

Workout 1 ▪ The Art of Endurance

Embracing Toil, Hardship & Suffering

Prompt, Exercise & Practice for the Cynics

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"Antisthenes used to walk about five miles to Athens every day in order to hear Socrates. He learned the art of endurance from him, imitating his indifference to suffering. So it was that he began the Cynic philosophy and the Cynic way of life." —Diogenes Laertius

"The Cynic should have such power of endurance that he seems insensible to the common sort of person — insensible like a stone." —Epictetus

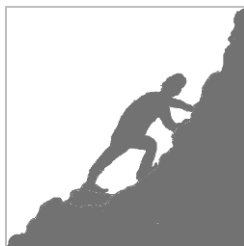
IN MANY WAYS, Cynicism is a way of life that can be reduced to the ability to endure. More: it is the positive inclination and eager choice to endure. In short, it is "the art of endurance."

Endurance of what? Whatever happens to happen. We're told that "when someone asked *the Cynic* Diogenes of Sinope what result he obtained from philosophy, he said, 'If nothing else, this: I am prepared for every turn of Fortune.'"

The ancient biographer Diogenes Laertius reports that the earliest Cynic Antisthenes "learned the art of endurance" from the archetypal Athenian philosopher Socrates. In learning this art, he "imitated Socrates' indifference to suffering."* "So it was," Diogenes Laertius concludes, "that Antisthenes began the

Cynic philosophy and the Cynic way of life."

Cynicism sprang to life from Antisthenes' ongoing struggle to endure. But its lifeblood was the *choice* to endure.



Cynics would agree with the goddess Athena, when she declared to Odysseus, "You must endure all your trouble and pain—you have no choice." But they would also disagree. "No," they would counter, "you actually have a choice."

As said, we can eagerly choose to endure—a choice that will eventually result in the ability to endure.

The benefit of such an ability is freedom and power relative to challenging circumstances. Any significant change. Toil. Hardships. Suffering.

*For Socrates, "suffering" included any kind of significant change, including both pleasure and pain.

PROMPT ▪ DEFINE IT ▪ What is **endurance**? What synonyms can you give for endurance?

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EXERCISE ▪ REFLECTION ▪ Is endurance necessary to human life? If so, why? Has there ever been any human being who has lived without needing to endure? Does the common human need to endure encourage you or give you any strength to endure?

EXERCISE ▪ CHECK AND EXPLAIN ▪ The following kinds of people are excellent at what they do. Which ones necessarily endure some kind and level of toil, hardship, or suffering to be excellent? **Check** the box of those who must endure. **Explain** to the side something they must endure to be excellent.

☐ Professional athletes, musicians, or artists _____

☐ High-achieving businessmen or women or entrepreneurs _____

☐ Devoted parents _____

☐ Good friends _____

☐ Dedicated physicians or healthcare workers or educators _____

☐ Faithful monks (Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, or otherwise) _____

☐ Ground-breaking scientists _____

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EXERCISE • MY PAST ▪ Explore **two things** you endured in the past. **What** did you have to endure? **When?** **How** did you endure? By what method? Did you muddle through? Or endure with gusto? Or were you somewhere in the middle? What would you **change** about the way you endured?

Thing endured 1 (What? When? How?) _____

What I would change _____

Thing endured 2 (What? When? How?) _____

What I would change _____

PRACTICE • THE ENDURANCE CHOICE ▪ Like a Cynic, **choose** to embrace toil, hardship, and suffering!

“Antisthenes argued that hard work, with all its toil and suffering, is something good.”

Why would anyone declare toil and suffering to be “something good”?

The Cynic logic is something along these lines: if the ability to endure is something positive, and if hard work

and its consequent suffering as well as other hardships are the means by which one develops the ability to endure, then hard work, suffering, and hardship are in fact something positive. Crates of Thebes therefore counsels us to “pursue not only the best of goods, self-control and endurance, but also what produces them, hard work and toil.”

Putting up with hard work and suffering is not

Greek & English ▪ The Greek word for love of toil, hardship, or suffering (the Greek for these is *ponos*) is *philoponia*. *Philoponia* is the active embrace of what’s hard or painful.

about being a masochist. Rather, it is about contentment—the ability to endure anything in order to be content with anything. The Cynic in Lucian’s dialogue says, “I can put up with cold and heat and be content with the works of God.”

