

UNITED WISDOM

Memento mori: remembering an ending and the present’s weight

Meaning and Direction

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *“So teach us to number our days”*

Psalm 90:12, King James Version numbering; opening seven-word clause. A request to God, not an instruction to calculate a personal lifespan.

What this article is about

Remembering death is often understood as a command to accomplish more, discard excess, and stop postponing life. Finitude itself, however, decides neither which activities are just, which promises are possible, nor how much effort someone currently has available. Seneca's first letter, selected passages of Marcus Aurelius's Meditations, and Psalm 90 in the King James Version offer different ways of attending to the present: passing time, action's character, and a request for wisdom. Their grounds differ and become no single productivity technique. An original hypothetical calendar scene distinguishes honest revision of a promise from endless later. This article proposes neither counting remaining years, intensifying fear, nor proving maturity through compulsory practice. Its question is narrower: how can awareness of a limit retain care, rest, uncertainty, and particular participation in living life alongside other people?

I. A reminder differs from an order

Imagine a hypothetical situation. Someone reviews a calendar and notices several arrangements have long existed only in the future tense. Someday they will give a friend an honest answer, attend to a chosen activity, and decide which extra responsibility they can no longer maintain. Thinking about life's finitude can then remind them that available time is not infinite. But it can also become an order to repair everything immediately. The previous tasks acquire another: live the remainder perfectly, waste no minute, and leave no question open. Limited time does not establish this demand. It needs separate grounds that the calendar itself does not supply or measure for the person reading it.

Here memento mori means a reminder of death that returns a question to the living present. We reconstruct no complete ritual history and prescribe no routine for repeatedly imagining one's ending. The subject is evaluating today's action when endless later ceases to be a reliable excuse. A reminder can raise a question without deciding which activities someone

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

needs, how much they must achieve, or how long they will live. Inappropriate reflection can be left aside. It tests no maturity and is no condition of entitlement to an ordinary day. Declining an exercise proves neither denial of finitude nor rejection of responsibility for one's actual promises.

We read Seneca's first letter to Lucilius, particular passages of Marcus Aurelius in George Long's translation, and Psalm 90 in King James Version numbering. They connect finitude with time's use, action's character, and asking for wisdom. Their grounds differ. Our original application is narrower: examining one available arrangement without completing an entire life. Understanding reminder versus pressure requires neither Stoic natural philosophy nor prayerful faith. Nevertheless, sources retain their grounds rather than becoming a universal technique. Those grounds matter when explaining what each text says and what cannot automatically be promised through it to a reader whose circumstances and commitments may be different.

II. Seneca: time has no ordinary receipt

In Letter 1, Seneca asks Lucilius to gather and preserve time. It can be taken away, slip unnoticed, or be lost through carelessness. Death is subsequently considered not only a future event: lived years already belong to what cannot return. This reasoning changes the habitual view of later. Someone may concentrate on preparation for a distant ending without noticing that today's time also passes. It is philosophical address, not measurement of the reader's remaining life. The letter gives us no death date, and its severe words about loss become no judgement on every pause, illness, or difficult period through which someone lives in their particular circumstances.

In section 3, time is compared with things for which people acknowledge debt. A received trifle can be returned, but lived time cannot be repaid even by a grateful recipient. A contemporary application concerns attention to another's actual capacity when requesting participation. This is our transfer, not an ancient ready-made contract. If our calendar reader continually tells a friend later, they can ask what the friend is actually awaiting and relying on. Expectation cannot be treated as free merely because no money changes hands. That thought does not turn every act of assistance into trading minutes or forbid anyone freely giving their time to another person.

Preserving time does not mean withdrawing it from all relationships. The letter itself addresses another person and participates in philosophical exchange. The question distinguishes chosen participation from unnoticed dispersal with no clear subject. Such a distinction needs a particular case. Conversation, rest, or slow work may be precisely what someone chooses; duration alone does not prove meaninglessness. Seneca speaks demandingly, but this article subjects readers to no court of productive hours. It invites noticing one place where a

promised future conceals a present choice and examining whether one remains prepared to answer for that choice personally and to the people whose lives it affects.

III. Marcus Aurelius: action’s character, not its speed

In Meditations II.5, Marcus Aurelius connects treating an action as one's last with dignity, affection, freedom, and justice. The emphasis is not an event's extraordinary intensity. It concerns how someone does what already lies before them. This differs from the popular fantasy that a final day permits everything previously impossible or unsuitable. Here the reminder concerns moral quality rather than release from responsibility. It makes no sudden desire more important than a promise to another person and authorises no demand that every minute become festive, heroic, or exceptional. The action's actual character remains the subject, including what it involves for people besides the one remembering finitude.

