

UNITED WISDOM

Starting Again: What We Carry from an Earlier Life

Meaning and Direction

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

P30 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *The person you are matters more than the place to which you go*

Seneca, Letter 28.4, Richard M. Gummere. A thirteen-word clause, ending before the continuing semicolon.

What this article is about

A fresh start is easily imagined as release from everything earlier. Yet a person arrives with memory, capacities, habits, and connections; these cannot all be treated as one object. This essay considers continuity at the beginning of another life: what travels, what requires testing, what changes form, and what remains a particular unfinished matter. Seneca's Letter 28, chapter XVII of Epictetus's Enchiridion, and selected episodes from Ruth illuminate different sides of the question. Their Stoic and biblical grounds remain distinct; no guarantee of successful relocation or duty to remain in difficult surroundings follows. Through an invented scene of unpacking, we distinguish changed conditions from destruction of the past, and retained history from a demand to repeat it. The practical scope is a nearby decision that can be clarified and tested without judging the whole life in one conclusive word.

I. The Boxes That Arrived with Us

Imagine someone moving to another city and unpacking in a rented room for the first time. A new job begins in a week. One box contains tools he has long known how to use; another holds a music notebook and several friends' telephone numbers. He would like to call this a fresh start, but the page already carries quite a few lines. This is an invented scene, not an observed case. Its question is simple: what begins again if skill with repairs, a habit of postponing difficult conversations, and a friendship have arrived with the person? A new city does not make these different kinds of past equally useful or equally binding.

"Again" may refer to a new job, another home, a different social circle, or a changed arrangement of the day. It need not mean that the earlier person has disappeared. It helps to name the level of change first. Someone responsible for a small area of work may now be learning another trade; competence has not vanished, but its conditions of use have changed. A relationship may end while shared events and some responsibilities remain, even if intimacy no longer continues. Not everything retained is an attachment to discard. Not every departure

betrays the past. Each thing has its own connection with the transition, requiring consideration rather than one decision about an entire life.

At the beginning of Letter 28, Seneca answers a traveller whose change of places has not brought the relief he expected. He attends to what the person carries along. This is a particular Stoic argument about moral condition, not research into relocation or a diagnosis of a modern reader. For our scene it opens a limited question: which habits might recur in a new place if circumstances allow their recurrence? Someone may again leave letters unanswered or undertake too many tasks. That does not put the cause of every difficulty inside the person. An examination needs to consider both the habit and the actual setting in which life now takes place.

Our traveller takes out the tools and decides not to throw them away for the sake of an attractive image of renewal. Yet the new home is arranged differently: some tasks here require different assistance. Experience remains, but possession alone does not establish its usefulness. He leaves the music notebook closed for now, without promising to resume lessons. He keeps his friends' numbers without undertaking to tell everyone everything about the move. Different actions emerge: use, test, postpone, change access. This is not yet a programme of self-development. It is a way to notice that continuity can comprise several separate decisions without immediately defining a single new identity for every occasion.

II. What Travels and What Needs Testing Again

A capacity and its conditions of use are different things. Someone may explain a familiar subject well and struggle to explain it in another language. They may handle one tool confidently while knowing little about local safety requirements. They have not become a complete beginner, but previous mastery does not replace new learning. During a transition, naming a specific piece of knowledge can be more useful than defending a general reputation for competence. "I can do this, but here I still need to find out that" allows experience and a question to coexist. It avoids requiring a choice between dismissing the whole past and demanding immediate recognition from a new setting.

In Ruth 2:10–11, the protagonist is called a stranger, yet her earlier conduct does not disappear from the account. Boaz says he has learned of her care for her mother-in-law after her husband's death and her departure among an unfamiliar people. This is a specific biblical narrative within familial and religious commitments. It does not establish a rule requiring every newcomer to present a worthy biography before receiving water or protection. The episode distinguishes a new position from actions already performed. Someone is unfamiliar to others in one respect, but their life did not begin when those others first became able to notice it.

At the new job, our imagined traveller knows how to organize a small stock of materials. He does not yet know who may alter purchasing procedures or how colleagues report mistakes. Immediately importing the old system could make experience obstructive. Concealing everything he knows could withhold something useful. Between those choices lies a small, testable step: propose one improvement, explain its purpose, and ask which constraints apply here. The proposal carries a capacity while allowing correction. It neither demands that the former workplace become the model for this one nor turns learning into a denial of personal history. Experience becomes available for a conversation rather than serving as its final verdict.

