

Threefold Walking

Today's lesson will focus on what we call in eurythmy "threefold walking," which is a way of walking in harmonious, conscious relationship to the earth. This practice of threefold walking lays the foundation for all of our later movements in eurythmy when we move forms in space. In daily life we probably take our feet for granted, but in eurythmy we speak to the earth through our conscious stepping. This gives us the ability to move in an almost effortless manner, whether we are gliding through music or poetry that is flowing or lyrical, or stepping firmly and powerfully in a dynamic piece. Whatever we want to express, we create a conscious body conversation with the earth through our feet.

At the same time, as with everything we do in eurythmy, we are also aware of the light above our heads. We consciously carry with us the vertical axis that connects us the light above our head, the gold in our heart, and the power in our legs. We are also aware of the horizontal axis, which connects us to all of humanity.

In our practice of threefold walking, each step is broken down into three components: lifting, carrying, and placing the foot. Each of these expresses a fundamental element of our human existence.

When we lift our foot, we assert our capacity to free ourselves from the force of gravity.

When we carry our foot, we are experiencing, although on an unconscious level, the balance that we always find on our life on earth: the balance between right and left, front and back, up and down, between all the choices that we make. Thus, every time we take a step, we have a phase in which we are off-balance, or need to be aware of balancing polarities.

When we place our foot, we enter into a conscious experience of how we ground ourselves on the earth.

Every step tells a story of lifting off, moving forward, and reconnecting. There is great poetry in threefold walking, and also the possibility for creating profound harmony. Threefold walking will integrate your breathing with your will in a beautiful way.

I know of a eurythmist who had the great fortune of working personally with Rudolf Steiner. At one point in her life she became ill with cancer, and asked him for advice. He told her to spend one hour each



day reading the most difficult Greek philosophers, and another hour each day simply doing threefold walking. In fact, she was cured of her cancer.

What is very important in threefold walking is that we place the foot with the toe first, and not in the way that we do in normal walking, which is with the heel first. This is because of the correspondence between the toes on your feet and your fingertips. When you touch things with your hands, you touch with your fingertips first, because they are the sensitive part of your hand. So, too, your toes are the sensitive part of your foot. And so, when we are doing this sensitive walking in eurythmy, we touch with our toes first, and then roll with our foot from the toes, across the arch, and then to the heel.

As you build your practice in threefold walking, you will move straight and tall, feeling the beauty of your human form. Cultivate open gaze, looking out so that you can behold with peripheral vision all the space around you. Feel the space behind you and around around you with your whole body as you become sensitive to the etheric space that you are moving through.

Creating your practice

Begin your eurythmy practice by choosing a place to stand in your eurythmy space. You should have a good amount of space to walk forwards, hopefully at least eight steps.

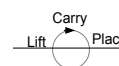
Clear your mind of distractions, and fill your whole body with light. If you like, begin with a nice, full-body stretch, loosening the muscles and tendons in your arms, erasing your tension. When you're ready, put your feet together. Become quiet, focused and centered, and take a deep breath. Align your body so your center of gravity is in your solar plexus, and your heart is open. Take a deep breath.

Standing tall, feel how you connect heaven and earth through your vertical axis. Imagine a crown of light on your head, gold in your heart, and strength in your legs.

Feel your feet on the ground, and place your right foot just slightly behind your left foot, so that you'll be able to begin walking with a right step.

Take your very first step very slowly, so you can develop extreme consciousness in it. Start by lifting only your heel off the floor. Imagine that it is stuck to the floor at first with Velcro, and you have to pull it off the floor as you roll your foot upwards. *At this moment, realize that it is the intense power of your I-Am that is able to overcome gravity by freeing your heel.* Release your heel and practice that a few times, savoring the sense of inner strength through your foot. At length, go ahead and really lift your heel and then your arch, your ball and finally your toes off the floor. Your foot hovers vertically millimeters above the floor, and you are balanced on your standing leg.

Conscious of your balance, carry your foot forward, keeping your toe pointing down.. You will notice three parts in this carrying phase: when your foot is behind, then next to, then in front of your standing leg. Keep these three phases equally long.



Finally, when your vertical foot is just below your knee – but before you have straightened your knee out and taken a big step---- find the floor again with the toes of your foot. Place your toes on the floor, and then carefully roll your foot onto the floor, feeling and greeting the floor as you do so, with your toes, then the ball of your foot, then the arch, and finally the heel.

Continue now with the other foot.

As you walk, remember to use open gaze, looking out and around you and not up or down. Feel the space around you with your whole body as you become sensitive to the etheric space that you are moving through.

Continuing walking forward, conscious with each step of lifting, carrying and placing the foot.

Prepare yourself to walk backwards by moving your back muscles a little bit, and imagining that you have eyes in the back of your head. Imagine, too, that you have eyes in the back of your heart.

Take eight steps, conscious of the lifting, carrying and placing phases.

For the next eight steps, focus on learning to keep your center of gravity at your heart level. Try to keep your arms neutral: that is, don't swing your arms, and don't sway from one hip to the other, but keep your upper body beautifully still, as your feet are powerfully talking to the earth.

Do eight steps forward again, with "lift, carry, place."

Open the eyes in the back of your head and the back of your heart, and now go backwards with "lift, carry, place."

