



Hello all,

Welcome to **Coherent Breathing**. Volume 3, Issue 9: *Consciousness...*
I hope you enjoyed Issue 8, *Is This The Breathing Generation?*

A common thread woven through much of breathing theory and praxis is this thing we refer to as consciousness. Many forms of breathing, including Coherent Breathing have as their goal, the enhancement of consciousness. But what does this mean? What is this elusive thing “consciousness”, anyway? In his May, 2023 *Psychology Today* article, *What Is Consciousness?*, Damian K.F. Pang, M.Sc., offers this definition: “The active experience of experiencing.”⁽¹⁾

I like this definition. The reason I do is the word *active*. Here, active means engaged. To be engaged, we must be present – the mind must be attentive, not thinking about one thing while doing another, not day-dreaming – but awake and focused on the matter at hand. This “drifting” is referred to as “mind-wandering”, generally considered to be an aspect of human cognition, having both advantages and disadvantages, a primary challenge being stray rumination which can be either positive or negative. Positive rumination can be uplifting and motivating; negative rumination, typified by re-runs of past unpleasant experiences, can destroy one’s health. This unruly attribute of mind is often accompanied by “the monkey mind”, an inner voice that is rarely quiet. Either way, if stray rumination is happening when we are attempting to focus on an activity at hand, it is problematic and for that moment, we are not fully present. As many know, a principal goal of meditation is to tame this problem. The objective is not to terminate mind-wandering, but to cultivate the ability to allow and disallow it. Personally, I see it as a matter of quieting down the nervous system. During meditation, this affords us the ability to apply the mind to the task at hand, without distraction or slipping into oblivion. Critical tasks *necessitate* that we be fully present.



In the last year I have found myself referencing *The Secret Of The Golden Flower* often, during Coherent Breathing instruction and in follow-on discussions about meditation. Written in the 1600s, the book is a manual for awakening the latent potential of the human being, expressly the elevation of consciousness. Translated by Thomas Cleary, possibly the most prolific translator of Eastern esoteric texts, *The Secret Of The Golden Flower* has been a major sourcebook since the publication of Cleary’s translation in 1991. I read and mused over it before and after the publication of *Wujishi Breathing Exercise*, translation by Men Den (pub. 1995). Dr. Meng-Sheng Lin and I published *Wuji Qi Gong & The Secret Of Immortality* in 2013, with the objective of elucidating both the philosophical background and the practical method. I highly recommend reading *The Secret Of The Golden Flower* for everyone interested in meditative practice. There are four axioms contained in the initial chapters that I wish to discuss in this article.

1) First establish a firm foothold in daily activities within society. Only then can you cultivate reality and understand essence.⁽²⁾ Here we are reminded that only by experiencing the world around us can we perceive a veil of illusion of our own making.

2) *Turning the light around*: This phrase refers to *reversing* the outward flow of our attention or “light”, where our light is our energy, mind, and spirit. The context is that the populace at large goes about life fully immersed and fascinated with the external world and its myriad emotions, issues, and objects. As written, *turning the light around* has double entendre, it is both a literal *reversal* of our attention and energy – from outward to inward, and is the *opposite* of the societal behavior of the time, an interest in inner cultivation vs. immersion in the outer world. The eyes direct our attention and with it our bioenergy. When our eyes are riveted to an external object or scene, our vital energy flows out of our body proper and is entangled in the milieu exterieur. This is particularly problematic in the world of today where we are surrounded with devices that demand our attention.

An easiest way to experience the power of “turning the light around” is to shift one’s attention away from, say a computer screen as I am using now, to closing one’s eyes and feeling one’s own skin – all at once – take a breath or two. I think you’ll agree, the distinction is surprising. “*When we turn the light around, all of the energies in the body rise up*”.⁽³⁾ What we sense is our own oscillating energy/field. We can call it whatever we wish, but in fact it is a function of the bio-electricity that animates all of our cells and our senses. Another fun experience is to walk in a straight line with the head positioned forward, looking forward, but then shift the eyes slowly left and then right. Do you notice your body following your eyes If we hold the eyes either left or right and allow the body to follow, we’ll end up walking in a circle.



