

Hello all,

Welcome to *The Restorative Power Of Shavasana*, the subject of this month's *Coherence Newsletter*. I hope you enjoyed March, April, and May newsletters, *The Meditation Series*, where we explored topics including elicitation of the meditative state, the spontaneous kriya, and meditation's role in the discovery of traditional Chinese medicine's jing luo - the meridian system. First I have a couple of announcements...

In the 3rd quarter of this year, COHERENCE will begin to offer eLearning courses on a variety of topics including The Art & Science of Coherent Breathing, Heart Rate Variability, The Six Bridges, and The Valsalva Wave, as well as tutorials on COHERENCE biofeedback instruments [Breathe-Heart](#) and [Valsalva Wave Pro](#). These courses will eventually include introductory, intermediate, and mastering levels. All you'll need to get started is a multi-media PC, a high speed internet connection, and Skype. I'll send an update announcing details and availability.



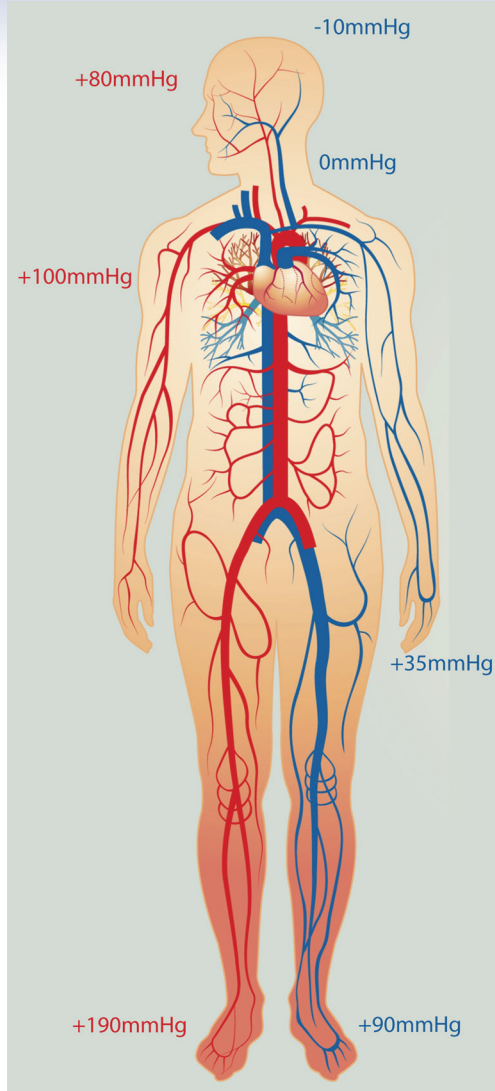
Stephen Elliott lies supine in Shavasana

Also, on August 28th through September 2nd, Richard Brown, Pat Gerbarg, and Heather Mason will be offering the 5 day workshop [Breath~Body~Mind® Training For Trauma](#). Participants will learn how to use this practice for self-care and for healing others. Sessions will cover neurophysiology, current research, clinical issues, and teaching methods. Experiential training will include movement, breathing, meditation, and practice-teaching under supervision. The unique techniques taught in this workshop serve to calm the body's central fear-processing networks and reduce the physical and psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The workshop will take place at Kripalu.

Dharma Mittra: Shavasana is the pose of total relaxation. Beginners often skip this pose at the end of practice but are missing one of yoga's most powerful moments. With every breath you allow awareness to enter the deepest parts of yourself. Resting, but with your mind fully aware, Shavasana calms the brain, relaxes the body, helps lower blood pressure, and rebalances the entire system. Ten minutes will bring you all these benefits; fifteen minutes is preferable, and corresponds to two or three hours of deep sleep. (From *Asanas* Copyright © 2003 by Here+There. Reprinted with permission of New World Library, Novato, CA.)

Can it be true that 15 minutes of proper Shavasana can yield rest equivalent to 2-3 hours of deep sleep? Absolutely! I experience it every day in my practice of [The Six Bridges](#). The secret is not in "sleeping" but in staying awake and breathing consciously while in a completely relaxed supine position. To understand why this can be so, let's consider what happens when we change from a standing position to a horizontal one. When we lie down, a number of things happen...

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Pressure in arterial and venous systems when erect due to gravitational affects.
(Ref. Medical Physiology, Guyton & Hall)

1) We reorient the entire body relative to gravity. Our weight, which is stacked bone upon bone when erect, is distributed over a much larger area as compared to the soles of the feet. Joints of the spine and legs are relieved of carrying their normal burden. This liberates the autonomic nervous system of managing the many fine muscles of the spine, pelvis, hips, and knees that keep us finely balanced so we are able to walk without falling. The body no longer needs to meet the energy demands of the many muscles involved including the large powerful but unseen iliopsoas.

2) When erect, blood tends to pool in the lower half of the body, decreasing pressure in the head and increasing pressure in the legs and feet. This is particularly acute when we are standing still as opposed to walking. Gravity increases arterial pressure in the feet relative to pressure at the chest by about 90 millimeters of mercury, i.e. where arterial pressure at chest level is nominally 100mmHg, arterial pressure in the feet when standing still is ~190mmHg, this pooling impeding circulation and placing increased burden on the heart and vascular system. Alternatively, in a supine position, the pressure effects of gravity are all but eliminated, allowing blood to flow freely from head to toe with little impedance, nourishing and revitalizing all the cells of the body.

3) To yield profound effect, Shavasana *requires* slow, deep, rhythmic, “coherent” breathing which serves to facilitate circulation and is a “necessary condition” for the body to relax. In this way, conscious breathing is the master key to Shavasana, as it is for much of yoga. It is for this reason that we must remain awake, i.e. if we fall asleep then we are unable to consciously facilitate slow, deep, rhythmic breathing, and therefore, we fail to realize the circulatory advantages accrued therefrom. Breathing enhances

circulation by creating a vacuum in the chest during inhalation that causes the blood in the venous system - which is unhampered by gravity when supine - to rush through the vena cava and the right heart entering the dense pulmonary capillary bed of the lungs where it meets with air across the extremely thin alveolar surface, the area of this highly compliant blood/air interface increasing with inhalation, infusing venous blood with oxygen. During exhalation, the large volume of blood that accumulates in the lungs during inhalation makes its way through the left heart filling the arterial tree as a wave. Average heart rate falls, a good indicator that the burden of circulation is lessened. If the electrical current between the body and ground is measured during this process, we see that it begins increasing almost immediately and continues to increase for 30+ minutes. I think of this as an indication that “prana” (bioenergy) is being replenished.

In summary, I propose that mitigating the effects of gravity on the body and the blood via horizontal posture, combined with enhanced circulation, gas exchange, and relaxation, all of which accrue from breathing, ultimately yield Shavasana’s powerful restorative affect.

Thank you for your consideration, Stephen Elliott - COHERENCE

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