

a guide to walking meditation

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You can do it

Walking meditation is the practice of Zen meditation while you are walking. This practice can bring you peace and well-being.

When you practice walking meditation, take slow, relaxed, and serene steps, with a half-smile on your face. Step like the most leisurely and unpreoccupied person in the world. Let worries and sorrow fall away. In order to be at peace, please learn to take such steps. It is not difficult at all -- you can do it. Everyone can do it if he or she really wants to be at peace.

Go without arriving

In our busy lives, we often feel rushed and under pressure. We hurry here and there. But where are we rushing to? This is a question we rarely stop to ask. Walking meditation is like taking a walk. We do not set ourselves the goal of arriving at a particular destination in a set length of time. The purpose of walking meditation is walking itself. The important thing is to walk, not to arrive. Walking meditation is not a means, it is the end. Each footstep is life, each footstep is peace. That is why we don't have to walk hurriedly. That is why we slow down our steps. Walk, but don't walk -- do not be pushed ahead by any purpose whatsoever. In this way, when we walk, a half-smile blossoms on our face.

Relaxed steps

In daily life, our steps are often weighed down by worries, tension, and anxiousness. Our lives may seem like nothing more than a succession of days, months, and years of worry. So our steps cannot be relaxed. The Earth is so beautiful, with so many wonderful paths. There are narrow paths with small bamboo trees growing on both sides, paths bathed in the fragrance of rice fields, roads lined with beautifully colored autumn leaves. But we are

usually unaware of them, and so we do not take the time to appreciate and make use of these paths. It is because we are not as open as we might be and our steps are not relaxed steps. Walking meditation is practicing how to take relaxed steps again. At about eighteen months old, we start to walk tottering. Now, by practicing walking meditation, you will take those tottering steps again. After a few weeks of practice, you will be able to take stable, peaceful, and natural steps. These words are written to help you begin this practice. Please enjoy your walking.

Let worry fall away

If I had Buddha's eyes, I would be able to look at your footprint and see the traces of worry and sorrow that you leave on the Earth's surface as you walk by, just as a scientist uses a microscope to see the micro-organisms present in a glass of water taken from the lake. Walk in such a manner that you leave only peace in your footprint - this is the secret of walking meditation. If you want to walk like this, you can learn to shake off worry, resentment, and sorrow.

Walking in the Pure Land

If I had Buddha's feet, I would take you to Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land, or, in Christian terms, to the Kingdom of God. The scenery up there is very beautiful and peaceful. But once you get there, how will you walk? Are you sure that you will not leave behind traces of the worry, sorrow, or grievance of this worldly life on the Pure Land? If you bring anguish with you and imprint it on the Pure Land, you will make the Pure Land impure. To be able to live in a peaceful world, please become capable of taking peaceful steps right here on Earth.

The Earth is the Pure Land

I would like to lean over and whisper something to you: if you can take peaceful steps right here on Earth, you no longer need to reach the Buddha world or the Kingdom of God. Worldliness and purity are just products of our mind. Once you are free and at peace, worldliness is purity, purity is worldliness, and there is nowhere you need to go. No need to use the Buddha's marvelous feet even if you have them.

The Earth has all the marvels of the Pure Land

In order to be free and at peace, learn to let afflictions fall away. First you have to observe carefully and see that this very world has all the wonders of the Pure Land. It is worry and preoccupation that make us incapable of seeing these wonders. I often think I would prefer this world of ours to the Pure Land. There are things on Earth that I like very much, like star fruit trees, lemon, banana and orange trees, pine trees and willow trees. I have been told that in the Pure Land there are precious lotus ponds, precious trees, paths covered with gold and silver, and precious singing birds. I am not very fond of them. I do not like to walk on paths lined with silver and gold, or even on those lined with marble here on Earth. I like the sandy paths with green grasses growing on both sides. I like each one of the pebbles and the leaves which fall on the paths. I like the bushes, the streams, the bamboo hedges, and the ferry boat docks.

Once when I was small, I told my teacher, "Teacher, I will not go to the Pure Land if it does not have lemon trees and star fruit trees." My teacher shook his head and smiled. He probably thought I was a stubborn student. But he did not say whether I was right or wrong. Now, knowing that worldliness and purity are just products of the mind, I am very happy. I am happy because I know that there are star fruit trees and lemon trees in the Pure Land and red sand paths with green grasses on both sides. I know that if I open my eyes mindfully and take

peaceful, stable steps, I can see the Pure Land. That is why I practice walking meditation every day.

