

Walking Meditation

Have you ever been in a hurry and the person in front of you was unconsciously walking much slower and moving erratically so far between left and right that it was impossible to overtake them?

There are also situations when people must focus consciously on walking correctly, for example: when they learn to walk for the first time as a child; when they have to learn to walk again after an accident; or if one's profession relates to this subject, as in the case of physiotherapists and occupational therapists.

The first thing to do is to lift your foot.

Breathe in.

*Put your foot down in front of you,
first your heel and then your toes.*

Breathe out.

Feel your feet solid on the Earth.

You have already arrived.

Thich Nhat Hanh

While working on my doctorate at LMU Munich, I regularly studied at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek [*Bavarian State Library*] together with a friend. I was not always very focused. At times, I'd let myself be mentally distracted by what was going on in the library. For example, I'd amuse myself in a "game" – could we guess the degree program of someone by merely observing their gait? This is just what we tried to do! Without looking at them, we guessed our fellow students' majors from the way they appeared to move as they passed by. It went like this: close your eyes. Listen carefully to the manner in which those students, walking past you, step and move: do they shuffle; are they hasty; do they move slowly or quickly; do they rumble or are they quiet, etc. Opening your eyes, write down what you guess their major is. Then, take a look at those who just passed by. Check your conclusion: was it law, business, philosophy or perhaps even political science?

Naturally, this "game" has its limitations, and one shouldn't generalize or stereotype; in all degree programs of course different approaches to walking can be observed. In noting this game, my intention is to illustrate that the way we walk and move is also influenced by other things; subjects we deal with and identify with, our daily habits, our emotions, etc. And since walking is routine, it's something we don't consciously think about; we just do it.

In walking meditation, all of one's conscious attention is focused on one's own walk.

Moderator: "When I lift my foot, what part of it is the last to touch the ground? When do I pick up the other foot? How does the knee move? What part of my foot touches the ground first when I put it down? We'll now try this out, taking our time. Our manner is calm and focused."

Try out walking meditation

Moderator: "What was your experience?"

Reponse 1: "Well, it helped me just to pay attention to walking."

Reponse 2: "It was difficult to find my own pace because there were so many people in the room."

Reponse 3: "I had the feeling that I was out of balance."

Moderator: "Did you notice any other thoughts?"

Reponse 1: "Now and then."

Reponse 2: "No, I was very focussed."

Reponse 3: "I was only aware of my feet and the other people."

Moderator: "Did you also remember to breathe? Did you notice how many steps you took each breath?"

A second part of the exercise is counting your breaths as you walk. How many steps fall in one breath?

Moderator demonstrates: "For example, 2 steps in one breath upon inhaling and 2 steps in one breath upon exhaling."

But this can be different for everyone. Let's try this out, we now have three points to consider: steps, breathing and counting.

However, if for some reason it doesn't feel good or you don't like it, you can do the walking meditation without counting the breath, as before.

Try out walking meditation while counting your breath.

Moderator: "And how did that exercise go?"

Reponse 1: "It was difficult. I got mixed up."

Reponse 2: "For me, it was good."

Reponse 3: "I found it strange. I can't yet say more."

Reponse 4: "I didn't like it. I'd rather do the exercise without counting my breath."

Moderator: "Who was also able to count at the same time?"

Reponse 1: "I took two steps on one breath, inhaling and exhaling."

Reponse 2: "I took two steps on the inhale and three on the exhale."

Reponse 3: "I walked slowly: one breath per step."

Reponse 4: "I walked faster, taking four steps upon the inhale, and three upon the exhale."

Moderator: "Why should one combine this practice with the breath?"

Reponse 1: "It's easier to concentrate."

Reponse 2: "All you can think about is walking and counting."