In IV.17, finitude again connects with being good while life continues. We do not convert a short Stoic formula into everyone's agreed definition of goodness. Its grounds remain a teaching about humans as rational and social beings. Our contemporary question is narrower: what matters in this action besides completion? In our scene, a quick reply can evade the promised conversation. An attractive plan can conceal its unavailability. Remembering time repairs neither automatically. It allows examination of an action's quality when someone will consider its subject, circumstances, and relation to another person instead of merely counting the completed item or assuming speed already establishes that it was done well.

The last action is therefore no performance of one's final perfected self. An ordinary act can be worthy without a grand result or certainty there will be no further chance. That timing is genuinely unknown. Philosophical reading need not compel imagined catastrophe to enable honesty today. A limited question suffices: can I do this available part faithfully and proportionately? Sometimes the answer means beginning, clarifying a promise, or acknowledging inability. None is a universal rule. Moral attention differs from speed and task quantity; personal finitude does not remove attention to living people connected with the action, whose own time and choices must also remain part of the consideration.

IV. The Psalm: numbering days as a request for wisdom

Psalm 90:12 in KJV numbering asks to learn to number days in connection with applying the heart to wisdom. It occurs within prayer, comparing human brevity with God and subsequently asking for mercy and established work. This is no instruction to calculate one's remaining lifespan. The subject is a relation to time within religious address. Extracting one line as a rule of personal efficiency would remove the addressee and the address's meaning. Readers can examine that meaning whether or not they adopt the prayer personally. Honest comparison nevertheless retains religious grounds rather than presenting them as incidental packaging for a universal technique whose efficacy the article has somehow established.

The context read includes wrath, sin, life's difficulty, and a number of years in verse 10. We transfer none into a diagnosis, blame of a contemporary person, or forecast of their age. Numbering belongs to the selected English version and may differ in other traditions. The request for wisdom need not make every historical expression a personal description of the reader. A religious text's reading differs from prescribing what someone must experience. Remembering finitude gives no authority to declare illness or loss proof of moral guilt, or establish time remaining through a prayer's single line. Those claims would require grounds that this comparison does not provide.

The final verse asks that the work of hands be established. Reflection on life's brevity does not cancel work here, yet work is not entirely assigned to confident human control. This differs from the philosophical letter about preserving time and Stoic address about rational action. Limited resemblance connects finitude with living's character; the difference concerns grounds and mode of address. Our calendar scene can retain a question about what someone hopes to make and which guarantee they demand from the future. That remains an authorial transfer. It promises neither prayer's delivery of project success nor that a religious reader must accept these practical questions as the expression of their faith.

V. The present’s weight is not every minute’s burden

Saying the present has weight can sound like a demand for constant special awareness. That demand can occupy all available attention. Instead of replying to a friend, someone checks whether the proposed reply is meaningful enough. Instead of resting, they judge whether rest wasted life. Our subject requires no endless inspection. The present's weight can mean something narrower: some chosen actions cannot happen exclusively in an imagined future. They have current conditions and can be named, discussed, and revised without turning an entire day into moral accounting. A reminder stays limited when someone returns to activity or a warranted pause afterward, rather than having to observe themselves every minute.

In IV.24, Marcus Aurelius qualifies doing few things: what matters is necessity and what a social being's reason requires, not merely a reduced quantity. This ground differs from any convenient method of lowering workload. We therefore borrow no promise of tranquillity from deleting half a list. Contemporary choices concern commitments and capacities about which the ancient line knows nothing particular. An activity may be unnecessary, or necessary but require different participation or timing. In our scene, an honest reconsideration of arrangements is more accurate than disappearing unilaterally. Finitude of one's time makes neither another's time less finite nor their expectation insignificant for the choice now being considered.

In Letter 1.4, Seneca acknowledges his own losses while being able to name their causes. This limits the picture of a philosopher who supposedly never misses time. We use the admission as no permission to ignore everything; it prevents infallibility becoming a condition for beginning. Someone can notice one recurring postponement while understanding no others. Imperfect action need not promise an immediate transformation of character. For this article, remembering an ending need not make every day a final examination. A limited area can be clarified while retaining rest, slow deliberation, and assistance where one's capacities are insufficient for the particular activity one has chosen to undertake.

