

# Visualization Techniques

The following methods have been extracted from the book '**Seeing with the Mind's Eye**' by Dr Mike Samuels, MD, and Nancy Samuels, with Dr Samuels most kind permission. Dr Samuels has written a number of books, including 'Healing with the Mind's Eye' - you can learn more about these on Dr Mike's website: <http://www.michaelsamuels.com/>

I have found these techniques to be most useful, and present them to you with the intent that you can benefit by using them to improve your own visualization abilities.

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## **PRELIMINARIES**

Certain things that people naturally tend to do, but may not be aware of, greatly increase their ability to hold an image in their mind, such as techniques people have used to develop the natural skills of relaxing, concentrating, and seeing.

Visualization is an inner state of mind. In order to visualize effectively people have to put themselves in a state in which they can be aware of inner processes. For most people, at least initially, it is helpful to separate themselves from distracting or chaotic external stimuli. This means finding a quiet, tranquil place, in or out of doors, for visualizing.

Eventually, it becomes possible to focus so clearly on internal stimuli that even strong external stimuli recede from consciousness. But it is much easier to visualize in the beginning if external stimuli are at a minimum.

In addition to finding a quiet physical space, it is helpful to find a quiet mental space. This means putting aside, as far as possible, ordinary concerns. People must make a choice to temporarily put aside matters that are not directly pertinent to their visualizing.

## **Relaxation**

Body relaxation is the first step in learning how to improve the ability to visualize. As soon as a person picks a quiet time and place he will find himself beginning to relax. Conscious relaxation further removes extraneous stimuli, thereby allowing a person to concentrate more intensely on his inner state. Body relaxation has also been found by several researchers to facilitate the flow of internal images.

In order to relax it's important to know how tension and relaxation feel. Most people know when their muscles are really tense, but they usually cannot distinguish low levels of tension and they do not feel they are able to relax their muscles at will. In the 1920's, Dr. Edmund Jacobson, an American physician, conducted research in muscle physiology, with emphasis on relaxation. Jacobson proved that people can become aware of tension and learn to relax. From his research Jacobson developed a technique called *progressive relaxation*.

People can become aware of the difference between tension and relaxation in their bodies by tensing a muscle and then letting it go.

Exercise for becoming aware of tension and relaxation

With your arm resting on a flat surface, raise your hand by bending it up at the wrist. When your hand is raised, the muscles on top of your forearm, below the elbow, will be contracted, tense. If you let your hand go limp, those muscles will be relaxed and your hand will drop. The feeling of tension, of contraction, when you raise your hand is subtle. If you raise your hand back too far you may be confused by a feeling of strain in the opposing muscles of your lower forearm. If you don't feel the upper forearm tension at first, alternately raise your hand in a slow, even motion and then let it go limp. You might even rest the fingers of your other hand lightly on top of your forearm in order to feel the muscle contract under your fingers.

People can use exercises similar to the one above to become aware of tension and relaxation in any muscle in their body. In progressive relaxation Jacobson has people work on different areas of their body, one by one, contracting muscles, letting them go, and then letting their whole body relax, for about an hour.

For most people the muscles with the greatest residual tension are those of the face and neck, especially those around the eyes and jaw. These are the muscles associated with speech and vision. Jacobson found that when people see something in their mind's eye, there is measurable tension in their eye muscles. In fact, if people imagine a dog running from right to left, their eyes will shift from right to left. Likewise, Jacobson found that when people think in words (inner speech) there is measurable tension in the muscles of speech, especially in the tongue and the muscles of the jaw. When people are totally relaxed their jaw actually drops loosely and their eyes become motionless. Jacobson believes that when the body is totally relaxed, there are no images in the mind; at that moment the mind is essentially clear. He believes that the mind becomes relaxed and clear naturally as the body becomes more deeply relaxed.

It's not doing the exercises which is most important in the Jacobson method; it's allowing oneself to relax and remain relaxed. This concept of *allowing* relaxation to take place is an important one. Emil Coue, a famous French pharmacist who wrote on the power of suggestion in the 19th century, pointed out what he called the law of reversed effort: "To make good suggestions it is absolutely necessary to do it without effort . . . the use of the will . . . must be entirely put aside. One must have recourse exclusively to the imagination." This is similar to the effect that Zen philosophers have referred to as "letting go."

Another commonly used technique for achieving body relaxation involves autosuggestion. It consists basically of a set of verbal instructions. People mentally repeat the instructions and *allow* the suggestions to work by themselves. The basic principle of autosuggestion is that people's bodies respond to ideas held in their mind.

