**Stoicism and Disability Manual:**

**How Ancient Philosophy Can Help You Accept Your Disability**

Introduction.

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**Chapter 1:**

**Part 1 – What is Stoicism?**

Stoicism is an ancient Hellenistic philosophy focused on living a virtuous and tranquil life. It was founded in the 3rd century BC by Zeno of Citium, who developed the philosophy after losing everything he had in a shipwreck – more on this later.

For more than two thousand years, Stoicism has survived and stood the test of time, and Stoics have learned to stand the test of adversity throughout the years.

The cool thing about Stoicism, though, is that it’s all inclusive – meaning that essentially ANYONE can practice it.

Don’t believe me? Well then, listen to this then say that you don’t believe me:

The big three names in ancient Stoicism – Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Epictetus – all led vastly different lives and faced their own challenges.

Let’s start with Seneca:

Born in Cordoba in Hispania around 4 BC, Seneca spent most of his life with severe asthma, leaving him breathless and sometimes bedridden. In his mid-twenties, he also contracted tuberculosis. This left him in loads of physical pain which was so great that he contemplated suicide multiple times.

But, instead of being held back, he went on to be a prominent Stoic philosopher, writer, statesman, and advisor to Emperor Nero. From this, Seneca grew his wealth significantly and lived a good life, even staying Stoic when he was exiled, and staying Stoic when he killed himself after Nero was going to have him executed – more on this later.

Now, let’s move to Epictetus:

Born into slavery around 50 AD at Hierapolis, Phrygia, he was enslaved by Nero’s secretary, Epaphroditos. It is known that Epictetus was also physically disabled – some scholars believe he was born with a disability, but others believe that his enslaver deliberately broke his leg – the latter I believe more.

After he was given permission by his enslaver, Epictetus studied philosophy under Musonius Rufus. (The fact that he had to get permission shows his hardships and his loss of power). After Neros’ death in 68 AD, he started teaching philosophy in Rome, after which he moved and taught it in Epirus, Greece, after Emperor Domitian banished all philosophers from Rome is 93 AD.

Here, we can see the sheer adversities Epictetus faced, but we also see that he overcame them and didn’t let them define hm.

Now, finally, we move to my favourite Stoic, and who I call my ‘dead mentor’ – Marcus Aurelius.

Known as the last of the five good Roman Emperors, Marcus was born in 121 AD during Hadrian’s run as Emperor – a good one. When he was three, Marcus’s father died, and he was raised by his mother and grandfather. After seeing potential in Marcus, Hadrian adopted Marcus’s uncle, Antoninus Pius as his new heir on the condition that Pius name Marcus as his heir.

Under Antoninus, Marcus studied many things to help him become Emperor, including Greek and Latin. During his reign, Marcus experienced heavy military conflicts, betrayals, and even a plague – the Antonine plague. But, despite all this Marcus persevered and stayed humble and Stoic.

All of this makes it seem like he had everything handed to him. But, before you think that, remember that Marcus still suffered adversity – pain, betrayal, anxiety – he was human at the end of the day.

Why do I tell you all this? Well, I particularly want to focus on Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Two completely opposite men bounded by the same philosophy. But, the one thing that I love about these two is that Marcus Aurelius read the works of Epictetus and was influenced by him.

Why is this interesting? Well, the fact that the most powerful man of his time – Aurelius – was influenced by a slave – Epictetus – just shows how Stoicism is for everyone, no matter your social status.

**Part 2 – What is My Disability**

My disability is called Ataxic Cerebral Palsy and it affects my coordination and balance. Ataxic Cerebral Palsy comes under the umbrella of Ataxia. In general, people with Ataxia suffer with the same difficulties, but the severity varies from person to person. The NHS website says that: “Ataxia is a term for a group of disorders that affect co-ordination, balance and speech” – to back up my claims with evidence.

The severity of my disability is mild, but it still affects me day to day and presents its own set of challenges.

Here, I’m going to give you a brief backstory of me and my disability – it won’t be long, don’t worry!

I was born on the 15th of June 2002 in Ipswich Hospital. From birth, my Mum could tell that something wasn’t right. After that, she took me to see some specialists who ran some tests – I don’t know the specifics, I was only a baby – who diagnosed me with Cerebral Palsy.

Because of limitations of medical and disability research, the doctors couldn’t say why I had CP or how it would affect me in the future – they didn’t even know if I’d be able to walk.

I have faced my own challenges because of my disability, such as accepting it, overcoming physical challenges, and not conforming to stereotypes – I won’t go into this stuff now as this is just a brief backstory!

When I was in primary school, and continuing to middle school, I had to wear splints whenever I wore shoes to support my ankles. These were really uncomfortable and nipped my legs constantly – I don’t have to wear them anymore.

Around the same time, I had to wear a body suit to support my core – not the good body suit. This, as with the splints, was uncomfortable, especially on hot days. Imagine wearing jeans to bed and sweating at the same time – wearing my suit was ten times worse. Thankfully, I don’t need it anymore – I stopped wearing it in middle school. All those years of hiding it and complaining about it finally paid off!

During primary school, I also attended a special needs school on a part time basis. That lasted for a year or so if I remember correctly, then it was decided I could go back to attending primary school full time, and that there was no need to attend a special needs school.

Fast forward to 2017, when I was in high school. Finally, I was going to find out why I had CP. One brain scan later, I found out that my cerebellum – the part of the brain that controls muscle memory, coordination, and balance – is under-developed, causing my CP.

During high school, I was getting burnt out, constant fatigue, and sometimes unable to move for days. To combat this, I was on a part-time timetable for a while and I was given an electric wheelchair to use when I didn’t want to use my walking frame, which I’ve used for all my life.

