

JENNY STAMOS KOVACS

# Blissing Out

**T**he kids need a ride to school, your husband can't find his shorts, your boss has just scheduled a meeting, and your best friend desperately needs your help – all at the same time. Is it any wonder that you can't find a minute for relaxation? In fact, if you're like most women, you may have even forgotten how to relax.

And while experts say that some stress is good for you – it can sharpen your senses and your mind – too much stress is bad for your mental and physical health. At the same time, relaxation can do wonders to restore balance in your life – and may even reduce some of the health risks associated with stress.

Here are some on-the-spot techniques you can use – any time and almost anywhere – to reduce the tension in your life.

• **Meditate**

If you're thinking meditation means twisting your body into an uncomfortable position and uttering "oohs" and "omms" for an hour, guess again. Any repetitive action can be a source of meditation. This includes walking, swimming, painting, knitting – any activity that helps keep your attention calmly in the present moment.

When you catch yourself thinking about your job, your relationship or your lifelong to-do list, experts say to simply let the thought escape, and bring your mind back to the repetition of the activity. Try it for just five to ten minutes a day and watch stress levels drop.

• **Picture Yourself Relaxed**

Is your mind too talkative to meditate? Try creating a peaceful visualisation, or "dreamscape." To start, simply visualise anything that keeps your thoughts away from current tensions. It could be a favourite vacation spot, a fantasy island or something "touchable," like the feel of your favourite silk robe or cozy sweater.

The idea is to take your mind off your stress, and replace it with an image that evokes a sense of calm. The more realistic your daydream – in terms of colours, sights, sounds; even touch and feel – the more relaxation you'll experience.

• **Breathe Deeply**

Feeling stressed evokes tense, shallow breathing, while calm is associated with relaxed breathing. So, to turn tension into relaxation, change the way you breathe.

**Try this:** Let out a big sigh, dropping your chest, and exhaling through gently pursed lips. Now imagine your low belly, or centre, as a deep, powerful place. Feel your breath coming and going as your mind stays focused there. Inhale, feeling your entire belly, sides and lower back expand. Exhale, sighing again as you drop your chest, and feeling your belly, back and sides contract. Repeat ten times, relaxing more fully each time.

• **Look Around You**

Mindfulness is the here-and-now approach to living that makes daily life richer and more meaningful. Mindfulness means focusing on one activity at a time, so forget multi-tasking! Staying in the present-tense can help promote relaxation and provide a buffer against anxiety and depression.

Practise it by focusing on your immediate surroundings. If you're outdoors, enjoy the shape and colours of flowers, hear a bird's call or consider a tree. In the mall, look at the details of a dress in the window, examine a piece of jewellery and focus on how it's made, or window-shop for furniture, checking out every detail of pattern and style. As long as you can keep your mind focused on something in the present, stress will take a back seat.

• **Drink Hot Tea**

If you're a coffee-guzzler, consider going green. Coffee raises levels of the notorious stress hormone, cortisol, while green tea offers health and beauty. Participants who drank regular black tea displayed lower levels of cortisol, and reported feeling calmer during six weeks of stressful situations than those who drank a placebo with the same amount of caffeine.

• **Show Some Love**

Induce the relaxation response by cuddling your pet, giving an unexpected hug to a friend or family member, snuggling with your spouse, or talking to a friend about the good things in your lives. When you do, you'll be reducing your stress levels.

**Why?** Experts say social interaction helps your brain think better, encouraging you to see new solutions to situations that once seemed impossible. Studies have also shown that physical contact – like petting your dog or cat – may actually help lower blood pressure and decrease stress hormones.

• **Try Self-Massage**

When your muscles are tense and you've no time to visit a pro, try this simple self-massage technique. Relax, and travel straight to Zen-land.

- ❖ Place both hands on your shoulders and neck.
- ❖ Squeeze with your fingers and palms.
- ❖ Rub vigorously, keeping shoulders relaxed.
- ❖ Wrap one hand around the other forearm.
- ❖ Squeeze the muscles with thumb and fingers.
- ❖ Move up and down from your elbow to fingertips and back again.
- ❖ Repeat with other arm.

