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When You Walk, Do You Feel Like You Are Dancing?

DEBORAH KINGHORN

THEATRE AND DANCE

A young man studying at drama school in New York City in the early '70s receives a free ticket to a concert given by the Atlantic City Steel Pier Band. He goes and finds himself the youngest person there. He observes his fellow concert-goers: most of them much older, arriving in taxis, being helped down the aisles, using canes and walkers—unable to walk unassisted. As the band begins to play music of the '30s and '40s, he sees throughout the audience heads nodding in time, then shoulders beginning to keep the beat as well. Pretty soon, feet are tapping, bodies swaying. By intermission, those same people who could not walk unassisted discard their walkers and canes and are up and dancing together in the aisles. It is as if they have rediscovered their youth.

What caused this reversal? Was it, as many poets and philosophers have noted, the “power of music”? Or was there something else happening? How does a body that feels creaky and stiff with age and rheumatism suddenly find the springing step of youth? The answer, it turns out, can be found in the body's natural energy sources.

Arthur Lessac, renowned voice and movement specialist, has been studying the body's natural energy resources and their effects on health and wellness for the past 70 years. He pioneered new ways of improving vocal and physical performance through the study and application of the body's natural energy qualities to every area of human endeavor.

In Lessac voice and movement training in the theatre, we work with “feeling”—not the emotional meaning of the word, but feeling as a sensation. For example, close your eyes and focus inward for just a moment. Do you feel motion in your body? You can feel your heartbeat, your breathing, or the gentle, almost imperceptible, swaying of your body as it works to keep balance. These are all moving actions of the body, and as such, can be felt, or sensed.

What if you could not only feel inner sensation, but you could learn to utilize it to promote better health in yourself, both physically and emotionally? If you could teach yourself to feel love, trust, and happiness rather than hate, anger, and depression, wouldn't you do it?

Consider this: you are living and functioning in two different environments. On the one hand, there is the huge *outer environment*, with everything and everyone else in it, with its widely varied cultures, with its unexplored territories, with its powerful energy forces—like nuclear, electrical, solar, and water—and with its conditioning and patterning, which shapes the way we think and act.

On the other hand, there is your vast *inner environment*, with only you in it, with your unique personal culture, your unexplored inner wilderness, your intrinsic body energies, which promote vitality and create health and well-being, and your own genuine originality.

While there are beneficial elements in the outer environment, there are equally many elements that are unhealthy and even destructive to us, such as chemical additives in our foods, air pollution, or people who display hatred toward us. Unfortunately, these unhealthy elements do not stay in the outer environment—they find their way into our inner environments, where they do major damage. In fact, recent research has made significant connections between emotions and disease, such as anger contributing to heart disease, anxiety causing panic attacks or heart arrhythmia, depression contributing to headaches and back pain. These feelings create more than just discomfort in the body—they create ill-health. They slowly poison us.

The antidote to that poison lies within your *inner environment*. Your inner environment includes the functioning of various systems of the body, such as the nervous, endocrine, circulatory, digestive, musculoskeletal, cellular, respiratory, urinary, and sensory systems. You don't think about their functioning, but the processes of these systems are taking place every second of your life. You continually receive information from them, whether you are aware of it or not. And there are subtler and equally dynamic processes in the inner environment, such as consciousness, imagination, creativity, rhythm, and emotion, among others. Inside this landscape, things function healthfully—until something causes distress or disease. Poisons from the outer envi-

ronment can easily seep through the body's defenses, unless you become aware of them, and learn how to deal with them.

Think of your inner environment, then, as the kind of wilderness we are often trying to protect and preserve in the outer environment—one full of forests, streams, clean air, wildflowers, nature at its purest. If this environment becomes polluted, choked with the detritus of man's daily existence, it quickly becomes uninhabitable. Your inner environment functions the same way. It is polluted by many things from the outer environment—smoke, air pollution, chemical wastes in our drinking supply, and toxic chemicals in the food we eat. It can also be polluted by anger, hate, pain, greed, jealousy, or fear. This is the detritus we find strewn about in our inner environment, and without care, this environment, too, becomes uninhabitable. We must remember that we are the ecologists for both the outer *and* the inner environments. We and they are inextricably intertwined, and our lack of caring for them produces problems in our lives, like sickness, malaise, depression, and acts of hatred toward one another. While we individually exert little control over the whole of our outer environment, we have full control over our inner environment, and we have a responsibility to keep it healthy.

We can do this by utilizing the body's natural energy sources. The body naturally relieves pain and fatigue with three simple, yet effective, actions: yawning, sighing, and shaking. These can be quickly demonstrated if you imagine you have been driving for a long time in a car. When you finally stop and get out, you yawn through your whole body, shake yourself a little, and breathe deeply in and out, which provides you with relief from tension and pain, and then infuses you with energy. The pain relievers evolve into natural "relaxer-energizers," which are always healthful and sensory experiences. Some natural relaxer-energizers include yawning, humming, pleasure sighing, easy shaking, smiling, singing, laughing, and dancing. When you perform any of these actions easily, your body balances, and you feel good. On a higher level, the duality of breathing and posture, which is felt when we breathe easily and instinctively while standing, sitting, or moving with an elongated spine, is a potent relaxer-energizer. Likewise, the sensation of rhythm, which is fundamental to all body movement, is a sophisticated body relaxer-energizer. It is a self-regulating device and provides an esthetic experience of body symmetry, balance, and expression.

And this brings us back to those elderly concert-goers at the beginning of this article. These people responded to the relaxer-energizer of rhythm. They began to nod their heads, tap their feet, shake their shoulders, and then sway to the beat—all forms of shaking, a natural body pain reliever and a natural relaxer-energizer. Feeling the lessening of pain and the increase of energy, these elderly people were soon able to get up and begin dancing—another relaxer-energizer!—which then induced smiling and laughing, singing and humming, and better breathing—all relaxer-energizers. No wonder they feel younger!

When you feel and can sustain the energy qualities in your body, you can apply them to any situation where there is tension, anxiety, stiffness, or pain and feel relief. (For example, studies now show the effects of laughter in reducing cancer.) Likewise, it is impossible to hold onto hate, or any other negative emotion, while you are enjoying the body's natural energy qualities. And this is significant for our communities and our world at large because once you begin to take care of your inner environment, it is a natural step to want to improve the outer environment—both as an act of self-protection and of love. Thus, our own *healthfulness* can open the door to *humaneness*. We share much with other humans: both biological humanness and cultural humanness. All cultures can belong to all of us, because everything that is in another culture can be found in our bodies in the form of natural body energies, including singing, dancing, and humor. Once we accept our shared humanness, *humaneness* can be learned, and all humaneness is healthy. The poisons that can be dealt with through humaneness are the emotional and psychological poisons: hate, prejudice, jealousy, greed, wrathful-anger, lying, fear. First, we must recognize that, for the sake of healthfulness, we **MUST** control them. We must recognize and be utterly convinced that these are indeed the foulest of poisons, and that only an exceedingly selfish desire for healthfulness in ourselves and in our world will eradicate them.

When you walk, do you feel like you are dancing? If so, you are tapping into the fountain of wellness: your own body's energy.

I look forward to further discussion on this and other topics throughout the year.

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