

Healing Movement:

When, Where, and How

By Mara Bishop, MS, ThM, CSC

Movement is an integral part of life, from the micro level of our cellular functions, to the macro level of the seasonally shifting patterns of the environment. In our bodies, movement stimulates synovial fluid to flush the tissues of our joints, keeping them flexible. On the earth, the movement of air and ocean currents prevents stagnation, and helps plant and animal life breathe, reproduce, and migrate effectively. Motion sustains individual and environmental health.

Stillness is also a valuable part of individual and natural patterns. Nature and her creatures innately know when it's time to pause. Plants go dormant seasonally; animals hibernate in winter, or go still when danger is near. Having the discernment to know when to be still and when to move usually takes more thought and effort for human beings.

BALANCE

When we move or act in unbalanced ways, we can do more harm than good. When we move conscientiously, in ways, times, and places that are consonant with our desired outcome, we can improve health on all levels. From the shamanic perspective, we look at the ways our actions impact our individual lives, the lives of others around us, and the community as a whole. We are beings who stand in relation to other beings and systems.

Here is an easy formula for managing this balance of stillness and movement, especially during times when you're not sure if action is called for:

1. focused observation
2. conscious stillness
3. deliberate action

Focused observation helps you perceive what is happening around you, to see patterns and gather relevant information. Conscious stillness helps you hear your sources of internal wisdom. These two steps are necessary preparation for determining what kind of action is needed (if any), and when. When focused observation and conscious stillness have become a regular part of your life, deliberate action often becomes a natural reflex, rather than an intellectual choice. The mist lifts and you can act decisively and bravely when you know you have to. Choices, even if they are hard or complicated, feel right somehow.

MOVEMENT: WHEN, HOW, WHY

What action or movement is important to you as an individual? We know that exercise is important to our health, but does where or how we exercise matter? Evidence shows that moving in nature produces a greater positive effect on our overall well-being than moving in other



SHAMANISM WITHOUT BORDERS

As a leader in the newly formed Shamanism Without Borders program, I will be facilitating groups to work on behalf of people, animals and places that have experienced collective trauma. Please contact me via email if you are interested in participating:

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environments. Researchers have found that the Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku or forest bathing, (essentially, "walking in the woods") reduces stress, as measured by

reduced cortisol, blood pressure and pulse rates, and increases immune function.* Activity in nature also has a positive effect on children with ADD, according to hundreds of parents who participated in one study. Children who played games in nature, or even in space with natural views, were able to focus better and maintain a relaxed state. Stress is the root of myriad health issues, both physical and emotional, so consider moving in the natural world to increase the benefits you receive from your intentional action. As a practitioner, helping people slip into a state of deep relaxation is one of my first goals, as it aids in healing. I also help

people see patterns in themselves and their lives, connect to their own sources of intuition and guidance, and decide on practical steps to create the life they want.

What action or movement is important to you as part of a community? Whatever our political or social beliefs, taking action as a collective has long been part of the history of our nation. Cooperative movements form to address the health of our communities. From a spiritual or shamanic perspective, the health of the individual reflects the health of the collective and vice versa. We are seeing a lot of "movement" in our communities these days. As with our bodies, movement can help get things flowing, keeping us flexible and preventing stagnation. It can also be uncomfortable. Anyone who has exercised with vigor knows that the day after is not necessarily pleasant, but it is in service of an ultimate goal of overall health. The benefits of moving as part of a group march will likely not be the peacefulness experienced when forest bathing alone, but a sense of union with your fellow citizens might soothe loneliness. It might inspire you to action in service of others. It might empower you to pursue work you didn't think you could do.

Individual and collective movement can be magical. Both can help us heal faster and stay healthier, form bonds with one another and the world around us, and come to a deeper understanding of who we are, alone and together. Finding a balance of both kinds of movement can be challenging, as can finding the balance between stillness and action. To be truly valuable members of the collective, we need to be grounded in ourselves, clear in our own voices, and decisive in our own actions. It's also useful to be able to put our own needs and wants aside and to be swept up in the tide of our sisters and brothers standing in solidarity for what we believe.

Observe, Be Still, Take Action. **h&h**

* *The Atlantic*, How Nature Resets Our Minds, March 29, 2013.

Mara Bishop is a shamanic practitioner, intuitive consultant, teacher, author, and artist. In her Personal Evolution Counseling™ practice in Durham, she combines shamanic healing, intuitive consultations, and energetic healing. She works with clients locally, nationally, and internationally. She is the author of Inner Divinity, Crafting Your Life with Sacred Intelligence, and the companion CD of guided meditations.

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