LIVES OF THE STOICS

The Art of Living from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius

RYAN HOLIDAY
AND
STEPHEN HANSELMAN

Authors of *The Daily Stoic*

P
PROFILE BOOKS

First published in Great Britain in 2020 by
Profile Books Ltd
29 Cloth Fair
London
EC1A 7JQ

www.profilebooks.com

First published in the United States of America in 2020 by
Portfolio/Penguin, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

Copyright © Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman, 2020

Illustrations by Rebecca DeFeld. Used with permission.

Book design by Daniel Lagin

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The moral right of the authors has been asserted.

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the publisher of this book.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 78816 260 9
eISBN 978 1 78283 550 9
Audiobook 978 1 78283 776 3

CONTENTS

Introduction ix

Zeno the Prophet 1

Cleanthes the Apostle 13

Aristo the Challenger 27

Chrysippus the Fighter 39

Zeno the Maintainer 51

Diogenes the Diplomat 55

Antipater the Ethicist 65

Panaetius the Connector 75

Publius Rutilius Rufus the Last Honest Man 89

Posidonius the Genius 99

Diotimus the Vicious 109

Cicero the Fellow Traveler 115

Cato the Younger, Rome's Iron Man 135

Porcia Cato the Iron Woman 153

Athenodorus Cananites the Kingmaker 163

Arius Didymus the Kingmaker II 169

Agrippinus the Different 179

Seneca the Striver 185

Cornutus the Common 209

Gaius Rubellius Plautus
the Man Who Would Not Be King 213

Thrasea the Fearless 219

Helvidius Priscus the Senator 229

Musonius Rufus the Unbreakable 237

Epictetus the Free Man 251

Junius Rusticus the Dutiful 269

Marcus Aurelius the Philosopher King 279

Conclusion 301

Timeline of the Stoics and
the Graeco-Roman World 311

Sources Consulted and Further Reading 321

Index of Stoics 327

INTRODUCTION

The only reason to study philosophy is to become a better person. Anything else, as Nietzsche said, is merely a "critique of words by means of other words."

No school of thought believed this—in the power of deeds over ideas—more than Stoicism, an ancient philosophy that dates to Greece in the third century BC.

It was Seneca, a Stoic philosopher of the Roman era, far removed from the academy, who would say quite bluntly that there was no other purpose to reading and study if not to live a happy life.

Yet this is not the role philosophy plays in the modern world. Today it's about what smart people say, what big words they use, what paradoxes and riddles they can baffle us with.

No wonder we dismiss it as impractical. It is!

This book will be about a different and far more accessible type of wisdom, the kind that comes from people like Seneca, a man who served his country at the highest levels, endured exile and loss, struggled with ambition and personal flaws, and ultimately died tragically and heroically trying to make good on his theories. Unlike the so-called "pen-

and-ink philosophers," as the type was derisively known even two thousand years ago, the Stoics were most concerned with how one *lived*. The choices you made, the causes you served, the principles you adhered to in the face of adversity. They cared about what you did, not what you said.

Their philosophy, the one that we need today more than ever, was a philosophy not of ephemeral ideas but of action. Its four virtues are simple and straightforward: Courage. Temperance. Justice. Wisdom.

It should not surprise us then that we can learn just as much from the Stoics' lived experiences (their works) as we can from their philosophical writings (their words). The wisdom offered by Cato the Younger's published works is scant—as a lifelong public servant, he was too busy in office and in battle to write down more than a few sentences. But the story of how he comported himself—with ironclad integrity and selflessness—amid the decline and fall of the Republic teaches more about philosophy than any essay. Along those lines, little survives to us about the theories of Diotimus, an early-first-century BC Stoic, but the legend of his literary fraud shows us how easily even righteous people can go astray. The same goes for the life of Seneca, whose eloquent letters and books survive to us at length, and yet must be contrasted with the compromises required by his job in Nero's administration.

And it's not just the lives of the Stoics that teach volumes but also their deaths—every Stoic was born to die, whether it was by assassination, suicide, or, most uniquely, of laughter, as was the case for Chrysippus. Cicero once said that *to philosophize is to learn how to die*. So the Stoics instruct us wisely not only in how to live, but in how to face the scariest part of life: the end. They teach us, by example, the art of going out well.

The Stoics profiled here are mostly men. This was the curse of the ancients: It was a man's world. Still, they were diverse. The philosophers

in this book hailed from the far-flung corners of the known world, from Cyprus, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Iraq. And though their philosophy would take root in Athens, the Stoics saw the whole earth as their country. The founder of Stoicism, Zeno of Kition, a Phoenician, would famously refuse Athenian citizenship because it conflicted with his sincere belief in cosmopolitanism. Stoicism eventually made its way to Rome, where it loomed large in Roman life, directing the course of one of the biggest and most multicultural empires in history.

Across the first five hundred years of Stoic history, its members form an astonishing spectrum of stations in life, ranging from Marcus Aurelius, the all-powerful emperor, to Epictetus, a lowly slave who was crippled in captivity but whose writings and life were an example that inspired many, including Marcus. Some of their names you may already be familiar with, and others (Aristo, Diogenes of Babylon, Porcia, Antipater, Panaetius, Posidonius, Arius, and Musonius Rufus) likely not. But each is worth knowing about, whether they were merchants or generals, writers or athletes, parents or professors, daughters or diplomats.

Each has something important to teach us. Each walked the path of virtue in a way that we must learn from.

The word "stoic" in English means the unemotional endurance of pain. Yet even a cursory look at the stories of these (mostly) men proves an enormous difference between the expectations of that lowercase stoicism and the realities of the philosophy, uppercase Stoicism. Stoicism is a vibrant, expansive philosophy filled with people who loved, who grieved, who strove, who fought bravely at close range in the great battles of history, who raised children, who wrote important works, who stood tall, who believed, and who *lived*. In their own time, these philosophers resisted the stereotype of lowercase stoicism, that they were unfeeling beasts of burden who suffered through life and looked only inward.

The Stoics were never simply resigned to the current state of things, accepting without objection the injustices of the world. Rather, they formed the most ardent "Resistance" to the tyranny of Julius Caesar, Nero, and others in the ancient world, even influencing popular democratic reforms. Just as Stoicism was the "stern nurse of heroes during the first century of the Empire," to borrow historian Richard Gummere's expression, it would play a similar role for many centuries after, including inspiring the leaders of the American Revolution as well as patriots like Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who led a black regiment for the Union cause in the Civil War (and was a translator of Epictetus). The Stoics have always been people who bled and died for change, whether it was appreciated or successful or not.

"I know," Seneca wrote in 55 AD in a book on mercy written for the young emperor Nero, "that the Stoics have a bad reputation among the uninformed for being too callous and therefore unlikely to give good advice to kings and princes: they're blamed for asserting that the wise man does not feel pity and does not forgive. . . . In fact, no philosophical school is kinder and gentler, nor more loving of humankind and more attentive to the common good, to the degree that its very purpose is to be useful, bring assistance and consider the interests not only of itself as a school but of all people, individually and collectively."

The structure and style of these pages are inspired by Plutarch, one of the great biographers of history and, as it happens, both a chronicler and a critic of Stoicism.* We will be presenting to you overlapping but independent biographies of all of the major Stoic figures. The aim is to give you a rich resource you can turn to over and over again—as millions of readers of *The Daily Stoic* and *The Obstacle is the Way* have done for years now.

---

* His grandson, Sextus, would be a philosophy teacher of Marcus Aurelius.

We have presented each of the Stoics through the lens of a defining characteristic or role they played in the history of their philosophy. You'll meet Porcia the Stoic Iron Woman, Diogenes the Diplomat, Antipater the Ethicist, and Zeno the Prophet. We want to leave you not only with some facts about these figures, but with a fuller sense of their essence and the aspects of their lives that teach us the most about the art of living.