GCSEs came and I passed most of them and got into Sixth Form, where I made a big decision. I decided not to use my wheelchair or my frame to see how it would go. It went great so I decided to carry on – and to this day I don’t use either. I still get tired and wobbly but that comes with the disability.

Sixth form was okay – some ups and downs but it was cut short by the first national lockdown due to COVID-19.

During lockdown in March 2020, I picked up my first book on Stoicism – A Guide to the Good Life by William B. Irvine. Well, I got my first books on the philosophy in November 2019, but I didn’t pick them up – stupidly – until five months later.

From there, I went on to read The Stoic Challenge William B. Irvine, and then How to Think like a Roman Emperor by Donald Robertson during the first UK lockdown. Since then, I have read and will continue to read book on Stoicism.

**Chapter 2 – Amor Fati**

**Part 1 – The Art of Acceptance**

***What is Amor Fati?***

Amor Fati translated means a love of fate. It is a concept that some people struggle to understand, from my experience anyway.

When I talk to people about this, they think it’s just the idea that you must love everything that happens to you and move on without complaint.

This is not the case – Amor Fati means a lot more than that. The Stoics meant that if you can’t change something, there’s no point in wishing for it to be different.

This doesn’t mean that it can’t hurt. If a bad thing happens to you and there’s nothing you can do to change it, it can hurt like hell. But Stoicism isn’t about ignoring the hurt, it’s about allowing yourself to feel it and then dealing with it is a way that is best for you, without hurting others.

Epictetus put it best in Discourses – “Demand not that things happen as you wish, but wish them to happen as they do, and you will go on well”.

If we spend our time wishing for things to be different, we waste time we could’ve spent learning how to deal with what happened.

***Acceptance and Accommodation***

Here it is – the big AA. The words everyone’s afraid of: Acceptance and Accommodation.

Accepting that something that cannot be changed is one thing – and it’s the first step to overcoming anything that cannot be changed.

But, there is an additional step: accepting the situation AND accommodating yourself around it. Living with an unchangeable situation is hard, no doubt about it, but it’s something we need to do or we will let the situation defeat us.

When I talk to people about accepting an unchangeable situation, they look at me like I’ve just cut their arm off – most of the time anyway.

I understand where they’re coming from – I was once one of those people. I think that those people think, as did I, that if something happens to you that cannot be changed, it is up to others to handle it and not you.

And, in some situations this is partially true. If you’re a victim of a crime, it’s up to the relevant authorities to catch the perpetrator. But even this requires your cooperation, and what you do with yourself during and after the investigation is up to you, whether it is therapy or something else that helps. This is what I mean by acceptance and accommodation.

We might need help accepting it, whether a therapist, friend, or family member. And that’s okay.

When we refuse to accept an unchangeable situation, or worse, when we refuse to accept AND accommodate, we fall into the victim mentality.

When something bad happens to us we are a victim at first, but there comes a point when we seriously need to get out of the pity party – it gets us nowhere.

Pity and sympathy gets us nowhere. I would rather someone express empathy and support me through the situation.

Some people are naturally sympathetic – I know I am. When something bad happens to you that you can’t change, the people around you will feel sorry for you, which is a natural reaction. But, when trying to accept it, sympathy only gets in the way. Acceptance and accommodation require empathy and objectiveness, instead of sympathy and subjectiveness.

We have two choices: revel in the sympathy and victimise ourselves, or accept, accommodate, AND better ourselves. Why do you think people who have survived horrific crimes call themselves survivors and not victims? Because they have accepted, accommodated, and bettered themselves.

After all of this, the situation can still bring sadness to us from time to time, which is natural, the path isn’t all smooth, it’s bumpy. Over time, we learn how to deal with the sadness and make it less frequent and less affecting – however we do that is up to us as individuals, as long as we don’t harm others.

You can probably see how this fits in with disability, so here we go…

***Amor Fati, Acceptance, Accommodation, and Disability***

The thing with a disability, whether you’re born with one or you develop one, is that it comes down to Fate at the end of the day. The Stoics believed in Fate and that Fate cannot dictate your whole life. This is true; although Fate dictated that you’re disabled, it’s up to you to dictate how you go about it.

The number one thing to do – the most important thing – when you have a disability is to accept it.

This seems like a daunting thing to do given the hardships us disabled people go through. But, accepting your disability isn’t about ignoring the hardships, it’s about accepting what isn’t in your control, an idea that stems from Epictetus.

Epictetus, in his manual the Enchiridion, says that “some things are in our control, and others are not”. Things in our control include: “opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, our own actions”. Things not in our control include: “body, property, command, and, in a word, others’ actions”.

Here, I will focus on the “body” not being in our control.

Having a physical disability obviously affects the body. My disability affects my body, but it stems from my brain – having an under-developed cerebellum.

Now, I can’t control my disability – the uncontrolled wobbles, slurred speech, tremors, etc – but I can control how I conduct myself.

Do I accept having a permanent disability, or do I hate the world and become a bitter man?

This is all about choice. I, and many others, have the choice of accepting that we have a disability, or we have the choice to let ourselves become bitter.

It’s so easy to allow yourself to become bitter – trust me, I know first-hand. You feel like fate has dished you out undeserved punishment. You may even wish that you weren’t disabled, as I have done in the past.

But this way of thinking is toxic to the mind, and it stops us from being a good person – one of the core values in Stoicism.

Wishing things happen differently, rather than wishing things to happen as they are, makes acceptance and accommodation impossible. If we wish we don’t have a disability when it’s unchangeable, how will we ever accept it?

***Accepting what we can’t do or find hard***

With acceptance of a disability also comes acceptance that there are some things that are physically impossible or harder for us compared to able-bodied people. This is where accommodation comes into the mix: if we wish to do these things we must accommodate to them, be it with help from others, equipment, or our own ways of doing it.

