

WALKING MEDITATION

Moving with Presence

A walking meditation with Thich Nhat Hanh

I have arrived. I am home.

In the here. In the now.

I am solid. I am free.

In the ultimate I dwell.

Walking meditation is meditation while walking. We walk slowly, in a relaxed way, keeping a light smile on our lips. When we practice this way, we feel deeply at ease, and our steps are those of the most secure person on Earth. All our sorrows and anxieties drop away, and peace and joy fill our hearts. Anyone can do it. It takes only a little time, a little mindfulness, and the wish to be happy.

When you begin to practice walking meditation, you might feel unbalanced, like a baby learning to walk. Follow your breathing, dwell mindfully on your steps, and soon you will find your balance. Visualize a tiger walking slowly, and you will find that your steps become as majestic as the steps of a tiger.

Walking with presence and mindfulness keeps us centered in the present moment. Only through our awareness of the here and now can we soak in the wonders of life, and become closer to the holy. We move into that awareness through the gift of our bodies and breath. A step taken with concentration, with mindfulness, is a step taken without the worries, fears and anxiety that separate us from the present. Our bodies give us the means to become one with the world around us, and in so doing experience the reality of the Kingdom of God.

Peace is something we can contemplate every day. Walking meditation is one of the ways to contemplate peace, and today we are going to walk together, generating the energy of peace, solidity, and freedom.

- I suggest that when you breathe in, you make three steps.
- Bring your attention to the soles of your feet, and become aware of the contact between your foot and the ground. Bring your attention down from the level of the brain to the soles of your feet.
- Breathing in, we make three steps, and we may tell ourselves with each step, "*I have arrived. I have arrived. I have arrived.*"
- And breathing out, we make another three steps, always mindful of the contact between our feet and the ground, and we say, "*I'm home. I'm home. I'm home.*"

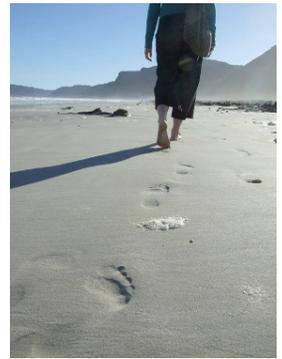
"I HAVE ARRIVED. I AM HOME."

Arrived where? Where is our home? According to the teaching and the practice of the Buddha, life is available only in the present moment, in the here and the now. And when you go back to the present moment, you have a chance to touch life, to encounter life, to become fully alive and fully present. That is why every step brings us back to the present moment, so that we can touch the wonders of life that are available. Therefore, when I say, "*I have arrived,*" I mean I have arrived in the here and the now -- the only place, the only time where and when life is available, and that is my true home.

The Buddha said that the past is already gone, and the future is not yet here. There is only one moment for us to live, and that is the present moment. We have an appointment with life, and that appointment takes place in the present moment. If we miss the present moment, we miss our appointment with life, which is serious. In our daily life, we have a tendency to think about the past, to get caught in the sorrow and regret concerning the past, and to get caught in the fear and uncertainty about the future, so our mind is not in the

present moment. That is why it is very important to learn how to go back to the present moment in order to become fully alive, fully present. Walking meditation helps us do that easily.

When I begin, I make two or three steps and I practice arriving. *"I have arrived. I am home."* It means, I don't want to run anymore, because I know that conditions for my happiness are already here in the present moment. Sometimes we believe that happiness is not possible in the here and the now; we need a few more conditions to be happy. So we run towards the future to get the conditions we think are missing. But by doing so we sacrifice the present moment, we sacrifice true life. Therefore, learning how to go home to the present moment is the basic practice of mindfulness. *"I have arrived. I am home."*



My home is right here, right now. I don't want to run anymore. The habit of running may have been transmitted to me by my parents, and I may have been running all my life. Now I don't want to run anymore, I want to stop. Walking meditation helps us learn to stop in order to be truly alive, truly present. *"I have arrived. I am home."*

If you walk like that with every step, the energy of mindfulness and concentration will be there to support you. And the place where you walk becomes the pure land of the Buddha or the kingdom of God. The blue sky, the beautiful vegetation, the face of a child, the flower blooming -- all these wonders belong to the kingdom of God, to the pure land of the Buddha. We allow separation between us and those wonders of life because we allow anger, fear, grieving, and despair to stand in our way. Going home to our body by mindful breathing will help us let go of our worries, our regret and our fear, and that is the basic condition for us to get in touch with the wonders of life that are truly present in the here and the now.

We should walk in such a way that the pure land of the Buddha, the kingdom of God becomes a reality in the here and the now. There is not one day when I do not enjoy walking in the kingdom of God, in the pure land of the Buddha. Why should I deprive myself of that pleasure? I need only some energy of mindfulness, of concentration, in order to penetrate into the kingdom of God, into the pure land of the Buddha.

