



*A Moving Balance*

AJAHN SUCITTO







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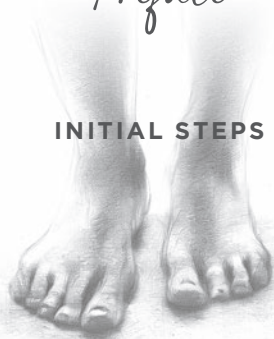
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# Preface

## INITIAL STEPS



Perhaps you've come across meditation as a practice that's undertaken while sitting in a hall with a group of other people. The emphasis might well have been to sit still, ignore what's around you, and focus your attention on a point in your body. However, summoning the energy to maintain that focus might have made you feel tense and constricted; there was too much emphasis on effort and control. If that's the case, a healthy and natural receptivity is getting overlooked – and that makes meditation into a stressful work project. It also doesn't give you much of a grasp on how to sustain mindfulness in interactive situations.

But there are other ways and means. ...

Bear in mind that the Buddha encouraged meditation to be practised when sitting, walking, standing or reclining. Out of these four, walking is unique because it supports mindfulness, full awareness and wisdom in the mode that most closely resembles that of our daily life: that of operating as an individual in the midst of an interactive world. Such a situation poses the question: *'How do I find authenticity and balance in myself while being sensitive and responsive to whatever's going on around me?'* Well, mindful walking, by establishing a supple and balanced bodily presence, trains and encourages us to move through the world by moderating the responses and feelings that occur in the heart as we experience it. More profoundly, this practice gives us tools to clear and brighten the psychological environment of our inner world. This is not by shutting it down, but by walking a firm and balanced presence through it, while discarding what isn't needed and giving full attention to what is useful and uplifting. Walking can then model an engaged process that supports a deepening into peace and understanding.

In the Thai forest mode of practice, masters spent at least as much time walking as sitting, often more. They found that the movement encouraged the mind to inquire, and the pacing gave prolonged vitality to their practice. Although the urban environment that

most people live in today doesn't offer such long undisturbed paths, in this book I suggest that walking can be done indoors inside an average room.

So, here is an attempt to guide the reader to this fluid but settled mode of meditation. I suggest that mindfulness of the fluidity of conditions is natural – even when sitting still, breathing is a flowing process. Moreover, through bearing in mind the rhythmic and settled energy of the body, there is an arrival at that unification of heart of which the Buddha spoke when he said: *'the concentration attained through walking meditation is long-lasting'* (A.5:29). In other words, the process of clearing, firming and releasing the heart is not confined to sitting still, or focusing on one point in the body. It's a matter of maintaining balance within movement. This small book attempts to indicate a way to develop that balance, literally a step at a time.

In here you'll come across a series of guides to the practice, presented in a graduated sequence. These are accompanied by:

**FOOTPRINTS:** These are summaries, bullet points to return to.

**COMPASS POINTS:** These offer details on points that rise out of the guides in order to align them to the language and broader themes of Theravada Buddhism. Some readers may like to know the sutta references, so I've added those.

(A is for Numerical Discourses [Anguttara Nikāya], S is for Connected Discourses [Saṃyutta Nikāya].)

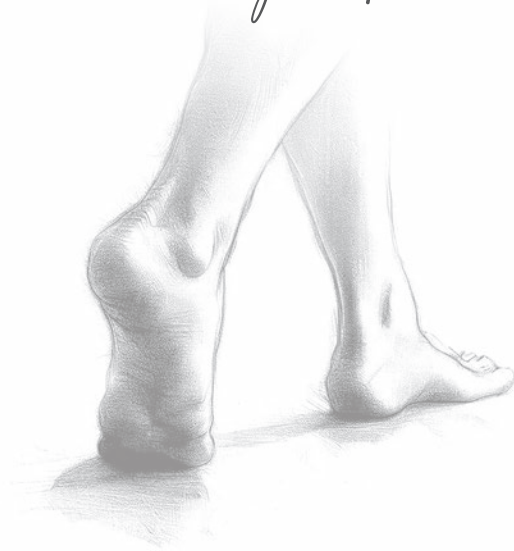
**SIDETRACKS:** The main guidelines are like a track to walk along. However, you'll recognize that from time to time, your feet hurt, or you bought the wrong footwear, or it's raining. Hence I've added 'sidetracks': short stories that illustrate how people practise mindful walking within the circumstances of their lives. The characters are fictitious, and I have formulated the stories. However these sidetracks are based on anecdotes and insights that I have heard of over more than forty years of teaching.

There is a **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS** section at the end that replicates the periods of inquiry that are a part of most meditation retreats.

I wish to acknowledge the creative efforts of Nicholas Halliday who crafted the layout, design and illustrations. I appreciate the editorial scrutiny of the Lotus Volunteer Group. *Anumodana!* Also it is the aspirations, struggles and joys of many practitioners that have encouraged me to think that writing this guide would be useful. Thank you! Sharing Dhamma is beautiful.

*Ajahn Sucitto*

*Why walk?*



Terms like ‘spiritual Path’, or ‘Noble Eightfold Path’ remind us that we are moving through territory. Living, human territory, to be more precise. The term ‘path’ may be a metaphor, but it does usefully imply that our lives have a deep purpose, and that clear steps are needed. Walking seems like the obvious way to travel.

Let’s start quite literally. Nothing walks like a human. Upright species are few; and amongst those, none have the fluid agility that the human spine offers as it turns within the weight-bearing pelvic girdle. No ape can manage that uniquely balanced carriage whereby the head is held poised and able to turn easily and the arms are left free to operate. That this structure can maintain balance and move the body along by means of the repeated shift of weight from one leg to another is a masterstroke of anatomical design. Walking, marching, strolling or running, the system works with minimal supervision.

However, once an infant’s body has developed to the point that they can accomplish that seemingly precarious balancing act, the mechanics of walking require no mental attention and we barely notice how it happens. Then again, on account of time, we have substituted it by appropriating four-legged creatures, then wheels, then engines, to get us from here to there. That means that our minds don’t even have to be in our bodies for much of the time. They can

plan and dream, worry and scheme and doodle away at this and that. Who needs a body? Why walk?

Well, it's the mind. One thing you know about the mind, is that it's lively and changeable. It's geared to doing, creating possibilities, remembering and comparing. You'll probably notice that from time to time, it gets tangled up in all this. It scatters, surges, slumps, or gets stuck in wheelspin. So, the theme is: guidance is needed. Nothing too tight; no straitjackets. Best not try to lock it down. A reasonable approach is to link the mind to something that can move along steadily, without a lot of effort, in a fluid and natural way. Yes, your walking body.

Bodies walk. They also swim, climb, run and leap. But whatever they're doing, they stay in the present, open to their surroundings and they keep you going as best they can. They seek homeostasis. They rarely initiate doing anything, but when the mind gets them moving, their own overriding priority is to maintain balance. Unlike the mind, a body doesn't get stuck in computer games, shopping binges, flings that leave a mess, grudges and guilt, boredom and apathy ... and yet the body doesn't criticize you like your mind does. Of course, minds can be bright and hearts warm – but when you're feeling undermined, overwhelmed or stuck, it's a body that keeps you steady and grounded.

Being grounded is not a matter of being glued to the earth, it's about keeping in touch with the whole body and not letting personal worries, the complaints of others, or urgent business throw you out into such loops that you don't know where your feet are. A good gymnast is grounded: by sustaining awareness of their entire body, they learn balance and synchronicity – or they tumble and fall.

Fortunately this book isn't about acrobatics. It's about walking, a safer way to get grounded. It's about walking as a way of engaging attention, mindfulness and wisdom. This is not a matter of concentrating on your feet; nor does it mean you mustn't think. It means that you can connect to the steady rhythm of walking in order to unclutter your thoughts, ease your emotions and get refreshed.

If you get that simplicity right, you'll find this is an enlightening hike, not a march. You'll become aware of some stuck mental habits and feel them dissolve. You'll be able to reset where you're going and how. In this way, mindful walking offers access to an intimate and flowing life.

## FOOTPRINTS

**1** MEDITATION IS NOT ABOUT FOCUSING ON ONE POINT IN THE BODY - BUT BEING FULLY AWARE OF YOUR BODY IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF WHAT THE BUDDHA TAUGHT. IT'S NOT ABOUT TRYING TO CONCENTRATE - BUT IT DOES GET YOU CENTRED AND COMPOSED. IT'S NOT ABOUT TRYING TO STOP THINKING - THOUGH THINKING DOES TEND TO QUIETEN DOWN WHEN YOU'RE MINDFUL OF YOUR BODY. IT'S ALSO NOT ABOUT TRYING TO HAVE AN EXPERIENCE THAT YOU'RE NOT HAVING - THOUGH YOUR EXPERIENCE GOES THROUGH NOTICEABLE AND BENEFICIAL CHANGES AS YOU MEDITATE.

**2** MEDITATION BEGINS WITH DRAWING YOUR MIND BACK A LITTLE IN ORDER TO GET PERSPECTIVE ON WHAT'S GOING ON. IT'S ABOUT GETTING SUPPORT FROM YOUR BODY TO DO THIS. WITH THAT SUPPORT, YOU CAN RELAX INTO A HERE AND NOW WHERE THE EMOTIONS SETTLE INTO A STEADY WARMTH.

**3** WALKING MEDITATION BEGINS WITH A 'STEP AT A TIME' ATTITUDE. AS YOU GET SETTLED INTO IT, WALKING IS INCREASINGLY A MATTER OF ENGAGING WITH, AND ENTERING INTO, A MOVING BALANCE.



*How bodies walk  
and why we need to know*



Before we go into the finer details of walking meditation, it's probably the case that you don't really know in directly-experienced detail how a body walks. And so you miss out on the benefits of walking. The first thing you might need to acknowledge then is that your accustomed way of walking isn't even focused on your body but on the idea of where you're going. So let's take a few moments to check out how a body walks.