For example, I wobble when I walk and I get tired easily when I walk long distances. The accommodation? I take my time, stopping to have a rest when I get tired. (I did use a walking frame for most of my life, and a wheelchair for high school but after high school, I chose to walk without equipment).

The same is true for my friend who has McArdle disease – her legs ache for days if she walks a long distance without stopping, so when we walk together, we stop at the same time.

With carrying cups and mugs of drink is especially hard with my wobbles and tremors in my hands. Carrying them usually results in me spilling some of it and burning myself if I’m carrying a hot drink. The accommodation for this has evolved over time. I used to ask someone who I was with to carry it, and I still do when I don’t have my cup caddy on me.

Then, I used to leave my drink in the kitchen or wherever it was, and I would walk back and forth for a sip, which wasn’t ideal. One other thing I used to do was carry it myself whilst taking my time, but this still ended in frequent spillage.

But then I got something that made carrying full cups so much easier: I got a cup caddy. It’s this neat cup holder where you put a cup on it and no matter how much you swing it, it never spills. I don’t know the science of it, but it still works and I recommend it to everyone who struggles with carrying drink.

The same science used in the cup caddy is used in other things, such as utensils, so people with bad tremors are able to use them. This is accommodation AND acceptance of this accommodation.

But that’s physical disabilities. What about neurological disabilities?

Some autistic people (I choose autism because I know many people with autism) have a sensitivity to light and loud noises – this isn’t exclusive to autism, though. So, the accommodation? They take themselves out of situations where bright lights and loud noises are present, or they dim the lights and drown out the noise with music.

Some might even get full sensory overload; in which case they take time out for themselves where they can rest their senses. Or, people who get sensory overload sometimes use a sensory deprivation blanket so they can disconnect themselves from the overwhelming senses for a bit.

Some people with down syndrome are hard of hearing due to an access build up of ear wax, which makes them sensitive to sudden sounds. The accommodation? They wear headphones with loud music.

***Using equipment***

Luckily, for most things, as I mentioned earlier, there is equipment and/or other help we can use to do these things.

I mentioned above that I used to use a walking frame – a Kaye Walker to be exact – and a wheelchair in hight school. School was so tiring that I wobbled a lot more (I wobble more when I’m tired) so these mobility aides helped me a lot with my already bad fatigue. A walker in my early years was so I could walk, but more so to combat tiredness when I used it in my later years.

Sixth form wasn’t as tiring, and once I reached a point where I learned to go at my own pace I chose to walk without aides, and I still do. Some disabled people don’t have the ability to walk, which must be frustrating for them as it was for me when I was constantly told I couldn’t walk without a walker.

In this sense I am lucky that I can walk. But, even if you’re physically unable to walk, you still need to accept it if you can’t change it.

Accepting it takes time and effort but it’s worth it in the end.

If you have a disability where you can’t walk and are confined to a wheelchair. It can be frustrating and hard to accept. But, acceptance makes everything so much easier, and you’ll start to see the bright side, such as: you have a nice bit of kit (your wheelchair) and it looks totally awesome!

Walking’s overrated anyway.

As I mentioned before, I use a cup caddy which makes carrying full cups so much easier, and there are utensils that do the same job but with food. With this equipment, disabled people, including me, are able to eliminate most of the struggle of carrying drink/eating food with tremors. (I don’t use the utensils, but I’ve seen them in action).

To give a better-known example of equipment, look at the wheelchair of the late, great Professor Stephen Hawking. I think we all know what happened to Stephen Hawking, so I won’t go into detail: Due to his progressing ALS, Hawking lost his ability to verbally speak and, for the most part, move. He had an electric wheelchair with a built-in voice module to help him move and communicate. (He would select which word he wanted to use by twitching his cheek when module came to that word – this was after losing mobility in his hands).

Hearing aids and symbol canes are also good examples of equipment.

Bottom line is equipment we have now allows people of different kinds of disabilities to flourish and live everyday life. It is challenging and frustrating at times, especially with the stigma it comes with (a whole section on stigma comes later in this book). But this equipment is there to help, so the sooner we accept it, the easier it becomes.

***Using software***

Equipment is great for helping with physical challenges, but what about digital challenges?

It’s all well and good if a disabled person can physically access a computer, for example, but what if they struggle using it?

Thankfully, software is available to those who need help with using a device.

For example, on my laptop I have software called Dragon, with is basically a voice command software and a dictation software. Due to my hands getting tired and achy occasionally, it’s harder to type and use my mouse. When this happens, I just open Dragon and I tell it what to do and it does it – e.g. I tell it to open Word, and it opens a new document. The same goes with writing – I tell it what to write. (If Dragon uses the wrong word, I just say “correct that” then say the right word). What’s also cool is that Dragon listens to how I talk with my slurred speech when I use it, and it uses this to work better with my voice so there’s less error.

Another think I, and many others use, is Global Autocorrect. It works the same as it does on phones, it’s just on a laptop. It also monitors your typing when it’s on so it can learn what words you use most and what words seem to be misspelled more. This is so it doesn’t accidentally correct a word to a word you don’t want to use. Using Global Autocorrect means we don’t have to manually correct our typing as often, making it easier not to get fatigued.

But, what about those who are unable to speak and navigate a laptop/computer?

Well, there’s software for that too. For IPADS and tablets, there are voice synthesiser apps where you’re able to pick words from a list and string sentences together. The best example I can think of is the winner of Britain’s Got Talent 2018, Lee Ridley, also known as the Lost Voice Guy. Due to a neurological form of cerebral palsy, he is unable to speak, and his movement is affected too. To combat this, he used a voice synthesiser app, which allows him to have a voice which would have been impossible without the app.

