

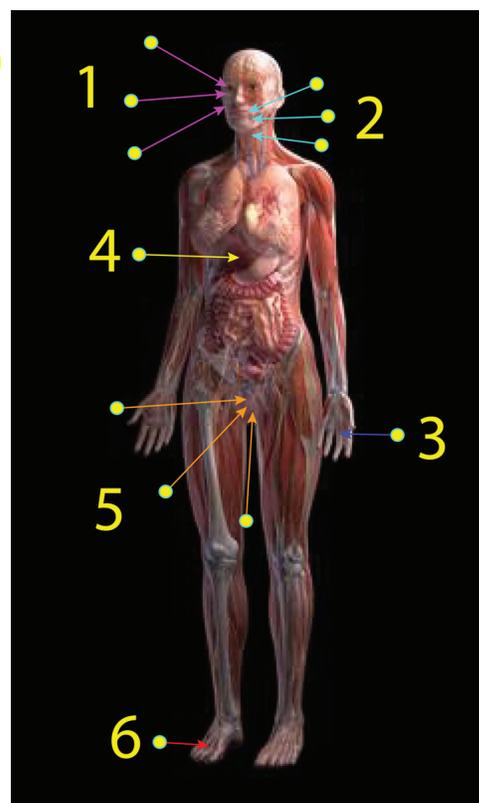
Hello all,

Welcome to the June 2010 COHERENCE Newsletter. This month I'm pleased to present *Six Bridges - The Yoga of Letting Go - Part I*.

I first introduced the concept of the "bridge" in *The New Science of Breath* in 2005, where it was explained that a "bridge" is an anatomical zone (and a related nervous function) that exhibits *explicit dual control*. "Dual control" refers to *both* fine conscious and unconscious governance.

As you may know, "conscious" control is attributed to the "somatic" nervous system; "unconscious" control is attributed to the "autonomic" or automatic nervous system.

The autonomic nervous system is charged with managing the myriad biological activities inside the body - processes that go on without our awareness or participation. These include blood flow, digestion, metabolism, endocrine functions, immune functions, etc. Medical texts often attribute respiration to autonomic function, the primordial areas of the brain generating nervous potentials that result in rhythmic activation of respiratory muscles.



12 Points Make Up The 6 Bridges

Alternatively, somatic activities are those that we perform "consciously". By definition, everything that we are able to do consciously falls into the somatic realm. By and large, somatic functions relate to the external aspects of the body. Relative to their respective roles, we might use the analogy of an iceberg, somatic governance being the external tip of the iceberg, and autonomic function being the vast portion that lies beneath the surface. The interesting thing is this...

If we consider the parts of the body and the degree to which they are controlled by the autonomic nervous system or the somatic nervous system, an interesting picture emerges. There are 12 anatomical areas of the body that are expressly controlled by "both". The are:

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| 1) The muscles that open and close of the eyes | 7) The muscles of the hands |
| 2) The muscles that focus the eyes | 8) The muscles of respiration |
| 3) The muscles of the jaw | 9) The urethral sphincter |
| 4) The muscles of the lips | 10) The vaginal sphincter |
| 5) The muscles of the tongue | 11) The anal sphincter |
| 6) The muscles of the throat | 12) The muscles of the feet |

Please take a moment to consider what these points of the body have in common.

First, I think you'll agree that they exhibit clear "dual control", i.e., we are able to control them very deliberately and very precisely and when we're not they function automatically.

Second, they represent the primary means by which we interact with the external environment...

- The eyes *take in* a visual image of the environment
- We use the lips, jaw, tongue and throat to *take in* nourishment
- The hands touch, sense, grasp, and manipulate
- We use the muscles of respiration to *exchange* gas with the external environment
- The vaginal sphincter supports functions of menstruation and reproduction
- The anal and urethral sphincters *output* waste
- We use the muscles of the feet to touch, sense, and move about

Here it seems that bridges are uniquely involved with either input/output or manipulation/movement relative to the external environment. Thirdly, bridges all exhibit an open and a closed "state", i.e. they are able to open to the external environment or close it off. They respond to stressors by tensing or "closing". The tendency of the hands to form fists when angry is an example. A second example is breathing which has the tendency to become rapid and shallow with the least provocation. Bridges are the first points in the body to respond to external stressors. As they interface the body with the external environment, this seems natural.

All of the bridges have this tendency to close under stress, and when they do the body begins to armor itself, literally closing off from the external environment. This reaction is not unlike other organisms that shrink back when threatened. From this we might assume their "wiring" to be extremely primordial, relating to humanity's earliest biological roots. I think this is the reason why bridges exhibit the explicit dual control that they do - because they govern our interaction with the environment and for this reason require careful governance - which *must* include both conscious and unconscious control.

It may be argued that the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch should be included in this list. The present question in my mind is whether or not they exhibit explicit dual control. It is true that if we pay attention to the senses they are heightened and if we ignore them they are dulled - but in the true sense of the word are we actually able to control them consciously? While I am confident about the 12, the senses remain a work in progress...

With this background, next month we'll discuss *The Yoga Of Letting Go*, or how we are able to use bridges to *consciously* influence our internal autonomic state. [Also see sixbridges.net](http://sixbridges.net).

Thank you all for your interest and consideration.

Stephen Elliott - COHERENCE