

Introduction

The first questions you are undoubtedly asking yourself are “What does he mean by tough?” “Who in the world is tough?” and “How does one become tough?” In this Introduction, I briefly consider the “what” and “who” from my personal experience and reading and then consider the ways in which simple, coordinated physical and mental exercises have helped me and others with “how.” The remainder of the book describes these exercises in detail, along with a number of preparatory actions and a “program” for personal development based on the exercises.

The reader should be aware that although the book is presented as a self-help manual based on old, well-tested focusing (meditation and relaxation) techniques, it is not intended to replace medical counseling; and he or she is solely responsible for if, when, and how any of the information or suggestions are used.

What Is Toughness?

In its usual, positive sense, “tough” is synonymous with resolute, resilient, tenacious, durable, cohesive, and hardy; and it is of course these connotations, rather than the negative ones of aggressive, unrefined, unyielding, and unmanageable, to which I refer in this book. For the practical purposes of developing integrated, personalized exercises, I go further and identify several different kinds of salutary toughness.

Mental/emotional toughness means the ability to resist distortions of thought caused by extreme experiences, such as failure, conflict, tragedy, and even good fortune.

Behavioral toughness means the ability both to control one’s actions and to break through limitations to behavior, such as shyness and fear.

Physical toughness means possessing the fitness that among other things helps us withstand the stresses of everyday life, resist illness, and enjoy the huge variety of leisure pursuits modern life has to offer.

Who Is Tough?

We have all seen people who possess a natural toughness that we commonly call “iron will;” and we may have met people who live tough lives through spiritual inspiration or who have been toughened through the exercise of authority or the experience of adversity. The less common, though perhaps more frequently wholesome, route is through exercising the mind into obedience. ***I believe that whatever kind of toughness we seek, it is best achieved in the same way as any skill, through practice and study, that is, through training.***

Which groups of people train to develop integrated toughness? There are in fact very few, the most prominent of which are the monks of some religions. In comparison with the average Westerner, Buddhist and Daoist monks, for example, are mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally tough, and even physically tougher. [Note 1] For our purposes, these groups will provide some toughening methods and a few insights into human behavior but no more—I don’t wish to become a monk and you probably don’t either!

How Does One Become Tough?

Your first step to becoming tough is to go for a long walk and count every single fall of your right or left foot.

* * * *

There is of course more to becoming tough than that simple exercise—but not much more, I believe. The basic pattern of the exercise, a mental activity performed in synchrony with a physical activity, is common to many body-calming, mind-toughening, and even enlightening techniques. It is the pattern underlying the pre-

mier method presented in this book, “Focused Walking.”

Counting your steps may seem a silly thing to do, but as we will see it is beyond argument that doing so has general therapeutic value of both emotional and physical kinds—and I could add mental and behavioral kinds if done consistently over a long period. The benefits include calming the body, clearing the mind, and integrating the personality. These are the basic gains derived from all focusing methods, and indeed are among the goals of the program presented in this book. We will however be mostly exploring more direct approaches to personal development than “footfall counting” and more personal goals than calming the body and so on. In particular, Focused Walking and the other methods are proposed as a means of modifying specific emotional and behavioral characters in ourselves while improving our physical fitness.

The price of achieving these seemingly impossible goals is not great in terms of ability to perform mental and physical tasks, since all the exercises presented here are exceedingly simple. And because this book is largely about using simple physical actions to facilitate focusing, ***no special talent for concentrating is needed.*** The cost in time may be high. For most people, I suspect that there is no maximum amount of time they could productively spend doing these exercises—after all, monks spend much of their day performing the same or similar activities. One hour a day is my minimum period (though as with other focusing methods, shorter sessions are better than none). Before dismissing this as too much time for yourself, ask yourself, “How badly do I want to change?”

We all wish for changes in ourselves, but few of us have the desire or patience required by most traditional or non-traditional mind-controlling practices to achieve those changes. Coordinated physical and mental exercises can provide both the specific benefits of self-examination and general benefits of focusing without the drawbacks (e.g., expense and low success rate) of many other approaches to personal development. Moreover, there is no interference with

the user's personal beliefs that he or she does not wish to change, since the ***proposed set of exercises is a methodology, not a mystical, religious, or philosophical system of any kind.*** [Note 2]

What I am proposing is no less than a life-long "toughening" program consisting of exercises that are personally customized, continuously modified, and goal oriented.

There are perhaps many reasons why every person should perform some form of mental training throughout his or her life. For example,

- Change, whether mental, emotional, or behavioral, is extremely slow. Anyone who has attempted to drop a bad habit recognizes this. Major changes are of course more difficult to make.
- There is no recognizable limit to human development. Human beings cannot (I would guess) develop an over-integrated personality. And spirituality, to take a more obvious example, is believed by many to offer infinite room for growth.
- There is the problem of death. A successful life should include a successful death, which means among other things dying without fear. Since our hour of death is uncertain, we truly cannot begin preparing too soon. [Note 3]

Part One of this book prepares the user for making the best of the toughening techniques presented in Part Two. It suggests:

- Long-term goals (Chapter 1)
- Suitable subjects for developing a personal brand of

toughness (Chapter 2)

- Methods for controlling the mind and controlling responses to the exercises (Chapter 3)
- Simple mental and physical preparatory exercises (Chapter 4)

Part Two gives a menu of exercises (Chapters 5 to 12). Each exercise is self-contained, and all could be considered during the gradual development of any personal toughening program. While the emphasis of this book is on Focused Walking outdoors, a number of proposed alternatives can be used indoors while walking, sitting, or lying down. ***Even the sitting and reclining methods have a physical component to aid concentration.*** To simplify access to the techniques, each chapter introduces the type of exercise and its benefits, describes and illustrates it, and provides a recommended duration and activity agenda.