Stephen Hawking’s voice module, as I mentioned earlier, is also a great example of software that helps disabled people.

These kinds of software allow disabled people to not only use technology easier, but also to do everyday tasks easier.

***Finance***

Now, the big f-word.

Obviously, equipment and software to help out with our disabilities cost money, and most of us don’t have disposable income. Whether that’s due to living expenses or, like myself, you’re unable to work long hours or at all due to your disability, or due to the fact that disabled people have less job opportunities (disabled employment rate across all ages is significantly lower than non-disabled people, according to the UK government).

However, there are things in place to help us. One such thing is Personal Independence Payment in the UK (PIP), which I’m not ashamed to admit that I claim as well, or Social Security Disability Insurance in the U.S. This is extremely helpful for those who can’t work, or work part time, or, like me, you’re in university but can’t get a job because university is very draining.

Not only does this money help with living expenses, but it also helps with paying for equipment and software to help us.

There is a stigma with claiming this money; people will say we’re lazy and to get a job. But, it’s important to remember that it’s nothing to be ashamed of, and that those people just don’t fully understand our situation.

Yes, I’m trying to make it as a writer so I can earn my own money someday, but that’s just me. Whether you claim money for a short time or a long time, it’s nothing to be ashamed of. I’m certainly not ashamed as it really helps.

Here I’ve put all the struggles and the accommodations I have talked about into a table as a too long, didn’t read thing:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Struggle** | **Accommodation** |
| Walking long distances without getting tired and/or achy. | Taking your time, whilst having regular rest breaks, or using a walking frame or a wheelchair. |
| Carrying a drink in a cup or mug. | Get someone else to carry it or use a cup caddy so the drink doesn’t spill when you carry it (such as the spillnot). |
| Finding bright lights/loud noises overwhelming. | Dim the lights and move to an area where it’s quieter/drown the noise out with music. |
| Sensory overload. | Use a sensory deprivation blanket/tank or take time out for yourself. |
| Using a computer when your hands ache. | Use Dragon voice command and dictation or something similar. |
| Spelling words correctly on a laptop/computer. | Use Global Autocorrect. |
| Typing and talking to use voice dictation. | Use a voice synthesiser app to put together sentences on a touch screen. |
| Working long hours or working at all. | Financial support from your country’s government. |

**Part 2 – How to Accept and Deal with Stigma**

So, I’ve talked a lot about how to accommodate your life to your disability.

But, I think I now need to pay attention to exactly how you accept these accommodations.

When non-disabled people see us using these cool accommodations, they will have opinions and reactions that we may not like.

Dealing with this stigma can be challenging, but this is what Stoicism helps with – dealing with these types of things.

As with the previous part of this chapter I will put the techniques in a table at the end of the chapter as a too long, didn’t read.

***Dealing with the stigma***

With disability, as with anything, comes stigma. People might think you’re lazy or, worse of all, inferior to non-disabled people. Or, you get people talking to you like a child or an alien just because they think your disability hinders your ability to think and speak for yourself. You also get people who, when they find out you’re disabled, take over anything and everything that you do because they think you can’t do it.

All this is very frustrating, and sometimes just downright derogatory. Sometimes it can be hard to deal with, even with the techniques I’m about to list. But these techniques will make it easier to deal with the stigma.

Now, let’s get into it:

***Understand***

By this I mean you must understand that some people just don’t know what it’s like to be disabled. If they did, they wouldn’t think the way they do.

Someone thinks you’re lazy? Understand that they’re not you so they don’t know if something’s physically or mentally impossible or challenging for you. That person can’t feel how tired you are, or if you ache. If you know in yourself that you’re tired and need a break, everyone else’s negative opinions can’t touch you. It’s only when you allow them to harm you, you start questioning yourself and putting yourself down.

Someone thinks you’re inferior to them because you’re disabled? Understand that their backwards thinking comes from a long line of believers in eugenics (survival of the fittest). This kind of conservative thinking is actually dangerous at times. We can see this in Adolf Hitler’s actions of trying to create a perfect race by killing everyone who didn’t fit his standard. This all seems scary, but there are laws and contingencies put into place to protect us as much as possible. It’s easy to get angry at these people, but when we start understanding that they don’t know any different, either because of how they were raised or just plain ignorance, we actually start to feel sorry for these people. Imagine how sad it is that you’re so sheltered, so unaccepting, that you really think this way. It’s sad, isn’t it?

Someone takes over what you’re doing or they treat you like a child because they think you’re incapable? Understand that disability is a large spectrum that cannot be condensed into one stereotype, but it usually is: the useless, immobile, dribbling mess (this isn’t the case). Since this is a common stereotype which has spanned years in the media, you cannot blame people for thinking all disabled people are like that. Stereotyping a certain group can be hard to break, so be patient with these people and don’t get angry at them – it’s hard I know but it’s possible to stay calm. This is where the next technique comes into play:

***Educate***

You also need to understand that non-disabled people don’t know what it’s like living with a disability. So, educate them. Educate them on why you’re not lazy, you just get tired easier. Educate them on why you’re not inferior and why their thinking is outdated. Educate them and show them that you are capable of doing things, you just need to go slower and do it a different way than non-disabled people.

As disabled people, I believe we have a duty to educate people. Whether it’s educating non-disabled people on how to better help us, or educating other, less fortunate disabled people on how to thrive in life despite the challenges, or educating ourselves on how to be the best version of ourselves, it’s our duty.

But you can’t educate people if you’re not educated yourself. If you’re struggling to educate others on your disability, it might be a sign that you need more help. And that’s ok, even the most educated of people still need help at times.

