



## ***Family Vacations: A Negentropic Opportunity***

As the holidays approach, many families consider this an opportunity to leave their domicile for adventures near and abroad. Some travel to visit family, some leave as a form of escape, and others pack up the entire clan for a much-anticipated vacation.

But what, in fact, does vacation mean and what does it entail?

At the word level, vacation derives etymologically from the Latin *vacantia*, which is the

neuter, plural noun-form of vacans, which, in turn, is the present participle of vacare, meaning "to be empty" but also "to be free".

So, do we consider a vacation a chance to explore the emptiness that is freedom or a freedom that is emptiness?

As you consider the holidays and perhaps even a family vacation, we offer our experiences with vacations as a negentropic opportunity if started with some questions, some explorations, and some certainties.

### **Question One: Explicit Expectations**

What do people usually, explicitly, expect from a family vacation?

Typically, we see three perspectives:

The first is for resting or re-posing—a term which, like those following, should be read and interpreted in the sense of body to mind. The hyphen is intended to suggest posing again. Re-positioning ourselves on the parts of our personalities that we recognise as functioning well and as being egosyntonic.

The second explicit requirement, which also permits the first, is that of re-charging, re-covering, re-discovering ourselves; stocking up with new energy after a period of tiredness; making a new embodiment by recovering our own corporeity and rediscovering our own subjectivity, which may have become a little lost in our frenetic day-to-day lives.

The third is having fun by doing pleasant things that we have been looking forward to for some time; inhabiting and breathing different territories, both real and mental, which are different from those of our

daily lives. Thus, going beyond our usual boundaries to decompress and wash away those tensions full of toxins which we have accumulated during the year.

### **Question Two: Implicit Risks**

Next we must ask what implicit risks usually present themselves during vacations.

Typically, we associate the following three:

The first is the interruption of rhythms – is this break bearable? How does it resonate with our life-history in relation to the theme of distance-contact? What about our identifying scene-position and or our working scene-position in the daily theater of life?

The second is the risk of emptiness. And, in connection with the first risk, is this emptiness bearable? Could it, itself, be a factor producing angst and adaptive stress? Can the greatly desired "doing nothing" become emptiness to be filled by repeated doses of acceleration?

The third is that of being too full. Can't doing so much that is so greatly desired represent another possible cause of adaptive stress, again dystonic, for the return to the boundaries of the person's usual daily life?

How much neurotic complicity is required of our holidays to be able to return with "liberti" to our daily lives?

In ancient Rome, the liberti were former slaves who had been freed, but who, however, continued to have an unequal relationship with their former masters, as if they had still been slaves.

How many people set off on a vacation, for

Continued on page 24

example, still thinking about work? About how to plan their time after their holiday? About how to conclude that business deal? Or about how to manage a situation at work?

Although the implicit requirements and risks associated with vacations can reveal them to be times of crisis or of opportunity, from a complex systemic viewpoint, it is not possible to determine which they shall be. This is thanks to the numerous variables to consider and the unpredictable outcomes of their interaction on the complex living system in question, be that as an individual, a couple, a family, or a group.

## Explorations

By definition, a vacation represents an opportunity for greater contact with internal time, "in the inside", when compared to normal daily life, and could favor a return to more balanced, vital pulsation between internal and external time "on the outside".

Time spent on vacation, with its explicit requirements and implicit risks, brings us to a reflection about the time in which today's holidays are set. We really can't avoid focusing on the present time in society and in families and its interdependence with time spent on vacation.

Every person experiences internal time and external time (Ferri, 2005). There is a subjective time, which we "feel" more, and there is objective time, which we "think" more and which it is possible to measure.

But these two times do not coincide exactly, proof of which being, for example, a state of happiness in which internal time seems to fly very quickly, or, the opposite, an angst-ridden state in which internal time is dilated – in both states external time remains unaltered.

Reconciling the two times, both internal and external, is both intelligent and a necessary operation for our own bodily-psycho-emotional equilibrium.

Internal time is indispensable for relationships and to transform emotions (immediate



feelings) into sentiments (emotions which persist over time). Today, internal time has become less, both quantitatively and qualitatively, we are almost living in "rarefied" time and the equilibrium between the two times has been disturbed and has moved towards the external time.

The external time of a family on vacation is, however, a time that is set in a different energy field, with a different atmosphere and with very different pre-dispositions of the individuals.

And what about the internal time of families on vacation?

Indeed, a family itself may be interpreted as a complex living system, with its own corporeity, with its own traits, its own individual parts, its own boundaries, its own sustainability, and its own history. There are marks incised from the family history that characterize it. There is a dominant trait mind, and it has its own internal time which, today, is often defectively insufficient and rarefied!

