



## MODULE FOUR: CONCENTRATION AND MEDITATION EXERCISES

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In this document, we've bundled together with a few concentration and meditation exercises we regularly teach and use. And, don't forget, you can also use the "Clear Water" exercise from Module One (*Wiser Visioning*) as a quick and powerful meditation.

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### ABOUT CONCENTRATION EXERCISES

The goal for practicing concentration is to create a foundation for the control of thinking; to choose what you think at any given moment. So long as you are at the mercy of your stream of consciousness — random and semi-conscious flow of associations and thoughts — your behavior will be also. The concentration exercise is a daily practice of taking charge for a few minutes, deciding what you are going to think about instead of allowing the random play of associations.

Spending a few minutes per day in active concentration can really add up over time. First, you'll see just how much is really going on in your subconscious, most of which is semi-autonomous, like a bad song stuck on repeat. You'll also notice how it crowds your inner space, drowning other possibilities in ways that definitely aren't serving you. Practiced over time, concentration exercises actually help you reclaim that space for fresh insights, more peaceful feelings, and a stronger will. We know this because we use these exercises and have seen their power.

In terms of leadership presence, learning to control our thoughts gradually builds a capacity to pay attention at will, without distraction, in an easy, unforced, active, and calm manner. In ordinary life, our flow of attention is usually not under our control — in fact we all too easily get distracted, or can hold our attention only when watching a movie or playing a video game. Some of us have a hard time reading books for more than a few minutes at a time! Our attention spans, it seems, are growing shorter and shorter. This simple exercise, if done repeatedly (not only once), gradually builds our ability to control our thoughts and attention, and practice greater attentiveness to our inner states, nature, other people, and all manner of situations.

We're going to share two exercises: a deceptively simple counting exercise and an exercise focusing on a small object. These exercises are field and battle-tested, and they really work. Build up to doing a concentration exercise once per day. We guarantee you'll see results!





## CONCENTRATION EXERCISE: COUNTING BACKWARDS

In your mind, count backwards from 30 to 0. You can speak out loud if that helps, but try to count backwards only in your mind. The idea here is while you are counting, don't allow yourself to think of anything else. This is nearly impossible to do, and not get distracted by any other thoughts for the 30 or so seconds it takes. The point here is not that you succeed every time, but that you try. In this, and any other exercise you do, it's the trying that helps you make progress. Success comes at the end of practice, not the beginning!

Try giving a little pause between the numbers, rather like counting at the pace of a second hand on a clock. While you are counting, you may notice that at certain points your attention seems to waver and you are suddenly thinking of something else while counting in the back of your mind. If this happens, simply and without blame or irritation, bring your attention back to the counting. You could also picture the numbers while counting to help you concentrate. When you get to 0, you can choose whether you will repeat the exercise again.

## CONCENTRATION EXERCISE: A SMALL OBJECT

Choose a small, man-made object such as a button, paper clip, or bottle cap. Look at it as it rests on the table in front of you. Close your eyes and try to picture it exactly as you see it. Do not hold the object with your hands, as the additional sensory input can be distracting.

When the mental image of the object begins to fade, open your eyes, and look at the object again, then close your eyes again and recreate the mental image.

Some people have a hard time creating mental pictures. If you're struggling to "see" the object in your mind, think thoughts having only to do with the object. Where did it come from? How is it made? Who made it? Follow these questions in your mind, based on your observation of the thing. Do not let your thoughts stray from the task; when they do, bring them back.

Duration: five minutes. Make notes about your experiences, and if you're with a partner, have a conversation about the exercise. Remember, the goal with this and other mindfulness exercises is NEVER "success." There is no success; there is only "do." To do the exercise is to succeed.





## ABOUT MEDITATION EXERCISES

We introduced meditation in Module Four, and if you don't yet have a meditation practice, today's the perfect day to start one. Don't be intimidated, please — that would be like being intimidated by eating wonderful food or listening to your favorite music. Meditation only seems challenging — at first. Within a very short period of time, you'll find it extremely rewarding, and no more challenging than taking a shower. Meditation is a bath for the mind and soul — and it delivers, as you probably already know, enormous benefits to those who practice regularly.

Our meditation exercises are not based on breathing. Our reasons for this are beyond the scope of this document, but essentially, there are many ways to meditate, and we prefer those that leave breathing to its own wise rhythms while we focus on thoughts that calm, deepen, enlarge, or otherwise move the soul.

We're going to share two meditation exercises, one based on the experience of "peace" and the other on the experience of "gratitude." You may have heard of exercises like these. As with the concentration exercises above, we have used these for many years; we teach these; we know without doubt that they are powerful and effective.

### ABOUT MEDITATION: SOME GENERAL TIPS

One of the goals of a meditation practice is, along with guiding what one is thinking, to guide one's feelings as well. To meditate is to practice thinking and feeling freely and actively, with great clarity, great intention — and with specific content that bears tangible fruit in the inner life.

