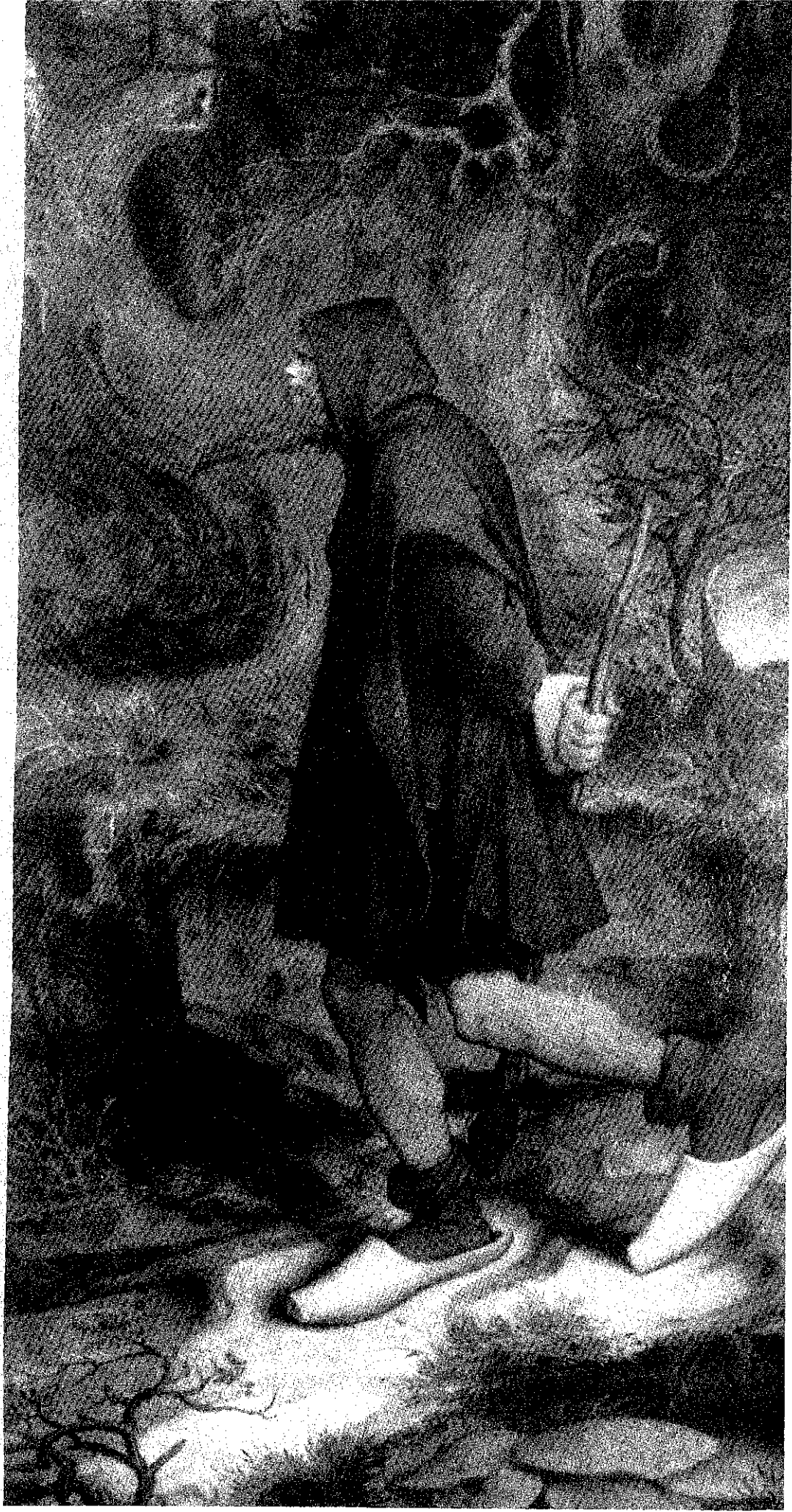


**VOICES**  
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**THE TIRED THERAPIST**



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## Invigorating the Tired Therapist



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Being tired is nature's wise signal for the return of the sweet restorer, balmy sleep. Exhaustion, deep fatigue, and the sense of being drained of all strength—these usually have other roots. Good, healthy sleep restores us after too much work, but when work itself is too much no amount of rest will bring back the lost bounce nor relight the dimmed sparkle in one's eyes.

The tired therapist is first and foremost a tired person. Those days, which I remember as if they happened a hundred years ago, seemed endless. They were filled with self-pity, deep hurt, and the almost constant wish to be cared for and loved by another. I collapsed at the end of each day as if it were a week long. I was not just tired, but sick and tired.

I am still sometimes tired in the morning now, wishing I had another hour of sleep. But at the end of ten or even twelve-hour days, I am generally fresh, full of energy, and eager to do things. There isn't enough time for everything. It's exactly the opposite of what it used to be when I dreaded free time and weekends, fearing that the emptiness within would surface. Not so now. Helping my patients work through their pain and their many fears is still a tedious task and the endless repetition often becomes boring. But not a day goes by in which the miracle of re-awakened life in others does not touch me deeply too. I make a living this way, but it is an exciting way to live. It is not tiring, but restoring.