• **Take a Time-Out**

Adults need time-outs, too. So, when you sense your temper is about to erupt, find a quiet place to sit or lie down and put the stressful situation on hold. Take a few deep breaths and concentrate on releasing tension and calming your heartbeat. Quiet your mind and remember: Time is always on your side, so relax. The stress can wait.

• **Try a Musical Detour**

Music can calm the heartbeat and soothe the soul, the experts say. So, when the going gets rough, take a musical stress detour by aligning your heartbeat with the slow tempo of a relaxing song. And you might want to make that a classical tune. Research shows that listening to 30 minutes of classical music may produce calming effects equivalent to taking 10 mg of Valium.

• **Take an Attitude Break**

Thirty seconds is enough time to shift your heart's rhythm from stressed to relaxed. The way to do that: Engage your heart and your mind in positive thinking. Start by envisioning anything that triggers a positive feeling – a vision of your child or spouse, the image of your pet, that great piece of jewellery you're saving up to buy, a memento from a vacation – whatever it is, conjuring up the thought will help slow breathing, relax tense muscles and put a smile on your face. Creating a positive emotional attitude can also calm and steady your heart rhythm, contributing to feelings of relaxation and peace.

**W**hen humans like to believe we are not alone, that somewhere in the Milky Way or even beyond, there flourishes a superior race, wiser in mind and stronger in body, with mind-boggling technological marvels to its credit, a race which has eliminated hunger, disease and death, to live in a kind of sanitised, timeless and pain-free bubble we can only dream of. If we didn't believe in this collective vision, perhaps the only thing that unites us at all, we wouldn't have had *Star Trek*, *Close Encounters of The Third Kind*, *Aliens*, *2001 A Space Odyssey*, and the recent *Avatar*. Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov would have never been in this business of sci-fi writing and nor would there have been breathless, garbled accounts of UFO sightings and alien abductions by prairie farmers and U-Haul truck drivers.

A comedian once quipped that the surest proof there is intelligent life in outer space is the fact that they have made no contact with us. That figures, considering we took this long to find water on the moon, or that we are clueless about how to prevent that huge asteroid coming this way from hitting us and ending human civilisation as we know it.

While the Martians may have no interest in fraternising with us, we really do need to send out feelers. Our reserves of fossil fuels are getting dangerously depleted and we need some tie-up for alternative sources. You don't want your car rusting in the garage because there's not enough oil to go around. Humans are also multiplying like rabbits and we need extra space, so we don't step onto each other's corns. And with the pandemics like swine flu around, we want to be at a safe distance when someone sneezes.

We also need someone before whom we can show off. This is quite logical and to convince you, I will draw an analogy. You've spent the best years of your life building a house. It's got all-weathercoat paint, genuine teak doors and window-frames, great views from the balcony, state of the art kitchen, Art deco furniture, Kohler bathroom fixtures, flat screen TV, Bukhara rugs, you name it. But it's not enough. You must have visitors to give them a grand tour, pointing out each acquisition, each embellishment, till they are bug-eyed, open mouthed and badly in need of a drink. You want to see the shocked envy in their eyes, the shame that they will never live upto your accomplishments. And as the euphoria hits you and you gloat, you think it's all been worthwhile... the blood, sweat and tears of thankless labour. It is exactly the same in this outer space context. We need these visitors because we want to show off our skyscrapers, our malls, our freeways, our futuristic gadgets and computers, our miracle drugs, genetic engineering, our space shuttles and cruise missiles. We want to

take them on this grand tour, dropping the broad hint that after starting out life swinging from trees, and gobbling bananas, this indeed is a vast improvement. They will be certainly impressed, but I hope not enough to abduct all of us to outer space.

