

Yellow Footprints and Learning Virtue

This week I returned to Parris Island after 27 years to watch my nephew, graduate bootcamp after earning the title of United States Marine. As I drove around the base, I passed the famous yellow footprints, the same ones I stood on years ago. Memories flooded back.

For those who haven't experienced it, let me explain. New recruits arrive at Parris Island under the cover of night. The bus weaves through dark, swampy roads. You realize there's no turning back. When the bus stops, chaos erupts. Drill instructors storm aboard, voices booming with commands. "Get off the bus!" Confusion. Panic. You stumble into the night.

Amid the turmoil, you're ordered to stand on yellow footprints painted on the ground. No explanations. No time to think. Just do it!! The footprints position you correctly, shoulder to shoulder with others, facing forward. In that moment, you begin a transformation that will take 3 months to complete, and last a lifetime.

At first, you don't understand the purpose. You don't need to. The footprints provide structure in the chaos. Over time, with discipline and repetition, you learn how to stand, how to move, how to operate as a unit. Eventually, you don't need the footprints. Alignment in formations becomes second nature. Standing any other way feels wrong.

This is the same way that Virtue works for the new Stoic.

The Stoics teach us the Four Virtues: **Wisdom, Justice, Courage, and Discipline**. At first, you might not grasp how they fit together. You might not see how they can shape your life. That's okay. You don't need to understand everything right away. You don't need the big picture, or the full philosophy at first. I'm not even sure that's possible, since it is something to be grown into, and you transform in the process.

What matters is that you start. You plant your feet on the path where others have walked before you. You embrace the principles, even if they feel unfamiliar. With time, practice, and persistence, these virtues become part of who you are. They guide your actions, decisions, and thoughts. They become your default.

Just as the Marines know how to forge warriors, the Stoics know how to forge character. The process isn't easy. It requires commitment. It demands discipline. But the rewards are immense. When you stand on the solid foundation of virtue, you are unshakable. The chaos of life doesn't overwhelm you. You act with purpose and integrity. And eventually, standing anywhere else feels wrong.

So, take that first step. Stand on the footprints. Trust the process. Embrace the virtues. Over time, you'll transform. Not just into someone who does the right things, but into someone who is the right kind of person.

I hope you find yourself standing with your feet in the right place.

Amor Fati

- Sgt. Steve