

# THE STOIC PHILOSOPHER

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## “Hypomnemata and the Humorist”

*Steen Nielsen is a stand-up comedian, the kamikaze of the theater, who also writes cartoon captions and just about anything that requires an exceptional sense of humor and pays money. Recently, he was out of work, lost his apartment, and separated from his wife and children. So, no money, no home, and a family lost—all at the same time. Steen was also a student in his final term in the Marcus Aurelius School program, the term when original hypomnemata is required. Here's what he wrote about this extraordinary time in his life.*

**Note:** *The assignment for the MA student is to relate some event in one's life that prompts one to reflect on the Stoic principle or concept involved. This is what Marcus Aurelius did in his Meditations. The passage can be a single sentence or several paragraphs, which is what Marcus did. Steen choose to include not only a brief hypomnemata but also the story that prompted the passage. It may surprise the reader to discover that Steen is Danish, and English is his second language. First the hypomnemata passage in bold italics, then the story that inspired it.*

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### **Ambitions and Children**

***Do not let your children become an excuse for your own ambitions. It is natural to want the very best for our children, but we should heed the words of Epictetus when he said that it is better to leave your sons well instructed rather than rich; for the hopes of the instructed are better than the wealth of the ignorant.***

***Go forth each day and do your very best to provide for your family. Share with them the fruit of your hard work and let them enjoy it, but above all provide them with an example to emulate by showing them a man doing what he was meant to do.***

[Greeting]

My sincerest apologies for not writing yesterday. They are doing some sort of renovations on the building where I'm currently staying, and apparently they accidentally dug up some cables cutting off internet access for the entire block. Ironically, my hypomnemata for this week was about not worrying too much about hard-to-meet deadlines. :D

My hypomnemata was inspired by two separate events, but they both concerned a forced sense of urgency that I consider a permeating trait of modern society. The first happened, when I was faced with a deadline for writing 20 cartoon strips. I did, but I was only really happy with 15 of them. I really hate missing deadlines, but the truth is that I simply couldn't do the job to my own satisfaction in the time allotted.

The second was when I was having dinner with a friend. There was this big award show for YouTubers in Denmark a few weeks ago, and my friend asked me if I would be interested in having my own YouTube-channel. It seemed like easy money; this one teenager made about \$200,000 last year filming himself playing computer games while still living with his parents, and one girl dropped out of high school when she earned \$100,000 in her second year of giving make-up tips online, but even more than the money these young people seemed driven by a desire to be seen. A natural extension, I suppose, of the celebrity culture championed by reality television.

Anyway, my daughter and I are on a mini-vacation in Copenhagen, which has messed up my morning meditations a little bit....I've spent a lot of time with my kids this past week, so naturally I have spent a lot of time contemplating my duties as a father, too. I firmly believe that the greatest inheritance any parent can leave for his children consists not of material possessions but in the means to live a happy life regardless of the circumstances they may find themselves in.

My daughter got me this little book for my birthday last year called "My Dad, My Hero." It's about 20 pages long, each with a cute little drawing and a single line of text like "Thanks for believing in me", "Thanks for teaching me new things", and stuff like that. It's really just a cute little gift, but I find myself reading it more or less every day to remind me what it means to be a good father.

I think one of the hardest things about being a Stoic is applying the Dichotomy of Control not to your own life but to that of your children. My daughter auditioned for and was accepted into The Royal Theater's School of Ballet last week, which is absolutely fantastic, but in the days leading up to it I found myself far more nervous than before any exam I've ever taken myself. She loves ballet, and she loves the idea of going to a school that lets her dance every day of the week, and I had no idea what to tell her if she wasn't accepted.

Constant worry often seems to be just part of being a parent, but then I witnessed a mother at the bakery section of the local supermarket burst into tears because they mixed up the order for her son's birthday cake. Meanwhile her son, this perfectly stoic 5-year-old, tried to calm her down, saying "It's OK, Mom. How about we just buy that one with the strawberries instead? That looks good, too." Sometimes our kids teach us as much as we do them.