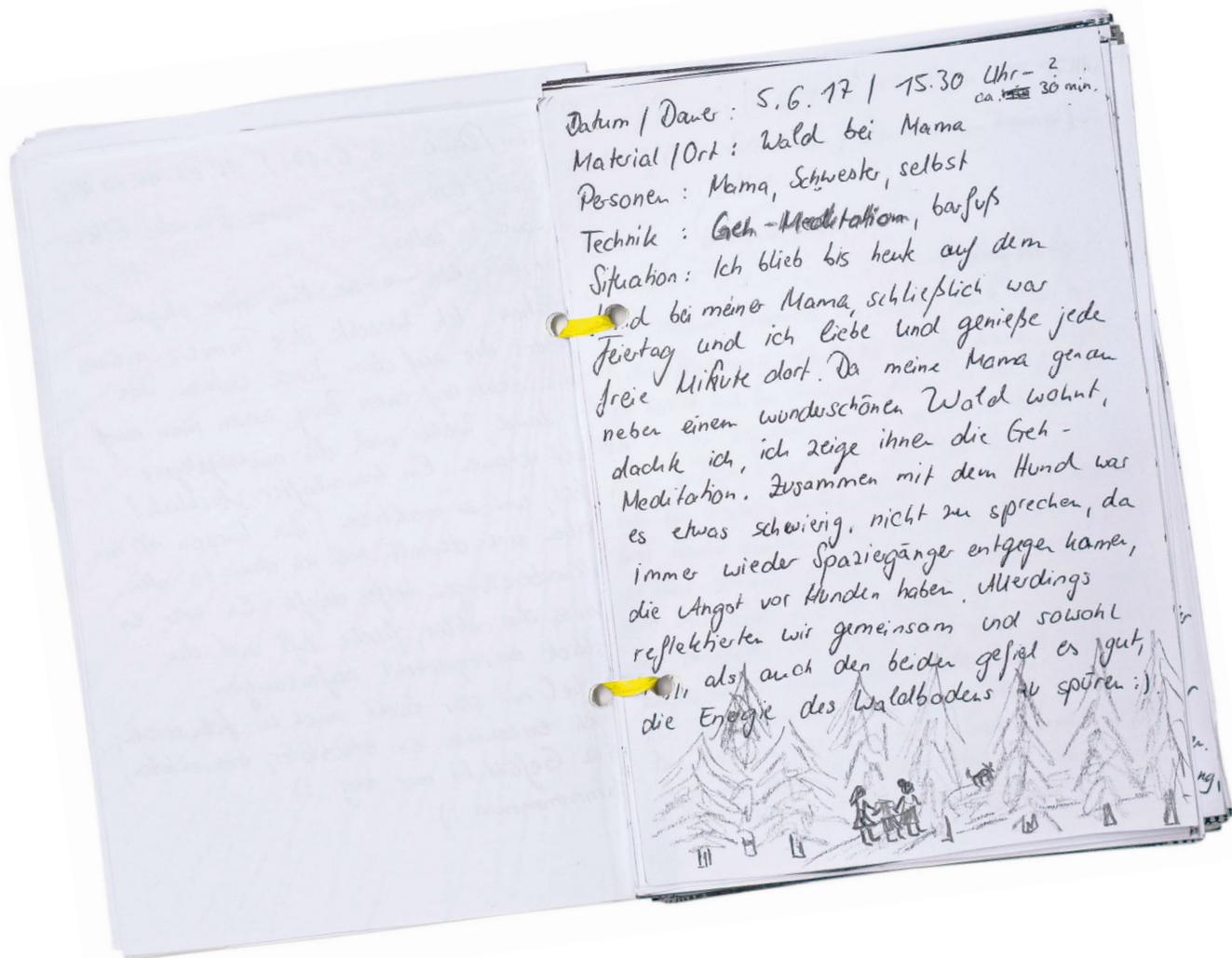
Walking meditation can also be practiced in everyday life – for example, on the way home, during a walk in the woods, on the way to an appointment, or to the university. It can be practiced even just before an exam – before entering the room and starting the exam; it offers a chance to relax your mind for a few minutes.

You can practice the walking meditation slowly or a little faster, with or without counting your breath or steps, as you like it. It's all about focus, and that focus is on walking.

