



# Relax and Release

The difference between comfort and change.

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*“The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.”*

— **William James**

Most of us don't understand the difference between relaxing and releasing. Relaxing is what gives us comfort; releasing is what allows for change. Releasing requires relaxing, but relaxing doesn't guarantee releasing. You start by relaxing and you might end by releasing, but if you don't release, you end up back where you started.

Relaxing is not holding things tightly. We think of it physically, but we can also relax mentally. We can relax our mind in general and our thoughts in particular. Releasing is letting things go, which can mean letting go of consciousness and falling asleep, or letting go of ideas and becoming open.

When our minds are open they look for ideas, that seems to be how it works. “Nature abhors a vacuum,” Aristotle's famous saying, is a reflection of the dynamic nature of things. If there is nothing

changing, then vacuums stay intact. But when structures are looking to settle, then holes eventually get filled in.

Letting things go allows new things to develop. Releasing fosters healing and growth. Relaxing just makes you comfortable. Having an empty mind makes you an idea attractor.

If we want to change, the distinction between relaxing and releasing is important. We relax when we go on vacation and then we return to the same situation as before. Before long, we need to relax again. We release when we stop what we've been doing and don't want to return to what we've been doing before.

The contrast is even more stark when relaxation brings happiness, because happiness is almost antithetical to enlightenment. Enlightenment involves effort, responsibility, leadership, and change. For most of us, those don't bring happiness.

With enlightenment comes a larger understanding of both relaxation and happiness, and from this larger understanding, things will look different. Happiness looks different, too.

If relaxation is what you're after, then enlightenment is what you won't get.

## Prejudice

Consider prejudice. You can relax it so you don't act on it, or you can release so you don't have it. Most social efforts aim to relax prejudice and, in that way, to allow new engagements. We call this being "politically correct." But the prejudice is not gone, it's just pushed back. This is obvious as this kind of inclusion rarely penetrates the family or the neighborhood.

Like most social memes, political correctness is a whitewash, but there are arguments for it. The argument generally goes, "Some change is better than none, and this can start things moving in the right direction."

We are attracted to the dissension between opposing parties, but here we have a disagreement between agreeing parties. It's a question of how much change, how fast and how disruptive a change. This is quite separate from those who want no change at all.

Where slavery was abolished—and it has not been abolished everywhere—it was abolished so as not to be too disruptive to the economies that depended on it. Those who advocate the abolition of slavery have something to gain. Change goes as far as there is some apparent benefit to be gained from it.

In the US, abolition was supported by those Northern states that didn't depend on slavery, and slavery was supported by the Southern states that profited from it. Abolition shifted wealth and power to the north, a condition that still persists 150 years later.

Moral arguments, as much as we'd like to think ourselves moral people, are rarely a deciding factor. They were not in this case, one of the most serious moral violation of human rights. We have similar

arguments going on today in the politicization of education, reproductive rights, health care, and information.



## Psychedelics

The demonization of psychedelics was not designed to return Negroes to slavery. But the war on drugs was—as was later disclosed by H. R. Haldeman—an effort to disenfranchise minorities and reanimate prejudice. It succeeded in putting mostly minorities in prison and marginalized the social initiatives they stood for. Making drugs illegal had many of the same results as slavery.

Fifteen years later, Nancy Reagan’s “Just say no” campaign continued an effort that was putatively against drugs but emotionally against Blacks, Latinos, and the youth movement. The war against drugs is a war against social change. It has been so whitewashed that few are aware of this.

Now we’re seeing opioids legalized in British Columbia and the limited legalization of psychedelics across the US and Canada. Those in favor of limited legalization—mostly in the medical profession—justify their position as its being a step in the right direction or, more honestly, an opportunity to profit from it. It’s fine for therapists to claim, “We’re advocating psychedelics for the benefit of our clients,” but I suspect their advocacy would flag if they were to economically suffer from it.

We have a 30 billion dollar market in the sale of antidepressants. If psychedelics “cure” a large part of this market at low cost, then medical professionals will start warning us of new dangers. Their funding will come the pharmaceutical companies whose sale of largely ineffective antidepressants will come under threat.

There have always been youth and ethnic minorities advocating social change. The current “psychedelic renaissance” is aggregating many factions, but the leading groups are corporations and medical professionals. Unlike the battle around the legalization of abortion, the legalization of psychedelics is not a social movement.

Corporations and medical professionals endorsing the use of psychedelics offer the same time-tested rationale: “This can start things moving in the right direction.” These people fancy themselves as leaders of change, but they are not.

The current is following the scent of money. This is made clear by those bankrolling the movement: drug developers, therapy providers, advertisers, the cannabis lobby, and partisan organizations. This doesn’t make the effort wrong, but it does indicate that its future flows toward opportunity. Nature abhors a vacuum.



## Releasing Attitudes

Releasing attitudes removes barriers and allows novelty and change. When you take away the wall, mixing becomes inevitable. Distinctions still exist between the parts, but the parts are no longer prevented from working together. To become an integrated person, you also release old structures in order to build new ones.

I put this problem to you up front: you will need to let go of your prejudice and fear if you want to change and grow. Relaxation is not a solution. It’s insufficient. What you’re looking for is a new understanding based on the positive change that a new system might create.

Your enlightenment is instantaneous when you move to a new state of mind. It is a rearrangement of your perception of reality. States of mind are largely exclusive of each other because they involve a rearrangement of the whole. If this were not so, then new states would not bring much change.

You can't reach new states if you're bound to old states. Until you're ready to let go, you won't benefit from anything I say. If you are hoping to bring yesterday's baggage with you, you're wasting your time. It won't work; get a refund.



## **Boundaries**

The hardest boundaries to cross are in our imagination and we hesitate to go there. Nothing is any more real than you can conceive it to be, and anything can become as real as you imagine it.

These hard boundaries are not for everyone, and they should only be approached with strength and purpose. Their purpose is to test your insight and your equanimity.

Testing these boundaries may sound extreme and unnecessary. That's for you to decide. There have been realities across these boundaries that are worse than either of us can imagine. These possibilities will exist as potential until they become realities again.

The purpose of the personality we create is to create boundaries we can control. To avoid what might destroy us. But to change we must accept risk. The more we protect ourselves, the less risk we accept, and the less guidance and support we'll provide in the control of chaos and change.

Enlightenment is not something you achieve, it's something you uphold. It comes when you take responsibility for it. It is that state of engagement with and response to chaos.

Become a beacon to guide others and marvel at the irony that others don't want to see the scene that you illuminate. There will always be others somewhere and sometime who will come to join you, riding on overwhelming waves of change.

Take a risk and be of service. You are giving up as much as you are getting, and probably more. You will give more and get less. Trouble will find you because you will be an anchor, a model, an example of how to orient attention, calm the heart, and breath.

Release what doesn't guide you. You can't attend to everything. Be relaxed in the present, engaged in the process of being, and benefit from having a purpose. Purpose is a form of capital that can motivate anything.

*“In the end, just three things matter: How well we have lived.  
How well we have loved. How well we have learned to let go.”*

— **Jack Kornfield**

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