Stand with your weight evenly distributed on both feet. Relax your upper body and head and feel your legs carrying you. Let a few breaths pass through; get settled. Then decide to take a careful but relaxed step. What happens? First your body shifts its weight to one leg. One hip (say the right side) takes the weight of the body and transfers it down through the right leg and foot and into the floor beneath you. The entire right leg from hip to foot engages. Let the right knee bend a little in order to strengthen the stance. As the movement continues, with the spine rotating slightly to the left, you can feel the muscles in the lower back at the left side of the pelvis tighten to lift the left leg. As those same muscles lift the left leg, the heel of the left foot comes off the ground and the swing begins. There's a slight push from the toes, the leg muscles lift the knee – so that the lower leg swings forward and the foot can descend to the floor. With the foot settling

on the floor to carry the weight of the body, the spine turns back to the right. At a relaxed pace, the movement takes about a second.

Re-run that small movement, this time focusing on the mind. First stand and relax, feeling the balance. In this way, *awareness*, the receptive sense, will spread over your entire body. Attention then forms a focus that limits awareness to the sense of 'body'. Consequently awareness of your body deepens to include its poise, steadiness, solidity and warmth. You're fully 'embodied'. In this condition, awareness is particularly attuned to the important matter of balance as you stand, and to synchronicity as you move. Accordingly, as you initiate walking, your attention first goes to the pelvis and waist to establish a steady centre, and then extends down the weight-bearing leg. Awareness then tells you that your weight is fully supported. Next comes the *intention* to lift the leg, the body responds, and your attention widens to include the stable leg, the moving leg and the upper body. It needs to cover the whole body so that, even as the momentum carries the weight to the front leg and initiates the next step, the counterbalance in the upper body allows for a smooth transfer of weight. Without that, you lurch forward or fall over.

If you want to continue into walking, these three mental qualities – **awareness**, **attention** and **intention** will have to stay linked, so that you don't lose balance (loss of awareness), or look at or think about

something else (distracted attention), or change your mind and switch on your phone (unsteady intention). So, to maintain embodied composure you have to keep the whole package in mind and connected to the actuality of what the body is doing – this ‘keeping in mind’ is **mindfulness** placed on the body. You keep awareness (the receptive) attention (the creator of focus) and intention (the agent of movement) engaged with the process of walking. One immediate benefit is that the mind doesn’t engage with the hundred and one other things that a mind can engage with. Mindfulness contains and calms.

Of course, your mind is used to engaging with ideas, possibilities and concerns, and it moves fast – so sustaining mindfulness of the body presents challenges: it seems that your mind can’t go that slow, it needs something to do. Well, here’s where walking will help and is easier than sitting still. Because, with mindful walking, you engage your mind with the shifts and changes that accompany movement of the body. Because that movement is undertaking the potentially risky process of balancing on one leg while the other glides through the air, awareness does attune to it. So the body’s intelligence is automatically tuned in to balance – but, because the body does the job so well, your mind normally doesn’t bother to engage with the process. The encouragement then is to stay directly aware and alert to how walking happens, with the intention to move in a composed and

fluid way. As to why ... through a mindful engagement, the balance and poise of walking can reach into the mind and heart. For example, if you're thinking and worrying about what could or should be, acknowledge that, draw your attention back to the simple steady movement of walking and keep it there – and the worrying will subside.

With mindful walking, we're undoing mental perspectives wherein you lose balanced presence – such as the notion of getting somewhere, either in terms of physical space or a mental state. This spacious, unhurried state is *enjoyable*. If you tune in to how the *whole* body walks, you pick up a flowing and rhythmic process; it's something you can sustain, it's not tiring. Mindful walking has an ease and vitality that calms mind and heart; and because that is enjoyable, sustaining an interest gets easier.

This process involves the whole body – feet don't walk. They obviously play a part, but it's a group effort in which the leader is in the pelvicolumbar region where the hip and lumbar muscles turn the spine and lift the leg. To get the whole group engaged, you have to relax in your abdomen so that the body flexes at the waist. That relaxing is important. Then the spinal turn will by itself draw the corresponding side of the upper body slightly back to act as a counterbalance. Don't make a deliberate effort – just relax, widen your attention and awareness to include your upper body, and as you turn your spine,

stay tuned in to balance. The body will form a counterbalance by means of the upper body, such that you can even pause with your foot in the air without tightening up to stay upright. (If these words are confusing, try walking up some stairs, and notice how when the left leg goes forward and up, the left shoulder turns slightly back.)

As the walking continues, the foot arrives on the ground centred in front of you to accept the weight of your body. Then the process of shifting weight and coordinating the whole body in the movement repeats. It's rhythmic. And mediating that rhythmic interplay are the muscles that lightly turn the spine and flex your waist.

That might not have happened in your usual way of walking, because normally you're aiming to get somewhere and so there's a tension in the body that keeps the waist locked and the abdomen tight. In this 'stride-march-scurry' mode, awareness isn't in the body, so you don't notice the lack of synchronicity. The tightness and the momentum of striding along keeps you from falling over, but drive and tension replace embodied awareness, balance and ease.

With embodied awareness, you put aside that 'going somewhere' assumption and the effects it has. By so doing, you find here-and-now balance, and as your mind notices the absence of pressure it shifts into awareness of flow. This is not a matter of moving very slowly –

your body can maintain that flow even while running. So you can still go places. The point is to let the body do the walking in a way that feels light and poised. This is not based on sensations, but on balance and synchronicity. If you sustain awareness of these, the mind is guided towards its own balance, free from the pressure of time and destinations. Thoughts may arise, but they're less tightly bound, and they lose their grip on your heart.

With this increased spaciousness and skill, you can contemplate any stress – and allow it to unravel. Mindful of that, your awareness picks up and absorbs qualities of lightness, openness and poise. It becomes a quiet open centre across which thoughts and energies can move, and into which they can rest. That's enjoyable, useful – and rare.

It also teaches us something about the body. It's not just a matter of meat and bones and tactile sensations. It's also the guiding intelligence whereby a gymnast or a dancer or a Tai Ch'i master maintains a cool alert poise in the midst of circumstances. That's what most of us, perhaps all of us, need to know.

## FOOTPRINTS

**1** STAND UPRIGHT, WEIGHT BALANCED ON BOTH FEET, RELAX IN THE LEGS, CHEST AND BELLY. YOUR FEET WILL FEEL MORE RECEPTIVE IF YOU WEAR SOFT FLEXIBLE FOOTWEAR, OR EVEN BETTER, GO BAREFOOT.

**2** KEEP YOUR EYES ON SOFT FOCUS, EVEN SLIGHTLY DOWNCAST - BUT DON'T TIP YOUR HEAD OVER AS THIS WILL CAUSE STRESS IN THE NECK AND SUPPORT UNNECESSARY THINKING.

**3** TAKE A FEW TENTATIVE STEPS WITH THE AIM TO BREAK OUT OF THE 'GOING SOMEWHERE' MOOD. BRING MORE ATTENTION TO THE PELVIC-LUMBAR MASS AND LET THAT MOVE THE LEGS. PRIORITIZE WHOLE-BODY AWARENESS, BALANCE AND FLOW.

**4** DON'T DEFINE A PATH AT FIRST, JUST ENJOY SOME AIMLESS WANDERING. THIS WILL HELP YOU TO READ THE BODY'S MOVEMENT AND RHYTHM. BEWARE OF 'TRACK MENTALITY' AS THIS WILL CREATE A RESTRICTIVE DRIVE IN THE MIND.

**5** NOTE THAT BUZZY, PUSHY ENERGY OF 'THERE'S SOMETHING TO DO, SOMEWHERE ELSE'. THAT'S WHAT WE'RE LEARNING TO GUIDE AND MASTER, NOT TO FOLLOW. FLOW INTO WALKING.



## COMPASS POINTS

### AWARENESS, ATTENTION AND MINDFULNESS

In using the words **'aware'** and **'awareness'** I am referring to the receptivity that comes with being conscious – that is, the ability to receive data. In Buddhism, this occurs within consciousness (*viññāna*) – as it receives data from all the senses, including that of mind (*manas*). Mind, or 'mind-consciousness' (*manoviññāna*), scans the other senses and registers their data in terms of meanings, impressions or recognized perceptions (*saññā*). As in the recognition: 'that object is an apple'. This *impression* (it could of course be a plastic replica) catalyses a feeling (agreeable, disagreeable or neutral) and a response (interest, aversion). The awareness that receives an impression and its feeling, and duly responds is called '*citta*', which I am translating as 'heart'. (It's also translated as 'mind'.) *Citta* deals with feeling and a whole range of responses to perceptions conditioned by visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental input. These responses (*saṅkhārā*) then shape our attitudes and steer our actions.

In terms of practice, the encouragement of the Buddha is to bring around the stopping of consciousness and the liberation of *citta*. This

means that for a moment or more, the process of receiving input from the senses can be turned off. If *citta* is trained to refer to its receptivity, rather than to the data, then that awareness can stand alone with no items to respond to. Although this sounds eerie and nihilistic to the uninitiated, it is a supremely peaceful liberation. What brings this around is attention to the quality of response, and the inner silence that responses such as non-aversion, patience, and dispassion leave in awareness. The deepening sense of steadiness and non-entanglement eventually allows *citta* to reside peacefully, released from work. The released awareness is referred to as ‘*nāna*’ (knowing) or ‘*vijja*’(clarity).

**‘Attention’** (*manasikāra*) is the action of the mind in selecting a detail out of the entire visual (or auditory) field and focusing on it. Like looking through a telescope at the sky. It is motivated by **‘intention’** (*cetanā*) – the directive response of the heart.

**‘Mindfulness’** (*sati*) is the ability to bear something in mind – whether that be an idea, a sensation, a mood, energy or teaching. It is a form of concentration, but when it is based on right view and wisdom it brings referential qualities to bear on any object of mindfulness. In this way, it filters out irrelevant, distracting or obscuring influences and supports the ‘full awareness’ (*sampajañña*) that gives insight into the transient nature of the content of consciousness. This results in dispassion and release.

