

The Practice Of Concentration

You'll have to trust me that these are wonderful exercises for helping improve your life. You'll probably find yourself thinking some of this stuff is whacked out and couldn't possibly apply to anything meaningful. But it all works to help you control your mind, your will, and your emotions, all of which will make you a super-human being.

All I ask is that you diligently do the drills if you want to get the full effect. Something that helps focus your emotions or your sense of smell may not seem important for what you think of as a muscle memory task, but you'll be surprised what kind of synergy is at work in these exercises. Plus if you do the work you will see tremendous benefits in almost anything you set your mind on to do.

Most of the text comes from "The Power of Concentration" by Theron Q. Dumont written in 1918. I have updated some really stilted language, added some of my own commentary, and tightened up some lengthy passages. Beyond that it stands as originally written.

Warmups and Commentary

Select some thought, and see how long you can hold your mind on it. It is well to have a clock at first and keep track of the time. If you decide to think about health, you can get a great deal of good from your thinking besides developing concentration. Think of health as being the greatest blessing there is in the world. Don't let any other thought drift in. Just the moment one starts to intrude make it get out.

Make it a daily habit of concentrating on this thought for, say, ten minutes. Practice until you can hold it to the exclusion of everything else.

You will find it of great value to center your thoughts on health. Regardless of how you feel, see yourself as you would like to be and be blind to everything else. You will find it hard at first to ignore your pains, soreness, exhaustion, etc. if you have any, but after a short while you will begin to shut out these negative thoughts and see yourself as you want to be. Each time you concentrate you form a more perfect image of what your goal is, and you move that much closer to attaining it on a regular basis.

I want to impress upon your mind that the habit of forming mental images is of the greatest value. It has always been used by successful men of all ages, but few realize its full importance. Do you know you are continually acting according to the images you form?

If you allow yourself to mold negative images you unconsciously build a negative result. When you think internally of poverty, weakness, disease, fear, missing shots, or whatever, your outer world will tend to express just that.

In deep concentration you become linked with the creative spirit of the universe, and the creative energy then flows through you, vitalizing your creations into form. This is a most desired state. Naturally it requires a good deal of training to reach this state,

but once you do, it becomes easier each time to do, and in the course of time you can become possessed of power which was unknown to you before.

The rays of the sun when focused through a magnifying glass produce a heat many times greater than its scattered rays. This is just as true of attention. Scatter it and you get ordinary results. But center it upon one thing and you secure much better results. When you focus your attention upon an object your every action, voluntary and involuntary, is in the direction of attaining that object.

If you will focus your energies upon a thing to the exclusion of everything else, you generate the force that can bring you what you want. When you focus your thought, you increase its strength. The exercises that follow are tedious and monotonous at times, but very useful. The monotony is on purpose. If you will persist in them you will find they are very valuable as they increase your powers of concentration.

When once you have learned to master your thoughts, you will be able to change them just as easily as you change your clothes. Remember, the real requisite of centering is to be able to shut out outside thoughts—anything foreign to the subject.

Now, in order to control your intention first gain control over the body. This must be brought under direct control of the mind, and the mind under the control of the will. Your will is strong enough to do anything you wish, but you must realize that it is. The mind can be greatly strengthened by being brought under the direct influence of the will. When the mind is properly strengthened by the impulse of the will it becomes a more powerful transmitter of thought, because it has more force.

The best time to concentrate is after reading something that is inspiring as you are then mentally and spiritually lifted up. Then is the time you are ready for deep concentration. If you are in your room first see that your windows are up and the air is good. Lie down flat on your bed without a pillow. See that every muscle is relaxed. Now breathe slowly, filling the lungs comfortably full of fresh air; hold this as long as you can without straining yourself; then exhale slowly. Exhale in an easy, rhythmic way. Breathe this way for five minutes, letting the Divine Breath flow through you, which will cleanse and rejuvenate every cell of brain and body.

You are then ready to proceed. Now think how quiet and relaxed you are. You can become enthusiastic over your condition. Just think of yourself as getting ready to receive knowledge that is far greater than you have ever received before. Now relax and let the spirit work in and through you and assist you to accomplish what you wish. Don't let any doubts or fears enter. Just feel that what you wish is going to manifest. Just feel it already has, in reality it has, for just the minute you wish a thing to be done it manifests in the thought world.

Whenever you concentrate believe it is a success. Keep up this feeling and allow nothing to interfere, and you will soon find you have become the master of concentration. You will find that this practice will be of wonderful value to you, and that rapidly you will be learning to accomplish anything you undertake.

