

CONCENTRATION IN PRAYER – Distance Learning Course

SUPPLEMENTARY PART

Introduction

Concentration means directing one's attention on whatever one intends. We all have a natural ability to concentrate. Have you noticed how difficult it is to get young children's attention when they are playing? Do you remember the time when you were completely engrossed in an interesting novel, a super film, and an exciting match? You were concentrating then. At this very moment you are reading these words, you are concentrating.

It helps to know what it is like to concentrate, so that you can get back to that state of being.

Activity: Think back to a time when you concentrated on something. It does not matter what you were doing; it could be you were working or having fun.

- What was the situation? What were you doing?
- How do you know you were concentrating?
- What did it feel like to concentrate? How was your body? What went on in your mind?

Poor Concentration

When people say that they can't concentrate, it usually means that they cannot stay focused on one thing for as long as they would like. Most of us experience lapses in concentration every day. We are not usually concerned about it; we may not even notice these lapses in concentration. They only become a problem when we find that we cannot get things done as quickly as we would like, or when they cause us to make mistakes.

You do not concentrate when you allow your environment to distract you, and/or your thoughts and feelings to interrupt you. Your thoughts are scattered; your mind jumps from one thing to another. It helps to learn and to practice concentration strategies, to harness your mind, so that it works at your will. If you know the causes of your poor concentration, you can learn to control these factors.

Activity: List as many factors as you can think of that could disrupt your concentration.

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Factors that may cause Poor Concentration

Lack of concentration is one of the frequent complaints among students. Distraction is a major cause of poor concentration. There are two types of distractions: external and internal.

External Distractions

External distractions are related to the physical environment of your study area. Once you have identified these distractions, it is often easy to deal with them. Some of the common external distractions are:

- Noise; conversations
- Inappropriate furniture; inadequate lighting
- Interruption from other people; telephone
- Television
- Work: paid or unpaid; housework
- The Internet; email

Internal Distractions

Internal distractions are related to you: your body, your thoughts and your emotions. Some of them can be easily dealt with once they are identified. Others can be managed with practice and/or with a little help. Some of the common internal distractions are:

- Hunger; tiredness; illness
- Lack of motivation; boredom; lack of interest
- Personal worries; stress; anxiety
- Negative thinking
- Daydreaming
- Lack of organization; dyslexia

Concentration and Your Body

Your ability to concentrate, to study at your optimal level, depends on your **entire body** being healthy. The pressure of deadlines and expectations may lead you to ignore the needs of your body. However, the more you look after and respect your body, the more your body will do for you.

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The body needs adequate nourishment, rest, exercise and sleep.

- Needless to say, a **healthy, balanced** diet is a must. Take time to enjoy your food; use mealtime to unwind.
- Avoid eating a big meal before a study session. Too much food will send your body into a 'rest' mode. On the other hand, don't starve yourself either. **Frequent small meals** are best.
- A sudden high intake of sugar will cause your blood sugar level to rise and then drop sharply. Consequently, you may feel tired, drowsy and have difficulties in concentrating. Glucose tablets and sugary food are for physical activities; they are not so good for mental work. For snacks, try savories, fruit or nuts.
- Drink **plenty of water** during a study session, especially when you feel sluggish.
- Caffeine may help you to stay awake, but it can increase your anxiety - use it in moderation.
- Choose an **exercise** that you enjoy. Regular exercise can improve your concentration.
- Your body needs to **rest and relax** periodically every day. Regular breaks are essential for good concentration and memory. (See below on concentration span).
- **Regular** bedtimes discourage insomnia. If you must cut down on sleep, try to go to bed at your regular time, but get up earlier instead.
- There is some research evidence to support the theory that **catnaps** promote concentration and memory.
- Do not associate your bed with work by studying on your bed. Your body will get confused as to whether the bed is for work or for relaxing.

Each time when you study, plan to use your body to help you to concentrate.

- Choose a chair that supports your back. It should be comfortable, but not too comfortable. Just like an athlete during a performance, your body should be relaxed, so that all your energy goes to where it matters - your brain.
- Have everything you need on the desk. Put away what you do not need for the study session. Seeing reminders of other assessments or domestic bills may increase your anxiety and distract you.
- Ensure that you have adequate, preferably natural, light.
- Study according to your body clock. Are you sharpest in the morning or at the evening? Schedule your most difficult materials when you are mentally at your best, and schedule the easier ones when you are mentally less efficient.
- Know and respect your concentration span, which will vary from hour to hour and from day to day.

