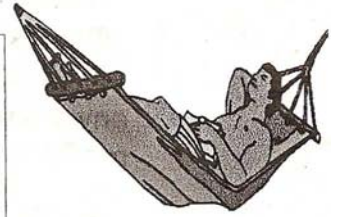




Fear of Relaxation



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It seems so easy.

Sit back in an easy chair. Put the "Gone Fishing" sign out front. Close the blinds. Take a siesta. Lie down for a nap. Kick off your shoes. Draw a bath. What could be easier?

As simple as it seems, relaxing is not necessarily the easiest thing to achieve for many people. In fact, it may be rather difficult, if not impossible for some. Relaxation has become like a foreign oddity that rarely passes through town. A circus freak show gets more respect. When it comes to relaxation we are very unintelligent and often times extremely ignorant.

What is "relaxation"?

Relaxation is a "state of consciousness". Relaxation is not a place nor is it found in a bottle of wine. A quiet and tranquil island resort isn't necessarily relaxation. Nor is a day at a spa. While these might help you to get to relaxation they are only tools. Relaxation is a place in our consciousness where we feel free from attack or enemies, either real or imagined.

Within our body we have two nervous systems that respond to Stress. When we sense danger our **Fight or Flight Response** will trigger our **Sympathetic Nervous System** to become activated. This system will speed us up and prepare us for any potential threats that may lie ahead. Our heart speeds up. Muscles are engorged with blood. We become hyper-alert.

When the danger passes we revert back to our Relaxation Response, or often referred to as our **Parasympathetic Nervous System**. When we are in our Parasympathetic Nervous System we are truly relaxed. We soften our muscles. We let down our guard. We put away our alertness. We do not feel danger. We are at ease. Relaxation is truly at state of consciousness when we feel safe to let go.

What "relaxation" is not

Relaxation is a funny thing. We all seem to know what it is but are we referring to the same thing? For instance, when someone says, "I am going on vacation to Tahiti in order to relax" the same as another person proclaiming that he is going outside the office for a smoking break, "In order to relax". Obviously, these are quite different methods.

As previously stated, relaxation is a state of consciousness when the Bodymind does not perceive any threats, either real or imagined. The muscles, nerves, and hormonal system will all reflect this Relaxation Response. This is what true relaxation is all about.

The language that we use is extremely important. So is the right diagnosis of any ailment in order to deliver the correct remedy. When it comes to relaxation many times we are not really feeling and experiencing relaxation but something else. Sometimes we are experiencing numbness. Other times we are engaging in our addiction of choice in order not to feel anything.

Being drunk or stoned are not necessarily states of relaxation. Some people might call this state "relaxation". Engaging in one's addiction might feel like relaxation, but this is really just numbing out. For many people numbness is the only sense of relaxation that they have ever experienced. But this is not true relaxation.

Calmness is another familiar culprit when it comes to experiencing relaxation. Due to tightly controlled value systems calmness is taught to be the ideal state of consciousness. But calmness is not necessarily relaxation. Calmness occurs in the mind. Relaxation is a full mind and body experience. Many people may have thought that they were relaxed because they had a calm mind. Unfortunately, from the shoulders downward their body is still at war and their calm mind has only furthered their numbness to feel these sensations.

Where did we get off course?

If relaxation seems so simple then why do so many of us struggle with it? This is because of the beliefs that we have about relaxation itself. We all have a stockpile of messages in our head in order to understand our world. We have these tapes that we keep playing over and over that determine our value system. We have tapes about sexuality, money, and work. We also have tapes about relaxation.

For many people the tape learned about relaxation was not a pleasant one. When we follow the laws of nature we come to understand relaxation as being extremely important and necessary. In the last couple of thousand years or so we have gotten farther and farther away from the laws of nature. We feel as if we are above or beyond nature and do not have to follow the same rules. In a natural world rest and relaxation are just as important as hunting, bathing, and procreation. When we instill our arrogance and form beliefs or messages that we are above nature we begin to cause ourselves harm.

Many of us were taught to believe that relaxation was the equivalent of laziness. Lazy people were evil or looked down upon. Achievement and busyness were rewarded. You were punished or shamed for relaxation. Not being productive all the time is unimaginable. This is the belief that many people hold that prevents their relaxation.

For others they learned that it was not safe to let go and relax from the very beginning. That's what relaxation is essentially- letting go. As young children first entering the world many of us were given the message that the world was not a safe place in which to be alive.

