

## *The Insights of Concentration*

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Simply by breathing, you give rise to feelings in the body. And so you have the choice: What kind of breathing are you going to engage in? Engage in what gives rise to painful feelings or gives rise to pleasant feelings?

There's no reason to give rise to painful feelings with the breath. There's enough pain in life otherwise. If you're going to be able to understand things, you have to have a safe haven where you don't feel threatened, so that you can watch things as they're happening and not feel disoriented or threatened by what's appearing.

This means you have to know how to give rise to pleasant feelings in the present moment. This is an important skill. Sometimes people will say, "Don't try to do anything at all, just be with whatever's arising," as if you weren't already causing things to arise. Simply by deciding to be still or just to look, you're causing something to happen, so you might as well cause good things to happen.

Someone else says that, "The more you try to change things inside, the worse they get." That's simply because you haven't learned yet how to change things properly. It's like someone sitting down at the piano and trying to play and all they get is weird sounds out of the piano and they say, "The more I try to play, the weirder it sounds. I'd better stop."

There's a training that's involved. You start with simple things like the in-breath and the out-breath. Then you get to more subtle things like the way you think, the perceptions you hold in mind. These, too, will have an impact on the kind of feelings you have.

So in the course of the practice, we want to learn how to give rise to pleasant feelings, how to use these feelings as a foundation for the mind so that we can do further work inside.

It's not simply a matter of being with whatever naturally arises, because your nature is to cause things to happen. The mind is an active principle, so learn how to use that active principle in a skillful way.

Work with the breath. If you find that working with the breath in a particular way doesn't work, back up a bit and try something else. If you have a sense that, when you breathe in, the breath energy is going down and that doesn't feel right, try going up. If going up doesn't feel right, try going down. There's a lot to play with.

When you're playing around with the energy in the body in this way, the mind

begins to settle down with a sense of interest. Not simply because you force it down but because you find that something really interesting is happening here: You can change the feeling tone in your body, you can change the feeling tone in your mind, and with practice, you can learn how to do it skillfully.

So there are times when you actively interfere and other times when you just want to sit and watch, but it's all part of this program of learning how to be observant of how you're fabricating feelings, how you're creating feelings. It's in this way that you get more and more sensitive to the workings of the mind.

This is how concentration practice leads to insight. In fact, it contains insight as part of the practice. That's when the practice stays most stable.