



NANBA WALKING

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Written by William Reed

The boy raised by wolves walked on all fours. Brazilian kids get an early start in playing soccer.

WALKING BEATS THE WHEEL

People in Japan discovered that the way they walk is very different from how their ancestors walked even a hundred

and fifty years ago, before the massive influx of Western and modern culture.

To distinguish between the two walking styles, we will refer to traditional Nanba Walking as distinct from conventional Modern Walking. This chart provides a quick comparison of how they are different.

Nanba Walking Edo Period (1603~1867)	Modern Walking Post Edo Period (1868~present)
Traditional Japanese clothing and footwear, walking on unpaved roads and mountain paths.	Western clothing and shoes, walking on paved roads in urban environments.
Fluid motion without forcing, twisting, or disconnected movements.	Twisting upper and lower body to gain power from torque.
Compact motion from a low centre, with a short stride and small arm movement.	Focus on using muscles with large strides and arm swings.
Lead from the back foot, stepping with feet parallel to the ground.	Heel strike and feet pushing off the ground.
Good posture, spatial awareness, unhurried.	Forward leaning, looking down, hurried rhythm.

PURPOSE

MIND YOUR STEP

As innovations and upgrades appear on our screens every day, it is easy to get the impression that newer is better. This is a peculiarly modern bias. An ancient Confucian proverb can change your perspective: Learn something new from the old.

We can become so distracted by new things that we forget to re-examine the familiar. Habitual behaviour such as walking is challenging to examine because we do it without thinking. Most likely, the last time you paid full atten-

tion to the process of how to walk was when you started taking your first baby steps. It was a challenge even to keep your balance. Once kids get the knack of walking, they seem to spend most of their waking hours walking and running around.

Many mammals are instinctively able to walk as soon as they are born. For human beings, walking is learned by watching others and then by trial and error. Watch a child walking alongside its mother or father, and you will see they often walk the same way. The family resemblance extends to the way we walk.

PURPOSE

The change in the walking style did not occur overnight, and many aspects of Nanba Walking persist in some areas of Japanese culture even today, particularly where traditional clothing is worn in the Samurai Sword Arts and Noh Drama and Kabuki Theatre.

In addition, you still see traces of Nanba Walking when people dress up in traditional Yukata for summer festivals. Still, for the most part, Japanese today wear Western clothing and shoes and unconsciously do

Modern Walking. For many people today, the convenience and efficiency of vehicles and transportation have almost replaced walking as a means of getting from one place to another. It is hard to think of any technology which has transformed society more from ancient times than the wheel. Yet, we should not forget that we were born with legs, not wheels, for all its marvels and convenience.

Although the wheel can certainly enhance the range of our movements,

ironically, it has also transformed the lives of many into a sedentary existence.

SAMURAI WALK

It was not uncommon in the Edo Period for people to travel on foot. For example, the journey from Edo (Tokyo) to Osaka was about 500 km, yet people commonly travelled this distance in 14 days. This amounts to walking 35 km a day for ordinary people, almost a full marathon every day for two weeks. On the other hand, the Hikyaku or Flying Leg Messengers and Ninja were purported to have covered this distance in as little as three to six days, equivalent to two to four marathons a day over unpaved roads and mountain passes. Even allowing for the possibility of exaggeration or relay runners, it is an extraordinary achievement by any measure.

The Tokugawa Shogun commissioned the Japanese Cartographer Inō Tadataka

(1745~1818) to survey the entire coastline of Japan, a task that occupied 17 years and covered nearly 35,000 km. In his travels, he walked on average 40 km a day while surveying the coastline of Japan, and many of his maps were accurate to 1/1000 of a degree. Commodore Matthew Perry, who famously forced Japan to open its doors to trade with America, was astonished at the accuracy of his maps.

Not only did the Japanese walk everywhere, but they walked extraordinary distances. Dr Erwin Bälz was a German Physician who came to Japan in 1876 at the age of 27. Over several decades, he helped introduce Western Medicine to Japan, taught hundreds of doctors at the Tokyo Imperial University, and was appointed the Meiji Emperor's personal physician. In his book, *Awakening Japan: the Diary of a German Doctor*, he observed how he had made a journey of 110 km from Tokyo to Nikko, which took 14 hours,

and he had to change horses six times. On his second trip to Nikko, he hired a two-wheeled taxi runner (jinrikisha), who made the same trip in 14-1/2 hours without a change of runners, subsisting on nothing but brown rice, miso paste, radish, and pickled vegetables. Dr Bälz observed that 50 km per day was a typical distance for these taxi runners, pulling a load of 80 kg, all on a low-protein vegetarian diet. When they switched to a meat diet, most were unable to run after just three days.

How could ordinary people seem to be so incredibly fit and that some of the professional runners would be Olympiad level marathon runners today?

Woodblock prints or Ukiyoe from the Edo Period often feature people walking on roads and mountains, walking in a Nanba Style. Scholars speculate that this style of walking, known as Nanba walking, may have been the easiest way to walk in traditional Japanese clothing and footwear. For example, the Japanese kimono easily comes apart if the arms are swung in modern style walking, and Japanese footwear would easily break if they took large strides and kicked off the ground with the back foot.