## SIDETRACK

### LEE MAKES SOME SPACE



Lee opened the door of his tiny apartment and stood looking at the scene. Three chairs and a couch wouldn't have seemed like much in one of those apartments that you see in brochures, but ... there was the heap of magazines sprawled at odd angles over the bedside table; the notes and stickers on the fridge door, the dead plant on top of the fridge ... and the TV screen, sitting in front of the couch, presiding over it and waiting for him to slump down, pick up the console and be flooded .... The sheer mindless habit of it all suddenly struck him. News, then a comedy show to get over the news, then having dragged a TV dinner out of the microwave, a movie to accompany spaghetti, fries and ... well, at least he'd cut out the red wine.

That move was a result of a recent change of routine. He'd decided to get off the metro a stop earlier than the nearby station and walk the rest of the way home. It took an extra twenty minutes, the neighbourhood was nothing special, but it felt good to not be rushing

through it. ...Sometimes there was a cheerful exchange with a woman who walked her dog at this time, but the benefit was mostly that of returning to his body – or rather entering it – after a day of phone and screens, high-speed work details and snatchy conversations that made up his working life. He had a mindfulness app that encouraged walking, feeling the sensations in the feet and body and relaxing the hands and belly. It was a gentle surprise to experience the body like it was some calm creature that he could get to know and feel strangely comforted by. It was a simple comfort, but it introduced him to a way of being that made the blurred state that half a bottle of wine would bring on seem unattractive, even gross.

Yes, the clarity that twenty minutes of no-hurry walking brought around – it felt clean and made him feel more intact, more present, more truly himself.

He looked at his life spread out in the single-roomed apartment. A mess. *‘The couch,’* he thought, *‘- get on that and I’m lost.’* He scanned the room: *‘Move that chair, slide the bookshelf and table back, stack that chair on the other, shove the couch into the corner ...’* There was now a clear path beside the window; it looked like he could take about seven steps and then turn a right angle to add a few more. So he pulled off his shoes, wriggled his toes alive, relaxed his shoulders and stood for a while before picking up a ‘strolling in the park’ kind of gait. He found that



if he gave fuller attention to the flow of the walking, it softened the fenced-in impression of being in the room. He walked to and fro three, four, five times, pausing at the end of the path and resting his weight and tension down through his feet ... then relaxing the compulsion to sink into a glowing screen. ... After seven of these, he sat down on the chair and looked around: *'Get rid of the old magazines, say goodbye to the plant. I don't actually need that big a bookcase, a shelf will do.'* Then he gave the TV a thoughtful stare – and threw a blanket over it. At least for an hour... He'd get some fresh food, cook a meal and just enjoy that. Maybe phone Kai after that, have a chat.

And once the bookcase was gone, there was an interesting corner that with a bit of tidying, looked like a good place to try some of that sitting meditation that the app took you through.

*Getting on track*



Keeping the kind of pace and poise that I've been describing, take a short walk – for maybe ten minutes – in your house, in your garden or on the street. Don't look at anything in particular – except what you need to in order to navigate. Your eyes are open, receptive but not roaming around. Bring the sense-organ of your skin into awareness. You might imagine your body is lightly wrapped in a sensitive medium that covers it like an envelope ... well, it is. That's your skin. Through that, feel the space around you, the absence of pressure, the presence of openness. Open your awareness to sense that; take it into your heart.

Then notice what happens. Maybe some train of thought moves in and picks up speed, perhaps it's a concern about the future, or about your family. Maybe you see or hear something that grabs your attention. Note these, but draw your awareness back to the whole-body focus and feel what happens within your body as these impressions arise. You may sense some stirring as energy picks up and shifts, probably into your face and head – though you might also get a tightening in your chest and abdomen. You might realize that thinking affects your bodily state. However, what's most likely is that almost immediately attention goes to thinking about whatever has affected you. And then ... the thoughts fill your awareness and multiply. How helpful is that?

However, building on the realization that body and mind are connected, you can keep the mind contained by strengthening your awareness of walking through the space that's touching your skin. Imagine, for example, walking through mist or water and feeling it open around you as you move.

I'd also generally recommend that you walk along a regular track, approximately straight or perhaps in a circle, in order to simplify your focus. If you can find a track that will allow twenty or more paces without zigzags, that's fine. Otherwise, it's possible to use ten or less. You then walk to and fro, or alternate clockwise-anti-clockwise in a circle, with pauses at the end of each direction, or wherever and whenever you need to stop and adjust. This is because the regularity of a track can send the mind into automatic mode, whereby pacing takes on a driven obsessive mood. Remember, you're only using a track to contain attention, not to constrict it. If you focus on the movement of your body in the here and now, and pause when you go off that topic, feel driven or go into automatic, you can get the benefit of a regular track – that is, you don't have to negotiate your walking with the changing world around it.

However, as an alternative, you could walk mindfully along a regular route – in a park for example, or maybe on your way to work or school. Once again set your attention to cover the entire body as you stand. Give attention to balance. Most often, we're top-heavy: we

lead our walking with the head and shoulders, because we're aiming to get somewhere. But your head can't walk. And you won't arrive any sooner by walking with your head tilted forward. This mode just draws your shoulders over – and that gets uncomfortable. When you're led by your head, that involves focusing your eyes and unconsciously holding your head with your neck muscles. So they get stiff.

To counteract all this, relax your shoulders, and draw your head back until it settles on top of your spine. You may find it helpful to have your hands lightly clasped behind or in front of you, or just left free – whatever prevents your shoulders and chest from pulling the spine over. Balance is centred on your spine, so moor your attention on that column as it extends from beneath your head down to the tailbone. Imagine that the line of attention you've just drawn can extend down to your feet, and let your awareness gently expand from that central axis to spread evenly through the entire form to reach the boundary of the skin. Where awareness goes, energy follows, so this spreads energy through the body and checks the tendency for awareness and energy to condense either in your head or in the front of your body. Then there's a unified sense of whole-body presence, rather than the restricted awareness of being in your head looking at or thinking about what's going on. Instead awareness opens the heart, and you feel centred and quietly happy.

Remember to relax your eyes, forehead and jaw. It's as if your eyes can float in their sockets – when you have a regular track, you don't need a sharp visual focus. Then as you walk with a relaxed belly and a flexible waist, walk as if the spine is carrying a stack of plates with the head on top. Don't get rigid – the truth is that the spine naturally operates like that. It's a curvy stack of vertebrae that supports the head and the upright carriage. Its base is in the lumbar pelvis, which is the leader of walking. So if your attention is centred around the lumbar-sacrum region, your awareness can pick up the rhythmic turning of the lower vertebrae while being stabilized by the spinal axis as a whole. From the waist and lumbar region, you can also sense the slow swelling and subsiding of the breathing in the abdomen. The repeated light sensations of your feet touching the ground punctuate the movement as a whole.

If your face is kept relaxed, the slight counterbalancing swing in the shoulders has a massaging effect on the neck muscles. Take some time to settle into that. Get comfortable, and let the movement release tension in your shoulders, neck and head. Then expand your awareness to the boundaries of your body – equally to the back and the front – and feel the skin, with its tingling and flushes, and the space immediately around you.

Many sensations and felt senses occur dependent on what's outside the body. This is what is meant by the expression 'mindful of the

body externally’, as the Buddha put it. Normally our attention goes to the presence of sensations, or more particularly the pleasant or unpleasant feeling that arises with them. But here we’re widening attention to include the spine – which isn’t affected by external contact – the skin, which generally isn’t being impacted by much more than the weather, and above all, the steady energy of walking. The reduction of impact that arises through restraining seeing, hearing and thinking is a relief. Combined with the calm and rhythmic turning of the spine and the openness of the skin, the overall experience is one of pleasant and balanced composure.

This encourages the mind to not get engrossed in sensations that come and go, but to attend to these cool and steady aspects of embodiment. By taking these in, your heart receives that agreeable feeling and calms the mind. Mental chatter dies down and you feel open – even though you’re quite contained.

As you get more experienced, you learn to contain your awareness within the boundaries of the body and extend it out to the degree that’s needed, rather than go out totally exposed to random sense-impact. Because, although what you see, hear, taste, or smell can’t actually get under your skin, anything that is attended to becomes a topic to feel and think about – and feeling and thinking *do* penetrate the mind and heart. Then that quiet centre is lost. So it’s

good to train your attention to be discriminative, like a discerning listener; then directly sense where your skin and your spine are. This mindful attention to your body's axis and boundaries will reduce the impact of senses that are focused externally and help to contain the thinking mind.

If this sounds like you have to keep shifting your attention here and there, reflect on how you would carry a bowl of water on your head and walk. You would be aware of the overall carriage of your body, particularly of keeping your head in line with your spine. You'd have to relax in your chest and belly to make sure that the walking was smooth and balanced. You'd need to see what was around you, but you wouldn't be gazing at anything in particular or paying attention to details. You had also better not worry about dropping the bowl or what to do next. Your attention would best be spread over the entire upright axis, with your awareness opening around that to supervise the balance – while noticing any relevant phenomena. That's walking meditation.

So don't get stiff. Feel the space open in front of your chest as you walk. This might be helped by the suggestion that you're walking through still water at chest-height, or through mist that parts around you. Your spine is like the mast of a boat, your chest like a sail opening to the space immediately touching your skin. Cruise on!

## FOOTPRINTS

**1** USE A PATH, TRACK OR TRAIL THAT REQUIRES MINIMUM ATTENTION. THIS ALLOWS YOU TO RELAX YOUR EYES, AND, AS EYE-MOVEMENT STIMULATES THINKING, THAT LESSENS DISCURSIVE THOUGHT.

**2** ESTABLISH THE 'UPRIGHT AXIS' OF THE SPINE, ROOTED IN THE PELVIS AND CROWNED BY THE HEAD. THIS WILL GIVE YOU THE UNCOMPRESSED UPRIGHT CARRIAGE. SENSE YOUR BODY TURNING AROUND THAT AXIS. THE TURNING WILL HELP TO RELAX YOUR NECK AND WAIST.