Our aim in these pages is not to achieve strict scholarly accuracy—which is impossible after so many centuries—but to elucidate the moral lessons that can be drawn from the lives of these complicated figures. For many of the early Stoics we turn to Diogenes Laërtius—the so-called "night watchman of the history of Greek philosophy." His classic work, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers,* compiled in the third century AD, is at times contradictory, offering what is clearly a mix of collected facts and fictions. But it is also filled with beautiful insights and stories. Diogenes cared as much about the personal as the philosophical, and that's why his observations resonate in ways that other ancient scribblers and critics do not.

Because of the proximity of the later Stoics to political power in the Roman era, their names appear in the classic histories of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius, often with admiration where they lived up to their ideals (such as Tacitus's accounts of the deaths of Thrasea and Seneca), or with derision where they failed them (such as Dio Cassius's account of Seneca's questionably accumulated wealth). Pliny, Strabo, Athenaeus, Aulus Gellius, and others shed additional light on the lives and teachings of the Stoics. Later, Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius, Jerome, and Saint Augustine, who all learned so much from many of the Stoics, also help to bring their lives into focus.

In other cases, we rely on the accounts of writers like Cicero or on

the Stoics themselves for information. Cicero, who identified as a member of the skeptical Academy and kept busy climbing to the top of Roman politics, nevertheless dedicated a huge chunk of his life to a deep immersion in the history and doctrines of the Stoics who preceded him, and through his effort we have access to many sources long since lost. Seneca is another equally valuable source, as he not only crafted new writings on Stoicism but filled them with a wealth of quotations and anecdotes about his Stoic predecessors we'd otherwise not have. It is these intersections that are most interesting, even if we don't always have other confirming documentation, because they show us how the Stoics influenced each other, and how moral tales—like the one generations of Americans taught their children about George Washington and the cherry tree—can demonstrate important lessons regardless of veracity.

What the Stoics were after, what we remain interested in to this day, were lights to illuminate the path in life. They wanted to know, as we want to know, how to find tranquility, purpose, self-control, and happiness. This journey, whether it begins in ancient Greece or modern America, is timeless. It is essential. It is difficult. Which is why we ask, as the Stoics asked: Who can help me? What is right? Where is true north?

"You've wandered all over," Marcus Aurelius wrote to himself in *Meditations*, "and finally realized that you never found what you were after: how to live. Not in syllogisms, not in money, or fame, or self-indulgence. Nowhere."

If philosophy is anything, it's an answer to that question—how to live. It's what we have been looking for. "Would you really know what philosophy offers to humanity?" Seneca asks in his *Moral Letters*. "Philosophy offers counsel."

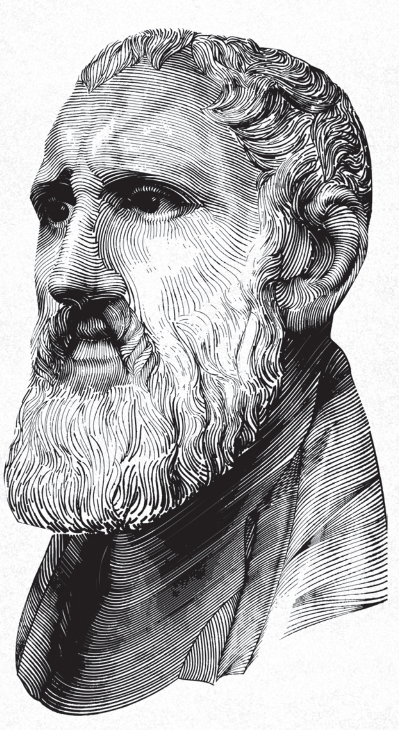
It will be your job, after you read these pages, to heed this counsel, and to struggle with what Seneca described as the most important job

of a reader of philosophy—the act of turning words into works. To turn the lessons of the lives of the men and women who came before us, their living and their dying, their succeeding and their failing, into actions in the real world.

