

# THE ART OF THE CONCENTRATED LIFE

## Culture of Concentration

*by Robert Crosbie*

selected excerpts

**Concentration**, or the use of the **attention** in the direction of anything that we wish to do, consistently and persistently, has long been recognized as the most effective means of arriving at the full expression of our powers and energies. The ancients called the power to focus the attention upon a subject or object for as long a time as is required, to the exclusion of every other thought and feeling, ‘**one-pointedness.**’ Concentration is difficult to obtain among us as a people because the keynote of our civilization is, in fact, distraction rather than concentration. Constantly and in every direction, we are having presented to our minds objects and subjects—one thing after another to take our attention and then to pull it off from what we are putting it on. So, our minds have acquired the tendency to jump from one thing to another; to fly to a pleasant idea or to an unpleasant idea, to remain passive. Remaining passive is normally sleep; abnormally, its tendency is towards insanity. That we have become habituated to these distractions and are not able to place our minds on any given thing for any length of time may be easily proved by anyone. If he will sit down and try to think of one single thing, one single object or subject, for only five minutes, he will find even in a very few seconds, perhaps, that he has wandered miles away mentally from the thing he intended to place his mind upon.

We have first to understand what man is, his real nature, what the cause of his present condition, before we can arrive at any pure and true concentration, before we can use the higher mind and the powers that flow from it. For the powers that we use in the body are transmitted powers, drawn, indeed, from our inner spiritual nature, but so disturbed and limited that they are not powerful. We need to know about our minds, and we need to control our minds—that is, the lower mind, occupied with personal and physical things, known in Theosophical phraseology, as Lower Manas. It is this “organ,” the thinking principle, which the ancients said is the great producer of illusion—the great distracter of concentration. For there is no possibility of obtaining real concentration until the possessor of the mind can place it where he will, when he will, and for as long a time as he pleases.

It is written in *The Voice of the Silence*: “*Mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the Slayer.*” The disciple, who is the Real Man—the spiritual man—has to act as such. He has to stop the switchings and fittings of his thinking principle and become calm in that knowledge to which the consideration of his own true nature brings him. The object of all advancement is the realization of the true nature of each one and an employment of the powers which belong to it. What hinders is the thinking principle. We are the thinkers, but we are not what we think. If we think wrongly, then all the results of our thoughts and actions must lead to a wrong conclusion, or to a partial one, at best; but if we realize that we are the thinker, and the creator—the evolver of all the conditions through which we have been, in which we now are, and in which we shall find ourselves in the future—then we have reached the point of view of the Real man, and it is only to the Real man that the power of concentration belongs.

Again, in order to obtain concentration, we need an understanding of the classification of the principles of man. We all have the same principles, the same kinds of substances within us, the same spirit within us. We all contain every element that exists anywhere or in any being. So, too, each one has all the

powers that exist anywhere, in himself, though latent. We are all of the same Source, all parts of one great Whole, all sparks and rays from the Infinite Spirit, or the Absolute Principle.

The second principle is Buddhi, or the acquired wisdom of past lives, as well as this one. It is the cream of all our past experiences. The next principle is Manas, the Higher mind, the real power to think, the creator—not concerned with this physical phase of existence, but with the spirit and the acquired wisdom. These three principles together make the **Real Man—Atma Buddhi-Manas**—and these three each one of us is in his inner nature.

Our Lower Manas is the transitory aspect of the Higher mind; that is, the portion of our attention, our thoughts and feelings addressed to life in a body. But if our thinking faculty is concerned only with the personal self—only with the body— **the powers which reside in the Triad, the Real man, and the acquired wisdom of the past, cannot force themselves through that cloud of illusion.** Lower Manas is the principle of balance. It is the place from which the man in a body either goes up towards his higher nature or down towards his earthly nature, made up of the desires pertaining to sensuous existence. Life about us is throwing its impressions and energies upon us all the time. We are constantly subject to them and connected with them by our ideas, our feelings and emotions, so that there is a constant turmoil going on within that inner mind which makes a barrier to absolute calmness and concentration.

The peculiar power and nature of concentration is that, when complete, the attention can be placed on any subject or object to the exclusion of every other for any given length of time; and this thinking principle—this mind of ours which has been flitting about—can be used to shape itself to the object gazed upon, to the nature of the subject thought about. While the mind takes the shape of the object, we get from that shape the form, the characteristics of every kind that flow from it; and when our inquiry is complete, we are able to know everything that can be known of the subject or object. Such a height of concentration we can easily see is not to be attained by intermittent efforts, but by efforts made from “a firm position assumed” with the end in view. All efforts made from that basis are bound to be of avail; every effort made from the point of view of the spiritual man counts, because it makes the body subservient to the thinking principle.

