will continue to do so.

So far, I'm almost convinced that Kipling, Epictetus, Seneca, and Aurelius just might be right. To have a peace of mind means everything. There are things in this world and beyond that happens which are beyond our control, so we may as well accept it. Holding on to your goodness and values accounts for much in life, it makes you feel honorable within yourself, so why not hold on to your virtue. Anything given by Nature or the Gods is borrowed so give it back freely when they come to take it back.

Works Cited

[1] Kipling, Rudyard. 1943 "If-", <https://poets.org/poem/if>

[2] Epictetus. The Enchiridion. AD c.125, The Internet Classics Archive, Translated by Elizabeth Carter, <http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicen.html>