



Mindful Living Blog:

Movement and Breath Collection

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Introduction

Welcome to the Mindful Living Blog – Movement and Breath Collection!

This collection has been designed to bring together a series of articles from the Mindful Living blog, all of which centre on the themes of movement and the breath. The articles in this guide provide an introduction and an entry point into these topics, which you can explore in your own time.

Within each article you will find information on the topic, as well as an invitation. We hope that you will find these invitations thought-provoking and use them to engage in your own process of self-exploration and mindful practice. Above all, we hope that this guide will help to inspire you as you progress on your own journey.

This downloadable guide can also be printed. Please feel free to share it with others who you think may benefit from the content it contains.

As always, we really enjoy hearing from our readers and our wider community. Please feel free to share your thoughts and experiences with us. You can connect with us via the website or by emailing anna@dunami-somatics.com.

Happy reading!

Anna and Diana

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Evoking Change Through Movement

Throughout our lives, we acquire specific patterns, rhythms and habits which are formed from our experiences, interactions and environments. In this article, we explore how we can evoke change through movement and embodied practices, particularly in outdoors settings.

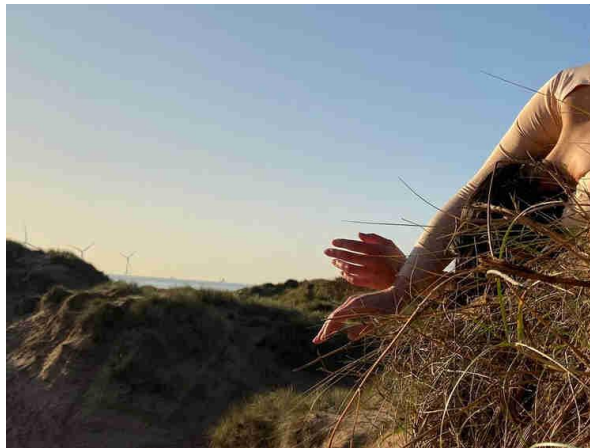


Photo by Anna Dako.

Patterns, Habits and Rhythms

Our habitual patterns, rhythms and habits have the potential to provide us with tools to overcome challenging situations and better equip us with positive ways to handle daily life. Yet, over time, even positive patterns can become routine habits that become embedded in our daily practice and rather than support us, can become a hindrance, preventing us from being able to achieve our fullest potential.

From poor posture, to incorrect lifting, as well as simply holding tension in parts of our bodies, certain patterns and habits can be detrimental to our health and wellbeing. Yet, by breaking these negative habits and experimenting with new rhythms, we open ourselves to the possibility of finding new ways of moving, which can be more beneficial to our everyday living and overall health.

Evoking Change Through Movement

Changing existing patterns and rhythms can be achieved simply by exploring the ways in which we move. Movement refers not only to large movements, but also to those smaller movements created from simple shifts in weight, or even the very act of breathing itself.

Taking time to simply observe, examine and explore our existing rhythms and patterns offers a great opportunity to begin to identify what habits we may have, including those which we may not be consciously aware of. A particularly effective way to begin this process is simply to slow down.

As we slow down our movements, we can begin to reflect on the way in which our bodies move. We create an opportunity to pay attention to the minute details and shifts in our body, including drawing awareness to areas which may be holding tension. By slowing down our natural tempo, we open ourselves to the possibility of change. Having recognised existing patterns, we can then utilise movement to evoke change by disrupting these and exploring new ways of moving.



Photo by Anna Dako.

In many embodied practices, including somatic movement, the breath is the core stimulus for change and transition. We can use the breath to mindfully consider the quality of the movement itself and to shift our awareness.

Through focused breathing, we can slow down our movement and begin to focus on specific areas of the body. Using the rhythm of inhalations and exhalations, we can explore alternative

ways of moving and being. We can sink deeper into a familiar posture, challenge ourselves to remain actively still for longer periods of time or entirely reset our mindset.

Movement and the Outdoors

Exploring our movements and ways of being in an outdoors environment can be especially productive. Studies have shown that simply spending time outdoors can contribute to a more positive mindset and help us feel less anxious and stressed. As such, engaging in embodied practices outdoors, such as somatic movement, yoga or martial arts, can prove especially valuable.

When we undertake such practice in an outdoor setting, we allow our habitual patterns to be shifted and disrupted. The outdoors further enables us to open our awareness beyond our selves and provides an opportunity to connect our movement and ways of being to our external, natural environment.

Familiar situations can trigger habitual ways of breathing and behaving. Yet, by taking a practice outdoors, we can welcome new stimuli and dialogues to emerge. This in turn offers us the opportunity to reflect more deeply and invites new self-discoveries. For those who engage in regular practice, taking the practice outdoors can help prevent familiar negative habits from forming.



