

Hello all,

Welcome to this month's COHERENCE Newsletter: *The Six Bridges, Body Input/Output, and Conscious Influence Over Nervous Function*. Before we begin, just a few things...

First, COHERENCE eLearning is now available on a number of topics including Coherent Breathing, [The Six Bridges](#), [Breathe-Heart and Valsalva Wave Pro instruments](#), biological grounding, and a number of esoteric topics including Wuji Qi Gong, Constant Bear, and meditation. [To find out more click here.](#)

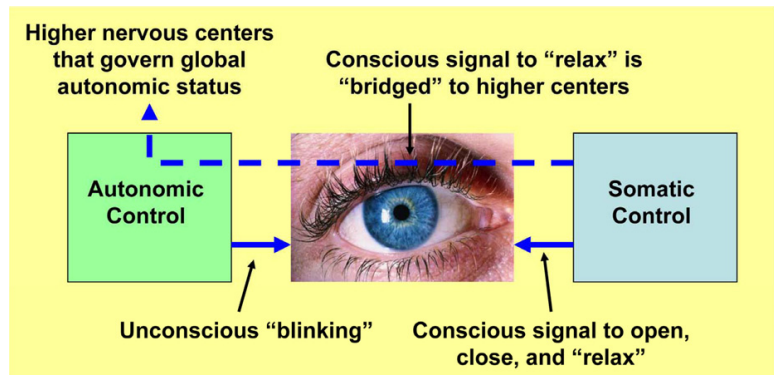


Figure 1: The Eye Bridge

Next, please welcome new COHERENCE artist Cecily Kuehl Shank. Cecily adapts The Six Bridges exercise to "Dreaming The Earth", her lovely original children's story, teaching children to breathe and relax the six anatomical zones of the body via which we are able to manage internal tension. [Find out more about Cecily and other COHERENCE artists here.](#)

In 2004, I introduced the concept of the "bridge." Since that time, this author and others have been working with bridges to understand their significance in facilitating conscious influence over the body/mind. Prior to this, but unknown to me at the time, [Stephen Porges](#) put forward his "polyvagal theory" which describes a relationship between facial muscles (and associated nervous function) and heart rate. He offers that this "wiring" has evolutionary roots having to do with communication and social interaction and describes the larger biological function as a "social engagement system".

But the face is only part of the larger complex that makes up the body mind's "input output system". Humans and mammalian life in general, interact with the environment via fifteen bodily "interfaces". These I/O functions include the eyes, the nose, the lips, the jaw, the ears, the tongue, the throat (larynx and glottis), the hands, the breasts, the diaphragm, the urethral sphincter, the vaginal sphincter, the anal sphincter, the feet, and the skin.

Of these 15, 12 (excluding the ears, the breasts, and the skin) possess these three very specific attributes:

1. They facilitate body input, output, or both input and output,
2. They possess musculature that allows them to "open" and "close,"
3. They exhibit explicit autonomic (unconscious) and somatic (conscious) nervous control.

The 12 functions can be grouped into six general zones that comprise "The Six Bridges." They are the face, the tongue and throat, the hands, the diaphragm and intercostals (breathing), the pelvic floor, and the feet.

If we think about it, it makes sense that body input and output functions would have the ability and necessity to open and close to the environment, “letting in” and “letting out” as required. While the ears, the breasts, and the skin can be argued to possess both unconscious and conscious nervous control, they don’t possess the ability to open and close as do other bridges. As compared to the eyes, we are unable to deny senses of hearing and of touch, probably relegating them to some more fundamental role in our evolutionary past.



Figure 2: Bridges Facilitate Immediate Changes In Heart Rate
(Instrument: COHERENCE BreatheHeart)

The eyes may be the easiest bridge to understand... The eyes facilitate visual input. Of course, they open and close, opening the body to visual input and closing it off therefrom. The eyes also exhibit explicit dual control, i.e. we are able to open and close them at will and when we are not controlling them deliberately, they open and close as the autonomic nervous system deems appropriate. Examples of autonomic governance of the eyes include blinking, sleeping, etc.

Via the eyes, we are able to facilitate change in mind/body status. If we open the eyes wide, it stimulates us and wakes us up. If we relax the eyes and allow them to close, it calms us down and facilitates relaxation. This is common sense. (As a matter of interest other bridges work the same way. For example, in the case of the jaw, clenching the jaw stimulates us, relaxing the jaw muscles calms us down. Clenching the hands stimulates us, relaxing the hands calms us down, etc.)

Regarding the eyes, we can see the effects of relaxation as changes in a number of biometrics. These include brainwaves, muscle tension, and electrodermal response, but the heart rate may be the most readily observed, where we see a dramatic drop in heart rate as we relax the eyes (and jaw). This is depicted by Figure 2 where breathing induced heart rate variability increases dramatically.

“Breathing” is something of a special case where the diaphragm facilitates both the intake of air and the output of exhaust, inhalation being “input” and exhalation being “output.” We are also able to allow breathing and to stop it – this allowing and stopping being breathing’s open and closed states. Finally, when we are not “managing” our breathing consciously, it goes on anyway, under control of respiratory centers of the brain which receive constant input regarding circulation, blood pH, pulmonary stretch receptors, etc.

Bridges are particularly important to the science of relaxation. This is because these 12 points of the body act as interface points between the conscious and subconscious mind. It appears that the reason they do is because of their “dual control innervation.” In concept, at each bridge conscious and subconscious nervous functions “come together,” and via their interaction they are able to influence each other. Hence, bridges “bridge” autonomic and somatic nervous functions.

Bridges are in effect points of control that we are able to sense, for example we are able to feel tension in the jaw muscles, and we are able to relax it away. When we relax the tension in the jaw muscles, tension throughout the entire body diminishes. Consequently, if we learn to pay attention to, and relax bridges, we are able to govern tension throughout the entire body.

This reduction in tension benefits both body and mind. The body becomes flexible, comfortable, and warm. Blood flow throughout the body increases. When the body relaxes deeply mental angst diminishes and is replaced with feelings of calm and comfort.

Knowing this, we can scan The Six Bridges for signs of tension. If any one of them is tense, we can relax that tension away. By training this method regularly, it becomes the new norm, i.e. we begin to be aware of these zones and to manage them proactively. In so doing, the body/mind learns to persist in a new state, a state that is free of chronic tension, discomfort, and maladies that accompany it.

The Six Bridges is an exercise created by Stephen Elliott. It involves simultaneous conscious Coherent Breathing and relaxation of the six anatomical zones. The practice is supported by a CD by Stephen Michael Hawley and Stephen Elliott. You can find out more about it at www.sixbridges.net.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stephen Elliott - COHERENCE

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