

RELAXATION

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It is well known that homœopathic remedies act more quickly and thoroughly if the patient is kept quiet for about half an hour after the dose has been taken. And experiments prove that they act better still if the patient can be shown how to relax completely, not only consciously but subconsciously. And quite apart from any other treatment, the ability to relax completely will not only confer immunity from the legion of nervous ailments due to conscious and subconscious tension, but will also go far towards the maintenance of glandular equilibrium and a healthy metabolism. It is clear, therefore, that the art of relaxation is a special therapy which is not only a valuable adjunct in all forms of treatment but should be mastered by everyone who wishes to develop and maintain the physical equilibrium we call health and the mental equilibrium we call sanity.

Have you ever wondered what enables a cat to relax so perfectly? What does man lack which the cat possesses? The unimpeded response to the rhythm of nature. Why does man lack this response? Because his *self-conscious* analytical thinking is continually cutting across the rhythm of nature at right angles. The animal lives in sensation and is conscious, but not self-conscious. The rhythm of nature is intimately bound up with sensations and, in active form, with physical movements in general. Thought is the opposite pole to sensation and worry and anxiety are destructive forms of thought.

There is so much in modern life, especially in industrial life, which is at enmity with nature: the decline of agriculture and the concentration on cities; the substitution of artificial for natural standards; the conditions of factory life in general, which involves the exploitation of man by the machine; the divorce of science from art and religion; the inferno of uncontrolled wireless and the modern craze for speed; the greed for gain which is strangling the will

to work—these are but a few examples of the divorce between man and nature which inevitably results in a profound disturbance of the nerves and ultimately of the vital functions of the body.

The problem is how to restore to man the last rhythm of nature, how to be aware of sensations without reverting to an animal existence. The beneficial effects of recreation are largely due to the suspension of thought, especially self-centred thought. But we cannot always be dependent on recreation. People need practices to which they can recur whenever they have the necessary time or opportunity.

Now nature is nearest to us in our own bodies. Our bodies, fortunately, still respond to the rhythm of nature even if our minds have developed antagonistic and discordant tendencies. These destructive tendencies are all connected with the ego, with what we call ourselves. It is *we* who worry, *we* who are anxious and apprehensive.

Therefore the type of exercise we require in order to be able to relax and renew our vitality is, in a nutshell, one which will make us *aware of sensations and unaware of ourselves*. Then the rhythm of nature will gradually be consciously restored.

Here are four exercises, the first three of which fulfil these conditions.

Preliminary Observations.

During the exercises the attention should be calmly directed to the physical sensations, whatever they may be, which accompany the practice. The type of attention required may be called *attention without effort*. Mental tension of any kind should be avoided. If such tension should nevertheless arise, smile slightly. Mental tension causes a constriction in the solar plexus. It is impossible to be mentally tense when you are smiling.

An impersonal attitude is essential, as this eliminates the ego during the practice. There should be no thought of "I", "me", or "mine."

When thoughts intrude, as they naturally will at first, quietly return to the sensations. There should be no direct clash with the thoughts, as this will cause tension. Merely return to the sensations, substituting sensations for thoughts.

EXERCISE 1. Lie down and direct the attention quietly to the face. Say mentally, "There is the awareness of a face" in order to establish the correct impersonal attitude. Then, beginning with the forehead, be aware of all parts of the face in turn. The points to be noted particularly are between the eyes, the eyes and the muscles connected with them, the muscles connected with the mouth and those just below the chin. Various forms of tension, often quite slight, will be observed. As soon as they have been observed, the muscles involved can be relaxed. When all these details have been impersonally observed, keep the attention on the face as a whole, but include the sensation of heaviness caused by the weight of the head on the pillow. Day by day you will become more relaxed, both consciously and subconsciously.

EXERCISE 2. Lie down on your back. Direct the attention gently to the rhythm of the breath as it flows in and out of the nostrils. Do not try to influence the course of the breath. Start by saying mentally: "The breath goes in" when inspiring, and "The breath goes out" when expiring. Then just continue to observe the process of breathing, following the course of the breath with the mind. This practice can follow the first or third exercise though it is complete in itself.

EXERCISE 3. Loosen your belt if you wear one, stand with the heels about a foot apart and the feet pointing slightly outward. Place the hands on the hips. Raise the heel of one foot, say the right, and slowly transfer the weight of the body from the left foot to the right in such a manner that as the right heel sinks to the ground, the left heel rises. Then transfer the bodily weight from the right foot to the left. Continue to do this rhythmically

and mentally observe the sensations connected with the practice. After the weight has been transferred five or six times, also be aware of the course of the breath which by then will have become naturally deep and full. Just keep the attention quietly on the rhythm caused by the combination of weight transference and breathing. Begin with about ten minutes and as you get used to the exercise increase to about twenty.

EXERCISE 4. This can be done either sitting up or lying down. Almost empty the lungs. Breathe out for one heart-beat and in for one, then cut out two beats, in for two, and so on until you reach the end of your capacity, without distress. This capacity varies in individuals from about nineteen to about eleven heartbeats. When you reach your maximum, descend again in the same way you mounted, one beat at a time. This is one complete round. Usually after two or three rounds, you will become so relaxed that you will yawn prodigiously, with tears streaming down your face. Some persons react better than others to this exercise.

All these exercises produce not only conscious but also, what is far more important, subconscious relaxation. Each time you return to the sensations, you become subconsciously a little more relaxed; like unstitching a seam in a sail, the removal of each stitch brings you nearer to your objective. In this way, the rhythm of nature is gradually restored with the result that physical and mental health will steadily improve. You will see more beauty in the sunset, enjoy your food more, find greater interest in people and books than formerly, and regain to some extent the physical elasticity and mental resilience of youth.

—Hcal Thysel, March, 1950.

THE PROBLEM OF CLINICAL ARTHRITIS

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The term "arthritis" is often used indiscriminately to designate a disturbed condition or disease in the neighbor-