

# A Fable on Unattainable Expectations

Post by “Pacatus” of October 16, 2024 at 5:12 PM

I came upon this fable recently during some cursory browsing, and thought it might also be helpful for others ...

## A Fable

Once upon a time, a woman moved to a cave in the mountains to study with a guru. She wanted, she said, to learn everything there was to know. The guru supplied her with stacks of books and left her alone so she could study.

Every morning, the guru returned to the cave to monitor the woman's progress. In his hand, he carried a heavy wooden cane. Each morning, he asked her the same question: “Have you learned everything there is to know yet?” Each morning, her answer was the same. “No.” she said, “I haven't.” The guru would then strike her over the head with his cane.

This scenario repeated itself for months. One day the guru entered the cave, asked the same question, heard the same answer, and raised his cane to hit her in the same way, but the woman grabbed the cane from the guru, stopping his assault in midair.

Relieved to end the daily batterings but fearing reprisal, the woman looked up at the guru. To her surprise, the guru smiled. “Congratulations,” he said, “you have graduated. You know now everything you *need* to know.”

“How's that”? the woman asked.

“You have learned that you will never learn everything there is to know,” he replied. “And you have learned *how to stop the pain.*”

- As told by Melody Beattie in *Codependent No More*

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Of course, no one here would condone or affirm such harsh “therapy” in reality (nor would Beattie). But, recognizing it as a fable, one might see where circumstances (and people) in one's life have been that harsh: demanding what you could not deliver - and punishing you for your failures to measure up, or fit into the “proper” box. (And perhaps, sometimes we ourselves collaborated in that, because of what we were taught and didn't know better.)

Till you see through the games, and learn how to stop the pain.

Seems to me that is what, at bottom, Epicurus was trying - with his gentler therapy - to impart. Then we can begin to live a simpler eudaimonic life in serenity and pleasure.