Now, we can't expect children to take a Stoic stance every time, but can we honestly claim to do so ourselves? Kids can be remarkably brave, yet sometimes their entire world will implode because they picked up a twig and forgot it at a bus stop 5 minutes later. In those cases, it is our duty to comfort them, but we must also give them credit by not worrying needlessly.

Best Regards,  
Steen

## Offense

***Do not accept the attempts of other people to restrict your free speech. Claiming the right not to be offended is deeply irrational, and accommodating people claiming such a right is impossible. Just be sure that what you say is worth saying.***

[Greeting]

Once again I must apologize for being late; it seems this being homeless thing doesn't come with a reliable internet connection. The good news is that being without access to the internet has given me loads more time to read and meditate. Once you get through the withdrawal symptoms I find the disconnected world quite enjoyable! Anyway, I have found a room for rent starting next month, so I should be able to maintain a schedule that is a bit more stable than borrowing a different couch every night.

This week I have spent a lot of time wondering about people being offended. I don't know if people are more easily offended these days or if the Internet just provides a platform for them to easily vent their frustrations, but it seems that every week there is some sort of outcry about often quite trivial matters. As a comedian I'm often asked questions like "is there anything you wouldn't joke about?" or "where do you draw the line?" and I've always been of the opinion that there is no such thing as off-limits as long as the joke is funny enough to justify itself.

A rather spectacular murder investigation is currently unfolding in Denmark. This eccentric inventor type (who was actually working on the world's first privately built spacecraft) took a Swedish reporter for a trip in his home-made submarine (I swear I'm not making this up!) after which she went missing, until her torso washed ashore a few weeks later followed by her arms and legs about a month after that.

Anyway, a chain of supermarkets found themselves in a bit of hot water when they started selling severed plastic limbs as Halloween decorations recently. People were complaining how insensitive it was to sell such a thing in light of such a gruesome murder. It wasn't a lot of people complaining, but social media allows even very small groups of people to make a remarkable amount of noise.

I always wonder where such outrage comes from. Note that the victim was Swedish, so there was little chance that any close friends or relatives would find themselves in that particular supermarket. Last year the same chain faced a similar outcry for the exact same product when people thought the decorations reminded them of ISIS decapitation videos. I would say it was even less likely for the families of those victims to find themselves in a Danish supermarket.

The interesting thing is that the people complaining are very rarely the people that might actually be directly affected. If the victim's family had asked the stores in her home town to skip the dead bodies this year out of respect and stick with ghosts and jack-o-lanterns, that would be somewhat more understandable, but the complaint was made by complete

strangers taking offense in the entirely hypothetical scenario that someone else MIGHT be distressed IF they were confronted with the display in question.

It's a curious thing, taking offense on behalf of others, and I'm not sure it's something they would even want. I used to date a girl who was brutally raped at knife-point when she was younger. She was remarkably open about the ordeal, and said (as stoically as anyone I've ever heard) that there was really nothing she could do about it neither then nor now, and that she was determined not to let it ruin her life. She claimed that she would never feel defeated by her attacker unless I stopped doing rape jokes out of a failed sense of respect.

As Stoics we are taught not to let outside things affect our happiness, nor should we attempt to control such things, and we certainly shouldn't let people complaining on Facebook affect us, but as a comedian I find the whole phenomenon of taking offense interesting.

I have always enjoyed the challenge of finding the comedy within the tragedy, and as a result I have stepped on a lot of toes over the years. This has never been an end in itself, and I really don't like comedians who deliberately go for the purely shock-induced laughs, but the truth is that it's impossible to avoid every sore spot in a room. If I were to really play it safe I could never do jokes about public transportation just in case somebody's dad once jumped in front of a train, and even if I did an entire set about cute little puppies someone would inevitably have just lost their beloved dog.