Testing experience need not become a test of the whole person. One inapplicable skill does not make earlier years wasted. One successful skill does not prove that every old method remains appropriate. The situation may require another pace, a different division of duties, or more frequent requests for help. Continuity here means the presence of something to work with rather than literal repetition. It may be an established capacity, knowledge of a limitation, or a question that previously never arose. A beginning becomes more substantial when these distinctions can be refined without making each correction a declaration that an earlier life was a mistake.

III. Place Matters

Seneca does not end with a simple ban on hoping that another place might help. In 28.6, he says he would prefer to leave the forum if circumstances allowed. In 28.7, he distinguishes enduring difficult conditions from choosing them: the wise person can bear war or a storm but prefers peace. These qualifications matter when reading the letter’s opening. Otherwise a moral question slips into an accusation: because habits travel with a person, every environmental change supposedly becomes useless. The adopted text does not support that conclusion. Working with a recurring habit and seeking more suitable conditions can belong to the same new life without being treated as mutually exclusive acts.

Ruth 2:8–9 describes material assistance: a particular field, a place beside other women, instructions that young men should not touch Ruth, and access to water already drawn. These are not merely inward attitudes of the protagonist. The receiving party acts to change her working conditions. The religious meaning of Boaz’s later words cannot be removed, but neither can it replace these specified measures. A limited comparison becomes possible: a transition depends on what someone brings and on the conditions made available to them. The account guarantees neither this reception to everyone nor an interpretation of absent help as evidence of an insufficiently positive attitude.

Our traveller discovers that constant noise in the new room makes it difficult to hear his own music. He can try another time, but need not regard every obstruction as a test of attention.

The conditions may simply be unsuitable for this activity. That conclusion does not invalidate the move or determine whether he should move again. It identifies the task: negotiation, another room, or a temporary pause may be needed rather than stronger will. Examining an external obstacle means recognizing what requires a decision. Without this distinction, a previous skill might be rejected by mistake when the difficulty chiefly concerns the place where it is being exercised.

A new setting can expand possibilities while introducing difficulties absent before. Neither fact cancels the other. Someone can value available work and notice the difficult journey to it; appreciate assistance and request changed conditions; remain connected with an earlier place while being unable to return. A beginning does not require one conclusive feeling. For this essay, naming particular relationships between a person and a setting matters more. What has actually become easier? What remains unclear? What needs other people’s involvement? Answers are specific and revisable. They need not demonstrate that the new life has already succeeded altogether or that the whole transition was mistaken.

IV. Roles Change; Action Remains a Question

In chapter XVII of the Enchiridion, Epictetus offers the image of an actor in a play. Another chooses its length and the role; the actor’s task is to perform what is given well. This Stoic picture of life’s order names different social and bodily positions. It cannot become contemporary career advice or a requirement to accept imposed treatment without qualification. The essay takes a narrower question: a new situation is not entirely chosen, yet specific actions may remain available within it. Beyond that question, the source’s providential frame differs from contemporary discussion of changing conditions, seeking support, or leaving a position that causes harm.

A new employee may not choose an organization’s rules, but that does not describe their entire participation. They can clarify a duty, decline an impossible deadline, or ask how assistance is arranged. None of these acts guarantees a good response or makes the newcomer responsible for the whole organization. They identify a possible area of participation. If that area is genuinely absent, the limitation also deserves naming. The actor image must not excuse arbitrary treatment by others. In this reading it distinguishes given circumstances from action without determining which circumstances are acceptable. That separate question cannot be replaced by a demand to perform every assigned role as well as possible.

A new role often reveals an earlier capacity from another side. Someone who previously advised others now asks; someone who organized work temporarily depends on explanations. This change does not make the past false. It shows that a capacity existed within relationships rather than operating identically everywhere as an independent possession. In our scene the

newcomer asks a colleague to demonstrate local stock records. Earlier experience can help him notice a question, but cannot replace the colleague's answer. Recognizing dependence becomes more precise when attached to an act: I need this process explained now. It requires neither a declaration of general helplessness nor a promise that every dependence will soon disappear.

In Ruth 2:10–11, the new status of stranger does not exhaust the protagonist either. Yet the narrative differs from Epictetus's assigned roles: it presents an encounter between particular people in which earlier conduct is reported. A limited similarity lies in distinguishing a position from a person's participation. The difference matters more than a shared metaphor. Ruth acts within a familial and religious history, while Epictetus considers providentially allotted life. The comparison does not assign every relocating person the role of Ruth or an actor. It permits a question about the name currently used for us and what that name leaves outside: a lived history, an available capacity, or a request not yet heard.

