

Dear Reader,

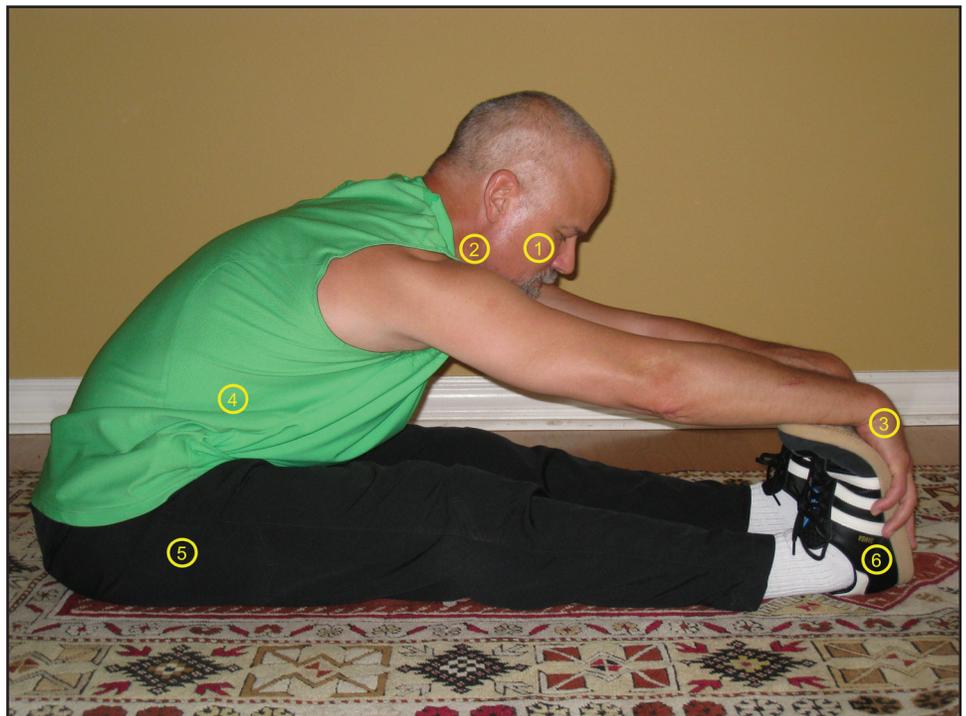
Welcome to the June *COHERENCE Newsletter* and thank you for your interest. This month's topic is "*Six Breaths - Six Bridges*" where I offer a method for incorporating *Coherent Breathing* and *The Six Bridges* into your practice of yoga. I hope you enjoyed last month's newsletter, *The Valsalva Wave*. If you missed it, you can find it here. I'll be sharing more about the Valsalva Wave in coming months.

I'm sure you'll agree that eliminating "tension" in the body and mind is a key objective of yoga. Tension not only causes mental and physical discomfort, at a more basic level it inhibits the body from following the subtle commands of the mind, in effect acting like a brake that is always on, interfering with both conscious (somatic) and unconscious (autonomic) activities. In this way, tension harms our health and limits our potential.

The subtle tension I'm referring to is electrical activity in the nervous system (what amounts to "noise") that causes low threshold muscle motor units throughout the body to contract and stay contracted.

Low threshold muscle motor units are those that "fire" at a very low nervous potential. They're distributed throughout the body, including the large muscles, e.g. the quadriceps, biceps, etc., but are concentrated in anatomical areas that require *fine* conscious and unconscious control. A couple of examples are the spine, where very subtle muscle action is constantly required to keep the spine erect and balanced, and the vascular system, where the autonomic nervous system is always controlling blood flow and pressure by contracting and relaxing the layer of smooth muscle of which blood vessels are made. Note that while both the spine and blood vessels are rich with low threshold muscle motor units, the degree of conscious influence we have over them is limited.