Two years ago someone posted a list on Facebook about things that one should never joke about. There were 11 points on his list, and what struck me was how incredibly arbitrary that list was. Why would cancer be worse than any other deadly disease? I actually ended up doing an entire one-hour show based on that list because I needed to show that of course you can make jokes about cancer, suicide and people's sexuality. (Ironically, I guess you could say that I was a bit offended by people being offended.)

Claiming the right not to be offended is deeply irrational, and accommodating people claiming such a right is impossible. I do not revel in the pain of others, and I make sure that I don't (in my mind) needlessly offend, but if I believe I have a truly great joke about incest, rape or the Holocaust I refuse to pull my punches out of fear that someone in the audience might be personally affected by it.

It escapes me why some people seemingly WANT to feel offended, and it seems to me that the world would be a brighter place if we accepted the fact that there just might be something a little bit funny in even the most tragic of circumstances instead of snuffing out the only spark of light in the darkness.

Best Regards,  
Steen

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## Practice

***The aim of the Stoic should be not just to study the concepts of Stoicism, but to practice them to the point where he can apply them effortlessly in any given situation.***

[Greeting]

I did a gig last week in another city. When the show was over they didn't have the money I was promised, and on my way home I just missed the last train to Copenhagen and had to wait for 2.5 hours for the late night train. It was 5:30 before I finally got home, and when I woke up, I got an e-mail telling me that the club I performed at had to do just a little bit of bookkeeping before I can get my money, so God knows when or if I'll ever get it.

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Now, not getting paid is obviously a problem, but whether or not they actually do pay me is really out of my control. I could of course threaten legal action, but the gig wasn't that well paid to begin with, so I don't really think the time and effort would be worth it. What I did was send an e-mail telling the guy who booked me that they really need to pay the acts they hire, and that I will be expecting my payment this week. I then proceeded to warn my fellow comedians about him—recommending that they ask for money up front if they ever decide to go there.

Missing the train actually ended up being the best part of the evening. The train station was really peaceful at night, so I decided to sit down and meditate for a while in the fresh, cool air. Later a stranger showed up who had also missed his train. He had a few cans of beer in his bag, I went to get us some snacks from a vending machine, and we ended up having a really fun conversation. When I finally got home, I decided that I wouldn't get any meaningful work done anyway, so I took the next day off to just rest and relax in good conscience.

The most interesting part of it all was that I never really stopped to think in terms like “what would Epictetus say?” or “what would Marcus Aurelius do?” I just intuitively applied the Dichotomy of Control to the situation at hand and didn't really think about it until the next day when I sat down to write about it in my journal. I really feel like the Stoic mindset is becoming second nature to me.

I believe that that night is a great example of how the true value of Stoicism lies not in theoretical studies but in practical application; I could have saved my analysis for the next day and concluded that in retrospect things might not be quite as awful as they seemed, but that would still leave me feeling miserable at the time. Instead I managed to turn things around on the spot and have a beer and a few laughs with a new friend.

Best Regards,  
Steen

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## Hardship

***Listen well to others' tales of hardship. You may find that their struggles make your own seem trivial by comparison.***

[Greeting]

I found a room for rent and moved in last week. My new room mate is a 40-year-old Afghan refugee who is honestly one of the most hospitable men I have ever met. Every night he brings home a bag of fruit and vegetables from his job at the local greengrocer and cooks a big pot of soup or stew. He told me I was always welcome to eat with him or help myself to anything in the fridge. The night I moved in we shared a pot of tea and had a good, long conversation.

He didn't go into details, but apparently he had to flee Afghanistan in 2008 when he "ran into some trouble" after assisting coalition forces. He had to leave his wife and 5 kids behind, and have been trying to get them up here ever since. For four years he didn't have any contact at all with his family, until a friend of his told him that his wife had died, and that his children had fled to Pakistan with his mother. His Mother later died, leaving his eldest daughter, aged 17 at the time, to take care of her 4 younger siblings. Even now he has warned them not to mention that he lives in Denmark out of fear that they may be kidnapped and held for ransom by people who mistakenly believe everyone in Europe to be rich.

