

# ETERNAL QUESTIONS

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## Identity of the New Stoic Monk

by Brother Kaiser, Abbot

*The following is an excerpt from an essay written to the monachi of Black Eagle Stoic Monastery (hereinafter referred to as BESM) not long after taking the office of Abbot in 2022. (ed.)*

To call oneself a Stoic, one must follow and be familiar with Stoic principles. Thus, the aspiring Stoic monk should begin by assimilating Stoic theory and practice. Special treatment should be given to the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude: *prosoche*, or attention. After undergoing basic Stoic training, the monk-to-be may join a Stoic monastery and begin his probation period. As a branch of New Monasticism, the Stoic monk is akin to the "new" monk, defined as a "lay person who denotes a level of commitment to their spiritual life and lives this spiritual vocation in the world."<sup>1</sup>

I argue that New Monasticism is compatible with (traditional) Stoicism in two primary ways:

1. Both engage with the world and prioritize moral actions,
2. Both have a conception of the divine that fits under the "interspiritual" umbrella.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McEntee, Rory, and Adam Bucko, "Why New Monastics?" *New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living* (Kindle ed., ORBIS, 2015, loc. 225).

<sup>2</sup> McEntee, Rory, and Adam Bucko. "Interspiritual Revolution: How the Occupy Generation Is

How then can we differentiate the new Stoic monk from the Stoic philosopher? The answer is the monk's desire to bring together philosophy and mysticism. The Stoic "mystic" wants to find out "what bearing, if any, does the mystical experience have upon the more important problems of philosophy?"<sup>3</sup> In light of this definition, I suggest the monk begins his integration of philosophy and mysticism with the practice of *anachoresis*, in my opinion, the foundation of Stoic monkhood.

"*Anachoresis* stems from the Greek verb, *anachoré*, signifying 'to withdraw, go back, retreat.' Coined as a concept in the Hellenistic period, it commonly designates the religious practice of separating oneself from the worldly community of the *chôra* in order to facilitate a life consecrated to religious spirituality. *Anachoresis* does not require absolute physical distancing from other humans; it should rather be seen as a particular principle for organizing everyday life."<sup>4</sup>

At its essence, *anachoresis* is the recognition that our soul is not subordinated to the body. Marcus Aurelius retreated within.<sup>5</sup> So did Seneca and other ancient Stoics who meditated,<sup>6</sup> wrote notes to themselves (hypomnemata), and repeated maxims (*mneme*) as a way to keep Stoic principles at hand. Furthermore, I propose the novice Stoic monk may also benefit from retreating within himself to:

- connect with their own Daimon<sup>7</sup>
- reflect on brief and fundamental truths<sup>8</sup>
- wash away distress<sup>9</sup>
- maintain equanimity
- identify with good behavior
- build moral character
- contemplate the divine, et cetera

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Re-Envisioning Spirituality and [New]Monasticism." HuffPost, 6 July 2013, [www.huffpost.com/entry/interspiritual-revolution-occupy-generation-re-envisioning-spirituality-and-newmonasticism\\_b\\_3164356?utm\\_hp\\_ref=religion](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/interspiritual-revolution-occupy-generation-re-envisioning-spirituality-and-newmonasticism_b_3164356?utm_hp_ref=religion).

<sup>3</sup> Stace, W., and Huston Smith. *Mysticism and Philosophy*. (First Paperback Edition, Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1987, p. 5).

<sup>4</sup> Stene-Johansen, Knut, et al. *Living Together: Roland Barthes, the Individual and the Community (Culture & Theory)*. Transcript-Verlag, 2019, pp. 31-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Meditations* 4.3

<sup>6</sup> This author attempts to reconstruct Stoic meditation: Buzaré, Elen. *Stoic Spiritual Exercises*. lulu.com, 2012. p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> "Also they [the Stoics] hold that there are daemons (δαίμονες) who are in sympathy with mankind and watch over human affairs. They believe too in heroes, that is, the souls of the righteous that have survived their bodies." *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II, bk. VII, 151

<sup>8</sup> Sellars, John. *Marcus Aurelius (Philosophy in the Roman World)*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2020, p.21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*,

At the time of this writing, it is impossible to give the identity of the new monk an exact description, because different theories have to be tested, practiced, and developed before a more definite identity of the new Stoic monk can be established. Nevertheless, I think the sketch I propose is well-grounded and ready to flourish.

