

Exercise: Release

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Begin seated or lying down in a quiet place at a quiet time. Turn off the phone, the computer, and all the buzzers and zappers that keep you galvanized like a frog's leg to a D-cell battery. And if anything does intrude, some sound outside, a dog barking or some distant siren, it will not disturb you.

Starting at the top of your head picture a column of light creating a small, round, warm spot at the crown of your head. Feel the warmth and relax the nerves and muscles in your scalp. Let this circle of comfort and relaxation expand to the size of the palm of your hand, growing to reach your temples, your forehead, and the back of your head.

Imagine a small lawn tractor the size of your thumb, or a toy bulldozer, or a little tank making wide circles around your scalp. Its little treads massaging your skin so that your whole scalp is infused with circulation, warmer and more relaxed. Recognize how much tension you carry around your ears, temples, and the back of your head, and release this tension as if you were letting down the curtains.

This little tractor motors across your forehead, and beneath its little treads all sorts of concerns and anxieties are erased, cutting you off in mid-sentence stuttering of vigilance, activity, and concerns of all sorts. Like a masseuse pressing their heel down the sides of your spine, the tension is flattened like cookie dough beneath a rolling pin. The words and complaints just smushed flat into a guttural exhale, an "ahhhh..." before a wave of relaxation.

Let this little tractor ride into your eye sockets, massaging the muscles behind eyes that we guard so carefully, letting those eyes loll in their sockets, rolling around comfortably, not really looking for or at anything, just seeing the world go past, circling the sky on some slow amusement park ride.

Then around the base of your skull, the hinge of your jaw, and across your teeth, and lips. These too we guard with some fears of injury, and release that fear and release that tension held in your jaw, and teeth, and the muscles around your lips. As if your face itself was a mask held in place by hundreds of rubber bands now relaxed, letting your face go limp like pizza dough, flapped and shaken into a glutinous elastic, folded up and set in a jar by the door.

Let your tongue settle, wider, warmer, softer. Let your jaw drop a little toward your chest, and your head bow toward the safe and comfortable space before you. Release the tension in your face and in the back of your neck. And as you take a deep breath

release your sinuses as your breath perforates your passages, channeled like steam or mist down past your palate, throat, esophagus, and into your lungs.

This relaxation is simple, it's just letting your body function naturally. You unlock the tensions in and around your chest so that your breath inflates thoroughly, evenly, and deeply beneath your sternum, below your ribs, extending broadly below the muscles of your scapula, an elastic webbing that both holds everything together, and relaxes everything together, sinking into your chair, bed, sofa, armchair, hammock, carpet, moss, beach sand, floating in air, water, or space.

Now let your relaxation roll down from your neck, across your shoulders, and down your arms. And as you feel waves of relaxation notice your pulse. Maybe you feel it in your neck, chest, arms, or hands. You can feel it anywhere if you look for it, and be amazed at how absent it seems when you don't. Feel your pulse now in your hands, tolling like a metronome, and in your arms, and across your breast pulsing above the gentler waves of breath that expand, flowing to fill, and then pause, ebb and slack.

Scan for tension in your torso, chest, back, spine, neck and shoulders. Tension appears as blankness, coldness, solidity, rigidity, or a furrowing, folding, inflexibility, or contraction.

It's amazing we have such poor language for tension, and such limited means of describing relaxation. Amazing that we have such a poor understanding of what comfort feels like, but so it is: we have no description because we have no understanding, and this is true in any language. The fault is not in our words but in our lack of awareness. This is the real object here: awareness. A perception beyond language. A body memory.

If you find some tension, and even if you don't, call back that little tractor that rumbled around your scalp and direct it to those places. Let that tractor tread back and forth over the tight spots, and if the tension is deep, then let that little tractor set its drill rig and burrow its auger into muscle, twisting and twirling the muscles as if it was stretching taffy, until that spot is loose and limp.