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Activity:

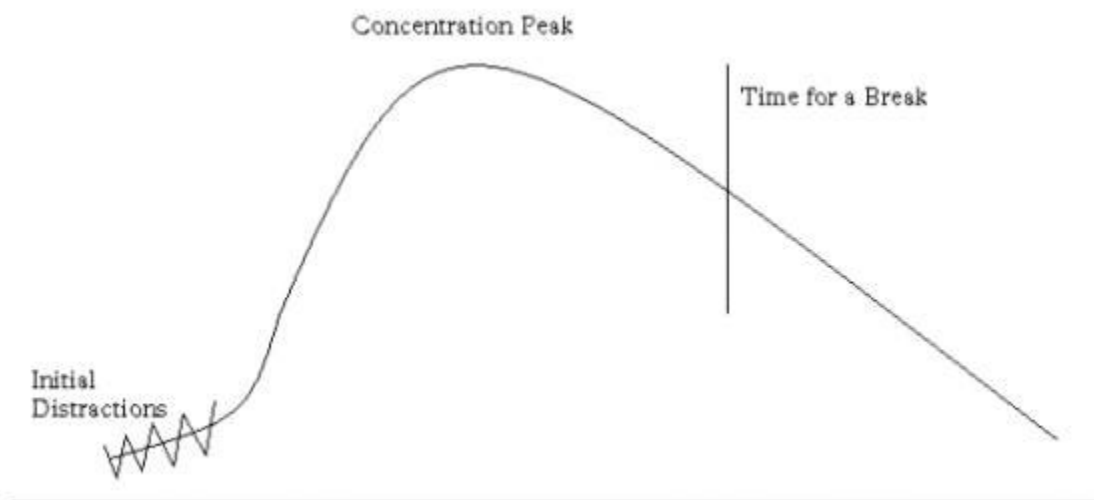
- List three things that you are doing to take care of yourself to help your concentration.
- List three things that you can do, but are not doing, to help your concentration.

How to Maintain Concentration

At the beginning of a study period, you probably take a little time to settle down into your work. Try to encourage your concentration to kick in quickly with conditioning.

Get into Good Habits

- Study at the same time and at the same place, devoted to study only. This helps you to associate the time and place with studying and concentrating. You will find that you get into a habit of studying as soon as you sit down.
- Likewise, you can carry out a small ritual at the start of every study session, such as taking out a figurine, wearing your study cap, or putting up a sign. This helps to tune your body into a study mode when you carry out the ritual. It also serves to tell others that you are studying and that you should not be disturbed. Do not choose an activity, such as reading your email or checking the stock market, that may lead you to procrastinate or distract you.



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Prepare your Mind

- Avoid exciting activities just before you start to study.
- At the beginning of a study period, spend a few minutes to calm and relax your mind and body. (Try 'Focus on Your Breath' exercise, below.)
- Be positive! Believe in your ability to overcome any challenges.

Approach Study Effectively

- Spend a little time to plan what you are going to work on. Be precise and realistic. 'I am going to work on my assessment' is not very helpful. 'I am going to spend the next two hours gathering notes on commercial contracts for my assessment. I'll work on chapter two of this book first, and if I have time, I'll start on chapter five' am much better.
- Break down your work into small manageable chunks, and then focus on a smaller task. Writing a paragraph is not as scary as writing an essay.

Be Active

- Vary your activities to keep your mind from wandering: make notes, highlight, underline, ask yourself questions, prepare questions for discussion, associate new material with old material, visualize a concept, etc.
- Change the subject/topic you are studying every two hours or so to maintain your interest.

Take Regular Breaks

It is important to take a break before you feel tired and lose your concentration completely. Regular breaks at least once an hour helps to sustain your concentration. If the work is not going too well and you have difficulties in concentrating, you may need a long break and go back to it later. Alternatively, you can try working for shorter period of time, such as 20 minutes, and have more frequent short breaks.

