

LIVING

Some Simple Ways to Relax

by Fayza Haq

If one may be fatigued both mentally and physically, one may resort to a psychologist or even a general practitioner's prescribed over-the-counter tension relieving medicines.

However, one knows only too well that one can easily get addicted to medicines, and when the critical time comes for medicines to take action, they may not work because of the heavy dosages that one may have taken over the years. To take alcohol, in the context of Bangladesh society, is forbidden.

Although alcohol is reportedly consumed by even the local youths, at a distant Muslim archipelago on the Indian Ocean, where alcoholic drinks are officially allowed to be imported only for the consumption of foreigners (who reside there, or come from as far flung places e.g. Europe, USA and Australia, for a brief holiday — what with the islands' sand and sea), in Bangladesh it remains a "no-no" for our society, at a public gathering. This of course, does not apply to one and all, say in the upper echelons of Bangladesh's metropolis. To resort to drugs such as hashish, and marijuana, as do some of our people in even in their tender ages, is also surely incorrect.

Psychiatrists might sometimes advise one to pretend that one is a cat. This is fairly easy to do, as most people have at least an iota of imagination, and one is fairly acquainted with cats — the world over, except for extreme points of the northern and southern hemisphere, especially around, say, Antarctica and Iceland. No matter what thoughts may be overpowering one's mind, one can envisage a cat or a kitten relaxing — twisting, turning and frolicking without fear (that is, here is nothing to alarm its five senses). One might also remember the kind words that one's elder siblings might have told one in one's ears as a child, such as, "Little one, off

to sleep." These tender and sweet cajolings can always be recalled, as every normal person has a memory that may be easily traced down to one's childhood.

Some doctors may also advise one to open one's eyes wide and stare into the darkness for minutes together. If this is repeated intermittently, say, for four at a stretch, this may even bring sleep to anyone of whatever gender or age, when caught sometimes in the somewhat intriguing and

asleep with worries on the mind. Dieticians tell you to eat a considerable amount of raw but properly scraped, cleaned and sliced vegetables, such as carrots or cucumbers, to fill up your stomach. Orange or lemon squash, drunk by the glasses, is an old Subcontinental remedy for easing one's mind. Try and cut down on your coffee or

reading in a dim one as teenagers sometimes do at hostels overseas, going by imported films and books. This, however, may give even an adult bouts of migraine attacks, and one has heard that the usual recommended remedy for migraine (even overseas) is sometimes, reportedly, questionable and may be even fatal if the recommended doctor is not able to diagnose the problem going by the symptoms. Doctors have been known to give over-doses and patients can be slow or reluctant to take all the accurate medications and have repeated check-ups, and follow fresh prescriptions.

Reading a story or a poem in, say, Bangla, to an outsider, who has only studied Bangla, for example, for a year, can be soothing and not just informative. Legends and myths were verbally told, say, as long ago as 3000 BC; and today these are found in books, which we may read in sections and find some respite. Books, magazines, newspapers and even letters or cards from friends and families — both at home and overseas — are good for our morale and not just our accumulation of knowledge. Reading tires your eyes, and if you happen to have serious work as your profession (say business, law or medicine) it is best to read the "light" magazines or books such as the "Mad Magazine," the "Reader's Digest," or "empty-headed" Mills and Boons romances rather than, say, some important lines from Shakespeare's well known plays.

Similarly, reading Somerset Maugham, or Pearl S. Buck or even Daphne de Mourier may calm one after a tired day, since one may already know

the plot and characters of the books that one might have read in one's youth. Reading even a pocket dictionary may relax one, as one may already be acquainted with most of the words listed in them, and one may be only double checking and recalling what one may have forgotten through a passing phase of amnesia.

Listening to the radio or watching the TV, even sitting at Dhaka, when one's mind maybe miles away, is another manner of having a break from the daily rigours of our metropolitan life. This, again, applies to people in our remote villages, as it does to all people, as is known universally.

Hobbies such as indoor/outdoor gardening, doll-making, doing basic tailoring or even working at fine embroidery can be entertaining, useful, and a form of occupational therapy, if nothing delights one's mind at some juncture in one's life. This applies mostly to women, but also goes for men, who may happen to share the chores of daily domestic existence, apart from earning a living (even if this is only a part-time or periodic occupation).

