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LET'S LIMBER UP--PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY

We all begin life with our inheritance from the past. What happens to us after that beginning is not only a matter of inheritance but is dependent on our environment and the fitness habits that we develop physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. This subject matter deals with the physical, mental and spiritual factors, although we cannot eliminate the emotional and social components of health which are just as important in achieving total good health.

Rudyard Kipling in one of his verses entitled "A Preface" put into poetry his thoughts on the subject of physical, mental, and spiritual fitness. When read and re-read thoughtfully it can be very meaningful and inspiring:

A PREFACE⁽¹⁾

To all to whom this little book may come---
Health for yourselves and those you hold most dear!
Content abroad, and happiness at home,
And--one grand Secret in your private ear:---
Nations have passed away and left no traces,
And History gives the naked cause of it---
One single, simple reason in all cases;
They fell because their peoples were not fit.

Now, though your Body be mis-shapen, blind,
Lame, feverish, lacking substance, power or skill,
Certain it is that men can school the Mind
To school the sickliest Body to her will--
As many have done, whose glory blazes still
Like mighty flames in meanest lanterns lit:
Wherefore, we pray the crippled, weak and ill--
Be fit--be fit! In mind at first to be fit!

And, though your Spirit seem uncouth or small,
Stubborn as clay or shifting as the sand,
Strengthen the Body, and the Body shall
Strengthen the Spirit till she take command;
As a bold rider brings his horse in hand
At the tall fence, with voice and heel and bit,
And leaps while all the field are at a stand.
Be fit--be fit! In body next be fit!

Nothing on earth--no Arts, no Gifts, nor Graces--
No Fame, no Wealth--outweighs the want of it.
This is the Law which every law embraces--
Be fit--be fit! In mind and body be fit!

(1) Kipling, Rudyard, Land and Sea Tales, 1919-1923, Doubleday, Page and Co., Garden City, N. Y.

The even heart that seldom slurs its beat--
The cool head weighing what that heart desires--
The measuring eye that guides the hands and feet--
The Soul unbroken when the Body tires--
These are the things our weary world requires
Far more than superfluities of wit;
Wherefore we pray you, sons of generous sires,
Be fit--be fit! For Honour's sake be fit.

There is one lesson at all Times and Places--
One changeless Truth on all things changing writ,
For boys and girls, men, women, nations, races--
Be fit--be fit! And once again be fit!

-- By Rudyard Kipling

Statistics tell us that Americans enjoy more years of life on the average, and more productive years, than most of the people in the world. In 1900 the average life span in this country was slightly over 47 years. By 1961 this had increased to over 70 years. Much of this gain is the result of the giant strides which have been made in medical science. The behavioral sciences, too, have contributed to the knowledge of the human mechanism. They have taught us many of the things we know about human nature. Our present and future mental health educational programs, the development of services and facilities for the mentally ill, and the training of doctors, clergymen, and teachers to recognize symptoms and to counsel, all indicate a recognition of the need for total health of the individual.

If you decide that it is time to improve yourself, you have a rewarding adventure ahead. Fitness,--physically, mentally and spiritually--can be achieved at any age. We should realize, however, that we do not achieve it overnight. It does take effort. But the resulting feelings of well being, renewed strength and vitality, interest in things as well as people, are well worth the effort.

How often do you look at yourself in your mirror and murmur to yourself "Getting fat, time for some physical exercise?" Have you ever thought the same about your brain?" "Feeling slow-minded lately, time for a mental workout."

The mind, like a muscle or a limb, requires exercise. Neglected, it grows flabby and inefficient. Confined to limited use, it creeps and aches if asked to do an extra chore.

Scientists tell us that we do not give our brain nearly the challenge with which it is able to cope. As a result, we get less production as well as less satisfaction and pleasure than we should from our mental faculties.

Six rules for limbering up my brain and keeping my mind in trim:⁽¹⁾

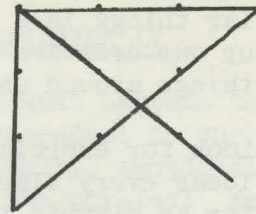
1. Shake off restricting mental habits that make me admit "I'm set in my ways." Here is a "game." Draw four straight lines connecting all the dots on the next page without removing your pencil from the paper.