**3** CENTRED ON THAT AXIS, EXPAND YOUR AWARENESS TO YOUR SKIN. REMEMBER, AS THE VISUAL SENSE POINTS FORWARDS, YOU MAY NEED TO PUT AN EMPHASIS ON FEELING YOUR BACK. WHEN YOU HAVE THAT OVERALL AWARENESS, OPEN TO THE SPACE YOU'RE MOVING THROUGH.



## COMPASS POINTS

### PERCEPTION, FEELING AND RESPONSE

Feelings change, don't they. From agreeable to disagreeable, through neutral – and back again. It's all very moving stuff, but as long as the heart's motivation is bound up with getting and holding onto pleasure and not being able to manage its decline, life is going to be tense. And that feels unpleasant. But there's a way of handling things differently. It's to do with how we respond to agreeable or disagreeable tones of feeling (*vedanā*) – and practising this brings around an end to stress, restlessness and feeling trapped by life. Moreover, we can get the support to end that stress in our own bodies. It just requires investigation and radical honesty.

Consider for yourself some obvious examples of how, with the same sense-object, the feeling and response can change. What looked beautiful five years ago (a judgment that other people might disagree with) probably seems average now. The first bite of an apple may be sweet, the tenth is so-so; eat another apple and it's boring. The change is not in sense input, but in the rapidly formulated perceptions (*saññā*)

that the mind creates. ‘Amazing’ becomes ‘old-fashioned’; ‘lively’ becomes ‘noisy’; ‘exciting’ becomes ‘same old thing.’ We can even establish thrilling perceptions based on sheer fantasies – such as with entertainment – yet even these don’t last. Realizing that can bring around a pessimistic perception of life as a futile search for happiness. That also feels bad... and triggers further responses and perceptions.

Other than through physical impact, feeling arises as the mind scans the other senses and delivers perceptions (that is, impressions and meanings). These *saññā* arouse mental feeling and evoke responses (*sañkhārā*) in the feeling-response system of heart/*citta*. The *citta*’s responses affect the body, even when they’re responding to a fantasy (as when your heart beats or you feel tense on account of what’s presented on a screen). Yet, although perceptions are inconstant and unreliable, they normally generate a response that establishes another perception: we describe something as noisy or musical, original or boring. That perceptually-derived experience then acts as the basis for the next set of responses – whether that be to do something, or to change the input. The net result of all this is the sense of being someone impacted, aroused and even driven by the linked-up process of feeling, perception and response. Yet ... what if that feeling-perception process could be witnessed, moderated and allowed without acting on it, holding onto it or repressing it? What kind of a ‘me’ would be the result? An unstressed one, probably. So this is a move in the right direction.

When you explore that process, you'll notice that with any degree of contact there's an immediate shift of energy. To feel anything means that the nervous system has to be stimulated – which means that its energy moves. That movement is the initial, involuntary response, and it is embodied. It can even occur *before perception informs you*. For example, your skin tells the hand to drop the hot plate *before* you realize that it's painful. A loud crash causes your body to jump before you know what caused the sound. But the response then leaves a perceptually-based feeling: you might experience relief that you're not badly burnt, or that the loud crash was nothing significant.

We can learn to play with this system: to go for a ride in a roller-coaster, or jump into cold water – and move from fear or shock to exhilaration to a sense of being refreshed ... and happy. Embodied energy races through a series of mental impressions – and as we arrive at a steady state the perception is *'I've been through a challenge and I'm OK.'* To take another example, a tough game of football may leave the players bruised and exhausted ... and dejected if they lost, but exuberant if they won. You might get a similar result after concluding a paper on management. Meanwhile, if you're absorbed in a movie you might not notice that your body is cramped and uncomfortable. So the prevailing state is based upon where the *citta* settles – and that process is independent of physical sensations. Therefore, whether the body's

reflex bypasses the mind, or the mental feeling overrides the physical feeling, what counts is what touches and activates the *citta*. Understanding this point encourages and allows for some fine-tuning on where we place our attention. We can focus on non-sensory phenomena, such as integrity, goodwill or composure – and that lifts attention from sensation-based feeling: we can disregard or get perspective on it. This is useful, because as long as the mind is attending to seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, thinking, and the perceptions based on these, the *citta* gets tangled up in reactions to phenomena over which it has no say. ‘*Go to the heart, steady and gladden it,*’ has to be a fundamental directive.

Mindfulness of body gives us a further way of managing feeling, perception and response. If one’s attention is grounded in the body, it calms the nervous energy through which responses occur. Then the *citta* settles. This allows its awareness to be open and alert. And that lessens the impact of perceptions, and puts them into perspective. For example, it’s good to have the perception: ‘*a plate from the oven might burn me,*’ but not to the point of paranoia around plates. On a subtler level, mentally-derived signals of friendship, reliability or hostility provide a constant felt backdrop to actions, thoughts and even to being seen. Shopping, voting, socializing... how to know whether the signals are valid? Since perceptions are about what *could* be, *should* be or what something (or someone)

*reminds* me of, and are not about what something is in itself – how can we know what signals to trust?

The pragmatism of the Buddhist approach is: whatever the signal, put the perception to one side and review the energy and the state that arises with it. Is it helpful or not? For example, we can use images and chanting that arouse perceptions whose energies gladden or steady the *citta*; and in contrast, notice that images that encourage consumerism, hostility or fear produce energies that stir the *citta* but leave it blurred or contracted. Wisdom then arises through keeping the *citta* focused on the energy of the signal and where your response to it takes you. So we focus not so much on what something seems to be, but rather on relating to how it affects us.

Furthermore, with bodily reflexes, once the response has done its job, once you've dropped the hot plate or jumped away from an oncoming car, the body's energy discharges and things return to balance. As this is the system that carries the *citta's* response, if the heart's response is traced in terms of how it affects the body, then it will also allow emotional responses to be felt, contemplated and released.

The mind can't do that. It may dismiss or override, but it can't let go. It can remember and recycle the horrors and disappointments of bygone years – and it does so if the body hasn't fully felt, responded and discharged the energetic effect. Why is that? Because we dismiss

the feeling and response (aka 'emotion') to 'get over it' and get on with life. Or maybe *citta* clamps shut to defend itself from feeling (as with trauma) or when a response might upset the social situation, or damage the person's image. Then the effect of any of that gets locked in the feeling-response system. There can be a good amount of unprocessed perception and feeling locked up in there. And that state becomes the basis of our identity.

Thus, this particular body-mind-heart link around perception and response conditions how our inner life is formed. And it is through gently activating this link, not through the senses, that clarity can be established. Body can protect the *citta* by providing a place that is at a remove from feeling based on sense-perception. It can also offer its ability to discharge the energetic residues of the *citta's* responses. For its part, the *citta* can generate positive moods and energies that resonate in the body to provide uplift, stability and openness. The settledness that comes from these non-sensory bases is something that the Buddha encouraged us to develop. Then when body, heart and mind walk together, we walk in fresh air: the steady receptivity becomes our basis.

Simply walking, we work through the weave of perception, feeling and compulsive responses. And with a release from this linkage, it becomes clear that there's no-one bound up in them.

# *Inner walking*



## ELEMENTS

I've mentioned mindfulness of the body 'externally', so you might be wondering, 'is there an internal aspect to this practice?' Yes, there is 'mindfulness of body internally' – a phrase that we could interpret in a few ways. We could think about liver and blood and bones, but that's thinking, not direct felt experience. You can't directly know you have a spleen. But you can directly feel the degrees of firmness, fluidity, warmth, and movement happening within your body. These are called the 'four great elements' (earth, water, fire and air). There's also a fifth element, that of space, both within and around your body. Don't skip over the fact that it's the space around you that allows you to move! Awareness of that really helps to lighten up the intensity of mental content.

You can contemplate the experience of body in these terms, internally as well as externally, and in the world around you. Sunlight and bodily warmth are fire; the firmness of land and skeletal structure are earth; the wind blowing leaves and the movement of breath are both air; and water is rain, streams and the overall fluidity and cohesiveness of the body. Space contains them all, and they're all subject to change.

This analysis gives rise to a certain detachment regarding the body – it's part of the physical universe, not a personal possession. These

elements are changeable – sometimes we’re warm, sometimes cold; the firm feel of the body depends on where the bones are or where pressure is received – and these felt impressions don’t comprise a fixed entity at all. Firm flesh softens, supple skin grows dry and wrinkles, vitality flares and dwindles – and as the body breaks down, the elements return to Nature.

In your walking, you can reference the body as elements externally – most readily in the ‘earthing’ firmness of the foot touching the ground, and the space in front of your chest. Then internally – there’s the upright firmness of the spine, and the sense of space opening within the chest as you breathe. Breathing is obviously ‘air’, but there’s also ‘air’ in the feel of a moving leg. Then you could contemplate the vitality (‘fire’) of your body or the fluidity of its felt shape (‘water’).

This analysis brings direct awareness to the fore. Your awareness doesn’t know spleen, bones or breath; it doesn’t know what you look like, nor is it affected by such appearances. It is receptive and what it receives are impressions of an elemental nature. Sensing your body this way changes your perception from the basis of visual appearance, along with its critiques, to the steady ground of embodied reality. With that attention shift, a weight of self-consciousness is lifted from the heart.

This shift also supports a change of intention. The elements aren't going anywhere, there's no 'forward' or distance to cover. You can even walk on the spot (which is handy if you don't have access to a track). You can feel the body lightly swinging as the spine turns, the brief 'earth' sensation of a foot taking the weight of the body and the gentle warming vitality that indicates 'this is body.' Walking is just the presence of these changing qualities. This perception then turns your intention towards an inner purpose – such as soothing agitation or firming up a resolve. All this helps to release stress and open the door to inquiry into the nature of mental and physical qualities.