## Conclusion

The Stoic monk of antiquity is a mysterious agent whose existence may be uncertain, but its modern counterpart can and does exist to encourage the monachi who explore and research Stoic cosmology, consciousness, and other mysteries of our world. In the end, I think Stoic monkhood is a calling, an urge to unite Stoic philosophy with the study of the divine. I am sure this new path will resonate with many contemporary Stoic practitioners and instill the pursuit of those obligations endowed to us with the privilege of being human.

## Who We Are

*Written by the abbot for this issue of the EQ Journal. (ed.)*

The Stoic monk is one who dedicates his life to intellectual and spiritual pursuits. He aspires to reach the ultimate goal of life with all his being by renouncing all that is not necessary to it. One might say that the Stoic monk is an intellectual ascetic who prioritizes personal enlightenment by way of developing a relationship with the divine. He is also unquestionably committed to one philosophy of life: Stoicism. As a consequence, he is a committed Stoic philosopher who trains at a deliberate and rigorous level.

The monks of the BESM follow the monastic tradition, both East and West, of accepting men only. As far as we know, there is no principle in Stoicism requiring men and women to be together on all occasions. That is not to say that women cannot be Stoic monks. They certainly can, and as made clear on our website, we encourage women to create their monastery in friendship with us. Please note that the BESM is not a Stoic school where denying women access to education would go against Stoic thought. Accordingly, we look forward to establishing a partnership with future female Stoic monks and working on joint projects.

Back to Stoic monkhood. The new Stoic monk is certainly an archetype, but we are all different (just as every body in the Cosmos is different and made of different tensions or *pneumata*). Each embracing his nature, personality, and tendencies, without stepping out of our core philosophy.

To become a Stoic monk we are first requiring applicants to go through an intense period of Stoic training at the College of Stoic Philosophers. This is to ensure that the novice is sincerely committed, wants to live by one philosophy of life, and finally enters the monastery with enough theory and practice under his belt.

Once inside the BESM, you'll find brothers known for their devotion to inner exploration and dedication to the evolution and enlightenment of the soul (the mystic monk). Additionally, you'll also find others bringing their academic research to their spiritual lives (the academic monk). All in all, the kinds of Stoic monks may range from mystics, intellectuals, artists, organizers, administrators, Samaritans, etc. And although no one of us is purely one thing, each of us has a dominant side, a preference, and a specialization.

Finally, among us, there is a category of Forest Monks.<sup>10</sup> These are regular Stoic monks who underwent the necessary training to join us but are unable to do so very often due to external circumstances or on the account of a vow of silence. In any case, they report to the Abbot at least once every 6 months.

In sum, one might say that the Stoic monk is a highly spiritual Stoic philosopher known for his rigorous, almost Olympic, practice, and his restless wish to unite and explore Reality; a work mostly done in his own monastery of one. The online monastery, on the other hand, helps him connect with his brother-prokoptons, and they all endeavor to walk a similar journey. It goes without saying that outside the monastery, the Stoic monk is engaged in the world just as any regular Stoic. He is working a job, socializing, befriending, raising a family, and trying to be an exemplar of society.

## WHAT WE DO

Since the founding of the monastery, the monks of the BESM have shared weekly observations. This was our only practice then and has been kept up to this day. There is a rotation schedule, and every Sunday one of us shares with the rest an (informal) observation concerning our projects, interests, spiritual experiences, etc. Everyone is encouraged to discuss the topic of their observations with the other monks at our monthly video meetings.

The monthly video meetings are an equally important facet of the monastery, because it's where we get together to discuss and learn. The meetings are usually discussions of who we are and what we do. Four of these meetings are individual presentations of metaphysical theories or ascetical practices held on a Saturday near the solstices and equinoxes.

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<sup>10</sup> They are called forest monks after the tradition of monks who may take leave of their monastery to go live alone in the forest (ed.).

During the month, we read the same designated text every day. Right now, we are reading one passage of the Enchiridion per week. Anyone can see what we are reading by visiting our website.

Chanting is also an important facet of the monastery. We practice both, a monotone chant as well as the Gregorian style of chanting. Last year, we arranged a series of Stoic texts in Gregorian style and recorded it to share on YouTube.

Finally, there's this journal of metaphysics, which aims, in a way, to open our doors to the public. In the EQ Journal, we want to share some of the things we do, define what we believe is the Stoic monk, and have a platform to formally publish the insights and explorations of our monachi. These practices include (but are not limited to) personal rituals, meditation, solitude (contemplation, *anachoresis*/retreat within), silence, daimon contact, and et cetera. Please visit our online monastery today at <https://stoicmonastery.com> .

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