

Walking Instructions

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So for those of you who came during the sitting after the initial welcome and announcements, I welcome you here. Thank you for coming. And there is one big announcement to make is that the way I prefaced it before for everyone was that in this practice of mindfulness, something like this, it's really appropriate to use this practice to learn how to be mindful and wise when things are not what you expect. And so this daylong is different than what I expected because when I looked at the description of the daylong, it was a different description than we've ever had for the ones, the daylongs that go from 8:30 to 5. And so now we're modifying it accordingly. So the description is that it's a day that involves instruction rather than a day of full silence. So it's been modified and it'll be novel as we go through a little bit for everybody as we try to find a way that works for everyone.

So sometimes we use, very often in our mindfulness tradition that we have, we use breathing as the default, as the kind of the home base for where we bring our attention, what we're paying attention to. And one of the ways that I really appreciate understanding why we do this is when you're sitting still, generally it's the biggest movement that's happening. It's the biggest activity that's happening, the chest, the belly, the belly moving in and out. The sensations of the air going out through the nostrils are the most kind of active part of what we're doing. And also it's a rhythmic sensation. There's an alternation, there's kind of a cycle.

And we're trying to kind of arrive and be in the present moment in a full and a meaningful, effective way, something that's very hard for many minds to do because they're so easy to be preoccupied by thoughts, past and future, concerns, lost in fantasy. And to wake up and be present here for our experience in a clear, clarifying, clear way is a real gift. And it's the foundation for a deepening of mindfulness, a deepening of our experience in Buddhism into

our spiritual life. The gateway in is this ability to be present in a nice way. And if you want to try to focus the attention on the present moment, and you focus on something that's unmoving, you'll strain your mind. So if you find some spot on the floor and just invariably just kind of fixate your attention there, it's not really a natural thing to do.

You have to hold your attention firm. A kind of more natural attention is a natural attention that, in a relaxed way, kind of moves and oscillates and shifts and changes. And you see that a little bit with the relaxed eyes. If you've ever seen a map of how a relaxed eye moves, it just kind of wanders around, looks here and there and goes around things. And it actually doesn't fixate. To fixate is to strain.

Right. So the rhythm of the breathing, breathing in and breathing out, that cycles are coming, it's a way, it's a place the attention can land and just kind of gently follow the changing rhythm of something. Kind of like some people find it very relaxing to watch a fire burn in the fireplace. You can do that for hours maybe, or a river floating by, and you're not fixing anything on the river. You're just kind of following and moving and roaming around the surface. Or here in California, sometimes we go to the beach and watch the waves.

And I mean, after, if you watch three waves, you know what it's about. Why do any more? Yeah. But in fact, it's quite relaxing, quite nice for the eyes, the attention kind of just to kind of watch this gentle movement up and down across the sand. And so the breathing is kind of that kind of thing. In walking meditation, it's the biggest movement we're generally doing, the walking itself, the legs that are moving.

And there too, there's a rhythm in a cycle of which the leg does a stepping and forward and the next one steps forward. And so there too, there's a possibility for the attention not to get fixated on something, but to ride along, to ride the wave, to flow along, to surf along, glide along, slide along. I don't know what metaphor you like, find your own, but to kind of follow that kind of pattern, to give the mind something that's meant to be kind of relaxing for the mind to do. But also, as we relax, what we're relaxing is the strong tendency of the mind not to be in the present, to be distracted, to be caught in thoughts, to be wandering off, to be thinking and analyzing, figuring out, engineering the meditation maybe, trying to make something happen. It's best not to try to make something happen. It's okay to want to have something happen in meditation if it's realistic.

And maybe realistic is to cultivate or awaken a relaxed, clear attention to the present moment, and to find that very satisfying, to be here in a clear, open way. And my reference point for it, I don't know if it works for any of you, is if I take an afternoon nap, the naps are usually not that long, maybe 10, 15 minutes. And that's innocent enough. But the problem I have,

I'm kind of a little bit joking, but still, you know, is that I set myself up to just nap for 10, 15 minutes, and then I'm going to go do something else. But when I wake up from the nap, I'm so content. And my mind is kind of relaxed and clear in a way it wasn't before.

