

# **The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts**

## **Episode 137: How To Practice Poverty and Reduce Fear**

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Tim Ferriss:

Hello boys and girls. This is Tim Ferriss and welcome to another episode of The Tim Ferriss Show. It is usually my job to deconstruct world class performed of some type, whether they are from sports, military, chess, entertainment, god knows where. They come from everywhere and you find a lot of commonalities across them.

This episode though is a special episode. I'm gonna hand the mic over to Seneca the Younger. And what you're going to hear is roughly 2000 years old and it teaches you how to deconstruct or construct a world class life. And suffice to say, Seneca and his letters have had an enormous impact on my life. I revisit his writing many dozens of times per year. And this particular letter has affected me in a myriad of ways.

Letter 18 on festivals and fasting, and I want you to pay particular attention to a few passages that beg around two minutes and 20 seconds in with the line, set aside a certain number of days. And what this will teach you and elucidate is how to practice poverty and reduce fear.

Specifically you can think of it as inoculating yourself against fear by practicing the worst case scenarios. This is an incredibly powerful concept that you can rehearse the things that you fear to take the fear away from them and out of yourself. It is extremely practical and I do this with short term fasting, which of course you shouldn't do without medical supervision. I must say that. I'm not a doctor. I don't [inaudible] on the internet. I do that with wearing the same clothing, for instance, like a white T-shirt and jeans for a week or so. Or you could do it by eating very cheap food, rice and beans for instance, 2 to \$3 a day in total cost for a week.

But I will let Seneca get into it because he will do a much better job than I could ever dare to attempt. I implore you to listen to more of these letters. The 27 hours or so of audio that I just put out is in *The Tao of Seneca*. This is not a big money-

maker for me. It's something I've wanted to do for decades just to make these letters available to you guys in audio format so you can do it say on the way to coffee or on the way to work once per day in the morning.

You can digest one of these letters and they can set you up for optimal performance in high-stress situations so you don't overly react and hurt yourself and others. So you can check out *The Tao of Seneca* at [Audible.com/TimsBooks](https://Audible.com/TimsBooks). Check it out. You can listen to samples. And for those of you who downloaded it a few days ago, there was an issue with the longer on-the-shortness-of-life essay so you can skip that. We're gonna be removing it but all the other letters should be in fine form. And this is one of my favorites, like I said, letter 18 on festivals and fasting. Pay attention. It's changed my life. I think it can do the same for you. And if you want additional resources, I will try to include them in the show notes. It's [FourHourWorkWeek.com/podcast](https://FourHourWorkWeek.com/podcast). And check out *The Tao of Seneca* at [Audible.com/TimsBooks](https://Audible.com/TimsBooks). Enjoy.

Seneca the Younger:

Letter 18 on festivals and fasting. It is the month of December and yet the city is, at this very moment, in a sweat. License is given to the general merrymaking. Everything resounds with might preparations as if the saturnalia differed at all from the usual business day. So true it is that the different is nil that I regard as correct to the remark of the man who said, once December was a month, now it is a year.

If I had you with me I should be glad to consult you and find out what you think should be done, whether we ought to make no change in our daily routine or whether, in order not to be out of sympathy with the ways of the public, we should dine and dare fashion and doff the toga.

As it is now we Romans have changed our dress for the sake of pleasure and holiday making, though in former times that was only customary when the state was disturbed and had fallen on evil days. I am sure that if I know you are right, playing the part of an umpire you would have wished that we should be neither like the liberty capped throng in always nor in always unlike them. Unless perhaps this is just the season when we ought to lay down the law to the soul and bid it be alone in refraining from pleasures just when the whole mob has let itself go in pleasures.

For this is the surest proof which a man can get of his own constancy, if he neither seeks the things which are seductive and allure him to luxury nor is led into them, it shows much more courage to remain dry and sober when the mob is drunk and vomiting. But it shows greater self control to refuse to withdraw oneself and to do what the crowd does but in a different way, thus neither making oneself conspicuous nor becoming one of the crowd. For one may keep holiday without extravagance.

I am so firmly determined however to test the constancy of your mind that's drawing from the teachings of great men. I shall give you also a lesson. Set aside a certain number of days during which you shall be content with the scantiest and cheapest fare with coarse and rough dress saying to yourself the while, is this the condition that I feared?

It is precisely in times of immunity from care that the soul should toughen itself beforehand for occasions of greater stress. And it is while fortune is kind that it should fortify itself against her violence. In days of peace the soldier performs maneuvers, throws up earthworks with no enemy in sight and wearies himself by gratuitous toil in order that he may be equal to unavoidable toil.

