

# Self-fulfilment through the integration of homeopathy, coherent breathing and Qigong ©

by Kenneth Silvestri Ed.D. CCH RSHom



Kenneth Silvestri is a psychotherapist and certified classical homeopath (CCH). He offers a unique integrative and mindful approach to improving one's immune system by resolving emotional and physical problems. His doctorate is in anthropology and psychology from Columbia University, New York, and he has completed homeopathic certification programmes with Luc De Schepper and David Little. Dr Silvestri has published over 80 articles and conducted hundreds of workshops on interpersonal communication, forgiveness, stress management, family therapy and homeopathy. He is currently completing a book entitled *Widening Your Lens: How to See Your Life Differently*, and is also an active black belt student of Aikido, a martial art based on peace and harmony.

The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think it works.

Gregory Bateson

During the past several years I have incorporated two profoundly effective resources, coherent breathing and Qigong, into my practice of systemic psychotherapy and homeopathy. This has made a dramatic positive difference in closing the gap between a patient's expressed presenting problem and desired wellness outcomes. These resources have also made my process of determining the simillimum more effective and enable me to create therapeutic plans that allow for profound, quicker and longer lasting change. It is my sense that there are many mind / body methods that can enhance the homeopathic process. My goal in this article is to demonstrate how this can occur using two specific techniques that have proven successful in my practice.

When a patient is seeking to improve their health, it is important for them to recognise how they interact with the world from a systemic point of view. I present the metaphor of widening one's lens. Using this perspective encourages them to see things in context, as opposed to focusing on content which seems to be the prevalent mode in the medical and mental health world. This part-to-whole viewing supports a process that can create significant changes. Like in quantum physics, there may be two or more solutions to a problem that can each be correct. This framework is ecological and provides a better understanding of what needs to be altered for improved wellbeing. This is

holistic healing as contrasted with allopathic medicine. Seeing beyond fragmentation enhances the homeopathic process, and even more so when it is integrated with coherent breathing and Qigong (Silvestri, 2010, 2014, 2015; Schütt, 2015).

Samuel Hahnemann supported the use of ecological psychology in treatment.

In all the so-called somatic diseases as well, the mental and emotional frame of mind is altered.

(§210, 6th edition, *Organon*)

In §211 he comments that This preeminent importance of the emotional state holds good to such an extent that the patient's emotional state often tips the scale in the selection of the homeopathic remedy.



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This is a decidedly peculiar sign which, among all the signs of disease, can least remain hidden from the exactly observing physician.

Homeopathy is meant to address psychological and physical states which have been proven and cured by its remedies.

What follows is the framework that I use with patients, as well as a case study that utilises this process to support the use of homeopathy. It focuses on emotional wellbeing and can provide a solid foundation for addressing physical ailments. It can also be adapted by a trained homeopath or used in conjunction with mental health practitioners.

### Being in the present

Isn't it wonderful the way the world holds both the deeply serious, and the unexpectedly mirthful?

Mary Oliver

By way of a starting point, let me share with you what I ask those seeking help in my practice. My initial question is simply: 'What is it that you are not getting in life that causes concern?' I ask them to

think about this for a few minutes. When they have defined this concern or grievance, I ask them to focus on the consequences of what they are not getting. This is a portal to homeopathic enquiry similar to Clemens von Bönninghausen's method of asking how, what, why, and when to illicit rubrics.

Next I ask them to describe how it looks and feels to not get what they want and how this influences their life. At this juncture, I introduce coherent breathing with the instructions: Breathe through the nose, fill up your stomach and then gradually bring your breath up to your chest to the count of six seconds as you slowly raise your arms above your head. Exhale through your mouth, lips slightly pursed, to the count of six seconds as you slowly bring your arms down to your sides. Think of something positive and compassionate as you exhale. Repeat this a few times.

This is coherent breathing: five breaths per minute as compared to the average 15 breaths per minute

### Joanne was jealous of couples

that we usually take, with a simple added Qigong movement that allows the parasympathetic and sympathetic parts of the nervous system to be more in harmony. I follow by requesting that they relax their body from head to toe while creating a peripheral view. By widening their lens, I ask them to try and to see beyond the confines of their surroundings. I then ask them to pause and think about what is happening in their community, nation and world.

After a few moments, I have them bring their lens back to the original concern and ask themselves how their core concern or grievance affects them, and is connected to all aspects of their life. What insights, sensations, modalities and strengths arise in them as they consider their grievance from a wider perspective? I request that they view these insights as unique, positive and profound and record them or enter them in a journal. This framework allows for homeopathic rubrics to come to the surface more readily.

▷ Widening one's lens gives us perspective and allows for ecological thinking. It also encourages us to see how we are all connected by an 'energetic charge', as author Lynn McTaggart suggests in her book *The Field*, or how we are made up of molecules traceable to high mass stars that 'exploded their chemically rich guts into the galaxy,' as physicist Neil Degrasse Tyson believes (<http://m.imdb.com/name/nm1183205/quotes>).

We can feel our life energy when we focus on our qi; recognising this is 'love' but understanding how we are all connected is 'wisdom'. To do this it also helps to have a 'beginner's mind' as expressed by Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh. The ultimate mantra, that I have found through Aikido (a martial art dedicated to producing harmony in the world), is 'expect nothing and be ready for anything'. During this process, unique expressions are brought up from the patient's subconscious leading to further differentiations of possible homeopathic rubrics.

#### Case study

Joanna, a 22-year-old woman came to me because of pain from an ovarian cyst. Her physicians recommended pain medication and management. During the above exercise, she narrated feelings of guilt and a sense that she was being condemned by her family because of her relationship with a man of whom they did not approve.

After widening her lens, I gently probed by creating a genogram, a psychological family tree, where she described being at odds with her parents since childhood. She always felt like she was doing something wrong. Her narrative was passionate and intense. The pain, both emotional and physical, that she was experiencing was 'a feeling of being swollen with shooting sensations'. Her articulated grievance to the question of what she was not getting in life was 'I am not getting vindicated from all the negative accusations about my behaviour'.

The consequence of this feeling produced guilt, resentment and unhealthy decision-making. Joanna said that she now recognised the connection to her feelings when the pain became intense. She agreed to do the coherent breathing and Qigong movements 20 minutes a day and return in a week. I did a preliminary repertorisation based on her initial narrative.

#### Creating a supportive environment

I realised that our major social issues – health, education, human rights, social justice, political power, protection of the environment, the management of business enterprises, the economy, and so on – all have to do with living systems; with individual human beings, social systems, and ecosystems.

Fritjof Capra

When a grievance is embedded, and shows no resolution, the 'fight or flight' part of our autonomic

## We can feel our life energy when we focus on our qi

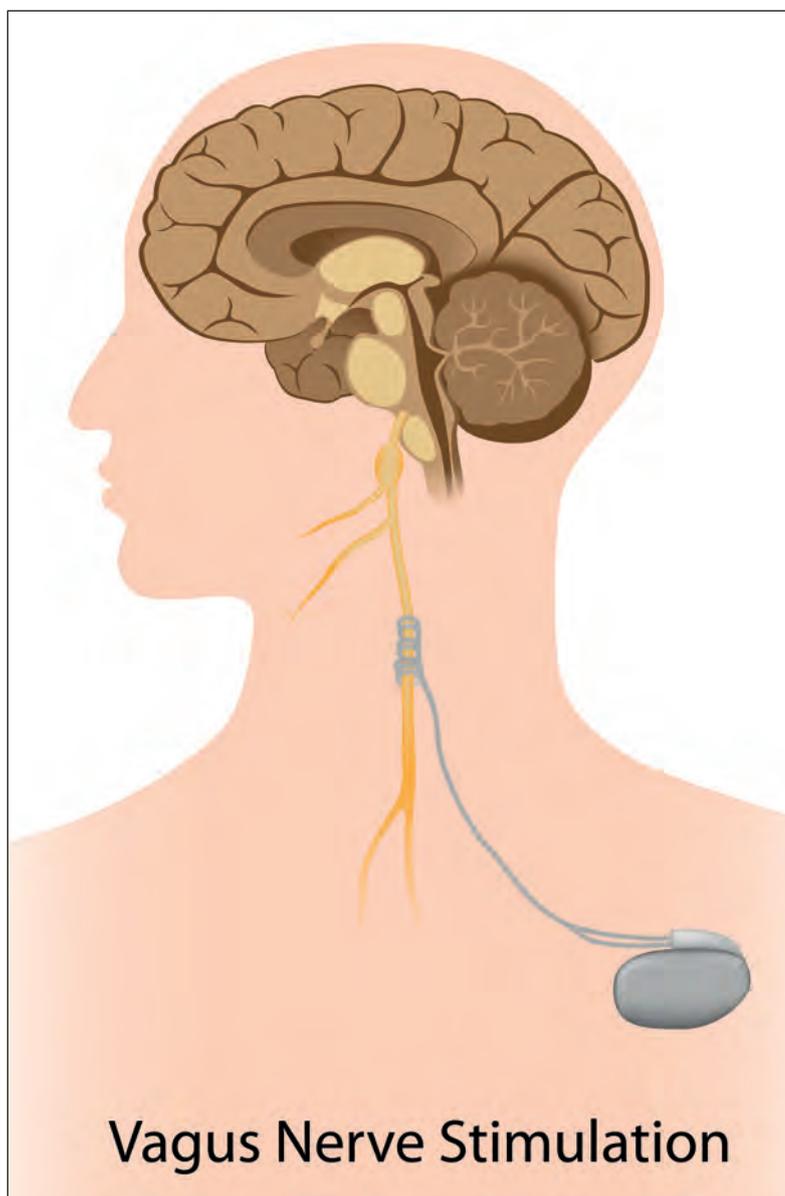
nervous system becomes revved up and habitually overused. This part of our nervous system is great for reacting to a life-threatening situation, but injurious to our mental and physical health if overused. It is not healthy to be saving your life 24 hours a day. However, we have a choice to alter our framework and utilise our parasympathetic nervous system (the 'calm down' part). This can be accomplished by mindfully focusing on and being grateful for the good in the world. It is not about minimising hurt; it is about changing one's grievance story. This helps unearth suppressed feelings

and embedded physical symptoms in many ways, providing clues to Hering's law and directions of healing.

Gratitude and compassion stimulate the vagus nerve, which gets its name from its Latin origin, 'wandering'. This nerve covers much of the upper body and regulates our metabolism, heart rate and general wellbeing. It responds to positive thoughts and is the nerve of 'compassion'. The consequences of a revved up sympathetic nervous system, as mentioned above, is that it undermines the vagus nerve, putting us in the 'protector mode' which overrides our 'nurturing mode'. It is difficult to be compassionate or, for that matter, empathic when we are locked into our sympathetic nervous system, which kicks us into 'fight or flight'.

We are actually dumber when frightened. The nervous system is made up of specialised cells that are responsive to the environment. We now know that cell membranes actually read information from our environment. Stress hormones shrink the portion of our brain that is the centre of higher reasoning. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had it right when he referred to fear as our biggest enemy.

Coherent breathing is one of only a very few techniques we can use to alter imposed injurious patterns on our nervous system. This slow and focused breathing assists the parasympathetic part of the nervous system to calm and heal us. The level of activity associated with this process can be measured using the changes in heart rate that are linked to breathing. These fluctuations are used to calculate heart rate variability, or HRV. Changing the rate and pattern of breathing alters HRV, reflecting shifts in nervous system activity. The vagus nerve is also activated by vibrational sensations throughout the body such as the sound of 'Om'. Using breathing patterns, it is possible to move the epicentre of the vibrations to different locations



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in the body. This presents a natural ally to homeopathic treatment which strives to balance the immune system.

Research clearly demonstrates that coherent breathing improves anxiety, PTSD, IBD, inflammatory markers, and heart issues. It also alleviates mental health patterns of schizophrenia, ADD, depression, trauma, abuse, and stress better than cognitive behavioural therapy and Alcoholics Anonymous. Coherent breathing alters thalamic inputs to the cortex, and enhances oxytocin, the cuddle hormone, while improving the vagus nerve function and space awareness. Most beneficially it

works with all temperaments and, in my experience, allows for homeopathic remedies to act in a much more positive manner (Brown and Gerberg, 2012; Elliott, 2006).

When Qigong, which has evolved over centuries and consists of very gentle movements,

**We are actually dumber when frightened**

## Research clearly demonstrates that coherent breathing improves anxiety

Gratitude and compassion stimulate the vagus nerve

is combined with coherent breathing it offers an effective, nontoxic process to improve one's autonomic nervous system and brain functioning (Cohen, 1997).

### *Case study continued*

During my second meeting with Joanna, she mentioned that her self-esteem was low when becoming anxious. She initially had trouble relaxing and doing the breathing exercises, complained of being thirsty and explained that being cold made her feel better. When she was able to get into a rhythm, her tone and description of her pain was more focused and with less anger and sarcasm. She exhibited an 'extroverted feeling' temperament with much rigidity, preoccupation of fear, jealousy of those who were married, and guilt regarding her family.

Her reasoning was somewhat egocentric; however, with the breathing and Qigong movements, she was expressing it with less anger. She was not confident that she could maintain it. The remedy was now confirmed and she agreed to try *Lachesis* in an LM1 potency to be taken once every three days as a test dose frequency. ▶

▷ **Celebrating possibilities to explore your energy and poetic expression**

Discovery ... is, in its essence, a matter of rearranging or transforming evidence in such a way that one is enabled to go beyond the evidence so reassembled to new insights. It may well be that an additional fact or shred of evidence makes this larger transformation possible. But it is often not even dependent on new information.

Jerome Brunner

There are many artistic means to experience creativity. Here is one exercise that demonstrates the power of poetic expression. Ask your patient to revisit their grievance from the 'widening your lens' exercise and to think about what it is that they may need to sustain themselves (list words that describe their needs). Next, ask them to do five minutes of coherent breathing with the simple Qigong movement listed above (extending their arms to the sides with palms

up, lifting them up during the six-second inhalation toward and above their head, then bring them down slowly on their six-second exhalation). This should be done for five minutes, 25 breaths. Ask them to allow words of compassion to come to their mind that nourish them as they exhale.

After they finish this exercise have them jot down ways they can connect the nourishing words with the needs that they listed. They can next write down feelings about connecting their needs with ways that will make them feel more whole and healthy. All these possible insights can evoke patterns and symptoms that can be used for possible second homeopathic prescriptions.

*Case study continued*

Joanna came for her follow-up session three weeks after starting the remedy. It had been decided after the first week that she should continue the remedy every other day. She said that while her pain

was still occurring, it was not as severe as before. After doing some coherent breathing at the beginning of her session with some Qigong movements, I asked her to do the above exercise which allowed her to take an inventory of her strengths, needs, to set goals, to feel less persecuted and to be more expressive toward her parents in an assertive manner. She felt less addictive and, although still very talkative, her train of thought was very focused.

**Be able to adjust and research your fallibility**

Mahatma Gandhi referred to the positive power of truth that comes out of seeing things in perspective when he said:

Your beliefs become your thoughts;  
your thoughts become your words.  
Your words become your actions;  
your actions become your habits.  
Your habits become your values;  
your values become your destiny.

The final step in this process of self-fulfilment using homeopathy and any adjunct mindful techniques is to amend the original grievance identified at the beginning of this article, for example, from 'I cannot find happiness' to 'I will be happy'. Patients should be encouraged to practise the above skills from this self-fulfilment process each day as if they are 'thousand-year techniques', or lifelong activities. Use of positive affirmations describing goals and accomplishments will clarify what one wants to see happening in their life. Part of the process is to have patients note how they are doing at the end of each day, and make any adjustments needed to close the gap between where they are and where they want to be. There needs to be respect for fallibility, by making adjustments to maintain a new paradigm of being truly healthy.

*Case study continued*

The next follow-up session with Joanna was six weeks after starting the remedy. She now believed in her goal to be healthier. She had continued the breathing and Qigong exercises, expanding them by joining

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a Qigong class at the local adult school. She shared an amendment to her original grievance by using what she called a 'new mantra', one that not only accepted her connections to her family but also one that understood the subtle nuances that caused conflict. Her amended grievance was a positive statement of 'I will have my actions and behaviour acknowledged and affirmed'. She also reported that her ovarian cyst pain had subsided and I recommended that she now should take the remedy on an as-needed basis.

### Conclusion

I believe that homeopathy, although having a long history of clinical successes, has been plagued with the difficult process of determining the 'simillimum' and supporting it with lifestyle changes, something that Hahnemann himself strongly advocated. A true integration of mind / body resources offers complementary means to recognise the pattern of suffering and consequently help

determine the needed remedy and therapeutic goals to strengthen and maintain the immune system's ability to create balance.

The use of coherent breathing and Qigong that I described above is one of many approaches that can enhance the homeopathic process. Other modalities such as yoga, meditation, music, art therapy, forgiveness, Aikido, Tai Chi, nutrition, sports, poetic expression, to mention a few, if they have a mindfulness or systemic basis, provide opportunities to create personal clarity. This provides a segue for the discerning homeopath to access the subconscious reservoir of insights that represent the totality of one's makeup, all of which can lead to a better understanding of the unique, extraordinary and peculiar patterns for healing and optimal health.

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**Coherent breathing improves our physical and mental health**

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