



# *Concentration: a Key to all Possibilities?*

*“There is nothing in the human or even in the superhuman field,  
to which the power of concentration is not the key.”*

The Mother



## **WHAT IS CONCENTRATION?**

“Concentration is a gathering together of the consciousness and either centralising at one point or turning on a single object...”<sup>1</sup>

## **IMPORTANCE OF CONCENTRATION**

“The mind, if not controlled, is something wavering and imprecise. If one doesn’t have the habit of concentrating it upon something, it goes on wandering all the time. It goes on without a stop anywhere and wanders into a world of vagueness. And then, when one wants to fix one’s attention, it hurts! There is a little effort there, like this: “Oh! how tiring it is, it hurts!” So one does not do it. And one lives in a kind of cloud. And your head is like a cloud; it’s like that, most brains are like clouds: there is no precision, no exactitude, no clarity, it is hazy — vague and hazy. You have impressions rather than a knowledge of things. You live in an approximation, and you can keep within you all sorts of contradictory ideas made up mostly of impressions, sensations, feelings, emotions — all sorts of things like that which have very little to do with thought and... which are just vague ramblings.

But if you want to succeed in having a precise, concrete, clear, definite thought on a certain subject, you must make an effort, gather yourself together, hold yourself firm, concentrate. And the first time you do it, it literally hurts, it is tiring ! But if you don’t make a habit of it, all your life you will be living in a state of irresolution. And when it comes to practical things, when you are faced with — for, in spite of everything, one is always faced with — a number of problems to solve, of a very practical kind, well, instead of being able to take up the elements of the problem, to put them all face to face, look at the question from every side, and rising above and seeing the solution, instead of that you will be tossed about in the swirls of something grey and uncertain, and it will be like so many spiders running around in your head — but you won’t succeed in catching the thing.

I am speaking of the simplest of problems, you know; I am not speaking of deciding the fate of the world or humanity, or even of a country — nothing of the kind. I am speaking of the problems of your daily life, of every day. They become something quite woolly.



Well, it is to avoid this that you are told, when your brain is in course of being formed, “Instead of letting it be shaped by such habits and qualities, try to give it a little exactitude, precision, capacity of concentration, of choosing, deciding, putting things in order, try to use your reason.”<sup>2</sup>

“Moreover, whatever you may want to do in life, one thing is absolutely indispensable and at the basis of everything, the capacity of concentrating the attention. If you are able to gather together the rays of attention and consciousness on one point and can maintain this concentration with a persistent will, nothing can resist it — whatever it may be, from the most material physical development to the highest spiritual one. But this discipline must be followed in a constant and, it may be said, imperturbable way; not that you should always be concentrated on the same thing — that’s not what I mean, I mean learning to concentrate.

And materially, for studies, sports, all physical or mental development, it is absolutely indispensable. And the value of an individual is proportionate to the value of his attention.

And from the spiritual point of view it is still more important. There is no spiritual obstacle which can resist a penetrating power of concentration. For instance, the discovery of the psychic being, union with the inner Divine, opening to the higher spheres, all can be obtained by an intense and obstinate power of concentration — but one must learn how to do it.

There is nothing in the human or even in the superhuman field, to which the power of concentration is not the key.

You can be the best athlete, you can be the best student, you can be an artistic, literary or scientific genius, you can be the greatest saint with that faculty. And everyone has in himself a tiny little beginning of it — it is given to everybody, but people do not cultivate it.”<sup>3</sup>

## HOW TO DEVELOP CONCENTRATION

“...concentration can be developed exactly like the muscles; one may follow different systems, different methods of training. Today we know that the most pitiful weakling, for example, can with discipline become as strong as anyone else. One should not have a will which flickers out like a candle.

The will, concentration must be cultivated; it is a question of method, of regular exercise. If you will, you can.

But the thought “What’s the use?” must not come in to weaken the will. The idea that one is born with a certain character and can do nothing about it is a stupidity.”<sup>4</sup>

## EXERCISES TO DEVELOP CONCENTRATION FOR 8-12 YEARS OLD

“It cannot be gainsaid that what most impedes mental progress in the child is the constant dispersion of his thoughts. His thought flutters hither and thither like a butterfly and a great effort is required on his part to fix it. Yet the capacity is latent in him for when you succeed in making him interested, he is capable of a good deal of attention. It is therefore the skill of the educator that will gradually make the child capable of sustained effort of attention and a faculty of more and more complete absorption in the work while it is being done. All means are good that can develop this faculty of attention: they can be utilised according to need and circumstances, from games up to rewards. But it is the psychological action that is most important and the sovereign means is to rouse in the child interest in the thing that one wishes to teach, the taste for work, the will to progress. To love to learn is the most precious gift that one can make to a child: to love to learn always and everywhere. Let all circumstances, all happenings in life be occasions, constantly renewed, for learning more and ever more.