The seal of a king

Choose a simple path to begin to practice, by a river bank, in a park or forest, on a short, tree-lined path nearby, or in your garden. There are people who practice walking meditation in concentration camps, even in narrow prison cells. It is good if the path is not rough or too steep. Slow down the pace of your walking and focus your attention on each step. Be aware of each step you take. Walk serenely, simply, mindfully, with the dignity of a Buddha. Walk as if you were imprinting your steps on the surface of the Earth with care, just as a king places his seal on an imperial edict.

The king's seal on the imperial edict can bring peace to his people or it can make them suffer. Your walking is like that. A peaceful world depends on whether you can take peaceful steps. If you can take one peaceful step, you can take two, and one hundred, one thousand.

Your step is the most important act

What activity is the most important one in your life? Passing an exam? Buying a car? Buying a house? Getting a promotion? Many people have passed exams, bought cars, and gotten promotions, but they are not at peace, they are not fulfilled. So the most important thing in life is to be at peace with yourself, and to share that peace with other living beings. But in order to touch peace, you need to be aware of each of your footsteps. Your step is your most important act. It decides everything. I light a stick of incense, join my palms into a lotus blossom, and wish you well.

A fresh breeze rises from each footstep

At the beginning of the walking path at one Zen center there is a big stone with five words carved on top: *Bo, bo, thanh phong khoi*. It means "A fresh breeze rises from each footstep." Isn't that beautiful? This fresh breeze is freedom. It blows away the sorrow of life and death and brings back the freshness of peace to our mind. Taking such steps, you can help the world.

Being aware in order to let go

Worries, sorrows, and resentments cling to us during our life. How can we let them fall away? Take relaxed and stable steps, be awake and strong-willed. Be awake so that you can see that you are carrying this luggage. Be strong-willed so that you can resolutely let it fall away. Anguish arises when you are preoccupied with the past and the future. Once we see our pain clearly, we are awake. Let us then have compassion for ourselves. We can only have compassion for others if we know how to be compassionate with ourselves. We have compassion for ourselves when we see that we are bound to the framework of time, bound to worry, sorrow, and dissatisfaction. If we want, we can let them go now, just as we take off our raincoat, shake it, and let the clinging drops run off.

Smile as a Buddha smiles

As you let afflictions fall away, let a smile blossom, a half-smile, and let that smile rest on your lips like a Buddha. Learn to step as a Buddha steps, to smile as a Buddha smiles. You can do it. Why should you wait until who knows when to in order to become a Buddha? You can be the Buddha right at this very moment.

Many times in *The Miracle of Mindfulness* I mentioned the half-smile and its benefits. Not only is this smile the fruit of mindfulness and peace, it also nourishes and preserves them. It is a true miracle. Please remember not to ignore it. It is your treasure of happiness. It nourishes your peace and mindfulness and makes those around you peaceful and awake. It turns the Earth into the Pure Land. While practicing walking meditation please remember to maintain this half-smile, it makes your steps serene and awake.

A chain of pearls

Taking peaceful steps and maintaining a half-smile can be seen as shining, yet distinct pearls. Your breath is a string bringing these pearls together in a chain. There is no separation between any two pearls. Please breathe mindfully as you practice walking meditation. Being aware of your breath is a wonderful way to maintain mindfulness and peace. In this way, you nourish each step.

Breath counting and walking

Mindful breathing is different from regular breathing. Mindful breathing means that when you breathe, you know that you are breathing. When you take a long breath, you know that you are taking a long breath. Similarly, when you take a short breath, you know you are taking a short breath. When you breathe gently, you know that you are breathing gently. You may ask how you can attend to your breathing and your walking at the same time. It can be done if we unite the breath and the step. We can do that by counting, counting our footsteps. In other words, we measure the length of a given breath by the number of steps: how many steps we take as we inhale and how many steps we take as we exhale.

This is the method I began to use about fifteen years ago. I would like to share it with you so you can experiment. Slow down your pace, but not too slow, and breath normally. Do not try

to extend the length of your breaths. Continue in this way for a few minutes. Then begin to notice how many steps you take as you inhale. In this way, your attention includes both your breathing and your footsteps. In other words, you are mindful of your breathing and your walking simultaneously. Your half-smile is closely connected to the serenity of your footsteps and your breathing. It is both a way to maintain attention and peace and an object of attention itself. After practicing a few times, you will see that all four -- breath, count, steps, and half-smile -- blend together in a relaxed, yet attentive state. This is awareness, this is the activity of wisdom.