Oxygenate

- When you sit for long periods, gravity draws the blood to the lower part of your body. When you take a break, take a few deep breaths and get more oxygen to your brain: try walking around and doing some light stretching for a few minutes. It will help to release tension in your body, and help your circulation. (Try 'Focus on Your Breath' exercise.)

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- If you have been working on a computer, relax your eyes by focusing at a distance, and relieve your eyes from the glare of the computer by covering your eyes with the palm of your hands for a moment.

Review - The Secret of Good Memory

The secret of good memory is frequent review and recall. As the saying goes, "If you don't use it, you lose it." After a break, spend a moment to remind yourself what you worked on. Going over the main points is sufficient. Do the same at the end of a study session, and recap on the main points. The feeling that you have achieved something will help to motivate you, which in turn will help with your concentration.

If you want to retain certain things in your memory, recall them, look them up or use them on a weekly basis until they have sunk into your memory. Thereafter you only need to refresh your memory every few weeks.

Reward Yourself

Praise yourself for your accomplishments. Give yourself a reward when you have completed a task, such as recreation that you had put off in order to study. This reinforces your behavior, and you will be more likely to study and concentrate again. Note that if you have been using a computer, do something other than watching the television to give your eyes a rest from the glare.

Train Your Wandering Mind

Below are some simple techniques for improving concentration. They are designed for most situations, so that you can practice unobtrusively no matter what is happening around you. Just like learning any skill, improving your concentration takes lots of practice. You probably would not notice any changes within a few days. However, if you persevere and practice these techniques every day, several times a day, you will notice an improvement in your concentration within a few weeks. You may even notice an increased sense of well-being.

Be Here Now

Whenever you notice your mind wanders away from what you are supposed to focus on, simply say to yourself

Be here now

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and gently bring your attention back to where you want it. If your mind wanders again, repeat

Be here now

and bring your attention back.

Do not tell yourself off or tell yourself to concentrate. When you are thinking about not concentrating, you are not concentrating.

Do not try to push any particular thought out of your mind. When you are trying not to think about something, your mind is occupied and you are not concentrating. Just let the thought go like a breeze, say to yourself "Be here now", and return to the present.

You might find your mind wanders hundreds of times in a day initially. This is normal. When you have practiced this technique for a period of time, you are likely to find that you stay focused for longer.

Let It Be

This technique is good for situations, which you have to live with, such as children playing, cooking smell, television next door, the humming from your computer, or traffic jam. When you notice that something is distracting or irritating you, make a conscious decision to

Let it be

Try not to let the situation irritate you; do not wish it to change. Allow it just to be. It might help to take a deep breath and breathe out slowly. As you breathe out, let go any tension and irritation you might have. Say to yourself

Be here now

and bring your attention back to where you want it.

Focus on Your Breath

This is a basic concentration practice. It is also the first step of relaxation exercises. You can use it at the beginning of a study session to put yourself in a good frame of mind, and when you take a break.

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- Take a long breath, and breathe out in a slow but comfortable pace.
- Take another long breath, and breathe out slowly.
- Breathe in your natural breathing rhythm.
- Focus on your breathing for a moment. Be aware that you are breathing in and breathing out.
- As you breathe out, let go any tension you may have in your body.
- If you find yourself distracted in any way, such as thinking about something else, simply let it go and return to your breathing.
- Focus on your breathing for as long as you like.

Activity: Spend a few minutes to try out 'Focus on Your Breath' exercise. If you are using a computer, turn away from the monitor. How do you feel after the exercise?

More Useful Strategies for Concentration

The following strategies are good for dealing with some of the internal distractions you might experience.

Worry or Daydreaming Time

If your mind is side-tracked into worrying or daydreaming during the day, then set aside a specific time each day to think about the things that keep interrupting your concentration. Research has shown that people, who use a worry time, worry 35 per cent less of the time within four weeks.

- Set a specific time each day, say 6pm to 6.30pm, but not just before you go to bed.
- During the day, when your concentration is distracted by thoughts or worries, tell yourself to think about it at your special time.
- Let the thought go; use the 'Be here now' technique.
- Be sure that you keep the promise with yourself. Enjoy worrying or daydreaming when the time comes! Stop when the time is up, till the next day.