Other things come about from that true power of concentration. We begin to open up the channels that reach from our brains to the astral body, and from the astral body to the inner man. Then, that which is temporary tends to become a part of that which is eternal. All the planes become synthesized from above down, and all the vestures of the soul which we have evolved from the past become in accord with each other. It is just like the tumblers in a lock: when they work together, the lock works accurately. So we have to bring all the sheaths of the soul into exact accord, and that we can do only by taking the position of the spiritual being and acting as such.

The height of concentration is possible to us, but not on a selfish basis. The concentration of the brain mind stands beside true concentration as a rush light beside the sun. True concentration is, first of all, a position assumed out of regard for the end in view of union with the Higher Self. That is the highest Yoga. Concentration upon the Self is true concentration. And concentration must be attained before we can ever reach that stage where eternal knowledge of every kind is ours to the last degree; before we shall once more resume and wield those powers, which are the heritage of all.

The full article is here: <https://www.theosophy-ult.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Universal-Theosophy-talks-by-Robert-Crosbie.pdf>

# Culture of Concentration

*by W. Q. Judge*

selected excerpts

What they wish to express is, "such culture or practice to be pursued by us as shall enable us, while on earth, to mirror forth the wisdom and fulfil the behests of the self within, which is all wise and all good."

As the use of this term "self-culture" demands a constant explanation either outwardly declared or inwardly assented to, it is wise to discard it altogether and substitute that which will express the practice aimed at without raising a contradiction.

For another reason, also the term should be discarded. That is, that it assumes a certain degree of selfishness, for, if we use it as referring to something that we do only for ourselves, we separate at once between us and the rest of the human brotherhood. Only in one way can we use it without contradiction or without explanation, and that is by admitting we selfishly desire to cultivate ourselves, thus at once running against a prime rule in theosophic life and one so often and so strenuously insisted on, that the idea of personal self must be uprooted. Of course, as we will not negative this rule, we thus again have brought before us the necessity for a term that does not arouse contradictions. That new term should, as nearly as possible, shadow forth the three essential things in the action, that is, the instrument, the act, and the agent, as well as the incitement to action; or knowledge itself, the thing to be known or done, and the person who knows.

This term is CONCENTRATION. In the Indian books it is called Yoga. This is translated also as Union, meaning a union with the Supreme Being, or, as it is otherwise put, "the object of spiritual knowledge is the Supreme Being."

There are two great divisions of Yoga found in the ancient books, and they are called Hatha-Yoga and Raj-Yoga.

The Hatha-Yoga practice represents the mere sacrifice itself, whereas the other kind is the ambrosia arising from the sacrifice, or "the perfection of spiritual cultivation," and that leads to Nirvana. The means for attaining the "perfection of spiritual cultivation" are found in Raj-Yoga, or, as we shall term it for the present, Culture of Concentration.

When concentration is perfected, we are in a position to use the knowledge that is ever within reach but which ordinarily eludes us continually. That which is usually called knowledge is only an intellectual comprehension of the outside, visible forms assumed by certain realities. Take what is called scientific knowledge of minerals and metals. This is merely a classification of material phenomena and an empirical acquisition. It knows what certain minerals and metals are useful for, and what some of their properties are. Gold is known to be pure, soft, yellow, and extremely ductile, and by a series of accidents it has been discovered to be useful in medicine and the arts. But even to this day there is a controversy, not wholly settled, as to whether gold is held mechanically or chemically in crude ore. Similarly with minerals. The crystalline forms are known and classified.

There must be in us a power of discernment, the cultivation of which will enable us to know whatever is desired to be known. That there is such a power is affirmed by teachers of occultism, and the way to acquire it is by cultivating concentration.

It is generally overlooked, or not believed, that the inner man who is the one to have these powers has to grow up to maturity, just as the body has to mature before its organs fulfill their functions fully. By

inner man I do not mean the higher self – the Ishwara before spoken of, but that part of us which is called soul, or astral man, or vehicle, and so on. All these terms are subject to correction and should not be held rigidly to the meanings given by various writers. Let us premise, first, the body now visible; second, the inner man - not the spirit; and third, the spirit itself.

Now while it is quite true that the second—or inner man—has latent all the powers and peculiarities ascribed to the astral body, it is equally true that those powers are, in the generality of persons, still latent or only very partially developed.

