

For thousands of years, many contemplative traditions included a walking meditation usually daily. For some it was a time of deep contemplation, for others it was a deep connection to the earth, in others it was a mindfulness practise, developing awareness, connection and presence.

I, on the other hand walked with purpose, and efficiency and was generally lost in thinking rather than enjoying the bodily experience of walking it was simply the backdrop for my thinking.

Mindfulness radically altered my view and experience of walking for life in a positive way and I find it particularly useful in reducing stress and bringing a reality check to my life.

My first experience of mindful walking was like learning how to walk again, I was learning to become much more aware of HOW I walked , the subtle movements in my body, the sensations of those movements and a growing awareness of the earth on which I planted my foot. A far cry from the purposeful walking of trying to get from A to B in the most efficient way in the midst of a city, where anything in my way was an obstacle be navigated or the lost in my own thoughts logistical planning walks.

Mindful walking is walking with connection. My mind is focused on the experiences in my body , my body is connected to the earth and I am aware of both how my body is moving and the awareness with which I place my foot on the ground beneath me- a mind, body, earth connection. If we tend to spend a lot of time in our heads, our feet being the furthest part of our body from our heads helps us to bring back our awareness of our bodies.

As we develop our awareness, we naturally become more aware of our whole body as we walk. Our walk can become as important as the destination to which we are walking towards, we tend to slow down and experience more of each moment. We can also become much more aware of our environment and bring more enjoyment to the walk.

Mindful walking is a slower more deliberate walk where your attention is focused on all the sensations in and around you, its an aliveness in the moment, which brings a beautiful sense of presence and connections quite unlike anything else. It can strengthen your concentration, presence, connection to the present moment.

The two key elements are awareness of the sensations of movement and awareness of how you connect to the earth- are you planting the worried thoughts, angry thoughts or peaceful thoughts in your head into the earth- what sort of imprint do you want to leave on the earth as you walk.

Focus on one element at a time until you master the art of both together, this is a practise that takes patience as we may have spent all our lives walking without this awareness. With mindful walking we are retraining our brains to pay attention and develop awareness as we walk and this mean overcoming old walking habits as well as learning new ones!

It takes patience, at first you need to slow the whole movement of walking right down so that first you lift your heel of the ground then the rest of your foot , then you move your foot through the air and place it on the earth again, doing so with gentleness and focus, then you need to shift your weight fully onto this foot before you lift the heel of your other foot and continue the process

After much practise you gently speed this process up to a more reasonable walking speed but only when you can maintain and enjoy the focus and connection to both your body and the earth.

THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH HAS brought much understanding of gentle mindful walking practises to the West:

“The miracle is not to walk on water, the miracle is to walk on the earth, dwelling deeply in the present moment and feeling truly alive!”

Some ideas around mindful walking from Thich Nhat Hanh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSOKte6TeMI>

“Walk so that your footprints bear only the marks of peaceful joy and complete freedom. To do this you have to learn to let go. Let go of your sorrows, let go of your worries. That is the secret of walking meditation.” THÍCH NHẤT HẠNH

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