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Be a Nurturing Parent to Yourself

A nurturing parent would

- praise your accomplishment, no matter how small it is,
- tell you not to worry or feel anxiety unnecessarily,
- help you to put things into perspective,
- encourage you to carry on when the going gets tough,
- tell you that it is human to make mistakes, and more..

Get your inner nurturing parent to manage some of your internal distractions, and to motivate yourself.

One Thing at a Time

If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by all the things you have to do in your life, remember that you can only do one thing at a time. **Prioritize.** Work down your list and do the most important one first. Focus on what you have done, the positives, not what you have not done. Ask your inner nurturing parent to help you.

Ask for Help

If all the self-help is not enough, talk with someone who can help: your tutor, a friend, a counselor, and a specialist.

Check your Medication

Some prescribed medication can affect concentration and memory. If you are on medication and you think that it might be affecting you, discuss it with your doctor.

Next Steps

Activity: There are many factors which can affect concentration, but many of which can be dealt with quickly and easily, others require commitment to practice.

- What can you do immediately to help with your concentration?
- What are you prepared to do in the long term to help with your concentration?

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GENERAL RULES TO CONCENTRATION

OBJECT OF CONCENTRATION: The object of your concentration exercise can be anything: a coin, a stamp, a candle, a flower, or quartz crystals are all good. Each of those have enough detail to help keep your mind focused, but are not so complex as to lead you away from the purpose of the exercises. After you develop proficiency in concentrating on simple physical objects you can begin using intellectual topics, abstract ideas, and more complex objects.

PLACE FOR EXERCISES: In the beginning its best to find a quiet place where you can be undisturbed. This could be your own room, a mosque, or any other private place. You might find it useful to use earplugs such as those made of wax and cotton, which are available in most drug stores. As you gain proficiency noises and the environment will not distract you and you will be able to exercise anywhere.

REGULARITY AND PERSISTENCE: Regularity and persistence in exercising is extremely important. Do not miss even one day. Ideally the exercises should be practiced twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening, and if possible at the same time every day.

DURATION OF EXERCISES: Don't demand too much of yourself at the beginning. Start with exercises lasting one minute or less, but do them regularly and correctly. The exercises may be difficult and boring in the beginning, but they will become fun when they become habit and you realize the positive effects they have on you in terms of better mental functioning.

INCREASE DURATION OF EXERCISES: When you gain some proficiency with a one minute exercise gradually increase the duration of the exercise by an additional one minute per day. When you are able to think intensively about any selected object or topic without interruption for 15 minutes you will have made tremendous progress.

The 15-minute time period should be maintained when it is reached. An effort should then be made to improve the quality of your concentration and to keep improving it until no disruptive thoughts appear during this period.

It's best to get an inexpensive digital kitchen timer to measure the length of your exercises. These can be set in one minute increments and make no distracting noise from the time they are activated to the time they ring.

BODY POSITION: During the exercises your body should be erect, with your spine, neck and head forming one straight line. You may find it helpful to do these exercises sitting in a straight-backed chair, your feet flat on the floor, and your hands resting on your knees.

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BODY RELAXATION: Your body relaxation must be complete, except for the muscles, which hold your body in the appropriate position. Make an effort to relax every muscle before starting the exercises. If, during the exercise, you notice that any muscle is getting tense, immediately relax it then return to the exercise. Although you need to be completely physically relaxed, you should not fall asleep and your mind should be alert. The rule is that your body should be relaxed, and your mind intensively active.

QUIETING THE MIND: This is done before the exercises begin. You do this by (1) *excursion of thoughts* and (2) *rhythmic breathing*.

(1) *Excursion of Thoughts:* Before starting an exercise relax your mind and let your thoughts come and go as they please. It's important to keep a distance from your thoughts and just observe them as you would observe the flow of a river from a bridge. Don't get involved and carried away by passing thoughts, just observe them indifferently and they will slow down after a couple of minutes.

(2) *Rhythmic Breathing:* It's very good to breath rhythmically before the actual exercises in concentration are started. Your heartbeat should be used as a measure. The rule is that your inhalation should equal your exhalation in duration, and the pauses between inhalation and exhalation, as well as those between exhalation and inhalation, should last half as long as the inhalation. For example inhale for 6 heart beats, hold your breath for 3 heart beats, then exhale for 6 heart beats, hold your breath for three heart beats, and repeat. This should be whatever length of time is comfortable to you since the actual length of time is not important, but the regularity and pattern is. It's important that your breathing be done effortless and without any strain.