This inner being is, so to say, inextricably entangled in the body, cell for cell and fibre for fibre. He exists in the body somewhat in the way the fibre of the mango fruit exists in the mango. In that fruit we have the inside nut with thousands of fine fibres spreading out from it through the yellow pulp around. And as you eat it, there is great difficulty in distinguishing the pulp from the fibre. So that the inner being of which we are speaking cannot do much when away from his body and is always influenced by it. It is not therefore easy to leave the body at will and roam about in the double. The stories we hear of this as being so easily done may be put down to strong imagination, vanity, or other causes. One great cause for error in respect to these doubles is that a clairvoyant is quite likely to mistake a mere picture of the person's thought for the person himself. In fact, among occultists who know the truth, the stepping out of the body at will and moving about the world is regarded as a most difficult feat, and for the reasons above hinted at. Inasmuch as the person is so interwoven with his body, it is absolutely necessary, before he can take his astral form about the country, for him to first carefully extract it, fibre by fibre, from the surrounding pulp of blood, bones, mucous, bile, skin, and flesh. Is this easy? It is neither easy nor quick of accomplishment, nor all done at one operation. It has to be the result of years of careful training and numerous experiments. And it cannot be consciously done until the inner man has developed and cohered into something more than irresponsible and quivering jelly. This development and coherence are gained by perfecting the power of concentration.

Nor is it true, as the matter has been presented to me by experiment and teaching, that even in our sleep we go rushing about the country seeing our friends and enemies or tasting earthly joys at distant points. In all cases where the man has acquired some amount of concentration, it is quite possible that the sleeping body is deserted altogether, but such cases are as yet not in the majority.

Most of us remain quite close to our slumbering forms. It is not necessary for us to go away in order to experience the different states of consciousness, which is the privilege of every man, but we do not go away over miles of country until we are able, and we cannot be able until the necessary ethereal body has been acquired and has learned how to use its powers.

Now, this ethereal body has its own organs which are the essence or real basis of the senses described by men. The outer eye is only the instrument by which the real power of sight experiences that which relates to sight; the ear has its inner master – the power of hearing, and so on with every organ. These real powers within flow from the spirit to which we referred at the beginning of this paper. That spirit approaches the objects of sense by presiding over the different organs of sense. And whenever it withdraws itself the organs cannot be used. As when a sleep-walker moves about with open eyes which do not see anything, although objects are there, and the different parts of the eye are perfectly normal and uninjured.

Ordinarily there is no demarcation to be observed between these inner organs and the outer; the inner ear is found to be too closely interknit with the outer to be distinguished apart. But when concentration has begun, the different inner organs begin to awake, as it were, and to separate themselves from the chains of their bodily counterparts. Thus, the man begins to duplicate his powers. His bodily organs are not injured but remain for use upon the plane to which they belong, and he is acquiring another set which he can use apart from the others in the plane of nature peculiarly theirs.

In the course of the growth of this ethereal body several things are to be observed.

It begins by having a cloudy, wavering appearance, with certain centres of energy caused by the incipency of organs that correspond to the brain, heart, lungs, spleen, liver, and so on. It follows the same course of development as a solar system, and is, in fact, governed and influenced by the very solar system to which the world belongs on which the being may be incarnate. With us it is governed by our own solar orb.

If the practice of concentration be kept up, this cloudy mass begins to gain coherence and to shape itself into a body with different organs. As they grow, they must be used. Essays are to be made with them, trials, experiments. In fact, just as a child must creep before it can walk, and must learn walking before it can run, so this ethereal man must do the same. But as the child can see and hear much farther than it can creep or walk, so this being usually begins to see and to hear before it can leave the vicinity of the body on any lengthy journey.

Certain hindrances then begin to manifest themselves which, when properly understood by us, will give us good substantial reasons for the practicing of the several virtues enjoined in holy books and naturally included under the term of Universal Brotherhood.

One is that sometimes it is seen that this nebulous forming body is violently shaken, or pulled apart, or burst into fragments that at once have a tendency to fly back into the body and take on the same entanglement that we spoke of at first. This is caused by anger, and this is why the sages all dwell upon the need of calmness. When the student allows anger to arise, the influence of it is at once felt by the ethereal body and manifests itself in an uncontrollable trembling which begins at the centre and violently pulls apart the hitherto coherent particles. If allowed to go on it will disintegrate the whole mass, which will then reassume its natural place in the body. The effect following this is, that a long time has to elapse before the ethereal body can be again created. And each time this happens the result is the same. Nor does it make any difference what the cause for the anger may be. There is no such thing as having what is called "righteous anger" in this study and escaping these inevitable consequences. Whether your "rights" have been unjustly and flagrantly invaded or not does not matter. The anger is a force that will work itself out in its appointed way. Therefore, anger must be strictly avoided, and it cannot be avoided unless charity and love—absolute toleration—are cultivated.