However, if you’re not getting educated or if you’re not educating, what are you doing? If you don’t want there to be stigma around disabled people, are you trying to change it? If you don’t want to educate and you don’t want to be educated and you just want pity – because a small percentage of disabled people do – stop complaining. Even if you are educating or being educated, complaining won’t change it.

Marcus put it best in his *Meditations*: “Show the offender where he went wrong” (Instead of getting angry and complaining).

Which brings me on to my next point:

***Stop complaining…***

This one is nice and simple. Not easy, but simple.

Simply stop complaining. Complaining does nothing to change a situation or make anything easier. This doesn’t mean you can’t get upset or frustrated over something – they’re natural emotions. If you get upset or frustrated over something related to your disability, take time to calm your emotions – complaining will just make it worse.

It’s easy to complain and to make it a habit of it. Trust me, I’ve been there – angry at the world and constantly complaining. But if we break the cycle and stop complaining then we’ll see a massive difference in our lives.

But, there are some disabled people who don’t want to stop complaining. They like complaining, they like the pit and they don’t want to change. These people don’t want to be helped; we can try but if they don’t want help, we can’t help.

***…and use logic***

Logic was one of the core teachings of ancient Stoicism, which included the study of language, grammar, rhetoric, and epistemology. That kind of logic is different to the one I’ll talk about, which is a practical way to solve a situation.

Too many people nowadays react on emotions, which, in most cases, ends in disaster. With logic however, you’ll be able to problem solve without emotionally out bursting. For example, you’re struggling to pour water in a cup because you’re fatigued. You know you can do it but you struggle now since you’re tired. Instead of getting angry and upset and rushing to pour the water, the logical thing would be to take a break and come back to it when you’re calmer. Or you can ask for help or take it one step at a time.

Let’s use an example from the workplace. Let’s say you’re wheelchair bound or wobbly on your feet and you apply for a job as a server in a restaurant. Let’s also say you didn’t get the job and instead it went to a non-disabled person. It’s easy to think this in typical ableism, but most likely the non-disabled person got the job because they are simply mor equipped to be a server – you need to be able to move around easily and carry and balance a lot of dishes.

When you start using logic, you’ll start solving problems better and realise that not everything comes down to ableism, whilst avoiding an emotional outburst.

***Learn to strengthen yourself***

When living with a disability, we’ll most definitely encounter ableism – institutional, derogatory remarks, jokes at our expense, etc. But if we strengthen ourselves, we can avoid these adversities harming us.

As Marcus Aurelius said: “Choose not to be harmed—and you won't feel harmed. Don't feel harmed—and you haven't been”. If someone makes a comment about your disability, choose not to react emotionally. Strengthen yourself.

We can still get upset over things – it’s natural to. But, if we strengthen ourselves, we won’t react emotionally, and we can not be harmed.

We spend so much time getting upset over these things. It’s understandable why we get upset but if we don’t get emotional, our lives would be so much better. Getting upset will just fuel the satisfaction of those discriminating against us, anyway.

What I find helpful is joking about my disability, it helps me to accept myself and strengthen myself. When you start joking about yourself, it will build up an immunity to others joking about you and making derogatory comments.

Strengthen yourself.

***Stop being hard on yourself***

It’s so easy to beat ourselves up and belittle ourselves. We spill something or wobble over and get angry and we start belittling ourselves. Or if you’re wheelchair bound you might belittle yourself for not being able to fit through doors or get around easily.

Simply take a breather, stop talking to yourself like that.

Here’s a tip: talk to yourself just like you would talk to your friends or family in distress.

Kindness is in short supply, so generate some yourself and put it onto you – you deserve it.

Be kind to yourself.

***It’s not anyone’s or anything’s fault***

It’s easy to get angry at people, at things, and at yourself for not being able to do something like non-disabled people can.

You might be frustrated at not being able to pour a glass of drink without struggling so you get angry at anyone trying to help, or you angrily smash the glass, or you get angry at yourself. But the person helping you is being nice so why get angry at them – it’s not their fault. That glass you smashed out of frustration did nothing wrong – it doesn’t even have feelings, it’s inanimate – it’s not its fault. And you. Why get angry at yourself? It’s not your fault you struggle, be easy on yourself.

Blaming people, things, ourselves is easy to do, but at the end of the day it’s utterly useless. If we stop blaming people, things, and ourselves our quality of life will be better, and we will start dealing with our struggles in a calm manner. A Stoic manner.

Too long, didn’t read.

|  |
| --- |
| **Techniques to deal with stigma** |
| Understand |
| Educate |
| Stop complaining…and use logic |
| Strengthen yourself |
| Stop being hard on yourself |
| It’s not anyone’s or anything’s fault |

**Chapter 3 - Quotes and Sayings**

**Part 1 – Remember these Sayings…**

Stoicism has three main sayings that really speak to me as a disabled person and a disabled Stoic. Here, I will explain how these saying can be applied to your life, and explaining why they’re a must in your life as not only a Stoic, but also a disabled person.

Sidenote – irrelevant but cool fact: I have all three of these sayings tattooed on my right arm.

***Memento Mori – Remember you will die***

Nothing in life is guaranteed except for death.

This seems morbid. But a reminder of our inevitable death is useful.

When most people think of death, they get scared, anxious about missing things. But, when Stoics think of death, they are determined to make the most out of life – since death can come at any time and anywhere, isn’t it better to make the most out of it instead of being scared? Would you rather your last hour of life be spent feeling anxious about death, or would you rather spend the last hour of life having the literal time of your life.

Memento Mori can also be used for helping with struggles. Let’s say you’re struggling with opening a jar and you get all riled up, you might treat it as the worst thing in the world. But, just remember: you will die one day, don’t spend what could potentially be your last moments being angry at a small inanimate object.