The curious thing is that I detected no desperation in his voice, as he told these stories; he just shrugged and sighed "So many problems..." as he took another sip of his tea. Desperation would be perfectly understandable; personally, I find it hard to spend a week away from my kids, and I can only imagine having to leave them behind in a war-torn country and not hearing from them for years. Yet, this guy fully accepts that getting his children up here isn't really up to him. He just filed the proper paperwork and patiently awaits a decision. When Immigration Services told him that he needed to have a place of a certain size for his family to live in, before his application could be processed, he went out and got a 2-bedroom apartment far too big for his actual needs, rented out one room and asked for extra hours at his job to pay the rent.

This guy has faced adversity most of us can barely imagine, and yet he keeps getting up every morning to go to work, he keeps his apartment nice and clean and finds the time to socialize and cook for his roommate. I do not doubt that his children inhabit his thoughts every day, but he fully accepts that he is already doing all he can for them, and prefers spending the rest of his time socializing with friends rather than worry needlessly.

The whole conversation put a lot of my own problems into perspective. It was almost like a cheat sheet for negative visualization: "OK, so you don't see your kids every day? Well, at least they're not trapped in a war zone with no means of contacting you." As Stoics I believe it is important for us to listen to the accounts of people who have lived through hardship in order to discover how much a man can truly endure.

Best regards,  
Steen

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## **A Way of Life**

***Epictetus was right when he said that philosophy is a way of life. Do not simply read a book or two and expect to be able to apply their principles. Stoicism must be practiced***

***every day like an athlete practices his sport. Only then will you have the skill and confidence to apply it when needed.***

[Greeting]

I hope you are well. Personally, the past week and a half have been rather hectic. I am fairly certain that twins coming down with chickenpox would give even Hercules a run for his money.

I've recently been booked to do a new year's gig at Denmark's premier comedy club, which means I have just over a month to write half an hour of brand new topical material about 2017 (which would probably have been even harder if you guys hadn't elected Donald Trump, lol) and hopefully find time to take it on stage for a few test runs, too, before the big night.

Marie [Steen's estranged spouse] is busy, too, with final exams just around the corner. In short, sick kids really didn't fit well into either of our schedules, But what are you to do, really? As a Stoic and as a father it is my duty to take care of my kids, so everything else had to go on the back burner until the boys were back on their feet.

The whole thing made me think about the nature of stress. Personally, I don't think I am affected by stress in quite the same way as most people. I actually seem to thrive in situations where the stakes are high, and my back is against the wall: I can handle service at a busy restaurant, I can write a new stand-up set in a month, and in school I always did well at my exams. All the problems I have ever had with stress, anxiety and depression have come from having too much on my plate, none of it critical.

I tend to struggle with the mundane day-to-day stuff, but when faced with big scary do-or-die tasks I develop a sort of tunnel vision that allows me to simply forge on and get it done. Accomplishing big goals always feels great, but in a masochistic sort of way I actually enjoy the sleepless nights and eating stale food from a vending machine, and I enjoy the feeling of being well and truly spent when the job is done. I like to say that my ideal job description would be to do the impossible on a regular basis.

Marie, on the other hand, likes to keep her calendar full, juggling several projects at once, running from one meeting to the next while talking on the phone or texting people on the way. A true woman of the 21st century always in touch with the rest of the world. When faced with the really big challenges, however, she, like most people, I assume, can be intimidated to the point of panic.

It all comes down to the fight-or-flight response: When faced with stress Marie's brain tells her to simply step on all the little critters and to flee the big, bad beast, whereas my brain wants to stay and fight the dragon, but is overwhelmed when tiny bugs attack in numbers.

However we handle stress, philosophy is a great tool. It helps us assess our priorities and tells us how best to direct our efforts. The problem is, however, that in stressful circumstances we lose the capacity for rational thought as instinct takes over. The ancient Stoics, of course, recognised this phenomenon as *propatheia* (First Movements), and suggested that the trick is not to give assent to this initial rush of emotion, which seems great, but how do we actually do this in our everyday lives?

