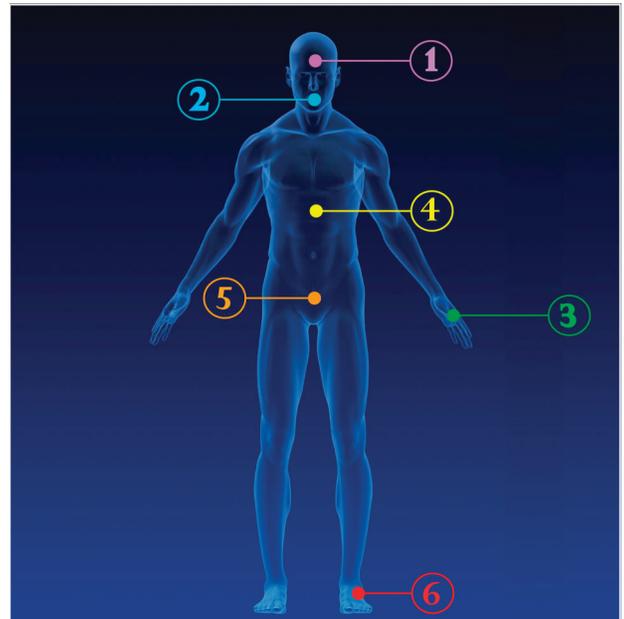


*Hello all,*

Welcome to the July COHERENCE Newsletter. This month, I'm pleased to present Part II of: *Six Bridges - The Yoga of Letting Go*.

As discussed last month, there are 12 points of the body that actively govern our interaction with the external environment. They can be generalized into six anatomical zones. From the topmost to the bottommost they are: 1) the face, 2) the tongue and throat, 3) the hands, 4) the diaphragm and intercostals, 5) the perineum, and 6) the feet. These points are *The Six Bridges*.

When we perceive an external threat, *bridges* tend to flex or “activate”. The eyes tend to squint (or in extreme cases, open wide), the jaw tends to clench, the tongue withdraws, the hands tend to form fists, breathing becomes short and shallow, the perineum contracts. Lastly, the feet prepare for flight. This flexion itself is a function of nervous potential which increases when threatened. The reaction is automatic, its autonomic roots probably dating back to the early vertebrate psycho-physiology of survival.



The Six Bridges

Mental effort and emotionally charged rumination also serve to activate bridges, the more intense the exertion the stronger the nervous activation. Here it seems that effortful thought itself generates the potential necessary to cause low threshold muscle motor units throughout the body to “fire”. As our lives tend to be filled with both perceived stressors and intense mental activity, there is a constant tendency toward elevated nervous potential and and persistent bodily tension.

I like to think of this nervous potential simply as “stress”, as the tension created literally stresses the entire body. Take the spine for example where chronic activation of low threshold muscle motor units surrounding the spine contract and remain contracted, a condition known to cause both acute and chronic pain and nervous dysfunction. Blood vessels throughout the body also contract, limiting blood flow, and eliciting the health complications that follow. We all have a natural desire to be free of this chronic tension. I believe it to be the compelling reason that we desire alcohol and some drugs – they promote relaxation, open-ness, one-ness, peace, and comfort, if just for a while.

Flexion of *bridges* themselves is not the problem – they are visible the tip of the iceberg – the areas of which we tend to have more awareness. Because of this awareness bridges allow us to sense nervous excitement and resultant tension that exists in the body at large. More importantly, because of the bidirectional communication afforded via their explicit *dual control*, by relaxing them we are able to mitigate this tension, not just of the bridge at hand but in the body at large. Consequently, we can think of *bridges* as “biofeedback” points, but here we need no instrument other than the body/mind itself to either sense or modify their state.

I refer to the practice of The Six Bridges as *The Yoga Of Letting Go*. Why? The *open relaxed* state facilitates union (yoga), the closed contracted state promoting its opposite - separation. Perhaps a best example is the sense of union we might have with Earth. When we are fully relaxed, we can literally sense gravity. When we are tense, we can no longer feel it. The same is true of our own energetic field and the energetic fields of others. In the art of Tai Chi, this *ability to feel* is known as “ting jing” or “listening power”. Ting jing is also an integral aspect of acupuncture. This sensitivity can only be realized when the mind and nervous system are quiet. Internal quietude requires that we let go of tension and more importantly, the nervous noise that creates it.

The way that we achieve quietude is by: a) conscious Coherent Breathing, and b) conscious letting go. Why must breathing come first? Because the diaphragm is the *master bridge*. When the diaphragm flexes the whole body flexes – when it relaxes, the whole body relaxes. Its mere movement has a profound and immediate affect on our physiology and the state of the autonomic nervous system, literally *allowing* us to relax. Without learning to relax the diaphragm, no matter how we might try, the rest of the body will not relax – this is simply the way we are wired (please forgive the mechanistic metaphor).

Next, *letting go* requires us to cultivate a *relaxation response* when we exhale. When we breathe, the body has a natural tendency to let go during exhalation – Coherent Breathing elicits this parasympathetic response. To achieve the deep level of letting go we’re looking for, we augment it with conscious letting go during exhalation. When I demonstrate this, I inhale, then for dramatic affect, as I exhale I fall out of the chair. The point being that when we exhale we *let it all go*, inside and out. This is the notion. Once we’ve worked at this, we’re able to exhale and let it all go while going about our daily lives. This is the purpose of the “sigh”, is it not?

Next, we go on to relax other bridges as they have command over different aspects of the body. For example, we cannot relax the arms without relaxing the hands. We cannot relax the hands without relaxing the face. Nor can we relax the legs without relaxing the feet. And we cannot relax the feet without relaxing the perineum. Again, it is a matter of wiring.

So, once we’re breathing coherently, we go on to relax the face, then the tongue and throat, then the hands, then the perineum, then the feet. When we’ve passed over each of these areas, “listening” to each and then consciously relaxing each, we move our attention to the whole body, feeling the whole body all at once. We inhale, and then as we exhale we let go of the entire body all at once. As we practice this, we learn to silence the inner noise. This includes cessation of internal dialogue.

Next month, I’ll describe the method and practice by which internal dialogue is silenced.

Thank you all for your interest and consideration.

Stephen Elliott - COHERENCE