It will be necessary to first train the body to obey the commands of the mind. I want

you to gain control of your muscular movements. The following exercise is especially good in assisting you to acquire perfect control of the muscles.

Exercise 1

Sit in a comfortable chair and see how still you can keep. This is not as easy as it seems. You will have to center your attention on sitting still. Watch and see that you are not making any involuntary muscular movements. By a little practice you will find you are able to sit still without a movement of the muscles for fifteen minutes. At first I advise sitting in a relaxed position for five minutes. After you are able to keep perfectly still, increase the time to ten minutes and then to fifteen. This is as long as it is necessary. But never strain yourself to keep still. You must be relaxed completely. You will find this habit of relaxing is very good.

Exercise 2

Sit in a chair with your head up and your chin out, shoulders back. Raise your right arm until it is on the level with your shoulder, pointing to your right. Look around, with head only, and fix your gaze on your fingers, and keep the arm perfectly still for one minute. Do the same exercise with left arm. When you are able to keep the arm perfectly steady, increase the time until you are able to do this five minutes with each arm. Turn the palm of the hand downward when it is outstretched, as this is the easiest position. If you will keep your eyes fixed on the tips of the fingers you will be able to tell if you are keeping your arm perfectly still.

Exercise 3

Fill a small glass full of water, and grasp it by the fingers; put the arm directly in front of you. Now fix the eyes upon the glass and try to keep the arm so steady that no movement will be noticeable. Do this first for one moment and then increase it to five. Do the exercise with first one arm and then the other.

Exercise 4

Watch yourself during the day and see that your muscles do not become tense or strained. See how easy and relaxed you can keep yourself. See how poised you can be at all times. Cultivate a self-poised manner, instead of a nervous, strained appearance. This mental feeling will improve your carriage and demeanor.

Stop all useless gestures and movements of the body. These mean that you have not proper control over your body. After you have acquired this control, notice how "ill-at-ease" people are that have not gained this control. I have just been sizing up a salesman that has just left me. Part of his body kept moving all the time. I just felt like saying to him, "Do you know how much a better impression you would make if you would just speak with your voice instead of trying to express what you say with your whole body?" Just watch those that interview you and see how they lack poise.

Get rid of any habit you have of twitching or jerking any part of your body. You will

find you make many involuntary movements. You can quickly stop any of these by merely centering your attention on the thought, "I will not." If you are in the habit of letting noises upset you, just exercise control; when the door slams, or something falls, etc., just think of these as exercises in self-control. You will find many exercises like this in your daily routine.

The purpose of the above exercises is to gain control over the involuntary muscular movement making your actions entirely voluntary. The following exercises are arranged to bring your voluntary muscles under the control of the will, so that your mental forces may control your muscular movements.

Exercise 5

Move your chair up to a table, placing your hands upon it, clenching the fists, keeping the back of the hand on the table, the thumb doubled over the fingers. Now fix your gaze upon the fist for a while, then gradually extend the thumb, keeping your whole attention fixed upon the act, just as if it were a matter of great importance. Then gradually extend your first finger, then your second and so on until you open the rest. Then reverse the process, closing first the last one opened and then the rest, and finally you will have the fist again in the original position with the thumb closed over the finger. Do this exercise with the left hand.

Keep up this exercise first with one hand and then the other until you have done it five times with each hand. In a few days you can increase it to ten times. The chances are that the above exercises will at first make you "tired," but it is important for you to practice these monotonous exercises so you can train your attention. It also gives you control over your muscular movement. The attention, of course, must be kept closely on each movement of the hand; if it is not, you of course lose the value of the exercise.

Exercise 6

Put the right hand on knee, both fingers and thumb closed, except the first finger, which points out in front of you. Then move the finger slowly from side to side, keeping the attention fixed upon the end of the finger. You can make up a variety of exercises like these. It is good training to plan out different ones.

The main point you should keep in mind is that the exercise should be simple and that the attention should be firmly fixed upon the moving part of the body. You will find your attention will not want to be controlled and will try to drift to something more interesting. This is just where these exercises are of value, and you must control your attention and see it is held in the right place and does not wander away.

You may think these exercises very simple and of no value, but I promise you in a short time you will notice that you have a much better control over your muscular movements, carriage and demeanor, and you will find that you have greatly improved your power of attention, and can center your thoughts on what you do, which of course will be very valuable.

No matter what you may be doing, imagine it is your chief object in life. Imagine you

are not interested in anything else in the world but what you are doing. Do not let your attention get away from the work you are at. Your attention will no doubt be rebellious, but control it and do not let it control you. When once you conquer the rebellious attention you have achieved a greater victory than you can realize at the time. Many times afterwards you will be thankful you have learned to concentrate your closest attention upon the object at hand.