Primary literature used for the lessons

Thich Nhat Hanh (2016). *How to Walk*. London: Rider.

Thich Nhat Hanh / Anh-Huong, Nguyen (2006). *Walking Meditation*. Boulder: Sounds True, Inc. [with CD and DVD]



Gehmeditation

30.10.17

Ein Spaziergang mit dem Hund
 so möglich oft eine kurze Meditation.
 Die Stille im Wald oder auf der Wiese
 lassen die Gedanken verschwinden.
 Durch die Betrachtung der Natur
 und die Fokussierung eines Objekts
 z.B. ein Baum, lassen die Gedanken
 verschwinden.

andere Ged

Woche vom 07.11.16 - 13.11.16

Als ich gerade auf dem Weg vom Bahnhof
 zu meiner Familie war, fiel mir ein, dass
 ich doch die Gehmeditation machen könnte.
 Also schaute ich auf den Boden zu meinen
 Füßen und versuchte ausschließlich an diese
 und das Gehen zu denken. Ich merkte, dass
 ich mich automatisch langsamer und gezielter
 bewegte und ließ es wieder normal
 gehend aussehen zu lassen. Dann fiel mir
 ein, dass ich die Atmung noch dazu tun
 könnte, was ich auch tat. Wieder kam
 mir das Gehen zu „gestellt“ vor, dass ich mich
 zwang einfach nur zu gehen und zu atmen,
 gehen und atmen, gehen und atmen...
 irgendwann konnte ich aufhören an diesen
 Satz denken zu müssen und ich dachte
 ausschließlich an das Gehen. Nur leider,
 als es dann ganz gut klappte, fing es
 an zu regnen und der Wind wurde
 stärker. Dann musste ich abbrechen.
 Mir ist klar geworden, dass es draußen
 viel mehr Dinge gibt, die einen ablenken.
 Im Raum, wo jeder das selbe getan hat,
 ist es mir viel leichter gefallen, mich auf
 das Gehen ^{allein} zu konzentrieren. Auch den
 Schülerinnen könnte ich mir vorstellen,

Journal Notes

Walking Meditation

A. P. Z.

10/30/17, walking meditation

Walking the dog often gives me the opportunity for a short meditation. The silence of the forest or the meadow allows my thoughts to disappear. By observing nature and focusing on an object, for example a tree, my thoughts disappear.

A. v. W.

On the way from the train station to my family, I thought that I might as well practise walking meditation. So looking down at my feet, I tried to focus only on them and on walking. I noticed that my movement automatically slowed down and became more deliberate, and I resumed walking normally again. Then it occurred to me that I could do the breathing in addition to what I was doing. Again the walking seemed to be too “forced” –that I was just forcing myself to walk and breathe, walk and breathe, walk and breathe ... At some point I was able to stop thinking about this sentence and I thought only about walking. Only unfortunately, just as it was working quite well, it started to rain and the wind picked up. I had to stop then. It became clear that there are a lot of things that can distract one outside. It was much easier for me to concentrate just on walking in the room where everyone was doing the same thing.

F. G.

Date / Duration: 6/5/17, 3:30 p.m.

about 30 min

Material / location: the woods by mom's place

People: mom, sister, myself.

Technique: walking meditation, barefoot

Situation: Up to now I've been in the countryside with my mom, as it's a holiday and I love and enjoy every free minute there. As my mom lives right next to a beautiful forest, I thought I would show her how to do the walking meditation. Our dog was with us, so it was a bit difficult not to talk, because there were often people, who are afraid of dogs, walking towards us. Still reflecting together, we all felt good to feel the energy of the forest floor.

J. Z.

11/8/14

Walking meditation from the university to my home, 3:45 p.m.