VI. Planning a future without owning it

Treating each action as a last one need not cancel plans. Otherwise learning, maintaining a shared undertaking, or arranging next week would be impossible. Today's act is not known to be the last, and we should not pretend to know. A plan differs from claiming it may be postponed indefinitely. Plans have assumptions, conditions, and possible revision; endless later conceals absence of a chosen step. Our calendar reader can retain a chosen activity and clarify when they are prepared to begin. This guarantees neither lifespan nor future circumstances matching expectations. The plan's clarity concerns an available decision rather than complete possession of the result or the time in which it will unfold.

In II.14, Marcus Aurelius treats the present as what someone has and can lose even while imagining a very long life. This requires neither deleting memory nor abandoning preparation. We adopt the narrower point: imagined duration is not today's action. Seneca's first letter likewise connects attending to today's task with less dependence on tomorrow's postponement. Limited resemblance returns attention to available time. The structures remain different: a philosophical letter about loss and a Stoic distinction between present, past, and future. Neither establishes that a good person never reschedules or that a reasonable plan must always be carried out immediately, regardless of the circumstances and obligations involved.

Rescheduling can be honest when conditions change or a more important obligation appears. The problem is not future tense itself but concealing a current refusal to choose and communicate. An available step can therefore revise a promise rather than accelerate fulfilment. Someone may tell the friend they cannot meet the intended timing and propose discussing an alternative. Agreement is not owed. Remembering finitude guarantees no convenient response and permits no unilateral imposition of another person's renewed wait. It returns responsibility to the present conversation, where one's participation can be named accurately and the other person retains their own decision about what to accept or do next.

VII. Finitude gives no permission to abandon people

An ending's reminder is sometimes used as permission to consider oneself alone. Life is short, so any inconvenient relationship supposedly becomes someone else's problem. But this is a judgement about obligations, not mortality's direct consequence. Another person's time is limited too. They may rely on an arrangement or have their own right to decline. Personal finitude treated as proof of exclusive priority produces an unequal rule rather than shared wisdom. We retain a separate question about an action's justice. Particular relationships need consideration rather than blanket demands always to stay or leave. A reminder does not replace this work or make it unnecessary through an attractive slogan about living.

Relation to others belongs to Marcus Aurelius's selected II.5: action concerns affection and justice, not just one's inner condition. In IV.18, attention to one's deed differs from constantly watching another's words and behaviour. This does not command blindness to others' needs. Our transfer is narrower: somebody else's conduct cannot wholly justify one's own choice. Changed participation requires naming what changes and attending to consequences of what was promised. We declare neither every obligation just nor every relationship necessary to maintain. The point is that finitude itself does not settle this dispute, which still has specific conditions and people whose own experience cannot be decided for them.

Seneca's image of time that gratitude cannot repay supplies another perspective. A request does not end with one's intention; it occupies some of another person's available life. In our scene, rescheduling can begin by recognising that rather than demanding understanding that living matters more to me. Recognition guarantees no forgiveness and turns no shared hour into perpetual debt. It retains the subject: promised participation, current possibility, and another's response. Remembering an ending can clarify relations without compulsory rupture, forced reconciliation, or unilaterally deciding that another person's time now matters nothing beside one's own. Their opportunity to respond remains real even when the proposed change is personally important.

VIII. Later remembrance does not replace present action

Another attempt to evade finitude makes each act an investment in later remembrance. Today's conversation then matters chiefly as part of the image left afterward. Others' memory is not entirely controlled by whoever will be remembered. In IV.19, Marcus Aurelius recalls the mortality of memory's bearers and questions posthumous fame's value. We turn that severe judgement into no claim that family memory, historical work, or gratitude is useless. Our subject is narrower: wanting future recognition differs from acting worthily now. It can distract from what a living person can influence in a particular situation, including information that another person currently needs in order to make their own decision.

Our calendar reader may want to be remembered as a reliable friend and therefore avoid admitting a promise cannot currently be fulfilled. Protecting a future image then obstructs present clarity. Finitude can raise a question: does this choice chiefly preserve an appearance of always completing everything, or accurately name available participation? The answer requires no public confession of every mistake or destroying reputation to prove sincerity. It suffices not to make remembrance a reason for concealing something material from a person already promised participation. Their knowledge of the current arrangement has its own value and should not wait for a final version of the story about us.

In Psalm 90:16–17, work connects with address to God and mention of children rather than just personal control of future impressions. That religious perspective cannot merge with Stoic criticism of fame into one argument about legacy's uselessness. Limited comparison distinguishes work from self-advertisement while retaining different grounds. Someone can care about others continuing a task without demanding an eternal name beside it. Memory can also matter without guaranteeing every present act's meaning. This article decides no required legacy. Finitude prescribes neither a monument nor complete invisibility to everyone living afterward, and it does not make those two extremes the only available choices for the person considering their present participation.