### **THE SUBTLE BODY**

You can go deeper into the internal body by exploring what activates these elemental qualities: the energies of the nervous system. By means of these, the body senses itself and organizes movement – as well as autonomous functions like heartbeat, vitality, and rate of breathing. Through this intelligence, the hands and eyes work together when we're writing, driving and so on; the lips and the hand work together to get food into our mouths; fingers finely adjust their contact-pressure when holding a range of animate and inanimate objects – and breathing in and out rolls on even when we're asleep. These are just a few examples of how our sensory-motor system and

autonomous bodily functions are governed by the nervous system. It's selective (attention: 'notice this'), directive (intention and impulse: 'do this'), and receptive (awareness: 'open to this'). These three can be trained for your welfare.

In Buddhism, the energy of this embodied intelligence is called *kāyasankhāra*, 'bodily activation' or 'bodily formation' (there are a number of translations). This is the vitality within the body that breathes, soothes and activates it. In spiritual traditions, the network that this energy flows through is sometimes called the 'subtle body'. When its intelligence is organizing the walking in a smooth and comfortable way, and your awareness tunes in to that state of fluid poise, this subtle body feels bright and steady. You experience embodied presence. Then it's relatively easy to anchor your attention in your body so that sense-contact (and thinking) stays at the edge of your awareness rather than occupying its centre. That gives you the space from which you can determine what's worthwhile, gladdening (or not) 'out there' and extend your attention while remaining composed and balanced. Learning to stay balanced in this way, in the midst of action, is why walking meditation is a great training for daily life.

The most penetrative input that we have to work with is not sense-contact, but thinking, feeling and emotion. Because these affect the

heart, they stimulate this subtle body – notice how its energy shifts when you're angry, relaxed or enthusiastic – but through managing this vital energy, we can moderate thinking and steady our emotions.

Thinking isn't a problem, it's a necessary part of life. We just have to know how to manage it. Thinking about a project or a plan has an external aspect – we're trying to work something out in the world 'out there.' But it also has an internal, heart, effect: it can feel fiery, foggy or firm, speedy or sluggish, painful or pleasing. We can fall in love with ideas and get frustrated when we can't bring them to fruition. And even when it's dithering and going nowhere useful, thinking grabs centre-stage. It ruminates and obsesses, mutters and rants, so even when there's nothing external stirring your mind, its repetitive antics clog your awareness and tangle your vitality. All this takes energy.

Therefore it's necessary at times to withdraw from thinking. Not by becoming stupid, but by contemplating its energy (rather than its topic) and turning your attention towards it – as in 'this is thinking, what does it feel like?' Steadily inquire: 'How is the mental energy ("fiery", "blustering", "like damp fog")?' This non-judgmental and impersonal adjustment of thinking coolly derails its runaway trains. Then you can sense the emotional energy, the pressure or spin that underpins them. How does that feel? And where?

Like any other reflex, an emotional state seeks resolution, and in the attempt to find that, emotions often express themselves through thinking (and speaking). However, when emotions compulsively surge and get repeatedly stuck; and when you've spent a long time trying to work out why you feel the way you do, whose fault it is, and what to do about it – you recognize that thinking doesn't allay the emotion. More often than not, it just stirs things up, and gives rise to a sense of being stuck with it – and that initiates more thinking.

Rationality can't undo a reflex or an emotion. But, as emotional energy (*cittasaṅkhāra*) shares the same response network as the inner body, if you're looking for resolution and release, bring mindfulness to bear on the subtle body. This is a matter of withdrawing attention from the topic while maintaining a sympathetic awareness of how it's affecting you in embodied terms. You can sense this in elemental ways. Sometimes it's just the 'closed in, no space' state of gloom ... at other times it's the flush of happiness, the heat of rage, or the gut-churning pressure of worry and fear. In happy times you may feel a warming in your skin, whereas your throat tends to constrict with an emotional flood. Sensing things in terms of energy-formations helps to curtail unnecessary thinking and elaboration – the process that keeps it all so stuck.

Adjust your intention to one of open-hearted listening. However disagreeable and seemingly stupid the mood, your intention shouldn't be to fix it, explain it, or cut it off. You can't cut off your emotional activation without doing some damage – because it's not a sensation, it's a response. You don't want to shut down a responsive heart. So the aim instead is to reset the system to a balanced state. This takes a full response: internal-external, and body, heart and mind working together.

In brief you walk the whole thing – body, heart and mind – along a path, steadily. In this way, attention to the energetic basis, sympathetic intention and open awareness will work on any troubled stuff, and delight in the bright, the clear and the balanced.

Settle in with the external aspects: suitable path, steady pace, whole-body walking. As you find a good norm, tune in to the body-heart relationship in its positive aspect. Allow yourself time to feel present, grounded and comfortable. Bring awareness into the heart by being a warm and generous listener. If inner turbulence takes over, turn attention to the external aspects of body to get settled. Then attend to the feel of walking as it flows between grounded stance and a light lift and swing, and especially as external and internal cooperate around keeping balance to the fore.

Dwell on and enjoy your balanced presence. This comes from the subtle body. It feels bright, light and open. You can feel the tactile sensations, but the experience of presence stands apart from them. It's not in the same place as the sensations; it's a whole-body experience, it's internal, and it becomes evident when sensations don't take over attention. Tune into that.

When there's no marching, faltering, or resisting, this balanced energy naturally discharges excessive bodily activation. With that, there's refreshment, and one feels tireless. The pressure releases: no need to find answers, or to not feel what you're feeling. When inner narratives arise, keep walking and sustaining mindfulness of the comfortable container of attention, intention and awareness. Within that broad focus, moods and memories can be reviewed clearly – and moved through. The stress of getting activated by it all can be released, the past gets cleared – and right now, there's more space in your life.

## FOOTPRINTS

**1** GET A SENSE OF THE ELEMENTS. HERE AWARENESS IS TO THE FORE, RATHER THAN ATTENTION. IT MAY HELP IF YOU NAME THEM AS YOU NOTICE THEM, THOUGH THIS NAMING SHOULD BE MINIMAL AND DISCARDED WHEN NOT NEEDED. YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET THEM ALL OR BE THAT PRECISE; IT'S A 'FEELS LIKE THIS' KIND OF APPROACH.

**2** GIVE AWARENESS TIME TO ADJUST TO THIS NEW WAY OF EXPERIENCING THE BODY. AS YOU GET FAMILIAR WITH THESE ELEMENTAL TEXTURES, CAN YOU SENSE SIMILAR QUALITIES IN YOUR MIND OR HEART? WHEN DO THEY FEEL FIERY, FIRM OR SPACIOUS? WIDEN YOUR ATTENTION AND SOFTEN YOUR INTENTIONS. ALLOW THINGS TO ARISE IN THAT UNPRESSURIZED SPACE.

**3** WHATEVER THE ELEMENT, THOUGHT OR MOOD THAT ARISES, BY BEING AWARE OF ITS ENERGY AS IT IS, THE HEART IS NOT SHAKEN AND THE MIND OPENS. IF SOME MOOD OR MEMORY FEELS STUCK, INQUIRE: 'HOW IS THIS AFFECTING MY BODY?' 'WHAT'S THE UNDERLYING IMPRESSION THAT STIRS MY MIND/HEART?' DEVELOP THIS APPROACH TO WHATEVER ARISES, KEEPING A SYMPATHETIC ATTITUDE IN MIND.



## COMPASS POINTS

### THE SUBTLE BODY AND ME

The term ‘subtle body’ is used to give a map to the patterns and processes of the subtle energy that flows through the body and is referred to as *kāyasaṅkhāra*, ‘bodily formation,’ or ‘bodily activation’. Other traditions recognize it in terms of chakras and meridians.

*Kāyasaṅkhāra* is the vitality of the body, and it’s sensitive to bodily reflexes as well as to the heart-energy that responds to feeling: emotion. We can notice how it lights up in predictable ways according to different signals: threat will probably tighten your belly and shoulders and send power energy to your limbs. Love and joy will most likely flush your face. When activated, these vitality reflexes forms a network, a ‘formation’. Through this, the body takes on a hard or soft, closed or open form. At rest state it’s the energy-pattern of breathing; this subtle body is not of the senses, yet it’s dynamically alive.

Except that it’s not always like this: it gets cramped, numbed and closed down. Imbalance in the subtle body isn’t unusual: it get hyperactive

and prevent us from sleeping at night. We can blame it all on the mind, and certainly both *manas* and *citta* have to accept responsibility, but they can only set up the conditions for the *kāyasāṅkhāra* to come into balance. Mindfulness of the subtle body shows them how to do that. Otherwise, a lot of the time, our ideas and imbalanced intentions are part of the problem.

Very fundamentally, a dynamic process that moves energy, and is attuned to affect and response, needs to have a ‘discharge, return to rest state’ phase in its cycle. To say it in another way: when most of your energy is about doing, you need to have an undoing. The simplest way of bringing this about is to acknowledge the shape your subtle body is in (all head, and no feet; or, cramped in the shoulders; or, buzzing and scattered; or, like a hard case around your torso) and while mindful of that, widen and extend your attention to cover your entire body. This will create a wider container for your energy. When it is gathered by the rhythmic processes of walking to and fro, breathing in and out, or chanting, this energy will gradually fill your body. Then as the *kāyasāṅkhāra* regains its wholeness, it naturally discharges and refreshes itself.

Yes, but there is the mind – and the heart. You might have guessed how the imbalances in the subtle body happen: high-pressure work, a history of insecurity and performance drives, addictive passion,

an absence of welcome. And either by oneself or others, these are psychologically induced. In terms of the language structures I'm using, induced perceptions and activations such as these stir and press the *citta* into craving to succeed, gain or be approved of. We learn to enter a race that no-one can win: the race to perfection; the quest for security where it can't be found; the aim to be a constantly loved and flawless self. These drives are called 'distortions' (*vipallasa*) – they direct our minds to distort our hearts. The heart is then on an impossible quest, it gets unbalanced, and the vitality of the subtle body pays the price.

