

# The Power of Concentration<sup>1</sup>

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There is one common thing that we notice in all walks of life. When two people engage in a similar activity they end up with different levels of success in their endeavours. We see this quite often among students. When two students spend nearly the same amount of time (say 5 hours a day) one scores above 90 and the other 60 marks. Similarly, the effectiveness of two people discharging the same activity vastly varies at times in an office or a factory. One housewife spends 3 hours to finish cooking while the other takes 5 hours and end up with less satisfaction even after spending longer time in the kitchen.

It is not uncommon to attribute reasons for poor performance. The often quoted reason is that perhaps there is a vast difference in the competency levels of the people. Alternatively we may conclude that one has a better knowledge of what is to be done compared to the other. Many hide behind the luck factor and say that the other person is lucky and therefore could do better. If you analyze even more deeply people come up with certain other reasons. Prominent among them is that the one who does the job well has a better attitude compared to the other.

While many of these are partially true, they still do not capture the core issue behind the observed differences in the level of performance and achievements of people of similar background and intellectual level. Lord Krishna diagnoses this problem and clarifies to us through certain thoughts he provides to Arjuna in Chapter 2 of *Bhagavad Gitā*.

## Root cause for low performance

Lord Krishna traces the problem to the issue of concentration of the mind and consequently the *buddhi* as well. An individual has to first understand clearly the consequences of not concentrating on the issue on hand. Only then the scope for improvement is maximum. Krishna says that in order to succeed in things that we do, we need to develop *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*. *Vyavasāyā* means tremendous determination and effort. Therefore, Lord Krishna advises that in order to develop tremendous determination there must be a one-pointed focus of *buddhi*. (*buddhi ekeha*). By contrast, *avyavasāyi* is one who has his/her thoughts in a distracted fashion, branching into several (*bahu śākā*). In fact the thoughts can indeed tend to be innumerable (*anantāḥ*).

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः एकेह कुरुनन्दन ।

बहुशाखा ह्यनन्ताश्च बुद्ध्योऽव्यवसायिनाम् ॥ 2.41

*vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ ekeha kurunandana*  
*bahuśākā hyanantāśca buddhayo'vyavasāyinām*

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<sup>1</sup> Mahadevan, B. (2012). "The power of concentration", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 9 (9), May, 2012, pp 17 – 18.

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The above *śloka* clarifies the problem very well. If you keenly observe the person with less effectiveness on the job you will notice that he/she is indeed a distracted person. A slightest noise level or a moving object is enough for him/her to take his senses off the job at hand and look at the passing phenomenon. The mind will start processing this information, the *buddhi* will analyse it further add its own impressions and colours to it and tread into that domain which was completely unnecessary. It will be a while before the person mentally returns back to his job. A little later another similar disturbance will do the damage and the process will go on. This is how the effectiveness suffers at the end of the day.

### **Concentration – Anti-dote to low performance**

Lord Krishna further assures that *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi* enables one to develop such a level of concentration that the person gets into a complete state of stillness or deep contemplation of the idea on hand (can reach *Samadhi*). It will not allow the mind to be stolen away since there will be no distracting thoughts. In fact Lord Krishna brings this aspect using a counter-argument. He says that those tempted by short-term pleasures (*bhoga aiśvarya*) with mind carried away by distracted thoughts (*apahrta cetas*) cannot bring their *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi* to a complete state of stillness.

भोगैश्वर्यप्रसक्तानां तयापहतचेतसाम् ।  
व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥ 2.44

*bhogaiśvarya-prasaktānām tayāpahṛta-cetasām  
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samadhau na vidhīyate*

The above *ślokas* clearly point to the fact that doing an activity effectively is simply a mind game. There is no scope for bringing other extraneous factors such as luck and miss the essence of the problem on hand. This is indeed one important prescription to discharge our activities in the most effective way. The other important fallout of this advice is that we can develop more mental strength, calmness of the mind and greater clarity on life by a constant practice of this. This is indeed valuable not only for the worldly pursuits that we carry on a day-to-day basis but also for our spiritual pursuits. Thus we have a two-in one prescription from Lord Krishna.

### **Developing the power of concentration**

Developing one pointed focus is a job well done through meditation. Meditation helps calm the mind, reduce the number of thought waves from several to a few by sustained practice over a period of time. Once the many thoughts come down to a few, the possibility of a single pointed focus brightens up. However, one practical problem people seem to face is that they do not have time for this as they are “busy” with a number of other activities. Even if they have some free time it is competed away by a number of gadgets such as ipods, cell phones, MP3 players, laptops, mini handheld video devices and tablets. These are passive

devices meant to feed signals to the five senses for one-way consumption. They have the propensity to agitate the mind than calm the mind.

Therefore, developing the power of concentration is a slow and steady process as it involves the mind. It also requires deep conviction to set off time for meditation. This calls for behavioural modifications and sometimes even life style changes. It may be worthwhile to consider this seriously. At least we can make genuine efforts to inculcate this habit in the younger ones. They may find it valuable as they grow.

In today's educational system a number of skills are taught to the youngsters. These include being creative, brainstorming for ideas and innovation, analytical skills and so on. Unfortunately, we are not concentrating enough on the core issue of "single pointed concentration" of the mind. Concentration of the mind is actually "brain-stilling", a radically opposite idea to the most popular "brainstorming". We need to put faith on Lord Krishna and actively coach our younger friends to sit in calmness for at least 30 minutes a day.