During inhalation think and imagine how air is entering and filling your lungs, during retention imagine how your lungs absorb it, and during exhalation visualize how it smoothly leaves your lungs.

These exercises should calm your mind and let you create a temporary distance from distracting everyday events.

The number of rhythmic breaths taken can vary from 6 to 20 depending on your mood and the available time.

DECISION: As you begin your exercise session think to yourself, "I shall concentrate on this (name of object) for (amount of time). I shall permit no other thoughts to enter my mind. If any unrelated thought enters my mine I will immediately send it away and concentrate on this (name of object). Every day I am concentrating better and better. I shall concentrate on this (name of object) for (amount of time) and nothing will distract me."

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SPECIFIC EXERCISES:

1. CONCENTRATION ON A SIMPLE OBJECT. Select your object, for example a 25-cent coin. Assume an appropriate body position, relax, perform the excursion of thoughts and rhythmic breathing, and make the decision that you will concentrate for your selected period of time on that quarter.

Now start thinking about the quarter. Think about its shape, color, material from which it is made, how it is made, what can be bought for it, and so forth. Keep an uninterrupted flow of thoughts directed at the quarter and send away any unrelated thought that may appear. Simply keep returning your mind to the quarter as soon as it wanders away. You will see some inscriptions on one side of the quarter; "Liberty", "In God We Trust", and the date. Think for a while about the meaning of the words, but don't permit yourself to be carried away too far from the quarter. When you think about "Liberty" deliberately turn your attention on that concept and think about what it means for a moment, then deliberately turn your attention to the second inscription, and so forth. Then spend some time thinking about the image of George Washington; then again turn your attention to the coin.

The second task is to direct your attention to the form of the coin in order to be able to visualize it later with closed eyes. Look at it without strain, calmly and attentively. Try to memorize its form. Then close your eyes and try to imagine it. At first you probably won't succeed in visualizing it clearly. Therefore, open your eyes again and look at the quarter to get a better impression of the parts that you were not able to visualize. Repeat this process until the time for the exercise is expired.

You may find it useful to concentrate on only a part of the coin in order to get a good picture of it, and then to go to the next part. For example you can try to imagine clearly Washington's forehead, then his nose, mouth, and so forth, and finally combine all those parts together in a clear image of his face.

If you find that you run out of thoughts about the object before the time has expired, you can elaborate on the thoughts which you already covered by going over them in greater detail. You may also just keep thinking the same thoughts over again. The purpose of the exercise is to keep your mind on the object, not to produce some extraordinary thoughts.

Use the same object in all of your future exercises until you are able to create a clear and B image of it and keep that image vividly in your mind. You may spend a considerable amount of time on this, but you will find that the same can be accomplished on other objects in a very short time because you will have trained your mind to concentrate.

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2. CONCENTRATION ON READING: This may be done anytime, in addition to the above exercise. Take a small passage or a sentence. Decide that you will concentrate on it for, say, 10 minutes. Read it slowly and get the exact meaning of each word and each sentence. Imagine what the writer wanted to say and understand it. If some scene is described, imagine it clearly. Then think about it. Analyze what the writer stated. Is he correct? Do you agree with him? What do you think about it? What are your experiences regarding the same topic. Be critical. What were the writer's motives? Why do you disagree with him? The important thing is that you again keep an uninterrupted flow of thoughts directed at the passage for a determined period of time. The passage should be short. The idea of the exercise is to develop the habit of sharp thinking and not to acquire knowledge by reading a lot in a fast manner.

3. COUNTING EXERCISES: This exercise can be executed anyplace. You can simply close your eyes and imagine that you are in front of a chalkboard. Imagine that you have a piece of chalk in one hand and a sponge in the other. Now imagine that you are writing the number 1 on the board. Visualize it written on the board as clearly as you can. Then erase it with the sponge. Again imagine the empty chalkboard and then write the number 2. Again erase it after you have formed a clear picture of the number. Repeat this process with the numbers 3, 4 and so forth. You will find that every day you will be able to visualize more numbers without distracting thoughts. Continue with this exercise daily until you reach at least 100 without distracting thoughts. What is important here is clear visualization of the numbers and an uninterrupted flow of that imagery and thinking.

