

Michael Chekhov

July 7, 1939

CONCENTRATION
IMAGINATION
INCORPORATION OF THE IMAGE
THE ACTOR'S PROFESSION
ALLOWING THE IMAGE TO LEAD
JUGGLER PSYCHOLOGY

CONCENTRATION:

I will give you some things to concentrate on and you will please concentrate. To concentrate on something in our sense, that means - to get the impression that you are taking with your "invisible hands" the object on which you are concentrating. It is not enough to have it before your mind's eye - it is necessary to make such an effort in concentration that you will get the feeling that you grasp in your hands the object - with your "invisible hands."

So, will you please concentrate on this pencil. Try to get the impression that you are taking it with your spirit - grasp the thing so that you really feel it from all sides - not only from the side you see, but from all sides. If you will really concentrate on this pencil, you will know its weight, whether it is soft and flexible, etc. That is what we call concentration that we can use. If it is weaker than this, then it is useless.

To be concentrated on something - that means with the whole being you are taking the object, keeping it, touching it. Drop it entirely so that you have no connection with the pencil. Then again, as quickly as possible, with full activity. Now will you shut your eyes and still be concentrated

M. Chekhov

July 7, 1939

on this pencil with your whole being - take it aggressively - have it. Drop it.

When we have developed our ability of concentration, then it is absolutely equal [the same] for us whether we see the object or imagine something. If we have this technique of having something, we are concentrating on, it can be imaginary or real.

Exercise:

Please concentrate on a red flower with the same technique. Try to avoid the thing which is quite natural - try to develop such an inner power that you can keep the image in your mind as long as you wish. Drop it.

Now will you please try to concentrate on a flying bird. Perhaps you have noticed one thing: The majority, when I ask you to concentrate on a flying bird, have done some movements, which is a good sign. When you are concentrating on something, if you are not at the same time creating this thing - you have at the same time to create the flight of the bird. It is more obvious with the bird than the flower. To be concentrated on this thing you have to become like it - without this you will not be able to concentrate. Now will you please try to concentrate on this pencil again, trying to become it, trying to create it with your whole being.

The most important part of the exercise of concentration

4732

1352

M. Chekhov

July 7, 1939

for our art
or other arts and music is the effort we make during the exercise. If we are satisfied each time with what we get, it will not develop us. We have always to make an effort to get more than we can. This is the principle of all exercise. If you get something, be grateful, but each time you must strengthen your power to get still more.

Please concentrate on the red flower by trying to become it, to create it, its redness, its softness, its form. When you stop the exercise, try to get rid of it entirely. Nothing more of the exercise when you are finished.

Again, will you concentrate on the flying bird and follow it, and create it, and become it with your whole being.

The next step for real concentration is to be absolutely concentrated on something and at the same time to have an absolutely free body so that the attention will become purely spiritual, which has nothing to do with the body. The spirit tense and strong, and the body un-tense.

The stiffness of the body does not help concentration - in only disturbs it. In the first stages of concentration you will always have this disturbance. Your spirit will fly everywhere and catch everything. So now please concentrate again on the same things and at the same time move freely. While you are moving your spirit is with the pencil. The freer your body is, the stronger you have to grasp the pencil with your spirit - make a strong effort to be with the pencil in spite

M. Chokhov

July 7, 1939

of the body. Drop it. Now just the same exercise concentrating on a blue flower.

You know, of course, that imagination and concentration are twins and one is impossible without the other, so if I give you now something for imagining, you will try to do it, applying your power of concentration.

IMAGINATION:

Will you please imagine a stormy night. On a road which disappears somewhere in the darkness, a figure approaches you from far away out of this dark, gloomy road - as he comes closer, you realize that it is a young man with a pained face and dressed like a knight with a sword in his right hand and when he comes near you, he falls down exhausted.

Now start the whole thing - that means you have to imagine it with your whole being - you have to become the knight. Do it as actively as possible so that you will not become frozen.

INCORPORATION OF THE IMAGE:

Now we know that concentration and imagination are twins, and the third child is incorporation. If we have strong powers of concentration and a strong, active imagination, then the third thing comes to you, as actors, to desire to incorporate immediately by means of your soul and body, by means of your will and body. So real concentration and imagination

M. Chokhov

July 7, 1939

lead to the real desire to act.

Will you take the same story and please try to become more and more the knight, and when he falls down, will you please take this moment of falling down - concentration, imagination, and incorporation. First let him fall down in your imagination and then incorporate him.

I want you to be aware of one thing: Whether you were resembling your image and to what degree, because we must have a certain sense in our nature which tells us whether we are really following our imagination or whether we are enticed by our body, which is always much weaker than our imagination, and if we do things which are much easier because of bodily habits, then we kill our creative possibilities.

Try first, before you start, simply to remember what we have said just now - to really concentrate - to really imagine, and then to explore the incorporation of the image - as if you are talking to somebody who has to get your ideas and understand them.