This is where practice comes in. Like the quarterback who practices his throw every day so that he may pass the ball accurately even when rushed by defenders, we must study and practice philosophy until it becomes second nature, so that we may use it when it is truly needed. Expecting to have the equanimity to sit down and calmly analyze what your brain interprets as a life-or-death situation is akin to the aforementioned quarterback skipping practice because he is confident in his playbook and decides to just figure out the actual throwing part on game day.

Best Regards,  
Steen

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## Politics

***Do not lose heart or faith in democracy even when it seems that the hearts of the many rule the heads of the few; your vote is just as important as theirs. Do not be shy in countering irrational arguments whenever you hear them, but do not think lesser of those whose logic has been flawed by fear and anger; their votes are just as important as yours.***

[Greeting]

It's election time in Denmark. I usually don't care much for politics, but local elections like this one can be very amusing. Clearance to run for town or regional council is a lot easier to come by than it is for parliamentary elections, so we always get quite a few characters like The Love Party, The Hemp Party, and even a naked cowboy posing on election posters wearing nothing but a cowboy hat and a gun belt.

A comedian friend of mine is running here in Odense. He is campaigning for the island of Funen (with a population of about 450,000) to be an independent country, and since he believes that most good ideas come from two or more people having a couple of beers together, he wants every adult citizen to receive "liquid welfare" in the shape of one free bottle of beer per week, paid for by the city.

That may all seem a little silly, and it is, but the truth is, that "serious" politics are often just as ridiculous. Politicians have a way of appealing to our baser instincts, and fear-mongering seems to play an especially big part of modern politics. Politicians don't even seem ashamed to admit it, as they argue time and again that "it's about making our citizens feel safe." Why, then, would you not work to dispel those groundless fears instead of spending billions affirming the belief that there really are monsters under the bed?

Polls show that trust in politicians is at a record low, and I strongly believe that this shameless appeal to irrational emotion is to blame. I believe that a significant part of the population are genuinely afraid, and the rest of us are just plain fed up with hearing them cry "wolf!" Add to this a growing feeling that one man's vote doesn't really amount to anything in the end, and



you get a strong combination of apathy and dread as you watch “the other side” marching society to its certain doom with you utterly powerless to stop it.

So what is one man to do? Well, democracy is actually a great example of the Dichotomy of Control in action: The result of the election is almost entirely out of your hands; your vote is literally just one among millions, yet your vote carries exactly as much weight as everyone else’s. Democracy really relies on every citizen’s willingness to perform their duty and cast their vote (or at the very least make a conscious decision not to vote).

And voting is really just one of many ways we perform our civic duty. By openly discussing politics we may convince others of our valid opinions (though seldom easily), we may volunteer to work for the candidate or party of our choice, or we may use social media to get our voices heard. Personally, I can use satire on stage to shine a light on irrational arguments and hypocrisy.

Well, I’m off to vote for my friend. While I wouldn’t generally recommend voting for goofy characters in sheer protest (look where that got you guys!) he really is a good guy and if actually elected I know he will take his job seriously. Anyway, if I have to listen to more fear-based rhetoric a free bottle of “liquid welfare” would certainly be a preferred indifferent.

Best regards,  
Steen

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## Economics

***Do not worry about the economy as it is never really good nor bad and is ultimately not up to you. Our modern economy is entirely based on value judgments, and if your own value judgments do not disturb you, why should those of others? Resolve instead to live a life in agreement with Nature and you will do well in any market.***

[Greetings]

It took awhile to write this one, sorry, but once I got started there always seemed to be just one more point to make, and I had to stop myself before I went on to write something the size of *Das Kapital*. Funny, really, considering that economics really doesn’t interest me, but the way it affects us individually and as a society is very interesting—especially since most people seem to have a rather limited understanding of how it actually works.