On the basis of my experience and reading, I believe that these exercises are suitable for nearly everyone. Perhaps the only people for which they are not appropriate are those with a schizoid, panic-type, or obsessive-compulsive personality. Anyone with concerns about potential side effects should discuss these exercises with a psychotherapist or medical practitioner. He or she should also investigate the vast literature on meditation and relaxation techniques (and also review Chapter 3).

Part Three helps the user integrate one or more of the toughening methods into a full toughening program. It presents a schedule of exercises (Chapter 13) and a sample program (Chapter 14).

Throughout this book, I have employed various devices to simplify the message. The language is plain because the exercises are simple and emphasis is on action not theory. Much of the information appears as bullet points or is presented in bold type to facilitate rapid study and re-study. In addition, I have included a few simplified charts and diagrams of, in some cases, horrendously complex ideas.

They are given solely to help the user design and modify his or her own programs, not to intellectualize mental processes, emotional responses, or whatever is being illustrated.

This book then is a practical, modifiable guide to a number of self-healing and self-maturing techniques. It is not a treatise on psychoanalysis, meditation, or will power. It most certainly is not an advocacy of monkhood, though I believe that the toughness of monks is to be greatly admired, and to be emulated in our own modest ways. Nor do I advocate that the user of these methods join any particular organization, follow any specific philosophy, seek a Master of any kind, or even associate with other users. I believe that whatever kinds of human development we pursue we ultimately pursue them alone. In brief, this book differs from other books on focusing techniques by emphasizing:

- Physical activity as a facilitator of mental, emotional, and behavioral change
- Personalization of both methods and goals
- Private nature of personal development

If you decide to use any methods presented here, I encourage you to read other books on focusing methods, continue modifying your chosen program to suit your tastes, abilities, and circumstances, and ***never stop exercising your mind and body.*** Above all else, be unceasingly mindful of your thoughts because they are both what you are now and what you will become.

What a man thinks about continually, to that his mind becomes inclined by force of habit. [Note 4]

Why Walk?

Because humans evolved as walking animals, [Note 5] walking is a basic, natural function that influences all aspects of our lives. This means among other things that walking is the safest and most natural

way for humans to get and stay fit. It probably also means that the first type of self-healing exercise involved walking, most likely walking and chanting during long homeward marches after a hunt or during the tedious gathering of non-game food. A modified form of walking, dancing, may have originated not long after. Dancing was considered by the ancient Greeks to be an essential component in the development of a sound mind and sound body. [Note 6] Regardless of the natural origins of self-healing and self-developing activities, there are currently many advantages to tying a focused mental activity to walking:

- ***Meditating while moving is more powerful than meditating while standing, sitting, or lying still*** (see the quote at the beginning of Part One). I believe that the reason is that a long-lasting physical activity is easier to sustain than a long-lasting mental task, and that physical activity can assist mental activity. The poorer one's ability to concentrate, the more important the assistance of walking becomes.
- Since walking by itself helps relieve stress, focusing in combination with walking probably reduces stress even more quickly.
- Focusing while walking instead of sitting forces us to become fit, and fitness improves many aspects of our lives.
- Walking while focusing keeps us alert, and it keeps us tied to at least one rhythmic activity whenever we lose concentration on our subject of focus. You can neither fall asleep nor jump up and do something else while walking (outdoors at least), which means that Focused Walking is suitable for nearly everyone, from people who readily fall asleep as soon as they are alone and quiet to nervous or distraught people who can't sit or concentrate for long.

- For some people, walking while focused may be more interesting than walking (or many other types of exercise) with random thoughts. Focusing may be the incentive to exercise.
- Movement while meditating helps integrate both the body and mind into one being. [Note 7]
- Movement is a more natural state than stillness.
- We are less likely to be interrupted while walking than while sitting or reclining. For many of us, it is the only way we can be alone to conduct our very private studies of our self. It may, for example, be easier to convince family members or colleagues that we need time to exercise than that we need time to sit alone in a darkened room.

The benefits of physical fitness should be obvious to everyone, though a visit to any mall may lead us to wonder otherwise. One benefit seldom mentioned is the greater behavioral freedom of fit people. Such people are of course more capable of performing vigorous work, play, and chores, but their behavioral freedom is far more subtle and extends beyond physical competence. Compare the readiness of fit and unfit colleagues and friends to do any kind of prolonged physical or mental activity—go camping, go to the beach, ride a horse, work long and hard on a special project, build something major for the home, and so on. ***The limitations on an unfit person are appalling considering the rich variety of activities modern life has to offer.***

Another rarely mentioned benefit of fitness is an improved ability to concentrate, which may be related to a more efficient brain physiology (as a result, for instance, of more fully oxygenated blood and better diet). It is certainly related to fewer distractions because fit people are more comfortable with themselves and have fewer health problems.