Repeated inner speech is a simple way for people to hold an idea in their mind. The concept of people giving themselves a set of instructions through inner speech is fundamental to directing inner processes. The instructions don't have to be memorized, but people need to have a sense of their meaning in words best suited to themselves, which they can repeat internally.

In John Lilly's terms, what people are doing is programming their own bio-computers. They are giving themselves a set of instructions in order to accomplish a particular goal.

**Relaxation exercise that uses autosuggestion:**

Find a tranquil place where you won't be disturbed. Lie down with your legs uncrossed and your arms at your sides. Close your eyes, inhale slowly and deeply. Pause a moment. Then exhale slowly and completely. Allow your abdomen to rise and fall as you breathe. Do this several times. You now feel calm, comfortable, and more relaxed. As you relax, your breathing will become slow and even. Mentally say to yourself, "My feet are relaxing. They are becoming more and more relaxed. My feet feel heavy." Rest for a moment. Repeat the same suggestions for your ankles. Rest again. In the same way, relax your lower legs, then your thighs, pausing to feel the sensations of relaxation in your muscles. Relax your pelvis. Rest. Relax your abdomen. Rest. Relax the muscles of your back. Rest. Relax your chest. Rest. Relax your fingers. Relax your hands. Rest. Relax your forearms, your upper arms, your shoulders. Rest. Relax your neck. Rest. Relax your jaw, allowing it to drop. Relax your tongue. Relax your cheeks. Relax your eyes. Rest. Relax your forehead and the top of your head. Now just rest. Allow your whole body to relax.

You are now in a calm, relaxed state of being. You can deepen this state by counting backwards. Breathe in; as you exhale slowly, say to yourself, "Ten. I am feeling very relaxed . . ." Inhale again, and as you exhale, repeat mentally, "Nine. I am feeling more relaxed . ." Breathe. "Eight. I am feeling even more relaxed . . ." Seven. "Deeper and more relaxed . . ." Six. "Even more . ." Five (pause). Four (pause). Three (pause). Two (pause). One (pause). Zero (pause).

You are now at a deeper and more relaxed level of awareness, a level at which your body feels healthy, your mind feels peaceful and open. It is a level at which you can experience images in your mind more clearly and vividly than ever before. You can stay in this relaxed state as long as you like. To return to your ordinary consciousness, mentally say, "I am now going to move. When I count to three, I will raise my left hand and stretch my fingers. I will then feel relaxed, happy and strong, ready to continue my everyday activities."

Each time people relax, by any method, they find it easier and they relax more deeply. People experience the sensation of relaxation as tingling, radiating, or pulsing. They feel warmth or coolness, heaviness or a floating sensation. When people have followed a method of relaxation several times they may be able to relax deeply just by breathing in and out and allowing themselves to let go.

Everyone has his own methods that he uses, consciously or unconsciously, to relax. In our society, with its external orientation, most people relax through their leisure-time activities. These activities are often physical. Swimming, bike riding, jogging, hiking and yoga are all activities which, when done in harmony with the body, leave people feeling energized, tingling and relaxed. Gardening, taking walks in the country, sailing, and crafts likewise produce in the people doing them a relaxed state of body and mind similar to that achieved by relaxation exercises such as we have described. Bathing, napping, taking long car rides, listening to music, and lying in the sun can also produce states of mental and physical relaxation.

## **Concentration**

In order to visualize effectively people must also be able to concentrate, to fix their mind on one thought or image and to hold it there. The counting breaths exercise below demonstrates that thoughts constantly enter people's minds, one after another, and that people seem to have little control over the occurrence or nature of such thoughts. Indeed, everyone has had an experience like starting to think about dinner, only to find himself thinking about what he likes to eat, then about college friends he has eaten with, and then about life at college. Obviously, if people are trying to fix their mind on one image, this lack of thought control is not helpful.

Yoga students are taught some simple exercises to help them concentrate. In addition to helping people to concentrate, these exercises also help people understand the nature of their thinking. The first of these yoga exercises involves concentration on a small external object. The object may be of any shape or substance, but it should be fairly simple and small enough so that its whole image can be taken in at a glance. Such an object might be an orange, a pencil, a light bulb, or a rock.

### **Exercise for concentrating on a small object.**

Place the object several feet from you, so that you can easily see all of it. Look directly at the object. Keep your eyes open and think *only* of the object. You may notice the size, the shape, the color, the texture, or the parts of the object. Beyond such analysis, you may think only of the object as a whole. The goal of this exercise is to keep your attention fixed only on the object. Try to do this for at least a minute. Each time another thought comes to mind, simply go back to the object on which you're concentrating. Practice in going back each time thoughts intrude will strengthen your ability to concentrate.

In doing this exercise most people are surprised to find that their mind wanders. They find themselves thinking about how well they're concentrating. The next moment they find themselves wondering if it hasn't been a minute yet. Then they wonder why they're doing this exercise at all. Then they hear a noise outside and wonder what's causing the noise. The point is, they are trying their best to concentrate on the object, but they find their minds are darting about—as the yogins say—"like a mischievous monkey."

### **Exercise based on counting breaths.**

People who count their breaths notice that thoughts come into their mind, which make them lose track of counting. To use the breath-counting exercise to build concentration, people just return to the count each time intrusive thoughts enter their mind.

After people have become used to noticing their thoughts and returning to the breath count, there are several other things they can do to sharpen their ability to concentrate. One is simply to stop the thought as quickly as possible, to "cut it off in mid-sentence," as it were. The natural desire is to follow the thought through. Practice in chopping the thought off at the roots frees people from having to follow thoughts through and prevents them from becoming enmeshed in a train of thoughts that does not pertain to the count. In fact it makes people more aware that thoughts constantly arise in their consciousness.

A second way of dealing with arising thoughts is simply to let them pass. In this approach, people maintain an impersonal attitude toward their thoughts, as if they were someone else's. They neither grab hold of the thoughts nor chop them down. They neither stop them nor pursue them. There is a Zen metaphor that thoughts are like birds flying across the sky of one's mind, and one simply watches them come into view and then disappear.

This exercise brings people to a state of heightened awareness, one in which they are relaxed yet alert. People practicing this exercise find that the quiet periods when they are only aware of counting their breaths lengthen and increase. As people become better able to concentrate on counting their breaths, they find themselves better able to concentrate on a single image. People find that they are able to hold an image for longer periods of time and are less bothered by intruding thoughts. People who've practiced any method of meditation have already developed some skills in concentration and relaxation that are useful in visualization.

### **Seeing**

Active, alert seeing is another skill that is helpful in strengthening the ability to visualize. Seeing, as we usually speak of it, involves much more than exciting the cells of the retina. It involves more than the eye, it involves the mind. Seeing is not like pointing a camera at a scene; it is a learned ability which can always be further developed. The better people train their minds to perceive external images, the easier it becomes for them to imagine internal images as well.

For example, a man who is deep in thought might walk right by a friend on the street. If that fact is pointed out to him he might truthfully say, "I didn't even 'see' her," although she was directly in his field of vision. In fact he did see her, but his brain was concentrated on another thought and did not bring to consciousness the image of his friend.

Another, somewhat different, example of blind seeing may take place when people view an object only with regard to a specific function. For instance, if a person is at a party and wishes to sit down, he may notice an empty chair and "see" it only as a place to sit and rest. If someone were to ask him the next day to 'describe the chair in which he sat, he might not even be able to remember the color or shape of the chair. But he did see the chair and his brain recorded information about it even if he cannot consciously recall it.

The first step for people to take in developing their ability to see is to look with awareness and alertness at whatever is in their visual field. The goal is to go beyond the everyday labels associated with the things seen and to concentrate purely on the visual images. There is much more in what people see than they usually notice. One way to become aware of this is to look at one characteristic of an object after another.

### **Exercise for alertness**

Notice the way light strikes objects: the highlights and shadows, reflections, radiolucent quality, and the range of tones it creates. With your body completely relaxed, let your eyes wander over the outline of each object. Notice sharp lines, soft lines, the total shape of the object and the smaller shapes which comprise it. Notice the texture and finish of the object: is it rough, smooth, dull, or shiny? Look for the grain in the surface. Look at the color of the object; the subtle gradations of tone. Is the color bright or dull, faint or dark, uniform or varying? Be aware of the depth and perspective inherent in what you are looking at.

Exercise for experiencing objects.

Allow thoughts to arise freely as you fix your eyes on different aspects of an object. Try not to react verbally to, or to label, what you see. Just try to experience the images, and the feelings that surround those images. If you do this for a long time, say fifteen to thirty minutes, you will discover a great deal about the object beyond its labelled aspects.

One of the goals of these exercises is for people to allow the object they're looking at to fill their whole consciousness. This is similar to the concentration exercises discussed earlier in that the goal is for people to let no other thoughts enter their mind.

Exercise to allow an object to fill their consciousness.

Move quite close to the object so that it fills your visual field. Then move even closer in order to concentrate on a single part of the object. In doing this, you will probably realize that what your eye focuses on, and takes in the details of, begins to fill your whole consciousness as well as your visual field. Once you become experienced at moving in until an object fills your consciousness, you will be able to accomplish the same thing without changing your position, by mentally "moving in," like a zoom lens on a camera. Or, you can imagine the object actually becoming larger and larger. Also, you can practice mentally "zooming out," so that the object becomes smaller, and your field of vision takes in the entire side of the room in which the object is located. As you zoom in or out you will notice new details in the object. When you zoom in you will be more aware of surface texture, small cracks, specks of dust, hair, etc. As you zoom out, you'll be more aware of shape, depth and perspective and the relationship of size between objects.

Another way for people to develop their ability to see is to look at an object from different mental points of view, as well as from different physical vantage points.

Exercise which involves rapidly shifting viewpoints.

Look at an apple. First, look at it as something to be eaten. You might imagine how the apple tastes, whether it is a variety you especially like, whether it is fresh or not. Just as you become a hungry person ready to bite into the apple, shift your viewpoint to that of an artist painting a picture of the apple. Become aware of the color of the apple, the texture, the light that is striking the apple, how difficult or easy it will be to paint it. As you become ready to pick up your brush, shift rapidly to the point of view of a worm eating his way through the apple. Then shift again, to the point of view of a migrant worker picking the apple . . . Shift once again to the viewpoint of a small child bobbing for the apple in a tub of water.

Each time people's viewpoints change, they will be aware of different aspects of the apple. Experiencing this and understanding it helps people to break free of their habitualized ways of seeing familiar objects. It makes the objects appear fresh and new and gives people greater control over the labels and associations they unconsciously use in ordinary seeing.

**Exercises for 'here and now' seeing.**

Walk down a street and concentrate only on what is immediately in your field of vision. If you begin to think of problems you have or what you'll be doing after this exercise, bring your attention back to your seeing. In doing this, you'll realize that seeing is a here and now experience. As you move, the images change. All there is at any one moment is the present image. You may also notice that qualities such as the intensity of color increase. You may find this to be a beautiful, exhilarating experience which leaves you with the kind of relaxed alertness we discussed earlier in the concentration exercises. You may even notice that you experience certain blank periods in which you cannot recall anything happening, thinking, seeing or moving. If that happens, simply return to seeing the here and now. The blank periods are examples of what the Russian mystic/philosopher Gurdjieff calls 'not remembering yourself'. In terms of this particular exercise, these periods are simply breaks in concentration. You can do the same exercise, walking down a street, from a slightly different point of view - that of remembering everything that you see. After you've walked a short distance, stop, close your eyes, and try to recall as many of the things that you saw as you can.

Another example of here and now seeing involves staring at a table with a number of objects on it. Put a number of diverse objects on your dining room table. Stare at the table for a minute, then close your eyes and see how many of the objects on the table you can see in your mind's eye. Do not list the objects verbally in your mind as you do this. Then look at the table again and see how closely what you remembered matched the things on the table. If you try this exercise several times you will probably find that you remember more objects each time.

***daVinci's Device" exercise***

Leonardo da Vinci noted that when he looked at a wall that had cracks, chips, and paint stains, and let his imagination wander, he noticed resemblances to animal shapes, figures, even whole landscapes in these random defects. DaVinci felt that looking at such amorphous patterns and allowing the mind to play upon them, inventing one object after another, helped to stimulate imaginative seeing. Everyone has had similar experiences as a child when he lay on his back and stared at fluffy cumulus clouds, finding in them ships and faces, seeing new patterns as the wind continually changed the billowy white masses. A somewhat different exercise is to find basic shapes and patterns within recognizable objects. For example, a person can look at a bicycle and notice that the hub of the wheel and the spokes make a circle with lines radiating out, while the reflector on the rear fender makes a circle on a wide line.

**Awareness exercise**

When looking straight ahead, be aware of all that is happening at the periphery of your vision. Do not gaze at what you see. Just become more aware of the details, and even widen your periphery of sight.

## **MORE ON VISUALIZATION TECHNIQUES**

Visualization is creating a mental image, creating a picture in the mind, seeing with the mind's eye. Especially when people first begin to consciously visualize, the images in their mind's eye are different from the images that they see with the aid of their retinas. Indeed, these mental images more resemble thoughts and ideas than sights. Many people feel as if they are "making up" the images rather than seeing them. This is natural. The feeling of making it up is the way beginning visualization feels. Early mental images appear less vivid than external images. In fact, some people feel that they sense their inner images rather than see them. This may be because they are consciously appraising their inner images for the first time. For the first time they are questioning the reality of their inner images with the analytical sphere of their mind.

**Exercise of visualizing a small, uncomplicated, two-dimensional object such as a triangle.**

Draw an equilateral triangle on a piece of white (or coloured) paper with the outer sides about 5 inches long and about 3/4 inch wide, and place it on another piece of paper (or other background) of a different colour (or shade).

Take several deep breaths and relax. Look directly at the triangle on the page for about a minute, or until you feel you are quite familiar with it. Close your eyes. Imagine that you are still looking at the page. See the triangle. Allow your eyes to scan it just as you did when you were looking at the drawing. See the colours of the triangle and of the area around and within the triangle. Now open your eyes and look at the triangle drawing again.

Compare the triangle with the one that you visualized. Close your eyes once more and again visualize the triangle. Imagine that you see the image of the triangle drawing about 18 inches in front of your eyes. You are projecting your imagined triangular image outward. When you project outward in this way you will be able to scan the image with your eyes as if it were an external image.

When you have success at this level, change the colours that you visualize - keeping the same shape. You can do this drawing (or just visualizing) a different shape.

Many people who do this exercise for the first time expect to see an inner image as sharp and clear as the image on the page. But actually people often see something different from their expectations.

For example, the first time Nancy did this exercise she described it as follows: "I was aware of the triangle only fleetingly. At one moment I was aware of it, the next moment I was not. At times I was only aware of part of the image, like the point at the bottom. Then for a second I would see the whole image. The image was never as bright as the image on the page. In fact, I felt as if I was looking at the image in a darkened room."

Michael, who had done this exercise many times, gave this description of what he saw: "I see the image clearly. However, it is a different experience than looking at the image on the page. The image fills my whole consciousness. I don't see the page in a room with other objects around it".

"I constantly look around the triangle and I basically see just the area that I'm looking at. I'm aware of the details: the sharpness of the white compared to the gray; the texture of the paper. If I stare directly at the center of the triangle, I then see a bright, ill-defined triangle flashing at me. It's almost like a neon light. It's easier for me to move my eyes around to different areas than to stare fixedly at the triangle, which requires more concentration. The image has a reality about it which is as real as an external triangle, but I would not confuse it with one. Sometimes the triangle drifts away or one even disappears if my interest wanes. Then I concentrate on the mental image of the triangle again and it comes back."

The important thing for people is to accept whatever they see as the right visualization experience for them. If people have fixed expectations of what they think they *ought* to see, they are apt to feel discouraged, to feel that they aren't doing the exercise correctly or that they visualize. These feelings virtually extinguish any image that they do see. For one thing, negative feelings break people's concentration on the image. They also program people's minds against any improvement. When people's egos enter into their visualizations - for whatever reason - the visualization experience changes. We call this *ego static*. Often the visualization will disappear and there will be a black period (similar to the one discussed in the 'here-and-now' seeing, when people suddenly realize that they have stopped visualizing. Then they may become aware that they are having thoughts such as "I'm really good (or bad) at this visualization." At this point it is helpful if they simply turn their attention to the visualization again (just as they returned to observing in the here-and-now seeing exercise) or if they re-do the relaxation technique exercises. It's been our experience that the more that people visualize, the more understanding they have of the whole experience and the more real that their images become to them.

In most techniques a two dimensional shape is usually given as the first visualization exercise because of its simplicity. The fact that the shape is simple, abstract, and (in a sense) not a part of everyday experience may make it more difficult for some people to visualize. Motivation plays a tremendous part in visualization, and some people may feel little involvement with the triangle and little motivation to visualize it. For that reason people will find it easier to visualize a more familiar object such as an apple or a pencil. People sometimes do an exercise involving a simple two-dimensional shape, become disappointed in their experience, and decide that they are poor visualizers. Whereas the same people may find it easy for instance to visualize a naked person of the opposite sex, and may have done so for years, not realizing that they were visualizing.

**Exercise visualizing a simple, familiar three-dimensional object such as an apple, a flower, or a cup.**

Place an apple about 2 feet in front of you. You will probably find it easier if it is at eye level. Set the apple by itself, without any other objects around it to confuse or distract you. Take several deep breaths and relax. Now look directly at the apple until you feel you are familiar with it. Close your eyes. Imagine that you still see the apple about two feet in front of you. See the apple in your mind's eye. Scan the image just as you did when you were looking at the apple with your eyes open. As you look at the image, notice the shape of the apple, the shadings of color, any irregularities, the tilt of the apple, the angle of the stem. Open your eyes. Compare your inner image with the outer one. Notice any aspects you were not aware of while visualizing. Close your eyes again and repeat the exercise.

**Visualization of a room that they remember from childhood.**

Some psychologists believe that most people find this the easiest visualization exercise to do. Close your eyes. Take several deep breaths and relax. Picture yourself in a room from your childhood. Look at the wall in front of you. Scan it with your eyes just as if you were there. Notice the furniture in front of you and any pictures on the walls. Let your gaze travel downward. Notice if you are standing on a rug. Notice what the floor is made of. Now look at the wall to your right . . . to your left. . . and finally turn around and look at the wall behind you. Notice doors, closets. Look at the windows, notice the color and texture of the curtains.

These visualizations are arranged more or less in a graded series. Each one introduces new aspects of the visualization process. These previous exercises use very recent memory images formed from objects immediately present in the outside world. The childhood room visualization is a distant memory image, of a place and objects most likely not present, and visualizers mentally move about for the first time and locate themselves spatially within a visualized place.

**Visualization moving around an object, rather than within it.**

Relax. Close your eyes. Visualize a large object that you know well, such as a house. Imagine that you are standing, facing the front of the house, which fills your visual field. Look at the door, the windows, the angle of the roof. Notice the material of which the house is constructed - the color and texture of it. Walk up to the house and look closely at the siding. Notice fine details of the texture. Look at other details as well, from this close vantage. Now walk slowly around the house, pausing to look at each side. Notice windows, doors, shutters, etc. Walk completely around the house and come back to the front.

The process of visualization seems to bypass many of the laws of the physical world. Some people may have noticed, while doing the last exercise, that when they wanted to observe something more closely they could walk up to it - or they could just move their consciousness up to the object without thinking about moving their body.

**Exercise involves more practice with mental moving.**

Look carefully at a chair. Notice the seat, the back, the sides, and if it has arms, the arms. Now relax. Close your eyes. Imagine that you are facing the front of the chair. Look at it, notice details of color, texture, and shape. Now look at the side of the chair; notice the profile. Then look at the back of the chair; notice its silhouette. Now look at the other side. Then come back to the front. Look down on the chair as if you were standing above it. Then look at the bottom as if you were below the chair.

In doing this exercise people learn that they can move their consciousness at will, without moving their bodies. When the instructions say, "Look at the side of the chair" they just seem to be at the side of the chair and no longer in front of it. Other people feel a sense of disembodied movement.

**Exercise exploring mental moving, introducing another kind of movement.**

Get a small three-dimensional object with protruberances, such as a teakettle. Look at all sides of the object. Notice the overall shape, the handle, the spout, the lid, and any dents or chips in the kettle. Relax deeply and close your eyes. Picture the teakettle in front of you. Orient yourself so that you are looking at one side of the kettle. Now imagine that you are moving slowly around the kettle, observing how its shape changes. Notice how the spout goes out of sight when you are looking directly at the back of the kettle. Float slowly up above the kettle and look down on it: look at the handle of the cover and the opening of the spout. Float back down until the kettle is at your eye level. Now imagine that the teakettle is rotating slowly in front of you, while you remain stationary. Again notice how shapes change as the kettle turns.

The teakettle exercise is the first exercise to introduce an imagination image. People imagine that the kettle is turning, although they had not observed that in their outer-world perception of the kettle.

**Exercise mixing memory and imagination images.**

Lie down. Relax deeply and close your eyes. Go back in your mind to the childhood room you visualized earlier. Re-orient yourself in the room. Picture the walls in front of you and scan them until you come to a light switch. Turn it on. Look at the light. Notice how the bulb glows. Turn the switch on and off several times, watching the bulb brighten and dim as you do so. Mentally move to a desk or table top. Pick up an object from the surface, such as a book or a pencil. Turn it around; look at it. Put it back down on the table. Now imagine that the same object starts to float up in front of you, as if it were weightless. Watch it float up past your eyes and bump gently on the ceiling. Watch it float back down and land gently on the table surface. Now turn until you face the window. Imagine yourself floating slowly toward the window and passing out through it. Let yourself hover a few feet outside the window. Look at the scene in front of you. Notice other houses, roads, trees, the sky. Still floating, look at the ground below you. Notice grass, sidewalks, shrubs, and other objects. Now float gently down until your feet touch the ground.

In this exercise people experience control over their visual images. Not only that, they are able to do things beyond the laws of physical space. For example, they are able to float through a window themselves and make objects float in front of them. They are also able to make an object's appearance change when they switch the light on and off. The image of the light bulb changes from luminous to dark and back.

**Exercise extending the ability to transform images through visualization.**

Picture an uninflated red balloon. Mentally blow it up until it is half full, but distinctly round. Knot it. Throw the balloon up in the air. When it gets near the ceiling, stop it there. Make the balloon rotate . . . faster and faster . . . then stop it. Make it bounce along the ceiling. Stop it. Bring it down until it's hovering just above eye level. Then change the color of the balloon to yellow. Look at it. Change the color to blue. Now make the blue balloon bounce along the floor. Stop it. Make the balloon bigger, until it's almost doubled in size. Now make the balloon very small, and let it come to rest on the floor.

In doing the balloon exercise and others before, people may have been surprised to find themselves visualizing things not specifically mentioned in the exercise. For example, when people watched the balloon float up to the ceiling, it may have been a familiar ceiling that they saw. Or it may have been an unfamiliar ceiling which had particular details that they noticed. In this exercise people also experimented further with control over their images. As a result of verbal instructions, they were able to change their visualizations in color and size.

**Exercise practicing visualization of a person.**

It is helpful if people choose someone who they know and see frequently - a close friend, a spouse, a child, or a business associate. Relax. Close your eyes. Imagine that you see the person standing a few feet away from you. Look at his or her face. Allow your eyes to scan the person's face as if he or she were standing in front of you. Notice the color of the person's eyes, skin and hair. Look closely at the shape of the person's mouth, nose, and chin. Look at the rest of the person's body, noticing the person's clothes and how he or she is standing. Now imagine the person doing something you've frequently watched. Notice the way the person's arms move, the way the person's body is held. Imagine that the person is talking on the phone. Watch the person's facial expressions. Listen to the person's voice; hear what he or she is saying. Listen to the tone, the inflection, the volume. Finally, watch the person as the conversation ends.

Many people find this exercise harder than some of the others. This may be because a familiar person evokes many images and it can be difficult to focus in on the specific images described in this exercise. But people often have vivid daydreams about other people. If people realize that their daydreams are visualizations they can use them as exercises for improving their image control.

**Exercise visualizing yourself.**

Interestingly enough, many people really do not have a clear image of what they look like. Some people find it useful to spend time looking at themselves in a mirror before doing this exercise. Looking at photographs and home movies is another way people can become familiar with the way they look.

Relax. Close your eyes. Mentally see yourself. Look at your face. Notice your hair, eyes, nose, mouth. Look at your body: your hands and arms, your feet and legs, your torso. Watch yourself doing something you frequently do. Look at your movements, the way you hold your body. Imagine yourself answering the phone. Listen to your voice, to the inflections it has when you say something familiar.

Many people find visualizing themselves more difficult than visualizing an object such as an apple. More thoughts seem to intrude. For example, a person may think, "Do I really look like that?" or "That's not how I look!" Because the object of a person's visualization is himself, his ego, with its fears, doubts, and wishes, is much more likely to make itself heard and thereby enter into the visualization process. Actually, people are present as observers in all of the exercises that have been described up until this one. The attitude of observing objects and other people is much closer to ordinary consciousness than is the attitude of observing Oneself.

So far in the visualization exercises even when people are active (and doing phenomenal things such as floating out a window) they do so from within themselves. But in this last exercise people visualized themselves, which, in a sense, requires them to step outside of themselves. In other words, they have to separate their consciousness from their body. Many people find this disturbing the first time that they try it. Often they find the process easier if they visualize themselves in a real or imaginary situation with people and objects around them.

In the two previous exercises people imagine hearing a voice, as well as seeing visual imagery. Mental imagery is not restricted to the visual alone, but involves other sensory modalities. Becoming aware of, and using, all the sensory modalities deepens and enriches the visualization process and its effectiveness.

**Exercise involving all of your senses.**

Close your eyes. Relax deeply. Visualize a tranquil scene from your past in which you felt strong, happy, and at ease. You may remember being in the mountains or at the seashore. Or you may remember a particularly warm, quiet time at home. In any case, the moment should be an especially fine one, one in which you felt as good as you ever have. Notice your surroundings - if you're at the beach, notice the sand, the waves, the sky. If you are at the mountains notice the trees, the ground and again the sky. Wherever you are, notice details in your surroundings, such as pebbles on the ground, light dancing on the water or coming through the trees, leaves on the ground. Notice the breeze, the way the air *feels* on your skin. Notice the warmth of the sand, the coolness of the ground. Notice the way the ground *feels* against your body. *Smell* the air: the salty odor from the sea, the live, humusy odor of the woods. *Hear* the sounds around you: the waves breaking on the shore, the leaves of the trees rustling in the wind, the cries of birds overhead, the chirp of nearby crickets. Remember how you felt—the warm heaviness in your arms and legs, the gentle rise and fall of your chest as you breathed. Enjoy these sensations.

In this exercise people experience how in using the mind's sense of hearing, touch and smell, their visualizations acquire richness, reality and presence. After doing this exercise most people feel very good. They are able to bring the pleasurable sensations of their visualization back into their ordinary consciousness. In fact, in doing this exercise they discover a quiet place in their mind that they can return to whenever they wish to feel those good sensations. In this exercise people primarily re- experience past sensations.

**Exercise *imagining* sensations and experiencing them in your body.**

Sit down. Close your eyes. Relax deeply. Hold your arms straight out in front of you. Imagine that your left hand is becoming heavy, very heavy. Imagine that it *feels* as if it were made of lead. Picture a heavy object such as a book resting on your left hand. Feel the weight of the object. Now imagine that your right hand feels very light. Imagine that there is a string around your right wrist that is attached to a helium balloon. Feel the buoyancy of the balloon. Now open your eyes.

Most people who do this exercise will find that their left hand has dropped considerably and that their right hand has drifted upward. Often people feel the tendency of their hands to move as they are doing the exercise.

Some people unconsciously act to keep their hands level. This exercise gives people practice in visualizing situations which produce changes in their body. The sight of their hands in different positions when they open their eyes shows them that their body responds to the visual images that they hold. We will talk more about this in the chapter on medicine.

Until now, all the visualizations we have dealt with have involved the conscious programming of visual images. For example, a person has said to himself, "The balloon is red . . . yellow . . . blue," and he has seen the balloon correspondingly change in color. The next exercise involves people experiencing undirected visualizations that arise spontaneously. We've mentioned that people are sometimes surprised when they see details that were not mentioned in an exercise. This element is a kind of spontaneous visualization. Another difference in the next exercise is that it will focus on an imagination, not a memory, image. So objects that people will picture may be objects that they have never seen before. Earlier, we talked about the fact that some people may feel that they are "making it all up." This feeling is especially common in spontaneous imagination exercises. We call this type of exercise a receptive visualization.

**Exercise: receptive visualization**

Close your eyes. Relax deeply. In this exercise you will visualize a place or a room where you can go to work in your inner world. The room is as real as a studio or a shop, but it exists in inner space, in your mind. Begin to visualize yourself in this space. You may see the space all at once, or parts of it may appear gradually. Begin to look around. Notice where you are. Notice whether you are out of doors or in a room. If you are in a room, notice how the walls, doors and windows look, what they are made of. Look at the ceiling, the floor, the rugs, the furniture. If you are out of doors, notice the kind of place where you are. Is it a clearing in the woods, a meadow, a cave? Look closely at the trees, the plants, the rocks. Find a comfortable place to sit. It may be a chair, a rug, or the ground. You may be surprised to find that your inner space is filled with plants although it is a room, or that it has a comfortable chair although it is out of doors. Because you are visualizing this space, there are no limits on what you may see in it. There may be objects made from materials you've never seen before, even objects that float in space. Explore the space, until you feel familiar with it. There are several things which people find useful in their inner space, and you can visualize them if you wish. You may already have noticed some of these things in looking around your inner space. The first object is a clock. The second is a viewing screen. You may also visualize a guide, someone who can help you answer questions. If you visualize a guide, notice what he or she looks like and how he or she is dressed. You can even ask the guide's name and talk to them now. Look around once more and visualize anything else you would like in your workshop. This is a space you can return to whenever you wish, to work, to think or just to feel good.

In this exercise people experience receiving a visualization, having a visualization come to them without pre-programming its contents. In the exercise we suggested objects, such as a room, with no details to define them. Most people are surprised when they do see a room. Often these locations are very detailed even though the person has never seen them before. A feeling similar to this is experienced by artists when they envision a new work and by writers when they visualize fictional characters as we will see in the chapter on creativity.