When going about one's hobbies, such as gardening, a lady once reported that her neighbours commented on her preoccupation with gardening as sheer madness (she was so perplexed by the situation around her that she had not the nerves to remind them that "talking" to one's plants is no madness but rather giving off of carbon dioxide that plants require for their growth). One must not mind that people around one may be coming to whatever conclusion. "What will the neighbours say" should not obsess one. If

one is doing pickling and jam-making, the neighbours may condemn one as a "branded Jew", or an individual merely "keeping up with the Joneses," if one is making fancy wall-tapestry, or, embroidering the edges of a five year old's canvas front with silk applique work.

Playing the harmonium or

be pursued. Even yoga practice or aerobics may have the on-looking domestic servants in fits of giggles. One has to shut the door while practising the above methods of relaxing (while keeping one's mind and body fit). In a place like Dhaka, this has happened for fear that one's domestic servants, in-laws, neighbours or even friends at the work-place may take two average *bandhobis* to be lesbians. This has actually happened in some homes at Dhaka, Bangladesh, where

ing news can be both useful and entertaining. It is said to be the favourite pastime of people of most ages, and genders at homes; markets; restaurants; shops; offices; factories, and school, college and university canteens. This may take place at libraries and even the pavement second-hand book/furniture or clothes shops. It is a form of catharsis for the run of the mill person or even the supposedly snobbish introvert individual.

Watching, *Jatras*, plays at a central place like the Shaheed Minar, the Public Library Auditorium, or the theatres along Bailey Road, or at school, or university stages, or even at the auditoriums of well-known cultural centres at Dhaka, Bangladesh, will provide a change, even if the play is a tragedy and there is no comic relief to be had as a final relief.

Similarly, watching films or videos take one's mind away from the humdrum of life. One is a part of the audience but may feel far from the madding crowd due to the apparent magical mystery of the effect of films such as "Out of Africa" or "The Piano".

If nothing else works to soothe, cool and keep one at peace with oneself and the world, the only solution is to pray. The prayer does not have to be of any particular religion, as one believes all religions to be based on philosophies to help and guide one onwards in one's time of difficulties and needs. Hence, adults sometimes hold *milaads* before important functions such as a wedding; and children may pray five times a day; say their "Hail Mary's", or even present the necessary fruits and flowers at the numerous *pujas*. If nothing provides solace or relief, there is always one's religion to lend contentment, satisfaction and peace. *Datta Damyata, Dayatvam.*

— "Wasteland" (T S Eliot)



"The Tapestry" by Auguste Renoir

overwhelming web of life. Journals from overseas advise you to have a cup of hot milk with cocoa and sugar at night, or even nibble at biscuits, as carbohydrates are said to send signals to a fatigued mind and body. One cannot fall

tea intake during the night, although they naturally perk you up during the day. Reading is said to be another universal modern method of falling asleep or relaxing. Yet, take care that you do so with a bright light, as



"The daughters of Catulle Mendes at the piano" by Auguste Renoir

the piano may disturb one in one's close vicinity. Yet music practices should be carried at home, to please oneself or entertain one's friends or even teach a child. One's hobbies — ways of relaxation — may be misconstrued but they should

women once practised by themselves, whatever they learnt and knew, and did not have the time or inclination to carry on a pastime at a more suitable place, such as, say a local beauty parlour, close by. Even gossiping or exchange-

THE streets of Dhaka are not all beautiful. Buildings were made at minimal budgets and do not always present an attractive facade. Paint is peeling off; glasses are sometimes broken and dirty. Grime may be seen to pile up at several places. Vehicles in the last stage of their lifecycle are often seen to pollute the air. There are few historical buildings left. It is no wonder that Dhaka fails to attract hordes of tourists, as many other capital cities do in the east.

But the streets are full of beauty. The art on the rickshaws and "baby-taxis" is well-known. Epic battles between man and animal, rustic scenes, passionate affairs, the fast world of planes, trains and automobiles: Bangladesh as the Bangladeshis would like their country to be. Genuine pieces of art remain to be seen at art galleries and the homes of the *creme de la creme* of Dhaka society. This is not the case, however, with an entirely different kind of art.

The art displayed on the signboards of shops, banks and big offices has surely not been paid much attention. These show such a large variety of letter designs, that it is safe to speak of them as a separate form of street art. Yet this is not all. Each of them is a small revolution in itself: a breakthrough from the standard way of writing Bangla letters, opening the road to apparently a complete transformation.

Graphic design is an old form of art. Any time you write something, you have to give a letter a shape. Hieroglyphics formed, perhaps, the simplest and most aesthetic alphabet. The Egyptians living some 5000 years ago, used pictures of animals, human body parts, and nature as letters, giving them the value of the first sound of their names. It is like a rebus. Cuneiforms stand on the other side of the spectrum of beauty. Uniform nail-like shapes, arranged in different ways, represent different

SUNDAR BANGLA BARNOMALA

by Nico den Tuinder

The alphabet which is used for making this newspaper was developed several hundred years BC, in Italy. The Romans perfected the alphabet system in which each individual letter represented an individual sound, making a clear distinction between consonants and vowels. This alphabet has only been slightly modified since then.

