

Why Take A Holiday?

I have just returned from holiday. I went in search of sunshine so on my return friends have taken great pleasure in telling me that it was pretty much as hot in North Wales as it had been on my holiday island in the Mediterranean. Why, they wondered, did I bother going, when the sunshine to be enjoyed here had been so good?

If one's only motive for taking a holiday were sand and sunshine then my friends might have had a point. When the weather is fine, the beaches of North Wales stand comparison with just about any beach anywhere but, of course, holidays aren't just about sun and relaxation.

Part of the value of taking holidays is that the experience abstracts you from normal life. When I find myself away from home, free from the concerns of my everyday life, then sooner or later my thoughts turn to that everyday life. When I am here, at home, and I think about my life, I am immersed in that which I am thinking about. My home, my work, my family and friends are around me. I cannot see the wood for the trees. When I am on holiday and I think about my life I see it as if from the outside.

Holidays punctuate our normal lives. A distance of miles can lend psychological as well as physical perspective. By breaking the mesmerising pattern of routine holidays allow us to see our lives as if from the outside. Experiences are richest if we can experience them from both points of view.

If you only see an experience from the inside, you are trapped within it. Some experiences are more involving and more entrapping than others. Being drunk is a very different experience to observing someone who is drunk! When we rush around believing that we have to achieve absolutely everything now the experience is compelling, yet an observer can see the futility of our behaviour in an instant.

We learn to see ourselves as others see us as we grow up. As adults most of us automatically consider how others will view our behaviour before we act. We can break the ties of vision and imagine how we look from the outside, but it is less easy to extricate ourselves from the ties of feeling and compulsion.

If I can take an imaginary holiday from being inside me, and perceive myself at a distance in time and space, then this gives me great potential for change. For example, I can step outside hunger pangs and imagine how much slimmer I will look at some time in the future and so inhibit myself from overeating now. By being mindful or detached from my immediate experiences I can inhibit habitual behaviours for as long as it takes to retrain my nervous system and so break the habit.

The ability to experience oneself from both inside and out, to watch one's thoughts and feelings without becoming immersed in them, varies hugely between people. Some people just seem to be better at it than others. However it is a skill that can be learned and practised.

What parts of your experience would you benefit from seeing more from the outside? What feelings or behaviours do you do that you might like to take a holiday from?

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Comments and feedback on this article are warmly welcomed.