Meeting Primer: Worry About the Future

An optional read-ahead and quick reference, about 10 minutes

The Stoic Fellowship Meeting Guide · Everyday Problems

Guiding Question: Do we suffer more from what happens, or from what we imagine?

At the Meeting

- **Today's reading: Seneca, *Letters* 13.4–8**. We'll read key passages aloud together.
- **The practice:** Rehearse a Setback, in three steps.
  1. **Picture it.** Calmly imagine one thing going wrong.
  2. **Plan.** How would I respond well?
  3. **Release.** Let it go and return to what is happening now.

Worry About the Future

A presentation is a week away. You picture losing your place, the room going quiet, someone looking at their phone. By the time it arrives, you've lived through it a dozen times, and it went badly every time.

Seneca wrote to a worried friend that there are more things likely to frighten us than to crush us, and that we suffer more often in imagination than in reality. He suggests a simple test: is the feared evil certain? Many fears never arrive. Some do, and Seneca doesn't pretend otherwise. His point is that suffering in advance helps with neither.

The Stoics also had a constructive use for imagining the worst. *Premeditatio malorum*, the premeditation of adversity, means calmly picturing a setback and planning how you'd respond well. Done briefly and calmly, it turns worry into preparation.

For ancient texts, use any translation you like.

Optional Reading (about 8 minutes)

1. **Seneca, *Letters* 13.4–8** (4 minutes) This is the passage we'll read from. How does Seneca examine a forecast rather than automatically accept it?
2. **Seneca, *Letters* 24.1–2** (2 minutes) A friend fears the outcome of a lawsuit. What surprising advice does Seneca give him?

3. **Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 5** (1 minute) We are disturbed by our judgments about things. How does that apply to things that haven't happened yet?

Think About

We'll rehearse a shared case aloud. You can use a made-up example.

- **Picture it.** What's one thing that could go wrong this month? Can you picture it calmly?
- **Plan.** How would you respond well if it happened?
- **Release.** Once you have a plan, what helps you put the worry down?

Key Terms

For reference during the meeting. No need to memorize these.

Premeditation of adversity (*premeditatio malorum*). Calmly rehearsing possible setbacks so you're ready to respond well.

Impression (*phantasia*). How something appears to us, including a picture of the future. We can examine an impression before we accept it.

Assent (*synkatathesis*). Agreeing that an impression is true. A forecast is an impression; we needn't assent to it.