

A far-reaching interview with JJ Semple, author of  
*Deciphering the Golden Flower One Secret at a Time*  
and reviewer Araminta Matthews of Front Street Reviews

Thank you to both of you!

AM: *Deciphering the Golden Flower One Secret at a Time* is a memoir meant to clarify the journey from the beginning to "enlightenment", or the discovery of the secret. In your letter, you mention that you struggled with where to begin your story. What made you settle on beginning at the beginning of your life as opposed to the moment you discovered the secret?

JJS: Finally, it came down to what you expressed so skillfully in your review: "Self-realization begins at birth; it is the journey as much as it is the destination." If I didn't know it when I started to write, I learned it by the time I'd finished. Also, I'm a fan of Carl Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. It's more down to earth than his other writings and it begins at the very beginning. And although I love flashbacks in movies, they're harder to pull off in a written narrative.

AM: How long did it take you to complete this book? Did you find it difficult to translate the metaphysical into the physical -- that is, was it ever hard for you to describe your experiences?

JJS: It didn't take long to write, but I fuss a lot once I finish something. In fact, I may be a better re-writer than a writer, if you know what I mean. Some writers are so talented they get it right the first time. I like to go over it; it's the part I enjoy most. As far as "translating" the metaphysical into everyday language, it demands that the author put himself in the reader's place. I used to be a technical writer and that's what technical writers should do—translate "techspeak" into everyday language. I learned a lot from that work. Of course, the vocabulary of metaphysics is even more arcane than the technical, so I have watch myself. In my new book, *The Backward-Flowing Method* I tried repeating various notions in slightly different ways throughout the book just to get my points across. Hope this strategy is not too redundant; I find a variety of different ways works best: images, metaphors, straight descriptive language.

AM: In your book, you talk about the importance of "symmetry in the face" -- what significance does that have?

JJS: Remember Phrenology—the discredited pseudo-science of the late 1800s? There may be something to it after all. I know it is hard to understand but the head, that is, its actual shape, controls the shape of the body. As soon as the Kundalini kicked off the Life Force inside me, it began reshaping my head. You may remember the passage in *Deciphering the Golden Flower One Secret at a Time* that describes my meeting with Muktananda. How he reckoned that I must be talking about some muscular action in the head that would cause reshaping. I was asking him if he knew anything about it. At the time I wasn't sure what was causing it. I certainly didn't think it was muscular.

I now realize that it is pure nerve force energy or neural energy. How it works on the inside I'm not exactly sure at this time. I can only say that it does work, that nature (the Life Force) wants to "correct" any instances of asymmetry in present state of an individual that don't match the individual's genetic blueprint. In other words, before it can correct a defect that isn't in the individual's original blueprint, a defect that is caused by some event subsequent to the individual's birth, it has to reshape the head. As soon as the head is reshaped, the corresponding body part starts to adjust. Again, the connection with phrenology. A slight reshaping of the head can cause a much greater bodily adjustment. This rippling process seems reasonable to me, because the somatic details of the body, its entirety and its parts, must reside in the brain. So the life Force makes the brain "aware of" a discrepancy between the blueprint and the actual body, the Life Force then reshapes the head, and the new cranial shape then "allows" the corresponding body part to "fill out" to the dimensions of the blueprint. You actually feel this happening: tissue and muscle moving into corresponding parts of the body. As an analogy, think of a computer program for designing houses. You add two feet to the width of one room on your computer, and immediately, it magically increases the width of the room in the real house.

AM: In an earlier chapter, you show a pair of pictures of yourself before and after kundalini. When I first viewed it, I observed your "after kundalini" image to look somewhat disconcerting -- shining eyes with a faraway look, unkempt hair and beard growing freely. How do you account for this transformation from the clean-cut academic-looking young man to the kundalini version of yourself? What impact did you expect the images to have on your readers?

JJS: Well, I hoped to show that Kundalini does effect a transformation. However in the instance of Golden Flower Meditation, this transformation is benign; it causes no damage. In a few days the individual is back to normal. And thanks to the Life Force, the normal soon becomes metanormal. Gopi Krishna called Kundalini "an upgrade mechanism." In my book, I called it a "warranty for the body."

AM: Once a book is published, it is no longer possible to alter its first presentation. Is there anything in this book that you wish you had edited or added before it first went to print?

JJS: I live in a redwood forest and walk there every morning. That's when ideas pop into my head—what I might have said, how I might improve such and such a section or passage, facts I know now, but didn't know when I wrote the book. A lot of this has to do with my continual personal/spiritual evolution triggering abrupt new insights into my personal, as well as my Kundalini, experience. Realizing that I did not understand a certain phenomenon/event/observation or did not express my understanding of it as accurately as I could have. I am constantly rethinking things, trying to clarify them in my mind. So yes I would probably change and edit the book. Which parts? Too numerous to list.

Perhaps the hardest part to get right is the Marketing Pitch—the back cover text. I am frequently bombarded with new ideas on how to "spin" the book. I try to visualize the customer experience. What goes through a potential reader's mind

during the 15 seconds she holds the book in her hands, evaluating the cover and the back cover text.

Every book should be revised from time to time. Maybe not *War and Peace* or *Crime and Punishment*. But who knows maybe Tolstoy and/or Dostoyevsky were bothered all their lives by little details. In any case, as a writer/publisher I can revise my books any time I want, since I do all the book layout and back cover text. Obviously, revision entails a lot of work and you don't want to be left with books you can't sell. In reality, I leave a six-month pre-publication period for reviews, comments and revisions. I print up a 100 copies, stamp "Publisher's Bound Galley" on the front and back covers (you'll be receiving one in a few days—my new book: *The Backward-Flowing Method*). They're like über-galleys; they've been edited and proofed, bound with a final cover. This allows me six-months of tweaking, like a movie that goes on tour before its official release.

AM: In your book, your language presents as clean and even. Very rarely you digress from neat presentation, and when you do it is justified. Can you describe your writing process? How do you manage conciseness without sacrificing meaning?

JJS: For me, every sentence needs to have a certain musical ring to it. Every paragraph should be like stanza in a tone poem, a hymn, an overture, a prelude, or a requiem. I have a studio in my office. When I finish the few things I'm working on now, I'm going to record my two books as Audiobooks. I will try to act them out in a not too obvious way. The words will be musical to the extent I can give them enough rhythm and feeling.

One of the great things about English is that any noun can become an adjective. This allows one to avoid overlong prepositional phrases. So a prepositional phrase like "the foundation for the purity of kundalini" can become "the kundalini purity foundation." Experiment with finding ways to get rid of prepositions; they can befuddle the most experienced writers.

I studied Latin and French as a young boy. They say this helps you and I believe it does.

AM: If you had to give advice to new writers, what would you say? And to new travelers along the path toward the Secrets of the Golden Flower?

JJS: "Easy on the Hoopedoodle" That's the title of a wonderful issue by Elmore Leonard in a NYT web series called [WRITERS ON WRITING](#) I would add to his list: Read your stuff out loud. When you hear it, you'll know whether it works or not. As a publisher, I receive many books. I can't believe some of the stuff people send me. It's as if the authors really don't care. Writing is hard work; you have to put a lot of energy into it. Re-read before you send it out. Then read it out loud. Shout it from the rooftop. Sing it! If necessary, pay someone to read it.

As for Golden Flower secrets, read my new book, *The Backward-Flowing Method: The Secret of Life and Death*. Among the many Life Force related issues, it explains how we need not fear death, deals with preparing for it during our lives.