### The Theft of Time

We are living through a technological age that involves a great acceleration in external time. Technology, in fact, represents a powerful attractor, like a strong magnet, which can pull the individuals in families, and in society in general, towards itself, thus taking time away from relationships, which belong to the affective circuits of the limbic brain.



*Image by tookapic from Pixabay*

If we imagine these "energetic circuits" as vectors, we could draw them as circular arrows within families, in groups and within society as a whole. However, with the advent of the technological age, the flow of energy has been redirected with the arrows now all heading in the same direction, towards a technological, multi-media "totem". This is why the circularity, in circuits in general, and in those in families in particular, has been weakened or, often, completely interrupted.

We are all constantly pushed into living in

Continued on page 26



the outside by the assault of these multi-media totems, which propose dominant forms of behavior, habits and values - they represent the new Super-Ego!

Multi-media totems use the language of emotions, through producing immediate feelings to grasp our attention. They induce ever-greater orality to be satisfied, with the associated risk of an escalation in consumerism and in new forms of addiction.

Indeed, it has been the theft of time in relationships.

### **Time and The Social Environment**

Zigmut Bauman (2003), using a most appropriate term, viewed modernity as being liquid - there being no time for form, slipping shapelessly through time like liquids, having been liquefied by velocity.

From a psycho-corporeal, analytical perspective, over the last few decades, we have witnessed the lysis of the "father", of law, of boundaries, the collapse of the parental couple, the modification of the Super Ego, with movement away from the family towards the multi-media totems, and an alarming transformation in the Living Body of Society. Many differences have been lost and there has been a significant increase in indifference.

We have witnessed the liquefaction of armoring and, to tell the truth, a free-fall, first into oral liquidity and then, with volatility in relationships, even further down into borderline rarefaction.

We find ourselves living in a time with more moments but fewer roots, with more emotions but less sentiment, more excitement but less awareness, more communication but fewer relationships and with more information but less knowledge (Ferri & Paiva, 2019).

In our rarefied liquid modernity, the Living Body of our Society is heading towards a reduction in serotonin (5HT) and an increase in dopamine (DA). Isn't this a form of depression masked by acceleration? Isn't it a Living Social Body which is moving forwards with a reactive, unsatisfied oral, primary trait mind, with the associated trait patterns?

### **Time and The Family Environment**

Today's multimedia Super Ego is non-affective, non-reciprocating, quite persecutory, certainly demanding, often excluding, superficial, narcissistic, and with great limits in terms of emotional intelligence and experience. The family (parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles . . . ) is no longer the seat of the Super Ego.

We are in a young person's society, which can be defined by the tribe, in which you go from the relational pair to 10 or more, missing out on the relational 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and, in reality, missing out on the field of close family affection, which would have the task of organizing pulsionality. The point of reference for the young is the tribe. This is an unstable, fragmented, polyhedral point of reference, which has a number of unidentifiable

interlocutors (Ferri & Cimini, 2018) and is overshadowed by the demanding multimedia totems!

We are living in a time deprived of affective limbic relationships. There is primary oral insatisfaction, which welds the amygdaloid patterns of the reptilian brain to the cognitive, bypassing those of the anterior cingulate gyrus and the limbic brain, as neuroscience might express it.

We are witnessing a multi-factorial process of transformation in this rarefied liquid modernity in which parents have been moved away and become depressed, resigned and impotent with children who are often lost, alone, frightened and impulsive. Rarefied liquid modernity functions more and more along the lines of "business practices" with the values of what we have currently defining the Being that we are.

A relational vacuum is created by the "theft of time" perpetrated by this Super Ego, which today inhabits the space of a multimedia, technological attractor, dictating the velocity of time outside and rarefying time inside. It defines which is the Luminous Object to be followed.

### **Potential Certainties**

At this point, we offer three steps for a negentropic opportunity on a family vacation.

Step one: The first important consideration is knowing that, even though it is temporary, going away on vacation, re-calls the transitions of our own life stories. These transitions (or "passages" between our lives' successive evolutive stages), however, represent the individuating patterns of separation along our own arrows of time.

The family will distance itself and individuate itself with the vacation, like a complex living system, as it moves into another field with fewer toxins. This represents the first condition that could facilitate a redefinition of that family. That is to say the opportunity to incisively mark certain specific patterns that could induce a negentropic reset and that are not merely chaotic or chance occurrences.

The second step involves marking out a time for special meetings during the vacation (and only then), which is dedicated to talking about ourselves and telling our stories, looking into each others' eyes with as slow, intense prosody as is authentic, bearable and including. Gathering together, that is, in shared, identified space and creating very precise temporal oases during the vacation. In this way the circularity of the vectors of the living body family can be re-established.

Giving internal time back and giving back to ourselves in these meetings, internal time, limbic time, time for the chest and for breathing; time for sentiments, for being with and for listening to ourselves and listening to others (children, parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, partners), giving back "Us Time" to our families.

