

## Step Two: Mental Creativity, Pore Breathing and Physical Self-Determination

By Rawn Clark June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Today I will be discussing the rest of Step Two: the sensory concentration exercises, pore breathing and bodily control, in that order.

The common theme in all of the Step Two exercises is creativity. Re-creating your personality, learning to create sensory impressions and exercising creative choice in regard to how you react to physical discomfort. The key then is to approach the work of Step Two with the spirit of creative play.

The sensory concentration exercises and your first experiments with pore breathing rely upon your innate ability to imagine and pretend. When exercised, strengthened and used with conscious intention, this innate ability of imagination becomes the magical faculty of creative imagination.

In Hermetic practice, the creative imagination is a tool that is used in very specific ways and with very specific goals. Many think that the point of developing the creative imagination is so that eventually you will be able to materialize objects out of thin air just with the mind, or that you will be able to alter reality to suit your desires merely with your thoughts and will power, but neither of these ideas is true. Its primary function as a tool is to connect self with other. Not to alter something external to self, but rather to alter one's own self. Let me explain . . .

A fundamental aspect of the mental plane, made use of throughout the Hermetic training, is the Law of Attraction. Like attracts like. In mental plane terms, things that share commonality, that are alike or similar, exist in close proximity; while things that do not share anything in common or which are opposites, always remain separated by the mental plane equivalent of distance.

This means that when you insert an ideation into the mental plane with your creative imagination, your creation will be magnetically drawn to whatever it shares commonality with in the mental plane. For example, if you create the idea of happiness within your own mind, and support it with the creation of appropriate astra-physical sensations, then similar ideas will surround your awareness on the mental plane. Very quickly your creation becomes a factual reality because it is supported by what is occurring in the mental plane.

Another example can be found in the practice of mental wandering. To get to the Venus sphere, one uses the creative imagination to fill one's awareness with all the symbols that represent the essential meaning of the Venus sphere and thus one is automatically drawn to the Venus sphere. It's by these means that one navigates within the mental realm or plane.

This is also the foundation of the Step Three exercises with the Elements. By creating with your imagination all of the sensations and ideas associated with an Element, you eventually connect with the factual, non-imaginary Element within the mental realm. Once this mental connection is established through repeated practice, it follows very quickly that there is no further need to imagine the effects of the Element. In other words, as magicians, we use the tool of our creative imagination to lead us to factual experience and perception.

Naturally, the Step Two sensory concentration exercises are quite important. Bardon designed them in such a way that they train your creativity with each sense independently and thoroughly so that by the end of Step Two you should be able to create any sensory impression you want and hold it steady for as long as you desire.

The basic technique is really quite simple and straight forward. We begin with direct perception, move on to memory and then go from there to true creativity which is not dependant upon memory. For example, with the visualization exercise, we begin by actually looking at the object we wish to visualize, in this case a simple pencil. First we look at a real pencil with our physical eyes and note all of its details. Then we close our eyes and call up the memory of the pencil we've just looked at and try to hold that memory-image solidly in our mind for as long as possible.

Ordinarily, when we look at something, such as our pencil, our visual cortex responds and specific synapses fire within the brain. This initiates a chain reaction of chemical messengers throughout the body. **And when we remember the thing we just looked at, the visual cortex responds in the exact same way**, followed by the same initiation of chemical messengers throughout the body. In other words, there is no difference to the brain between perceiving a thing and remembering a thing. And ultimately, there is no difference to the brain between something we have created with our imagination and something non-created that we have actually perceived.

The Step Two exercises with the senses are rooted in this fact. We **begin** by remembering the object/sound/taste/etc. we have just perceived, but then we depart from the "normal" by focusing our awareness exclusively and extendedly upon this image that we have brought forth in our memory. This prolongs and amplifies the firing of the brain's synapses, causing the memory to become something more than just a fleeting image/sound/taste/etc.

Once we are able to prolong the remembered image, we can then manipulate its appearance as if it were made of clay or some other easily changed substance (i.e., use our "plastic" imagination). In other words, we take intentional, conscious control of the image/sound/flavor and therefore determine its nature independent of our memory. This is when we begin to create.

You see, this is really very simple! As with most of the Hermetic techniques, it's merely an intentionally focused prolonging of something we do all the time.

With practice, you will quickly become able to create images, sounds, smells, sensations, etc., that are original to your experience and which do not arise from your memory. This is the goal of the Step Two sensory concentration exercises.

Bardon laid out a very specific sequence to these sensory exercises: first sight, then hearing, then tactile, then smell and finally taste. And while it is best to preserve this sequence it is not essential that you do so. Each person is different when it comes to the sensitivity of their senses. Some of us are primarily visual and will most likely find the visual exercises the easiest to begin with, while others are primarily tactile and will find those exercises easier to begin with, and so on. What matters more than adhering to Bardon's stated sequence is that you meet with success with one sense fairly quickly. Once you have achieved success with one sense, the rest of the exercises become very easy to master.