Anyway, in the wake of the recent election (my friend didn’t get elected, by the way), I was discussing politics with a few friends of mine, specifically cut-backs affecting schools. “But wait,” one friend asked, “why do we have to cut back? I thought the crisis was over?” This, I thought, was actually a very interesting question. You see, the news tells us that the crisis of 2008 is long over; things are back on track and the economy is strong, but for the majority of people things don’t really seem to have improved that much.

But then, how bad were we really affected by the crisis back in 2008? Sure, a couple of big companies went out of business and a lot of people lost their jobs, but Denmark has a pretty strong social safety net, so while those people may have had to move to a smaller home and make do with one car per family instead of two, nobody really ended up on the streets. (I realize people in other parts of the world were not quite that lucky.)

I used to do a bit about the financial crisis in which I noted that when the first iPad was released in 2010 people were lining up to spend thousands of dollars on a new toy while they were still going on about this terrible recession, we were in. Crisis means people lining up in front of soup kitchens; not the Apple Store. I noticed something similar when I passed by this expensive, but highly popular, café in the middle of Copenhagen. It's a small family-owned business (I believe they're currently 5th generation) that has produced the most amazing cakes since the late 1800s, but it seemed rather strange to watch people in the middle of a recession line up to pay around \$20 for a slice of cake and a cup of coffee. It was like the people just took Marie Antoinette out of the equation and skipped straight to the cake-eating.

Anyway, it occurs to me that the crisis, and, indeed, our entire economy, is based on value judgments. No house actually increases or decreases dramatically in value all of a sudden, nor does a barrel of oil. Does your car suddenly drive longer on a gallon of gas because the price shifted? Of course not. It used to be that money was tied to something tangible; a \$100 bill essentially meant that you owned \$100 worth of gold in a vault somewhere (the value of gold being a value judgment in itself), but money today is mere numbers on a screen, that's it. The crisis of 2008 was not a famine caused by a failed harvest or any natural disaster like that; it was merely the value judgment of some bankers colliding with reality. The problem is, though, that those value judgments have a very real impact on other people's lives.

As Stoics we are taught not to make such value judgments, but while we may be able to see through the emperor's new clothes, the entire global economy is hardly up to us. What we can do, though, is avoid the next value judgment in line: That the economy itself is good or bad. A recession is not necessarily a bad thing; hard times force us to reconnect with what is truly important and rid ourselves of unnecessary fluff.

At the same time economic growth is not necessarily good; sure, a growth-based economy has taken us from the middle ages to the digital age at a blistering pace, but it has also had a devastating impact on the environment and has left us anxious, depressed and sleep deprived as we try to keep up with the ever-increasing speed of growth.

As Stoics we would do well not to get caught up in the frenzy. I read somewhere that the average office worker spends the first two hours of his workday just paying for the car that got him there. Add to that the cost of kindergarten for your kids, overpriced lattes at your coffee break, and the cost of takeaway when you are simply too busy to cook, and you actually end up spending quite a significant amount of time working just for the means to work.

Now, I don't expect anyone to swear off money and quit their job in favour of a hunter/gatherer lifestyle (Stoics, after all, should strive to be active members of the community), but we would do well to examine our lives on a regular basis to discover if what we do is truly worthwhile, and which parts are simply a source of unnecessary stress. Finance is, after all, an entirely man-made game, and playing by its rules may at times be at odds with our goal of living in agreement with Nature.

Best Regards,  
Steen

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## Sleep

***Do not forego sleep in a vain effort to be productive, and certainly not in the pursuit of mindless entertainment. A philosopher must keep his mind sharp as the butcher does his knife, and nothing dulls the mind as lack of sleep.***

[Greeting]

Sleep. Essential to our well-being and even our very survival, yet many seem to treat a good night's sleep as a luxury. As any new parent will tell you, we cannot always expect 8 hours of undisturbed sleep, and as Stoics we must learn to endure such things just as we must learn to accept hunger when food is scarce, but to continually ignore such a vital need is very much at odds with our goal to live in agreement with Nature.