If the heart of a man is depress'd with cares,  
The mist is dispell'd when a woman appears.

John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*

Not only a love affair can be an antidote for depression. Being a therapist often serves that same function also. In a recent issue of *VOICES* I found a sensitive and candid piece written by Dorita Araoz (1978) about her

search for meaning out of "depression—the dark night of the soul." She first answered the ringing bells of the convent, marriage was supposed to bring happiness, then motherhood. She finally hoped that becoming a psychotherapist and working with the depression of others would bring the yearned-for solace. But this too, obviously, failed to fill the void. Samuel Johnson (1934) wrote that "Life is a progress from want to want, not from enjoyment to enjoyment" (p.53), and when one's existence is so perceived, the result is not merely tiredness, but a sense of being sick and tired. Storage is impossible in an incompetent vessel, and only fools would hope to restore that which was not stored in the first place.

I work with my patients as I worked with myself, trying to complete the process of individuation which was begun soon after my physical separation from mother occurred. I had been torn away, suddenly thrust into the cold world. Suddenly there was no longer anyone to anticipate my hunger nor to regulate my temperature. The surrounding fluid which comforted and protected me from cold breezes and loud noises suddenly vanished. Overwhelming fear had overcome me, but there was no escape. I could not have "known" its nature, but perhaps I sensed my fragility. Might I not simply dry out, or would my life substance just ooze out of me? I was incomplete, non-whole, yearning to re-unite, or at the very least be held and "loved" perpetually. What I really yearned for was the sense of being protected and cuddled, looked after, unceasingly accepted, always unconditionally welcomed.

Like all men and women anywhere and anytime, I gave up these yearnings only when I had to. Hope dies very slowly. Harsh reality forced me to give up many of these wishes while still in infancy, some in childhood. But powerful remnants of these yearnings remained in me as an adult, as they do in all people until they are worked out in or out of therapy (Bar-Levav, 1975). Only after this long process of self-completion was essentially finished did I begin to efficiently hold those emotional supplies that came my way. Only after the structure was basically firm, without much oozing, could I effectively store my strength and also restore myself, so I would not constantly be tired. I could contain most of my illness only after I had essentially constructed most of my wholeness. This construction job is the biggest of them all; it lasts all life long.

I remember an occasion at a recent meeting of the American Academy of Psychotherapists when a large group of good people offered love and support in a well-intentioned attempt to give strength and solace to one who was often calling much attention to his yearnings and pain. All that was poured into him was soon lost without effect. The container was unable to hold those riches. They were barely of momentary use to the recipient, which is always disappointing and tiring for the givers, whose efforts yield such meager crops. Work is differentiated from toil by its usefulness. The sense of futility and exhaustion is especially pronounced when giving is also

motivated by an unspoken wish to be given to oneself. Hope springs eternal, and it is nourished both by illusion and by delusion. If someone else's unsatisfiable yearnings could somehow, magically, be satisfied, one's own might also not have to be given up. As long as hope of full-filling oneself from the outside can be maintained, despair and depression can be kept at bay. Recognition of one's existential aloneness in the world can be the first step towards self-fulfillment, but no one ever gave up delusions that offered solace until there was absolutely no choice.

When we, therapists, tire excessively it may well be not from too much work, but because we work in a way which yields too little for our unconscious needs, whose very existence we may deny. Such work is experienced as bearing relatively little fruit and as unrewarding, even when the monetary returns are good. Not only is the attempt to fill others with love and concern doomed to fail, but we, too, may need to plug the cracks in the structure of our own ego before we are able to contain the joys of our work. Frustration and a sense of tiredness and exhaustion are expected results when dedication, devotion, and good intentions are poured into others by us, while we really expect others to do this to us. When the work becomes a burden, it is probably time to examine the basic assumptions and tactics of our particular efforts, as it might be useful to check our hidden expectations. One of the two, or both, may be at the root of the tiredness.

Extra energy is required for work that goes counter to the tendencies which are natural to our physical and psychological state of being at any one moment. In conformity with the basic laws of physics, more force is needed to perform work against resistance, internal as well as external. In his beautiful descriptions of *Zen in the Art of Archery* Herrigel (1971) shows how terribly arduous and painstaking the process of mastering is. But once mastered, when the "full presence of mind is reached" it all becomes clear.

Bow, arrow, goal and ego, all melt into one another, so that I can no longer separate them. And even the need to separate has gone. For as soon as I take the bow and shoot, everything becomes so clear and straightforward and so ridiculously simple. (p.70)

Suzuki's remark in the Introduction addresses the issue less allegorically:

If one really wishes to be master of an art, technical knowledge of it is not enough. One has to transcend technique so that the art becomes an "artless art" growing out of the Unconscious. (p. vi)

A Zen master might describe the essence of Zen as "sleeping when tired, eating when hungry." When the psychotherapist, the instrument of therapy, has sufficiently mastered his self and made it more complete, he no longer needs to override the wisdom of nature. His work becomes easy and

invigorating, not tiring, for being with, and for, a patient no longer takes anything away from oneself.

The man, the art, the work—it is all one. The art of the inner work, which unlike the outer does not forsake the artist, which he does not 'do' and can only 'be', springs from the depths. (p.51)

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