Several years ago I met with a fellow who had been essentially stuck on the visualization exercise for a couple of years and he was very frustrated by his lack of success. Upon meeting him I recognized that his strongest sensory affinity was with hearing sounds so I suggested that he switch to working with the auditory exercises and gain his first success there, then move on to the other senses. He returned the next morning to say that the auditory exercise proved to be extremely easy for him and that his success with the auditory exercise informed him of what was meant by "success"! He then mastered all of the sensory exercises in a matter of a few weeks and finally progressed to Step Three after so many frustrating years of fruitless devotion to the sensory concentration exercises.

What is very important to adhere to though is Bardon's instruction to keep the senses separate from each other during the exercises. For instance, if you are creating the sound of a bird's song, you do not want to split your focus by also creating the visual image of the bird singing. Focus your creativity in just a single sensory impression at a time and, if you must, forcefully disallow any images to accompany your sounds, or smells to accompany your tastes, etc. This isolates each sense as you are developing it and results in much more refinement and power than if you mix the senses at this point in the training. Multi-sensorial creation comes with Step Three after each sense has been trained separately.

One side-effect of these exercises that I have experienced, and which I believe most who do this work experience, is that training your senses in this way heightens their sensitivity and you are enabled to perceive more subtle nuances than before. For example, when I smell an aroma now, I smell it very deeply and perceive multiple layers within what used to be just a simple smell. This fact has greatly increased my appreciation for what the sensory world has to offer in terms of its beauty and variety. While this might seem inconsequential it must be noted that it is through sensory perception that we receive much of our astral-emotional nourishment. Who has not experienced the sense of wellbeing that comes from observing a beautiful sunset, for example? Observing a sunset or anything else for that matter, with trained senses heightens and enriches the nourishing aspect of sensory perception. It's like the nutritional difference between eating a highly

processed, pre-cooked, packed-in-plastic vegetable, verses eating one you've freshly picked from your garden. ☺

Okay, enough said about the sensory concentration exercises for now. I'm sure you'll have questions later so I'll save any further elaboration till then.

Let's turn now to the physical exercises of Step Two, beginning with what Bardón titled "conscious pore breathing". This is not the opposite of good breathing! LOL In fact, this is just an elaboration of the Step One magic of air, the main difference being that instead of breathing with just the lungs, you are learning how to breathe with your whole body.

While we call this breathing, the pore breathing doesn't have to be associated with the breath. Clearly, you are not drawing air in through your pores in the same way you draw air in with your lungs. Instead, what you are drawing in through your pores are all the energetic constituents normally inhaled during regular breathing. In other words, you are drawing energy plus the Akasha into your body with pore breathing. And of course, when you tie this to normal breathing you are simultaneously inhaling the air with your lungs, but this is inconsequential to the exercise itself. It's tied to normal breathing only because this makes it easier to learn – it's simply easier to draw something insubstantial into your body when you mimic the act of inhalation. And besides, it feels very much like regular breathing does in that you feel an internal expansion as you draw the vital power into your body.

It is very important however, that you understand the magical aspect of pore breathing is not accomplished by your lungs – it's accomplished by your mind. So you do not want to engage in elaborate breathing practices such as taking extra deep breaths or holding your breath or counting your inhale and exhale, etc. Your breathing pattern and rhythm should be perfectly normal and unaltered during your exercises.

Eventually, in later Steps, you will learn how to simply coalesce energy, Elements, Fluids, Light and ideas into an object, for example, merely by willing it to occur, but how you get to that point or level of ability is by beginning here with mastery of pore breathing. So do give this exercise your full attention.

I recommend that at first you don't worry about whether or not you are actually inhaling the vital power or energy in your pore breathing. Set aside the obvious question of what the vital energy feels like and just focus on the idea and the sensation of inhaling with your whole body. For me, it feels like my physical inhalation creates a vacuum at the very center of my physical body and this vacuum draws air into it through my skin. I feel that passage of energy with my skin and muscle and bone as a physical sensation.

If it helps, use what you've learned from your pursuit of the visual sensory concentration exercise and visualize the vital energy entering into your body as you inhale. And if you've worked with the tactile exercise then also use your imagination to create the

feeling of this entry of energy into your body. Remember, this will build a connection for you with the factual vital energy on the mental plane and thus draw the actual experience of the vital energy to you.

Once you are comfortable with the practice of pore breathing then begin to impregnate your inhalations with your auto-suggestive phrase or some ideation relevant to your soul mirror work. This is exactly what you mastered with the magic of Air in Step One just on a slightly larger scale. In this instance, your idea is intentionally bound to the resident Akasha of the physical air and to the vital energy itself, which ultimately is a more powerful practice than the Step One technique.

And then, you start working with the exhalation phase of the breathing cycle and literally exhale the opposite of your inhaled ideation. For example, you might exhale the essential meaning of a negative trait in order to help rid yourself of its influence. Bardon called this the magical exhalation.

Ultimately this too does not need to be tied in with physical breathing but it is nonetheless the best way to learn the magical exhale. This must be mastered to the same high degree as the magical inhalation because in later Steps you must be able to exhale or rid yourself of an accumulation of the Elements, vital energy, fluids, etc., with an absolute confidence.

