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Greetings,

We are approaching the mid-point of spring and it has been a busy time! We have all of our usual things going on in the office and with our regular classes and we have some exciting new programs coming up as well!

The first new program is our Environment Based Movement class. This is something that I have worked on for some time. I'm sure that you'll recognize it as a recurrent theme in my articles. I have all of the information on the class below. I have also included the full length article from our member's section on "Environment Based Movement."

Speaking of members, we are continuing to provide care to many people who could not otherwise afford it through the support of our membership program. If you are not yet a member, please consider joining. More information on that here: <http://traditionalhealtharts.com/Membership.html>

The second new program (that I don't have the dates yet for - I'll keep you posted), is called Moving in Accordance with Nature: normal physiology and health within traditional Chinese medicine. From the class description: We'll be covering health and the normal functioning of the body, mind and energetics within TCM. This program emphasizes understanding the norm within a human being as the basis for qigong, bodywork, acupuncture, herbal medicine, nutrition, and so on.

I'll have more information on that soon. You can check our [update page](#) or [Facebook page](#) and I'll have the details posted as soon as it is set.

Environment Based Movement Class *Nature is wherever you are.*



Develop balance, strength, coordination and flow while learning to move comfortably in your environment, whether at home, on the street, in the park, or out in the wilderness. These basic movement skills and awareness practices form the basis of traditional Chinese movement and martial arts as well as being common to most traditional cultures.

This program will be 3 meetings, one Saturday morning a month for three months. It includes a specific movement program and exercises to train throughout the month to prepare the students for each subsequent session.

Session dates are: April 27, May 25, June 22.

The cost for the program is \$120. The member's rate is \$108.

This first program is limited to 5 students. Class location will vary as we will be going to different environments to practice nature awareness and train our movement skills. This class is for all ages and abilities.

Have fun and enjoy moving freely as part of your environment!

Contact me for more information or to reserve a spot.

Environment Based Movement

by Sean Fannin

Environment and Movement

Yin yang theory is a fundamental way to understand relationships. The basic question within Chinese medicine is always, 'what is the relationship of this to that?' as the answer will provide us with a basic understanding of context and meaning.

When we apply this to physical movement and activity we come up with a basic relationship: us and our environment. Many systems of movement are great in and of themselves but they leave out a context. We are not moving in isolation, we are always moving in a physical and energetic environment. This is true whether we are moving in wilderness, a city street or inside our house. From this perspective, the two important factors for movement and our health and longevity are awareness of our environment and the quality of our movement. These two things are intimately related and combining them gives us the ability to move with the reality of the environment rather than imposing ourself onto the environment (or having the environment imposed upon us).

It all begins with an awareness of nature. Again though, nature is everywhere. It is not just out on a mountain or in a park somewhere. We are in nature wherever we are because, in fact, we are a part of nature. The observation of nature forms the basis of traditional Chinese philosophy and medical theory. By observing nature we are reminded of our own nature, and it is our own nature that places us within the natural order and allows us to participate more fully in the reality of life.

Nature Observation Exercise

So we need to begin with awareness and observation. The following is a simple but profound exercise that forms the basis for developing an awareness and relationship with the environment. This is excerpted from my article "Awareness and Vision."

"Begin by going outside and practicing relaxed vision. Find a comfortable place to sit and then look around your environment without a specific focus, seeing how far you can expand your peripheral vision. Let your awareness and vision shift naturally between wide-angle vision and particular areas of focus, just don't stay focused on any one thing or area for very long. After a little while you will start to notice patterns of movement happening around you. Let yourself relax into those patterns - they are not actually separate from you. If possible start with the same place and the same time for a little while. Then try going there at a different time of day and pay attention to the differences in movement patterns that show up.

You will not only begin to expand your awareness and reset your own physical and mental rhythms, but you will also be building up a relationship with the place. It may sound funny, but you will begin to recognize the birds (and other animals) as individuals rather than as a generic crow, jay or towhee. There is something very fundamental about this level of relationship. When we talk about cultivating a relationship with nature people think of this as an abstract idea or process, when it is literally paying attention and getting to know what is happening all around you, from the birds to the changing warmth and light of the day. And yes, the birds will recognize you pretty quickly as well, as part of their environment.

The next stage of this exercise is to practice this while walking. As you walk with relaxed vision let your body and breath relax as well. Our body, breath and awareness are intimately related and

the state of one will greatly influence all of them. You will notice that your body relaxes and you are naturally more alert, and physically aligned. And you will feel invigorated and refreshed after the walk! This also expands your relationship with the environment to a larger, more dynamic area."

The Four Attributes of Movement

Once we have started to cultivate our awareness and relationship to nature, we can begin to look at the quality of our movement. In understanding movement we can break down movement into four main attributes: balance, strength, coordination and flow. Any specific movement that we do comes from a combination of some or all of these qualities. In order to be able to move freely and comfortably within our environment we need to cultivate all of these attributes.

Balance is one of the most fundamental aspects to movement and is that which probably ties us most strongly to our environment. Another word for this is proprioception, our ability to sense how our body is oriented in a particular space. This is linked to our vision our sense of touch (particularly in the feet) and our inner ear. Balance training is one of the most fundamental skills to develop as all of our movements depend on this.

Strength is our ability to manipulate our body or an external load within our environment. We use strength in everything that we do, from standing up to picking up a grocery bag, and so on. Training strength is ideally about increasing our ability to move ourselves or other things in relation to us and has a huge benefit in and of itself to our health.

Coordination is what gives us the ability to apply our balance and strength to a physical movement in a cohesive way. It is our ability to have our body work as a single unit to form a specific, cohesive movement. Every movement takes coordination from walking on the street, to climbing stairs, to the more obviously complex movements.

Flow is what joins our individual movements together. If coordination give us the ability to take a step, flow gives us the ability to walk, linking up all of our steps in a rhythm. All of our movements begin with flow and rhythm. The more we are in tune with our environment, the smoother that flow and rhythm will be. When we think of the graceful movement of an animal running we are admiring their flow.

While all of these attributes are interrelated there is somewhat of a hierarchy. In other words, we should start with balance and end with flow.

One of the simplest exercises for beginning to train all four of these attributes is to crawl. Go outside to a field or lawn, get on your hands and feet (if this is too difficult start on your hands and knees), and crawl forward. When you start to tire, stop and rest. Then do the same thing crawling backwards. There are of course many variations of varying difficulty with this, but this simple exercise is fantastic because it is easy to start, you can practice it just about anywhere, and you will feel the benefits of it quickly!

Environment Based Movement

By increasing our awareness of nature and of our place in nature we are deepening our relationship to nature. This is not abstract, as you will build a relationship with a specific environment and that is what has the strongest impact on us. When we are aware of our environment we can begin to utilize it to improve the quality of our movement. There is never a need to go the gym - unless you want to. Through observing your environment you can find places and activities anywhere that you go that will develop your balance, strength, coordination and flow.

The main reason why many people don't move as much as they know they should is simple. I don't believe it is because people are lazy or don't want to move. I think that it is because it is not comfortable for them to move. When we are not comfortable in our environment or with the quality of our movement we stop moving. This leads to less and less comfort in movement and more and more separation from the environment. The more we develop the attributes of movement and cultivate a relationship with our environment, the more free and fluid our movements become. This is true for all of us, regardless of our age or health. So start by seeing what is around you, and practice moving with the reality of your environment!

As always, feel free to contact me with any thoughts or questions,

All my best,
Sean



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