

To Walk, To Run, To Be Human

An Excerpt from *The Life we are Given*

By George Leonard & Michael Murphy



Walking is one of the most commonplace of human activities. It is also a great wonder – stately, graceful, and efficient, an essential mark of being human. The journey of our lineage toward the large brain, culture and consciousness took a decisive and irreversible turn with the evolutionary gamble of the upright stance and unique bipedal walking of our hominid ancestors. We are so accustomed to it that we are unaware of how marvelous

walking is. To see this form of movement as if for the first time, use a lens that turns things upside down or (if you're willing to look a little foolish) lean over so that your head is upside down. From this perspective, a group of people walking toward you reveals an amazingly supple, undulating movement, an easy, liquid flow of energy unlike that of any other creature.

To take three brisk hour-long or six thirty-minute or nine twenty-minute walks every week would fulfill your ITP aerobic exercise commitment, yield proven health benefits, and help build the foundation for possible transformations – and do all this with a minimal risk of injury.

Does this mean you should walk merely to gain benefits, to fulfill your commitment? Better, we think, that you walk primarily for the joy of it. Walk to experience the upright stance, the flow of motion through space and time. Walk with full awareness of your legs and arms swinging freely in perfect counterpoise. Walk with a spring in your steps. Walk with shoulders, neck, chest, and abdomen relaxed. Be aware of the back as well as the front of your body. Give special attention to your physical center, a point an inch or so beneath the navel. Imagine your center moving powerfully and effortlessly through space. Take deep breaths. Be sure to walk vigorously. A casual stroll doesn't qualify as aerobic exercise.

Running ups the ante, adding possibilities and risks. When we walk, one foot is always earthbound, but when we run, we leave the ground. The earth becomes our drum, and the rhythm of our drumming feet presages the quickened pulse of heart and blood. The

face flushes, and we feel the rush of air on cheeks and forehead. Breathing deepens. We experience the beginnings of a familiar exultation along with a touch of fear, a momentary catch in the breath. It is a feeling of vertiginous anticipation and delicious dread akin to the first awareness of sexual arousal. Running, we can no longer deny our animal nature. At the same time, we are uniquely human, for no other animal runs as we do.

Walking downhill, quickly become weightless. Walking uphill, slowly become your strength.

- Michael Murphy

Practice mentally for physical activities. Practice physically for mental activities.

- George Leonard