



NOTES

Walking

ONE STEP AT A TIME

ERLING KAGGE

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177 PAGES



KEY POINTS

Why Walk?

It's what nature intended!

Walking Shifts Experience.

Want a new level of understanding?

Have You Forgotten Your Feet?

Yes, most of us have!

The Freedom of Walking!

Use it.

Pain and Walking: MORE GLOW!

Walking to Slow Down...

And create

"Before I got a family, I never wondered why walking was important. But the kids wanted answers: Why do we have to walk, when it's faster to drive? Even adults had questions: What is the point of moving slowly from one place to another? Until now, I have tried the obvious explanation, the one you turn to because it's quick and easy and the opposite of the essence of walking, which is slowness: I explain that he who walks lives longer. The memory sharpens. The blood pressure falls. Your immune system gets stronger. But each time I said it, I knew it was only half the truth. To walk is something much larger than a list of advantages you can read in an ad for vitamins. So what is the other half of this truth?"

Erling Kagge from 'Walking'

This note is a little different. This is not a book about how to walk or the physiology of walking; it's about the experience of walking. It's philosophy not anatomy. My mother gave me Erling Kagge's book 'Silence' for Christmas in 2018 and when she asked what I would like in 2019 I asked for another of Erling's books, 'Walking'. I walk every day. I walked 39 km to celebrate my 39th birthday. I walked this morning with my girlfriend, drinking coffee around the neighbourhood. I walked yesterday in the morning and observed all the runners poor biomechanics! (ha ha) I saw one man who was running well; I wanted to give him a high five. I will walk this weekend and next and I will walk everyday because walking is a joy. Many of my clients would not need my help if they had a habit of walking daily. Not walking results in a series of biomechanical disfunctions but it also results in psychological distress. I walk because I am human and walking on two legs is what made me (and our species) who we are.

I loved reading this book. It made me fall in love with walking a little bit more. It helped me to understand why I love walking. It also helped me to understand why others don't. Some people don't want to slow down, they love the race, and that's ok.

Why Do We Walk?

"Homo sapiens didn't invent bipedalism. It was the other way around. Australopithecus, our forefathers, had already been walking for over two million years when our particular species came into being. Everything

that we do today, that which separates us from other species, can be traced back to our origins of walking.

The ability to walk, to put one foot in front of the other, invented us."

We walk because it made us who we are. Without upright bipedal walking there would have never been Homo sapiens.

"If Homo sapiens had not been a walking species, we would have died out long ago, or lived much like other animals. We would have crawled around without the languages we have today."

Walking defines us; it created us and yet now many of us choose not to walk. This baffles me. You were not born on a bike or in a car. You were born in your body. Walking is the most natural way for you to move through the environment. Walking is less limited by the terrain. You can walk anywhere. If you are a good walker you can go many places where cyclists and drivers cannot.

"If we walk less, we are no longer a species characterised by the fact that we walk, but rather by the fact that we sit, and that we drive."

A body that walks looks entirely different from a body that sits and drives. That body feels different too. Have you ever walked every day for a month or two? How did you feel? Have you ever been injured and unable to walk? Or have you simply made the choice not to walk? How does your body feel when walking is not part of its daily routine. If you have, like me had periods in your life when you walked a lot and periods when you didn't you know that it is the times when you are walking that life is better.

Walking Shifts Experience

"And this is precisely the secret held by all those who go by foot: life is prolonged when you walk. Walking expands time rather than collapses it."

"Walking, I can stop whenever I feel like it. Take a look around. And continue on. It's a small-scale anarchy: the thoughts that stream through my mind or the anxieties that I sense in my body shift and clear up as I walk."

"When travelling, I only really feel at home in a new place once I've had the chance to see it on foot. If I'm in a city I go up and down the streets. I'm letting my feet make maps."

There is so much wisdom in this sentence. Understanding an environment comes from moving through it. Interacting with the world and moving through complex environments alone or with others wires our brains. Our thoughts and interactions create movement patterns. Our movement and the environments we move through shape our bodies.

