

Concentration

Date / Time

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None of the Above

PURPOSE/EFFECTS

One of the hallmarks of modern life is the proliferation of distractions. As media become more pervasive, and media connections more ubiquitous, time away from distractions becomes ever harder to find. Previously, people were content to sit in restaurants, or stand in line, without a television screen to stare at. Now these have become standard. The result of all this, and many other causes, is that people find it increasingly difficult to focus their minds.

Concentration is a necessary human skill. It makes proper thinking possible, increases intelligence, and allows a person to calm down and achieve their goals more effectively. A concentrated mind is like a laser beam, able to use all its powers in a single direction to great effect.

Concentration is critical to many human endeavors. Being able to listen to another person, for example, in a compassionate and connected manner requires being able to shut out distractions. The experience of making love can be greatly enhanced when one is not, for example, thinking about other things.

Concentration allows a person to stop being a “reaction machine” or “robot,” simply responding to stimuli, and instead to become more thoughtful, self-directed, and confident.

METHOD

Summary:

Think about one thing. Every time you get distracted, return to that one thing.

Long Version

1. Find an object on which to concentrate. This can be a physical object, like a pebble or a feather. Or it can be a mental object like a particular idea. It could even be, say, your homework.
2. Cut off any sources of distraction. These include, but are not limited to, telephones, emails, computers, music, television, and so forth. Turn all of these off during your concentration practice.

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Concentration

3. Begin your period of concentration by mentally reminding yourself what you are concentrating on.
4. Now begin to concentrate. If your concentration object is an external object, this may mean looking at it. If it is a mental object, then think about it. If it is your homework, then do it now.
5. Each time your mind (or eyes) wander from your concentration object, bring it back to the object. It is important to do this very gently and without judgment.
6. Repeat this process of coming back to the concentration object for as long as you wish, or until your homework is done.

HISTORY

Cultures worldwide have developed concentration practices for both spiritual and practical reasons.

Concentration is called dharana in Hinduism, and samadhi or shamatha in Buddhism. It is considered to be a key skill for meditation.

CAUTIONS

Concentration can at first seem to trigger a lot of anxiety. This is, however, not the fault of the concentration practice. Rather, it happens because many people use distraction to avoid feeling emotions. Then when the distractions are removed, a tremendous amount of ambient, unprocessed emotions (i.e. emotions you are feeling but were unaware of feeling) are present. So it is not the practice of concentration that is causing anxiety, but instead it is the habit of distracting ourselves from our emotions. This may be the root cause of much inability to focus and concentrate. If that is the case, try meditating on emotions.

NOTES

Concentration is an interesting thing. It is a very general ability. That means developing concentration in one area will help you concentrate in ALL areas. So, for example, if you learn to concentrate on a particular idea, it not only helps you think about that idea (which would be very limited), but actually helps you to concentrate on anything, which is very generally useful for everything! It's like lifting weights. It doesn't just make you strong for lifting weights, but strong for anything else you want to do!

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Concentration and meditation are not the same thing, although they are related. Meditation (usually) requires concentration, but also requires relaxation or equanimity.

thank you for your mindfulness practice

May I continue to look deeply into
my mind, my heart and body.

May I see things and meet things
AS THEY ARE

and may this clear and sustained knowing free me
**FOR THE SAKE OF
ALL BEINGS.**

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