

FOUR RELAXATION EXERCISES PREPARATORY TO PRAYER

Introduction :

Many of us find it very hard to enter into prayer. In spite of all our sincere efforts and goodwill we find it difficult to concentrate and attain certain union with God.

The cause, many a time, is that we try to enter into prayer while we are tensed and wound up. It is worth spending a good deal of the time allotted to prayer going through some relaxing exercises.

If we are relaxed, calm, peaceful and tranquil, we shall be able to enter into communication with God in a shorter time, than we would by being tense and highly strung.

We propose here four sets of "Relaxation Exercises" as given by Fr Philip Terrasa, s.j., in a seminar on Prayer to a Charismatic Renewal Group.

First Exercise:

RELAXATION THROUGH SUGGESTION.

Keep your back straight without forcing it: don't make yourself uncomfortable. Sit in a posture which you can maintain for about 20 or 30 minutes in this exercise. Keep your hands in a comfortable posture. Close your eyes to avoid distractions. Concentrate on the following instructions:

- Without thinking or trying to imagine them, concentrate on your toes...
They are relaxing... They are relaxing...
- Then, on your feet and the ankles. Now they are relaxing ... Don't examine them.
Don't think about them. Just let them go... They are relaxing ...
- Next, on the knees and the thighs. They are relaxing ... They are relaxing ... They are relaxing ...
- Now on your stomach muscles, both inside and outside., They are relaxing ... They are relaxing... They are relaxing ...
- The on your hips, too, are relaxing ... The whole of your waist is relaxing ... Let go
They are relaxing ...
- You begin to feel relaxed, pleasant, peaceful ... Just sink into this feeling of relaxation ... You are relaxing more and more ...
- Now your right hand, arm and shoulder are relaxing ... Don't think ... Just let go ...

Let go ... They are relaxing ... They are relaxing ... relaxing ... relaxing ...

- Now your left hand, arm and shoulder are relaxing ... Let go ... Let go ... They are relaxing ...relaxing ... relaxing ...
- All your back muscles are now relaxing ... The whole of your back is relaxing ... Let go ... Let go ... It is relaxing ... It is relaxing ... relaxing ...
- You're your neck muscles are now relaxing ... Your throat muscles too... The whole of your throat and neck are relaxing ... They are relaxing ... They are relaxing ... Feel your muscles open up ... Let go ... They are relaxing ... They are relaxing ... relaxing...
- You're your jaw and facial muscles ... your lips ... they are all relaxing ... Let go ... they are relaxing .. They are relaxing ... They are relaxing ... relaxing ... relaxing
- You're your eyes, your forehead, your temples... they are all relaxing... Let go... Let go ...They are relaxing... They are all relaxing ... relaxing ... relaxing...
- The back of your head... the whole of your head is relaxing ...It is relaxing ...It is relaxing... relaxing ... relaxing ... relaxing ...
- The whole of your body is now relaxed... very relaxed ... very relaxed.
- Go still deeper into this relaxation... You are relaxing ... relaxing ... Sink deeper and deeper ... Let yourself go ... sink into this relaxation ... deeper... deeper... deeper... still deeper...
- You feel very calm... very relaxed... very peaceful...
- Each time you breathe out, you will be breathing out all your tensions... you are relaxing... you are relaxing ,, sink deeper and deeper into this relaxation... Go deeper and deeper... All your tensions are gone ... You feel very calm... very tranquil... very relaxed... very relaxed... very relaxed.

N.B.: The whole exercise takes about 20 to 30 minutes. So it has to be done very slowly, repeating the same if necessary. With practice, it can be shortened considerably.

This exercise can be used as a kind of preparation for prayer: to enter prayer fully relaxed. Even in a group session, after one or two hymns, you can try this exercise. Either someone conducts the exercise, or each one tries to relax by himself.

It is however, easier to do it if someone conducts it. Once you are relaxed begin your prayer. Though you will have cut a little of your time of actual prayer, you will meet God more easily, more fully – there will be less obstacles or distractions. The quality of your prayer will increase and you will experience God more fully, more deeply.

Second Exercise:

RELAXATION THROUGH AWARENESS OF BODY SENSATIONS

Become aware of the contact-points of your body.

Let us start from the feet upwards.

Be aware of your feet touching the slippers or shoes... Don't think, just be aware of these sensations in your feet... Feel the touch of your clothes on your knees. Feel your thighs pressing against the seat... Be aware of the sensations on your hands as they rest on one another and on your thighs... Feel the pressure of your back against the back of your seat... the touch of your clothes on your neck... Don't think... don't strain yourself... Be relaxed. Just be aware of these various sensations... Concentrate on these contact-points in your body one at a time.

Repeat the whole process again : feet... knees ... thighs ... hands ... back ... neck ... feet... knees ... thighs ... hands ... back ... neck.

Keep on doing it again and again until you feel the effects of the exercise.

This exercise will give you a deep relaxation over the whole body, and peace and concentration of mind. If you can become aware of the sensation present all over your body, even in non-contact points, the effects of this exercise will be still more beneficial, the tensions will disappear and the relaxation and your concentration will be deeper. The important thing to remember is: DON'T THINK, just BE AWARE of the sensations.

Third Exercise :

RELAXATION THROUGH AWARENESS OF SOUNDS.

Some people find they can relax better and faster by concentrating on sounds. So you can try this exercise.

Block your ears with your thumbs, and cover the eyes with the palms of your hands. Listen to the sound of your breathing ... After ten breaths, bring your hands to rest on your lap, keeping your eyes closed,...

Now, listen to the sounds around you ... Become aware of the sounds as they reach your ears ... close and distant, soft or loud. Do not try to find out what the sounds are; don't identify them. For instance, if you hear a strange noise, don't try to find out what produced it. Don't think, just become aware of the sounds ...Do not strain yourself to listen. Do not try to reach the sound. This will cause strain and tension. Let the sound reach you clear or indistinct. Just allow the sound to strike your eardrum; that's all.

Keep on doing this exercise until you feel relaxed and peaceful.

Fourth Exercise:

RELAXATION THROUGH CONCENTRATION ON YOUR BREATHING.

You can get relaxed also by concentrating on your breathing. There are two models.

a) Sit comfortably with your back, neck and head straight. Breathe naturally as you normally do.

Now be aware of the air passing through your nostrils as you breathe in and out ... Feel the touch of the air on your nostrils ... cold as it goes in, warm as it goes out ... Feel the area of your nostrils on which the touch of the air is felt more and on which less ... Be aware of the greater quantity of air passing through one nostril than through the other... Keep on doing the exercise as long as you need to feel relaxed and peaceful, and calm.

b) As you breathe in and out, you concentrate not on the air and the sensations it produces on your nostrils, but on your abdomen as it rises and lowers. Keep on at it as long as necessary to feel relaxed and peaceful.

Remember that it is the abdominal breathing that helps. When you are fully relaxed, it is your abdomen that goes up and down, not your chest. Relaxed breathing is always the abdominal type of breathing. It has to be done naturally without effort or strain.