

Three Archetypal Styles of Walking

— Stephen Spitalny

With infants, a diligent observer can get a glimpse of the individual's unique style of engaging his or her own will. If one observes the steps taken in movement development toward walking, one sees how the will takes hold of the physical body to fulfill needs and desires. From the first lifting of the head, to the discovery of one's own two hands, to sitting and then the first locomotion—the moving of the whole body from one place to another—this is all will activity.

The first forward movement is a great joy for the child. Babies repeat their first successful movements over and over. They imprint the gesture of that success onto their etheric body. One can observe in that specific pattern in the individual child the character, the qualities of their will taking hold of movement. How is this picture of movement, this picture of will taking hold, related to later events and situations in the child's life?

Rudolf Steiner said at various times that if one observes how a child comes to uprightness, one gets a sense of the child's future biography. In one lecture he articulated it thus: "The most intimate matters in life are closely connected with how the child finds its way into the static and dynamic realm. If one can develop a faculty for observing such things, one will find that an individual's destiny already begins to be revealed in a strangely sense-perceptible form by how a child begins to place the feet on the ground, in how a child begins to bend the knees, or in the way a child begins to use the fingers. All of this is not merely outwardly or materially significant, but it reflects what is most spiritual in the human being" (*The Child's Changing Consciousness*, Lecture 3, p. 48).

Observing how a child moves and extrapolating from that how he achieved uprightness can be very informative and can give insight into various challenges the child may have. In his book *Bio Typing: Beyond Body Language*, Johnny Seitz offers the results of his research into observing various styles of achieving that uprightness. He describes the three archetypal ways of achieving uprightness and the archetypal accom-

panying personality traits. Seitz names these three the "forward faller," the "backward faller" and the "sway walker."

For me, any time there are categories with which to classify people there is a danger of over-generalizing and not being awake to what is present in the moment with another person. So with the following characterizations it is advisable to consider the content as themes, and gestures, and see how it all might apply to real people.

The Forward Faller

The forward faller walks on the midline. His head remains centered, not swaying side to side, while walking. The heels stay close together, and the feet are slightly turned out. He walks on the balls of his feet, slightly leaning forward. His head may face toward the ground, and is the leading part of the body while walking.

The forward faller breathes primarily into the abdomen with the diaphragm being the organ driving the breathing. If you ask a forward faller to stand on one foot, he will lock his knee and maintain balance at the ankle. As child he felt safe exploring the world. He often fell face forward, and often had scabs and stitches on his face and head.

The focus of the forward faller is forward, on where he is going. He is goal oriented, and perhaps even visionary. He has an open-mindedness to others' ideas, but is most focused on his own moving forward into what is next. He tends to focus on the parts of a situation, rather than the whole picture.

The forward faller is naturally impulsive, making a decision easily and then following forward the course dictated by the decision without looking back. He may find it easy to do several things at once. He engages his will into action easily, and later his thinking and feeling come along and join in.

The Backward Faller

When walking, the backward faller has his feet just off midline and his head moves slightly side to side. The feet are parallel, landing just the either side of the midline when walking. He breathes primarily by lifting chest up using spinal muscles. He tends to walk on his heels, leaning back a bit, his chest pushed forward. Remember R. Crumb's cartoon character "Mr. Natural"? He was a backward faller.

If he is standing on one foot, the knee is slightly bent and balance is maintained with the knee. The backward faller tends to have lower back pain and a chronically tense back of the neck. As a child learning to walk, he was careful and cautious and did not fall often.

The backward faller meets everything in life one step at a time. He needs lots of details and engages in detailed planning. He tends to be careful and cautious and think a lot about the past, where he has been. Often his focus is on the whole, not the parts. With his narrow focus it is hard to multitask. His energy is focused on what he is doing in the moment.

When the backward faller wakes up in morning, it is best if no one tries to hurry him out the door. He does not like to feel pushed or pressured. The backward faller is independent and strong-willed and likes to test other people's ideas for himself before accepting them. When he engages his will into action, he has already fully thought through the possibilities.

The Sway Walker

His gait is back and forth across the midline like an ice-skater. The head very noticeably moves from side to side. His heels are shoulder width apart, and the toes are even further out. He breathes primarily by spreading the ribcage laterally. While standing on one foot, knee bent, he maintains balance with the knee.

As a baby, he crawled a long time and may have feared falling or being knocked down. He felt challenged and vulnerable as a child. The sway walker likes routine. He lives very much in the present. His actions have to align with his feelings. When he takes a stand he does not back down easily. His strong opinions make it hard to accept change.

The sway walker has his focus on what is around him and how he is in relation to the world. He is always trying to minimize risk. He can multitask, but always gives his full attention (even when multitasking). For him to engage his will, his feelings must first align with the action to be taken.

A Threefold Lens

Imagine a rainy winter day when the back yard has a small puddle. The five-year olds are looking at it and imagining themselves as giants on the edge of a huge ocean. Jack (who walks with a slight forward lean) with no announcement, discussion or delay, takes a step back and successfully leaps over the "ocean."

Sam, who walks with a slight backward lean, watches Jack leap over the ocean. He looks carefully at the puddle—how wide is it? For a couple of minutes he seems to be considering various factors about the ocean and how big a giant he is. Then he announces, "I'm gonna jump too." He jumps and barely makes it across, making a small splash as he lands.

Alex (when he walks it looks a bit like he is ice-skating) says, "I don't want to get wet. I'm not jumping." Sam and Jack and the other children try to convince him to jump, but he just won't do it. "I don't feel like it," he says.

Since reading Seitz's book I have tried to observe people with this threefold lens. It is getting easier to see the three different walking styles for me. And so often the style of walking corresponds with a palette of personality qualities. Seeing these archetypes in young children aids me in providing the support they need. Observing the child through the window of Seitz's research into styles of achieving uprightness can be a helpful complement to the resources we already have in a Waldorf approach to child development. Looking carefully and deeply makes our interest in the child more dedicated.

Labels are a way for the intellect to classify and therefore not have to be present with the person at hand. Yet the qualities and characteristics the labels stand for can be revealing and can offer insights not easily gleaned otherwise. It is up to each of us to do the research, and to *observe, observe, observe* and see what reveals itself to us. ♦

References

Steiner, Rudolf. *The Child's Changing Consciousness as the Basis of Pedagogical Practice* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1996).

Seitz, Johnny. *Bio Typing: Beyond Body Language* (iUniverse, Inc., 2004).

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