The nature of *sāṅkhārā* is that they form patterns. That is, they form and store habits; they 'remember'. Some patterns are unpleasant and even worse, damaging. What is the difference? Say you're threatened: you experience fear, the energy runs through you and your body tightens up – but you find a way to get grounded, keep your cool and face the threat until it leaves. You're upset, that was unpleasant – but you calm down. Another option: you run away, get safe, and the threatening force passes. You feel confident again and return to balance. But, if you experience threat, and you can't stand your ground, run away, or get help, because the threat is the person who lives with you and is bigger and smarter – you stay in fear mode. If this state of affairs persists, your intentions and actions will adopt patterns

of fear and anxiety – even when the current external situation is not threatening. Your *citta* has been shaped by fear, and it will project that inner pattern onto your external circumstances. That’s damage. And external circumstances can’t help you to get out of that pattern. Only internal change can.

Internally, *kāyasaṅkhāra* and *cittasaṅkhāra* share the same subtle body’s response network. So, if the heart hasn’t been able to come up with a suitable response, the trigger (say fear) is frozen into a pattern in the subtle body. The network might go numb when a perception evokes comparison and therefore potential blame. Then we don’t feel anything, but keep acting in a numb way. In such a case, one needs to find and listen to the subtle body. When you notice stress or imbalance in that felt territory, bring awareness to that, widen and introduce the query: ‘*What does this need?*’ Carefully cultivated, this invites the *kāyasaṅkhāra* into an open space, that of unpressurized inquiry. The openness, rather than any answer, allows the heart to open – and as the *citta* regains feeling, the pattern begins to release.

Such a process affects your sense of self – which is based on the patterns of *saṅkhārā*. So it can feel disorienting. However if we take the time to walk ourselves day after day back to balance and wholeness, the beauty and vitality of the heart is restored. How long does it take? Well, do you have anything better to do?

## SIDETRACK

### SAMIRA WALKS HEARTFUL



Samira didn't like her garden path. She wanted to practise some of the walking meditation that she'd learnt about at the daylong last weekend. But whereas at the Jivita Center she'd been able to find a good straight path of twenty-five paces, at home, her garden path was only fifteen and had a bend in it. It was difficult to see how she could get into a precise and unbroken state of mindfulness on that.

Mind you, the day at Jivita had also had its difficulties. She was used to adding a period of quiet sitting after her evening yoga session, but walking was a new thing. It seemed complicated – how was she supposed to synchronize focusing on the sensations in her feet with her hips, shoulders and whatever her spine was doing? And what to do with her hands? When she asked the teacher, he gave her a quizzical look and said: *'Just walk like you're happy. You know – heartfelt.'*

*Happy!* What had mindfulness to do with being happy? The daylong was called 'Clarity and Calm' – and to her that meant a clear focus and an unwavering attention. But on what? Not that it was

possible to be happy at the retreat anyway: there was an old guy who slouched along, head down, hands in his pockets – oblivious to the fact that he was transecting her walking path – or maybe it was on purpose! Then there was the girl wearing a hideous orange tee-shirt that clashed with her bright blue pants, and who kept strolling by mumbling some kind of mantra. How was one supposed to be mindful when surrounded by weird people?

At least her garden path offered some solitude. So she started, counting her footsteps in a measured stride. At step eleven she had to swing with the bend, and that brought a nasty patch of weeds into her field of vision. So she inclined her head down, got to the end of the path, turned – and felt a tug on her sweater. A straggling shoot of the rose bush had snagged her. Making a note to snip that later, Samira continued to pace up and down, although the bend and turn broke the regularity of her stride.

Losing the momentum of her walking, she began to feel uncomfortable... and suddenly felt a compulsive need to snip that bush and pull out those weeds – right now...! A ripple of acute agitation rushed up from her belly... tightened her throat, snatched her breath ... and a wave of sorrow broke over her.



It was Leah! Leah, her sister. Their mother had phoned her to pass on the message that Leah didn't want to see her this week; she was quite weak from the radiation treatment and needed to rest. Samira had phoned Leah immediately, and her elder sister, true to form, had been more direct. *'Sam, I don't need five alternative remedies, I'm OK with what I've got. I don't need to study a website. I don't need to learn some breathing technique to improve my oxygen intake. I'm not interested in developing a positive attitude towards my body and visualizing it chomping cancer cells. And please keep your diet to yourself. I just need to operate at my pace in my way.'*

Oh Leah! Didn't she know how much Samira loved her tough bright sister? With tears in her eyes, Samira felt the rose bush tugging at her sleeve again. One of the blooms was withering away, a small bud was beginning to open. *'My pace, my way'*: Leah's words rang through her as she felt a huge involuntary out-breath release her belly and chest. Gently unhooking the thorn, she let her feet and legs carry her, tears running down her face, in a meandering loop that strayed over the grass to connect both ends of her path in a long figure of eight. Yes, all she could do was hold Leah in her heart and let it overflow. So here it was: the neighbours' dog was yapping, the weeds were bobbing their heads, the compost was stinking – and somewhere Leah was pushing through. And Samira was walking, face wet with tears, not that happy – but heartfelt.

*On through the storms*



For the onwards journey in an authentic life, the territory that we need to cross is that of our body and mind. We set out by experiencing the body in the here and now, in order to tether the wandering abstractions of the mind — and that allows a deepening into awareness and a steadying of the nervous energies that activate us. By bringing bodily and mental energies around the experience of a flowing balance, it is possible to touch into a place that is open, alive but not associated with sense-contact, thought or emotion. This place of presence is worth hiking a long way for. It is the place where the tides of pressure and aimless vacuity, of overwhelm and stagnation, don't go. All your practice so far has been about accessing this sensitive stillness in the midst of circumstance. You can't get there by maps, you have to follow your nose. Or rather, to tune in to the intelligence of awareness that takes this centre as its home base.

The strange consequence of this is, that as your awareness deepens and settles, you enter a challenging stretch of the hike, but the most rewarding. Let's take this slowly.

What arises in terms of the process of deepening are storms that form out of the mental mist. They begin with preoccupations that stir you. There are pet peeves (there's always something that's not right), worries (there's always something that is problematic), things you have to do (and yes, there's always plenty of that), people you have

issues with (oh yes, there are those too!). Then there are aspects of yourself that you're not happy with – including how you keep getting stuck on these same trains to nowhere time and time again. ...You may even conclude that of all the people in the world, you are the most hopeless, frustrating, and demanding one to live with. This is mesmerizing stuff ... it all seems real enough – but ask yourself: *'Why is all this breaking out now? After all, I'm just walking on a path, no-one's bothering me, I've set aside half an hour for some peace and quiet. ...'* Well, the fact is that you're on track for clearing out afflictive potentials that reside in your mind and energy system. This is a path of purification, and now you've entered the territory of the hindrances; a potential that crops up in daily life but generally gets buried under circumstances, or slid over by distractions. However, here, now, there's the possibility for transformation. Because if you can walk through this with whole body and heart, you'll be a different person, more deeply at ease with yourself.

The method of clearing the hindrances is to step out of their narrative and examine their energy and mood. The first stirring may well be one of getting bored and dull: *'Same old thing, not interested.'* As this takes shape, restlessness arises: *'I can't settle into walking up and down. There's too much on my mind.'* There might be a tinge of irritation, then some doubt gusts in. Doubt about the practice: *'What's the point of doing*

*this anyway?’* Doubt yourself: *‘I can’t do it.’* A search for a map and a highway: *‘What’s the method that will shut down these nagging thoughts and get me to emptiness?’* Then, right on cue, lightning bolts of ill-will flash down. *‘I’m fed up with this. I’m annoyed with the way so-and-so relates to me, but I feel so stupid getting caught up in all this.’* Then the fog of sense-desire closes in with its glowing auras: *‘Some fun music, a movie, a date with so-and-so – that would hit the spot.’* Suddenly even a walk in the park with an ice-cream feels like the peak of ecstasy that awaits you – as soon as you get off this walking meditation path.

OK, if that’s what you need ... but first why not take a few more paces? A few more minutes won’t hurt. .... Then, maybe, a sunbeam of realization breaks through: *‘I’ve already done all that, and it didn’t get me anywhere useful.’*

Don’t close down. Just linger in that sunbeam of acknowledgement, opening your awareness towards your body, externally and internally. You may recognize some pressure zones. Maybe your energy is now packed in your head. Or gripping your chest. Or palpating your heart. Or causing your hands to tighten. Either that or your shoulders are hunching over. Somewhere in your body, the stress is speaking. Acknowledge those places and, spreading awareness over them, give

attention to the sense of movement as you walk, and the touch of one footstep followed by another. As your awareness settles into the flow, let it softly and steadily widen to cover your entire body externally, down to your feet. Notice: *'No ill-will in my feet.'* *'No worry in my knees.'* Don't forget to include the back of your head, neck and down your back. Then you can regain the spine, relax the belly and open into the fullness of walking. The vitality of walking will help to alleviate dull sleepy states, while the comfortable rhythm can soothe other inflamed hindrances.

As all this helps the inner body to open, you realize that all that pressure and storming has arisen from knots and tangles in your energy system. It all seems so personal – but when you investigate these energies and put aside the images and words, you realize that they are impersonal and elemental. Fiery or blurred or blustery or hard – everyone gets these. Then, just as you would smooth out a crumpled sheet or massage a tight muscle, you can clear your embodied mind by steadily sweeping your awareness from the tangles to include your entire body. In this way, you discharge the energy that the hindrances are knots of.

The list of five hindrances may at times seem too short, but if you examine the stresses and distortions in your energy system, you'll trace the following essential qualities.

**Sense-desire:** There's the desire to own, absorb or be gratified by sense-contact. This includes the attempt and concern to be physically desirable. Reflect on the stress of that. Then untangle the energy, and as it rests back in your inner body, you'll feel contented and warm.

**Ill-will:** You experience irritation towards others or to yourself. There's aversion towards the condition of one's body or mind, and consequent resistance and forcefulness. Imagining that others look down on you, there is mistrust and fear of being rejected; an assumption that one isn't welcome. Consider: '*Who is the averse one? Who is judging me?*' Look at the face of the aversive heart and relax it. This will take you back into your body, and your heart will widen with compassion.