Photo by Anna Dako.

An Invitation...

We invite you to take your practice outdoors. Whether you regularly engage in somatic movement practice, yoga, martial arts, dance or meditation, set aside some time to explore what happens when you take a familiar practice into a new outdoor setting.

If you regularly practice outdoors, challenge yourself to find a new location. Explore moving on a beach as opposed to a woodland, for example. If you are new to such practices, listen to one of Anna's [audio guides](#) in an outdoor setting you feel comfortable in.

During your practice, we invite you to slow down your movements. Be attentive to each act. Use the breath to help slow your tempo and allow it to be the impetus to move in a new direction, with renewed energy or with a different intention. Notice how these changes impact upon your existing practice and your usual rhythms.

Consider too whether there are opportunities to welcome such little changes into your daily life. Are there moments in the day when you can slow down movement and disrupt your regular habits to make space for new, more positive and beneficial patterns to emerge?

The Importance of Breath

In many embodied practices, the breath is central to the practice. In this article, we explore the importance of the breath for our wellbeing as well as in practice, alongside ways in which we can begin to breathe more fully in our everyday lives.



Photo by Anna Dako.

The Importance and Role of the Breath

Breath work is significant for a number of reasons. Conscious breath work allows us to work on releasing old habits and existing patterns and instead open the way towards creating new patterns which are healthier and more supportive for our daily lives. Additionally, by actively engaging the breath we activate the body. This allows us to re-energise and re-invigorate our bodies, as well as our mental approaches and states.

Focused work on the breath can support us in developing greater awareness of our bodies and our selves. It can be a simple, yet highly effective way to reduce stress and anxiety and to bring more balance to our selves and our wellbeing. Furthermore, when we engage in breathing practices and breath work, we are working on altering our state of consciousness, including developing a state of alertness and allowing ourselves to become more present to each given moment.

Ultimately, regular breath work provides us with the opportunity to create and develop a set of skills which can support us to develop more positive and effective responses to the challenges we face in our lives.



How to Begin to Breathe

Breath work aims to bring this most basic human function to the forefront of our consciousness. The more you actively engage with breathing practices, the more it will become second nature to you and become a tool which you can rely upon and utilise in daily life in a range of situations.

The first step of breath work is simply to begin to notice your breath. Don't attempt to change or influence it, but simply become aware of it. Begin to take deeper breaths, allowing your focus to remain inwards on your breath as you do so. Try to inhale into all parts of your body, making sure your breath reaches all the extremities before you begin the exhalation. Similarly, take your time when exhaling. Fight the urge to simply push out all the air. Instead, breathe out slowly and with control.

It's important to remember that the inhalation is as important as the exhalation. The inhalation allows you to bring renewed energy and life into your body, whilst the exhalation helps you to remove any excess tension, stress or negativity. If practicing outdoors, it can be helpful to visualise the inhalation connecting you to the air around you and the exhalation as an expression of surrender and connection to the earth.

Equally important is to acknowledge and note the moment between breaths. Allow yourself to pause between each breath and as your breath shifts from inhalation to exhalation.



The Breath in Practice

Many practices utilise the breath. In some cases, the breath may be the stimulus for a new pose or movement to begin. It may be used to shift focus, change direction or alter intentions during a piece of movement improvisation or exploration.

Similarly, the breath can be used to create pause and stillness. As you move into a pose, for example, the breath can be used to help you sustain or to sink deeper into it. Similarly, the breath, in particular the exhalation, can be used as a tool to release tension within specific areas of the body. Moreover, breath work also provides the opportunity to re-ground and reconnect with nature and the earth as you breathe out.

Through the setting of intentions, the breath can be a powerful tool, giving meaning to otherwise routine movements and allowing the psycho-physical to link to one another. Similarly, the breath also provides you with the tools to fully inhabit each moment, even if that moment is simply one of stillness.

Fundamentally, the breath provides practitioners with the tools and ability to be open, present and active, thereby enhancing the quality of their experience, as well as increasing their presence in the act of doing.



An Invitation...

We invite you to create some time to engage in active breathing. If you are able to, try to set aside some time each day. Simply taking 5 minutes every day can be very effective in the long-term.

Some people find that practicing breath work first thing in the morning is particularly effective for setting a positive intention and start to the day. Others prefer to use breath work to close the day, providing them with an opportunity to reflect on the day and cast aside any stresses which may have been accumulated. The key is to find a time which works for you. If possible, we also invite you to do the breath work outdoors.