V. A Relationship Does Not Travel like an Object

In Ruth 1:14–18, departure is connected with a particular person. Naomi invites Ruth to follow Orpah back to her people and gods; Ruth expresses her determination to go with Naomi. References to people and God retain specific religious meaning. Reducing the passage to loyalty towards the past would lose the content of the choice. The account shows that a journey somewhere unfamiliar may continue a relationship rather than only end one. It does not make every departure an obligation to bring a relative, preserve intimacy, or adopt another faith. This relationship provides something to compare, not a universal model of the correct way to relocate.

Our traveller's friendship continues through occasional conversations. They once met often after work; the former rhythm is no longer possible. One call is short, another postponed, and sometimes they want to discuss different things. Preserving the connection does not mean preserving its earlier form. They can agree on available time, explain limited capacity for a long conversation, or acknowledge that they share less. This guarantees neither the friend's agreement nor the relationship's future. It distinguishes continuation from pretending that distance has changed nothing. A new beginning includes working with the form of an earlier connection rather than only deciding whether to keep it or discard it.

A relationship is not stored in a box like a tool. It has another side, its own time, and the possibility of not continuing. Proposing to maintain a connection therefore differs from claiming former access. Someone can carry gratitude for assistance without retaining the possibility of earlier meetings. They can remember a shared undertaking without consent to discuss it again. They may end close contact while remaining responsible for a specific promise. These distinctions need not be combined into one moral verdict. They separate

memory, contact, obligation, and another person’s right to set a boundary. Each concerns something that a new life does not automatically erase.

Comparing Ruth with Epictetus XVII also shows a limit to general language about roles. One text expresses determination to continue a particular relationship; the other describes a role allotted by another authority. Choosing a connection and Stoically accepting what is given do not become one mechanism merely because both accompany changed positions. For a contemporary decision, this limit is useful. “There is a relationship I want to preserve” and “a duty has been attributed to me without my choosing it” raise different questions. The first still needs the other party’s consent; the second requires examining its basis and possibilities of change. Starting again does not settle both questions alike in advance.

VI. What a New Name Does Not Erase

Another life may come with another name: a profession, a family position, or a form of belonging. A name helps communicate change but does not perform every associated action. Finished work may still require handing over materials; ended collaboration may require returning someone else’s property; relocation may call for notifying people who depend on an earlier arrangement. These are editorial examples, not legal advice or assertions that every transition carries such duties. The distinction concerns a specific unfinished matter and a general demand to remain the former person. The first may be settled through an identifiable act. The second may lack a clear basis despite being confidently presented as obvious loyalty.

Our traveller finds a note about a book he promised to return. A new life does not make the book his property. He can contact its owner and propose an available way to hand it back. That promise does not require resuming the whole friendship or explaining every circumstance of the move. Responsibility is bounded by its object: the book and the agreement concerning its return. This is why listing remaining questions can be more useful than saying, “I still owe my past.” The latter cannot distinguish a real promise, another person’s expectation, and private longing. A beginning could become an endless attempt to pay an undefined account nobody can state precisely.

In Seneca 28.4, the traveller matters despite the new place. That does not imply that every desire or way of acting is unchangeable. Epictetus XVII distinguishes a role from its performance without supplying an answer about every remaining duty. Both passages resist the image of a person emerging from nothing at a new address. Further distinctions concerning responsibility are the essay’s own editorial work. The sources do not endorse a contemporary list of the traveller’s promises or prescribe their execution. Their limited support concerns the continuing participant in a life, not a claim that every previous duty must retain its former time, form, and basis without alteration.

Sometimes an ending remains incomplete for reasons beyond one person. Another party does not respond, a former organization withholds a needed document, or a conversation cannot be arranged. Naming this remainder is more useful than declaring that beginning is allowed only after the past has been entirely closed. Here, a beginning and unfinished matters can coexist. Someone can record the action taken and what remains unknown. This guarantees no release from consequences and replaces no professional assistance where needed. It does distinguish an available next step from a demand to secure another person's response before being allowed to live within changed circumstances.

VII. Continuity Can Change Its Form

A retained capacity need not be used in the former way. Our traveller once played music with others and now has only a short period alone. He might work through several lines instead of an entire piece; he might decide not to practise for now. Both differ from declaring that the musical part of life has disappeared completely. Keeping the notebook nevertheless creates no obligation to return to it. An object can witness something lived without promising a future. This distinction matters in discussions of continuation: remembering an activity and being obliged to continue it are different. Their relationship may be decided later, when actual conditions become clearer.