Pace

Let me tell you more about the counting method. In order to count easily, adjust the pace of your footsteps. For example, if you find your breath cannot be extended to three steps but only to two and a half, you can either walk a little faster so your breath measures exactly three steps, or walk a little slower so it measures exactly two steps. Then, maintain that rhythm in counting and breathing. Your exhalation may be longer than your inhalation, especially for new practitioners. Observing for a while, you will discover the length of your normal breath, for example 3-3, or 2-3. In the first case, exhalation and inhalation are of equal length (3-3). In the second case, the inhalation is shorter than the exhalation. If you take two steps for each inhalation and three for each exhalation, note that 2-3 is the pattern of your normal breathing as you walk. Breathing at this rate suits your lungs and makes you feel comfortable. You can breathe like that for a while without feeling tired. The first number, 2, is the number of steps taken during one inhalation. The second number, 3, is the number of steps taken during one exhalation. When you are climbing up a grade or going down a slope, the length of each breath is shortened and is not your normal breath. Please follow your normal breathing.

To take in more air

After a few days of practicing, you can experiment with the following method. While walking and breathing normally, increase by one step the length of your exhalation. For example, if your normal breath is 2-2, try to practice 2-3 for four or five breaths, then go back to 2-2. Practicing in this way may feel comfortable because when your exhalation is longer, your lungs are contracted a bit more and deoxygenated air can be more easily released. When we breathe normally the air in the bottom of our lungs is not exhaled completely. By extending the exhalation by one step, this air will be exhaled. Four or five breaths like this are probably enough, otherwise you may become tired. After these four or five breaths, return to your normal breathing. In about five minutes you can do it once again, taking four or five such breaths and returning to your normal breathing. Please remember to extend only the exhalation by one step, not the inhalation.

After practicing like this for a while, you may also feel like extending the inhalation by one step. Your lung chambers seem to be telling you that if you now take one more step for each inhalation (3-3), it can feel very good. Only when you have this sense should you extend the inhalation. It will feel quite good. However, do not practice like this for more than four or five breaths. Remember to return to your normal breathing, 2-2 for example. A few minutes later, if you wish, you can again extend you exhalation (2-3), then your inhalation (3-3). A few months later, your lungs will be healthier and your blood will be better filtered. Your normal breathing may change. For example it may become 3-3 from 2-2. Breathe normally when you practice walking meditation. The pace at which you walk becomes your own.

Walking, standing -- each act continue the work of realization.

I have already suggested that you walk as a Buddha walks, and take the steps a Buddha takes. Each step carves peace and relaxation into the Earth's surface. The ground you walk on becomes sacred. In 1968 I visited the mountain where Shakyamuni Buddha dwelled. I had the

opportunity to walk mindfully along the same paths where Shakyamuni had walked. I stood on the piece of land where, centuries ago, his quiet home had been built. I sat on the block of stone where he had sat and looked at the same red sun sinking below the horizon that he had also watched so long ago. I felt that if I did not walk, did not stand, did not look at things as he had done, I could not continue his work. So it is with you. If you do not walk, stand, sit, and look at things as the Buddha does, you cannot continue the Buddha's work for the sake of all beings. It is not by preaching on Bibles that we perpetuate the way of awareness and wisdom, but by our daily way of walking, standing, sitting, and seeing. There is no enlightenment outside daily life.

A lotus flower blossoms from each footstep

When an artist draws a picture or sculpts a statue of the Buddha sitting on a lotus flower it is not only because he wants to honor him. The artist wants to show that the Buddha is sitting in peace and awareness. Each of us sits down many times every day, but very few of us can sit peacefully, like a Buddha. For many of us, when we sit down, it is as if we sat on a bed of smoldering coals. As soon as we are seated we think of something else and pop up again. Although the Buddha may be portrayed sitting on a block of stone, he is serene as if he were sitting on a lotus. When I first became a monk, I was taught that before sitting down I should evoke this thought, "*Chanh, than doan toa, duong nguyen chung sanh, toa, bo de toa, tam vo so truoc.*" This means, "As I sit down I wish that all living beings may be seated on a throne of perfect enlightenment, their minds free from illusion and from all mistaken views." After evoking this thought, we were to sit down mindfully. This is learning to sit like a Buddha.