However, there are 10 other points that *require* very fine conscious AND unconscious control for us to live and function. I refer to these points as "bridges", in that they afford a great deal of conscious influence over what is otherwise subconscious, hence "bridging" or facilitating somatic



Modified Paschimotana Showing The Six Bridges

influence over what is otherwise automatic. They are: the eyes, the jaw, the tongue, the glottis, the hands, the diaphragm and intercostals, the anal sphincter, the urethral sphincter, the vaginal sphincter, and the feet. If you consider it, I think you'll see what I mean about our ability to control these specific muscle groups to a *very fine* degree. These 10 bridges can be generalized into a more practical set of 6: the face, the tongue and throat, the hands, the diaphragm and intercostals, the perineum (pelvic floor), and the feet.

Now, the magic is this.... By focusing on and relaxing these zones, we are able to facilitate the relaxation of low threshold muscle motor units throughout the body, including those of the spine and blood vessels. I believe that this is an outcome of reducing the overall noise level in the nervous system (which relates to undesirable sympathetic activity) and have confirmed this effect via desirable changes in numerous biometrics. We experience this reduction as internal quiet, increased mental and physical comfort, freedom of movement, better reflexes, etc. The body feels lighter. [This exercise also helps cultivate robust blood flow and heart rate variability (HRV) amplitude.]

So, without further discussion, here is the practice....

Assume a yoga position of your choice and begin breathing coherently...

Bridge #1: 12 seconds

- a) As you inhale, gradually open your eyes wide, in synchrony with your inhalation.
- b) Place your attention on your whole face. Sense it as clearly as you can.
- c) As you exhale, gradually *allow* your eyes to close, this time in synchrony with your exhalation. (You may want to pretend that you are falling asleep.) At the same time, consciously *let go* of the whole face.

Bridge #2: 12 seconds

- a) While in the same asana, inhale, opening your eyes wide.
- b) Move your attention to your tongue and throat, sensing them as clearly as you can.
- c) Exhale, gradually *allowing* your eyes to close in synchrony with your exhalation. At the same time, consciously *let go* of the whole area of the tongue and throat.

Bridge #3: 12 seconds

- a) While in the same yoga posture, inhale, opening your eyes wide.
- b) Move your attention to your hands, sensing them as clearly as you can, especially the fingers.
- c) Exhale, gradually *allowing* your eyes to close in synchrony with your exhalation. At the same time, consciously *let go* of both hands, especially your fingers.

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Bridge #4: 12 seconds

- a) While in the same yoga position, inhale, opening your eyes wide.
- b) Move your attention to your diaphragm and intercostals, sensing them as clearly as you can.
- c) Exhale, gradually *allowing* your eyes to close in synchrony with your exhalation. At the same time, consciously *let go* of the diaphragm and intercostals.

(Note that we don't have the same degree of familiarity with the diaphragm and intercostals as we do other bridges. Generally, this is because we've not spent as much time learning to use them as we have other bridges, i.e. a lifetime.)

Bridge #5: 12 seconds

- a) While in the same yoga posture, inhale, opening your eyes wide.
- b) Move your attention to your pelvic floor including all of the muscles in this general vicinity. Sense it as clearly as you can.
- c) Exhale, gradually *allowing* your eyes to close in synchrony with your exhalation. At the same time, consciously *let go* of the pelvic floor and all of the surrounding muscles.

Bridge #6: 12 seconds

- a) While in the same yoga posture, inhale, opening your eyes wide.
- b) Move your attention to your feet. Sense them as clearly as you can, especially your toes.
- c) Exhale, gradually *allowing* your eyes to close in synchrony with your exhalation. At the same time, consciously *let go* of your feet, especially your toes.

This completes one asana. The process has taken us 72 seconds. Now move to the next asana in your yoga routine and do it again, releasing the Six Bridges from top to bottom in each posture until you complete your routine. It is important to stay on task and not allow yourself to day dream. At the end of your routine, take stock of how you feel, both physically and mentally. After your practice, as you begin to go about your day, see how your body feels and responds. Do you notice a difference?

Please let me know.

The end.

Thank you for your interest and consideration,

Stephen Elliott, COHERENCE