Let no day go by without practicing concentrating on some familiar object that is uninteresting. Never choose an interesting object, as it requires less attention. The less interesting it is the better exercise it will be. After a little practice you will find you can center your attention on uninteresting subjects at will.

The person that can concentrate can gain full control over his body and mind and be the master of his inclinations; not their slave. When you can control yourself you can control others. You can develop a Will that will make you a giant compared with the man that lacks Will Power. Try out your Will Power in different ways until you have it under such control that just as soon as you decide to do a thing you go ahead and do it. Never be satisfied with the "I did fairly well" spirit, but put forward your best efforts. Be satisfied with nothing else. When you have gained this you are the man you were intended to be.

Exercise 7

Increasing the Sense of Smell

When you take a walk, or drive in the country, or pass a flower garden, concentrate on the odor of flowers and plants. See how many different kinds you can detect. Then choose one particular kind and try to sense only this. You will find that this strongly intensifies the sense of smell. This differentiation requires, however, a peculiarly attentive attitude. When sense of smell is being developed, you should not only shut out from the mind every thought but that of odor, but you should also shut out cognizance of every odor save that upon which your mind, for the time, is concentrated.

You will find plenty of opportunity for exercises for developing the sense of smell. When you are out in the air, be on the alert for the different odors. You will find the air laden with all kinds, but let your concentration upon the one selected be such that a scent of its fragrance in after years will vividly recall the circumstances of this exercise.

The object of these exercises is to develop concentrated attention, and you will find that you can, through their practice, control your mind and direct your thoughts just the same as you can your arm.

Exercise 8

Going Within

Lie down and thoroughly relax your muscles. Concentrate on the beating of your heart. Do not pay any attention to anything else. Think how this great organ is pumping the blood to every part of the body; try to actually picture the blood leaving

the great reservoir and going in one stream right down to the toes. Picture another going down the arms to the tips of the fingers. After a little practice you can actually feel the blood passing through your system.

If, at any time, you feel weak in any part of the body, will that an extra supply of blood shall go there. For instance, if your eyes feel tired, picture the blood coming from the heart, passing up through the head and out to the eyes. You can wonderfully increase your strength by this exercise. Men have been able to gain such control over the heart that they have actually stopped it from beating for five minutes. This, however, is not without danger, and is not to be practiced by the novice.

I have found the following a very helpful exercise to take just before going to bed and on rising in the morning: Say to yourself,

“Every cell in my body thrills with life; every part of my body is strong and healthy.”

I have known a number of people to greatly improve their health in this way. You become what you picture yourself to be. If your mind thinks of sickness in connection with self you will be sick. If you imagine yourself in strong, vigorous health, the image will be realized. You will be healthy.

Exercise 9 Inducing Sleep

What is known as the water method is, although very simple, very effective in inducing sleep. Put a full glass of clear water on a table in your sleeping room. Sit in a chair beside the table and gaze into the glass of water and think how calm it is. Then picture yourself, getting into just as calm a state. In a short time you will find the nerves becoming quiet and you will be able to go to sleep. Sometimes it is good to picture yourself becoming drowsy to induce sleep, and, again, the most persistent insomnia has been overcome by one thinking of himself as some inanimate object—for instance, a hollow log in the depths of the cool, quiet forest.

Those who are troubled with insomnia will find these sleep exercises that quiet the nerves very effective. Just keep the idea in your mind that there is no difficulty in going to sleep; banish all fear of insomnia. Practice these exercises and you will sleep.

By this time you should have awakened to the possibilities of concentration and have become aware of the important part it plays in your life.

Exercise 10 Saving Energy and Appearance

Watch yourself and see if you are not in the habit of moving your hands, thumping something with your fingers or twirling your mustache. Some have the habit of keeping their feet going, as, for instance, tapping them on the floor. Practice standing before a mirror and see if you are in the habit of frowning or causing wrinkles to appear in the forehead. Watch others and see how they needlessly twist their faces in talking. Any movement of the face that causes the skin to wrinkle will eventually cause

a permanent wrinkle. As the face is like a piece of silk, you can make a fold in it a number of times and it will straighten out of itself, but, if you continue to make a fold in it, it will in time be impossible to remove it.

Stopping the Worry Habit.

If you are in the habit of worrying over the merest trifles, just concentrate on this a few minutes and see how needless it is; if you are also in the habit of becoming irritable or nervous at the least little thing, check yourself instantly when you feel yourself becoming so; start to breathe deeply; say, "I will not be so weak; I am master of myself," and you will quickly overcome your condition.