Printers and publishing houses have traditionally been the agents of change in Western Europe. The font (a set of letters and characters

text resembled seas of minute worms. Not only the drive for a better legibility shaped the development of the present fonts. People and companies in the present century wanted to express something about themselves with the shape of letters. For instance, the logo of "Coca-Cola" is world famous. It has free-flowing lines, expressing energy and movement. "Coco-Cola" is meant to be for the young and dynamic people. If you do not drink it, you may be termed a "nerd".

In this manner, typography has developed into a spe-



Samples of "banmalata" seen at Dhaka along its streets

such as "X", "Y" and "Z" Times Roman, for example, was designed at the request of the newspaper "The Times". This daily wanted to have a letter with which it could print many words in its narrow columns. It also had to remain legible. Printers and publishers have found various solutions to the problem of designing a clear and easy letter. Times Roman, Palatino and Helvetica are nowadays the most often used fonts for publishing.

History has favoured the least ornate letter types. In the Middle Ages these were very elaborate. Some pieces of

cialised art. Graphic designers balance corporate identities with legibility. Different fonts are used for various purposes. In schoolbooks those fonts are used which most approach the handwriting of young children. Bangladesh is currently experimenting with Bangla fonts. When you go to New Market, you will find a dazzling variety of letter forms. For one reason or the other, similar shops are all huddled together. Still, each wants to draw the attention of potential buyers. Some shops give the letters the form of the articles, related to their business: pipes, eyes, car

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wheels, spectacles, socks etc. Beauty shops prefer baroque letters with curls, for example. With other shops' phantasy appears to have gone wild. The letters used are hardly related to their original shapes any more. "Adar Apan", near the pedestrians' flyover on Mirpur Road, is a good example. Again, some other enterprises try to combine two alphabets. A Chinese restaurant on the corner of Kakrail Road and Malibagh Road provides a fine specimen on its signboard. "Angel Stationers" of New Market has my favourite *banmalata*. The letters on its Bangla and English signboards are almost identical.

The importance of the signboards goes much further. They show the past, present and future of the Bangla script. "Karika" on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, shows the origin of the Bangla script. It uses triangles, circles and rectangles in its signboard (showing that these are the basic and original shapes of the alphabet). A whole lot of signboards simply use the present standard Bangla, or some variations on it. "Balaka" (cinema) is one of the latter. "Karupannya" on Airport Road and "Smrity Optical" of New Market introduce a revolutionary element, by omitting the *matra* (upper line of Bangla scripts). The end result is a clear, highly legible Bangla script which is easy to learn and write for children. Like the highly successful European script, it applies a small set of standard shapes. By mixing this small set in various ways, virtually all the letters are written.

I have not yet seen any book, magazine or even leaflet printed with these modern types of letters. Will this be the end of development of Bangla? I do not think so. You cannot freeze history.

With the streamlining of Bangla, children will find it much easier to learn to read and write. And this is the aim of "Literacy for All", or "Universal Primary Education".

A good laugh is more than mere fun — it is healthy. For many, there is little realisation of the health benefits of laughter. It is now being increasingly felt by some members of the BMA that a human being's ability to laugh is just as valid an indicator of his health as are all those other things that doctors may happen to check.

Many researchers have studied the beneficial effects of laughter. These studies show that when we laugh, our muscles are activated. When we stop doing so, these muscles are relaxed. Since muscle tension magnifies pain, many people with arthritis, rheumatism and other painful conditions may benefit from a good peal of laughter. People suffering from headaches may also find the same relief.

How can you bring laughter into your life? Here are some guidelines:

(i) **Mix with people who can make you laugh:** An acquaintance of mine was once painfully shy and had a difficult time trying to laugh. Once he went to see a circus with his friends. He was intrigued with the antics of the clowns there and from that time onwards he seldom missed a circus, whenever he found an opportunity. This led to a sudden transformation in his life, and now he makes it a point of mixing with people who enjoy laughing, as their happiness rubs off on those around them.