Above all, we hope you enjoy your breathing practice and the discoveries you may make along the way!

Oppositions in Movement Outdoors

Engaging in outdoor practice is a fantastic opportunity to extend our experiences, as well as our practice. From promoting a more positive mindset and wellbeing, to allowing us to (re)connect to and with Nature more successfully, it is a rewarding experience. In this article, we explore the notion of oppositional forces within outdoor movement practice.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Oppositions in Movement

Whenever we engage in any type of practice, the support of the ground is a commonality. However, when working outdoors, the support of the Earth itself becomes even more important. Not only does it provide physical support, but it also offers greater opportunities to extend the practice further by grounding and connecting us to the Earth.

As we engage in outdoor practice, even in physically still practice such as meditation or breath work, we are able to more fully explore the dual or opposite tensions of push and pull which are always present and at work. In so doing, we can activate the body and engage in deeper levels of psychophysical work.

The pull of gravity, which draws us down towards the earth, grounds us and provides a constant support or base from which to begin work. If working barefoot, this can be further

enhanced and we have the opportunity to more fully explore the notion of becoming grounded or rooting through the feet to provide greater stability.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Simultaneously, there exists an opposing pull upwards towards the sky. Initially, we may begin exploring this upward pull using the common visualisation of being drawn upwards by an invisible string emerging from the top of the head and extending upwards. This upward pull helps to create length in the neck and consequently, opens the body and creates space.

However, as we explore further with movement, we can extend this tension duality to other areas of the body. For instance, we may be rooted down through the left knee, whilst the right fingertips are drawn upwards, reaching towards the sky.

It is this dance of oppositions, of exploration of tension within the body which can activate movement. Cultivating these oppositional tensions is also what can lead to a greater sense of presence and the creation of internal movement in an outwardly still pose. Thus, stillness becomes alive and active.

The Benefits of Outdoor Practice

Engaging in these practices and explorations outdoors is especially beneficial as it breaks down the barriers we may experience when practising indoors. Without physical walls or

barriers, we are free to extend our movement further and to seek to experiment and experience oppositional forces at work more extensively.

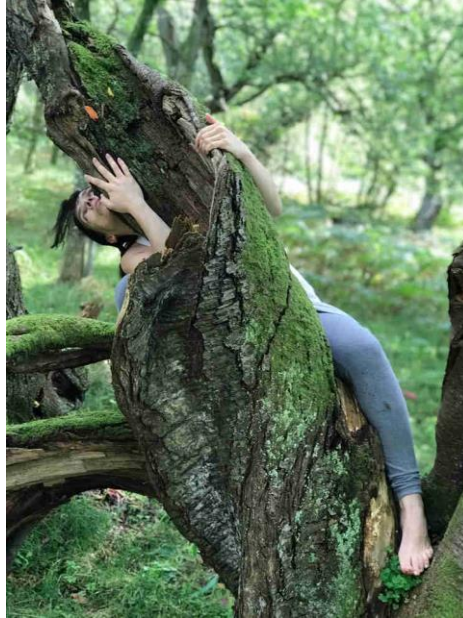


Photo by Anna Dako.

Additionally, outdoor movement work also encourages us to consider not only the natural environment or landscape we move in, but also ourselves and our bodies, both as place and space. Through movement, we can explore the notions of place and space, how we experience both of these notions and how we can use movement practices to better embody and inhabit these.

For example, how can we use movement to embody a place? How can we use movement to express space, rather than simply occupying it? Can we use movement to explore our sense of self not only in space, but *as* space?

By slowing down our practice, we offer ourselves the possibility to explore these questions more deeply and meaningfully. It also provides us with the opportunity to work carefully and at a detailed level on the notion of oppositional forces. The added benefit of doing so outdoors is that we are, at all times, working in response to and in relationship with the natural environment, thereby engaging in constant dialogue with Nature itself.

An Invitation...

Whether you engage in an embodied practice or are simply looking to pause and take some time to reflect and breathe outside, we invite you to continue to make time, whenever you can, to engage with your natural, outdoor environments and landscapes.



Photo by Anna Dako.

We invite you to find an outdoor space in your local area which you find most appealing. Take some time to simply explore breathing and being in your chosen place. Take a few moments to deepen the breath and then begin to explore the dual forces simultaneously rooting you to the earth and pulling you upwards towards the open sky.

If you engage in a practice, dedicate one session to simply slowing down and really taking the time to explore the oppositions within each movement. If you are new to such practices or looking for a new experience, use one of Anna's [Movement Inspirations](#) as a point of departure.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Simply spending 10 minutes regularly engaging in such practice can improve your wellbeing, help you to find balance and equip you with tools to better cope with challenging or stressful situations.