**Dullness/sloth-torpor:** You feel sleepy or unwilling to make an effort. Vitality is low or blocked. Feel what's happening in your skin, then move your attention from your skin to your spine as you walk. Walk tall. As you get through dullness, you'll experience restful embodied stability.

**Restlessness and worry:** The mind darts from this to that, endlessly making plans. Its basis is insecurity. Steady your awareness in the body, externally and internally. You'll feel grounded and spacious.

**Doubt/loss of confidence:** Attention goes to thoughts that are attempting to create clarity and certainty. It constructs ideas that offer no resolution of the need to have an idea ... except to have

another idea. Take one step at a time; just this. An attentive and listening heart will open.

Avoid judging yourself by the presence of these hindrances. If you keep fashioning ill-will towards another, you create an enemy; if you fashion it towards yourself, the result is worse – because you can't get away from yourself. And it gets so you can't see things any other way. If you keep mentally fondling objects of sense-desire, your mind gets obsessed: this is the way to addiction. It's the same with the other hindrances. With dullness, the tendency to retreat from making decisive choices diminishes responsiveness: you lose initiative. Restlessness and doubt keep you busy chasing the next distraction. All these hindrances have an effect on your energy body and mental disposition. If you refer to the subtle body, you can feel the knots and distortions that the hindrances create: face distorted, hands clenching, heart on fire. This will give you the message that your thinking mind blots out, the message of kamma: every sustained activation has an effect. In meditation we can witness how the action and even the sustained interest of the mind leaves results in the psycho-somatic system that is the foundation of our life.

These results can cramp and twist you. But there are also the bright results of clarity, goodwill and resolve. And there are those results that go further. They transform who you sense yourself as being.

Because ... whenever you release a hindrance, there's the clear and effortless entry into free, cool presence. Linger in this, take a mental photograph of that state: your subtle body feels upright, spacious and grounded; and your awareness is poised and gently vibrant. This is your undistorted, living form. Refer to this as you move through life and you'll increasingly relinquish any negative potential.

## FOOTPRINTS

**1** WALKING SUPPORTS THE CLEARING OF HINDRANCES BY BRINGING THE MOBILE BODY INTO AWARENESS. THIS HELPS TO CURTAIL FIXATION ON HINDERING THEMES AND ENERGIES. KEEP THE WALKING BRIGHT AND FRESH TO CURTAIL ROBOTIC WALKING - AND THE MIND'S SLIDE INTO BOREDOM.

**2** LET YOUR FEET FULLY FLEX AS YOU WALK. AS THE BACK LEG BEGINS TO PUSH THE MOVEMENT OF WALKING, ITS FOOT FLEXES FROM THE SOLE TO THE BALL OF THE FOOT ONTO THE TOES - WHICH ADD THEIR PUSH TO LIFT THE FOOT. THERE IS A SPRINGINESS TO THE MOVEMENT THAT HELPS TO KEEP THE ENERGY BRIGHT. THIS DOES NOT INVOLVE ANY EXAGGERATED MOVEMENT, OR SLOWING DOWN, JUST A FULLER AWARENESS OF THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE UNDERSIDE OF EACH FOOT WITH THE GROUND.

**3** DROP YOUR AWARENESS TO YOUR BELLY, CENTRE YOURSELF THERE. YOU'RE THEN RIGHT AT THE HUB OF THE WALKING, WHERE THE NERVOUS SYSTEM IN THE ABDOMEN - THE ONE THAT SENSES INSECURITY - CAN GET GENTLY MASSAGED BY THE TURNING WAIST.

**4** THINGS ARISE AND PASS AT THEIR OWN RATE, NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR WISHES AND RESISTANCES. YOU HAVE TO ALLOW THINGS TO ARISE BEFORE THEY CAN PASS. OTHERWISE HINDRANCES GET BURIED, ADOPT WEIRD ENERGIES AND IMAGES, AND THE HEART AND INNER BODY LOSE CAPACITY.



## COMPASS POINTS

### CAUSE AND EFFECT

The term ‘kamma’ refers to the process of cause and effect. The causal aspect is called ‘new kamma’ and the resultant effect is called ‘old kamma’ (*vipāka*).

‘New kamma’ refers to the choices that we act upon now. It means that every decisive action that is carried out by means of body, speech/ thought and mental fixation has its results – for our welfare or not. Consequently the results are laid down in the heart – where they form habits and mental dispositions – and in the reflexes of the body's energy system. This is the ‘old kamma’ of habits, memories, attitudes and reflexes, and it carries the potential for fresh kamma. To put it simply, we will tend to act in terms of our acquired habits and learned behaviour. The actual launch of that potential into fresh kamma is intention (*cetanā*) – the shaping of a response to whatever impacts awareness. It is a leader in the *saṅkhāra* process. However, ‘intention’ is not necessarily a well-considered choice; it’s the ‘do it’ energy that

arises in the heart. It may be a blurred reaction, a choice made under pressure, or a social obligation. The liberating point is that old kamma merely establishes the *potential* for action; we can notice it and choose to act differently.

This point is given a deeper significance by the fact that intention is a *sankhāra*, and so it establishes patterns for our responses. These patterns become psychologies and embodied reflexes that form us. We are moulded by them, become them, and give our life's energy to perpetuating them.

This view of kamma encourages us to make conscious choices rather than glide on automatic; to take responsibility for our actions rather than follow a social trend; and to investigate our attitudes, responses and reactions. Of course what to do in any situation is not always clear, but the mind will default to habit and established norms, so the most generally useful choice to make is to get clear about one's mind, what motivates it and what thoughts or emotional responses are worth following. In this respect, although action/kamma can be carried out by the body, by speech and even by mental fixation and bias, the roots of it are in the heart. In order to access those roots, we tune in to the heart and to the energy of intention as it is felt in the body. Mindfully attuned to these, we can contemplate how intentions and activations based on goodwill, conscience and concern, and empathy

give rise to reliable and benevolent states – such as ease, openness and alertness: good kamma. On the other hand, worry, resentment, greed and aversion lead to muddy or inflamed states of tension, agitation and defensiveness. These don't feel good, because they're not good: that's bad kamma.

It therefore becomes important for one's mindfulness to handle and get perspective on these kamma-forming patterns. This is made possible through bringing awareness into a place where energy is in balance, willpower ceases and intention stops. This may occur in walking when you allow the body to flow along – so that thinking quiets down and awareness settles into its open centre. From here you can review the causes and conditions of kamma, learn how to engage, and explore how letting go happens – so that habitual patterns don't take form.

## SIDETRACK

### KEEPING A COOL HEAD



It was day five of the ten-day retreat; the mid-afternoon walking period to be more precise. Or the realm of ‘sloth-torpor’ as far as Katryn was concerned. Her attention struggled, sank and flailed around trying to find something firm to hold onto as a fog of low energy settled over her. ...It was all so—oooo dreary. She even tried imagining having a giant sloth wrapped around her as a way to bring some energy into the mind. But the glue of her mind couldn’t even stick that together. ...Why bother?

She had never liked walking meditation that much. Plodding to and fro, occasionally glimpsing her fellow inmates, heads down, shoulders hunched, doing the same – a jail sentence. Over the twelve retreats she’d done in the last eight years, Katryn had tried it from time to time, but often sneaked off to do some Tai Ch’i – which felt like a better way to spend an hour. But since she was about to become a

nun, she reckoned that she had better get used to discipline and to not doing what she wanted ... even though Ajahn Paññadharā had allowed people to find what worked for them.

She had also instructed them to be aware of the entire body as they walked, and to walk with a sense of balance rather than focus on the footsteps alone. *'Back - OK. Shoulders - stiff; neck too. How can I get out of this?'* Katryn started pacing a little faster, putting more flex into her waist and allowing her arms to swing free. After a while, that felt a bit better, but all this trying...! And *urgh!* Now a sharp breeze was chewing her neck and newly-shaved scalp. But at least the aversion gave her something to work with.

*'I am aware of aversion. My awareness notices ill-will. My awareness is not the ill-will.'* She experienced a sliver of detachment as she witnessed the tangles and clutches of aversion. That glimpse of openness! It was what she was going forth for. ...Mysterious and quiet, it was the only thing she'd found in thirty years that was truly reliable - and, at times, really wonderful. ...

Then the breeze dropped, and the dull state of mind began creeping back. She really hated that... so went back to a more vigorous stride... up and down. And then she realized - aversion to dullness! Right *there* was the heavy fog ... and *here* was awareness. ... Her pace slowed down. *There* was the sense of the skin wrapped around her face like a thick



damp rag ... and the resistance to it. And *here*, somewhere, she was relaxing the ill-will. *'This is just low vitality,'* she thought. *'It's just the way energy goes. Stop fighting.'*

Something opened to and met that thick damp rag. Awareness wasn't dreary. *'Awareness is just what it always is.'* Outbreath. She didn't feel much more lively, but there was a calm, cool presence in the midst of that. It began to trickle down her back as she walked ... and slowly the tightness in her neck began to ease up. This was a different body; looser in some sense. ... Its form was not so hard-edged; there was more space inside, and the feet seemed to be even enjoying the earth. ... A subtle ease washed over her. ... *'Don't try too hard. ...'*

*Gon-n-ng!!* Time! People were starting to move back to the meditation hall for the next sitting ... an hour had passed. Katryn stood there for a while, sensing her changes, quietly aware and unhurried.

A scratchy sensation arose at the edge of her awareness – it was her head. A cool wind was scraping it. *'Sharpening its claws,'* she thought. *'Scalp massage ...'* Fingers tucked into the woolly hat in her pocket, she followed the others back to the hall.

# Noble Path



As you establish mindfulness in the walking body and fill it with awareness, you'll have less need to concern yourself with the physical details. Instead you'll be able to abide in qualities such as suppleness, fluidity, vitality and balance; qualities that go straight to the heart. Here they undermine the program of unawakened walking with its top-heavy, numb-footed drive; and in doing so, release the corresponding stress and constriction from the heart. That bright heart can then guide you on the walk through your life.