But anger may be absent and yet still another thing happens. The ethereal form may have assumed quite a coherence and definiteness. But it is observed that, instead of being pure and clear and fresh, it begins to take on a cloudy and disagreeable colour, the precursor of putrefaction, which invades every part and by its effects precludes any further progress, and at last reacts upon the student so that anger again manifests itself. This is the effect of envy. Envy is not a mere trifle that produces no physical result. It has a powerful action, as strong in its own field as that of anger. It not only hinders the further development but attracts to the student's vicinity thousands of malevolent beings of all classes that precipitate themselves upon him and wake up or bring on every evil passion. Envy, therefore, must be extirpated, and it cannot be got rid of as long as the personal idea is allowed to remain in us.

Another effect is produced on this ethereal body by vanity. Vanity represents the great illusion of nature. It brings up before the soul all sorts of erroneous or evil pictures, or both, and drags the judgment so away that once more anger or envy will enter, or such course be pursued that violent destruction by outside causes falls upon the being. As in one case related to me. The man had made considerable progress, but at last allowed vanity to rule. This was followed by the presentation to his inner sight of most extraordinary images and ideas, which in their turn so affected him that he attracted to his sphere hordes of elementals seldom known to students and quite indescribable in English. These at last, as is their nature, laid siege to him, and one day produced all about the plane of his astral body an effect similar in some respects to that which follows an explosion of the most powerful explosive known to science. The consequence was, his ethereal form was so suddenly fractured that by repercussion the whole nature of the man was altered, and he soon died in a madhouse after having committed the most awful excesses.

And vanity cannot be avoided except by studiously cultivating that selflessness and poverty of heart advised as well by Jesus of Nazareth as by Buddha.

Another hindrance is fear. This is not, however, the worst of all, and is one that will disappear by means of knowledge, for fear is always the son of ignorance. Its effect on the ethereal form is to shrivel it up or coagulate and contract it. But as knowledge increases, that contraction abates, permitting the person to expand. Fear is the same thing as frigidity on the earth, and always proceeds by the process of freezing.

In my next the subject will be further developed.

RAMATIRTHA

*Path*, July, 1888

The full article is here: <https://www.theosophy-ult.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/WQ-Judge-articles-in-two-volumes.pdf>

## Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge

*by H. P. Blavatsky*

selected excerpts

Since dreams are in reality the actions of the Ego during physical sleep, they are, of course, recorded on their own plane and produce their appropriate effects on this one. But it must be always remembered that dreams in general, and as we know them, are simply our waking and hazy recollections of these facts. It often happens, indeed, that we have no recollection of having dreamt at all, but later in the day the remembrance of the dream will suddenly flash upon us. Of this there are many causes. It is analogous to what sometimes happens to every one of us. Often a sensation, a smell, even a casual noise, or a sound, brings instantaneously to our mind long-forgotten events, scenes and persons. Something of what was seen, done, or thought by the "night-performer," the Ego, impressed itself at that time on the physical brain, but was not brought into the conscious, waking memory, owing to some physical condition or obstacle. This impression is registered on the brain in its appropriate cell or nerve-centre but owing to some accidental circumstance it "hangs fire," so to say, till something gives it the needed impulse. Then the brain slips it off immediately into the conscious memory of the waking man; for as soon as the conditions required are supplied, that particular centre starts forthwith into activity, and does the work which it had to do, but was hindered at the time from completing.

Q. How does this process take place?

A. There is a sort of conscious telegraphic communication going on incessantly, day and night, between the physical brain and the inner man. The brain is such a complex thing, both physically and metaphysically, that it is like a tree whose bark you can remove layer by layer, each layer being different from all the others, and each having its own special work, function, and properties.

Q. What distinguishes the "dreaming" memory and imagination from those of waking consciousness?

A. During sleep the physical memory and imagination are of course passive because the dreamer is asleep: his brain is asleep, his memory is asleep, all his functions are dormant and at rest. It is only when they are stimulated, as I told you, that they are aroused. Thus, the consciousness of the sleeper is not active, but passive. The inner man, however, the real Ego, acts independently during the sleep of the body; but it is doubtful if any of us—unless thoroughly acquainted with the physiology of occultism— could understand the nature of its action.

The full article is here: <https://www.theosophy-ult.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/transactions-of-the-blavatsky-lodge.pdf>

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