

Walk Your Way To Cosmic Consciousness

Peak experiences in daily life

By Esther VM. Hame'l

Modern prescriptions for optimum health very often include walking. Besides the enjoyment of this outdoor exercise, you may be walking away from your own funeral by adding years to your life.

Health journals and magazines are currently lauding the many benefits of walking; however, there is a lesser known benefit. Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician who fathered medicine, prescribed walks to prevent emotional disturbances and depression. From reading the comments of some famous people, it also appears that walking enhances creativity. Robert Louis Stevenson, Christopher Morley, Keats and Rousseau were creative

strollers. Socrates, Plato and Demosthenes created their philosophies while walking. They were convinced that the mind works better while walking because "the physical exercise stills the emotional, leaving pure reason to hold sway."

Gymnastics of the mind

Modern knowledge indicates that increased oxygen to the brain may enhance creativity. The mystics among us will point to harmony between the physical and the spiritual, especially in an outdoor setting.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who looked upon walking as a tune-up for his soaring philosophical writings, said, "Walking has the best

value as gymnastics for the mind." Friedrich Nietzsche noted, "Only those thoughts that come by walking have any value. A sedentary life is a sin against the Holy Spirit."

Cosmic Consciousness

It may not come as a surprise then, that several instances of the mysterious peak, transcendental or high cosmic attunement occurred during walks, recorded by Richard M. Bucke, M.D., in his classic 1901 book *Cosmic Consciousness*:

St. Paul on his way to Damascus, Jacob Behmen transfixed by sunlight reflected from metal, Walt Whitman with his "fondness for strolling," Alfred Tennyson's "walking trances" and an anonymous woman who had the experience while "walking at sunset."

Bucke writes that Whitman is the best, most perfect example the world has so far had of the Cosmic Sense. First, because he is the man in whom the "new faculty" has been so well developed, and second, because he wrote so clearly about the experience of cosmic consciousness, and third he referred "to the facts and phenomena more plainly and

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fully than any other writer either ancient or modern."

Whitman's achievement was particularly impressive because those who have had the experience without exception have referred to the difficulty of expressing what they saw, learned, and felt in common language. Ineffability is a hallmark of this attunement during which a person is given a glimpse of the vast order and knowledge of the Universe.

Behmen wrote that "spiritual knowledge cannot be communicated from one intellect to another, but must be sought for in the spirit of God." And

Whitman wrote in *Leaves of Grass*, "Wisdom is of the soul: [and] cannot be passed from one having it to another not having it."

Bucke isolated a number of elements belonging to attainment of the "cosmic sense." In some cases of intense attunement, intellectual acumen and creative prowess is greatly increased. To this is added an indescribable feeling of peace, elevation, elation, and a strengthening of moral sense, along with an intense desire to serve others, a deep feeling of love, and a greater consciousness of beauty.

These unusual insights and



changes are accompanied by a lessened concern about death and an unshaken sense of immortality. Experiencers stated having several or all to a lesser or greater degree of intensity. The experience may last several minutes, a few hours, or several days, and may recur during the recipient's lifetime.

While incidences of this peak experience were termed rare in earlier times, a report in *Noetic Sciences Review* (Autumn 1991, pg. 33) indicates either the experience is more common than believed or the number of experiences are unaccountably increasing. A group of 246 psychology students, (ages 18-64) anonymously participated in a study conducted by John Davis and team from the Denver Metropolitan State College.

A surprising 79 percent indicated they had had such experiences, with varying degrees of intensity and results, but were reticent to tell others about it. As with the earlier reports, the indescribable quality was noted; the most common reason (37.8 percent) given was that it was a not-to-be-shared, private, special and intimate experience and one they felt others could not appreciate.

Over one half in the Davis group said they couldn't find "words to describe it." This late 20th-century study indicates that approximately four percent found the peak experience to have transformed their lives

leading to major changes in life direction and individual priorities. Another 12 percent said it inspired regular reflection and "renewed commitment" without changing life priorities.

But, for the majority, the experience was wondered about occasionally, but had not particularly changed or guided the individual. A finding in line with Bucke's study was indicated in that only a favored few were profoundly and intellectually inspired. An encouraging factor is that the experience appears not to be something reserved for only a select few, or for those dedicated to specific disciplines (e.g. meditation, yoga, etc.) designed to elicit such experiences. Interestingly, Prof. Davis reported in a telephone interview that though walking was not specified in the research questionnaire, a number of participants reported that the event happened outdoors.

Sky awareness training

Sky awareness training has enhanced school children's imagination and creativity, according to a 1988 article in the magazine *Venture Inward* (Nov/Dec. p.9). Children told to stare upward at the sky showed marked improvement in the creative quality of their essays and poetry. It may simply be that the act of turning one's eyes upward tends to stimulate the creative centers of the brain, but the pleasure of

looking at the sky, expanding one's horizons visually, as well as the physical act, seems to open channels of inspiration.

Mystic history presents the occult practice of upward eye-rolling sometimes referred to as "transmogrification," which was believed to lead to transcendence. The greater majority in Bucke's study had the experience around age 30 to 33. In a number of cases, observers noted an especially "bright countenance" of the person after the experience. He noted they had not, to any extraordinary degree, realized the need nor the possibility of using their unusual insight and power in any systematic fashion.

Famous among those whose writings, teachings and observations of companions indicate they

did have this luminous attunement with the cosmos include Jesus, Gautama the Buddha, Mohammed, Dante, Francis Bacon, William Blake and the poet Whitman.

The gift of becoming transcendent is being open to revelation. Along with consciousness of the cosmos there sometimes occurs an intense intellectual enlightenment or illumination, which in Bucke's words, "alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence...would make him almost a member of a new species."

The modern medical emphasis on walking, coupled with the back to nature movement and the emphasis on alternative spiritual attunement methods, might be an evolutionary nudge from the Cosmic Hand. ■