Whisked away at birth. Stinging eye drops placed in our eyes. Measured, weighed, and categorized before we even have a chance to greet our world, many of us are left traumatized by our birth. We go right from the womb to a sterile, isolated crib. We do not have the comfort and safety of our warm and safe environment any *more*. Many of us develop a belief that the world is not safe and we must hold on for dear life. Our **Fight or Flight Response** is triggered from day one. At our very core many of us believe that it is not safe to relax because of our scientifically altered birthing practices.

If we were to follow nature's law the baby would be placed with the mother right after birth *and never leave until age two or three*. This would instill in a child the belief that the world is a safe place and it is okay to let go and relax. At our core a child needs to know that she is safe by either physical contact with a trusted person, (most often the mother), or to be able to see mom or dad. Placing a child in a crib, especially alone at night when it is dark, only creates a belief of panic in a child. This belief may not ever go away and may continue to torment a person for the rest of his life.

Relaxation occurs when we feel safe letting go. Sleeping is a time when we are letting go. Why is it that most other mammals sleep huddled together? Most adults feel the most comfortable when sleeping with another person. Why is it that we have broken natural law once again and have banished our children to a night of aloneness and terror? Why do many adults feel the need for an animal to sleep with them or at the foot of their bed? We let our children survive for themselves at night in their cribs. In the meantime their nervous system is fully activated in **Fight or Flight** as a protection, from the unknown. Letting go and relaxing becomes a challenge throughout life as the early patterns become entrenched.

Cultural Messages

Our early childhood experiences are just the beginning. From early on we are given one message after another to dissuade us from learning how to relax. "Doingness" is good. "Not doing" anything is bad. Production earns accolades. Laziness is rewarded with shame and scorn.

In a natural world we need down time. In a high tech industrialized culture wasting time is the enemy. In the past we would lie lazily in our hammock on a Sunday afternoon watching the wind gently blow through the trees. We built front porches on our homes to sit back and watch the world go by. We felt safe. The only way that we could be disturbed was by either a letter carried by a postman or a visitor walking up to our doorstep.

But now we have all kinds of electronic enemies. Pagers and cellular telephones keep us hyper-alert at all-times. Even on remote mountaintops we can now be found. Fax machines go off in the middle of the night. Our mind believes that we are under attack. We become alert again. E-mail travels around the world at the click of a button. We feel guilty for not responding immediately. We continue to be on guard.

Federal Express and the computer chip helped to create our urgency addiction. Everything needs to happen now. We have become professional addicts, taking our work home. There is seldom any down time. We fear surrendering and collapsing. Instead we keep it all together. Losing control or letting down are our most feared enemies.

We are further bombarded by reminders of our failure to respect natural laws of time and seasons. Because of electricity we can work at night, a time in the past where we would have been home relaxing. Alarm clocks jolt us out of bed in the morning. Artificial time, measured by wrist watches, keeps us hyper-alert about how late we are running each day. Our answering machine keeps us plugged in to not miss anything. In essence, we are living in a culture that continues to fall farther and farther away from *natural cycles and natural laws*. Relaxation is being pushed aside and productivity and alertness are taking its place.

Why is relaxation important?

Try holding your arm straight out for a minute, or even ten minutes. Notice the tension created. Now imagine all of the muscles of your body held tight for a day, a week, months, or even years. Imagine all of the stiffness. That is what is happening when we forget how to relax and have little down time. Our muscles actually glue together.

When we are nearly always in this hyper-alert state we are also dumping large amount of stress hormones in our body. Our immune system becomes depleted. We begin to suffer from the long-term affects of stress. We get sick more often. It is estimated that 98% of all disease is stress related. Could it be possible that diseases later on actually began in the first days of life when we were placed in cribs or abandoned to face life alone?

Relaxation is important because it is a time for maintenance and repair of the body. Machines will break down more frequently if not given adequate repair and down time. So will our body. Relaxation is also a time of being there for you. Nobody can relax for you. This is a time to reclaim your right to be "selfish" and honor your self. Fearing taking time for yourself is one obstacle in learning how to relax. Feeling unvalued and unimportant is another.

It takes practice

Learning to relax takes practice. Relaxation has to become a priority and a strong commitment needs to be made. Look at how important learning to read or driving a car has become. The same occurs with relaxation. If we would spend half the time learning to relax as we do reading the sports page or learning to play computer games we would definitely be well on our way to knowing how to relax.

Relaxation is definitely achievable. Are you willing to make the commitment and spend the time learning such a valuable skill?