The Immune System and Cellular Consciousness

Keeping ourselves well has never felt more important. With that concern come questions of immunity. How can we promote and improve our immune systems?

The immune system is a complex, interconnected network of cells, tissues and organs, which all work together to help the body fight infections, as well as other dis-eases. Science, in this regard, is not able as yet to provide us with full details about the intricacies of how we can enhance our immune systems. What it does provide us with however, is a growing body of research into the benefits of a healthy lifestyle not only for our physical and mental wellbeing, but also as a beneficial factor towards our immunity.

Research is still ongoing into the relationship between immune response and our lifestyles. What is clear, however, is that immunity is not based on one single, isolated entity, but rather reliant upon the wellness of the system as a whole. In order for us to develop and sustain a healthy, strong immune system, we must seek to create harmony and balance within our own bodies.

We know of course that there are many things we can do to improve our lifestyles. From eating more healthily and drinking plenty of water, to ensuring we get plenty of rest and good quality sleep, as well as plenty of exercise. But there is also growing research being carried out into the benefits of embodied practices, such as yoga, mediation, music therapy and dance/somatic therapy, which can promote overall wellness and help to boost our immune system in the process.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Supporting Immunity Through Cellular Consciousness

Our wellbeing comes in many forms. The benefits to someone who engages in mindful practice can be extensive, including the link between emotions and immunity. Learning to cultivate a positive attitude and outlook to life, reducing stress and improving our mood and our relationships and responses to others, are all important factors in contributing towards our overall health.

Similarly, spending time outdoors in nature, breathing the fresh air, feeling the breeze against our face, listening to the sounds of nature and allowing ourselves to feel the heat of the sun on our skin are all important factors in enabling us to feel calm, at ease, grounded and ultimately, well in our whole psycho-physical selves.



One of the most extraordinary aspects of our bodies is its ability to continuously learn. Our bodies carry within them our histories. Not only do they bear the physical scars and passing

of time – from aging skin and stiff muscles, to evidence of prior falls and injury – but our very cells and organism are affected by our daily choices and actions.

Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen states that our histories, memories and habits are stored within the body's nervous system. Each new experience felt in the present is interpreted and recorded in relation to our prior experiences. As such, considered in terms of embodied experience, learning is a form of knowing, sensing and being aware of and alert to the moment, to the present while the nervous system functions as a recording mechanism.

In order for our bodies to truly learn and for new experiences to be wholly obtained, Bainbridge-Cohen, suggests that we need to release the nervous system, so that “a new cellular experience can come into being” (Bainbridge-Cohen, 2012: 161). In this way, new experiences, new connections, new pathways can be created and therefore ‘learnt’. It is this relationship, this “dialogue between present cellular and past nervous system experience” (ibid), which when truly combined allows our bodies to ‘learn’ in a psycho-physical way. Of course, true learning occurs when the two – cellular unconscious and nervous-system unconscious – combine together in a continuum, each informing the other in a truly symbiotic fashion.

“In other words, when one’s consciousness is centred on the brain, the cells are peripheral or in the unconscious, when one’s consciousness is centred on the cells, the brain is peripheral or in the unconscious. They can also be integrated into a single consciousness or both remain in unconscious.” (ibid.)

But how can we achieve this balance? How can we explore and experience in a way which engages the ‘present cellular’? What activities can we do and engage in to enhance our psycho-physical ‘learning’, to deepen our wellbeing and promote our immunity?

Like so much other embodied practice, Bainbridge-Cohen suggests starting with the breath.

An Invitation...

Consider the breath as the life force which connects us to our inner selves, as well as the outer world. It is a most basic, instinctual action, the very first one we take upon being born. It is your guide.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Take some time to simply be present with your breath. Follow its pattern, its rhythm and journey through your body. Allow your mind to focus simply on this, as you breathe in the air and allow it to fill your lungs. Notice that moment, between the inhalation and exhalation. Sense the breath as it travels back, through your body and out into the world around you. A continuous relationship.

Focus your awareness deeper, sensing the breath on the layers of your skin, your organs, your very cell. Allow yourself to exist in this present moment. Sense the power of the breath, as it activates the cells within your body, energises you and allows you to sense and perceive your inner depths.

In focusing upon the breath, you allow yourself to re-centre, to be truly engaged in the now and to create inner balance. The breath allows you to become reinvigorated and re-energised, to open your awareness to your self and to others around you. Through the breath, you can become truly active and present in the moment.

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Bibliography:

Bainbridge-Cohen, Bonnie 2012, *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, Third Edition, Contact Editions, Northampton MA.

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