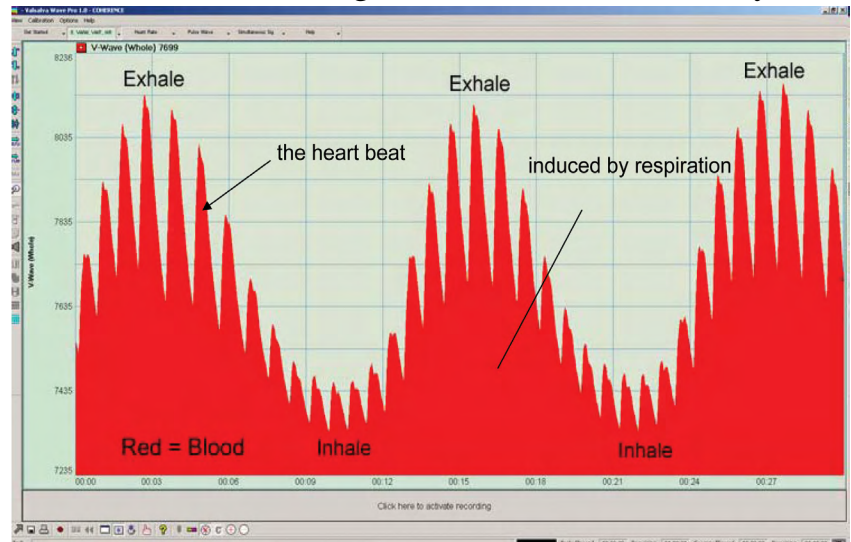


*Hello all,*

Welcome to October's *COHERENCE Newsletter*. I apologize for a delay in *The Substance Series* which was planned to start in October. The delay is a result of a lightning strike that made its way into the Office North network taking out PCs, printers, networking gear, etc. In the end, its cost about 6 weeks of productive time. In its place, I offer you: *To Breathe Or Not To Breathe, That Is The Question*, a consideration of the role of consciousness in the breathing process.

COHERENCE was founded in 2003 based on the understanding that most adults and many children breathe in a manner that is detrimental to their health, well-being, and longevity. Coherent Breathing, *conscious* training of breathing at the nominal frequency of resonance with equal periods of inhalation and exhalation is the essence of the method put forward to transform our breathing into a health promoting activity vs. an activity that detracts from it. It accomplishes this by facilitating healthful breathing frequency and depth which serve to promote healthful circulation. A robust Valsalva Wave is the first order evidence of its result.



Complex Valsalva Wave rising and falling with exhalation and inhalation. Heart rate rises and falls in opposition.

[Instrument: COHERENCE Valsalva Wave Pro](#)

Variation in heart rate is a second order result, heart rate varying inversely due to autonomic nervous system detection of the blood wave's rise and fall. Both Valsalva Wave and heart rate variation can be seen in the graphic where the large underlying wave is a function of breathing depth and regularity. The faster wave riding atop is the heart beat where we see heart rate slowing down as the respiratory wave rises and speeding up as the respiratory wave falls. Coherent Breathing requires *conscious* practice, and encourages *conscious* guidance of our breathing during daily life as circumstances permit, thereby facilitating this wave action as well as a host of other positive biometrics.

But there exists a debate: *Should we participate consciously in our breathing?* Some argue that *spontaneous breathing* (automatic breathing without training, conscious participation, or guidance) is the best approach, this notion being based on the fact that breathing goes on with or without our conscious participation, and because it does, the body/mind must know best. As noted in [last month's newsletter](#), HeartMath, though not the only one, is an example of this mindset, although HeartMath's reasoning is that the alternative, "conscious breathing", may require *too much* effort for some. [Actually, I also find this to be true and as you would think, of the population that doesn't embrace breathing readily, where a primary reason may be characterized as "I don't have the energy to do it." As the generation of bioenergy accrues in large part from breathing, breathing practice and exercise in general can be precisely what is indicated, as opposed to its opposite - not breathing.]

But I am troubled by the overall philosophy of abstaining from conscious participation in our breathing. Yes, if we're not participating, breathing does go on anyway (in some way, shape, or form) but is this a justification for not participating? If the initial thesis is correct, i.e. that ineffective incoherent breathing is a key contributor to poor health, then failure to reorient the status quo unconscious breathing pattern via education and practice fails to address the problem.

Why is it better not to participate consciously in breathing, a vitally important process, given our ability to do so, and with the knowledge of how to do it? Is our conscious participation in the breathing process to be limited to blowing out the candles on a birthday cake? The very idea that the human body/mind functions best without our conscious participation seems to exclude consciousness from the body/mind itself. Reptilian in my view.

Personally, I like to believe that at some time in our history, breathing spontaneously was healthful. However, I suspect that a "natural" breath 10,000 ago was very different than one today. I say this because I'm certain that breathing well, be it conscious or unconscious was critical to survival, i.e. if you did not breathe well, you didn't make it for long. Certainly, the same was also true of other forms of fitness, strength, speed, etc. As the vast majority of today's adults are in poor physical condition including circulatory functioning, is it surprising that respiration is not equally dysfunctional? They are part of the same cardio-vascular-pulmonary system.

I believe that the bottom line is this... Physical exercise is a *conscious* activity that improves our health – this is firmly established. Breathing can be a *conscious* activity that improves our health, one that we can engage in most of the time regardless of what we're doing. Or breathing can remain an activity over which the medulla oblongata has complete autonomy, in keeping with its primordial instincts and imperatives. Is this the role of consciousness?

In my humble opinion, while much remains to be understood, there is no mystery. A reason we are afforded conscious control over breathing along with a discerning intellect, is so we can employ them in concert toward an optimal outcome: health, well-being, peak performance, and longevity. The question then is:

*To breathe or not to breathe...*

Thank you for your interest and consideration.

Stephen Elliott

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