Developing further this theory, however far fetched it may sound (outer space is indeed very far, remember), I also wish to say that mankind is obsessed with the idea of encountering an alien species. Not knowing about denizens of the great beyond is sheer torture. He is sick of hearing that nebulous species is intelligent. How intelligent is an alien? Man wants to pit his wits against an extra-terrestrial. He is spoiling for a fight. He is bored witless of watching twenty-four hour cable television and being nagged by his wife. He is sick of excluding sugar from his diet and

in. The earth presents no new challenges, no new discoveries. Everything, from the highest peak to the deepest fathom of the sea has been probed and catalogued. There is a danger of all of us collectively dying of boredom. If, in some parts of India, the marriage of frogs brings about the rains, perhaps it is time to wed some other species to get those spacecraft landing, and little green men walking up to us, beeping and buzzing "Take us to your leader".

There is yet another reason why we've got to get those aliens visiting. It's an issue as old as mankind – yes, you've got it. The gender wars. Mankind has fought countless bloody wars and won decisive victories. Empires have grown and crumbled out of these skirmishes and maps have changed. Wamongers have been brought to justice and treaties have been signed. But, the gender wars continue, with

way she can't figure out why he forgets they have an anniversary. They react to the same situation in a completely different way. She is described as the weaker sex, but it is he who faints when she is giving birth. One human has also penned a persuasive book on how they hail from different planets. It's only because there is no oxygen, water and beauty parlours in other planets that women are forced to herd with the male species on the same planet. But I digress. All these details lead one to the conclusion that in this never ending war of attrition between the sexes, we need a referee, an arbiter, a tribunal if you please, an impartial observer who is neither man nor woman and has no interest in siding with either gender. This space referee would help us complain about each other, pick on each other's faults and generally let off steam. But who would want to be in that hapless referee's shoes? You side with one gender, and the other comes at you hammer and tongs. I have a sneaky feeling aliens have stayed away precisely because they don't want to get caught in this gender war crossfire. If that is so, their superior intelligence is beyond question.

Talking of UFO sightings, why is it that such reports come mainly from America? Is it that the Americans are on some hidden agenda, to prove that they are the Chosen Ones in alien landings? Would UFOs and the little green men choose this highly over-rated country just for Starbucks coffee and McDonald burgers? Hello, is anyone going to tell the ETs you get it in other countries too, thanks to a thing called global franchise? Or is it because Americans are friendlier than the British, less hoity toity, not stiff upper lipped? Is it because the Americans bathe more often than the French, and are less voluble than the Italians? The aliens need to be told that after the Lehman Brothers fiasco, Americans are in no mood to play host. And it certainly is a very dimwitted idea to land in such a thinly populated country. They'll have to walk miles to reach civilisation. India is the best bet, with people crowding around you without breathing space, and touts offering to get you a taxi and hotel.

In conclusion, we are sadly divided by our idea of the alien. While one group sees them as potential invaders, ruthless and armed with scary weapons of death, the other group sees them as pacifists, benign and highly evolved, absorbed in music, poetry... Aw, come on. They sound like the sixties hippies in batik kurtas, tripping so high on LSD that they landed right in outer space. Where's the thrill of encountering such a namby-pamby species? Give me the mean Martian any day, with evil, metallic voices and incinerating infrared eyes. They could really spice up our existence... or end it forever. I have to sign off now. Gulp, I think I am having a panic attack.

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## 3rd eye

Indrani Raimedhi



# We are not alone...?

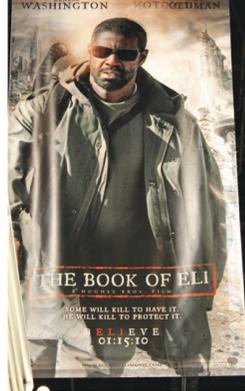
sadly examining his beer belly in the mirror. He is sick of politics and traffic jams. He wants something big, something so humungous that it will rap him awake. He won't mind if Martians attack. He even imagines working under a Morgan Freeman type of figure to save the planet, all fitted out in combat gear and laser guns. It would certainly be more macho than toting up sales figures at his dreary work cab-

no end in sight. Men and women continue to be sharply polarised and yet, inexplicably, there is so much fraternising with the enemy (check it out this Valentine's Day). Men and women can't live with each other. Problem is, they can't live without each other too. They are always snooping and sniping at each other. A man will never understand why a woman needs to match her handbag with her outfit, in much the same

## The Book Of Eli

Cast: Gary Oldman, Denzel Washington  
Director: Albert Hughes, Allen Hughes

In the not-too-distant future, some 30 years after the final war, a solitary man walks across the wasteland that was once America. Empty cities, broken highways, seared earth—all around him, the marks of catastrophic destruction. There is no civilisation here, no law. The roads belong to gangs that would murder a man for his shoes, an ounce of water...or for nothing at all. But they're no match for this traveller.