IX. A reminder can be brief and optional

Reflection on finitude requires no repeated amplification of threat. This article establishes no relation in which vividly imagining death necessarily improves life. A historical text may speak sharply; readers need not reproduce that sharpness as personal discipline. A question can concern an existing arrangement without imagining the moment of death or calculating remaining years. It can also be left untouched now. The approach's limit matters: philosophical reading and a narrow authorial transfer are not verified assistance for every condition. If the subject interferes with ordinary life, it should not become a compulsory ordeal to endure more insistently for promised wisdom that the article cannot establish will follow.

Brevity need not be superficial. One accurate distinction can have more substance than a long list of urgent goals. Consciously rescheduling a promise differs from leaving it in endless later; completing quickly differs from completing justly. Sources raise these questions without deciding particular circumstances. Seneca acknowledges lost time, Marcus connects action with social nature, and the Psalm asks for wisdom and established work. These grounds form no single method. Readers can choose a question they are prepared to examine without treating the collected texts as a compulsory inventory of moral demands. They need not demonstrate agreement with every passage before considering one limited issue that already matters in their own lives.

Once the question is named, its scale can remain available. Our participant need not rewrite the whole calendar and announce every new decision immediately. Clarifying one arrangement or recognising that deliberation needs conversation may suffice now. This guarantees no improvement in feelings, productivity, or relationships. The promise's limit matters: the article offers a clearer subject rather than an outcome it cannot ensure. Appropriate assistance remains available when difficulties exceed this reading's scope. Remembering death replaces no care for living life and makes solitary endurance no measure of a correct attitude to finitude, even when an ancient ideal of self-reliance sounds compelling in abstraction from actual circumstances.

X. One honest scale is enough now

Remembering an ending can restore the present's weight when the present need not contain an entire remaining life. Seneca notices passing time, Marcus addresses action's quality, and the Psalm connects numbering days with wisdom and religious petition. Their grounds remain different and promise no identical result. Our question stays particular: what chosen participation is available now, and which promise can I genuinely answer for? It decides no fate after death and turns no life into a completed-list report. The question can have room without making each day a final-chance ordeal or requiring fear to disappear entirely before another action can be considered and undertaken within its actual conditions.

Our calendar reader may notice one postponement, name it, and remain uncertain about other activities. Conversation preserves another person's right to respond. A pause needs its own grounds rather than automatically wasting time. Beginning work gives it value not measured solely through speed. These distinctions simplify no decision, but avoid substituting a command to fit living in. Finitude can inform choice proportionately to its subject. This is our inference, not every tradition's common teaching or a scientifically established technique for overcoming anxiety, procrastination, and every difficulty in communication. It remains a limited way of asking about what someone has already chosen rather than prescribing their entire future.

The present has weight because participation is available, not because we proved it the last. A promise can be partly fulfilled, clarified, supported through assistance, or relinquished when genuinely impossible with attention to others. No option must create a completed life story. Remembering death remains humane when it leaves uncertainty, rest, and imperfect movement available to the living person. Memento mori can ask about faithfulness to an action rather than demand maximum intensity in every minute. Planning can continue while remembering that plans do not own time, and a worthy action needs no promise of endless continuation to be available today within a life whose entire meaning is not ours to guarantee.

What this means in practice

If this question is appropriate now, choose one existing arrangement continually left for later. No search for life's most significant item or imagined death is needed. Clarify what was actually promised and to whom, then distinguish available participation from a desired self-image. This reflection can be left undone now.

Consider a proportionate step: begin part of the task, clarify timing, discuss changed conditions, or explain that the current promise is impossible. Another person can decline the proposal. Finitude justifies neither unilateral rescheduling nor demands for immediate forgiveness. Rest or assistance can belong to an honest decision rather than prove time was wrongly lived.

Finish by considering the chosen step's quality rather than how many further actions could be added. This is an authorial transfer from the readings, not a validated treatment or universal technique. It guarantees no relief, productivity, or improved relationships. Stopping without a final answer is possible. Remembering an ending replaces no assistance for serious difficulties and makes declining the exercise no sign of immaturity or absent wisdom.

Key quotation

> *“While we are postponing, life speeds by.”*

Seneca, Moral Letters to Lucilius, Letter 1, § 2; seven-word sentence, Richard M. Gummere.

Connections between traditions

1. **What belongs to the present: Seneca, Letter 1, § 2, and Marcus Aurelius, II.14.** Seneca treats past days as an already departed part of life; Marcus contrasts imagined duration with the present someone possesses and can lose. Limited resemblance: a supposed total of years replaces no available moment. Their mechanisms differ: a letter about daily losses and Stoic reasoning about possessing time. For this topic, attention returns to a particular current promise. Boundary: memory and planning are not useless, and the present's sameness does not equalise different lives' actual conditions.