A similar distinction applies to a value previously expressed through an occupation. Someone valued precision and enacted it in a former profession. After leaving, the value need not vanish, although its next form may remain unknown. Every subsequent occupation cannot automatically be called a continuation of the same story. Sometimes the assessment of what matters changes too. An open question is useful: what from the past is worth retaining now, and through which action will it appear? The answer need not be eternal. A small form can be tested, its consequences noticed, and the decision revised. Continuity becomes work with specific content rather than an attractive line connecting every event afterwards.

The biblical account of Ruth is not an example of moving any value arbitrarily into any form. Ruth 1:16 names people and God; 2:11–12 names earlier conduct and Boaz's prayer for recompense. This frame has its own content and cannot be reduced to our language of a testable step. Comparison can notice that a new journey does not exclude connection with earlier actions. The prayer does not promise a modern reader that fidelity will inevitably bring housing, employment, or recognition. Keeping this ground distinct allows attentive reading without turning the story into a convenient mechanism in which the correct attitude automatically produces a favourable outcome.

When describing a life, leaving a gap can be useful. "I do not yet know what place this skill will have" is more precise than "it will never be needed again" or "it must become central." A gap need not be a defect in the account. It reflects actual uncertainty at a beginning. Our traveller

has tools, a notebook, and conversations not yet held; he lacks a finished story explaining why these things arrived in the new city. He can live and act without that complete explanation. Continuation will appear through separate decisions, while some objects may remain memories. Change is allowed without declaring the earlier life entirely preserved or entirely gone.

VIII. Beginning as Clarification, Not Erasure

A new beginning can be described without imagining a destroyed past. Conditions have changed; some capacities remain; relationships need another form; certain questions are still unresolved. This is less ceremonious than promising to become someone entirely different, but each element has something to examine. A person can learn workplace rules, test a tool’s usefulness, agree on a time to talk, and leave one unresolved question open. Such actions do not determine the value of an entire life. They help arrange its nearest part. That is the scale considered here: a beginning as an opportunity to relate a continuing history more precisely to changed circumstances and available action.

The three sources do not give one answer about another life. Seneca attends to the traveller while acknowledging surroundings. Epictetus distinguishes an allotted role from its performance within a Stoic frame. Ruth presents a particular connection and encounter: the stranger already has a history, and the receiving party performs specific acts. The shared question concerns what continues when a position changes. The grounds differ: moral argument, a providential image, and biblical narrative. Preserving that difference matters more than obtaining one rule for every transition. It permits a limited comparison without requiring the reader to accept an entire system of conclusions that might otherwise arrive unnoticed with it.

Our traveller puts the boxes away but leaves several objects where they can be reached easily. He sends one message about the book, asks one question at work, and postpones a conversation for which time has not been found. The scene does not end by proving that relocation succeeded. We do not know whether the job will suit him, the friendship continue, or music return. What becomes visible is that a new place does not demand deciding all these futures in a day. An object can be returned, another tested, a third retained. A beginning need not become a public report of a complete personal transformation. A private act can give the nearest step sufficient content while the larger account remains unfinished.

Starting again sometimes means ceasing to demand the impossible from “new.” The word can name changed accommodation or work without erasing memory or guaranteeing relief. It can allow a capacity another form without requiring every previous activity to continue. It can change access within relationships without cancelling a specific promise or demanding preserved intimacy. “What am I taking with me?” is therefore better unfolded into precise

questions about objects, actions, and people. The answers can differ. Life continues through decisions whose grounds and limits can gradually be named, without depending either on complete sameness with yesterday or on a complete break from it.

What this means in practice

Choose one small matter within a transition: a capacity, object, connection, or unfinished promise. It need not be the most difficult subject. Write what has actually changed in its conditions. Instead of “everything is different,” name a difference: another room, a new rule, distance, changed timing, or the absence of former consent. If a condition is unknown, record that uncertainty instead of assuming everything depends on you.

Separate what remains from what requires examination. A skill may remain while its application needs agreement; gratitude may remain while the frequency of contact is undecided. Your note can contain two answers. It need not prove that the whole past is useful or must be discarded.

Name an available step and whose participation it needs. This could be a question, a short proposal, returning an object, or deciding not to promise anything yet. If you depend on another person’s response, distinguish your action from the hoped-for response. A time can be chosen to review your step, not to demand that someone else change.