Try this exercise: Be very conscious of what we are trying to get. Use this opportunity here in the school to exercise very consciously. Later on you will get the ability to act unconsciously because of this conscious work we are doing now. It is quite a wrong idea to start our artistic education with floundering. First very conscious hard work, and then you will be rewarded by the ability to create subcon-

2P18

4186

M. Chekhov

July 7, 1939

sciously. So be very conscious during the exercise - "What am I aiming at, and how shall I get it?"

THE ACTOR'S PROFESSION:

This is again the meaning of rehearsal - to rehearse means to find the way to incorporate your images as finely and subtly as possible. You know in our profession we meet such situations where we are compelled to act in a few weeks, and to belie the audience and ourselves by thinking that it is a creation. It is nothing but a skillful, usually dull, wrong creation of things.

The audience comes into the theatre and sees actors who are doing the same things. They do not expect anything more of our profession and, therefore, actually they despise us and our profession because an actor is the lowest profession if he is not a "star" - everybody feels that these people have no profession, no technique, no knowledge. If they are brave enough to appear before the audience to speak in loud voices and move freely and charmingly - that is all.

If you compare our profession with others, you will see that everyone has technique except actors - they use their bodies just as they want them - no direction - no ideas. Therefore, we have to create our technique - we have to create our profession anew. We must, first of all, understand the difficulties and, thus, it requires years and years to get the inner technique which is perhaps more difficult. For instance,

M. Chekhov

July 7, 1939

the ability for concentration is hard work, and we must work at it for years and years. What does it mean to imagine? What does it mean to incorporate?

Will you please take these exercises, and do them every day even if only for five minutes.

The well-developed imagination has a very interesting ability which does not come at first. You have to create your image - you have to make an effort to imagine in our sense, not only to see, but to be the thing or the character. You have to strengthen your will to concentrate on the character, and if you have enough technique and enough experience, and you are able to concentrate on your imagination, then you will notice once (and this will be a moment of great happiness for you) that you are doing nothing - the image does all.

ALLOWING THE IMAGE TO LEAD:

This is the happiest moment in our profession, but to get this blessed moment, we have to work - we have to strengthen our power - we have to be attentive. We will create our images, and perhaps not so successfully, but still we have to go on to strengthen our will to this point where we will realize the image goes on and leads us. This is the moment which our profession can give us as the highest gift. Try to exercise this.

Start with the same image of the stormy, dark night, and will you please lead with your will the whole way through,

M. Chekhov

July 7, 1939

and when the knight comes near you, and when you reach the moment when he falls down, instead of this falling down, try to imagine and let him do what he wants to. Try to find the first approach to this marvelous technique: to allow your image to lead you and to be passive and follow it. It is important that you try to get the idea about this thing.

When it comes in its full power, then you will feel first very strange because it is so powerful - when it really comes, it is almost frightening. Then you will love it and will really rely upon this thing which is much finer than all possible direction.

JUGGLER PSYCHOLOGY:

This is one side. We have to train our spirit, our psychology, but we have to train the body also to become obedient to our psychology.

Juggler Exercise:

We have to move and throw things believing that we are jugglers, so skilful and so flexible, and our spirit needs to develop this belief in our body. Whatever an actor wants to perform he must be sure that his body will not make any difficulties. He must believe in his body. If he wants to express youth through the body, then he must be sure that when he runs across the stage, the body will express youth. If he loses this belief, then he is a funny old man. When the

M. Chekhov

July 7, 1939

spirit and body are inharmonious it is really funny. We must believe in our bodies, and for this aim one of our exercises is the juggler's exercises, believing everything is perfect and well.

Exercise:

Take things in your hands, trying to persuade yourselves that the movement is perfect and complete. After making a movement, then stop to enjoy and accept yourself. And so on. It must not be complicated. Use not only your hands and arms, but your whole body in all possible positions. Your psychology must be that it is the most difficult and fine trick. Use your whole body; arms, and legs, and heads. More pauses.

The aim of the exercise is: to develop in your mind the belief in the skilfulness of your body. Now convince Mr. Somoff of your belief in your trick. Try to persuade Mr. Somoff that you are jugglers and that your bodies are absolutely obedient to you.

Now another exercise:

Again the idea of this new exercise is to be able to govern your own body in accordance with what your spirit desires and wishes - we have done it for rhythm, now we will do it for the other aim. I want you to start being absolutely immovable, then gradually start to move, but so slightly and

M. Chekhov

July 7, 1939

so gently as not to be noticeable until you will become wild people running and dancing about. Then gradually down again to this gentle moment so that I will not notice the moment when you stop - this is a simple exercise. With music, because it helps us. Crescendo - diminuendo individually, but as a group.

The curve is this:



What has spoiled your work is that your bodies are still blind, deaf, and dumb. We have to develop our actors' bodies to the highest extent - we do not need to be jugglers, but we have to develop the side that the body will become so sensitive that the desire will be immediately transmitted to our bodies.

Now will you please add the following thing - dance with music and the following figure:

