

**Calming The Mind So The Body Can Perform** There's two seconds left in the championship game, your team is behind by one point and you are at the free throw line shooting two shots. You're keenly aware of the situation and you, like everyone else in the sold out arena, know how important these two shots are. You can feel your heart pounding and your legs are a little weak as you bounce the ball and prepare for your first shot. You take a last deep breath and push the ball towards the basket. You watch with considerable anxiety as the ball hits the front of the rim and bounces straight up. It comes back down and starts rolling around the rim, finally dropping through. As the ball drops through the hoop you feel a tremendous sense of relief. It's as if all the weight of the world has been lifted from your shoulders. The ball is passed to you by the referee for your second shot and you step up to the line and dribble the ball. This time, there is no thought of failure, there is no doubt in your mind. You know that you're going to make the shot. You take the last bounce, look to the basket, inhale, feel your knees bend slightly and begin pushing the ball towards the basket. It's effortless and you're in total control, you know before the ball leaves your hand that it's going through without even touching the rim. You feel the excitement as watch the ball spin through the air in slow motion towards its target. The moment almost seems frozen in time for you. Just before your second shot, you entered what athletes refer to as "the zone." One of the primary roles sport psychologists have, consists of trying to help athletes get into the zone and stay there. To do that, we have

to help athletes quiet thought processes. We have to teach them to shut out distractions, to trust their bodies, to simply let themselves perform. **What is the Zone?** The zone is an altered state of consciousness. When you are in the zone, your normal way of experiencing things is dramatically altered. By examining the descriptions provided by elite level athletes, it's possible to identify some of the common alterations of perception that occur when an athlete has a "peak experience", or enters the "zone" or "flow" state (Ludvig, 1966; Ravizza, 1977; Cohen, 1991; Williams & Krane, 1993).

- There is a feeling of complete control, total confidence.
- The athlete knows with certainty what is going to happen before it actually occurs.
- Time is slowed down.
- Objects seem larger and/or more vivid than usual.
- The performance is effortless, occurring automatically without any conscious direction on the part of the athlete.
- There is a feeling of exhilaration even joy.
- The level of performance exceeds the individual's expectations, making him or her aware of a higher level of potential than he or she would have hoped for.

From the descriptions provided by individuals who have had peak experiences and entered the zone, it's obvious why it is such a desired state. Who among us would not like to feel totally confident and in control, to be able to perform as if in a dream? Unfortunately, athletes descriptions alone, don't tell you how to get there. **Getting Into The Zone** There is considerable evidence supporting the theory that alterations in an individuals focus of concentration and/or changes in physiological arousal are what

precipitate an altered state of consciousness. These changes may be brought about through meditation, hypnosis, the use of drugs, and/or biofeedback (Tart, 1969). To understand how these seeming diverse methodologies lead to similar experiences, you need to understand the role that focus of concentration plays in determining a person's physical, mental (or cognitive), and emotional experience. **Robert M. Nideffer, Ph.D. To read more, Please download the book.**  
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