



**Xpace
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Jennifer Laiwint, ***How to Relax***

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Tired Models for Self-Improvement

Have you ever felt unsatisfied? In your abilities, your dreams, your achievements? How does that make you feel? Keep this feeling in your head, in your body; allow it to totally and fully permeate from your toes slowly up to your hips, then higher along your spine until it reaches the highest part of your head. Let yourself steep in its intensity, and take a moment to allow it to take priority over everything else.

Breathe in, breathe out. Again, breathe in, pause, and breathe out.

Our exhausted existences fuel themselves on common vulnerabilities, each desperate to find the cause for self-doubt. Take time to consider the inconsistencies and faults in your personality. If not, the doctor can do this for you. How does that make you feel?

Breathe in, pause, breathe out. Again, breathe in, and breathe out.

This strenuous experience should now remind you of your own worn presence, or maybe it's just the anxiety building up in this moment? Whichever the case, take this opportunity to metaphorically puncture a hole somewhere on your body, and allow the feelings to slowly seep away, pouring steadily out of the hole, then slowing down until depleted.

Breathe in, breathe out. Again, breathe in, pause, and breathe out.

We are the architects of our own destinies. We make choices and build the scaffolding upon which we can achieve goals and reach milestones. Without discernible markers of self-improvement, can you really be succeeding?

Breathe in, breathe out. This time pause, breathe in deeply, then exhale out your nose.

Take in this moment, this feeling—or lack thereof—and consider what is left. This physical index is a marker of your corporeality. Think of your limbs this time, head, neck, arms and fingers, to your thighs, knees, calves and toes. Now move them, one at a time, as slow as possible. Fully engage in each part's individual characteristics and peculiarities. If you could not stand on your feet how would you stand? Move your body to explore this concept.

Now wait a minute. Okay, breathe in, slowly, deeply. Hold it, now through your nose. Exhale.

The answers you are looking for are found within, and even though you seek help elsewhere, the solution resides within the inner chamber of one's own being. As a seeker you will be entangled in an interminable series of self-explorations. This is the beginning, but it may also be the end.

Exhale, but only allow small bits of air out in bursts. That's it- continue until it's gone. Inhale.

You are lying propped up by your right hand and hip, feet raised only so far as to not touch the floor. In this position you feel the full weight of your body shift to this side and the dull ache of your weight grows as time passes. Consider the sensitivity of the bones that are currently touching the floor. After you do this, move it off the floor and shift the weight to another, continuing this process so you are moving in a slow, fluid motion. Don't stop.

Keep breathing in, keep going for as long as possible, then hold. Good. Now, exhale.

Find the method that will give you the most important information and appropriate procedures that suit you, for not just any method can result in the desired behaviour. Keep in mind the urgency needed to enforce this self-direction is entirely your responsibility. I'm only here to remind you about that.

Don't forget to breathe, keep going.

No matter where your body has left off throughout this, stop. Return yourself to a position that's comfortable for you, and enjoy it for a moment. Now look at something blue. Find the deepest, darkest, truest blue you can and stare into for as long as you can without interruption. Lose yourself in this colour. Let your senses be completely enveloped within it. Can you even hear me? If so, keep trying.

In and out, out and in.

These concerns are primarily caused by thoughts, attitudes and beliefs. Instead of focusing on the negative and non-productive things they are doing, they should imagine themselves in a cycle of endless development, continual advancement.

Keep going. Continue at your own pace.

Once out of the colour, remind your eyes to see other colours again. This time look for an object that comforts you. The image of the rose over there will do. Stand close to it and take it in, from the colour palette to the tiniest details. Imagine smelling it, touching it, hearing it sway in a gentle summer breeze. Now embody it, you are now within its vegetative confines. Feel the thirst for water on a hot day, while the sunlight soaks into your leaves to be turned into energy for more growth and eventually pollination. Feel yourself, renewed.

You can stop when you like and return to normal breathing again.

Take a step back, contemplate all that we've experienced here. What is left should now make you feel lighter, a realization that brings you that much closer to finding what you wanted in the first place. Isn't that why you're here?

"Dr. Salvatore,

You seem distant right now.”

Have you ever had a pen pal? Writing to a person that you know physically exists somewhere in the world—but still don’t *really* know—is for some reason comforting. Is it possible that by eliminating the visual aspect of meeting a person makes it easier for us to be more honest, more vulnerable? In her research and resulting exhibition, artist Jennifer Laiwint acts as the partner to the perfect pen pal: a psychiatrist who may or may not still exist, yet continues to guide her through a prescribed regimen of self-help “psychotechniques”, with the promise to alter and restore its reader to a more fulfilled personhood. *How to Help Yourself and Someone You Love Using Psychotechniques* by Dr. Salvatore V. Didato, is the book that spurred Laiwint’s investigation into the grey-area of self-help culture and human emotion, an exploration that became a tool not only for creating mindfulness, but also art. As stated by author Sandra K. Dolby in her book, *Self-help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them*,¹ there are typically three characteristic methods to self-help culture. The first asks the reader to define their problems or concerns through describing what they may not be able to articulate in an easy to understand, rhetorical style; the second distracts the reader from said worry through guided meditations, while the third projects a feared or unwanted feeling onto a subject which then disappears.

These techniques in mind, the artist’s feelings are explicitly vulnerable and exposed throughout the exhibition, from the text-based works created from stream-of-consciousness ramblings to the video of dancers generating choreography in response to the authoritative suggestions of Dr. Sal’s techniques, Laiwint bares all, perhaps in hopes that viewers can too somehow relate, even if only through a person who may or may not still exist.

-Lauren Lavery

¹ Dolby, Sandra K. *Self-help books: Why Americans keep reading them*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2008.