Continued on page 28

Reading and recounting together, in these meetings, the bottom-up time of the family history and its meaning; the times of the life experiences of the family members and their expression, even bodily, over time.

In this way affective serotonergic (5HT) time is given back to family relationships with knowing eyes that look at the other and return to their own Self and to their own nose (to mention a very precise, bodily activation of ontogenetic patterns in the Reichian Analytical setting)(Ferri, 2019).

All this is experienced in a circular arrangement of family members, which makes the vector-arrows' circularity marked, but also establishes the field boundaries, making possible new, or renewed, relational density within the family's internal time.

And then the third step, which is another important oasis of special meeting-time during the vacation, which accompanies and completes the preceding step:

Walk together . . . in beautiful dopaminergic silence, crossing our own cortico-spinal pathways (Ammanniti & Gallese, 2014), feeling the movement of proceeding alone and together as a living-family-body and going forwards looking at the way ahead, be it smooth, problematic, beautiful, complex, straight or undulating. Taking it on with intelligent flexibility, and with the possibility of modifying it, so as to reach that objective previously shared and agreed by everybody.



*photo by Allen Taylor Unsplash*

Walk together, waiting for each other, if necessary, in truth even strolling slowly, looking sideways at each other and turning the neck to the left and to the right (to mention another, very precise bodily activation of ontogenetic patterns in the Reichian Analytical setting) (Ferri, 2019), without too many words, allowing corporeity to express itself in facial expression, in looking, in movement, in breathing and in lifting the eyes above the horizon towards the sky.

Those proposed are two means of translating simple bodily activations into the setting of

a vacation. They are in succession on the arrow of time, codified and belong to the post-oral stages in the evolutive stratification of our Self. They are bodily activations that are a little phylo-ontogenetic, a little pre-subjective, but that, in association with cognitive subjectivity, can intelligently re-combine it into a new connection, so as to better protect the boundaries of the complex living-system "family" and permit them greater embodiment-individuation for the return to the social field of daily life.

## References

- Ammanniti M., & Gallese V. (2014). *La Nascita della Intersoggettività*. Milano R. Cortina Ed.
- Bauman, Z. (2003). *Modernità Liquida*. Bari, Laterza Ed.
- Bertalanffy, L. V. (1971). *Teoria generale dei Sistemi*. Torino, Isedi Ed.
- Damasio, A. (2012). *Il Sé viene alla Mente*. Milano, Adelphi Ed.
- Ferri, G. (2005). Chi mi ha rubato le lancette? Intervista di Roberta Ronconi a Genovino Ferri *Quotidiano Liberazione della domenica*.
- Ferri, G. (2016). The Mind...the embodied mind...the enactive mind...the trait mind. *Somatic Psychotherapy Today* 6(1).
- Ferri, G. (2017). *Body sense*. eBook Alpes Ed.
- Ferri, G., & Cimini G. (2018). *Psychopathology and Character*. eBook Alpes Ed.
- Ferri, G., & Paiva M.J. (2019). Primary object relationship: A new reading. *Somatic Psychotherapy Today* 9(1).
- Ferri G. & Paiva M.J. (2019). Salutogenesis and Well-Being. *Somatic Psychotherapy Today*, 9(2).
- Ferri, G. (2019). Lezioni su "Didattica delle Attivazioni Incarnate Terapeutiche". Scuola di Specializzazione in Psicoterapia S.I.A.R. Roma.
- Gallese, V., Migone P., & Eagle, M.N. (2006). *La simulazione incarnata: i neuroni specchio, le basi neurofisiologiche dell'intersoggettività e alcune implicazioni per la psicoanalisi*. Ed. unipr.it
- Prigogine I., & Stengers I. (1981). *Torino La Nuova Alleanza-Metamorfosi della scienza*. Einaudi Ed
- Porges, S. (2014). *La Teoria Polivagale*. Roma, Fioriti G. Ed.
- Reich, W. (1932). *Analisi del Carattere*. Milano, SugarCo Ed.
- Schrodinger, E. (1995). *Che cos'è la Vita?* Milano, Adelphi Ed.
- Tiezzi, E. (1996). *Fermare il Tempo*. Milano, Cortina Ed.
- Valzelli, L. (1976). *L'uomo è il rettile*. Torino, C.G. Med.Scient. Ed.



**Genovino Ferri** is a psychiatrist/Reichian analyst. He is the director of the Italian School of Reichian Analysis and the Director of Mind Body Collection of the Alpes Edizioni.



**Mary Jane A. Paiva** is a clinical psychologist, body psychotherapist and Reichian Analyst trained by Genovino Ferri and Federico Navarro, who have been practicing this model for over 40 years.