

EARLY MORNING DAY TWO

WALKING INSTRUCTION

During the course of our everyday life, we normally find ourselves walking a lot. We often walk hundreds of kilometers every year. For example; we are now on a small island in the Gulf of Thailand. Many of you were staying at the beach before coming to this retreat. You probably took long walks along the beach.

I wonder, while you were walking along the beach, were you really there -- walking along the beach? Or were you thinking where you have been, where you are going, who you are going to meet, what you are going to eat for lunch, what you are going to do next week, or even further into the future? All the while, not really experiencing the reality of the moment -- of walking along the beach.

Many times in our life we do this. We are at a particular place and we are not really there, not really experiencing the place. Instead we often only experience our thoughts about the place, or our thoughts about the future or the past.

Walking meditation helps to develop more energy in the mind. It can be used to flow the sharpened awareness developed in sitting meditation into the broader awareness necessary for moving and walking.

Most of you lead fairly active lifestyles. If you are to bring an attitude of focused awareness to your everyday life, it's very important to learn how to center the mind while the body is more engaged in the surroundings, in more active activities, or when the body is moving. So I'd like you to treat the walking meditation as carefully as you would a sitting meditation. It is not just a time to go for a walk in the surroundings and enjoy the scenery. It's a time where we can develop the focused, centered awareness, and learn how to bring our meditation practice into our everyday life. So we don't have a split between the formal meditation, which we think is sitting, and the rest of our life, over there.

The formal sessions of walking meditation are another sharpening stone, helping to sharpen the mind. We can then use this sharpened awareness and try to apply it to our everyday life. Becoming more aware, we try to watch ourselves in all aspects of life. We can then try to drop the obstacles to being aware in the present moment, trying to come back to the present moment, and experience what is actually happening. Keen awareness of the body helps us to see more clearly how we think, and our awareness starts to include more aspects of ourselves.

In walking meditation, you are going to be walking back and forth. But you are not going anywhere -- to some specific destination. Try to let go of thoughts about arriving and leaving. Try instead to arrive in each moment, each footstep and the feeling of the body and legs; the experience of walking. For walking meditation you need a walking "track," preferably a flat, clear area. It is very helpful to mark each end of the track. Then you do not have to think about where you will be turning around, which could create extra thoughts and doubts in the mind. Some people like quite a long track, thirty to forty paces. Others find that this allows more opportunity for their mind to wander and they prefer a shorter track. If the track is too short, some people feel that they are turning around too often and sometimes this may create extra restlessness. Try a track about twenty paces long and experiment for yourself, to see whether you prefer a longer or shorter track.

You begin by standing at one end of the walking track. Become aware of the body standing and the posture for a few moments. The head is slightly tilted forward. The eyes looking forward but downcast, about two meters in front of you. There are two reasons for this. First, it will help add a

compassionate intention to your walking. If you see that there are any ants, snails, millipedes or other creatures in front of you on the ground, you can avoid stepping on them, either harming them or yourself. The other reason is that it helps you to be less distracted by the other meditators and the surroundings. Less sense contact with the eyes helps you to bring your awareness to the body and the movements. Try your best not to gaze around.

The hands can be placed in a position similar to the standing meditation posture, either hanging loosely beside you, or placed on top of each other or interlaced in front of you. They can be at the level of the stomach or, with the elbows bent more, at the level of the chest. Run your attention through the body starting from the head, relaxing into the posture, until the attention comes to the feeling of the feet on the ground.

To begin, walk at a normal easy pace, not too fast, not too slow. Direct your attention to the feeling of the touch of each foot on the ground; the touch of the right foot, the touch of the left foot as you walk. Try to keep your awareness on the touching sensation. If you wish, you can use mental noting; "left, right, left, right" or "stepping, stepping" to aid you in keeping your awareness with the feet. If you find your mind wandering, then gently note "wandering" or "thinking". Try not to get upset at the wandering mind. The mind is used to wandering, it's not used to concentrating, it's used to thinking. So rather than getting upset at the mind, we try to note just what is happening; if the mind is thinking, we note "thinking, thinking," and then gently return to the footsteps.

When you reach the end of the walking track, we would like you to stop. The reason for this is that sometimes the mind just wanders off, the walking becomes automatic and you may not really be aware that it has wandered off. By stopping, you can check to see if the mind is actually there, giving yourself the opportunity to bring the mind back to the body.

You can stand for a few moments, feeling the feet on the ground, or being aware of the whole body. If you wish, you can note "standing, standing." Some meditators may also become aware of the breathing for a few moments. If you wish to stop for longer than a few moments, that is O.K. When you want to turn around, note your intention to turn and then slowly turn around. While turning, try to feel the motion of the body and/or the movements of the legs and then stop again.

When you decide to start walking again, note your intention to walk and then bring your attention to the legs and begin again with stepping, stepping or left, right, left, right. The mental noting is used as an aid in awareness. Try not to let the noting overpower the actual experience of the feeling of the feet touching the ground. If you do use the mental noting, it is quite important to realize that it is an aid to awareness, it's not awareness in itself. Our main focus is to be aware of the feet, and to use the mental noting to aid us in knowing what is happening, describing what is happening, it's just a soft, mental word. Our main focus is not on the words. Otherwise you may find that you are saying "placing" while you are lifting, or you are saying "lifting", while you are placing.

When you find that your mindfulness, awareness is a little stronger, that you are able to concentrate and keep the attention with the touching of the feet more clearly, then you may wish to begin with the two phase walking. To practice the two phase walking, try to be aware not only of the touching of each foot on the ground, but also of the lifting of each foot off the ground. If you wish, mentally note "lifting, placing, lifting, placing." When you move into being aware of the two phase walking, it's quite important to let one foot come completely to the ground before you lift the other foot. This is so that you can transfer your awareness from the one foot, and be aware of the whole process of lifting, noting "lifting, placing, lifting, placing". Some meditators find that they naturally slow down a little at this time. In the beginning, it is probably better not to exaggerate the slowness, as the mind may feel too restricted and forced. If there is any slowing down, allow it to happen naturally.

As your awareness starts to increase, and you find that you can be with the two phase walking for some time, you may wish to move into the three phase walking. Try to be aware of each foot lifting off the ground, moving through the air, and the placing on the ground. The lifting, moving, placing of

the right foot, the lifting, moving, placing of the left foot. Again, you can use mental noting to try to tie the awareness to the actual experience; "lifting, moving, placing, lifting, moving placing."

As well, try to remember that when the mind starts to think, we want to try to note this objectively. Not getting upset that we've wandered away from the footsteps, but developing the ability to note the mind objectively, noting gently "thinking, thinking", "wandering, wandering". Then, letting go of the thoughts and coming back to the footsteps, with "stepping, stepping", "lifting, placing", or "lifting, moving, placing".