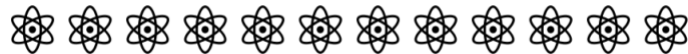


Walk Nine

In Touch with the Self/World

Reminding ourselves what it means to feel and discover through touch is precious. The surfaces around us are communicating so much. The same much though we do take for granted, just because we recognise the objects in our natural environments visually and cognitively, and dwell on that superficial level of connectivity. Understanding our skin layers will add to our tactile comprehension of different qualities in touch. Tapping into the cellular reception under our fingertips can indeed be eye-opening.





Glad to be welcoming you again, released into the outdoors, released into the outside world. The world that is the essence of our existence and the essence of the world that nourishes that existence for us every single second. The world that we all share.

It does not matter whether you are walking amongst the landscapes you grew up within, or you are discovering the beauty and the living connection to new landscapes that you happen to reside within more recently, or perhaps are just visiting briefly. There is always room for new discovery, there is always room for reconnection as well.

Again, encourage yourself to start walking today with an open attitude, as the openness of your heart will enable you to see and feel more, not in a quantitative sense but in a way that the 'more' that you feel really speaks to you, and to what resonates within your own experience of growth and belonging.

Let the rhythm of your walk create some space for that trust to grow. And let the relaxation within your trust the supporting you surfaces of the earth follow.

We will spend a minute here, as I would like to bring in Anna Halprin's words on how rhythm, here of our walking patterns, and relaxation are interconnected, yet they are still different.

In her book on *Moving Towards Life*, Anna writes:

"Whereas rhythm is the dynamics of timing between intervals of contraction, release and various types of opposing forces, relaxation is the equilibrium and balance between rest and activity. Rhythm is sensing your harmony, ease, and free flow of energy. Relaxation does not mean going limp or collapsing. Relaxation is using the appropriate sets of muscles to perform a movement without bringing in other sets of muscles not needed. Relaxation means moving efficiently. It means resting while you are moving." (Halprin, 1995, p. 35)

And with this sense of relaxation and trust in our energetic connectivity to ourselves and the environmental circumstances that make our walk possible in the first place, I would like you to feel into what might that mean for you today.

Being connected, being in touch with, and perhaps some first sensations, imaginings and associations will start shaping for you here.

Take a moment. Just breathe into whatever is emerging here. You do not even need to interpret it for yourself, just glide on your own sensations, finding new forms of connective energy in them.

Try to think whole-bodily as well.

Logically, as Susan Aposhyan reminds us in her book on *Natural Intelligence* (Aposhyan, 1999), we may reason that we can think only with our brains, however, biology has disproved this logic. New developments within psychoneuroimmunology prove that we think with every cell in our bodies, and just to remind you here, we are composed of over 75 trillion cells.

If only imaginatively, although I hardly believe that does not give you little tickles all over your body, feel into that thought, and imagine yourself consciously active through and through. In all those trillions of cells.

Awaken in that way, and I will be guiding you today a bit more into our tactile connections to the world.

Just so you can reconnect with the touch-based origins of our body to body, or membrane to membrane blueprint, coming from our developmental history, as we all come from the life developments of a single cell.

And as we pondered over on our last walk, our walking, in touch with the ground, is a mutual relationship. All relationships are, and movement comes from living relationality of phenomena.

Our subjective experience sensed in thoughts, imaginings, memories and feelings is also awakened because we are touched by things, literally or imaginatively.

Whenever you touch you are also being touched by, back.

And today, let's expand on that relationship of being in touch with things in a bit more conscious ways.

Can we live without touch at all?

As you continue walking you can remind yourself of the different textures of ground, some are easier to walk on than others, we cannot for example walk on water surfaces. Our relationship with the ground, the body of earth, has to be able to support our weight.

When we lose balance we also find ourselves in immediate need for support, we reach out to grab anything available.

Even when we lie down and rest or sleep, we are in constant physical connection to the ground, and its gravitational presence.

We also touch to get to know things, to help our other senses process all the information about the physicality of an object, the temperature, the texture, the size, etc. But touch is not only physical, it is also loaded in emotional connections, especially those relating to our being well.

On an embryological level our capacity to receive and respond through touch is active as early as week seven, and in further development, that activity precedes other senses, those of hearing, tasting or seeing.

Touch and movement are ultimately connected in most primal ways, and as infants we also develop our sense of space and our sense of safety through touch. Our basic movement actions are those of yielding, pushing, reaching, grasping and pulling. All in a palpable realisation of our touch or no-touch relationship.

This is how infants explore the world, the space around, all the objects and living organisms in it, and I trust it is important for us adults to keep this tactile playground open and accessible for ourselves as well.

After all, navigating on our two feet does not define the end of our learning process, our bodies change so much throughout the span of our lives that we should really keep updating our relationships to our surroundings instead of living by the outdated concepts we once developed in childhood.

Perhaps reliving and reminding ourselves that touching things also means being touched can encourage us back into that ongoing relation we often shy away from or leave available for kids to play with only.

And as a practising therapist, I also believe that due to such disconnection with the environment we are often unable to resolve the many experiences of our childhoods, as they simply get shut off unnaturally from our adult ones. We simply walk away from them, by keeping our heads too high up.