A literal interpretation of the pictures in these woodblock prints can lead to absurd conclusions. For example, one scholar attempted to walk in the robotic way that he imagined them to be doing and concluded that people in the Edo Period could not turn corners.

Scholars debate on how and even whether it was possible to walk such distances, claiming that they must have gone by horse or by boat to cover the distance in that time. However, I



participated in a historical re-enactment of a famous Samurai Walk for a nationally televised documentary. In the summer of 1582, Hideyoshi Toyotomi led 20,000 Samurai from Takamatsu Castle to Himeji Castle, over a distance of 100 km in two days, crossing two mountain passes. As a Nanba Walking Coach, I covered the distance myself with a Japanese television personality and the staff. It was broadcast on Sekai Fushigi Hakken (Discovering the World's Mysteries) on May 8, 2021. Thus, everyone agreed, Nanba Walking works.

WE CAN DO THIS

Both in preparation for this extraordinary Samurai Walk, and now I walk between 8,000 and 10,000 steps a day as a regular daily custom. Many people know that they should walk, and there is plenty of evidence from science that says a sedentary life, sitting for eight or more hours a day, is more harmful to your body than smoking. It can shorten your life via various diseases ranging from Type 2 Diabetes, Cancer, Cardiovascular Disease, Alzheimer's and Dementia.



Life Insurance companies have a vested interest in keeping their subscribers healthy. Many reward their policyholders with significant discounts on their premiums or other cashback rewards if they can show through data on wearable devices that they have walked 10,000 steps a day for a certain number of days of the year. The statistical evidence is clear that walking this much can significantly reduce the chance of death and disease compared to a sedentary life.

Although this approach is designed to benefit both the insurance company and the policyholder, inevitably, people will find a way to beat the system. There is even a small pendulum swing device on which you can mount your smartphone that will log in the number of steps (swings) while you sit in an armchair and watch Netflix. Although your smartphone might not be smart enough to tell the difference, you cannot fool your body. Ironically, you cheat the insurance company, but far worse, you cheat yourself by dropping a notch in character and increasing your risk of disease.

Perhaps laziness is not the only major reason people might try to get out of walking every day.

There is the inertia of habit. An object at rest tends to stay at rest. Likewise, an object in motion tends to stay in motion.

The easiest way to change your habit is to gradually work up to your goal, adding 1000 steps a day to your regular walking until it becomes comfortable.

Then add another thousand steps until you reach your goal of 8000 to 10,000, which is considered ideal for maintaining health.



Another way you can sustain this good habit is to change your walking style from Modern Walking to Nanba Walking, which is much better suited to long-distance walking. Three small changes can bring about a significant improvement in the way you walk.

This is how to Nanba Walk

1. Let your hips lead the movement, and your legs follow. Modern walking usually starts with the foot leading and the rest of the body trying to catch up.
2. Keep your feet under your hips by taking a smaller stride: long stride, no pride. Short stride is dignified. A Japanese proverb has it that, "He who walks with a long stride has yet to master his craft."

3. Hang your arms at your side and make a small reverse circular motion with your hands, like a small wheel turning in reverse as you move forward. This helps engage the upper body with the rhythm of the leg movement and prevents you from swinging your arms and twisting your body.

You will find that walking becomes easier and more fluid. Walking is one of the best ways to get into a state of flow. It relaxes your body and opens your senses to discover new things in nature. If you track your steps using a Pedometer, you will find that you can easily do 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day with Nanba walking, and you will miss it if you walk less.

Even when walking is recommended, someone will find a reason not to walk. Too hot, too cold; too wet, too dry; too dangerous, too boring. Walking is always too something to somebody. But, with a bit of imagination, you can find a way; walking in place with a step machine, walking instead of riding, walk up a staircase instead of taking the lift. Where there's a will, there's a way.

The cost is minimal, and the return is extraordinary. As people in many countries are increasingly able to expect to live to the age of 100 and beyond, it is important to consider the quality of that life in later years. Living longer will not serve you or your family if it brings the burdens of disease and dementia. Walking can prevent the onset of many