Later, notice what became clearer and what remains open. An unsuccessful attempt does not determine the value of the transition. The action’s form can change; suitable assistance can be sought; a matter can remain paused. Where safety threats, intense distress, or complex obligations are involved, this brief exercise does not replace appropriate support and professional consideration.

Key quotation

> *seeing I am a stranger?*

Ruth 2:10, King James Version. A five-word fragment within Ruth’s question.

Connections between traditions

1. **What continues on the journey?** Seneca 28.1–4 presents a traveller whose moral condition survives changed places; Ruth 1:14–18 continues a particular connection with Naomi during departure. The limited similarity is earlier content accompanying a new path. The mechanisms differ: Seneca questions the person whom travel alone does not change; Ruth expresses a particular familial and religious commitment. This distinguishes a travelling habit from a continuing relationship. Neither becomes a demand to retain the entire past: moral argument determines no individual relationship, and Ruth's choice becomes no duty for every relocating person.

2. **When do surroundings help?** Seneca 28.6–7 prefers leaving an unsuitable place and distinguishes enduring a storm from choosing peace. Ruth 2:8–9 specifies Boaz's field, water, and protection against touching by young men. Both retain external conditions beside the person. Seneca distinguishes endurance from preference; the narrative presents acts by the receiving party. This supports examining conditions alongside a recurring habit. The difference remains: an ethical preference guarantees no available exit, and assistance to one character guarantees no equivalent assistance to everyone. Neither authorizes blaming a person deprived of help.

3. **Does a new role exhaust the person?** Epictetus XVII distinguishes an allotted role from its performance. Ruth 2:10–11 distinguishes a stranger's position from earlier conduct known to Boaz. Both ask about participation beyond a position's name. The Stoic image gives the actor a task; the biblical encounter introduces previous action into speech about a newcomer. This resists imagining an unfamiliar person as emerging from nothing. The limit is definite: Epictetus's role is providentially allotted; Boaz's information belongs to a particular narrative. Neither requires proving worth before basic care or accepting a harmful role.

4. **Person and changed position.** Seneca 28.4 attends to who travels before where they go; Epictetus XVII separates the role's conditions from its performance. The limited similarity distinguishes setting from a continuing participant. Seneca directs attention to a carried moral condition; Epictetus organizes duty through the play image. This permits questions about an act within new conditions without declaring experience erased. An ethical traveller and a providential actor remain different. Immutable personality, universal control of circumstances, and a duty to perform every imposed assignment follow from neither passage.

5. **Chosen connection and given role.** Ruth 1:15–18 presents an invitation to return and determination to accompany Naomi, her people, and God. Epictetus XVII assigns the choice of role to another authority. Both connect participation with something beyond an address, but through different mechanisms: personal religious commitment within narrative and acceptance of what is allotted within a Stoic model. This distinguishes a connection someone wishes to

continue from a duty attributed to them. The similarity does not erase choice and givenness. Contemporary mutual consent and examination of a duty's basis remain editorial questions rather than a ready doctrine common to both sources.

6. **Assistance and a transition's outcome.** Seneca 28.6–7 acknowledges a preference for peaceful surroundings; Ruth 2:11–12 combines recognition of prior conduct with Boaz's prayer for recompense from Israel's God. A limited similarity concerns conditions and grounds of hope beside continuing history. Seneca considers ethical preference; Ruth presents an encounter and religious prayer. This allows assistance to be noticed without claiming to know the future. The boundary separates preference from guarantee and prayer from prediction: inward work is not promised to secure relocation, nor fidelity necessarily rewarded with favourable circumstances.

Primary sources

Only named passages, actually read before drafting, are adopted. Seneca was read in Richard M. Gummere's translation and Epictetus in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's, without collating Latin or Greek. The biblical episodes were read in the King James Version; Hebrew and the entire book of Ruth were not studied. English quotations retain the identified translations; Russian versions are United Wisdom's own translations from them. Stoic and biblical grounds are not replaced by a general psychological theory.

• Seneca. Moral Letters to Lucilius, Letter 28.1–7; Richard M. Gummere, volume 1918/reprint 1925, Wikisource.

• Epictetus. Enchiridion XVII; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Project Gutenberg 45109; complete actor-role paragraph.

• Ruth 1:14–18 and 2:8–12; King James Version, BibleGateway; second selected passage separately identified in notes.

Tags

beginning, starting again, transition, continuity, new life, memory, experience, capacity, habit, connection, relationship, responsibility, promise, place, surroundings, relocation, work, role, action, condition, assistance, uncertainty, Seneca, Epictetus, Ruth, Stoicism, biblical narrative, comparison, boundary, continuation

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.