

What if you have no concentration? What are the benefits of concentration? ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 What if you don't have any concentration? I know it helps build it, but what if you
00:00:11 don't even have enough to stay, keep your focus there for five seconds?
00:00:18 Well, everybody has to start somewhere. If you think of the analogy to a workout,
00:00:29 if you've never worked out, the very first time you work out, you get winded in like
00:00:36 two minutes, right? And it's like, oh my God, at this rate, I'll never get anywhere.
00:00:42 What you don't realize is that the growth is not linear. It's somewhat hockey stick,
00:00:51 so that you grow faster as you grow more. So it's true initially that you might very
00:01:00 well have the experience that you're describing, which is just like, I'll never get this because
00:01:06 I, you know, it's like I'm here 1% of the time and 99% of the time I'm like lost in
00:01:16 ruminations and worrying about, you know, body sensations, sounds, memory, plan, fantasy.
00:01:25 That's my memory, plan, fantasy, reaction, judgment. When I decided I was going to like,
00:01:32 okay, I'm going to be healthy, I'm going to run. So I was 21 years old, but I'd never
00:01:37 really worked out or done anything. I ran down the block and at the end of the block,
00:01:41 I'm like, and it's like, oh my God, I mean, I'll never be able to run more than a block.
00:01:49 But within two months, I was running miles, right? It was a dramatic change. So initially,
00:01:57 yes, you may have to put up with that. But everyone has to start somewhere. Another way
00:02:03 to look at it is if you never start, then you'll have to live your entire life in a
00:02:09 scattered state, an unrecalled state, as the Christians would say. You know, I quoted
00:02:15 T.S. Eliot before. He's got this great phrase where he says, this is a place of disaffection,
00:02:27 meaning ordinary experience, right? This is a place of disaffection. Then he goes on and
00:02:33 eventually says, distracted from distraction by distraction. People are so distracted,
00:02:39 they don't even realize they're distracted. So distracted from distraction by distraction.
00:02:46 That's how you're going to have to live your whole life and it's going to be time to die
00:02:49 really quick. And then you will not have lived and you'll freak out. So you've got to start
00:02:56 somewhere. So the bad news is, yes, you might have to put up with what you're describing
00:03:02 for a while, like getting a stitch when you first try to work out, but things get better
00:03:08 with practice. If you don't do something like that, you'll basically just live your life
00:03:16 just in that distracted state, meaning you won't really live your life.
00:03:20 Meaning you're not focusing on what's relevant back to your concentration model?
00:03:27 Exactly. You can either say, oh my God, this is awful. I'm able to focus 10% of the time
00:03:36 and 90% of the time I'm away. So you can make that a problem or you can make that an insight.
00:03:43 You can realize, oh, this is how most people live. This is how I would have lived otherwise.
00:03:51 So you're never really being present. You're spending the present thinking about the past
00:03:56 and the future. Essentially, that's the human condition at
00:04:00 least at this point in history. What that means is that people don't fully live each
00:04:09 moment and therefore they don't really live. If you discover when you first attempt to

00:04:16 meditate that it's nine to one, one unit of focus versus nine unit of distraction, that
00:04:27 means that you're missing 90% of your life. That's the bad news. When it comes time
00:04:34 to die, you won't have lived and you'll freak out.
00:04:37 On the other hand, the good news is with practice, you can get it reversed.
00:04:42 Does it take two months like it did for you to run two miles?
00:04:45 No, it takes longer typically. Six months to a year of regular practice.
00:04:51 What's regular? I would say 10 minutes each day and at least
00:04:55 four hours of intensive continuous practice per month. That's why I have the home practice
00:05:00 program so people can call by phone wherever they are in the world.
00:05:04 Oh, I was going to ask you about that later. Maybe we should finish up this one thought.
00:05:09 The bad news is that you may have what might be called a sobering realization when you
00:05:17 first try to meditate, which is it's like I say, it's 90% of the time I'm unable
00:05:28 to focus. Well, with enough practice, you can eventually reverse that. You're 90% focused.
00:05:40 You've basically multiplied your ability to be present by a factor of nine. That means
00:05:50 you get to live life nine times as big as the average human being.
00:05:55 When it comes time to die, you will have participated enough in life that you won't freak out.
00:06:03 You will have completed your life activity. If I were to tell a person, hey, give me 10
00:06:10 minutes each day, subtract 10 minutes each day from your life and every month subtract
00:06:16 four hours and keep that up for the duration and you'll be able to live to be 300 years
00:06:26 old. Well, that would be something like amazing, right?
00:06:33 Yeah.
00:06:34 That's not possible. You can't add 100 and 200 and however many years to a person's
00:06:43 life. However, what you can do is multiply your ability to be present in each moment
00:06:52 and you can do that dramatically. As the result of that, you'll get to live life two, three,
00:06:58 four times as big as you would otherwise. The effect will be the same richness as though
00:07:06 you live to be 100, 200 or 300. That's actually doable by anyone.
00:07:12 Formal meditation practice subtracts a little bit of time from your life, but it multiplies
00:07:18 the richness and depth of the rest of the time. As we say, do the math. It's a good
00:07:25 deal.