I gave the walking meditation a try while on my way home from university, in the afternoon. I tried hard to pay attention to my gait and the sensations in my feet. I felt the ground under the soles of my shoes and perceived the different surfaces more intensively. I let everything else around me fade out. I first went down the stairs of the stairwell in the university building, noticing that in order to keep my balance, I had to concentrate to place my feet precisely on the steps. The floor was hard and in some places sticky. My right foot was still tingling a bit, as it had fallen asleep during the seminar. My left big toe was pressing against my shoe. I paid attention to the noises my shoes made on the different floors. The stairs outside the building were more slippery and also wider, so I had to take 1.5 steps for each of the stairs, which didn't match my natural “walking rhythm”. On the escalator I could easily feel the grooved steps. My legs felt heavy and tired after a long and exhausting day. In the subway I was able to sit down, to relieve my legs. I stretched out my legs and moved my toes in my shoes. They pressed lightly at the sides. I got off at my stop and walked up the stairs. I took one step at a time. Walking along the sidewalk to my house I tried not to step on the lines between the square sections, but to keep my feet within the squares. Then I had to walk through a small park, along a gravel path, and could hear the rattling of the pebbles under my shoes. Lastly I walked across a patch of meadow covered in leaves, listening to the rustle of leaves under my feet. The stairs to my apartment felt slippery and squeaked under the soles of my shoes. Arriving at my apartment, I was finally able to take off my shoes, freeing my feet from their confinement. That felt good. I've never before been so focused on my way home, but from now on I plan to do this exercise more often.

04.06.17 11:00 → ca. 45 min: Gehmeditation

Endlich bin ich mal wieder in Italien. Ich habe mich die letzten Wochen schon so richtig auf den Toskana-Urlaub zusammen mit meiner Familie gefreut. Unsere Unterkunft ist gleich am Meer. Ich ging heute Vormittag etwa 45 min. am Strand von Cecina spazieren. Es tut gut die Sonne, den Wind, die salzige Meerluft auf der Haut zu spüren. Ich ging langsam und achtete auf meinen Gang. Setzte bewusst ein Fuß vor den anderen, spürte das Wasser an meinen Füßen. Es war ein tolles Gefühl am Meer entlang zu gehen. Nach dem Spaziergang fühlte ich mich richtig frei und erfrischt.

L. R.

**6/4/17, 11:00 a.m., approx. 45 min,
walking meditation**

Finally, I'm back in Italy. For the last few weeks I've been really looking forward to my holiday in Tuscany with my family. Our accommodations are right by the sea. This morning I walked for about 45 minutes on the beach of Cecina. It's good to feel the sun, the wind, the salty sea air on my skin. I walked slowly, paying attention to my walk I deliberately put one foot in front of the other. I felt the water on my feet. It was a great feeling to walk alongside the sea. After the walk, I felt really free and refreshed.

**5/29/17, 6:00 p.m., approx. 30 min,
walking meditation**

After the seminar, due to the beautiful weather, I decided to walk along Leopoldstrasse to Odeonsplatz and then to Marienplatz. I wore my favorite summer sandals and made sure to walk consciously. I went slower than usual, and consciously rolling my feet while walking stabilized me in my posture and gait. I felt a feeling of security within me. The thought "I'm on my own path" was

06.06.17 21:00 → ca. 5 min: Kerzen-Meditation

An diesem Abend machten wir ein kleines Lagerfeuer im Garten vor unserer Wohnung in Cecina. Ich schloss für 5 min. die Augen und meditierte. Ich nahm das Knistern des Feuers und die Wärme auf meiner Haut wahr. Ich stellte mir innerlich das Licht des Feuers vor. Dann öffnete ich die Augen, schaute noch eine Weile in die flackernden Flammen. Ich spürte den inneren Frieden in mir.

very present during my walking meditation. Arriving at Marienplatz, I could have continued. Instead, feeling renewed, I made my way home by train. After the long day at university, I was looking forward to a nice dinner with my family.

