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Guided imagery or visualization has been described by many as the ultimate consciousness tool! But because the human imagination and its contents are such a basic part of our nature it is often overlooked as the potent inner healing and integrating resource that it is.

If you're someone who doesn't believe you can visualize just ask yourself the following questions. Do you catch yourself daydreaming now and again? Some mornings, do you wake up with the last snippet of a dream still present in your mind? Can you remember back over the last gathering you enjoyed with friends or family; if you closed your eyes can you recall the faces, hear something of the conversation and taste that chocolate decadence you dove into so enthusiastically? If you answered yes to any of these questions you do and can visualize! The truth is we all see in the mind's eye whether we're conscious of it or not.

There are so many remarkable benefits to using the simple, easy form of Self-Help. Guided imagery has been proven to deepen relaxation, enhance vitality, provide pain relief, offer comfort mentally and emotionally, build confidence, change attitudes, habits or belief systems and contribute directly to the healing process.

What I appreciate most about guided imagery work is that it provides me a safe, economical and creative means of assisting in my own healing and rebalancing process. All healing, it is thought, springs from within and positive visualizations appear to gently nudge that process back into action, if or when balance (mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually) has been disturbed due to stress, illness or just plain fatigue and burnout.

Begin by experimenting on your own, following the simple instructions found below. If you like how you feel afterwards you might wish to investigate the many visualization/relaxation CD's commercially available to you locally. Music, nature sounds and the voice of a "guide" (played softly on a nearby CD player) have been found to increase concentration and thereby deepen the satisfaction with and quality of any guided imagery experience.

But for now when you're ready to begin... Take a minute or two to get settled and relaxed. Loosen any tight clothing and sit or lie down comfortably. Close out the outside world by removing all distractions (ticking clock, cell phone, too much unfiltered light, etc.)

Close your eyes and begin to put your body at ease with several slow, deep breaths. Continue to relax with regular, rhythmic deep breathing. Provide yourself with suggestions of the sensation of warmth and heaviness in the body and limbs. This will intensify your feeling of relaxation.

Now call up your Relaxation Image. Imagine (or sense) a peaceful, serene natural scene (a desert island, a sandy beach, sailing on a quiet lake, or perhaps place yourself in a cozy study beside a warming fire). Be creative but highly personal. With as much detail as possible, respond to your image with all of your senses. Slowly inquire:

Sights: What can I see around me? (clouds, surf, sky, etc.)

Smells: What smells do I notice? (ocean, grass, flowers, etc.)

Sounds: What do I hear? (birds, wind, water, etc.)

Tastes: What can I taste? (salt air, salt water, food, etc.)

Touches: What textures do I notice around me? (soft, rough, slippery, etc.)

Awaken slowly, stretch, and notice what has changed inside you. Savor the sensation and enjoy the afterglow of having gone on a very special and personal retreat. Repeat daily if possible, and always when needed.