

## An Introduction to Walking Meditation

You can begin understanding walking meditation by thinking of it as applying mindfulness and the lessons we learn in sitting meditation to walking - and, by extension, to bodily movement in general. From this perspective, it can be very helpful in showing us how to take our practice “off the cushion”, and integrate it into the rest of our worldly life.

In formal walking practice we walk in a prescribed manner, analogous to the formality of sitting. We find a quiet, unobstructed path somewhat away from others. We walk forward and back along a modest distance, of 20 or 30 feet. We walk with eyes open, vision softly focused on the ground a few paces ahead. As we come to the end of each short segment, the simple but essential tasks of stopping, mindfully turning around, relaxing and reestablishing our intention and focus, then restarting the walking helps the mind stay present and attentive.

Walking slowly and deliberately, focus your attention on the physical sensations that arise and pass away with each step. Note how the sensations of weight, movement and balance shift as the body moves. Yes, of course you already “know” this; certainly, at a conceptual level. But, are you fully present and aware of it? Do you fully appreciate it? This is the challenge, the opportunity, offered you by meditation in all its forms.

You may find that mindful awareness at one level becomes the foundation for awareness to arise of finer, more elemental levels of experience. Initial awareness (or is it just a thought?) of a step as a single action may open into awareness of each step as four distinct processes: shifting the weight from trailing to leading leg (as we take an in-breath), then letting all weight settle onto the leading leg, establishing a sense of rooted balance on it (on the out-breath), then lifting the trailing foot and moving it forward (second in breath), then finally placing it down to the earth/floor in front of what had been the leading leg (second out-breath). Finer awareness may arise, revealing that each of these movements has its own beginning, mid-phases and end. All the while, awareness and adjustment of balance may provide a welcome sense of unity binds these separate motions and sensations together.

Since intention and movement are present with walking meditation, you may find it more engaging than sitting meditation. Its “busy-ness” makes it somewhat less subject to the energy-based hindrances of restlessness and sloth/torpor. But the mind can wander or be drawn away from mindfulness of walking, just as it does from the breath when sitting. The same strategies for training the mind apply. Initially we focus on learning to let go of distracting sensations; abandoning commentary, criticism and other internal discourse; and simply returning to the focus on walking and awareness of waking. Later in our practice, the ebb and flow of intention, movement and sensation make walking meditation a rich setting for practicing insight or vipassana.