M. M.

Walking meditation in nature

**When: Wednesday, December 3rd, 2014,
8:15 to 8:50 a.m.**

**Where: in Gilching (sidewalk next to meadows
and trees)**

Why: to start the day feeling more relaxed

How:

- Before going outside, I listen to the CD "Walking Meditation in Nature" by Thich Nhat Hanh and Nguyen Anh-Huong.
- In the open air I imagine myself standing as a tree and feeling the connection with the earth under my feet, which isn't easy for me.
- I begin and start by "inhaling" for two steps and "exhaling" for three steps.
- I feel the fresh, cool, humid air on my face, making me feel more alert.
- I say upon inhaling: "in, in, in", upon exhaling: "out, out, out." I realize that I can't manage to continue it, and I stop.

- I notice that my steps feel less hurried than usual, my stomach gradually relaxes, I become calmer.
- While inhaling I now say to myself “I have arrived”, while exhaling “I am home” – I have a reassuring feeling of satisfaction.
- While walking I notice the different colours. There’s a lot of clover growing in the meadow. On the leaves there are many silvery drops of water of different sizes.
- I think of getting out my camera and taking some nice pictures

N. H.

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Duration: approx. 30 min.

Place: outside – walk in the forest

Type of meditation: Walking meditation

How did it go?

After we were introduced to walking meditation in yesterday’s seminar, I tried it right away today. In general I often go for a walk outside in the fresh air in the evening, which is very relaxing for me and allows me to switch off. So I already expected that walking meditation would be a good method for me. And it was! I took a stroll through a small wood near my home. Normally it takes me 15 minutes to walk back along this path. Today I needed twice the time. Step by step I slowly rolled off each foot adjusting my steps to my breathing. I was surprised at how many details and features of the forest floor I consciously noticed.

Meditation 11/23/15

Time: 11:45 a.m.

Duration: 3 min

Location: way to the university

Type of meditation: walking meditation

How’d it go?

I was on my way to the university and very nervous, because I was supposed to give a presentation during my seminar at 12:00 p.m. On the way from the subway to the seminar room I concentrated only on myself, my feet and my breathing. I slowed down my pace a bit and put one foot in front of the other. I took care to concentrate only on my gait and breathing. I breathed deeply into my chest and belly and slowly rolled my feet from heel to toe. In this way I was able to calm myself down.

P. S.

Thursday, 12/8/16, at my home, approx. 7 min

Result: walking meditation

On the way to see the student I tutor, I decided to practice walking meditation. As it had been a bit stressful for me this morning (cleaning, cooking for my sister, washing) I wanted to arrive more relaxed and at ease for my student. I wasn’t able to walk as slowly as I do in a room at home (doing so would have attracted people’s attention), but I still tried to walk as slowly as possible following a rhythm. In the beginning it was hard for me to find a good rhythm and to look down at my feet – normally I pay more attention to the surroundings – but halfway down the path it continued to improve. I even counted the steps.

During the walking meditation it did me a lot of good to concentrate only on walking and to fade out the vortex of thoughts “in my head” completely. I really didn’t think of anything else and completely forgot that my mom was there. She also tried the meditation, and she liked it very much for the beginning.

T. K.

6/29/19, mindful walking / walking meditation

At home in the village while walking Gassi

This morning I had to walk the dog, so I thought I would combine it with mindful walking this time, before continuing with my BA thesis again. This worked wonderfully, despite the dog. It’s probably because I didn’t have him on a leash and so he had his freedom and couldn’t pull. I already found mindful walking very interesting during the exercise during the lecture, but unfortunately I have not repeated it until now. But this will change in the future. I noticed that afterwards I was much more focused than I usually am after the meditations. I’ll now do mindful walking more often instead of regular meditation and see what better suits me in the long run.

T. O.

Where: in the forest

When: approx. 2:00 p.m.

What / how: My boyfriend and I went for a walk in the forest this afternoon. I wanted to do the walking meditation and he was interested in it too. So, I explained to him how the practice works and combined with the breathing, it was much easier for me in the fresh air. I did the walking meditation for about 20 minutes, then I couldn’t concentrate anymore. My boyfriend didn’t do it for that long, but in general he liked the exercise.



Pigeons at Munich's Central Station need braking distance.