

## Stepping Stones

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One of the characteristics of *insight meditation* is for it to always be concrete or specific in the sense experience—something you can sense and feel and touch and hear—that we meditate through. What's called in Buddhism the *six senses*. The sixth sense being the ability to track what's going on in the mind.

But often we don't live close to our senses. We don't live in the kind of concrete world of here and now. We live in abstractions. We live in constructs of the mind, ideas that are somewhat removed.

So, if you spend a lot of time thinking about next week, next week—what's a week? I mean, you can't touch a week exactly, and you can't see a week. And it's just an invention of human beings in certain parts of the universe, this construct of a week. Different people might have a different association with the word “week.” But it's not something that you touch or feel or be with.

So when we're doing sitting meditation and walking meditation, it's the same way. If you are following your breathing, breathing is kind of abstract. Not completely, but it's kind of abstract. And if you're walking, walking is kind of an abstraction.

And how it's an abstraction is that it implies continuity over time, like breathing. So you're supposed to stay with your breathing forever, right? It's a continuous thing. And walking continuously, being aware of walking.

But to really practice meditation that way, mindfulness that way, it's a little bit like walking on a high wire. It's kind of connected to something real, but it's so thin and narrow you'll probably slip off a lot. And hopefully, it's not too far to fall.

What you want to do, if you're going to walk, is—you don't want to walk very often on a high wire, especially if you don't know what you're doing. What you want is stepping stones. And

it's clear you're stepping on a stone. It supports you; it's firm. You put your weight on it, and then the next one—it's a wide stone, stepping stones as you go along.

So, in breathing meditation, to be aware of breathing just as an abstraction, you're probably going to slip off a lot. But you think of the inhale as a stepping stone, and you connect to that. You land there. You stay with that. Then the exhale is the next stepping stone.

That you can do. You might not fall off that stepping stone. It's wide. It's broad. It's short enough—the length of time—you might be able to just stay there for that. You know, the inhale, the exhale, coming and going, and just kind of walk gently, softly in the present moment.

So with walking, it's each step that is the stepping stone. Each step is kind of like you land on a stepping stone, rather than just the idea, “I'm gonna be mindful throughout my walking.” Good luck.

But if you're gonna be aware of one step, this step makes sense. This step is concrete. This step is specific. This step comes with sensations here now. This step, here now, and then you do it again.

And if you forget to do it again, it's not that dangerous. Maybe unless there's oncoming traffic. But then, so the breathing, this inhale—that's the place of mindfulness. That's the place we rest. That's the place where we connect and receive and feel and sense.

This inhale, and that's meant to be a lot less abstract than breathing. It might be a little bit abstract, and there's a range of abstractions around something like inhale and exhale. But we're moving towards less and less abstraction. And not better and better ideas, but better and better sensing, sensing the experience, just the sensations. Oh, this is what it is.

As the stepping stones, just like if you walked on a—I don't know—a marsh or some kind of a little bit dangerous place. But as long as you stay on the wide, broad stepping stones, you're safe. You know, you're comfortable. You're right there.

But you don't want to forget—you don't want to forget about the stepping stones and get distracted and fall into the water. So I hope that helps. And something interesting to practice with today. And may your steps take you fully into the present moment. Thank you.