Death can come at any point, so make the most out of life and don’t spend it being angry at the world!

***Amor Fati – Love Fate***

Amor Fati is a love of Fate, of everything that happens.

The saying “everything happens for a reason” is true; only it’s up to us to find the reason.

If you can’t change a certain thing that happened, what’s anger going to do? It’ll only make it worse.

This doesn’t mean we can’t make a change or try to. If an injustice happens don’t get angry, love it because it’s an opportunity to stand up to it and try and bring justice.

It’s easier said than done. It just takes time.

One night when I went clubbing with my friends I was stopped at the door because the staff thought I was drunk because I was wobbling due to my disability. I’ll be honest, I froze in the moment because I didn’t know what to do. When my friends explained I was disabled the staff member didn’t believe me. I eventually got in thanks to the head of security who knew about my condition. The next few weeks I doubted myself and beat myself up, resulting in panic attacks. After a while, I realised that it was up to me to find out why Fate let this happen: it was to help strengthen me and tom raise awareness for similar situations at the club which was on my university campus. Now, we have more disability awareness at the club and a queue jump card system for disabled people.

When it comes to things like wobbling over, name calling, and whatnot, I love it because it gives me comedic material – turn adversities on their head and use them for your own good, whether that’s joking about it, raising awareness, or anything else.

Everything happens for a reason, it’s up to you to find out the reason and how you’re going to deal with it.

***Carpe Diem – Seize the Day***

You probably hear the saying “seize the day” almost every day. Although it’s easier said than done, just like the other sayings, it is useful when done right.

If done right, we’ll be able to make the most out of our lives.

As disabled people, we need rest so we don’t get fatigued, we say no to anything too strenuous, and we avoid getting ourselves hurt because we know we’ll suffer the consequences later. Some people see this as boring and not living life to the fullest. But, if preventing ourselves from serious injury is boring, then so be it, we’re boring.

Carpe Diem doesn’t mean act now and bear the consequences later, it means make the most out of what situation you’re in. Staying in because you’re fatigued and need a rest? Make the most out of it and spend the time having a bit of self-care, have the day to yourself.

Seize the day in whatever situation you’re in. That way we won’t feel bad about taking time out for ourselves.

***Honourable mention: Thou Knowest this Man’s Fall; but Thou Knowest not his Suffering***

Too many times have I seen disabled people berate other disabled people for taking more rest than they are.

It’s easy for someone with cerebral palsy tell another person with cerebral palsy “You can keep going because I can” or “I’m not tired so you shouldn’t be”.

This isn’t fair, no-one knows what other disabled people are feeling or going through. No-one can decide when another disabled person needs a rest except for that individual.

Don’t you get frustrated when you’re told you’re not tired? If you do, why do it to someone else.

You see what people go through and how they feel, but we can never truly *know*.

**Part 2 – Remember these Quotes**

Throughout our lives, we hear so many quotes but that’s it. We might feel motivated for a bit, but then it goes away. In this section, I will say some of my favourite quotes with practical advise so they’ll actually help, whilst also modernising the quotes to fit the context of this book.

***“When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly” – Marcus Aurelius, Meditations***

When Marcus wrote this down, he was probably having an internal dilemma about dealing with people who were almost unbearable to deal with. The most likely reason is he was having a hard time dealing with arrogant and ignorant soldiers fighting alongside him in the Marcomannic Wars. He was probably also dealing with dishonest, meddling, and jealous government figures in the Marcomanni and Quadi tribes who he was fighting against.

While Marcus was dealing with people in a war, we, as disabled people, deal with unbearable people almost everyday due to our disabilities. Whether it’s dealing with ignorant people, patronising people, or just downright rude people, we still deal with it almost every day in many different forms.

Here is the quote in the context of this book – “When you wake up in the morning. Tell yourself: The people I will deal with today will be patronising me, not understanding of my disability, ableist, and downright rude. I will also deal with disablism from companies, inaccessibility to some places, and being overlooked by people for being disabled.”

It’s longer than the original, but feel free to add, replace, or take away words.

This might seem counterproductive – surely saying this will just give you a bad impression of people? It depends how you see it: if you think it will give you a bad impression of people then it will. But if you see as preparation for all the adversities people will try and put in your way, it becomes productive.

If it helps you can also add a “But I will also meet people who are kind, understanding, and who will stick up for me when I need it” to the quote to remind you that it’s not all bad.

By reminding yourself of this everyday you prepare yourself for when it does happen, so you don’t get caught off-guard and too upset, as you’ll be expecting it. But if you don’t prepare yourself, you can easily be caught off-guard and in turn upset and angry.

I’m not saying these things won’t hurt anymore – sometimes we can be so prepared for something but it still hurts. I’m saying that if you keep preparing yourself for these people it won’t hurt as much as it would if you weren’t prepared.

Granted this won’t happen overnight – saying the quote for one morning won’t change anything too much, but if you keep at it, a daily reminder, you’ll notice that you’re getting less upset over these things.

You might find that on some days you won’t meet any of these people, from which you’ll be pleasantly surprised. But, if you do encounter them, you’ll be prepared.

***“It is not what we endure, but how we endure it” – Seneca, On Providence***

This line from Seneca’s essay *On Providence* should speak to all of us.

We all have been through things that has made us question our character, our values, our morals, ourselves.

And when we go through that type of thing, other people put us under a microscope as well. They don’t want to see what we’ve been through. Instead, they want to see what we’re doing about it.

We are not defined by what we go through. We are instead defined by how we go through it.

Let’s take me getting stopped by the door staff at the club as previously mentioned. I felt what I needed to feel for a few weeks – I now realise that I should have go help sooner rather than letting it go on for weeks. And after, I did something about it with my friends.