4. DELIBERATE DISTRACTION OF THOUGHTS: The idea behind this practice is to train your mind to learn voluntary distraction of thoughts. You can train yourself at any time with this practice, as much as you want during the day. It is good to do it at least several times per day.

The exercise is quite simple. You consciously distract your attention from something that attracts it. For example, some pleasant or unpleasant sight attracts you or stimulates your imagination. Say to yourself, "I don't want to think about it." and then focus your attention on something else. The same can be done with any other stimuli, such as: refusing to listen to some pleasant music, distracting yourself from some memory, or some fantasy activity. This exercise should be considered as simply another tool for training the mind.

The psychological term for this process is called "suppression." It is a source of strength for the person who is able to do it. The conscious process of suppression has nothing to do with "repression" which is an unconscious process by which traumatic or unpleasant experiences are kept from emerging to the surface of consciousness.

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5. DO EVERYTHING WITH FULL ATTENTION: This is very important. You must strive to be concentrated on everything you do. The effect of exercises will be lost if you do one thing and think about something else. There must be harmony between doing and thinking. That is, if you do something you should give it full attention: you should not think about other things, or of something that you will do in the future, or something that happened to you. For example: if you shave, think only of shaving; if you read something, think only of what you are reading; if you eat, give full attention to eating, and so forth. It may take a long time to develop this habit, but it is a very necessary one.

You will find that after you practice an exercise of concentration in the morning you will be more attentive and concentrate on everything you do during the day. Your mind will develop what psychologists call a "set" of concentration, or a concentrated attitude, which will persist a long time after the exercise.

FINAL COMMENTS

The above instructions should be read, reread, studied and committed to memory. They may look complicated, but they are actually simple to perform in practice. Although they are simple, proper performance will require great persistence until the habit is developed. Regular practice is a lesson in self-discipline, which will strengthen your ego, and aid in the rapid development of your ability to concentrate and visualize. You will find that regular practice of each one of these exercises will increase your abilities to practice the other ones.

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1. Intention should be in the heart. That is the real place of intention. Intend that you are praying to Allah Almighty and only for His sake. Focus on the nature of the prayer you are making. Is it an obligatory prayer or a supererogatory one? Are you praying Fajr, Zuhr, and `Asr, Maghrib or Isha' and any other prayer. How many prayer units or *rak`hs* you intend to pray and whether you are praying alone or with the congregation? The clearer you are in your intention; the better will be your attention and concentration.
2. Perform your prayers on their appointed times without delay.
3. Perform your prayer according to the *sunnah* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him and his family).
4. Stand upright. Keep your eyes open and look at the place of your prostration or *sujud* while you are standing. In bowing or *ruku`* look at your feet, in *sujud* towards the floor and in the sitting position at your lap or your hands.
5. Do not play with your hands and do not rub your face, body or clothes. Be as quiet and still as possible.
6. Think yourself in the Presence of Allah and Allah is facing you.
7. Do not rush your prayers (i.e., to perform your prayers in haste). Rather, you ought to perform every part of your prayer with care and in a relaxed manner.
8. Recite the words carefully. Pay attention to what you are saying. You should learn the meaning of various supplications or *du`a's* in prayer.
9. Implore Allah earnestly to help you in your prayers and to accept your prayers. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to say, "***Allahumma a`inni `ala dhikrika wa shukrika wa husn `ibadatika (O Allah help me in remembering You, in thanking You and in worshipping You in the best way).***"
10. Finally, remember that *haram* (forbidden) food, *haram* income and sins take away the joy and concentration in prayer. Keep yourself pure and clean as much as you can.

Allah Almighty knows best.

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1. Reserve a small portion of the most pleasant time of day for focus practice.
2. Always practice at the same time, place and set of circumstances each and every day.
3. Always do a few deep breathing exercises before practice. It is necessary to keep an adequate supply of oxygen going to ones brain in order to improve speed ability during the practice session.
4. It is necessary to consume a diet of nutritious food in a correct amino acid balance in order for the focusing practice to be successful. The utilization of certain nutrients may enhance learning, while the use of others may impede such learning. Medications, drugs, food and life style will have an effect on learning some good, some bad.
5. Practice focusing with two or more short sessions daily. Distributed practice has been proven to be more successful.
6. Always control your ambient surroundings. Your family should understand the purpose of your practice sessions. Do everything necessary to shut out outside disturbances.
7. Alternate your practice session by doing focusing exercises and then going into trance to reprogram the deeper levels of your mind.