(ii) **Practise how to laugh:** A psychotherapist tells about a patient who was a chronic worrier. This psychotherapist had the patient list his worries which was a fairly long one. "Now read all your problems, but at the end of each one say, 'Tee-hee'", he recommended. The patient scowled for a moment, but he did as he was told, surprising himself when he could not hold back his laughter. Then,

Eyelash curlers obviate the need for mascara. However, if you have fair hair you might want to consider having your lashes dyed dark brown, which is far cheaper in the long run and is kinder to your eyes. However, do not attempt to dye your lashes yourself with hair dye. It is far better to seek professional help.

One way in which you can avoid expensive beauty treatments is by simply brushing your eyebrows into shape every night. Take an eyebrow brush (an old, soft toothbrush will do) and guide the eyebrows into the shape you want. Smooth a little petroleum jelly on to stubborn hairs to keep them in shape. — Courtesy: Health Essentials.

Tips on How to Laugh

by A S M Nurunnabi



A picture of a ready laughter

seeing the ridiculous point of it all, he let out a hearty peal of laughter.

Faking laughter shakes the diaphragm and it is like putting an ignition key to a car: the engine starts and the wheels oscillate. A similar thing happens with a fake laughter and the diaphragm interprets this as an original one, and before you know it, a genuine laughter may follow.

(iii) **Try to keep a laughter file:** This means creating a humour scrapbook. A humour scrapbook, of course, takes time, but keeping a simple "laughter file" may help. Clip your favourite cartoons and jokes. Also, try to keep a pad for jotting down the humour that you may find in everyday life. Collecting funny greeting cards and "zany" bumper stickers can enrich your "laughter file". This will add to your fun when, for instance, on an occasion of your friend's birthday, or some other festive occasion, you have checked your file and copied down some of the witty sayings, and used a line or two suitable for the occasion.

(iv) **Take time out for laughter:** Setting aside moments for collecting and practising witty anecdotes can be a healthy pastime. We should always keep in mind that "Laughter is the Best

Medicine". Some of us may find ourselves in the grips of such tight schedules that we may feel we may be losing our sense of humour. In such circumstances, we can improve the situation if we begin by placing notes and cartoons on suitable places in our surroundings, say, on mirrors and on refrigerator doors. Also, on birthday and anniversary cards for family and friends, you may put in a humorous note or a brief quotation of poem with humour.

(v) **Try and laugh when you need it most:** Through humour, it may be possible to soften some of the worst blows that life presents. Once you may find something to laugh about, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive whatever vicissitudes of life that are facing you. In the words of a sociologist, laughter is a skill that we can all acquire, as it can come naturally, yet it is also something that can be developed — as famous comedian once said, "We are just here for a spell to get a few laughs."

REFRESH your eyes by lying down, preferably in a quiet room, for 15 minutes with a slice of either raw potato or cucumber over each eye. Cotton wool pads soaked in witch hazel or in iced water can be used instead. You will notice that your eyes will sparkle and that any puffiness will have disappeared!

Tea has been used as a reviver for less than sparkling eyes for over two centuries! When you have had a late night or a long, hard day, relax with a couple of cooled teabags (the new round ones fit particularly well) over your eyelids for 10 minutes. You're guaranteed to feel instantly revived. It is not just the coolness of the teabag

that makes you feel better: the polyphenols and tannin in tea have a mildly astringent and stimulating effect on the skin. Tea also causes skin to tighten slightly, and this helps to reduce puffiness and to remove dark circles.

Natural Ways to Remove Eye Make-up

Cleanse away eye make-up mascara with a trace of sweet almond oil and cotton wool. Wipe carefully from the nose to the outer eye. Leave a trace of oil on your skin to nourish it. Cotton buds (use one end for each eye) dipped into the oil and wiped gently over eye make-up and mascara will serve the same purpose. Rinse with a gentle toner, preferably

Focus on the Eyes

by S. Shaukat

one that is alcohol, colour and fragrance-free.

Baby oil is an effective eye make-up remover, especially for thick, waterproof mascara. Pour a small amount on to round cotton wool pads and wipe gently over the make-up, using one pad for each eye. If your eyes are sensitive, dip cotton buds ends directly in the baby oil, remembering to use one end for each eye.

Healthy Eyelashes and Eyebrows

Applying a little petroleum jelly to the root of your lashes

each night will encourage healthy growth and make the lashes long and strong. For both day and evening make-up, petroleum jelly can be used to keep your eyebrows in shape and give them a good sheen. Work the jelly into your eyebrows with your fingers, but use only a tiny amount, because too much will look and feel greasy.

Petroleum jelly is also an effective, colourless mascara. Use an old eyelash comb to comb it through your lashes to make them look instantly thicker and longer.



A side profile of any beautiful face is a sight to behold

— Courtesy: "Elle"