I want to remind those who wish to enter the Pure Land: please sit on a lotus right now. Do not wait until you arrive in the Pure Land. Please live and die in a lotus at this very moment. By living and dying in a lotus flower and sitting on a lotus seat at this very moment, you no longer have to doubt the Pure Land's existence. The same is true with walking. The newborn Buddha is commonly shown taking seven steps. With each step a lotus flower blossoms from the

imprint in the earth. We should be able to take steps that are so peaceful that a lotus flower can blossom beneath each of these steps. Next time you practice, try this: let a lotus flower blossom under each footstep, just like a newborn Buddha. You need not feel inferior or inadequate to the task. If your step is serene, it is worthy of having a lotus blossom from it. You too are a Buddha, like everyone else. It was the Buddha who said that every living being has the potential to awaken. To practice walking meditation is to practice living in mindfulness. Mindfulness and enlightenment are one.

The miracle is to walk on the Earth

Taking peaceful and relaxing steps on the Earth, that is a miracle. Some say that only walking on burning coals, on spikes, or on water should be called a miracle. But I think that walking on Earth is already a miracle. Neige Marchand, when translating *The Miracle of Mindfulness* into French, chose the title *Le Miracle, c'est de marcher sur terre,*" the miracle is to walk on the Earth. I like that title very much.

Imagine that you and I are two astronauts. We have landed on the moon and cannot get back to earth because our spaceship's engine is broken and we have no way to fix it. The control center back on earth cannot send up another spaceship in time to rescue us, and we know very well that in two more days we shall die from lack of oxygen. In that moment you and I wish for nothing other than to be able to return to our beautiful planet and take peaceful steps together. Knowing that death is inevitable, we can now see that steps taken on the green Earth are precious.

Let us now imagine we are astronauts who have survived and have returned to earth. We are so happy to walk peacefully on our green planet. We carry out the miracle with each of our steps. That is what is meant by a lotus flower blossoming from each footstep. Please practice and be aware that you are taking miraculous steps on the Earth's surface. The Earth will emerge in

front of your eyes and beneath your feet as a wonder. With this focus, with this awareness, you can walk happily and freely.

Try standing as a child might stand while it is playing, keeping only one foot on the ground. You can see the whole round Earth beneath your foot. While walking, you can look down and see clearly ahead the ground you are going to put your foot on. Walking mindfully on that ground, you are aware, at the same time, of both your foot and the Earth. In your mind's eye you can see that your foot is a king's seal. As you walk in the Zendo, you can use each of these three phrases: "The seal of a king," "A lotus blooms from each step," and "The Earth emerges," as themes for meditation.

Choosing an object of attention

Walking meditation aims at mindfulness and peace. These need to be maintained in a continuous way, so we make use of breathing, walking, counting, and keeping a half-smile. These four elements make possible the development of *niem* and *dinh*. *Niem* means awareness, mindfulness. It comes from the Sanskrit *smirti*, and the Pali *sati*. *Dinh* means one-pointedness, the opposite of dispersion. Walking meditation helps you return from forgetfulness and develop mindfulness, concentration, and peace.

The four elements -- breathing, counting, walking, and maintaining a half-smile -- need not always be practiced together. There are times when just walking is enough. Following your breathing, counting, and the half-smile are useful when mindfulness is difficult to sustain. Everyone can coordinate breathing, counting, and walking. But if you focus too much, let's say, on walking, your awareness of breathing and counting may become weaker. This is like a light bulb which dims when the electric heater is plugged in. You may ask whether by focusing exclusively on walking you can still see other wonders like the cool paths shaded by plum trees, and still smell the fragrance of freshly cut grass. Yes, your attentiveness does tend to decrease as the field you are focusing on becomes wider. Nonetheless, it is fine if you are able to maintain

mindfulness while walking. If you choose to focus on "Lotus flower blossoming," just focus on that. If you choose the image of the Earth emerging before you, just attend to the Earth as it emerges in front of you as you step. When you place your foot on the ground, you see the whole earth beneath your foot, immediately. Your foot and the whole green Earth can be seen simultaneously.

If you want to pay attention to the smell of the grass, the shade of the trees, the sky, the clouds, or the song of the birds, stop walking. Then, while maintaining your breathing, smell, watch, or listen attentively. Smile naturally, without strain. After a while, continue your walking meditation, attending to your footsteps.