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The Visual Countdown Technique

VISUAL COUNTDOWN TECHNIQUE

1. Get comfortable where you will not be disturbed for about 20 minutes. 2. See the number 10 in your minds eye and at the same time say to yourself: “I now control my thoughts”. (Don’t vocalize or say the number in your mind). Just say the sentence, but ONLY SEE or visualize the number. 3. Next see the number 9 in your mind and say the sentence again “I now control my thoughts” 4. Continue seeing the numbers downwards but always say the same sentence until you reach 1. 5. When you reach 1, start again at 20, and do the same thing until you reach 1 again. 6. When you reach 1 again, start at 30, and do the same thing. Continue this pattern until you have seen all the numbers from 30 to 1, 40 to 1 and so on all the way from 100 to 1 and repeated the same sentence “I now control my thoughts” every time you see each number. The desired performance level is completing the whole exercise starting at 10-to-1, and ending at 100-to-1 without drifting off or losing the thread of the visual countdown.

IN SUMMARY

1. Get comfortable.

2-6. Visual countdown from:

10 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 10 times

20 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 20 times

30 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 30 times

40 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 40 times

50 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 50 times

60 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 60 times

70 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 70 times

80 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 80 times

90 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 90 times

100 to 1 + “I now control my thoughts” 100 times

It may be difficult at first, and may take some time, but when you have reached the desired performance level the whole exercise will take less than 10 minutes.

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Concentration Exercises

Exercise 1

Take a book and count the words in any one paragraph. Count them again to be sure that you have counted them correctly. Start with one paragraph and when it becomes easier, count the words in a whole page. Perform the counting mentally and only with your eyes, without pointing your finger at each word.

Exercise 2

Count backwards in your mind from one hundred to one.

Exercise 3

Count in your mind from one hundred to one, skipping each three numbers, that is 100, 97, 94, etc.

Exercise 4

Choose an inspiring word, or just a simple sound, and repeat it silently in your mind for five minutes. When your mind can concentrate more easily, try to reach ten minutes of uninterrupted concentration.

Exercise 5

Take a fruit, an apple for example, and look at it from all sides. Concentrate your attention on it and examine it from all sides. Devote the whole session to concentrating on it. Do not be carried away by irrelevant thoughts that arise. Stay with the apple. It could be any other fruit. Look at it and do not think about the shop where you bought it, about the way it is grown, its nutritive value etc, only about the object in front of you. Just look at it, see it, smell it and touch it.

Exercise 6

This is the same as exercise number 5, only that this time you visualize the fruit with your eyes closed. Start by performing again exercise number 5 for five minutes, and then do this one. Try to see, feel, taste, smell the fruit in your imagination. Try to see a clear and well defined image. If difficulties arise open your eyes, look at the fruit, close them again and continue the exercise.

Exercise 7

Take a small simple object such as a spoon, a fork, or a glass. Concentrate on one of these objects. Watch the object from all sides without any verbalization, that is, with no words in your mind. Just watch the object without thinking with words about it.

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SUPPLEMENTARY PART

Exercise 8

After becoming proficient in the above exercises, you can come to this exercise. Draw a small geometrical figure, about three inches in size, such as a triangle, a rectangular or a circle, paint it with any color you wish, and concentrate on it. You should see only the figure, nothing else. Only the figure exists for you now, with no unrelated thoughts or any distractions. Try not to think with words during the exercise. Watch the figure in front of you and that's it. Try not to strain your eyes.

Exercise 9

The same as number 8, only this time visualize the figure with the eyes closed. As before, if you forget how the figure looks like, open your eyes for a few seconds and watch the figure and then close your eyes and continue with the exercise.

Exercise 10

The same as above in number 9 but the eyes open.

Exercise 11

Try for at least five minutes, to stay without thoughts. This exercise is to be attempted only after all the previous ones have been performed successfully. The previous exercises, if practiced correctly, will endow you with the ability to impose silence on your thoughts. In time it will become easier and easier.