2) *Tuning the breathing*: Isn't the 400 year-old term *tuning the breathing* interesting! I posit that this refers to finding one's resonant rate with commensurate depth. In fact, 400 years isn't that long ago. The Yellow Emperor knew of this phenomenon circa 2500 B.C.E. *Tuning the breathing* is exactly what we are able to do today with the aid of biofeedback instrumentation. In my experience, managing one's breathing is totally necessary to managing one's mind. This is because breathing has a profound affect on the brain and nervous system at large. Most readers know of the strong relationship between breathing, autonomic nervous system status, and the fight or flight response. Per Coherent Breathing theory, when we are breathing resonantly, a large wave of oxygenated blood washes through the brain with every breath. As viewed with EEG, the brain generates electrical signals that are 10 times the voltage of those of functional EEG bands. Given that the mind is what the brain does (Stephen Pinker), what are the global effects on the mind when we breathe in a resonant manner? When we meditate? As we go about our daily lives?

The Secret Of The Golden Flower instructs that we breathe such that we cannot hear our own breath⁽⁴⁾ – this in itself making necessary adjustments to the rate and depth. As such the ears are also turned inwardly listening to our own breathing – the sound of our breathing is the biofeedback. As we slow and deepen our breathing, there is a natural central nervous system relaxation response, and with it a slowing down of impulsive thought. The longer that we maintain the practice, the further apart impulsive thoughts become – until we experience periods with no thought and learn to allow or disallow impulsive thought.

3) *Keeping to the center*: A goal of *reversal* as set forward in *The Secret Of The Golden Flower* is to prevent the deleterious “leakage” of spirit and consciousness, associated with worldly fascination and entanglement by maintaining one's attention on one's center.⁽⁵⁾ However, keeping to the center isn't just about avoiding the escape of our vital energy, it is also about generating, accumulating, and employing it for alchemical purposes, morphing the body and mind so as to realize true human potential. *The Secret of the Golden Flower* describes the goal as refining the higher soul which is a means of controlling the lower soul wherein consciousness resides, and by so doing so elevating consciousness itself.⁽⁶⁾

We articulate these same points of practice in *Wuji Qi Gong & The Secret Of Immortality*, the basis of which is another Taoist classic, the *Can Tong Qi*. There we identify the mysterious “center” as the navel, “the point of origin”. In *The Secret Of The Golden Flower* the center is referred to as “the mechanism of creation”. The special significance of the navel is that it is the point from which the body emanated. As such, it is connected to all of the meridians in the body, so when we place our “light” of attention there, that light flows into the meridians, filling them and circulating energy within them. The body fills with energy.

Here, there is a process of cultivation that occurs over time, such that the existence of the meridian system becomes self-apparent and the body and mind become integrated. Attaching to or resting the mind on the navel as we breathe is a literal form of biofeedback and is very potent. We are connecting our “light” to our point of origin. Of course, this is the location of the Manipura chakra, Sanskrit translation being “city of jewels.” In Wilhelm's translation, the shen (spirit), whose home is the eyes, must be allowed to dive down to the solar plexus, where when held there, unites with energy and crystalizes.⁽⁷⁾ Note that this is yet another example of reversal. As the body fills with energy, it is realized that this energy extends beyond the limits of the physical body – the dvadashanta (12 ends) or celestial stems extend into space. This is the symbolism of the 12-spoked wheel of Buddhism.

As we are reminded in *The Secret Of The Golden Flower*, everyone's experience is unique and for that reason, I will not dwell on what one might or should experience. Like all else in life, the only way to understand is to experience it for oneself.

References:

- 1) *The Secret Of The Golden Flower*, translation by Cleary, Thomas. Harper Collins, 1991
- 2) *The Secret Of The Golden Flower*, translation by Wilhelm, Richard, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1962

Notes:

- 1) Psychology Today, May 2023, *What Is Consciousness?*, Damian K.F. Pang, M.Sc.,
- Notes from *The Secret Of The Golden Flower*, translation by Cleary, Thomas, Harper Collins, 1917: 2) Page 10, Verse 7, 3) Page 11, Verse 12, 4) Page 24, Verse 6, 5) Page 20, Verse 15, 6) Page 15, Verse 13
- 7) *The Secret Of The Golden Flower*, translation by Wilhelm, Richard. Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1962

Best wishes for 2025.

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