If you would not have a man flinch when the crisis comes, train him before it comes. Such is the course which those men have followed who, in their imitation of poverty, have every month come almost to want that they might never recoil from what they had so often rehearsed. You need not suppose that I need meals like [inaudible] or any other device which luxurious millionaires use to beguile the tedium of their lives.

Let the palate be a real one and the course cloak. Let the bread be hard and grimy. Endure all this for three or four days at a time, sometimes for more, that it may be a test of yourself instead of a mere hobby. Then I assure you, my dear Lucilius, you will leap for joy when filled with a pennyworth of food and you will understand that a man's peace of mind does not depend upon fortune for even when angry she grants enough for our needs.

There is no reason, however, why you should think that you are doing anything great, for you will merely be doing what many thousands of slaves and many thousands of poor men are doing every day. But you may credit yourself with this item, that you

will not be doing it under compulsion and that it will be as easy for you to endure it permanently as to make the experiment from time to time.

Let us practice our strokes on the dummy. Let us become intimate with poverty so that fortune may not catch us off our guard. We shall be rich with all the more comfort if we once learn how far poverty is from being a burden. Even Epicurus, the teacher of pleasure, used to observe stated intervals during which he satisfied his hunger in niggardly fashion. He wished to see whether he thereby fell short of full and complete happiness, and if so by what amount he fell short and whether this amount was worth purchasing at the price of great effort.

At any rate, he makes such a statement in the well-known letter written to Polyanus in the arcon ship of Carinus. Indeed he boasts that he himself lived on less than a penny but that Metrodorus, whose progress was not yet so great, needed a whole penny. Do you think that there can be fullness on such fare? Yes.

And there was pleasure also. Not that shifty and fleeting pleasure which needs a fill up now and then but a pleasure that is steadfast and sure. For though water, barley meal and crusts of barley bread are not a cheerful diet, yet it is the highest kind of pleasure to be able to derive pleasure from this sort of food and to have reduced one's needs to that modicum which no unfairness of fortune can snatch away.

Even prison fare is more generous. And those who have been set apart for capital punishment are not so meanly fed by the man who is to execute them. Therefore, what a noble soul must one have to descend of one's own freewill to a diet which even those who have been sentenced to death have not to fear. This is indeed forestalling the spear thrusts of fortune.

So begin, my dear Lucilius, to follow the custom of these men and set apart certain days on which you shall withdraw from your business and make yourself at home with the scantiest fare. Establish business relations with poverty.

Dare, oh my friend, to score on the side of wealth and mold thyself to kinship with thy God, for he alone is in kinship with God who has scorned wealth. Of course, I do not forbid you to possess it but I would have you reach the point at which you possess it dauntlessly. This can be accomplished only by

persuading yourself that you can live happily without it as well as with it. And by regarding riches, always as likely to elude you.

But now, I just begin to fold up my letter. Settle your debts first, you cry. Here is a draft on Epicurus. He will pay down the sum. Ungoverned anger begets madness. You cannot help knowing the truth of these words since you have had not only slaves but also enemies. But indeed this emotion blazes out against all sorts of persons. It springs from love as much as from hate and shows itself not less in serious matters than in jest and sport. And it makes no difference how important the provocation may be but into what kind of soul it penetrates, similarly with fire. It does not matter how great is the flame but what it falls upon. For solid timbers have repelled a very great fire.

Conversely, dry and easily inflammable stuff nourishes the slightest spark into a conflagration. So it is with anger, my dear Lucilius. The outcome of a mighty anger is madness and hence anger should be avoided, not merely that we may escape excess but that we may have a healthy mind. Farewell.

Tim Ferriss:

Hey guys, this is Tim again. Just a few more things before you take off. Number one, this is Five-Bullet Friday. Do you want to get a short email from me, would you enjoy getting a short email from me every Friday that provides a little more soul of fun before the weekend?

And Five-Bullet Friday's a very short email where I share the coolest things I've found or that I've been pondering over the week. That could include favorite new albums that I've discovered, it could include gizmos and gadgets and all sorts of weird stuff that I've somehow dug up in the world of the esoteric, as I do.

It could include favorite articles that I've read and that I've shared with my close friends for instance. And it's very short. It's just a little tiny bite of goodness before you head off for the weekend. So if you want to receive that, check it out, just go to [FourHourWorkWeek.com](http://FourHourWorkWeek.com), that's [FourHourWorkWeek.com](http://FourHourWorkWeek.com) all spelled out and just drop in your email and you'll get the very next one. And if you sign up, I hope you enjoy it.