Breathing Exercise To Develop Concentration

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The ability to concentrate is clearly useful in almost all spheres of life. Counselling is no exception. The ability to concentrate on what a client is telling them will enable a counsellor to engage more fully with the client. It will enable them to pick up on more detail and nuance in what the client is saying rather than merely the 'gist' of it. Furthermore, the better we can concentrate the more interested and engaged we will appear to the client. Another way of putting this is that if we cannot concentrate sufficiently on what the client is saying the more difficult we will find it to summarize, paraphrase, and reflect back to the client. We might then run the risk of seeming disinterested and in the worst case lose the client.

This exercise is derived from an introductory Taoist breathing technique. It would typically have been used as a preparatory method for spiritual or martial development, but as the author recognizes, it could be usefully applied to develop the ability to concentrate on whatever we wish. “The big challenge in the preparatory phase of Taoist meditation is learning to concentrate on what you are doing for an extended time without becoming distracted. One of the best ways to achieve this ability is through breathing exercises.” (Relaxing Into Your Being B.K. Frantzis, page 38)

Here is an abridged step-by-step guide to this breathing exercise. It is likely that with regular practice the practitioner will develop the ability to concentrate for longer. Initially you should aim to practice for between five to ten minutes. As you become more comfortable with the exercise you can extend that time providing you do not over-strain or over-extend yourself.

(1) Always breath in and out through your nose unless some medical condition proclives it.

(2) Only ever take the limits of your concentration and breathing to a maximum of 70% of your capacity. Inhale and exhale only 70% of what you could push yourself to do at your most extreme effort.

(3) Stand or sit comfortably with your eyes and mouth closed.

(4) Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth and gently rest it there.

(5) Let your mind become aware of your breath entering your nostrils as you inhale or exhale.

(6) After you can feel the movement of breath inside your nose, let your breath penetrate progressively down the centre line of your body and feel everything along the way. First to the bottom of your throat. Next, to your lungs, your solar plexus and your navel.

(7) A complete breath consists of a smooth inhale and exhale with no holding of the breath whatsoever after the end of either the inhale or the exhale.

(8) Consciously count each of your breaths, first for 2 breaths, then 3, then 4, then 5, then 6, then 7, then 8, then 9 and finally 10 breaths, without losing count or spacing out.

(9) Begin with one set of 10 breaths. Progressively to 2 sets of 10 breaths, then 3 sets, then 4 sets and so on and so forth.

(10) Do your best to breath and count in a relaxed manner without tensing up. While counting do not project into the future.

(11) When you lose count, do not try and pick up where you left off, simply start from the beginning again.