

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES OF FATIGUE.

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All our fatigue does not come from physical nor external causes. In the experience of us all, it is an equally common discovery to feel as tired when we have little or almost nothing to do, as when we are rushed from morning to night thoroughly interested in the work we are doing. Here we are in touch with what may be called the *psychological causes* of fatigue.

We are generally aware, too, of a difference in quality between physical and psychological fatigue. In the case of the former, the results are more localised; in the latter it is a weariness of the spirit that pervades our whole being. There is another great difference. The effects of bodily fatigue are more easily to be resolved—rest, especially sleep, is all we need to be restored. Psychological fatigue, however, is often permanent, and remedies that are usually efficacious in the instance of the first are ineffectual now. But we will explain the reasons why this should be the case later on.

Let us now describe more fully the causes of psychological fatigue, with or without a certain admixture of physical fatigue, because the feelings arising from the first state of affairs rapidly pass over to the second, although it is usually a much slower process for the tiredness of the body seriously to cause deep-seated mental fatigue, unless some of the special psychological symptoms and causes have also been stimulated by the external causes and conditions also.

We have said that we can work with the greatest energy all day and not be aware of fatigue *when we are interested* in our work. Here we have the reverse side of many instances of fatigue.

*We are tired because we are bored.* This may take place because of (1) monotonous work; (2) not enough work, which leads to the heaping-up of unused energy; and because (3) we do not happen to like the work or the people we are working with. We will be quite ready to concur with this suggestion. But yet there is another point of view. Someone may say, "Yes, I am often tired because I am bored and know it, but at the same time I am still frequently tired when I am doing things which I like and with people I like. What can be said then?"

The reply might be, "Are you sure that you do like these activities and the conditions and people connected with them? Or can they in some way revive old memories that were painful and you now feel tired because of these old half-forgotten memories and with the exertion of keeping them forgotten." Frequently *fatigue bordering upon exhaustion may arise from this energy-draining task of keeping up repressions.*

This takes us directly to the psychological concept of the unconscious mind, that mental underworld, where are stored so many unwanted memories, ungratified impulses, wishes and emotions that we have never learned to deal with nor even to acknowledge. We confined them there for many reasons, and it takes a most tremendous amount of energy in some instances to keep them there. This condition, which is known as *conflict*, is caused by the repressed wishes or memories

trying to gain expression and our censorious conscious mind trying to keep them in bondage. This struggle is responsible for a great deal of tiredness, because it uses up as much mental energy as our bodies consume physical energy by several hours of violent bodily exercise.

*Our conscious mind and the repressed contents of it are answerable for many of the feelings of fatigue for which we cannot account consciously.* We have said that heaped-up unused energy can lead to results that resemble the symptoms of bodily fatigue, so, too, can *heaped-up, undischarged emotions.* We have a real need of outlets for emotion, for pleasure and recreation in our lives, just as much as we cannot live without food or sleep.

But a factor of supreme importance of which many of our repressions are kept in durance vile, using up our energy and causing us so much unnecessary fatigue, is that of the *Super Ego*, our conscience, developed from the opinions and teaching of "our elders and betters" in our early childhood.

We may have been taught that to have or to want pleasure, ease and comfort was wrong, it was self-indulgence. We must live a life of self-sacrifice and hardship, to atone for our natural sins or personal guilt. This may, indeed, cause some of us to smile. But when we have the opportunity to get below the surface of the minds of a large number of men and a still larger number of women, we find this state of affairs responsible for much of the fatigue from which they suffer. They are burden bearers and are weary, not knowing what they are doing nor that it is unnecessary to go on carrying this heavy burden of the past sorrows. They work incessantly to atone for something they have done or left undone for the sake of establishing their position in the world to come maybe. Their constant fatigue is a sign of the feeling of Guilt that oppresses them or the manifestation of some belief that they are inferior in some way. They therefore cause their own fatigue by overwork in order to accomplish as much or more than others to prove they are not inferior to the rest of human beings.

*Some use overwork and the consequent feeling of exhaustion as a dope*, so that they have no time nor energy in which to *think*. They have thoughts they do not want to allow to the surface. Or, if they had leisure, there would then be something to be done, which they do not really want to have time to do.

*We may be tired, too, because we cannot sleep; we sleep too heavily, or our rest is disturbed by bad dreams. We are afraid to allow ourselves to sleep.*

Here, again, we are closely in connection with the phenomena of the unconscious mind, whose working may most plainly be seen in dreams or nightmares. Old wishes, old fears, old anxieties creep out of their hiding places like skeletons from cupboards, and threaten the peace of our night's rest. We may always suspect they have been troubling us when we wake in the morning heavy and unrefreshed but unable to remember any dreams. They have slipped away, too unpleasant or unhappy to be brought across the frontier to waking life, and yet their reverberations follow us throughout the day as a dogging weariness.

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