Using a phrase as the object of attention

In addition to counting the number of steps, you may also use a phrase as your focus. For example, if your rhythm of breathing is 3-3 and you are meditating on "A lotus flower blossoms from each footstep," then you can silently repeat to yourself, "Lo-tus blooms / lo-tus blooms." If your breathing is 2-3, you can say to yourself, "Lo-tus / Lo-tus blooms." If you want to meditate on the green Earth, you can say "Walk on the green Earth / Walk on the green Earth," (5-5-), or "Walk on the green Earth / I walk on the green Earth," (5-6). Remember to look for the phrase with the appropriate number of syllables. If your efforts are directed toward realizing the Pure Land, you can repeat silently, "A-mi-ta-bha/ A-mi-ta-bha," (4-4), or "Na-mu A-mi-ta-bha / Na-mu A-mi-ta-bha," (6-6). Practicing with such phrases, or others which you may develop, links your breathing with your walking and at the same time makes the great Earth emerge.

The future of human beings depends on your steps

While practicing walking meditation, step naturally; you don't have to join your palms into a lotus bud or be too formal. Choose quiet stretches of path in a park or along a river bank.

At the Zen center you can practice anytime. Whoever sees you will recognize that you are doing walking meditation and will not disturb you. Meeting a person on the meditation path, you need only join your palms into a lotus bud in front of your chest, then continue your walking practice.

I used to practice walking meditation in the early morning and evening when I was living in Sceaux, France. The neighbor's dog's used to come out and bark at me. While at the Zen center in Mount Tremper, in northern New York State, I was showing American Zen students how to do walking meditation. Here too, one morning, a dog began to bark. In America, as in France, dogs are not used to the quiet, relaxed manner of walking. If you walk very quickly they think it's normal and pay no attention. I told the students, "Next year if I come back here to do walking meditation with you, perhaps this dog won't bark at us as we walk by. You will be practicing walking meditation throughout the year and the dog will become familiar with your way of mindful walking." Everyone agreed. Sometimes I think that our way of walking, standing, sitting, and looking at things does have effects on the animal and plant world. How many species of animals and plants have become extinct because of the harm we have caused our living environment? This environment, with its polluted drinking water and air, is now harming us. We have by now manufactured over 50,000 nuclear warheads, enough to exterminate hundreds of Earths. Yet we still continue to produce more and more and it seems that we cannot stop. Mankind is like a sleepwalker, not knowing what we are doing or where we are heading. Whether or not human beings can wake up depends on whether each of us can take mindful steps. The future of mankind and of all life on this planet depends on your steps.

Let me walk with your feet

The Vietnam War caused innumerable injuries to our minds and bodies. There are many Buddhists who lost an arm and are no longer able to join their palms together to pray or to greet each other. Some have lost a leg and can no longer sit in the lotus or half-lotus position to meditate, nor practice walking meditation. Last year two such people came to *Phuong Van*

temple to practice during the retreat period. We had to try different ways so they could practice. They sat in chairs placed near the corner of the meditation hall while the others sat on their cushions on the wooden floor in lotus or half-lotus position. I showed them how to practice walking meditation in the Zendo. I suggested that they choose a person who was actually doing walking meditation and follow that person, become one with that person, follow that person's steps in mindfulness. In this way, they can take peaceful and serene steps on the wooden floor. In this way, those who cannot walk can make lotus flowers blossom from their footsteps. The people who practiced this method found it fruitful and effective. The first time they tried it, I saw tears well up and fall from their eyes. You are the person who has two arms and two legs. You can join your palms into a lotus and practice sitting and walking meditation easily and in a relaxed manner. See how fortunate you are. Let us be that meditative walker, practicing for ourselves and for our friends who are sitting on a chair and following our steps. Do you realize that you are walking for many of your fellow beings?

Walking in order to find peace and joy

You can practice walking meditation with another person, walking together without talking, though it may be easier to focus while practicing alone. I wake up early every morning to walk, and during the day I practice whenever I have from five minutes to a half-hour of free time. Walking meditation can bring peace, awareness, and happiness. Let us turn every path on this Earth into a path for walking meditation. If you do not practice, you do not benefit, I do not benefit, and the lives of other beings do not benefit.

In the first few days of practice, take slow steps. Your walking may not yet be stable, like a baby's steps when it is just learning to walk. Follow your breathing, focus on your steps, and you will find that they become more stable. Have you ever observed a cow or a tiger as it walks? The cow takes slow, measured, stable steps. The tiger takes gentle, supple steps. Practice

walking meditation regularly and you will find that your steps too become precise, stable, and supple.

Walk so that all beings may be peaceful

The air is more likely to be cool and clean in the morning or at night. No source of energy is more nourishing than pure air. While practicing walking meditation, you take in that energy and feel stronger and more balanced in body and mind. Practice regularly and you will recognize a change in your everyday life. You will become more aware of what you are doing, and your movements will become more relaxed and more conscious. In your relations with others, in your observations and decisions, in all of your daily activities, you will gradually become calmer, see things more deeply, and look at the world with greater compassion. Every species, familiar or strange, big or small -- from the moon and the stars to the leaves and the caterpillars -- all will benefit from your mindful steps.