Our feeling life can be developed, sensitized, deepened, and made into a finely-tuned instrument that is available to us as an organ of perception, giving us deep wisdom and insight into ourselves and others. When you practice such meditations as we are sharing below, you begin to build a "reservoir" of equanimity and positivity that, in the face of chaos and difficulty, becomes an inner resource.





Meditation is the foundation of any inner practice. It is neither a belief nor a faith; it is a practice of harnessing and strengthening one's attention, as if you're kindling a light with which you can more clearly discover and organize the contents of your inner world.

As with all practices, it takes time to change habits, build capacity, and see results. It is a subtle process, and it can take some investment of time and effort before you notice a resulting change in your state of mind. It's also important to remember that the point is not whether you achieve the "purpose" of the meditation you are doing — for instance to evoke a feeling of peace and calm — but that you **try**. It is the intention and, most importantly, the **activity** of your trying that builds capacity. Success has nothing to do with it.

Finally, meditation should be done every day. It has a rhythmical nature, much in the same way that learning any practice requires regularity. Doing meditation every day increases the effectiveness of your efforts over time.

Instructions for two meditations will be found on the following page. For all meditations, you should sit straight up, not lie down. Choose a comfortable chair, but not a comfy chair. In the beginning, you may find yourself on the verge of sleep. Persist and practice; you're falling asleep because you have not yet developed any strength to become quiet without dozing — but you soon will.

Once seated, making sure you are physically as comfortable and relaxed as possible so you can focus, close your eyes and let any inner thoughts, feelings, or activity come to quiet. If there is inner noise, look through it, as through the dirt on a windscreen. In time and with practice, the silence will grow stronger, but in the beginning there will be noise; that's normal and should not discourage you!

The best times to do your meditation is immediately after waking up - sit up in bed for 5 minutes. Then, right before you go to sleep, sit up in bed (don't lie down!) and meditate again for 5 minutes. Because you are building new capacities here - doing it every day, feeling peace, and building your capacity—you need to practice, hence doing it twice a day. You will achieve much more if you do just a little bit every day than if you do it infrequently, no matter for how long at a time.





## THE PEACE EXERCISE

Sit quietly, making sure you are physically comfortable, and think the word: **peace**. Try to summon up what peace feels like, and then see if you can imbue your whole inner world with this feeling. Try to hold onto this feeling for a couple of minutes — as long as possible or until you have gone through a substantial experience of “peace.” You can do this in any number of ways; here are some suggestions:

- Focus on the feeling, an experience: peace. Let go of anxieties, worries, fears, outside concerns. Fill your mood with this single and living idea.
- Think of a place in nature that feels peaceful to you. It could be a quiet meadow of flowers with bees humming and the sun shining at midday. Try to hold onto the feeling that arises in you when thinking of that peaceful scene for as long as possible.
- Think of still water, and a drop falling in, creating ripples that “ripple” the feeling of stillness and peace in the water.
- Imagine being in a quiet garden. The flowers, the grasses, the tiny insects, the wind. Fill your thoughts and feelings with the feeling of peacefulness and rest.

When you are finished, leave your inner space gently, quietly, as if leaving a quiet room. Go about your day as normal. Ordinarily, a meditation like this lasts about 15 minutes — but even five minutes is sufficient if you have no more than that at the moment.

## THE GRATITUDE EXERCISE

Actively practicing gratitude has the power to change your mood from one of stress, fatigue, unhappiness, or discontent to one of gratitude, abundance, joy, and creative force. It can really move mountains; it literally fuels your ability to overcome the odds and to find a way through difficulties in the face of which you might have given up long ago. Practicing gratitude is strength training for the soul. It's a lever that moves the world. It's pretty simple, but goes deep. It also makes the perfect “cool down” moment after other concentration and meditation exercises. Here's how you do it.

Think of three things for which you are grateful. Bring them to mind and heart with a sincere feeling. It could be your kids, your work, the beauty you find in the world, your relationships,





your friends, your parents, your health... you get the idea. The point is to actively *feel* grateful, to intentionally and powerfully feel gratitude.

Sounds easy, right? It is, but its effects on your soul over time are profound. Most prominently is a sense of buoyancy and positivity that is like a shield against negative thoughts. In this sense, in addition to bolstering positivity and resilience, this exercise can give you an experience of holding two different lenses simultaneously.

It might be your habit, for example, to dwell on all the negative possibilities — and to miss the challenges in life that are potential opportunities. Most of us go through life looking through a lens that is more or less habitual, and that lens influences our decisions and perceptions — indeed our whole experience of our life. We are nearly always unaware of the lens, but it's there.

The gratitude exercise gives you a tiny, rhythmical dose that interrupts the unconscious acceptance of the lens through which we analyze and judge the world and ourselves. It gives us greater soul flexibility. When we practice this exercise, we have the inner resources to check our habitual lens, and to adopt one of abundance and "flow" instead.

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