

## *On Walking*

### **Sauntering**

#### **What It Takes To Walk Besides A Good Pair Of Shoes**

*Do you know the origin of the word 'saunter?' It's a beautiful word. Away back in the Middle Ages people used to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and when people in the villages through which they passed asked where they were going, they would reply, "A la sainte terre," 'To the Holy Land.'*

*-John Muir-*

Here is what it takes to walk well besides a good pair of shoes - the shoes being quite helpful if you are walking on the earth rather than on a perfect wooden dance floor. One. Your feet must learn how to give themselves to the ground. Most people stand on their own two feet, not on the ground.

Two. Accessing core support that wells up from the ground is invigorating. Imagine pouring water from a pitcher into a tall glass. The water goes down all the way to the bottom of the glass, then steadily rises within the glass. Reaching the brim of the glass, it begins to overflow into the world, while remaining full. There is spill, and there is overflow. They are worlds apart.

Imagine, within you, a fountain, the water continually shooting up from the ground and continually falling to the ground, and you may begin to get a feeling of core support.

Imagine a wave in the ocean swelling, rising, and for a moment standing there, suspended, all the while remaining one with the ocean. That wave is being supported from under itself and from within itself. The wave is not being held up externally. No one has put it in a coca-cola bottle. The coca-cola bottle would be analogous to our superimposing postural rigidity upon ourselves to hold us upright. Core support comes from far below us and from deep within us, *and is effortless. It needs no external support.* It's the real thing.

Three. When you look in the mirror, below your chin, you will see your neck. What you are seeing is the bottom half of your neck. The upper half of your neck, or your entire cervical spine extends up higher than you think.

*The top of your spine actually joins the bottom of your skull, in between your ears, and a couple of inches behind your nose. Your eyes are just above the top of your spine.*

From there *you* must learn to see the horizon, which is not where the floor meets the wall, but where the distant ocean and the endless sky touch and widen forever.

Four. Just as a bird would have trouble flying, if it's wings were weak, and crooked, and stiff, so a human has difficulty walking if its arms are weak, and crooked, and stiff. The arms will hamper the free movement of the torso. It is utterly mysterious to see the anatomy of a birds wings. Within the wing, you will find an arm that looks remarkably like your own – one with a humerus, a ulna, a radius, wrist bones, and fingers.

Imagine DaVinci's man who is standing in a perfect square, his finger tips touching the sides of the square, his head the top, and his feet the bottom. Proportionally speaking, what does that mean? It means that your arms are exactly the length that you are from

the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. Your "wingspan" is longer, and more important, than you might suspect.

Five. Your ribs do not hold up your spine. Your spine holds up your ribs. If your ribs are lifted in the front, you may appear full of zest, but your back will be tight, and your breathing impaired.

Six. Your spine is not a trunk, that is, not a tree trunk. It is a limb for your head and for your pelvis, as your wingspan is a limb for your hands, as your legs are limbs for your feet.

This spinal limb must be strong and springy. It is designed to move as a flexible unit. It must be able to rotate easily and smoothly in both directions, like a chair that can swivel with equal ease to the left and to the right. Your spine must be able to softly compress and effortlessly decompress, like a powerful shock absorber. And finally your spine must be able to bend and sway from side to side, like cottonwood trees in the wind. While walking, the spine fluidly and simultaneously moves slightly in all these ways.

The rapport between your head and spine governs your balance, and refines poise. It helps you orient and re-orient rapidly and accurately.

Seven. Solidly attached to your spine, via your "sacred" sacrum, your pelvis must also be able to move in these three directions.

Your pelvis is the place of pace and power.

Eight, your sacrum also serves as the keystone that gladly bears and transfers the weight of your upper body through your legs and feet into the ground, while taking its

rightful place in the center of the arch structure, that are your legs. This arching structure is every bit as beautiful and functional as any arch in a church. More amazingly, your legs have myriad joints built into them, allowing you, at once, to be not only stable but mobile. These leg joints, your hips, knees, and ankles must move in synergy, and in accordance with their differing joint structures. When this happens you discover your natural gait. You find your stride.

Nine. Your feet do not resemble socks or shoes. They are far more intricate, and they need to be. Your ankles must be profoundly un-held for your feet to function with any effectiveness. Learning how the weight transfers and rolls through the foot, which is unlike most people imagine, if they imagine anything, is essential to walking with power. Once your ankles and feet become a vital part of your walk, you suddenly have a vehicle with four wheel drive running on biofuel. This is exhilarating.

The Walking Way is about the workings of walking, that is, what makes waling work. Whether you are walking from your kitchen sink to the front door, down or around the block, or up a mountain, the essentials of walking, when embodied, will bring lightness and pleasure into every step you take. Ultimately you no longer walk; you are walked by the earth under your feet. This is grace.

As a younger man, I identified with the ideas expressed in the quote below by Nietzsche. As the older man that I am, I had to rewrite this quote to reflect it's countertruth, it's opposite, which is also true.

Both are beautiful.

Friedrich Nietzsche from Thus Spoke Zarathustra

*I would believe only in a god who could dance.  
I have learned to walk ever since I let myself run.*

*I have learned to fly,  
ever since I do not want to be pushed before moving along.  
Now I am light, now I fly, now a god dances through me.*

Commentary by Bruce Fertman from The Walking Way.

*I would believe only in a god who could dance.  
I have learned to walk ever since I have let myself stop running.*

*I have learned to fly only since I have learned to wait  
until moved by forces greater and other than myself.*

*At last I have found the ground. Now I can fly,  
for now the ground flies through me.*