

## Finger Dancing

–an exploration of mindful sensitivity in movement –

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Finger dancing is a potentially rich contemplative exploration involving two people that can give one an expanded, non-verbal taste of the sensitivities that are possible in mindfulness practice. It is done in two steps: the first, on your own, and the second, done with a partner.

### Step One:

Stand with your weight evenly balanced on both feet and knees slightly flexed. Notice how the soles of your feet make contact with the ground. Imagine roots, growing from these points of contact, anchoring you deep in the earth. Now, close your eyes and begin to savour the varying textures and rhythmic processes that together make up your breathing. It can enhance your focus to breathe through your mouth and nose simultaneously. Breathing in, through mouth and nose. Breathing out through mouth and nose. You will know that you are doing this if you can feel an alternating warming and cooling on your lips and at your nostrils.

With great sensitivity, relax into this mouth/nose breathing and explore the myriad shifting details of your entire body/brain/mind/community – a constantly changing dynamic of relationships – your body of experience in the act of standing and breathing. Physical sensations, feelings, emotions, memories and flows of thinking are inter-responding with and to each other. At the same time they are responding to phenomena taking place in the environment around you. Feel the subtle ripples of muscular adjustment that facilitate your ability to stand vertically, on the surface of a spherical planet, which is turning on its axis while whirling around a star. If you notice any physical or mental tensions or holdings, invite them to soften and relax. Smiling, breathing, present – feel your way into this exploration.

After a while, begin to extend and exaggerate some of the subtle physical movements that together compose this integrated activity of standing and breathing. Eventually, with the exception of your feet which remain 'planted in the earth', all of you is moving. Chest relating to shoulders, to hips, and legs and arms and face. Abdomen and back muscles – your buttocks and thighs feeling their strength, your entire physiology is 'dancing', moving harmoniously with the rhythms of your breathing. Guided by gradients of pleasure and interest, engulfed in the music of your breath, explore the full range of possible movement.

Experiment with this dynamic contemplation while centering in or from your head. Then let the centre drop into your throat. How is this different? Explore moving from your heart. Eventually settle into your belly and stay with this, moving from the '*hara*' or belly until this way of experiencing becomes very familiar.

*Breathing this body of moving experience,  
Gently, lovingly, softly, forgivingly,  
Interweavings of space and time and knowing  
While rooted in the earth.  
Letting go, letting be  
Hovering, weightless  
This smooth line of bliss.*

Finish the session of practice by decreasing the range of movement until you are standing 'still' – mouth/nose breathing – tracking the very subtle shifts and changes in this ever fresh body of experience.

After you have become quite familiar with the possibilities of this meditation, you are then ready to explore 'step two' with a partner.

### **Step Two:**

Begin by standing a little less than a metre apart, facing each other. Both of you should close your eyes and re-visit the over-all feeling of 'stage one'. Refresh your appreciation for this fluid, sensitive, smiling, breathing, constantly inter-adjusting presence. After a minute or two, open your eyes. Raise your right hands, and bring your palms close to each other and make contact with the soft pads of your index fingers. Once you have made this physical connection, close your eyes and return to the explorations of stage one. Everything continues as you did before, with the exception that your index finger must remain in contact with your partner's index finger.

Gradually begin to sway with the music of your own breathing, until it becomes a dance. Explore the possibilities of movement; the range and rhythm and textures of coordination. Your entire organism is involved: stretching and extending, expanding and contracting, flexing and bending. Sensitively track the shifting landscape of your body/brain/mind/community – the continuously morphing body of experience that you are. Softening and releasing; again and again. Softening in the belly. Softening in your wrists, your knees, your face and arms. Go deeply into your experience while at the same time staying sensitively in contact with your partner's finger.

It seems to be common for people new to this meditation to find themselves distracted by concerns about staying in contact, or who is leading and who following, or what might the other person be thinking, and so forth. Quite quickly though, (sometimes on the second or third attempt at this exploration) most people discover a degree of blissful, attentive sensitivity that surprises them. The challenge of being tuned to oneself moving with one's own volition, while at the same time being in relationship with another who is doing the same, seems to bring forth a degree of heightened attentiveness. In this way the exercise can

hint at new possibilities. I can be actively engaged with a multitude of subtle shiftings in my private experiential field while simultaneously appreciating and responding to changes in the environment I am perceiving around me. Especially marvellous is the recognition that I can be in a state of deep contemplation while at the same time collaborating with another sentient being.

Stage two ends with both of you gradually decreasing your range of movement until there is an exquisitely sensitive minimalist dancing. Spacious, open, relaxing and releasing, the movement continues to diminish until you find yourselves at rest in stillness.

When it feels right, break contact, lower your hands to your sides, and spend a few moments more, tracking the textures of being - standing, breathing, present. Finish the session by verbally sharing something of your experience with each other.

With familiarity, the inner feeling of finger dancing can become a metaphor that can be applied in any meditation practice. The 'finger' of our attentiveness, of our extraordinarily sensitive body of experience is in seamless contact with the chosen object or theme of meditation and we become one ecstatic, dynamically flowing experience. Once you've recognised this, you could try 'finger dancing' with whatever you perceive or think of. Try finger dancing with your breath, with a feeling, with a kinaesthetic memory or a clear idea. Try finger dancing with an emotion, or with an interpersonal situation. What about finger dancing with a plant, a bird or your perception of a flowing river.

Enjoy the exploration!