Focus on your hips, pelvis, sacrum, and the base of your spine. This is a place of special tensions because of the weight it carries, both as the superstructure of our posture as well as the cradle of our organs. And here too attach the big muscles of our buttocks and thighs, connected to the big joints of our knees, laced and cross braced with tendons and ligaments quite a bit more vulnerable to injury than you might suspect.

Like some towering scaffold the spine is connected to the muscles of the hips and femurs, and the big bones sit atop each other, cushioned by cartilage, meniscus, and connective tissues. These too need to be relaxed. The whole complex: spine, hips, pelvic floor, thighs, knees, and calves. Bring that toy tractor down to excavate the

situation, to police the interior and separate the muscles down the outside of your thighs, letting our knees spread a little, as a little warmth glows your shins, down to your ankles.

Feel the pulse in your legs. I feel it first in my thighs, but then I feel it around my thighs, and it extends down like a spear through my knees, and a whisper around my calves. I don't know about you, but I carry a lot of tension in my ankles, they seem to be made of metal, as if they were artificial joints. They feel sturdy and, indeed, I have never injured them in spite of many assaults. Perhaps yours feel more vulnerable, more like a pitchfork militia and less like an Imperial Star Cruiser. However you feel, let the pulse carry through your ankles to your feet, whether the joints pulse actively or simply resonate with the pulse around them. Move down to your feet.

Picture those foot rollers, cylindrical ridged wooden rolling pins you roll beneath your feet. Imagine them rolling under the arches of each foot, loosening the muscles in the arches and tickling the balls of your feet.

Let that little massage tractor go to work on your feet, the heels, the sides, the balls, the arches. Feel those little rolling treads forward and reversing over and around your feet, around each toe, and back up your Achilles tendons.

Pushing against the joints of your feet, the knuckles of your toes, feel the nerves following the tendons like upside down tree roots weaving around your ankles, up your shins, carrying the energies of balance, direction, and support up into the massive joints of your knees.

Feel the lighter energy coming down your legs, swaddling your feet, and launching out your toes to create roots of energy into the ground around you. Connecting your relaxation to a stability rooted in the earth itself, real roots that kept you always connected to the ground.

Now with each breath feel a warm sensation roll over you from head to foot, leaving a kind of tingling, more or less, in the looser sense of body, always ready to call the little massage tractor to explore the tensions you carry. Feel yourself as the liquid that you are, percolating like water through the rocks, always moving energy, nutrients, plasma, antibodies, and who knows what!

At any point you focus -- calf, hip, gut, back, hand, shoulder, neck, ear or eye -- feel the natural connection, energy and relaxation flowing through you like a river. You are a river of relaxation, waves of all heights, sounds, and frequencies all passing through you without a sound. A turbulent concoction of attentions and emotions, all let go, all swept away, all released and relaxed. A million colored papers, all cut and mixed up like confetti, and you don't need to think about any of them. You don't need to do anything but breath,... inhale,... and exhale,... letting feelings float past,... feeling clear, careless, thoughtless, and relaxed.

Let's do the count again now, and let's see if you find yourself moving into a different place as the numbers fade away. I will speak the numbers counting down from 100, and you will whisper beneath your breath "deeply relaxed" between each number that I count. And I'll go on for a while, until I feel the whole thing fading away.

*I begin by saying "100," and now you say, "deeply relaxed."
Then I say "99", and you say "deeply relaxed." And we go on...*

98
97
96
95
94
93
92
91
90

Let these numbers float like sensations on your skin.

89, 88

Shift your focus to the sensations beneath your skin.

87, 86

A quieter, and more connected world. A world of shadows and currents that we can't see clearly because we have no clear memories, we are not focusing, and we're not thinking clearly. And without focus you become calm, because you spread out... and move into softer feelings.

Now let part of your mind come back, and let part of your mind stay there, like a scout, like a sentry, leaving a benchmark. Let part of you remain to remember for next time where feeling relaxed is, so that it won't take any effort to find your way back, when you want to function well, without tension, with room to focus. Moving toward sleep.

(wait 30 seconds)

And this is the end of this exercise. Return to awareness or go further in this state, as you prefer.