
Lying as an Activity

By Charles Brooks

excerpted from chapter 18, *Reclaiming Vitality and Presence*

Normally in this work we travel along at an everyday pace. For most people at the beginning the attention span is short, and if they are not to wander off we must now and then shift direction. I believe this is the basic difference between our approach and that of zazen. There the student persists through thick and thin for the appointed time, hour after hour, despite all difficulties. Our work, which has a similar ultimate objective of full presence, takes a varying course, with many interruptions, changes, and times for rest.



What we use for resting is what most people unhesitatingly associate with resting: namely, lying down. And since we have only a floor to lie on, that is what we use - hoping, often vainly, that when people lie down they will neither get lost in daydreams nor fall asleep.

But it is by no means assured that in lying the student will either remain awake or come to rest, let alone

both, regardless of the hardness or softness of what he lies on. So again and again, paradoxical as it may sound, we work on lying and resting itself. Indeed, we may remember that lying, which is the mode we have chosen for resting, is one of the "four dignities" of the old Chinese saying.

The reader, like the student, will almost certainly assume that work on resting means practicing relaxation. I must state, however, that in certain vital respects it is the opposite. For most people's idea of "relaxation" is a kind of limpness, or what Charlotte often likens to a flat tire, or a flower without water, and this is what the practice of relaxation very often produces. We have heard too much of the "tensions of modern life" and have too little recollection of the marvelous tonicity of healthy living creatures - for instance, our own young children. So lying for us will be an activity, just as standing is. And as in all our activities, we will aim equally at inner openness for our own life processes and at sensitive contact with the environment. Whether this leads to more fatigue or to more refreshment is something each one can discover for himself.

Lenore Tawney, 1907 - 2007



Lenore Tawney died at her home in Manhattan on September 24. She was 100 years old. Lenore was a close friend and student of Charlotte Selver. She was an innovative fiber artist and an influential figure in the development of woven sculpture as an art medium.

From a letter by Lenore to Charlotte*:

"I began to realize that my suffering was caused by my resistance to change, that I have a deep and basic fear - of "the other" of everything that is not me.

It is a beautiful world, made for joy. I look out at the river reflecting the sun in the millions of points and these reflections reflecting shimmering light on my ceiling.

One speaks glibly, settles everything with words. I have lately thought how beautiful

to be mute like the animals" then to convey only the truest feelings with the eye and body. All the superfluous noise cut off. "

* From an collage of letter excerpts collected by Mary Alice Roche. This excerpt appears to be from a letter dated October 2, 1959.