



DEVELOPING CONSCIOUS-AWARENESS

By Phil Golding

Focusing on the breath for concentration and using the breath as a channel for energy control and also awareness is an important feature of meditation. Even through the breath is a physical function, it can also be a tool or avenue for awareness. To help you understand this further, I need to introduce the nature of consciousness, and I emphasise “introduce”, because understanding consciousness is a long, slow, exacting process. I will get back to the breath shortly.

Because the body is within the mind, with mental focus, the mind can alter and potentially control the body’s internal functions in ways that we don’t normally think is possible. Slowing down the heart rate at will is a good example. The mind needs to be trained, however, so there must be a higher force than the mind. This force is given the term “consciousness”. Consciousness is a force that is in all of us, but for most of us, it is largely “unconscious”. Its effects on our lives go largely unnoticed. It has been shown through yoga and also Western science that consciousness is the ultimate intelligence and potential within the mind, or more accurately, the intelligent force that acts through the mind and can potentially direct the mind. I am not talking here about narrow academic intelligence. I am talking about holistic intelligence or meta-cognition, as it is known in psychology. The mind, therefore, is within consciousness, and the power and potential of consciousness seems to be unlimited. Becoming aware of this consciousness and learning how to use it constructively is what meditation is all about.

Pure conscious-awareness does not wander about like the untrained mental mind that is driven by its untamed passions, like a child running willy-nilly, getting itself in all sorts of strife such as being caught in fear, worry, regret, resentment, craving etc., wasting it's energy trying to control what can't be controlled, and confusing itself. In contrast, consciousness is always peacefully present in the moment. Consciousness has one pointed focus, while also being able to expand itself to take in far more than the mind's normal perspective. This is why an athlete or musician, for example, can get into the zone, as it is called, and reach amazing peaks in potential – they are in a state of focused meditation.

To get into consciousness, we must first “get out of the mind”. To get out of the mind, we do our best to consciously anchor our awareness to the sensation of our breath, because like conscious-awareness, every breath is here now – you can't breathe yesterday or tomorrow or somewhere else! This keeps our awareness somewhat occupied in the moment of ongoing now, and less inclined to get distracted by the mind. This focus on the breath creates some conscious stillness and an open space of awareness where one can observe the mind. You then have two forces operating independently within the mind: 1. Conscious-awareness observing the sensation of the breath and 2. The untrained habit-bound mental/emotional mind. The untrained mind's habit thinking soon pushes into the open space of awareness that is created by focusing on the breath. Awareness can then more easily recognise and observe these thoughts that push into the focus on the breath, instead of being blindly swept away by them, because despite the thoughts, we can keep bringing our awareness back to the breath. With enough practice, this new focus triggers major realisation, the importance of which is hard to grasp at first. “Ah...this thought is not the silent focus on my breath that I have committed to. I did not choose this thought. It habitually sprang from the mind. I am the conscious observer watching this thought. I am not the thought, I am the conscious observer.” It may take a while for enough focus and awareness in the meditation experience to be established for this realisation to be genuine, but with practice it is inevitable. A separation between conscious-awareness and habitual thought is created, if only subtly at first.

This separation then enables a relationship to be established between ourself as conscious-awareness and this hyperactive child that is our mind. As conscious-awareness, we can become the loving, patient and wise parent/guardian to the mind and to the body, but that is a subject for another day.