Exercise 11 **Controlling Your Temper**

If you are one of those that flare up at the slightest "provocation" and never try to control yourself, just think this over a minute. Does it do you any good? Do you gain anything by it? Doesn't it put you out of poise for some time? Don't you know that this grows on you and will eventually make you despised by all that have any dealings with you?

Everyone makes mistakes and, instead of becoming angry at their perpetrators, just say to them, "Be more careful next time." This thought will be impressed on them and they will be more careful. But, if you continually complain about their making a mistake, the thought of a mistake is impressed on them and they will be more likely to make mistakes in the future. All lack of self-control can be conquered if you will but learn to concentrate.

Many of you that read this may think you are not guilty of either of these faults, but if you will carefully watch yourself you will probably find that you are, and, if so, you will be greatly helped by repeating this affirmation each morning:

"I am going to try today not to make a useless gesture or to worry over trifles, or become nervous or irritable. I intend to be calm, and, no matter what may be the circumstances, I will control myself. Henceforth I resolve to be free from all signs that show lack of self-control."

At night quickly review your actions during the day and see how fully you realized your aim. At first you will, of course, have to plead guilty of violation a few times, but keep on, and you will soon find that you can live up to your ideal. After you have once gained self-control, however, don't relinquish it. For some time it will still be necessary to repeat the affirmation in the morning and square your conduct with it in the evening. Keep up the good work until, at last, the habit of self-control is so firmly fixed that you could not break it even though you tried.

I have had many persons tell me that this affirmation and daily review made a wonderful difference in their lives. You, too, will notice the difference if you live up to these instructions.

Exercise 12 Talking To The Mirror

Make two marks on your mirror on a level with your eyes, and think of them as two human eyes looking into yours. Your eyes will probably blink a little at first. Do not move your head, but stand erect. Concentrate all your thoughts on keeping your head perfectly still. Do not let another thought come into your mind. Then, still keeping the head, eyes and body still, think that you look like a reliable man or woman should; like a person that anyone would have confidence in. Do not let your appearance be such as to justify the remark, "I don't like his appearance. I don't believe he can be trusted."

While standing before the mirror practice deep breathing. See that there is plenty of fresh air in the room, and that you are literally feasting on it. You will find that, as it permeates every cell, your timidity will disappear. It has been replaced by a sense of peace and power. The one that stands up like a man and has control over the muscles of his face and eyes always commands attention. In his conversation, he can better impress those with whom he comes in contact.

He acquires a feeling of calmness and strength that causes opposition to melt away before it. Three minutes a day is long enough for the practice of this exercise. Look at the clock before you commence the exercise, and if you find you can prolong the exercise for more than five minutes do so.

Exercise 13 Controlling Sensations

Think how you would feel if you were cool; then how you would feel if you were cold; again, how you would feel if it were freezing. In this state you would be shivering all over. Now think of just the opposite conditions; construct such a vivid image of heat that you are able to experience the sensation of heat even in the coldest atmosphere. It is possible to train your imagination until you do this, and it can then be turned to practical account in making undesirable conditions bearable.

You can think of many very good exercises like this. For instance, if you feel yourself getting hungry or thirsty and for any reason you do not wish to eat, do not think of how hungry or thirsty you are, but just visualize yourself as finishing a hearty meal. Again, when you experience pain, do not increase it by thinking about it, but do something to divert your attention, and the pain will seem to decrease. If you will start practicing along this line systematically you will soon gain a wonderful control over the things that affect your physical comfort.

Exercise 14 Alternate Breathing

Sit in a chair with a high back in upright position. Press one finger against the right nostril. Now take a long, deep breath, drawing the breath in gently as you count ten; then expel the breath through the right nostril as you count ten. Repeat this exercise

with the opposite nostril. This exercise should be done at least twenty times at each sitting.

Exercise 15 **Controlling Desires**

Desire which is one of the hardest forces to control will furnish you with excellent exercises in concentration. It seems natural to want to tell others what you know; but, by learning to control these desires, you can wonderfully strengthen your powers of concentration. Remember, you have all you can do to attend to your own business. Do not waste your time in thinking of others or in gossiping about them.

If from your own observation, you learn something about another person that is detrimental keep it to yourself. Your opinion may afterwards turn out to be wrong anyway, but whether right or wrong you have strengthened your will by controlling your desire to communicate your views.