For me the same sensations arise with the magical exhale as I experience during the inhalation except that they are reversed. This time I feel a great internal pressure at the center of my body which when I intentionally press down upon it, spreads outward from center with force and exits my body through bone, muscle and eventually skin. Again, I feel these as physical sensations.

I gather all of the negative trait, for example, into that pressurized space and force it out of my body with the magical exhale.

At first, the pore breathing takes a lot of concentrated effort but very quickly it will become as easy as . . . well . . . as easy as breathing! LOL And once it's mastered, it can be quite fun and educational as well. There's a whole universe of energies and ideas out there to be inhaled and savored!

Okay, so that brings us finally to the last part of the physical section of Step Two: what Bardon titled "control of your body". Although these exercises were presented in the fairly simplistic context of a physical discipline or self-determination, they are much more subtle than they first appear and have more far reaching implications that you might suspect.

I have always felt that there was something important missing in Bardon's sensory concentration exercise regimen; namely, the creation of different emotional states. Our emotions are as much a sensory apparatus as our eye sight or hearing and it's our

emotional reactions to what our senses convey to our mind that really determine the quality and quantity of our perceptions.

The creation of a variety of emotional states in the same fashion as you'd create a variety of images, sounds, smells, etc., has many benefits. First of all it is VERY educational and serves to increase one's sense of empathy. Secondly, it broadens one's experiential comprehension of various emotional states that might otherwise remain enigmas due to their foreignness. Third and most importantly, it teaches emotional detachment; or rather, the ability to determine or create your emotional state regardless of how external influences might ordinarily affect it.

I had always recognized that creating emotional states plays a part in the self-transformation of character work since much of that discipline involves self-determination in regard to your automatic subconscious emotional reactions. But Bardon didn't address it specifically and head-on in the same way he did the senses of sight, hearing, feeling, smell and taste. Considering the initiatory importance of self-determination in regard to emotional reaction and its impact on the astral Equilibrium of the Elements, the only explanation that makes any sense to me as to why Bardon didn't provide equally explicit exercises for it is that in Eastern Europe of the 1950's, emotional states were not discussed as openly and readily as we are used to in this day.

Whatever the reasons for his lack of explicit exercises concerning the emotions, he did manage to include indirect ways of reaching pretty much the same goal of emotional self-determination. Till now I thought I had located all those indirect bits but to my surprise, while re-reading the physical section of Step Two in preparation for this lecture, I came to realize that I'd missed an important example in the physical control exercises!

Sensation is merely the firing of nerve impulses to the brain but how we feel about those nerve impulses determines whether we experience a sensation as painful or pleasant and how we feel about the sensation determines how we react to it. But when you remove the emotional valuation of the sensation, all that remains is pure sensation, to which we may either react or not as we choose.

To succeed in Bardon's control of the body exercises you must learn how to disconnect from that automatic emotional evaluation of sensation and disempower its instinctive influence over your reactions. In other words, you must choose to inhabit the emotional state we call "comfortable" when you experience what would ordinarily be deemed "discomfort".

Sitting in the posture Bardon described will most likely be uncomfortable at first until you have learned to separate yourself from the natural inclination to readjust your body's position. The same with not drinking water when you are thirsty or not eating when you are hungry, etc. Each demands that you first recognize your instinctual reaction and then supplant your unconscious instinct with a consciously intended alternative.

It is VERY educational to confront these unconscious emotional evaluations of sensation. For example, in real life I am a skinny boy with no protective fat layer so I get cold very easily. To me, cold equals uncomfortable so my instinct is to get warm, but when I set aside that emotional valuation of the sensation, my sense of discomfort disappears and I am then at ease when cold and even enjoy its refreshing quality. The cold no longer interrupts me, no longer influences my actions, and I am then at liberty to do as I please instead of being a slave to instinct.

In terms of your future practice, the ability to disregard physical sensation, whether painful or pleasurable, becomes important when you need to be physically still for several hours at a stretch or physically active for long durations. It's important that you learn to rule your physical body instead of letting your body's needs always rule you.

The essence of an Elemental Equilibrium is the power of self-determination. This means that you consciously determine what happens in your mind; what emotional responses you will enact; and what influence your physical body will exert over your behavior. All of these are within your ability to determine for yourself with conscious intention.

As I said at the beginning of today's lecture, Step Two is all about creativity. To me there nothing so exciting as creating something with my own hands. So I was in seventh heaven when I first began the work of Step Two – what better to create than my self? LOL For me, this is fun work, more akin to play really than work. I hope you too will find this same playful joy in being creative with your self and with how you live your life. Why not make them things of beauty and wonder that grace the world?

Well, that ends today's lecture. In a moment I'll take your questions but before I do I should mention that in two weeks from today, Sunday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, I will be giving the first of two, possibly three lectures on Step Three. And next Sunday the 21st, and every Sunday in between these lectures, we're holding a live Bardson discussion group here. I've enjoyed the question sessions after these lectures so much and they seem so productive that I thought why not have an hour or two of just discussion between the lectures? So that what's happening. I hope you will come join us!