For that, to attention and concentration should be added observation, precision of recording and faithfulness of memory.”<sup>5</sup>

### *1. Developing concentration through observation:*

Observation is the first quality of the mind that needs to be developed. Detailed observation is a great aid in developing concentration. Following is a worksheet that encourages one to observe in detail.

There are many hidden objects in the given picture. Find the objects that are given around the picture, in the given picture. Take a colour pencil and colour those objects in the picture. Could you find all of them!



# A Day on the Farm



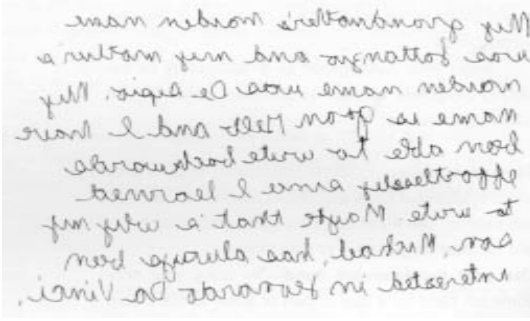
*See p.61 for the answer!*

## ***2. Mirror Exercise: bringing all your attention at one point:***

Take any passage which you enjoy reading. Now place a small mirror in such a way that you can see the reflection of the first sentence in your mirror. Now feel relaxed and bring all your attention on to the reflection. Start observing in

great detail, its thickness, its curve, its style, its bent etc. And now start copying the reflection from the mirror. Make a record, how long you could go. Repeat this exercise and see if you could do it for a longer time. Practise this exercise to increase your concentration.

A Sample of a reflection -



### 3. Concentration through Meditation:

Children can be taught to meditate through creative visualisation. Children can be taught from the very beginning to go within to look for answers and pursue their questions, like ‘who am I’, ‘what do I want to be’, ‘my potentiality’, etc.

A sample of guided introspection:

“There is a secret and beautiful place within all of you. If you want to discover that land of beauty within you, come I’ll take you there. For that you must sit comfortably. Feel your body.. is any part tense or uncomfortable? Take soft and long breaths as though you are inhaling the fragrance of white roses. Just feel the white bird of peace coming down to you and sitting in your mind and body. Remain absolutely calm, quiet, and comfortable. Let no thought or feelings create any wave within you. Now

feel your heart and hear your heart beats till they become louder and louder. Then with each beat you will find a door opening in your heart. Whenever you feel ready just step inside and keep going till you pass through the second, third, and fourth door. And as you pass through all the doors you will come across a room with beautiful treasures in it. You will see different kinds of treasures there, in many different forms, and colours. How are you feeling there... quiet, joyous, peaceful? Feel the space there. Is it warm or cold? What colours do you see? Is anyone calling you? Listen carefully, someone might be calling you softly and wanting to tell you something very special.... Collect everything from there as you might want to bring back the treasures with you. As you come back, watch the way carefully as you might want to go there again to bring back more treasures. Hold all your treasures carefully as you might like to draw and create all you have seen and discovered.

Now it is important to remain quiet, and without talking, otherwise you might lose out some of your treasures. Take a paper and colours and start drawing quietly.”

A follow-up drawing exercise can help the children to remain in that concentrated state with their eyes open.

☞ **Compiled by Ritika Goyal and Aditi**

A kangaroo kept getting out of his enclosure at the zoo. Knowing that he could hop high, the zoo officials put up a ten-foot fence. He was out the next morning, just sauntering around the zoo. A twenty-foot fence was put up. Again he got out.

When the fence was forty feet high, a camel in the next enclosure asked the kangaroo, “How high do you think they’ll go?”

The kangaroo said, “About a thousand feet, unless somebody locks the gate at night!”

<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo, in *How to Cultivate Concentration*, p.6

<sup>2</sup> The Mother, *Collected Works of the Mother*, v.8 pp.182-83

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. v.9 pp.360-61

<sup>4</sup> The Mother, in *How to Cultivate Concentration*, p.18

<sup>5</sup> The Mother, in *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Education*, pp.115-16