The Pleasures of Walking

THE PLEASURES OF WALKING

by Michael Lewin

"Stillness in stillness is not real stillness. Stillness in activity – that is real stillness"

Lao Tzu

This morning I awoke with my in-built, 'agitation mechanism' kicking in to disturb me. A maelstrom of petty, negative thoughts whirl around inside my mind, creating a awful, unsettling feeling inside me, and despite all my attempts to ignore them they just won't go away……They almost seem to have an existence independent of me, imposing themselves on me, knowing that I have no real control over them. But I know deep inside that they are very much a part of me, that I have ownership of them and no one else. So I will just let them run their course, hoping they will burn themselves out.

I lie on the bed trying to get into a comfortable position (which is difficult as my body is physically aching from undertaking too much arduous work lately) trying to ignore these feelings, but they keep surfacing – such must be the depth and power of our inner lives. Many of our negative thoughts and feelings are habitualized. They build up over time and become entrenched within us thus making it difficult, it seems, to change. But consciously recognizing them for what they are – projections – is the first step towards release. We must not allow ourselves to become prisoners of our own negatively charged, conditioned minds. We must not concede to their power over us as an ' externalized force ', beyond our control. Because to do so would be to embrace the chains of a subtle form of slavery……

I reluctantly take my aching body from the bed to the bathroom to wash and shave. And after some scrambled breakfast I decide to go for a walk and try, through a conscious effort of mindfulness, to ease myself back 'into' my normal functioning body from which I appear to be currently estranged from. Through personal experience I have found that when I am fully present in my body there arises a feeling of spacious calm, completeness, which will not tolerate an agitated mind.

As I close the front door I am very much aware of the self imposed obligation to S L O W D O W N. The walk I wish to undertake this morning is not my normal 'I must storm off I'm busy, busy, busy 'walk but a much softer 'I feel present in my actions' walk. Sinking my awareness into my body I slowly take the first step, then the next, then the next. Soon I'm in a nice rhythm of mindful walking and I can feel that my earlier mind agitation is slowly evaporating along with the physical aches that I have accrued over the last few days.

My walking actions are now receiving my full attention. There is recognition, acceptance and delight in the knowledge that I am not just simply walking but WALKING, fully present in the 'now-ness' of the 'now walking' moment and not a fraction of me elsewhere to cause distraction.

"the press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections."

Walt Whitman

My walking continues and I am made aware of a deep feeling of integration through listening to my body. And this is no fanciful, romantic notion, for awareness (intelligence) is in every cell of our bodies. THE MIND IS IN THE BODY AND THE BODY IS IN THE MIND – an integrated whole, a united functionality.

I walk further and then slip into an awareness of my 'ploughshare gaze' as I feel my feet touching the pavement in

a fresh, reassuring way. I become conscious of my breath and take delight in that feeling.

Being in the body, is being IN the body – nowhere else. Open and available for the full sensation and experience of simply being in the body……..

Now I feel quite remote from my previous negative physical and mental states as I arrive at the edge of the forest just over one mile from my home. The earlier overcast sky has dramatically changed and made way for a fine spring day to develop with a certain crisp, vibrancy to it. I decide to rest in a secluded spot of the forest away from the more popular haunts…….I sit in silence and solitude amidst this ancient forest aware of its very calming presence on me and my mind wanders, through associations, to thoughts on Thoreau……

"I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of time…i love to be alone. i never found a companion that was so companionable as solitude."

Thoreau

The trees that I'm surrounded by in this dense woodland – rooted in the depths of the earth and stretching upwards into the bright sky – seem to know of no other beauty but themselves and are contained within that, in the fullness of their existence – their completeness. How different from us ! Because we are so anxious to engage with the next moment of our lives, and the next, we simply miss out on savouring the present and all its potential rich feelings of depth experiencing is dissipated. Distractions are powerful pulls away from the

'now' time of our existence, they are wanting to take us away – anywhere else but the 'hereness' of the here. And this process can lead to restlessness and anxiety. Through our 'elsewhere – ness' we can soon get caught up in an almost pathological activity mania which pushes and squeezes our

lives in distorting ways. But if we are centred sufficiently enough in the present, the body becomes relaxed, and when the body is relaxed, the mind is relaxed, and when the mind is relaxed, the body is relaxed, and when the body is relaxed……

In large measure this is what has been happening to me lately. I have been so preoccupied – mentally and physically pushing myself too far – that I have over – stretched myself and now my body is saying : "Please come home."

Common understanding suggests that 'energy flows where attention goes' and if we are living too actively in the mind, fragmented, not centred or concentrated enough, then over time the energy of anxiety and tension slowly builds up. However, like my little walking experiment today shows, if we can bring solid, mindful attention to our activities then our energy is contained therein.

I will make a strong resolve to listen more intently to what my body is saying in the future

……..it's the only one I have !

Take your attention into your body and your body into your attention

"SOLVITUR AMBULANDO – IT IS SOLVED BY WALKING"

MICHAEL LEWIN

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