2. **Action's quality: Marcus Aurelius, II.5 and IV.17, and Psalm 90:12.** Marcus connects a possible last deed with dignity, affection, and justice; the Psalm asks for numbering days toward a heart of wisdom. Limited resemblance: finitude concerns life's assessment rather than only counting remaining tasks. The mechanisms differ: Stoic moral orientation and religious address to God. For this topic, speed ceases to be the present's only measure. Boundary: prayer becomes no rational algorithm and the Stoic ideal no duty to display perfection or constant readiness for death.

3. **Loss does not make someone complete: Seneca, Letter 1, § 4, and Psalm 90:13–17.** Seneca admits losing time while recognising losses; the Psalm asks for return, mercy, joy, and established work. Limited resemblance: neither speaker is represented as fully possessing life and its outcome. Mechanisms differ: personal admission within counsel and trusting religious petition. For this topic, imperfect participation retains room rather than only an impeccable report. Boundary: no identical doctrine of guilt or salvation, guaranteed relief, or inference that every lost moment requires prayer or strict self-accounting.

4. **Remembrance and continuing work: Marcus Aurelius, IV.19, and Psalm 90:16–17.** Marcus questions posthumous fame while recalling memory's bearers are mortal; the Psalm asks for work to appear to children and be established. Both concern present action's relation to a future not wholly controlled. Resemblance is limited to personal image being insufficient grounds; mechanisms differ between criticism of fame and petition for work's continuation before God. For this topic, work can differ from seeking perpetual renown. Boundary: family memory is not meaningless, religious continuation is not reputation, and legacy is no compulsory reader goal.

5. **What counts as necessary: Marcus Aurelius, IV.24, and Seneca, Letter 1, §§ 1–2.** Marcus qualifies fewer activities through necessity and reason's demand for a social being; Seneca distinguishes time taken, unnoticed, and unattended. Limited resemblance: occupied time alone explains no participation's meaning. Mechanisms differ between necessity within Stoic social nature and attention to temporal loss's forms. For this topic, reducing a calendar needs grounds rather than discarding everything labelled excess. Boundary: rest and illness are not

automatically loss; neither passage grants default permission to abandon obligations or prescribes a universal task count.

6. **Another's choice and time: Marcus Aurelius, IV.18, and Seneca, Letter 1, § 3.** Marcus redirects attention from watching others to one's own deed's justice; Seneca observes that gratitude cannot restore borrowed time. Limited resemblance: action needs its own accuracy rather than good intention or comparison alone. Mechanisms differ: moral examination and time's irreversibility. Our authorial transfer is discussing changed promises while retaining another's response. Boundary: this modern conversation is no direct instruction from both authors; another's time becomes no perpetual debt, and attending to one's action is not indifference to others.

Primary sources

This article compares three particular primary texts read before drafting. Russian quotations are our translations of brief English clauses in the identified historical translations; no Latin, Greek, or Hebrew original reading is claimed. Sources establish neither practice efficacy nor an outcome for every reader. Historical availability does not determine identical edition permissions in every jurisdiction.

1. **Seneca, Moral Letters to Lucilius, Letter 1**, Richard M. Gummere. The complete five-section letter was read. Sections 1–4 are adopted; the closing discussion of poverty remains context. Translation first published in 1918, indicated reprint 1925. The quotation is § 2's complete seven-word sentence. Images of lost time become no accusation against rest, illness, or needing assistance. Primary text.

2. **Marcus Aurelius, Meditations**, George Long, Project Gutenberg 15877. Available Books II and IV were read completely before writing, including surrounding context. Adopted: II.4–5, II.11, II.14, IV.17–19, and IV.24. No complete reading of all twelve books is claimed. Historical language about departing life becomes no permission for harm. No direct quotation is used. Primary text.

3. **Psalm 90**, King James Version numbering. All 17 verses were read; 90:12–17 are adopted and 1–11 remain context. The quotation is 90:12's opening seven English words. Address to God retains religious meaning; contextual lifespan figures are neither personal forecasts nor age norms. Other biblical editions may number the Psalm differently. Site commentary is not adopted as Psalm wording. Primary text.

Tags

memento mori, finitude, death, present, time, limit, remembrance, promise, responsibility, participation, justice, dignity, wisdom, rest, uncertainty, planning, future, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Psalm, prayer, faith, Stoicism, character, action, postponement, relations, care, proportion, imagined scenes

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.