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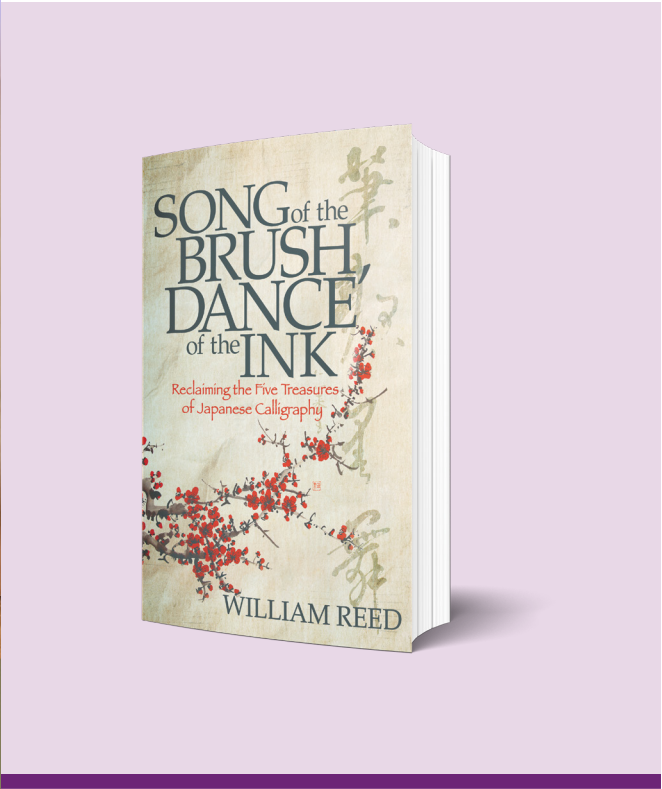
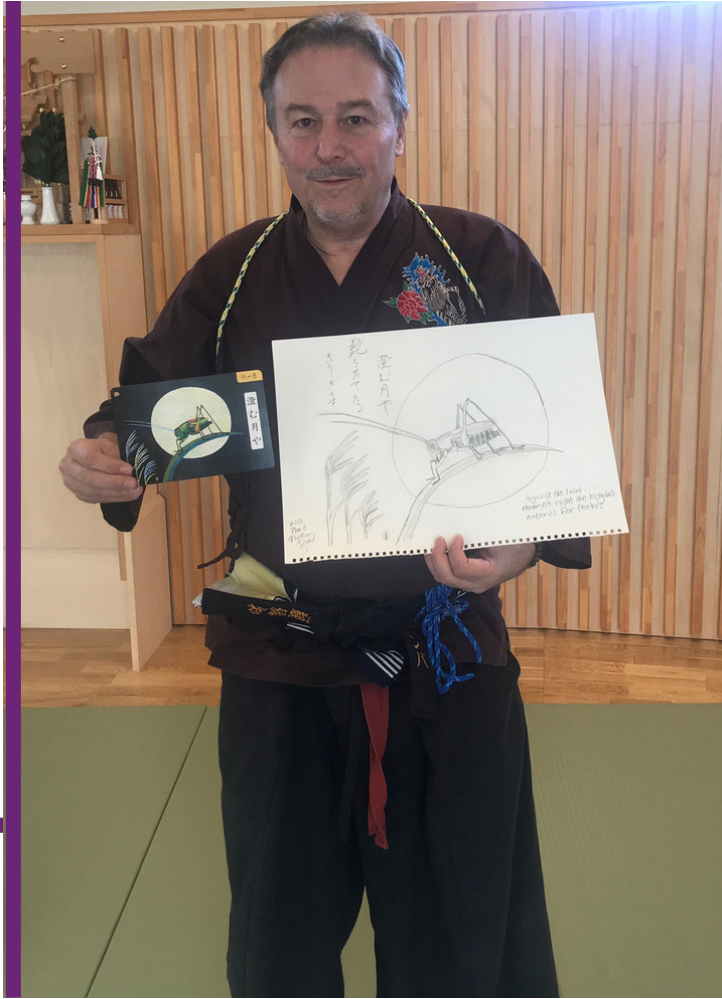
diseases as well as keep your mind clear and resilient. Thus, we can aspire to perpetual youth and longevity with a higher quality of life.

LESSONS FOR LEADERS

You cannot lead well from behind a desk. As a leader, you will gain more insight and greater respect if you walk the floor, talk to employees and customers, and demonstrate authenticity by walking your talk. Walk and Talk Meetings are being practised by executives in leading companies and innovative entrepreneurs.

The next step is to discover and share how to walk the Nanba Way. I have done two TEDx talks on Nanba the Art of Physical Finesse, and provide more information on Nanba on my website at: www.nanbawalking.com





Maestro Educator and Professor of Samurai Culture at the International College of Liberal Arts (iCLA)

(8th-Dan) and Calligraphy (10th-dan) and connections to Masters of Zen, Swordsmanship, and the Tea Ceremony.

From a young age, William has sought how to find his Way through the Zen Arts and Japanese Culture, first coming to Japan in 1972, and from that time learning Aikido and Calligraphy from top Masters. Then, at the age of 20, he was fortunate to begin learning everything over again in a new language and culture that was very different from Western culture yet very adapted to the modern world. He discovered over time that the Japanese owe much of their resilience, sense of beauty, and dedication to lifelong learning to Samurai Culture. This became his Passion, and it led to Mastery of the Japanese Language. The highest ranks possible are in Aikido

William has twice been a TEDx Speaker, has written several bestselling books on Amazon in Japanese, and is a certified World Class Speaking Coach. In addition, he has appeared as a navigator in a number of documentaries on Samurai History and Cultures and teaches these subjects at the International College of Liberal Arts (iCLA) near Mt. Fuji and offers executive coaching and corporate training based on these principles.

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[www.youtu.be/-5myS5AJ1t4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5myS5AJ1t4)

www.cabanga.co.za