(1) Reprinted by permission from Changing Times, The Kiplinger Magazine, Copyright 1964, February.

The "game:"

. . .
. . .
. . .

The answer:



Failure to figure out the right answer is normal because many of us have the habit of thinking of space as confined. Why can't the lines reach outside the triangle indicated by the dots? Thus--the first rule for exercising the mind is to free it from bondage of old habits.

2. Keep alive to the changes in the world. In other words, keep alert to what is going on around us. Here are some tests to see how well I have kept up to date.

- a. Locate these places and explain why they are noteworthy: Check-point Charley, Saigon, Ithaca, Walden, Sutter's Mill.

Check-point Charley is one of the access points at which traffic is held up going to eastern Berlin. Saigon, capitol of South Vietnam has been in the news because of American aid in the Vietnamese war. All three other places you have probably read about in the past--Ithaca, home of Ulysses, and the name of numerous towns and cities in the United States; Walden, a pond near Concord, Massachusetts, made famous by the American writer, Thoreau, more than a hundred years ago: Sutter's Mill, the location of the gold strike that set off the 1849 gold rush to California.

3. Read. Most of us have knowledge gaps. People who keep abreast of current affairs often neglect the past. Yet the present can be fully understood only if we know something about what went before. It works the other way, too. Readers who bury themselves in the past often are unaware of the changing world around them. None of us can hope to swallow all of the knowledge there is. But there is fun in choosing and it is inspiring as well.
4. Let my mind do the things it enjoys. Have fun! Let my imagination and interests lead me. If the reading of a poem or story sets me off on a writing kick of my own I may find that this is real enjoyment. If reading about other people and their interests starts me collecting a hobby or developing a new interest, this is certainly worthwhile. If looking at a painting stimulates my imagination and sets me to thinking that I could do that, too, then I should try it. Willingness to let myself go will help increase creativity, and calls on the participation of spirit, mind, and body. It involves the ability to generate new ideas, to discover, to invent, to improve.
5. Strive for intellectual independence. Find out things. Here is a simple illustration of Rule 5. Look at a teacup, which is normally used for drinking. In what other ways can it be used? List as many as possible. Here are some: Cookie cutter, flower arrangement container, mixing bowl for paints, flour and water, measuring cup for soap powder, etc., container for pins, screws, and similar things, drinking dish for birds, sugar bowl, tiddly-winks cup, paper weight, mold for mud pies, pattern for drawing circles, shooting gallery target, temporary fish bowl.

Are these far fetched? Of course. But the ability of the mind to see familiar things in a new light is a measure of its creativeness. And we can limber up our creative thinking by applying imaginative and critical attention to the things around us.

6. Look for exercises that will help. I need not aim at highly intellectual ideas every time I give my mind a workout any more than I need to be training for an olympic team when I do my physical exercises. Exercises for the mind, simply to keep in shape, are fun and worthwhile.

A variety of books are at the public library or at the book stores that contain quizzes of all kinds. Families often have fun together this way, especially if the books have to do with reading comprehension, observation, vocabulary, number manipulation, use of the imagination, or memory. Here, now, for fun are some:

Three riddles: What makes Eskimoos cry? The answer, the blubber they eat. What state can be used to cut grass? The answer, Missouri--Mo. Where are people most ignorant? Answer, where the population is densest.

Christ's teachings indicated that we should grow in body, mind, and spirit. History has proven that people can improve themselves under any circumstance and at all ages, if they have the spirit and the will to do so. The future of mankind would indicate that we must improve ourselves for the sake of survival as well.

Edna St. Vincent Millay expressed the above sentiments in the last verse of her poem entitled "Renascence."

"The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky,--
No higher than the soul is high.

The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand;
The soul can split the sky in two.
And let the face of God shine through.

But East and West will pinch the heart
That cannot keep them pushed apart;
And he whose soul is flat--the sky
Will cave in on him by and by."