If you hear good news resist the desire to tell it to the first person you meet, and you will be benefited thereby. It will require the concentration of all your powers of resistance to prohibit the desire to tell. After you feel that you have complete control over your desires you can then tell your news. But you must be able to suppress the desire to communicate the news until you are fully ready to tell it. Persons that do not possess this power of control over desires are apt to tell things that they should not, thereby often involving both themselves and others in needless trouble. If you are in the habit of getting excited when you hear unpleasant news, just control yourself and receive it without any exclamation of surprise. Say to yourself, "Nothing is going to cause me to lose my self control. You will find from experience that this self-control will be worth much to you in business. You will be looked upon as a cool-headed business man, and this in time becomes a valuable business asset. Of course, circumstances alter cases. At times it is necessary to become enthused. But be ever on the lookout for opportunities for the practice of self-control. "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that ruleth a city."

Exercise 16 **Reading**

No one can think without first concentrating his thoughts on the subject in hand. Every man and woman should train himself to think clearly. An excellent exercise is to read some short story, and then write just an abridged statement. Read an article in a newspaper, and see in how few words you can express it. Reading an article to get only the essentials requires the closest concentration. If you are unable to write out what you read, you will know you are weak in concentration. Instead of writing it out you can express it orally if you wish. Go to your room and deliver it as if you were talking to some one. You will find exercises like this of the greatest value in developing concentration and learning to think.

After you have practiced a number of these simple exercises read a book for twenty minutes and then write down what you have read. The chances are that at first you will not remember very many details, but with a little practice you will be able to write

a very good account of what you have read. The closer the concentration the more accurate the account will be.

It is a good idea when time is limited to read only a short sentence and then try to write it down word for word. When you are able to do this, read two or more sentences and treat similarly. The practice will produce very good results if you keep it up until the habit is fixed.

If you will just utilize your spare time in practicing exercises like those suggested you can gain wonderful powers of concentration. You will find that in order to remember every word in a sentence you must keep out every thought but that which you wish to remember, and this power of inhibition alone will more than compensate for the trouble of the exercise. Of course, success in all of the above depends largely upon cultivating, through the closest concentration, the power to image or picture what you read.

Exercise 17

Overcoming Bad Habits

If you have a habit that you want to get rid of shut your eyes and imagine that your real self is standing before you. Now try the power of affirmation; say to yourself, "You are not a weakling; you can stop this habit if you want to. This habit is bad, and you want to break it."

Just imagine that you are some one else giving this advice. This is very valuable practice. You, in time, see yourself as others see you. The habit loses its power over you and you are free.

If you will just form the mental image of controlling yourself as another person might, you will take a delight in breaking bad habits. I have known a number of men to break themselves of drinking in this way.

Exercise 18

Watching Your Watch

Sit in a chair and place a clock with a second hand on the table. Follow the second hand with your eyes as it goes around. Keep this up for five minutes, thinking of nothing else but the second hand. This is a very good exercise when you only have a few minutes to spare if you are able to keep every other thought in the stream of consciousness subordinate to it. As there is little that is particularly interesting about the second hand. It is hard to do this, but in the extra effort of will power required to make it successful lies its value. Always try to keep as still as possible during these exercises. In this way you can gain control over nerves and this quieting effect is very good for them.

Exercise 19

Inspiring Faith

A belief in the power to concentrate is of course very important. I purposely did not put this exercise in the beginning where it naturally belongs because I wanted you to know that you could learn to concentrate. If you have practiced the above exercises you have now developed this concentration power to a considerable extent and therefore you have faith in the power of concentration, but you can still become a much stronger believer in it.

We will say that you have some desire or wish you want fulfilled, or that you need some special advice. You first clearly picture what is wanted and then you concentrate on getting it. Have absolute faith that your desires will be realized. Believe it will be fulfilled according to your belief. Never attempt to analyze the belief. You don't care anything about the whys and wherefores. You want to gain the thing you desire, and if you concentrate on it in the right way you will get it.

A caution. Never think you will not succeed, but picture what is wanted as already yours, and yours it will surely be.

Self-Distrust.

Do you ever feel distrust in yourself? If you do just ask yourself which self do I mistrust? Then say: "My higher self cannot be affected." Then think of the wonderful powers of the higher self. There is a way to overcome all difficulties, and it is a delight for the human soul to do so. Instead of wasting precious thought-force by dreading or fearing a disagreeable interview or event, instead devote the time and concentrated thought in how to make the best of the interview or event and you will find that it will not be as unpleasant as you thought it would be.

Most of our troubles are but imaginary, and it is the mental habit of so dreading them that really acts as a magnet in attracting those that really do come. Your evil circumstances are created or attracted by your own negative fears and wrong thoughts, and are a means of teaching you to triumph over all evils, by discovering that which is inherent within yourself.

Shoot for the Stars,

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