It is also about taking the “hard” out of hard work or toil by freely and enthusiastically embracing it. Approving his wife’s practice (his wife, Hipparchia, was a fellow Cynic), Crates of Thebes wrote, “You are persuaded that working hard is the reason why one does not have to work hard.” To another he encouraged, “Whether you want to work hard or you want to avoid working hard, work hard. This way you won’t be working hard. Why? Because

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when you slack off you're not actually avoiding hard work; rather, you're making things harder."

As for how to make the endurance choice—to embrace toil, hardship, and suffering—let's look to the Cynic Diogenes of Sinope as an example. We're told, for instance, that "in summertime, Diogenes used to roll in his wine-jar house over hot sand. And in wintertime, he used to hug statues of men covered with snow. He practiced endurance in every way." Dio Chrysostom offers another example of Diogenes' choice to endure:

When a certain man asked whether Diogenes had also come to see the contest at the Isthmian games, he responded, 'No, but to take part.' When the man laughed and asked Diogenes

who his competitors were, he said, 'The toughest there are and the hardest to beat. They are not sprinters or wrestlers or jumpers, however, but those that correct and chasten a man. They are hardships that are very severe and impossible to overcome for gluttonous and folly-stricken men who feast all day long and snore at night but yield to thin, spare men. . . . The noble and excellent man believes that his hardships are his greatest opponents and always wants to battle with them day and night. . . . He challenges them one after another, grappling with hunger and cold, withstanding thirst. . . . Poverty, exile, loss of reputation, and the like have no terrors for him.'

So with Crates, Diogenes, and the other Cynics, let's make the choice to endure. Let's embrace toil, hardship, and suffering.

PRACTICING ENDURANCE ▪ Identify **three things** you can choose to endure. You can embrace. **It may be** choosing to work hard right now rather than slacking off or putting the hard work off, or choosing the longer line at the grocery store, or eating a food you don't like, or taking a cold shower, or driving in the slow lane, or doing an extra chore, or actively listening to someone blather on about something that doesn't interest you, or delaying the satisfaction of a desire, or putting up with an uncomfortable feeling or emotion, or following orders (of someone in authority) when you don't want to. Or? What else? Whatever you do, make sure your choice is **specific** and **concrete**. Try to **define your choice** in terms of what (the event), when (the time), where (the place), how (the way or method), and the like. Finally, **evaluate** how things went with your practice.

Endurance Practice 1 (What? When? Where? How?) _____

Evaluation of practice 1 _____

Endurance Practice 2 (What? When? Where? How?) _____

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Evaluation of practice 2 _____

Endurance Practice 3 (What? When? Where? How?) _____

Evaluation of practice 3 _____

“To those who said to him, ‘You are an old man, you should take a break and rest,’ Diogenes of Sinope replied, ‘Why? If I were running a race, should I slow down near the finish line? Should I not endure to the end?’ ” —Diogenes Laertius

3 ACTION POINTS

- **Understand** the nature of endurance and why it is necessary to endure. **Identify** excellent people, those you admire and would like to imitate, whose excellence is based in part on their long-term choice to endure, to embrace toil, hardship, and suffering.
- **Choose** to endure. **Make it your practice** to daily (in some small way) embrace toil, hardship, and suffering. **Train** yourself to endure even greater things (say, once per week or month). **Be creative** in the way you choose to practice to endure. **Recognize** that an endurance habit (the regular choice to endure) will take time to develop (yet another thing you can choose to endure!). So **walk** the endurance path one (small) step at a time.
- **Review** your practice. How did things go? If necessary, **redefine** the parameters (what, when, where, how, etc.) of your choice to endure in any small or large way.

Open pages for additional answers-journaling

“In reply, white-armed Nausicaa said to Odysseus, ‘Stranger, since you do not seem to be a base or senseless man, and since Olympian Zeus himself dispenses fortune and happiness to men, . . . so I believe that surely he has given misfortune to you. Regardless, you must nevertheless endure it.’ ” —Homer

“Patient endurance is a virtue. It is the knowledge or habit that suggests what we must—and what we must not—abide by and endure.” —the early Stoics

“It is easy to grab at Failure (Mediocrity). It is there in abundance for you. The way is smooth to her, and she dwells very near to you. But the immortal gods have put sweat in front of Success (Excellence). The path to her is long and steep. And so it is rough going at first. Nevertheless, when one comes to the highest point, then the path becomes easy—however hard it is at first.” —Hesiod

Open pages for additional answers-journaling

“Train yourself in self-imposed toils and hardships so that you may be able to endure those that are contrary to your choosing.” —Isocrates

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