So I will encourage you today to keep opening that tactile world of relation for yourself here, and grabbing objects of interest into your hands. There are plenty to choose from, be it a pebble, or a piece of bark or a pine cone. Invite yourself to experience the object anew every time you find something interesting, without even calling it a name.

On many occasions it will connect you to many memories that are worth revisiting or to things you might be missing in your everyday life.

Please try. Let the trees know you acknowledge their presence just by exchanging a gentle touch, and experiencing the versatility of surfaces, temperatures and colours they live by.

Play with those exteroceptors in your skin. This is what they are for. And it is important to remember that our nervous system keeps creating new cells all our life time, they never cease to develop. Providing the peripheral nervous system with new stimuli keeps our nervous system healthy and flexible.

Now as you have hopefully grabbed an object or two already, invite yourself to grab one more. This time try to reorganise your senses of connection, attend to searching for an object on the ground or other surfaces with your eyes closed, or even just following the sounds of it only.

Allow yourself enough time to explore your objects by touch only for a substantial amount of time, observe how they activate your other senses, and how this triggers your overall experience.

You can also touch with different surfaces of your hand or arm, to discover the differences in information and sensations.

Expand on your understanding between, touch and smell experience, or touch and sound.

Slowly bring your vision back.

Our skin, together with all its various sensory receptors, is the primary organ of touch for us.

Our skin is a semipermeable membrane that covers and protects our entire body, and it is also our opening to the world in its versatility of depth and sensitivity.

The skin layers on our eyelids, for example, are not thicker than a few cells, and the skin layers on the soles of our feet can be really thick.

Expanding our knowledge about the layers of the skin is worth pausing for a moment here. Our skin is made of three of them, the epidermis, the dermis and the connective tissue.

The epidermis is the outer layer of the skin exposed to the weather conditions and the air built primarily of dry cells without blood vessels.

The dermis is the deeper layer of skin that is interwoven with sensory receptors and nerves, as well as blood and lymph vessels, smooth muscles, sweat glands, hair follicles and then onto connective tissue.

Connective tissue is found deeper, wrapping all other living tissues as muscles, joints and the outer parts of bones. It is a crucial layer that offers strength and elasticity to both dermis and epidermis and which connects the exteroceptors of the skin to the interoceptors of the organs.

And our exteroceptors, through the nerve endings, are capable of recognising versatile types of touch from light and gentle, vibration-based to pressure into the deeper layers. How we perceive the qualities of touch is then translated onto our proprioceptors, while adjusting ourselves in space through movement, and onto the exteroceptors, to relate to how we feel on the inside via the nerve endings in the walls of blood vessels.

Our skin layers then respond to both inner and outer stimuli, as the communication and exchange of their functionality works both ways.

Our skin can also regulate its own permeability, depending on our chemical organisation, for example it can dilute and open up in response to the warmth of the Sun, or a hug, and get thicker and more compact when feeling cold, or scared.

And I will remind you again, that in our understanding of the primal movement patterns in Felt Thinking, skin is intimately connected to the nervous system as they both develop from the same embryonic layer, i.e. the ectoderm.

This is the layer of our own connectivity to the outer world that regulates our openness or disconnection for protective reasons, calming or alarming us to react.

Andrea Olsen (Olsen, 2022) reminds us that touch is essential to both, our physical and emotional health. And depriving ourselves of experiences connected to tactile connection causes a lot of under-

development in our nervous system. Also, we all come with very unique landscapes of touch receptors distribution, and paying attention to what our hands alone can do for us, if we are not taking the experience for granted, is amazing.

A small shift in our attitude, with the mindful reorganisation of our sensual habits, can help us re-educate ourselves about the endless dialogues hidden in gentle touch opportunities that enrich our body intelligence as well.

And just as you have already been experimenting with different textures and types of responsive touch with a chosen selection of picked up or just touched objects on our walk today, try now to attend to getting to know the layers of the skin, your own touch apparatus.

You can offer yourself hand to hand or hand to arm touch exploration here, without pausing your walk.

First attend to a gentle check of the outer layers, your hand, forearm or arm might be covered with some clothing of course, so give some time to recognise that texture with touch first.

Then bring your attention to the outer layer of your skin just beneath the cloth. Adjust the quality of touch here, and try to gauge the gentleness, as this layer of the skin is very thin.

Then try to move a bit deeper to the muscles, connected to the dermis. Observe any reaction of the muscle itself as you continue rubbing, perhaps some temperature changes might also be felt.

Then try to get to know the whereabouts of the muscle as well, slide onto the closest joint to feel the experience under your fingertips, the tactile architecture of the tendons and ligaments. Discover the collagenous texture of those and the ways the fibres of connective tissue join the bones together.

Finally find the deepest endings of your nervous system that wrap our bones and feel into the density of a bone. Become aware of any sensations here too and relate it to all that historicity of the living cells in your bones that grow and change throughout your life and which produce red and white blood cells for you.

Sense into that journey of growth and change.

And when you are ready, attend to the reversal of this journey from connection with bone to connection with ligaments to connection with muscles to connection with the outer skin layers.

Make sure you transition gently onto no touch at all. At the same time, let your feet remind you that the ground is there all the time.

Take some time to reflect. Your findings might change a lot in your mindset today. Being touched by changes happening on this journey for you is part of its rich offering.