

**Spiritual Practices for the Joy of It –
Beginning with Finding Joy in the Breath**
From: *Desire – The Tantric Path to Awakening*
Chapter 6 – *Breath: Door of Our Sensoriality*
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Pages 26-29

If presence to sensations, emotions, and thoughts is to reach plenitude, everything must start with awareness of the breath. Rather than devoting ourselves from the start to breathing exercises, the Tantric masters advise us to become conscious of the manner in which we breathe. This one act of consciousness will calm and deepen the breath. There are never any new behaviors to apply, because the masters believe that nothing deep can be developed starting from the unconscious.

When we have become conscious of our way of breathing, we can allow the breath to find its proper place and its plenitude, very progressively encouraging complete breathing – on the condition that the process be founded on the emergence of consciousness and not on the idea of “doing,” of applying a technique to obtain an effect. Nothing is done in Tantric yoga to obtain some future gratification; on the contrary, it offers “practices” whose fruits are immediately present in “the practice” itself. In this way we breathe solely to experience the profound harmony of breathing – nothing else.

...

It is much more important to become conscious of the breath many times a day than to attempt to practice for too long at a time. All the “micropractices” of Tantric yoga are done for five, ten, or thirty seconds followed by a conscious return to the habitual manner of living or doing things. This pulling back or withdrawing of attention is crucial, because it allows us not to get lost in automatic activity while believing we are doing our practice.

At first, I try to be present to my breath ten to twenty times a day. Little by little, *to the degree that this awareness brings me pleasure*, I let the number of times I become aware of the breath increase to a hundred times a day and more. Pleasure is an essential element of Tantric practice, because once we find pleasure in presence, we have a natural tendency to return to it. It is thus no longer a practice but a way in which to savor life and our sensoriality more fully, and this is the basis of all the subsequent practices.

The effects of conscious breathing or partially conscious breathing are extraordinary:

- Decrease in stress
- Development of sensory sensitivity
- More regular sleep
- General equilibrium of the body

- Regular blood and lymph flow
- Calmness, equilibrium
- Improved mental capacity
- Mini rests distilled over the whole of the day
- Improved concentration
- More precise physical movements
- Feelings of plenitude and joy

Once conscious breathing replaces automatic breathing, you will feel a complete change in your way of perceiving the world. Fears and anxieties about relationships with others will disappear; you will have a profound feeling of being connected to the earth, the impression that we call "having your feet on the ground."

The success of the later practices, all of which deal with full consciousness of the sensations, depends uniquely upon the ability to breathe consciously. This is so important that certain Tantric masters limit their teachings to the practice of breathing.

The Buddha himself, in the *Anapanasati Sutra*, bases his teaching of the practice of full consciousness of the breath: "The practice of Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will lead to perfect accomplishment. ..."

The great seventeenth-century Zen master Man-An wrote, in his "Elementary Talk of Zen":

When you breathe out, know you are breathing out; when you breathe in, know you are breathing in. Focus your consciousness on your breathing, not letting consciousness go up or down or out or in, not thinking discursively, not making intellectual or emotional interpretations, not trying to figure anything out, simply being aware of outgoing and incoming breath, not missing a single breath.