So, if you’re going through something, feel what you need to feel, get the help you need should you need it, and do something about it.

Do you want to be the person who is easily upset and shaken, who takes it out on others and needs a pity party? Or do you want to be the person who feels what they need to without taking it out on others, who accepts help and does something about it?

It’s easier said than done, but it’s time to choose what path you want to take.

***“We all change when you think about it, we’re all different people all through our lives, and that’s good, you’ve got to keep moving, so long as you remember all the people you used to be” – The Doctor , The Time of the Doctor***

Who we were, who we are, and who we will be are three different people.

Although this quote was said by The Doctor speaking about his past regenerations before regenerating again, it definitely applies to us disabled people.

I used to be someone who always wanted pity and was just plain lazy and used my disability to get out of everything. I’m now a person trying to educate myself and other disabled people one step at a time. As for who I will be? Time will tell.

Who you were before picking up this book is a different person to who you are today now that you’re quite a few pages in. And when you’re finished reading, you’ll be an even different person.

We’ve all been someone who we’re not proud of, but it’s who we are today that matters.

Sure, no-one’s perfect – we all make mistakes and bad decisions at times. But then we change.

We’re all changing every day, and even if you’ve just started, that’s still a big step.

But we also must remember who we used to be. This way we can look back and ensure that we never go back to being who we don’t want to be anymore. If we have changed for the worst, gone off the rails, lost touch of ourselves, we remind ourselves of the best version of ourselves and get back to that point, one step at a time.

***“You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think” – Marcus Aurelius, Meditations***

It’s true – death can come at anytime, anywhere.

So, make the most out of life and try to avoid saying or doing anything you’ll regret. And if you do? Work on redeeming it.

As disabled people we get tired easily, overloaded, and frustrated.

But is that a reason to take it out on other people? Do you want to leave life as someone who takes everything out on others? Or do you want to leave life as a calm, easy going person?

Do you want to leave life as a bitter and angry person who is mad at the world for being disabled? Or do you want to leave life as a disabled person who is trying to make a change and educates other, less fortunate disabled people?

Point is, what last impression do you want to make in the world – Memento Mori.

**Chapter 4 – Two Examples.**

Every disabled person has their own set of unique challenges, frustrations, and a unique story.

Whenever I am told one of these life stories I am always invested.

Telling our story is crucial as it helps other disabled people, whether it’s to relate to it or to learn from it. And we can do the same by listening to other people’s stories.

Here, I will give two examples from me and my friend of how we deal with our disabilities, and our experiences.

The format I will use for this section will be in Q&A style so it allows the other person to tell their story rather than me putting it into my own words.

***Bronte Thomas-Bush – McArdle’s disease***

1. What is your disability?

McArdle’s Disease, Neuromuscular.

1. How has your disability affected you and people around you?

My disability affects me in many ways. First of all, immediately, it is an ultra rare disability- with me statistically being 1 in 100,000. Therefore, the main factors that the people around me and I had to go through was adaption, patience, and understanding of what I was living with.

1. What mental frustrations come with it?

Mentally, I feel annoyed by not being able to be "normal", I always wanted to fit in and having an ultra rare disability entirely negated that - these frustrations added on with my inability to do things that my peers, or anyone else can, and how I now have more blockades on my life, as I exist and get older.

1. What are some mental strategies you use to overcome/accept these frustrations (techniques, philosophy, etc)

I loosely base my ideology on allowing things to happen and realising that there is a plan for me and that I can overcome whatever hits me with time, patience and knowledge. Mentally, I've also had to learn to be patient. Patient with myself and with others, it's given me an entirely different outlook on the world, and people, to which I had prior my diagnosis.

1. What physical frustrations/challenges do you face due to your disability?

Considering my muscles do not absorb energies in the same way, my physical limitations are vast. The main issues I have is with everyday movement. I have to regularly take a break and stop, for danger of permanently damaging my muscles, this is something I face almost every minute of every day.

1. What strategies/techniques do you use to overcome/deal with these challenges?

Understanding patience and tolerance is key to strategically benefiting with my condition and allowing myself to live a relatively safe and normal life. Tolerance and patience with myself, realising I'm not "lazy" I'm just different to those around me, and taking extra steps to be lenient with who I am and how I manage.

1. Name one or two ways you accommodate your life around your disability.

Monetarily I accommodate through getting extra money with the government, PiP. This allows me to lessen the strain of buying equipment or technology that could potentially benefit me and my condition, as well as being able to give myself a sense of relief in case I do become unwell with my condition, I still acknowledge that I have that extra funding. Mentally, I accommodate myself by taking everything a little slower, and by connecting with those who suffer the same as me, it's incredibly important to reach out to those around you who are similar and learn from their experiences as well as share my own.

1. Is there equipment you use to help you? If so, what?

I do not use any equipment for my movement, as it hinders more than it helps, however I do use software on my electronics to take the strain off typing if my hands ever get sore: as well as help me manage my energy levels.

1. How do you deal with the stigma of having a disability?

For a long time, I didn’t. I almost turned a blind eye to it if anything. I think realistically you never just "deal" with it, you take every day as it comes, some days are worse than others and some days are better, the people around you make you realise that it is all worth it. But if I were to state instrumentally what does help me adjust to my disability, it would be understanding. Understanding of myself, who I am away from my disability, and what my disability is. And understanding of those around me, whether similar or different.

***My story***

Hello, my name’s Alf Parry-McCulloch and I have Ataxia, Cerebral Palsy.

My disability has affected the people around me in weird ways. To be honest, I used to play the victim a lot and was very lazy, using my disability as an excuse every time. And that affected the people around me as well. It annoyed them and it was unfair on them, especially because attention was on me most of the time and not on them. This also affected me as I didn’t allow myself independence – combined with a mum who wrapped me in bubble wrap for most of my life, my independence was below zero - and even to this day I’m still learning life skills. I don’t blame anyone for this, even my mum, because she was doing what she thought was right.