This movement should not be too fast, nor too slow. It should be at a tempo that enable you to breathe with it very organically. We never consciously chain our movements to our breathing in eurythmy, but we find that the movements organically invite us to breathe in a harmonious way. In this exercise, you'll find that you naturally want to inhale when you lift, and exhale when you place. Allow that to happen as you walk, and remember that if you need to take an extra breath or two as you walk, you should do so.

Now add another layer of experience into this. Every single step you take embodies a cycle of energy, a wheel of life. With every step in threefold walking, your foot describes a small circle. Because your etheric body functions as an organic whole, a holon, what happens in your feet is echoed throughout your whole body.



With every lift, your whole aura is illumined, from your heel up through the back of your head. In the carry, you sustain the illumined field, all around your head as you feel it crest over the top of your head, mirroring the movement of the foot. With every place, you feel the field gently fade as your energy meets the ground below you.

These cycles of ascending and descending energy mirror the seasons of the year.

Every lift is like inaugurating the season of spring, with upsurging, uprising energy.

Every carry is like summertime, when the sun is coursing high above your head.

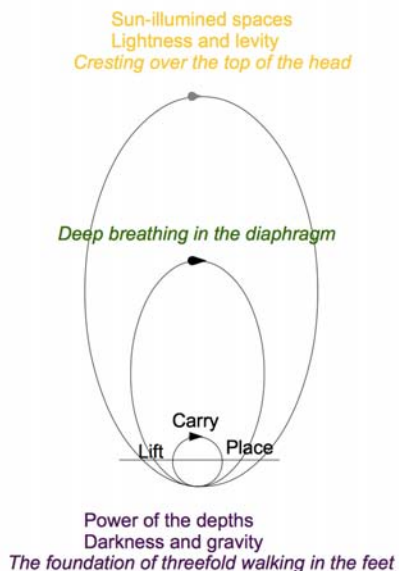
Every place is like the falling energy of autumn, and every time that the energy goes underground, we are in the dark of winter. That is between the place of one step and the carry of the next one.

So once again, take eight steps forward and eight steps backwards. However, instead of the inner words "lift, carry, place," picture to yourself the changing seasons. Visualize "springtime, summer, fall and winter" with each step.

You can try it once again, but instead of the seasons, evoke the energy of the times of the day. You might find that you like one or the other better.

So once again, take eight steps forward and eight steps backwards. However, instead of the inner words "lift, carry, place," use the pictures of "sunrise, noon, sunset, midnight."

Come to rest.



Supporting the practice with a rod

Focus now on how this circle is embedded in another, somewhat more intimate cycle, that rises up to your diaphragm and falls back to your feet. You are now going to feel three embedded circles: one at your feet, one that rises to your diaphragm, and one that flows up to and over your head.



You can support this with the use of a copper rod* that you will move in circular rotations in harmony with the circling energy of your threefold walking.

Hold your copper rod lightly in your open hands, its weight resting lightly on your fingers. Visualize the circles your feet will make, and how they are echoed throughout your whole body.

As you lift your foot, feel the rising energy extending up through your arms, and very gently lift the rod, beginning a small circle. As you carry your foot, let the rod crest over the top of the small circle, and as you place your foot, let the rod descend to its beginning point. To sense how small these circles are, remember that the whole time the rod will rest on your open fingers, and you will keep your elbows bent at your sides. Your goal is to bring harmony between your feet and your arms, that is, between your will and your rhythmic system. Breathe gently, evenly and deeply with this balancing exercise. Notice how your mind becomes quiet even as your body becomes warm and soothed.

Practice this pace several times. Continue to walk forward and backward, or, if you like, in a circle, for five to ten minutes, practicing this deep, deep activity of rhythmic breathing connected with your walking. Allow the healing rhythms of this practice to bring health and harmony to you, reducing your stress and strengthening your life forces.

Quietly, place your feet together and fold your arms before your chest. Take a moment to breathe quietly, and let the fruits of this exercise settle into you, giving nourishment to your physical body, your etheric body, your soul and your spirit.

The Journal Box

Journal about your experiences with walking. How long did it take you to find your balance (or are you still working on it?) Can you be poised in the middle phase, or do you need to find earth quickly?

The three phases of your stepping should be equal in time and dynamic. What did you notice about yours? Are you more willful in the lift, carry or place phase of your step? Did this open up for you any insights into your own constitution? How can you find balance?

How did it feel to be conscious of your head, heart and limbs engaged in three different ways----and all at the same time?

How was your breathing? Could you relax and settle into a comfortable flow with your whole body?

Was it easier or harder for you to use the copper rod to help you?

Choose a time to do threefold walking in perfect mindfulness for 30 minutes some time, and reflect on it afterwards in your journal.

Feel free to expand our online community by sharing your experiences on the community page at eurythmyonline.com.

* The simplest way to get a copper rod is to go to your local hardware store and purchase a 36 inch piece of ½ inch hollow copper plumbing pipe. Buy two rubber caps as well, to put on the ends of the rod. The exact length of the rod might vary a bit: your personal rod should be exactly one half the distance between your fingertips when you stretch out your arms to the sides. If you are working in a class, however, all students should have the same length rod. See the chapter on rod exercises for more information.