

Walking Instructions

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Good morning or good day for some of you. So one of the things that happens in a retreat like this is that the continuity of attention begins to create a momentum, a momentum of mindfulness and concentration, and it can build and strengthen as the days go on. It doesn't necessarily do it, you know, step by step by step, you know, straight up. It kind of goes up and down as it builds. The more that the awareness is present, the more it builds. And walking meditation and having continuity of attention, all your activities during the day helps build that momentum.

And walking in particular can be a significant form of meditation as sitting. Some people take to right away and find it really satisfying. I wasn't one of those people. It took me a while to learn to really appreciate it and make it part of my practice. But it's worth taking the time to develop it. And if you feel you've given a time and you still don't like it, I'll say some things at the end of this little piece I'm doing right now that might be helpful.

Yeah. So one of the things to remember is that it's the same mind that's present for sitting or walking. It's the same mind that gets distracted by what we want or don't want. There's, you know, we might be wanting to be more comfortable. We might be wanting to eat. We might be not liking the noise around us. You know, it can happen anywhere.

So it's the same mind that's present that... in everything. It's the same mind that where the five hindrances show up, you know, in meditation, one second, somehow I went away. Okay, I want to be able to see you. It's hard to talk when you're looking at, you know, full screen of yourself. So, you know, the same five hindrances show up regardless of what you're doing.

You know, you want something, you want something to go away, you feel restless, you feel tired or sleepy, or you start doubting, am I doing this right? You know, it's this, you know,

what are, you know, some form of doubt. Those are the hindrances that show up. And those are something we really want to see clearly as we practice and really see them or how they are, how they're formed, and allow them to come and go. They will go.

So the object of meditation does not matter as much as being mindful and being peaceful and letting go of clinging with whatever shows up. When we apply our efforts in integrating this throughout the day, the concentration does build. So we usually do walking meditation. The most common way that we tend to do it in this tradition is we take an area about 20 feet long and we walk back and forth. When we come to the end of the path, we come to mindful stop, mindfully turn around, maintaining continuity, really feel the body turning, and then mindfully start again.

You know, when we use it as a stop at each end, it helps us notice if the attention's wandered, and it can allow us to recommit. You know, I've said to myself, I'll be mindful for these next 20 steps. It's similar to counting breaths, and it can really help stay with it, stay with it. In an online retreat, some of you may not have the ideal place to walk in meditation the way you might on a residential retreat. Or for instance, the walking path that you use during the day might not be practical when it's dark. But it's quite doable, even in small spaces.

And I mentioned during opening circle that I've done it in a living room, just walking in a circle. The disadvantage of a circle is it doesn't have a beginning, no natural stop. So what I did was I just placed a little Buddha I had at the front. I called it the front of my circle. And so that's when I would stop, I'd bow and then continue. You know, so and recommit myself if I needed to.

For anyone who can't do walking due to a physical condition, you can get the same mental benefits of continuity from other rhythmical movement. You know, one way is, you know, there's many ways. But a very simple one is just alternating the movement of the hands. You're doing the same thing as walking and your mindfulness can be mindfulness of the movement of the hands, of the arms. Okay.

There's more complex ones, you know, there's a monk in Asia that he teaches like an eight-step arm movement, you know, and, you know, where you've, but I'm not going to teach that, you know, because I don't remember it. But there's ways of doing this. It's not exactly the right way, but it's the fact that we're moving the body and we're moving the attention in a different manner than we do when sitting meditation.

So to the method of walking, you know, we can walk at any speed. You know what's most important is to have a sense of ease. When I first learned this everybody was walking really

ultra slow and, you know, I have problems with my low back and it was excruciating to me to walk that slow. You know, and eventually I learned that no, do it at what's at easeful. So it can be helpful not to rush, you know, to be on the slower side. And if really slow works well for you, please do it.

But remember, it's just really about being at ease. Whatever's really a relaxed way of walking. Sometimes people have balance problems when it's too slow also. Yeah. Sometimes for people, faster walking brings more ease if we're agitated or if we're sleepy. Faster walking can wake us up.

And sometimes if the mind is calm and alert, the slower walking may feel more natural. It's okay to change your pace at different sitting, at different walking periods. Or, you know, one of the methods that one of my teachers, Joseph Goldstein mentioned, is that what he used to do, and I have no idea, you know, this is like, you know, decades ago. But he would spend the first 15 minutes of the walking period, walking really fast, you know, right after he sat, just really getting his energy up. Then he'd do the middle kind of at a middle pace. And the last 15 minutes before he went to sit down, it'd be like a very slow pace.

And he just did that rhythm throughout the day. And that was great for him. And I've done that at times, you know, when, and it's been, it's been very supportive. So it's okay to play with it, to see what supports you the most. And remember, the walking period is about the continuity of your attention and the ease of your mind. You know, staying connected and present with our bodies as we walk.

Um, you know the basic instruction is first before you even start moving the body, connect with the body during one of the periods you're not doing anything wrong. You know, just keep the attention really present in the body and the mind gets distracted you bring it back, you know, just like you do in in a formal meditation. So, um, so I think that's, oh, the last thing, you know, because I realize sometimes people are new and I forget to say this, is, this is now with your eyes open, you know, but you kind of want to keep them kind of looking down a bit, not at your feet, but maybe a few feet in front of you and kind of be defocused, you know, so you're not like staring.

You know, but just like a soft focus, a few feet in front of you, you know, the body at ease, the mind at ease, and gentle walking in a way that's easeful and allows the mind to concentrate. So for those of you who are already delighted with walking meditation, please enjoy your walking. And those of you who are open to finding the light in walking meditation, please enjoy walking. So thank you.