I broke out of the metaphorical bubble wrap after many years of being mollycoddled, and I do most things myself now, asking for help when I need it. I have also learnt to take my time and go at my own pace. I owe this to my stepdad and my sister for helping me and being patient with me while I found my independence in the first UK COVID lockdown.

Of course, there are mental frustrations – thinking that I’m useless because of my disability, especially when I can’t do certain things well, and a feeling of being ashamed. But that way of thinking is toxic, and it plagued most of my life, along with a feeling of regret of not being independent sooner. I deal with these feelings with my study in Stoicism, which has helped me realise my worth and growth. Once I realised that no matter how much regret I feel nothing will change the past, but I can work in the present to make myself better. Life got so much better and simpler. Not easier but simpler.

Obviously, I have physical challenges, such as not having great balance, not being able to walk long distances without getting fatigued, and not being able to do anything physical for more than a couple of hours. To help myself with these challenges I take my time with stuff, go at my own pace, ask for help when I need it, and I get PIP from the government until I find a job that is suitable for my disability.

I used to use a Kaye Walker and, on occasion, an electric wheelchair to aide with my walking and to combat fatigue, especially in school. Now I can walk unaided, but I still wobble and get tired, so I go at my own pace. I use the Spill not cup holder, so I don’t spill drinks when carrying them. In terms of software, I use Dragon Dictation for when my hands get tired to make productivity better.

My studies in Stoicism have helped me deal with the stigma – understanding that not everyone has a disability, so they don’t understand what we feel, and knowing that no matter what other people say, if I need a rest, I’m going to take one. There are of course daily challenges, but it’s important to prepare for these and deal with them one by one. Having a goal o educate people on disabilities helps me with dealing with stigma – I know that people need educating, even me, so whenever they say or do something ableist they might not realise it or they think they’re right, so they need educating.

**Chapter 5 - Techniques**

There are plenty of techniques we can do to help us mentally and physically, which the Stoics used throughout the years.

Some of these techniques may seem odd or impractical, but I can assure you they work. You just need to give them a try.

***Meditate your own death (and the peoples’ around you)***

Ok this one sounds weird and, quite frankly, morbid and pessimistic. But it’s not. Let me explain.

When we think about our own death, it’s almost impossible to imagine ourselves dying. Our whole life, gone. But, if we think carefully and more critically, we realise that we can die at any point in time. Memento Mori.

It’s the same with our friends and family, and even our pets. It’s hard to imagine life without them, so cherish them.

If we can die at any point, we might as well live like it’s our last day. I don’t mean goo rob a bank or blow all your money. I mean live like it’s our last day like a good person would – by doing good.

And if the people around us can die at any point, why waste your time on petty arguments? Tell them you love them and cherish them before it’s too late.

Do you want to die being bitter about your disability? Or do you want to die helping others with their own, and being happy with who you are.

***Negative visualisation***

You may or may not have heard the term negative visualisation before. You most certainly would have heard of positive visualisation – thinking of the best-case scenario. Well, negative visualisation is the opposite – thinking of the worst possible scenario.

This technique can help us with two things. Firstly, it can help stop us making rash and bad decisions. Have you ever thought of doing something risky and your friend says, “What’s the worst that can happen?” They either say this to encourage you. After all, most people rarely think about the worst possible outcome. Or they are warning you to think how it will affect your future.

If we actually think how a decision affects our future and the worst outcome it can cause, we’ll be less likely to make rash decisions. Next time you’re tempted to make a risky choice, ask yourself, “Will this cause me danger? Will it affect my morality? Am I making the right choice? What’s the worst possible outcome?”

Secondly, negative visualisation helps us prepare for the future when times get bad, whilst making us appreciate the now. When in a situation, good or bad, think how it could be so much worse. You have no food for dinner one day, but you can afford it? It could be worse – you could be homeless having to eat scraps. You’re writing an important document that gets deleted? It could be worse; you could have not started in the first place and have no ideas at all. You’re made fun of because of your disability? It could be worse, this could have not happened, which would have been nice, but you wouldn’t have had this opportunity to practice resilience.

To add to this, by thinking of the worst situation, we can put contingencies in place in case it actually happens. You can lose everything anytime, so you’re better off having savings and a backup. You can lose your job, so you might as well make connections and have people you can rely on to help you, or you can have a side hustle to support yourself.

***Choose to go without***

Stoics have a tendency to go without certain things. Maybe they’ll underdress for the weather, or they’ll fast for a couple days. They do this not only to build resilience, but also to prepare for if they were actually in that situation not by choice.

But, for some disabilities, underdressing for the weather, or fasting for a day or two, is dangerous. If you can do these things without consequences, by all means do it! But if you can’t, don’t put your body at risk.

There are plenty of other things you can go without to build resilience. You don’t need every video game you want. You don’t need to read that news story that will likely get you angry. You don’t need to watch that video instead of doing that assignment.

Going without these things makes you realise how menial they are in the long-term – will you care about them in a year? It also helps you realise how lucky you are to have a choice of whether you go without or not, building resilience for when you don’t have a choice.

***Let go***

This is the simplest yet hardest thing you can do – let go.

I spent years being angry I was disabled, as do many other disabled people, but once you let go, your anger goes, and you realise you can do so much with your life.

It’s easier said than done. But it is possible, and it’s the best things you can do!

It just starts with acceptance.

**Thank you!**

Thank you for purchasing and reading my manual. I know it’s one of its kind and it’s short, but I guarantee that everything in here will improve your life.

Thank you, again.