

## The Therapy of Movement

It is without even the need for conscious thought that we humans are aware of the therapy of movement. This awareness is, in fact, innate and common to the human experience. And yet, how ironic is it that some of us still jockey for a parking space nearest the door of our local health club, even though we intend to run on the treadmill for an hour. And then we run on that treadmill, as if to compensate for our time at the computer desk, and feel justified because of the time saved in the parking lot. Is there something of an irrational juggling act at work here? There's a clue in the fact that we don't see our local farmers at the health club. Perhaps they are already blessed with the bodies we aspire to—bodies formed by arduous labor—the work that is the natural condition of humankind.

Well then, is it beauty alone that urges us to seek this state of physical prowess? Or is it more likely that we seek that which is our natural condition? Consider the likelihood that our powerful minds were meant to exist in symmetry with strong and lithe bodies. Psychological studies show that the more balanced a physique, the more we ascribe beauty to that form. How natural, then, that humans everywhere seek the experience of balance—mind to body, body to environment. The beautiful bodies we want are formed by movement—a further testimony that this is our natural condition. We were meant to move, just as we were meant to think, intuit, evolve. The balance of strength between our bodies and minds is key to an overall feeling of fulfillment.

We are fascinated with watching our children—rarely still, loving to run, to dance, to play, unless confined by study or stories or the artificial total engagement of television. Still, deeply imbedded in their intuition, they seem to sense that a developing mind and a growing body go hand in hand. How much there is for us to learn from them!

Often we realize when struggling with a problem that's troubling us, a simple and practical remedy is to take a walk. The kinesthetic in all of us is freed up by walking, and the mind/body connection aligns; our thinking becomes clearer. Those who work out regularly know the emotional benefits of the release of endorphins that occurs as we begin to breathe more deeply, fully and rhythmically—it feels GREAT!! Often such movement and breathing are the best medicine for situational depression, stress and anxiety. We thereby not only get to feel good about our strong and lovely bodies, but concurrently enhance emotional well-being. Simultaneously, our deeper breathing promotes health of the heart and lungs and oxygenates the entire body more fully. Talk about multitasking!

Surely the queen of multitasking in the realm of movement therapy, however, is the science of Yoga. In its most basic assumptions, Yoga seeks the balance of mind and body as well as the balance of human life to the life of the planet (through the concept of ahimsa or 'nonharm'). Its series of physical movements (asanas) balances the strength and flexibility of the muscles and the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, all while promoting spinal alignment. It further balances the systems of the body: the

endocrine, nervous, circulatory and lymphatic, with the movement of energy (prana) in our bodies. It balances our shoulders with our hips, our left side to our right side, our forward bending to our backward bending, our breath to our movement. Like its sister science, Ayurveda, Yoga seeks balance of body in general as the primal and natural state of health. This state of balance or health exists through the combination of movement (asana) and contemplation or meditation (dharana and dhyana). The perfection of movement in yoga asana is meant to purify the body, (which it achieves outstandingly), to prepare the body for states of higher awareness as something possible for every person.

Those who do Yoga experience the relaxed state of mind/body and the sense of well being it imparts. This type of movement increases flexibility and strength, promoting longevity and calm. It is truly therapeutic at every level of our being. We know this intuitively when we do it. Perhaps it is the same intuition that moves those in sedentary occupations to go to the gym and work out on the elliptical—at some level we know we were meant to move; as a species we have not evolved past the need to balance intellect with physicality.

In the same way, one notes the meditative power of movement in Yoga asana matched to the rhythm of the breath -- as in Sun or Moon Salutations (Surya or Chandra Namaskar). It has proven equally powerful for this author to add musical rhythm to the synchrony of breath and asana, thereby further enhancing a deep sense of connectedness. This offering is called Adagio Yoga. ‘Adagio’, a well-known type of Ballet performance marked by calm and grace, in its base means, ‘displaying feats of lifting and balancing’. As the intention of Adagio Yoga is to promote the lifting and balancing of the Subtle Body (energy field), as well as the balancing of the physical and emotional bodies (sheaths), through the addition of a musical mechanism, the analogy works well. To connect breath and movement to music becomes, then, a mimic of the synchrony of our bodies in alignment with the music of the natural world—the lyrical quality of the movement of the trees in the breeze, the fish as they sway in the pond and the bird as she soars rhythmically to the beating of our hearts and the turning of the planet.

Another of the wondrous mechanisms for the balance of body and mind is in the joy of dancing. Though perhaps not for everyone, there is much evidence that the rhythmic movement of the body, to music or otherwise, aligns neurochemistry, and makes a symphony of our brainwaves that is conducive to integrated mental functioning. The therapeutic use of rhythm in a neurological context has been explored by the Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential in treating intellectually challenged children, and by pioneers such as Dr.s Michael Cheikin and Dharma Singh Khalsa. Cheikin has demonstrated conclusively that the use of rhythm in movement sequences can be used to significantly reduce spasticity during the rehabilitative process. Cheikin concludes, “The use of rhythm and sound to facilitate neurological recovery remains a vast, unexplored frontier.” (1) Similarly, Khalsa’s many studies of rhythmic breathing (pranayama) demonstrate its positive effect on neurochemistry (especially in the periaqueductal gray area, or PAG in the midbrain, the site of the body’s largest supply of opiate receptors). (2). Khalsa notes especially the power of rhythmic breathing to relieve pain, anger and fear and is, like many of us, himself inspired by the incredible ability of rhythmic breath

to connect us to the vast power locked within the collective rhythmic movement of all life in the cosmos.(Khalsa, p 69).

The school of Dance Therapy, moreover, enjoys a continuous notoriety in the field of Mental Health to facilitate the unfolding of emotional states. The truly kinesthetic at heart receive great pleasure, as well as increased coordination and fitness, from the pursuit of movement to music. Whether in a structured ballet or hip-hop class, or in totally free-form dance, there is some part of us that reaches upward, toward the free, the spiritual, the integrated part of ourselves as we surrender to ecstatic movement. We feel free, and beautiful, as if we could fly or at least evolve, while dancing. Like all art, we feel it in our souls.

So for once let's attend to the inborn wisdom of our kids, to our Yoga practice, to the rhythm of our souls in alignment with circadian rhythm, and move. Dance to the music. Twirl in alignment with the spiral of the galaxy, like the dervishes of old. Explore the primal nature of the beauty of the physical body. Balance the intellect with the heart; find the symmetry in the seat of the soul of our movement, our breath. Move with beauty, with grace, with abandon if you want. But move.

1. Cheikin, Michael, "Rhythm and Rehabilitation," Art. p. 6.
2. Khalsa, Dharma Singh, Meditation as Medicine. (New York: Simon and Schuster, First Fireside Edition, 2002), pp. 61-2.
3. Khalsa, p.69.

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