

## Caṅkamaṇa | Walking meditation

As already mentioned, meditation can be practiced anytime in any position in any environment. When we meditate, it is important that we are aware of our minds, that we investigate the arising conditions of it, and that we are fully present, regardless of our body position. Awareness is the key tool for an effective meditation practice. We need not to forget to be aware of the body, as well as of the surroundings. Our body talks to us, and we certainly should listen to it, or the mind will get distressed.

When we sit for a long time, we may start feeling the pain in our legs, back, feet, etc., and the mind starts being impatient. In that exact moment, our focus can turn to that pain for a few minutes, and when the mind and the body are ready, with constant awareness, we can slowly and mindfully stand up. The mind state does not change from sitting to standing. It is a continuous meditation state, where the focus of the mind mindfully moves from the breath to bodily feelings, from rising and falling of the belly to the slow movement of the legs. When our awareness becomes stable, we are ready to mindfully move one foot forward, and start our walking meditation session.

It is usual during meditation retreats to have alternate periods of sitting and walking. This enables you to retain concentration while at the same time stretching the legs and releasing body tensions that have developed while sitting. Little instruction is given for walking meditation. The impression is sometimes given that walking is not as important as sitting, but it can be rewarding. There is no specific instruction in the scriptures on how to practice walking meditation but the Buddha referred to it on various occasions. For certain kinds of people, commentaries say, this may become their regular practice. Maintaining proper awareness of it is even said to be a route towards enlightenment.

The meditation object in this kind of practice is the actual position, movement and contact of the feet with the ground; the attention (but not one's eyes) is on the feet. It is necessary, therefore, to explain a bit about how to do the practice as well as talking about posture. There are three stages: standing, walking and turning. If practising indoors, it is usual to walk across the meditation room, turn round and then walk back. If you are outside, then you will have to decide where your turning point will be.

Stand in a relaxed manner facing into the room by the wall where the walking is to begin. Take a few minutes to adjust your posture, being aware of the body at all times. Your feet should be placed on the floor parallel with each other, about 18cms apart, and the arms should be hanging loosely by your side. First of all, adjust your balance to ensure that it is evenly placed between both feet; then between the heel and sole of each foot: the point of balance should be over the arch of the foot. Next, bring your awareness to your knees and make sure that they are directly above your ankles and that they are not tense, then pull up the thigh muscles.

The secret to a good standing posture is in the position of the hips. While maintaining the correct balance on the feet, carefully adjust the pelvis until the spine feels erect without the stomach protruding or the shoulders slouching forward. For most people this will be obtained by slightly moving the hips backward. Make sure that all the tension is released in the shoulders by letting the arms fall by your sides with the palms facing inwards and the hands relaxed. Then create space between ear lobes and shoulders and adjust the head

if necessary so that it isn't thrown back or the chin protruding. If you have made all the correct adjustments there should be no tension in the body. Stay in this position for a few moments to get used to the feel of the posture. You will probably have to keep checking from foot to head since often every time you make an adjustment at one place something goes wrong elsewhere.

When doing walking meditation the mind has to be totally absorbed in what is going on. Before there is movement, therefore, be aware of the intention to walk and which foot is going to be the first to move. Transfer all your weight to the foot that is going to remain on the ground. Next raise the heel and then the sole of the other foot off the ground, becoming aware of the loss of contact with the floor. Maintain awareness of the movement of the foot in the air as you lift it up, move it forward and then start to lower it towards the ground. Good walking practice dictates that the heel is placed on the ground first, then the sole, but whichever part of the foot you first put on the ground be aware of the moment of contact and then of the whole foot being placed on the ground.

With both feet grounded, adjust your weight evenly between the feet before repeating the process with the other foot. Continue to walk across the room, making the position of the foot the object of concentration, whether it is in the air or in contact with the floor. On reaching the other side of the room stand awarely for a moment before turning. The eyes should never be on the feet or wandering since this will distract the attention. Just cast them downwards and keep them focused about a metre in front of you. The same goes for the standing position as well. If your eyes wander (or even if you close them), then you are liable to fall over!

Again, before starting to turn be aware of the intention to turn and the direction in which you are going to turn. One meditator told me that she always makes a point of not having her back to the Buddha image. Turning is achieved by lifting and putting down at a slight angle first one foot then the other. The steps are very small and the foot is only raised an inch or two off the ground. When the rotation is complete and you are facing in the opposite direction, take a few moments to stand and be aware of your posture and adjust it if necessary.

Many meditators find that they become fascinated with the detailed process of walking and with all the small movements that are required. This is not the object of the exercise, however, and it does not maintain the necessary concentration for the practice to be beneficial if you let your mind go wandering all over your body while moving. Just keep your mind on what the feet are doing, on the sensation of them doing it, nothing more.

By concentrating on the movement of the feet in such detail you will automatically walk very slowly. But there is also a technique of fast walking that is usually employed if one is outdoors. It is only 'fast' in comparison to the method described above; it is still slow compared to normal walking. You walk up and down as above but the difference is that you will only maintain awareness of which foot is in movement, left or right.

Even before you begin a practice, then, there is a lot of preparation required. Place, body and mind must all be properly prepared. Once they have been, you are ready to select a method and apply yourself to it.

**Dr. Rewata Dhamma Sayado:** from the book *Emptying the Rose-Apple Seat*