How is your environment shaping you? Are you being shaped by your stillness, by your lack of walking? How is your movement shaping you? What movements do you do? How are you shaping yourself through movement?

“The great pleasure of walking in a city is to be among the people. For the entire duration of the walk, you are what social anthropologists call a participant and not merely an observer. The divisions between what you see and what you do get smaller.”

When trying to start her political career a friend of mine walked her entire electorate and knocked on everyone’s door. She won the seat. It had never be held by her party before. How many others had walked their entire electorate before? What would happen if politicians started walking through neighbourhoods again? Instead of jetting in and jetting out. How you interact with an environment is how you care for it. When flying overhead or racing past in a car there is no connection only a looking down or a looking out. Our politicians need to stop looking down. They need to walk with the people they serve, only then can they begin to understand them. When there is no conversation, when there is no walking, there is no connection.

“What would happen if world leaders were forced to take daily walks among the people? For those who are in positions of great power, this can be complicated. A nice black car waits to pick them up. Those who are endowed with power separate themselves physically from the daily realities of everyone else, or in Kierkegaard’s words: ‘...robbers and the elite agree on just one thing--- living in hiding.’

Have You Forgotten Your Feet

“Your feet are your best friends. They tell you who you are. The feet are in dialogue with your eyes, nose, arms, torso, and with your emotions. This dialogue often takes place so fast that the mind is unable to keep up. Our feet help us to proceed with precision. They can read the terrain, and also what hits them from underneath the soles; they process each impression, in order to take one step forward or one to the side.”

Your feet are you best friends and yet you put them in stiff casts all day. You restrict their movement and you wonder why they hurt. Shoes cause the slow decline in our feet. Shoes restrict movement of the feet and slowly the tissues in our feet die, blood flow dwindles, muscles atrophy and our feet lose their sensitivity. The feet become weak because they can’t move freely when they are in shoes all day. Imagine your feet if they had never been put in shoes. Imagine your life. Can you?

"I prefer to be barefooted, though it's not easy to do when you have a full time job. I do this not only in consideration for my feet. To feel the wood floor, the cement, carpets, grass, sand, muck and tarmac. Or moss, pine needles and rocks. To feel the reflexes in each toe, the balls of my feet, heels and ankles improving. The skin on the bottom of my feet, with its nerves and reflex-points-- points that are connected to the rest of my body—are able to come in closer contact with the ground. Just as the body requires sunlight, the skin loves to feel the wind, and the ears delight in the sound of birdsong, the feet are liberated in this way. Naked feet are more vulnerable. I have to pay attention so that I don't step on anything sharp or trip on something hard"

"The shoe "platform" on which your feet are resting reduces the range of motion of your feet and ankles, preventing optimal positional control during movement. The shoe also encases your foot in a plastic "cast" that prevents natural motion. This reduced range of motion, thick cushioning, and exaggerated protection of the foot for prolonged periods softens the skin and weakens the bones and muscles of the feet, which eventually reduces foot function and makes them injury-prone." Erwan la Corre From The Practice Of Natural Movement

"Cushioning is more common place in the popular, expensive sports shoes. In a December, 1997 issue of the British Journal of Sports Medicine, researchers Robbins and Waked state, "Expensive athletic shoes are deceptively advertised to safeguard well through 'cushioning impact' yet account for 123% greater injury frequency than the cheapest ones.""
Phil Maffetone from Fix Your Feet

"Shoes are shaping the humans who wear them--- and not for the better. This is why I am most interested in footwear. I deal with the injured public, individuals with head-to-toe ailments that they've been trying to remedy for years (and for thousands of dollars) with little or no success. Thwarted by what they put on their feet each morning and stomp around in all day, well-intentioned folks go to the chiropractor's office, spinal surgeon, and podiatrist looking for answers to the wrong question. The question is not "How can I fix this?" but "What am I doing every day that creates this?"
Katy Bowman from Whole Body Barefoot

Have you forgotten your feet? Is your habit of wearing stiff shoes, heeled shoes or shoes that squish your toes together slowly hurting your feet? Are you engaging in a mild form of foot binding? Have you got a foot problem you want to fix? Are you asking yourself the right question? What are you doing every day that creates your problem? Do you need to take off your shoes? Make sure your transition your feet wisely into more and more foot movement. Your body can't run a marathon without training and your feet can't all of a sudden be barefoot without training either. Regain your foot mobility and strengthen your feet, your whole body will love you for it.