The kingdom of God is available to you in the here and the now. But the question is whether you are available to the kingdom. Our practice is to make ourselves ready for the kingdom so that it can manifest in the here and the now. You don't need to die in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, you have to be truly alive in order to do so. It's not too difficult. Just breathe in and bring your mind back to your body. That is the practice of mindfulness.

Mindfulness of breathing can be combined with mindfulness of walking, and you will continue to get the nourishment and healing that is available in the here and the now. Let us walk in such a way that every step can bring us stability, freedom, healing, and transformation. In order for each step to be solid, to be free, to be healing, to be nourishing, we need the energy of mindfulness and concentration. That energy can be obtained by mindful breathing, mindful stepping. *"I have arrived. I am home."* That is not a statement. That is a practice, and you will know whether you have arrived or not in the here and the now. You don't need another person to tell you. If you are truly established in the here and the now, you feel free, and you can get in touch with all the wonders of life that are available to you. Every step is an enjoyment.

Peace is the outcome of that practice. Walk in such a way that peace becomes a reality in every cell of your body, in every cell of your consciousness, because our consciousness is also made of cells. Mental formations, feelings, perception - they're all the cells of our consciousness. And when we breathe peacefully, the peace of our breath will penetrate into our body and into our mind. Then very soon, in no time at all, body, mind, and breath will become one in concentration, and we get the energy of stability, solidity, and freedom generated by every step we make. *"I have arrived. I am home."* That is a practice.

"IN THE HERE. IN THE NOW."

After a few minutes, you may move to the second line of the poem: *"In the here. In the now."* It means I have arrived in the here and the now. I am at home in the here and the now. The address of the pure land, the address of the kingdom of God, the address of peace and brotherhood is here and now. If you want to

meet the Buddha, if you want to touch God, if you want to touch the ultimate dimension, that is the address: the here and the now. It is very special.

After some time, you might like to move to the third line. "I am solid. I am free." Solidity and freedom are the most important characteristics of happiness. Without some solidity, without some freedom, true happiness is not possible; therefore, every step should be able to generate more of the energy of solidity and freedom. And, again, this is not a wish or a declaration. If you are able to make steps, they can bring you back to the here and the now. You become more solid and freer with every step. So, "I am solid, I am free" means I notice that now I am more solid, I am freer. That makes the practice much more pleasant, because every step helps to bring more solidity and freedom to you. You walk like a prince. You walk like a lion, a princess. You walk like a king, because you are truly yourself, with all your serenity. "I am solid. I am free."

Every step becomes a delight. Every step has the power to heal, to transform. Not only can we heal ourselves by our steps, but we can help heal the Earth and the environment.

"IN THE ULTIMATE I DWELL."

The last line of the poem is, "*In the ultimate I dwell.*" There are two dimensions to reality. The first dimension is called the historical dimension, and the second dimension is the ultimate dimension. We have an ultimate dimension--the ground of our being--and if we know how to live deeply every moment of our historical dimension, we are able to touch our ultimate dimension.

It is like a wave. A wave may seem to have a beginning and end. A wave might be seen as high or low, big or small, different or not different from other waves. These terms--beginning, ending, high, low, more or less beautiful--they belong to the dimension called historical, but the wave is at the same time the water. Water transcends the form of the wave, the idea of beginning, ending, high, or low. These notions apply to the wave but not to the water. The moment when the wave realizes that she is water, she loses all her fear and she enjoys much more being a wave. She is free from birth and death, being and non-being, high or low, because when we are able to touch our ultimate dimension, we are no longer subjected to fear-- fear of being; fear of non-being; fear of birth; fear of death.

This is a very, very deep practice. When you've touched your true foundation, your true nature, the nature of no birth and no death, then non-fear arises. And with non-fear, true happiness will become possible. It is possible to live each moment of our daily life in such a way that helps us to touch our ultimate dimension. And this is a wonderful way to transcend fear.

"I have arrived. I am home.

In the here. In the now.

I am solid. I am free.

In the ultimate I dwell."

Four lines guiding us in our practice of walking meditation. Let us practice together as a Sangha, as a community. Let us flow like a river, generating peace with every step we make. There is no walk for peace; peace is the walk. By walking, we generate peace within our body, our consciousness. We embrace and heal the pain, the sorrow, the fear in us, and that is the ground for helping peace to be a reality in the world. Let us sing these lines together in order to help memorize the four lines of the song:

"I have arrived. I am home.

In the here and in the now.

I am solid. I am free.

In the ultimate I dwell."

Let us walk together and let us generate the energy of peace and happiness and joy. Let us transform this place and this time into the kingdom of God, into the pure land of the Buddha. This is possible. The collective energy of mindfulness will be generated and penetrate into every one of us for our transformation and healing. Happy walking for everyone.