You can love only if you see clearly and understand

Before closing I would like to confide something. I have told you that this world of ours contains every marvel of the Pure Land. But I haven't reminded you that our Earth has one thing that the Pure Land does not have, the presence of suffering. If I hesitate and do not want to enter the Pure Land, it is not only because there are no star fruit and lemon trees there, but also because there is no suffering. The first and most basic thing a Buddhist should see is the presence of suffering. If you do not recognize this, as Shakyamuni Buddha pointed out in the first of the Four Noble Truths, then you cannot become a Buddhist. It is the awareness of suffering that generates compassion and the will to go on with our way of living. Compassion and wisdom are one. If you do not see clearly then your love is not yet love.

When I returned to Europe after trying to help the boat people, I felt that Western life was not my life. After witnessing the refugees' suffering on the high seas, I landed at the airport in

Paris. Driving home, I passed cities and supermarkets with colorful lights. It was like walking in a dream. How could there be such a disparity between the two situations? On the one hand, the plight of people being pursued, robbed, raped and killed while trying to find safe harbor, and, on the other hand, the situation of people who seemed to keep searching for pleasure through glasses of liquor and colored lights.

During the Vietnam War, those in the West watched as scenes of the war passed across their television screens. I wonder whether they could really grasp the situation from looking at images on a screen. I too have seen these images, and I do not think they can convey the real suffering.

In the Pure Land, Amitabha Buddha and the many *bodhisattvas* are continually preaching the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path. But all the sacred teachings cannot replace the direct awareness of suffering.

Do not obscure half of the Dharma treasure

I see our daily lives on this Earth as the best ground from which to learn how to live peacefully. Mahayana Buddhist teachers sometimes equate enlightenment with the good and the beautiful. In the saying, "Violet bamboo and yellow flowers are none other than the Dharma treasure / White clouds and the moon display the whole truth," half of our essential nature is obscured. The true face of our essential nature is also the mud -- the greed, hatred, ignorance -- the suffering and the killing between human beings. In the Pure Land, the song of the birds becomes the voice of the Dharma. On Earth too, birdsong can reveal our essential nature.

A teacher once said, "From the beginning, all things are neither born nor destroyed." He offered a poem as a comment, "When Spring comes, a thousand flowers celebrate, and the golden bird sings in the green willow tree." For us, the singing of birds expresses joy, beauty, and purity, and evokes our love of life. But looking more deeply, we see that birdsong can also create suffering. One day while sitting quietly in the forest, I suddenly trembled when I heard a

bird's call. I could see that the worms, hiding under the leaves and in the hollow of a tree, trembled just as I did. The call of birds can make worms and insects afraid, just as humans become afraid when we hear the tiger's roar. The song that expresses beauty can also inspire fear and suffering.

Choosing bodhisattvas as our traveling companions

Practicing walking meditation helps us open our eyes to the many wonders of the universe. It turns the Earth into the Pure Land. It helps us to let sorrow and worry fall away and brings peace. But walking meditation also helps us to see the suffering of life. When we are awake we can see clearly what is happening in life. I often tell Zen students, "If you can't see what's happening in front of you and around you, at least try to understand your own self." It is not by closing our eyes that you come to see into your own essential nature. On the contrary, you have to open your eyes and wake up to the real situation in the world. In this way you can see the whole Dharma treasure, your own Dharma body. The bombs, the hunger, the pursuit of wealth and power -- these are not separate from your nature.

Country roads fragrant with the smell of fresh cut hay, paths shaded by large oak trees, lanes covered with beautiful falling leaves -- these are your walking meditation paths. Please enjoy them. They do not lead you into forgetfulness. Rather, as you step, you can remember, you can awaken to see the real suffering in the world. Then, every path, every street -- from the back alleys of Beirut, to a hostile or violent family environment, to the roads of Vietnam where undetonated mines lay buried and still explode, taking the lives of children and farmers -- every path in this world is your walking meditation path. Once you are awake you will not hesitate to go onto those paths. You will suffer, but not from doubt, worry, or fear for yourself. You will suffer with all beings, in kinship, as you feel the compassion of an awakening person, a *bodhisattva*. Then all those you encounter along the path, loving and peaceful or not, will likewise be *bodhisattvas*, your companions on the way.