The Freedom of Walking

"It's common to believe that people locked up in prisons are the ones who move the least. But it's not that simple. Three-quarters of all English children spend less time outdoors than prison inmates of the same country; every fifth child is largely indoors all day; and every ninth child has not set foot in a park, forest or on a beach in the course of the entire year. Their time is spent indoors in front of a screen."

Walking through a natural environment is what human bodies are designed for. We evolved in nature and hence living and moving in nature is what creates our greatest levels of health. Bone density has decreased from the start of the agricultural revolution and it's still decreasing. Children are moving less than prisoners. People are spending between one and four hours on their phones every day. If we replaced this phone time with walking the world would be different. Put down your phone and go for a walk and DON'T take your phone with you. Walking is our number one freedom. The ability to get up and go any direction we choose. Are you feeling free? Might you need to go for a nice long walk?

Pain and Walking

"For Arne Naess, happiness had to do with glow--- by which he meant fervour or passion--- and pain. He distinguished between bodily and mental pain. Like a philosopher with a grasp of mathematics, he devised his own equation for well-being. The first time I saw the equation; I had to read through the logic several times because it is as ingenious as it is simple—and true."

$$W = \frac{G^2}{P_b + P_m}$$

W = well-being, G = glow (joy/fervour), P = pain, b = bodily, m = mental. Naess emphasized that G can be increased to whatever exponent you wish. This gives the equation a rather optimistic quality. The equation assumes that a small increase in glow can outweigh a lot of pain. If you have very little glow for anything whatsoever, you will also experience little well-being, no matter how few inconveniences you might suffer. Naess told me that he wanted to point out the meaning of pain, while simultaneously spoonfeeding that belief that it is more valuable to increase one's glow than to reduce one's pain."

Ahhhhh I love this “It is more valuable to increase one’s glow than to reduce one’s pain.” A lovely reminder for the next time I am in pain, not to focus on doing all that I can to reduce my pain but to do all that I can to increase my glow. I LOVE THIS IDEA.

Walking to Slow Down

“When I walk my thoughts are set free. My blood circulates and, if I choose a faster pace, my body takes in more oxygen. My head clears. If my phone rings when I am sitting down, I like to stand up and pace about as I speak. My memory, concentration and mood improve after only a few steps. ‘If you are in a bad mood, go for a walk,’ was Hippocrates’ advice. And if you are still in a bad mood: ‘Go for another walk.’ The context is reflected in our language. Motion and emotion. Move and moved.”

Walking is a pleasure for the body and the soul. The blood can move, the muscles can move, the lymph can move, the nervous systems connects with the tissues. When we move we come alive. When we sit still we slowly get stiff, movement does not assist the blood, muscles disappear, lymph pools. The whole organism feels this stagnation. We call it depression. I call it a lack of movement, a lack of zest or as Arne Naess would say a lack of ‘glow’. Take Hippocrates advice and go for a walk. If you still feel bad go for another walk, and another, and another. I have walked my way out of being sad and despondent more than once. Now I walk daily so I never feel the stagnation. Stand up and walk. Do it NOW! Please.

About the Author of ‘Walking’

Erling Kagge

Erling Kagge is an explorer who was the first in history to reach the ‘three poles’—North, South and the summit of Everest. He lives in Norway, where he works as a writer and a publisher. You can find out more about him on Google;)

About the Author of this Move Note

Hazel Boot

Hazel has a degree in Exercise and Sports Science. She is also an Anatomy Trains Structural Integrator and a Restorative Exercise Specialist. She works with clients to improve movement and reduce pain. She loves reading and geeking out on movement books. She writes notes on the books she loves to help others learn faster.

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I hope you enjoyed the content of this note but please remember that it is not medical advice and should not be used as such.