

Michael Chokhov

January 25, 1940

CONCENTRATION - IMAGINATION
THE CREATIVE WORLD

The Cricket on the Hearth:

CONCENTRATION - IMAGINATION:

Real creative imagination is impossible without the ability to concentrate. Concentration is a thing which can be developed to a certain extent, to more than that, and to the highest extent. Without the ability to concentrate our attention to a very high degree, everything is useless in the creative process. It is nothing but floundering about and not a real creative process.

We may think that some great artists have created their work without any previous training, and this is true in some cases of real talent, but we must forget such accidental things - there will be times when such an artist cannot arouse his imagination and will sometimes waste many futile hours. An artist may say, "I will accept my destiny - if I can create, I will, but when I can't, I won't." But this is not our point of view because we are a school. We must take the point of view that we have all the abilities necessary for an artist and that in the school we must develop these abilities. We must develop our imagination, our concentration, our ability for group feeling, for radiation, for feeling of form, feeling of beauty, etc.

What I am about to tell you, concerning concentration, you must accept as something to which you must aspire. You

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must do these exercises every day or your work will be lost. We know that rhythmical repetition in exercise does more good than violent effort today which is followed by days of doing nothing. That is more destructive than constructive. Five minutes each day will give you more than spasmodic efforts of longer time. If you will develop your ability to concentrate, your imagination will grow as if of itself. When your imagination is strong, this ability to concentrate your attention and keep the object on which you are concentrating like a stone in your heart, that is the aim. The strength of the real concentrated attention is very similar to the feeling of strength in the healthy muscles of one's hand. It is something like a gigantic grip.

Actually, to be concentrated on something does not mean to be concentrated with one sense - it means to be concentrated with all our senses, all our abilities which the human being has, whether we know them or not. The whole human being has to be taken by this act of concentration and with all these invisible powers and forces which we possess, we have to make this grip. If we will get this ability and develop it, the ability to use our whole being for gripping an objective - whether it is a physical one or an imaginative one - then we will get the first idea of what it means to be concentrated on something. It will be a miracle, and you will discover new things which you did not know existed; such

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qualities and depths of things. Only if we grasp the object with our whole being, with all our powers and forces and qualities which we have in our living being, will the miracle happen.

Exercise:

Concentrate all your abilities on the lamp - try to see it - then stretch your hand and try to touch it, although you cannot because of the distance, but get the feeling that you are touching it. Certain powers must be awakened in us if we see and touch this distant thing with our whole being. Then shut your eyes and touch it without seeing. Try to increase this feeling of being more free, and not in your bodies, as it were. Try to grasp the lamp and possess it, and have it with your whole being. Try to penetrate into it, and saturate the lamp with your whole being, and become almost one with it. Purely psychological - the more purely psychological, the nearer you will be to the ideal.

If you are tired, it is good, because it means you have made an effort. Be so strongly merged with the lamp that you can feel its weight. Try to penetrate into the glass of which it is made, and try to guess the quality of the lamp, being in it - how hard, how breakable, how elastic - all these qualities must be yours. Now you will feel that you are streaming to the lamp, that you are flowing to it. You can get it with your hearts, your hands, your soul, your whole

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being has the lamp. Then you will feel that you are creating the lamp at this moment - at this moment it would not exist without you because you are creating it. Now, being so much with the lamp, try to make the gesture of passive acceptance. What will come from it? The lamp will speak to you - the object will speak to you about its qualities, if you will exercise sufficiently. These qualities will arise before you like a conscious dream - more concrete than a memory and more organized than a dream.

If we will try to develop our concentration in this way by making an effort every day, gradually we will get another feeling, and this will be the actual success. When concentrating on something, whether it is visible or in your imagination, you will get the feeling of exhilaration, and you will become quieter and stronger. A feeling of health and well-being and youth. Certain psychological satisfaction will come. Life will come from simple concentration.

When concentration is developed to the point where you are invigorated, then you will know what concentration is. You will be happy because you will see how your imagination will become quite a different one. It will come about, as it were. Always try to understand these things as being intangible things in comparison with chairs and tables, but more tangible because they are spiritual, and spiritual values and things are more concrete than our concrete things here.

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This kind of concreteness is actually the creative world - there and only there begins the human creation. These exercises on simple concentration and, at the same time, the creation of parts, will sometimes come together; and then we will know that the whole technique of the actor will be justified. The real actor is a very noble being and not someone who goes running after parts. If you feel the high quality of our art, the real dignity of our art and what must be done inside ourselves to become real actors, you will feel that you are serving others. You cannot give your heart to others without feeling that you give everything to them. If you will get our art in this higher aspect, you will feel that you are taking your heart and giving it to your fellow man. Then you will create with your individuality, which is absolutely precious.

I speak about these things in connection with the simple exercise of concentration because there is nothing in our profession which can be understood and performed without dignity. Everything is noble and must have dignity. This concentration, this grip with our whole being, can be executed with objects which are purely imaginative.

Exercise:

Imagine a yellow flower and try to grip this imaginative flower with all your being. Try to have it with all your

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human abilities and faculties! Keep it and then as a last effort, be passive and let it speak to you.

How can this highly developed ability of concentration be applied to our art? It will apply itself. If you have the ability to concentrate, you will get more and more a certain strange feeling - when you are not concentrated on something, you will feel uncomfortable, and it will seem as if something is wrong. Then you will see that you are obviously not concentrated, and your own soul will immediately get the desire to be concentrated instinctively, and it will become a more and more constant state.

This is what we are aiming at when we are preparing our part - we will not lose our energy and time because everything will become concentrated of necessity. On stage we will not be distracted. We will always be able to grip the most important thing, and the whole performance will become one rhythmical thing.

When the performance is finished, you will be more alive and powerful than before it began, because it was done in a concentrated way. All the efforts you will make towards this concentration will give you something which you cannot buy, nor it cannot be given to you. The result will be a new ability, a new muscle which will serve you of itself.

In doing these exercises alone you must try to remember one thing - you must be concentrated with your whole being.

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If you will try to do this, your whole being will become more and more clear to you. You will experience who you are and how powerful you are psychologically. This will grow of itself.

Imagine that in our being is a little box in which are all our feelings. The box is closed and on the stage we cannot get certain feelings because we cannot order our feelings, but this power of concentration will open this box, and you will be astonished to find that your feelings will be there immediately. All things are at your disposal, real and concretely. The box has opened. If you try to force out tears, for instance, you will only make grimaces. When you are concentrated, you will have yourself in your own hands, and this will be an artistic pleasure.

You may take different objects for your concentration exercises. Or you may try to concentrate on the whole universe of the stars, and try to touch them. You will see that all the stars will come so near. Then you will get the ability to extend yourself, and extend yourself to such an extent that you will touch the stars, without our materialistic feelings of distance. To be concentrated on the whole universe requires not our calculations but something different - our whole being. Or try to embrace the whole earth - then the earth becomes small but you must expand your being to the extent that you will get some new things, and that is what we need from our

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characters, our images, our parts so that they will speak to us just as the lamp at the beginning of the lesson did.

That means that concentration consists of two opposite gestures - tremendous activity and at the same time tremendous passivity. To be only active in concentration means to make the universe small and to be only passive means to lose yourself. The two gestures must be there-- tremendous gesture to be able to touch and hold, and tremendous activity to be able to receive the answer.

Whether it is the lamp or the universe which is the object, the technique is the same and the whole being is organized for these exercises, not only the eyes or ears or other senses, but the whole being with all its powers and abilities.

Feeling of ease: Start with the desire to be light and easy. This feeling of ease is sitting in the same box as all our artistic emotions and feelings.