For it is this, and nothing else, that earns one the title: Philosopher.

ZENO THE PROPHET

(ZEE-No)



B. 334 BC

D. 262 BC

Origin: KitION, CYPRUS

The story of Stoicism begins, fittingly, in misfortune.

On a fateful day late in the fourth century BC, the Phoenician merchant Zeno set sail on the Mediterranean with a cargo full of Tyrian purple dye. Prized by the wealthy and by royalty who dressed themselves in clothes colored with it, the rare dye was painstakingly extracted by slaves from the blood of sea snails and dried in the sun until it was, as one ancient historian said, "worth its weight in silver." Zeno's family trade was in one of the most valuable goods in the ancient world, and as it is for many entrepreneurs, their business was on the line every day.

No one knows what caused the wreck. Was it a storm? Pirates? Human error? Does it matter? Zeno lost everything—ship and cargo—in a time before insurance and venture capital. It was an irreplaceable fortune. Yet the unlucky merchant would later rejoice in his loss, claiming, "I made a prosperous voyage when I suffered shipwreck." For it was the shipwreck that sent Zeno to Athens, on the path to creating what would become Stoic philosophy.

There are, like the origin stories of all prophets, some conflicting accounts of Zeno's early life, and his shipwreck is no exception. One

account claims that Zeno was in Athens already when he learned of his cargo's demise and said, "Well done, Fortune, to drive me thus to philosophy!" Still others hold that he had already sold the cargo in Athens when he took up the pursuit of philosophy. It's also quite possible that he had been sent to the city by his parents to avoid the terrible war between Alexander the Great's successors that ravaged his homeland. In fact, some ancient sources report that he possessed an estate and maritime investments worth many millions at the time of his arrival in Athens. Yet another source records that Zeno arrived in 312 BC, at the age of twenty-two, the very year that his birthplace was razed and its king was killed by an invader.

Of all the possible origins for a philosophy of resiliency and self-discipline, as well as indifference to suffering and misfortune, an unexpected disaster rings the most true—whether or not it fully wiped out Zeno and his family financially. A shipwreck might just as easily have driven Zeno to an ordinary life as a land-based merchant, or, depriving him of his family, it could have driven him to drink or destitution. Instead, it was something he *used*—it was a call he decided to answer, spurring him to a new life and a new way of being.

This ability to adapt was a survival trait well suited to the times. The world of Zeno's boyhood was one of chaos. In 333 BC, the year after he was born in Kition, a Greek city on the island of Cyprus, Alexander the Great liberated the country from two centuries of Persian rule. From then on, Zeno's home was a valuable chess piece on this shifting board of broken empires, one that changed hands many times.

His father, Mnaeseas, was forced to literally navigate this chaos, as he traveled the seas in the family trade. There would have been blockades to run, bribes to pay, and enemy lines to avoid as he sailed from Cyprus to Sidon, Sidon to Tyre, Tyre to the Piraeus, the great port city outside Athens, and back again. Yet he seems to have been a loving fa-

ther who made sure to bring home many books to his son, including those about Socrates.

It was likely never a question of whether Zeno would enter the family trade and follow his father to the sea, trading Phoenician dye, dreaming of adventure and riches. We're told he was tall and lean, and that his dark complexion and bearing earned him the epithet "an Egyptian Vine." In his later years, he would be described as thick-legged, flabby, and weak—attributes that caused him some awkwardness and social shyness as he aged and adjusted to life on land.

For all the uncertainty of the conditions of Zeno's arrival in Athens, we know what the city was like when he arrived. Athens was a bustling commercial center with twenty-one thousand citizens, half as many foreign nationals, and a staggeringly large slave population, which numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The entire city was turned toward business, ruled by literate elites whose success and education allowed them time to explore and debate ideas that we are still talking about today. It was fertile ground for the awakening that was to come for Zeno. In fact, we even know exactly where this awakening happened—a surprisingly modern place: a bookstore.

One day, Zeno found himself taking a break from the fray of business, browsing titles in a bookshop, looking for something to read, when he learned that a talk had been scheduled for that day. Taking his seat, he listened to the bookseller read a medley of works about Socrates, the philosopher who had been put to death in Athens a century before and whose ideas Zeno's father had introduced him to as a boy.

On one of his voyages before his shipwreck, perhaps inspired by a similar trek that Socrates had made, Zeno consulted an oracle about what he should do to live the best life. The oracle's response: "To live the best life you should have conversation with the dead." It must have struck him there in that bookstore, possibly the same one his father had

shopped in years before, as he listened to the words of Socrates read aloud and brought to life, that he was doing precisely what the oracle had advised.

Because isn't that what books are? A way to gain wisdom from those no longer with us?

As the bookseller read from the second book of Xenophon's *Memorabilia,* Zeno was hearing Socrates's teachings as they had been conducted in those very streets just a few generations before. The passage that struck him most was "The Choice of Heracles," itself a story of a hero at a crossroads. In this myth, Heracles is forced to choose between two maidens, one representing virtue and the other vice—one a life of virtuous hard work, the other of laziness. "You must," Zeno would have heard the character Virtue say, "accustom your body to be the servant of your mind, and train it with toil and sweat." And then he heard Vice offer a very different choice. "Wait a minute!" she cries. "Don't you see what a long and hard road to the joy she describes? Come the easy way with me!"

Two roads diverge in the wood, or, rather, in a bookstore in Athens. The Stoic chooses the hard one.

Approaching the bookseller, Zeno asked the question that would change his life: "Where can I find a man like that?" That is: Where can I find my own Socrates? Where can I find someone to study under, as Xenophon had under that wise philosopher? *Who can help me with my choice?*

If Zeno's misfortune had been to suffer that terrible shipwreck, his luck was more than made right for having walked into that bookshop, and made doubly good when in that moment, Crates, a well-known Athenian philosopher, happened to be passing by. The bookseller simply extended his hand and pointed.

You could say it was fated. The Stoics of later years certainly would

have. The hero had suffered a great loss, and because of it crossed a threshold to find his true teacher. At the same time, it was the *choice* that Zeno made—to go into the bookstore after his terrible loss, to sit and listen to the bookseller, and, most important, to not be content to leave the words he had heard there at that. No, he wanted more. He *demanded* more answers, demanded to be taught more, and it's from that impulse that Stoicism would be formed.

Crates of Thebes, like Zeno, was the son of a wealthy family and heir to a large fortune. From Diogenes Laërtius we learn that after Crates watched a performance of the *Tragedy of Telephus*—the story of King Telephus, son of Heracles, wounded by Achilles—he gave his money away and moved to Athens to study philosophy. There he became known as the "door-opener," Diogenes wrote, "the caller to whom all doors fly open" of those eager to learn from the great philosopher.

When the student is ready, the old Zen saying goes, the teacher appears. Crates was exactly what Zeno needed.

One of Crates's first lessons was intended to cure Zeno of his self-consciousness about his appearance. Sensing that his new pupil was too worried about his social status, Crates assigned him the task of carrying a heavy pot of lentil soup across town. Zeno tried to sneak the pot through town, taking back streets to avoid being seen doing such a humiliating task.* Tracking him down, Crates cracked the pot open with his staff, spilling the soup all over him. Zeno trembled with embarrassment and tried to flee. "Why run away, my little Phoenician?" Crates laughed. "Nothing terrible has befallen you."

Just because someone has anxieties or self-doubts or was taught the wrong things early in life doesn't mean they can't become something

* Lentils were then seen as a food eaten only by poor people. Undoubtedly, Crates was attempting to challenge the snobbish identity of Zeno's upper-class upbringing.

great, provided they have the courage (and the mentors) to help them change. With Crates's tough love, Zeno overcame his self-consciousness to become who he was called to be.

As Zeno left his trading days behind him, he chose a new way of living that balanced study and thought with the needs of a world driven by commerce, conquest, and technology. To Zeno, the purpose of philosophy, of virtue, was to find "a smooth flow of life," to get to a place where everything we do is in "harmonious accord with each man's guiding spirit and the will of the one who governs the universe." To the Greeks, each of us had a *daimon,* an inner genius or guiding purpose that is connected to the universal nature. Those who live by keeping the individual and universal natures in agreement are happy, Zeno said, and those who don't are not.

In an effort to reach this harmony, Zeno lived a simple life, not all that different from that of his rival Epicurus, who began his school just a few years before Zeno struck out on his own. His diet mostly consisted of bread and honey and the occasional glass of wine. He lived with roommates and rarely hired servants. Even when he was sick, he refused attempts to spoil him or change his meager diet. "He thought," a later Stoic would say, "that someone who once experiences gourmet cuisine would want it all the time, inasmuch as the pleasure associated with drinking and eating creates in us a desire for more food and drink."

As part of the simple life, Zeno kept to himself, preferring a close circle of friends to large social gatherings, and would later famously slip away from a party thrown by King Antigonus (and rebuff invitations to visit the king's court). He made his points quickly and shook his head at needless rhetorical flourishes. He was also clever and funny, making a habit to ask strangers for money, so as to deter others from asking *him* the same question. There is no indication that his early life of ease and

wealth in any way spoiled him or inflated his baseline sense of comfort. If anything, losing it had proved to him that money was not to be prized and mattered very little. It became almost a proverb in Athens, when someone was describing a sober, frugal, and disciplined person, to say, "He is more temperate than Zeno the philosopher!"

After his studies with Crates and the Megarian philosopher Stilpo, Zeno began to teach as well—fittingly for a former merchant, in the *agora* itself. There, amid the shops where people bought and sold their wares, Zeno discussed with them the true value of things. In this literal marketplace of ideas, he offered to them something he believed vital—an engaged philosophy of life that could help people find peace in an often turbulent world. "Of the three kinds of life, the contemplative, the active, and the rational," Diogenes would write, the Stoics "declare that we should choose the latter, because a rational being is expressly produced by nature for contemplation and action."

Zeno learned to be a creative kind of instructor, pitching his wares, as it were, alongside so many other merchants. At a dinner with a man who was known for eating so much so quickly that there was little left for his guests, Zeno grabbed an entire tray of fish and made as if he was going to eat it all himself. Catching his host's surprised eye, he said, "What then, think you, must those who live with you suffer, if you can't endure my gluttony for a single day?"

When one young student attracted too many admirers, Zeno ordered him to shave his head to keep them away. When a different rich and handsome student from Rhodes begged Zeno for instruction—no doubt reminding him of himself at that age—he assigned him a seat on a dusty bench, knowing it would dirty the boy's clothes. Later, he sent him to rub shoulders with the city's beggars, much the way Crates had sent him through the city carrying soup. But unlike Zeno, who had

endured his humiliations and learned from them, this student simply left. Zeno believed that conceitedness was the primary obstacle to learning, and in this instance he was proven correct.

Zeno would eventually move to what became known as the Stoa Poikilē, literally "painted porch." Erected in the fifth century BC (the ruins are still visible some twenty-five hundred years later), the painted porch was where Zeno and his disciples gathered for discussion. While his followers were briefly called Zenonians, it is the final credit to Zeno's humility and the universality of his teachings that the philosophical school he founded didn't ultimately carry his name. Instead, we know it today as *Stoicism*, an homage to its unique origins.

