

**Text from the Tradition: A Guide to Walking Meditation by Thich Nhat Hahn** (pages not listed in text)

*Walking Meditation as Walking with the Holy*

Walking meditation is practicing meditation while walking. It can bring you joy and peace while you practice it. Walking meditation is a practice that brings the activity of the body, brain, will, and feeling into harmony. When you practice walking meditation, you go for a stroll. You have no purpose or direction in space or time. The purpose of walking meditation is walking meditation itself. Going is important, not arriving. Walking meditation is not a means to an end; it is an end in itself. Each step is life; each step is peace and joy. That is why we don't have to hurry. That is why we slow down. With walking meditation, we find "thought" and "concentration," and together they denote a state of mind which is still and focused—where there is no conflict, no dispersion, and one's consciousness is kept always on the right path.

Walking meditation is learning to walk again with ease. To do this, you have to learn to let go—let go of your sorrows, let go of your worries. Be clear that you are indeed carrying the heavy luggage of worry and sorrow and be compassionate with yourself. Walking with ease and with peace of mind on the earth is a wonderful miracle. Whether human beings can wake up or not depends on whether we can take conscientious and mindful steps. That is why the future of human beings, as well as the future of all life on this earth, depend on your steps. When you practice regularly, your life will gradually be transformed. Your movements will become easygoing, not precipitous, and you will be more aware of what you are doing. In your social relationships, and in making decisions, you will find yourself acting calmly and incisively, with better insight and more compassion. All beings—from the moon and the stars to the leaves and the caterpillars—will become peaceful as you take your steps.

While walking, look down and anticipate the ground where you are about to place your foot, and when you do, mindfully experience your foot, the ground, the connection between your foot and the ground. Step naturally when you practice walking meditation. You don't need to join your palms in a lotus bud or put on a solemn face. Take short steps in complete relaxation; go slowly with a smile on your lips, with your heart open to an experience of peace. Slow down and concentrate on your steps. Be aware of each move. At first, when walking slowly, you might feel unbalanced, like a baby when it first learns to walk. Walk straight with dignity, calm, and comfort. Consciously make an imprint on the ground as you step. Each step will cause a breeze to rise. Walk more slowly than you usually do, but not too slowly, while breathing normally. Do not try to control your breathing. Walk along in this way for a few minutes. Then notice how many steps you take to fill your lungs and how many steps you take as they empty. In this way, your attention includes both breath and steps. You are mindful of both. The link is counting. Your half-smile brings calmness and delight to your steps and your breath. It helps to maintain your attention and is an object of attention in itself. The four elements of breathing, counting, stepping, and the half-smile become one. These four elements bring power to our spirit.

## **Teaching on Text from the Tradition:** by Christine Luna Munger

Two things that I most appreciate about the practice of walking meditation are, first, that the practice offers an explicit reminder of the connection between the active and passive elements of contemplation, and second, that the practice, especially as taught and practiced by Zen Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, points to the Christian notion of sacramentality.

First, there is perhaps nothing more telling about the human bias of “passivity” toward all-things contemplative, than to watch a group of people who are just learning to practice walking meditation sludge around like snails in a circle! At the Episcopal House of Prayer, we almost always practice walking meditation inside, in-between our two twenty-minute silent sits. However, as taught and primarily practiced by Thich Nhat Hanh, walking meditation takes place outside. I think that if we were to imagine that we were outside while practicing our walking meditation, rather than inside, it would be easier for us to remember that contemplation can also be active! Fortunately, or unfortunately, those of us experiencing “shelter in place” during this pandemic likely face the opposite paradox—our sudden slowing down of regular life rhythms helps us to notice more acutely the pace at which we had been going. Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us of this as well; by “walking more slowly than usual, but not too slow,” we can keep pace with the tension between the active and passive elements of contemplation. Real life has a lived pace, and our intention with either active or passive meditation is always to learn how to lovingly gaze at reality, just as it actually is—snails and antelope included!

Snails and antelope are a good segue to the second thing I appreciate about the practice of walking meditation—sacramentality. In some of his other instructions, Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that we imagine a lotus flower blooming beneath our feet as we take each step. As a symbol for the sacred in Buddhism, the lotus flower might be equivalent to a Christian imagining a white dove, or a drop of Christ’s blood, beneath one’s feet with each step—something to treat with tender reverence. Whatever the symbol, sacramentality is the act of looking to something natural and normal as a carrier of our sense of the sacred, which somehow permeates all things, allowing us to truly gaze at God when we focus on a single object as the focus of our attention. In walking meditation practice, something as natural and normal as walking, allows us to recognize that God is always, already present and active in the midst of our daily lives; there is no need to call out to God to come be with us; God Is, Always, Already. May each step and each sit recollect this truth and may each of us recognize the power of peace that comes through our awareness of the sacred, even as we face chaos and uncertainty.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

- What attracts you to the practice of walking meditation? What tends to “trip you up?”
- What natural objects within creation provoke within you a sense of connectivity to the Holy One?