To the philosopher the ability to act rationally is of the utmost importance, and few things dull our minds as much as chronic lack of sleep. Sleep is as important to the mind as food is to the body, yet many people today seem to wear their sleep deprivation as a badge of honor. "My work is very important to me, and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get ahead," seems to be the standard argument, but is foregoing sleep really the way to excellence?

What is it you hope to gain by staying awake? More money? The admiration of your peers? As Stoics we strive to be above such things. Sure, they may be preferred indifferents, but preferable to fulfilling the natural needs of our bodies and minds? Are you even actually productive in all those hours you spend awake every day? Personally, I find myself much more prone to procrastination when I'm tired. Not only is it harder to focus on the task at hand, but I find it a lot harder, too, to sort through the myriad of other small tasks that pop up during the day.

Running a marathon every day would certainly be a staggering display of willpower, but for a professional athlete it would seem quite counterproductive to do so. I dare say that very few MVPs show up to the big game at the brink of exhaustion.

In my own struggles with depression, I have discovered an intimate link between lack of sleep and depression: Heavy thoughts would keep me up at night, and at day the lack of sleep would impair my ability to rationally process whatever adversity I went through during the day, thus creating a vicious circle in which I was left the following night ruminating all the terrible stuff that had befallen me.

But wait, didn't Marcus write something about getting up in the morning to do a man's work? Yes, he did, but I'm not advocating laziness here. It used to be that our daily rhythm followed the sun, and the sunset put a fairly effective end to our day, but with the invention of the light bulb that all changed, and with entertainment options around the clock and easy access to caffeine and other stimulants it has become so easy to postpone our natural need for sleep.

As Stoics we are supposed to endure a sleepless night, but can we honestly claim to live in agreement with Nature if we treat sleep, a natural need of all living beings, as an anorectic does food? Indeed, since a lack of sleep so quickly and directly impacts our ability to reason I would say that foregoing food would actually be less harmful to us.

A philosopher's mind is his most important tool, and if we are to live our lives to the utmost of our ability we must endeavour to keep that tool sharp as the butcher does his knife. Only then can we claim to live in agreement with Nature.

Best Regards,  
Steen

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## Hypomnemata in a Rush

[Editor: As Steen's last term at the Marcus Aurelius School progressed into December, he was kept very busy on the Danish comedy circuit.]

**Hypo #10: Do not feel pressured to spend too much time and energy on selling if such a thing is disagreeable to you. Focus instead on doing your job to the best of your ability knowing that quality work always have been and always will be in high demand. Don't be shy, however, to let the world know of you and your work, for how else will they benefit from it?**

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The first one was the result of a discussion I had with a colleague about the need to profile yourself professionally, specifically via social media. As a natural introvert I never really liked the idea of selling stuff and I feel that a good product should essentially be able to sell itself. I am aware, however, that this is not really 100% true, and thus I must learn to recognize when I'm actually focusing on content over packaging, and when I'm simply rationalizing my natural tendencies towards shyness.

**Hypo #11: It is easy to dislike Christmas: Crazy traditions, overeating and spending money you don't have all in the name of a religion you don't support. Do not be so quick to dismiss it, however, that you miss the opportunity to bring genuine joy to your family and friends. Partake (within reason) in the traditions you do care about, endure the ones your loved ones care about, and do not worry about the rest.**

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The second one is quite obviously about Christmas, of which I must admit that I'm not a huge fan. I don't really dislike Christmas as such; it just never really seemed worth the hassle to me. I do realize, however, that not everybody feels that way, and that a lot of people, religious or not, really enjoy the holidays (even if they spend most of December complaining about it, lol). It's easy for me to let kids enjoy their Christmas, but I find it a bit harder, sometimes, to indulge grown-ups who act like kids around the holidays. However, while I would be hard

pressed to find anything Stoic about the modern day consumerist version of Christmas, I do think it would also be quite contrary to virtue to rob other people of their joy while you assume an attitude of smug superiority.

Best Regards,  
Steen

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