

## Walking Meditation Instructions

By Peter B. Williams

Walking meditation is a great compliment to sitting meditation and is yet another skillful means to add to your mindfulness tool box. Some people even prefer the walking to sitting because the movement gives them something more tangible to be aware of. Walking meditation is also a very useful practice to bring into daily life, since for most of us, we spend some time each day moving around on our feet. For instance, I find that when I do carpentry, I am most mindful during the periods I am walking to fetch a board or a box of nails, because this is usually a time when I have already made a plan and I don't need to be thinking anything through.

These instructions are based on teachings I received from the many wonderful teachers at Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock Meditation Center, particularly Joseph Goldstein. I thank them for their wisdom and clarity.

To do walking meditation practice, find a quiet place where you can walk back and forth. This can be in your home, or anyplace outdoors. As you walk slowly along, pay attention to the sensations that arise in your feet and/or legs. After twenty to thirty steps stop and turn around and repeat the process.

Walking speed is an important question. At the fastest, your pace should be a bit slower than normal. Slowing down helps your mind become present. At this pace, it is best to notice the sensations in your feet as they contact the ground. Mental noting, just as in sitting practice, is very useful for reminding the mind what it is trying to do. At this pace, I recommend using the note "placing" or "step" or "pressure" every time a foot contacts the ground. It can be very helpful to slow down even more, and walk at a slow pace. At this speed, the attention can be in the feet on contact and in the leg as it

swings. Use notes of "placing" for the foot contacting the ground and "moving" when the foot is moving to the next step. It can be really beneficial to spend some time moving very slowly, with attention in the feet on lifting and placing, and in the legs on moving. Use the notes "lifting," "moving," and "placing."

Joseph Goldstein recommends breaking up a walking period into three equal parts, starting with the slightly slower than normal pace, then the slow pace, and then the very slow pace. You may find this works for you most walking periods. However, the sole criteria on proper meditation technique is whether it helps you be present or not, and there may be times when you need to vary the pace to whatever speed helps you be most present.

Walking meditation is best practiced as a one-pointedness practice, where you keep bringing your attention back to the sensations in your feet and/or legs. When you notice you have been distracted, make a light mental note of "thinking" and return to the sensations of walking. Remember, judging your practice never works because it is just more thinking. As Sharon Salzberg so wisely counsels, when you notice you have become distracted, just simply begin again. Every step is a new opportunity for awareness.

It is best to place the eyes far enough in front of you so that you are not seeing your feet moving. The point is not to watch your feet; it is to notice sensations in your body. For that matter, you may be seeing your walking body with your internal eye, which is also not the mediation object. Notice this "seeing" without trying to make it stop, and just simply return the attention to the sensations in your feet or legs.

I would recommend that you add walking meditation to your daily practice. If you sit every day, I would recommend doing walking for at least one or two of those meditation periods each week. As you get used to the walking practice, you may find your attention naturally arousing as you are walking around in your day. You may be working intently at a problem on your computer, and as soon as you get up to

go to the bathroom you might find yourself noticing the sensations of walking. I find this to be true even on busy days. On such days, I tend to be most mindful when I am walking between errands.

Good luck bringing this great mindfulness tool into your life! May it benefit you and all beings everywhere.