A warrior not by choice but necessity, Eli (Denzel Washington) seeks only peace but, if challenged, will cut his attackers down before they realise their fatal mistake. It's not his life he guards so fiercely but his hope for the future; a hope he has carried and protected for 30 years and is determined to realise. Driven by this commitment and guided by his belief in something greater than himself, Eli does what he must to survive—and continue.

Only one other man in this ruined world understands the power Eli holds, and is determined to make it his own: Carnegie (Gary Oldman), the self-appointed despot of a makeshift town of thieves and gunmen. Meanwhile, Carnegie's adopted daughter, Solara (Mila Kunis), is fascinated by Eli for another reason: the glimpse he offers of what may exist beyond her stepfather's domain. But neither will find it easy to deter him. Nothing—and no one—can stand in his way. Eli must keep moving to fulfil his destiny and bring help to a ravaged humanity.

## Extraordinary measures

Cast: Harrison Ford, Brendan Fraser, Keri Russell  
Director: Tom Vaughan

**E**xtraordinary Measures is inspired by the true story of John Crowley, a man who defied conventional wisdom and great odds, and risked his family's future to pursue a cure

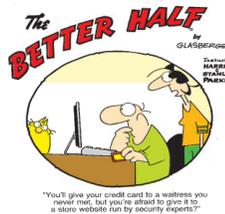
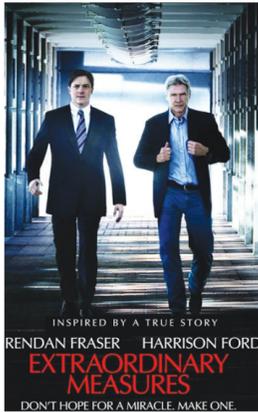
**MOVIE WATCH**

Vikram Barkataki

**TOP 10 Hollywood**

- Avatar
- The Book Of Eli
- The Lovely Bones
- Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel
- Sherlock Holmes
- The Spy Next Door
- It's Complicated
- Leap Year
- The Blind Side
- Up in the Air

for his children's life threatening disease. From his working class roots, John Crowley (Brendan Fraser) has finally begun to taste success in corporate America. Supported by his beautiful wife, Aileen (Keri Russell), and their three children, John is on the fast track. But just as his career is taking off, Crowley walks away from it all when his two youngest children, are diagnosed with a fatal disease. With Aileen by his side, harnessing all of his skill and determination, Crowley teams up with a brilliant, but unappreciated and unconventional scientist, Dr. Robert Stonehill (Harrison Ford), to form a bio-tech company focused on developing a life-saving drug.



**GLASBERGEN 12-13**

"My doctor said to start my weightlifting program gradually. Today I'm going to practice my grunting!"

"I'm my own worst enemy, so I got a restraining order against myself."

"Legs walk to the kitchen, arms tear open the bag, jaw crushes the potato chips... snacking is the perfect workout!"

"I'm on the Swiss Cheese, Donut, Bagel and Onion Ring Diet, but I'm only allowed to eat the holes."

# FORECAST

FEBRUARY 1 - 7, 2010

**ARIES (MAR 21-APR 19)**  
On Monday and Tuesday, take things slowly, but don't take them so slowly that you obsess over matters that may turn out to be inconsequential. Your intentions are good, and you genuinely care about the other people involved, as you will demonstrate midweek. On Friday, charm someone out of a bad mood with a razzle-dazzle tap dance. But keep the tap dancing to a minimum this weekend — your feet need a break, and your comfortable bed is just waiting for you.

**TAURUS (APR 20-May 20)**  
Monday and Tuesday are smooth sailing on the river of love. Wednesday through Friday return you to dry land, delirious and nostalgic, and more excited about life — even its drab, everyday aspects — than you have been in a while. Laziness figures somewhat this week, but try not to let it get the best of you. This weekend is, no doubt, related in some way to your love life, relationships and marriage.

