



Walking Practice

We have been walking since a year or so after we were born. But, how often do we really experience walking? Walking practice/meditation is another way to focus the mind, to 'land' in our bodies, in our breath, in our lives. It can be a way to practice mindfulness in public without anyone knowing.

I'll present two common approaches to walking practice. Try them out. See how each feels different. This can be done inside or outside. Outside can be a feast for the senses (seeing light, smelling fragrance, hearing sound, feeling the sensation of wind, rain, sun on our skin).

Initially as you explore this practice, choose a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Stand still for a moment. Notice your body. Stand tall like a tree, like a mountain. You can allow your arms to hang loosely at your sides, fold them as if strolling behind your back, or hold them one on top of the other over your belly. Feel the sensations already present in your body. As in sitting meditation, simply notice them, honor them, allow them to be there, and come home to include awareness of the breath. Your gaze can remain softly downcast on the ground a few feet in front of you.

Slowly, we shift weight into one side of the body, feeling long through the spine and the crown of the head, and rooted down through the *weighted* foot. The *empty* foot is lifted as we inhale, and we exhale as we place the foot. Inhale, lifting. Exhale, placing. Inhale, lifting. Exhale, placing. Over and over. You can set out an area for this kind of walking; the edges of a room. Or pick some landmarks if walking outside; from a tree to a bench, a rock to a rock.

You could set a timer and simply allow yourself to experience walking until the timer goes off. You could choose to focus attention on a particular aspect of walking to focus your mind as it cartwheels all over the place, which it will.

- the soles of the feet
- the texture of the ground
- the movement in your joints
- the sensation of your spine
- sensations on the skin
- experience of the breath

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This is enough; a simple way to increase awareness of something you do everyday. Some people enjoy adding words in their mind or a sentiment as encouraged by Thich Nhat Han, Breathing in “I have arrived”; Breathing out “I am home.” Breathing in “In the here”; Breathing out “In the now.”

In a second approach to walking, begin in the same way as above, with awareness and attention in the body. Then set out a stretch of about 10-30 paces. Walking can be slow to moderate pace, natural. Simply walk the path you have laid out, aware you are walking, and then pause. Really pause. Allow your eyes to rest for a second on some object or the whole field of what’s in front of you with soft focus. And after a healthy pause, turn around and return in the opposite direction.

Continue to walk back and forth for 5-30 minutes. Experiment with pace and distance. You can refer back to the prompts noted above (sensation of soles of the feet, joints etc.) to focus your mind on your present experience of walking.

Walking with intention and awareness can feel a bit awkward in the beginning. One might feel a little like a zombie or a robot. Over time, a grace and ease can come, as if dancing with every step. Once you are more familiar and comfortable with the practice, you can do it anywhere: to cross from the fridge to the sink in your kitchen, from one room in your home to another, between your desk and the drinking fountain at work.

Enjoy a fresh, vital experience of learning to walk all over again.

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