Is it not also fitting that the ancient Stoics chose a *porch* as their namesake and their home? It was not a bell tower or a stage, nor a windowless lecture hall. It was an inviting, accessible structure, a place for contemplation, reflection, and, most of all, friendship and discussion.

It was said that Zeno had little patience for idlers or big egos on his porch. He wanted his students to be attentive and aware. And those who came to him with an inflated sense of their own self-worth either quickly lost it or were sent away. But for those who were ready and willing, the porch was a place to learn and be taught.

Sadly, none of his works survive to us, not even his most important work, *Republic,* which masterfully rebutted the arguments of Plato's book of the same name. What we know of it comes via summaries from people who read it. From them, we learn that the early Stoics were remarkably utopian. Much of that would be discarded by later, more pragmatic Stoics, but still Zeno's early thinking set a tone that rings true today, namely that we "should consider all men to be of one community and one polity, and that we should have a common life and an order common to us all, even as a herd that feeds together and shares the pasturage of a common field."

Zeno also wrote well-known essays on education, on human nature, on duty, on emotions, on law, on the *logos,* and even one tantalizingly titled *Homeric Problems*. What could *Of the Whole World* be about? How wonderful would it be to read Zeno's *Recollections of Crates*? Alas, all we have of these writings is the occasional fragment or quote.

Even these scraps are enough to teach plenty. "The goal of life is to live in harmony with nature," we are told he wrote in *On Human Nature*, "which means to live according to virtue, because nature leads us to virtue." Zeno is also credited with originating the expression that man was given two ears and only one mouth for a reason. He supposedly said that there was nothing more unbecoming for a person than to put on airs, and that doing so was even less tolerable for the young. "Better to trip with the feet," he once said, "than with the tongue."

He was also the first to express the four virtues of Stoicism: courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom. He held these traits "to be inseparable but yet distinct and different from one another." We don't know where or when Zeno first put this "Big Four" in writing, but we can feel its impact—for they appear in the works and the decisions of nearly every Stoic that came after him.

Unlike many prophets, Zeno was respected and admired in his own time. There was no persecution. No angering of the authorities. He was given the keys to the city walls of Athens, awarded a golden crown and a bronze statue in his own lifetime.

Yet for all the adoration Athens heaped on him and the adoration he gave in return, Zeno knew that *home* mattered. After donating money for the restoration of some important baths in Athens, he specifically requested that "of Kition" be inscribed on the building next to his name. He may have been a citizen of the world, an expat who loved his adopted Athens where he would live for half a century, but he didn't want anyone to forget where he came from.

For all his clever quips, the only thing Zeno really cared about, what he tried to teach about, was truth. "Perception," he said, stretching out his fingers, "is a thing like this," meaning expansive and large. Closing his fingers together a bit, he would say, "Assent"—meaning to begin to form a conception about something—"is like this." Now closing his hand into a fist, he called that "comprehension." Finally, wrapping one hand around the other, he called this combination "knowledge." This full combination, he said, was possessed only by the wise.

In his studies with living teachers like Crates, and his conversations with the dead—that chance encounter with Socrates's teachings that the oracle had predicted—Zeno danced with wisdom. He explored it in the *agora* with his students; he had thought deeply about it on long walks and tested it in debates. His own journey toward wisdom was a long one, some fifty years from that shipwreck until his death. It was defined not by some single epiphany or discovery but instead by hard work. He *inched* his way there, through years of study and training, as we all must. "Well-being is realized by small steps," he would say, looking back, "but is truly no small thing."

As with many philosophers, accounts of Zeno's death stretch our credulity but teach a lesson nonetheless. At age seventy-two, leaving the porch one day, he tripped and quite painfully broke his finger. Sprawled on the ground, he seems to have decided the incident was a sign and that his number was up. Punching the ground, he quoted a line from Timotheus, a musician and poet from the century before him:

> I come of my own accord; why then call me?

Then Zeno held his breath until he passed from this life.