**GEMINI (MAY 21-JUN 21)**  
Try as you might, communication doesn't come easily on Monday and Tuesday — especially with your family. Wednesday, when you can turn your attention on the romantic interest in your life, you're more successful in the forming-words-to-express-what-you-mean department. Thursday and Friday, you are exceedingly busy and exceedingly happy you have someone to dream about in the back of your mind. But Saturday and Sunday, you're really not thinking about anyone but yourself. Health and well-being figure strongly.

**CANCER (JUN 22-JUL 22)**  
If you narrow your gaze at the start of the week, the important clues will stand out. Home issues dominate your life Wednesday through Friday — not just related to house chores, but also to neighbours, roommates, landlords, pets, etc. Your domestic bliss may be challenged. This weekend is marked by intensity. You are worried about a financial transaction. Be sure you understand the terms before you sign.

**LEO (JUL 23-AUG 22)**  
You are devoted to straightening out your finances at the beginning of the week. Keep the profligate adventures to a minimum. Wednesday is as good an illustration as ever — your friends are not for sale, and they are what you love most about your life. Thursday and Friday are friend-filled as well. This weekend, an insight about your life starts you into looking at everything with still more depth.

**VIRGO (AUG 23-SEPT 22)**  
Tidying up your desk, or your car, or your house on Monday will give your brain some time to put things in order. It may be a more productive task than you realise. Tuesday is a fine day to marshal the troops for a new operation, but watch unnecessary expenditures on Wednesday and Thursday. Indecision stalls you on Friday, and you spend the weekend in fact-finding mode.

**LIBRA (SEPT 23-OCT 22)**  
Your magic quality this week (especially at the beginning of the week) is your utter inability to hold a grudge. There are too many important things to think about. Plus, on Tuesday especially, you're a wonderful listener. Wednesday through Friday, use those listening skills to be a better flirt. The second half of the week is charged with beauty and social energy, but the weekend finds you a bit moody. Make a date with the couch, an eye mask and some relaxing music.

**SCORPIO (OCT 23-NOV 21)**  
The information you receive on Monday helps you immensely. On Tuesday, if you have to make a detour to cover a friend's back, you certainly should. The second half of the week, decisions come less easily than you may have anticipated — a word to the wise: Sometimes giving in is an awesome solution, but this weekend you are bolstered by new confidence and by the respect everyone else has in you. Why let them down?

**SAGITTARIUS (NOV 22-DEC 21)**  
Others may drive you crazy on Monday and Tuesday, but why let on? Save your lectures for situations that matter. By Wednesday, you will be heralded as everyone's favourite person to be around. Thursday and Friday bring still more compliments on the social front. Nevertheless, something deep down is bugging you. Spend the weekend sorting it out.

**CAPRICORN (DEC 22-JAN 19)**  
A long-distance phone call brings you more relevant news at the beginning of the week, than you ever expected. And, if the person on the other end is an old pal, the interaction will leave you feeling grounded and content. Wednesday, it's time to leave the ground. But don't expect to make headway immediately — new missions take time. Thursday and Friday are all work and almost no direct pay-off. This weekend, your friends are so good for you; they prove what's possible.

**AQUARIUS (JAN 20-FEB 18)**  
You might as well take care of the details from the outset, because you'll have to take care of them at some point. Not everyone may be on the same page as you, and the fault may be your own. Clear your throat and spell it out. Wednesday, a chance interaction with someone you barely know will lead to a revelation — you love it when that happens — and Thursday and Friday, as your mind spins, you may reflexively go into aloof mode. Resist doing this, as connections are key right now. This weekend, career ambitions preoccupy you, but your crazy social life distracts you at night.

**PISCES (FEB 19-MAR 20)**  
Your analytical mind can be too much for a friend seeking solace. Sometimes, the best course of action is to listen intently. If advice is solicited, follow your intuition. The second half of the week, you'll be collecting favours — and maybe even money — from others. This weekend, don't succumb to the sharks. You are a beautiful fish all your own.