And I'm just very content to look at the ceiling and look at the cracks in the ceiling, or the dust floating in the light beam, or just kind of just, I'm very present. It's very nice. It's not very interesting, the patterns and cracks on the ceiling or the dust, but it's just very nice. It's something very satisfying about being present like that. It's just, it's nice to be alive. I don't have to prove anything or defend anything or accomplish anything.

I don't have to be at the beck and call of a to-do list. I'm just happy to be breathing and alive. And so that's a little bit what we're looking for. It's okay to want that. But at the same time, to have the wisdom, don't try too hard. Just be content to just kind of sit here and breathe, rest, ride, surf on the breathing, on the present moment.

So the breathing is kind of the default. And that's, if nothing else is more compelling, that's what we bring our attention to. And then as we, as the instructions develop through the day, and as people's practice develop over days and months and years, we start incorporating into that contemplative attention, that calm, quiet, peaceful kind of attention, more and more of our life, more and more of what's difficult in our life. And we learn to hold it, we learn to receive it into this calm attention. And that's very different than receiving our life experiences into an agitated attention, into an anxious attention, into a desirous attention that wants something desperately, into a conceited attention where all the reference point is about me, myself and mine. It's all about me.

We're beginning to shift the attention so the attention is not held hostage or caught by a lot of these things where there's tension and stress in our life and produces stress, into a place where the attention can be much more productive and allows for a deeper intelligence to be operating within us as we learn to be present for all of our life, just as it is, with a calm, open, peaceful attention. That's not meant to justify what you're paying attention to. It's not meant to be an accepting of what you're paying attention to. It's neither rejecting nor accepting. It's just calmly being aware of it, meeting it with calm attention, and then figuring out what's the wise thing to do. So that's kind of the foundation of, you know, of kind of the orientation of developing mindfulness.

And we do that with walking meditation. And for those of you who are experienced with walking meditation, you can head off now in a moment. Okay. And I'll say something about that in a moment, but now I'm remembering another announcement to make, for those of you who came late, that if you could, if you parked on this street here, just south of our build-

ing, all the way down to Brewster Street, the one-way street, that's only one block, one-way street, if you can move your car, if at all possible. If you have accessibility issues, you can leave it. But if you can move it, because it's troublesome for our neighbors not to be able to find parking when they come home with all their groceries and it's nice for them to have good relationships with their neighbors.

So if you could do that, but a little bit and do it in a relaxed way. Don't be in a hurry and don't rush off and rush back and, you know, like, this is where to be. You're supposed to be here. Just, you're supposed to be practicing calm mindfulness. And so for those of you who know how to do walking meditation, one of the interesting ways to do it is to find a pace. It gives you a sense of ease.

And what that means is very personal, very specific to the time and place you're in. But something that feels nice, a nice, useful, calm way to walk. If you're really agitated or really angry or something, sometimes walking fast is what brings ease. So you have to kind of know what that means for you. But then the idea is to begin paying attention to the rhythm, the alternation of the feet walking, the sensations that play there. But if you're walking, especially if you're walking a little bit slower than the normal street pace, be content to have the only ambition you have is to be fully present for one step.

That's all. Don't try to do more than that. I mean, you know, that's hard enough. Just try to be with one step and then do the next one and then do the next one. Some people who try to have some idea that they're supposed to be continuously mindful the whole time, it's just too challenging. And so then the mind slips off really easily and they don't notice it and they're not paying attention.

But if you have a very short goal, just this step and then just next step, maybe it's easier to just hang in there and just give yourself over and just kind of get into the rhythm of that step, that step here, here. We'll start in here again at, in 45 minutes, so at 10:15. And Kevin's the manager for today. And at any time that you have a question or concern, you can, or you're for the morning, right? For the morning. Anytime you have a question or concern, you can go and ask him, check in with Kevin.

But he'll also ring the bell about seven, eight minutes before the next sitting. And he'll do it in the building here, he'll do it outside. And for those of you who have been here before and don't need walking instructions or orientation more to IMC, you're welcome to begin. And those of you who are new and want walking instruction, why don't you come up here in the front and I'll get a chance to say hello to you and we'll talk more and I'll give you some walking instructions.