In embodied practice, we're aiming to release the stress that the pressures of time, destination, and a need to get ahead condition into the heart. We can notice how these compress and numb the subtle body, so that its wholeness gets broken into an overcharged head riding on a mechanical body. Attention is then on what is in front of the body (or actually to the fore of the mind) and to the face; awareness is confined to what occurs within that form.

Other than having a physically de-vitalizing effect, this also puts stressful psychological programs in charge of our life. The result is a lessened capacity for warm-heartedness and flexibility, and an increased tendency for irritability and compulsive, automatic behaviour. These psychological programs don't only arise while walking, but this movement in particular brings up the felt sense of

what we move through, and how: our environment. Although this environment seems external, it is psychologically tinted. And it can be cleared and reset by walking with full balanced presence.

You'll notice that when there is the sense of having to push through, ward off or grab at something in an unsympathetic environment, stressful programs arise. For example, in dense traffic, there are 'drive forward' programs that can escalate to aggression if thwarted. In shared spaces, defence programs may switch on to hold our own against others. They make us hard and spiky. As do the control programs that react to signals of insecurity. There are also destination/gratification programs – to get to that sweet spot and hang on to it in order to compensate for the depletion and lack of warmth in the world in general. And there are distraction or numbing programs to blot out the discord created by the others.

These psychologically-tinted environments and programs act as a foundation for attitudes about ourself and the world around us, attitudes that give rise to afflictive emotions and hyperactive thinking. This is the territory of 'acquisitions' (*upadhi*), or stuck programs. Some of these reflex strategies get established through unresolved grief, shock or trauma. So, although we may not have created these programs by choice but out of a necessity to deal with what has happened to us, following them has the kammic effect of

shaping us in ways that determine our present and future. To put it bluntly, if you keep running the stuck programs, they run you.

These programs are reflexes that prevent the heart from meeting aspects of our relationships with others that have been internalized and become personal history. But in so doing, they also obstruct a clearing of the past. The result is that the heart, rather like a broken arm in a sling, loses flexibility, vitality and joy. Of course, we can't fix the past ... but now the programs of defence, distraction and denial can be undone.

Although psychological programs affect the subtle body and become aspects of 'me', the body has its own learning program. It's open to input, so it learns how to balance, walk, swim, dance, skate, do headstands, and give birth. ...It shivers when it's cold; and when the heart feels social embarrassment, or the pressure of work, it tenses up. In brief, it picks up signals from its inner and outer environment. And, just as negative programs arise when we move through our psychologically closed environment, there's the possibility of walking out of that into the non-intrusive external environment and the 'no pressure' inner environment of meditation. Through settling into this, there can be an arrival into the open territory of unconstricted awareness. You just have to undo the contracted form

of your inner body and return to the natural state that supports its learning and skill.

You can't resolve a program by pushing or clamping down on it, but, by restoring the natural intelligence of the subtle body, its reflexes can be cleared. Any embodied meditation will support this, but in walking, the resetting process is given support by the dynamics of balance and flow. This transmits groundedness, ease and bright vitality to the heart that is immersed in it.

The beauty of the heart is that if it's not confused, pressurized or absent, its natural intelligence finds skilful ways of meeting the ups and downs of life. If this were not the case, there would be no chance for authentic, realizable peace and awakening. However, because the heart does get infected and depleted by confused aims, passions and short-term attention, and because it acts upon them and acquires damaging habits, the return to this natural state takes patient effort. It's the kind of effort that is needed to walk with no intention other than to stay balanced and fill the body with awareness; but as you do this, there can be a relinquishment of out-of-date reflexes and defective programs.

So walk in a way that is natural to the body. Let the body walk free from fixed attitudes (as in the 'get there', 'get concentrated' disposition),

imbalance (walking led by the eyes and head rather than the turning spine and the legs), and mental preoccupation. Some teachers recommend that, as mindfulness is established, we trust the natural intelligence of awareness to clear hindrances and programs. Then, just as when a bucket of muddy water is settled on steady ground, the mud will sink to the bottom to leave clean water, so, a mind that rests on stable ground will discard its confused habits.

In this analogy, attention is the bucket, intention places it on the ground and holds it steady, and awareness is the water. But for awareness to get clear of the mud it has to stay in the bucket and clearly know water is water and mud is mud. It all sounds natural enough. ...

However there is an agitator lurking in all this: the sense of 'me' and 'mine' with its history and preferences. This does get the bucket rocking and leaking. True enough, this psycho-somatic territory feels like me: the hindrances and stuck attitudes all feel like me; and because they shape my awareness, capture my attention and enlist my intentions to follow or fight them, there's a relative truth in that. However you can come out of that 'me' and 'mine'. When you walk, and you feel your body moving and opening and easing, that rhythm and supple flow can break through the holding on, tension

and agitation of personal history. You don't need an identity, a past or a future, to walk.

So you learn to refer, not to your attitudes and wishes, but to embodied awareness. Who, or better, how, is that? Is it supple and open? Observe how the sense of 'me' and 'mine' is accompanied by contraction of awareness, a fixation of attention and agitated intentions. Then, go fully into the body, and steadying through that, acknowledge that awareness can open and: *'I can be aware of my agitation and resistance, even listen to it and study it ... so, although it may be happening to me, it can't be me.'*

Whenever we accomplish that shift, we bring awareness into the mind. In other words, we're not denying or affirming any point of view, just noting it in a way that is aligned to receptivity rather than any preceding view or expectation. This discernment, the knowing that embodiment has brought to the fore, isn't me or created by me, it's steady and free from bias. Ongoing practice is then about bringing one's personal disposition, reactions and what they rest on into this light. And as discernment reviews the historical self with its memories and attitudes, it can inquire: *'How useful is this? Where does this take me?'* In this inquiry, the rule is: if you don't need it, if it doesn't make a useful contribution, withdraw energy and attention from it. Run this line of inquiry over the need to narrate, justify, prove, improve, and

criticize – and even the urge to map what stage you’re at. What you’re left with is increasingly steady ground.

This open territory is not measured in worldly terms of getting ahead, or holding on – and certainly isn’t arrived at through cutting corners. In fact the aim is to get to the end of the world with its measures of gain and loss, success and failure. Pause when any of these start to form; return to the present when you feel a map unfold or a destination arise – and investigate these dispositions with the aim of understanding their effect. Certainly intention is useful; we wish to change for the better. But open the attitude. Maybe the change for the better would be to relax into embodiment, to take the pressure off your ‘doing’ energy, and cultivate the receptive. Energy and motivation are still there, but instead of darting forward like an arrow, that shift of intention opens your awareness into a circle that covers what arises – and that changes your inner shape. This felt abiding place gets broader, and you can see things more clearly. You walk out of history and become conscious that deep change is possible. In fact, in the natural state, it’s inevitable.

This open territory has no maps, and is not moved out of. And it doesn’t need some self to own it.

## FOOTPRINTS

**1** STABLE INNER GROUND IS FOUND BY WALKING AS IF THE EXTERNAL GROUND IS RECEPTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE (YOU MAY NOT HAVE REALIZED IT, BUT IT IS). THE INTENTION IS TO BE RECEPTIVE TO HOW IT CARRIES YOUR WEIGHT AND ACTS AS THE SPRINGBOARD FOR YOUR MOVEMENT.

**2** BEARING IN MIND THAT THE MOVEMENT OF WALKING BEGINS IN THE LOWER BACK, ADJUST YOUR PERCEPTION OF WALKING TO SUIT. YOUR BACK IS THE DRIVER; YOUR FRONT IS QUIET, OPEN AND RECEPTIVE. YOU'RE NOT WALKING TOWARDS A POINT, YOU'RE WALKING AWAY FROM A RESIDUE. THE SPACE IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF YOU IS ALWAYS OPENING.

**3** LET AWARENESS SPREAD WIDTHWAYS, ACROSS YOUR SHOULDERS AND HIPS AS YOU WALK. THERE'S NO CHANGE IN TERMS OF MOVEMENT, JUST AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR AWARENESS TO FULLY FILL THE FORM - AND EXTEND BEYOND INTO THE SPACE AROUND YOU.

**4** THE SIGNS OF AN ACQUIRED PROGRAM OR UNDERLYING TENDENCY ARE: A) YOUR AWARENESS NUMBS OUT FOR A MOMENT OR TWO; B) YOUR MIND SUDDENLY LEAPS AND GETS ACTIVE - YOU THINK OF ALL KINDS OF THINGS TO DO; C) YOU EXPERIENCE A CONSTRICTION IN YOUR INTERNAL

BODY; D) POWERFUL EMOTIONS SUDDENLY FLOOD YOUR HEART, OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY HIGH-SPEED THINKING AND NARRATIVES. WHEN ANY OF THESE OCCUR, AND YOU BRING AWARENESS TO THEM, THERE MAY BE DISORIENTATION - YOU FEEL UNBALANCED. FIND YOUR BODY, EXTERNALLY AND INTERNALLY, WIDEN YOUR AWARENESS OVER ALL THAT AND STEADY THE HEART. WHEN THERE IS A PAUSE IN THE FLOOD, MOVE INTO THAT. YOU DON'T NEED TO EXPLAIN ANYTHING RIGHT NOW. JUST LET YOUR AWARENESS ADJUST TO THE OPEN STATE.



## COMPASS POINTS

### PROGRAMS, TENDENCIES AND SKILFUL QUALITIES

With ‘programs’ I am referring to *sañkhārā* again, but at a psychological level, where the thinking mind contributes to the emotional movements of *cittasañkhāra* to formulate strategies in response to the inner environment. This is *vacīsañkhāra*, the conceptual energy that we employ to plan our days, assess other people and what we should be in a range of circumstances. It creates maps. It carries the emotional charge of the *citta* – but that isn’t always evident, as this charge is obscured by views and opinions as to how things should be and what is normal and the right thing to do. It may murmur that ‘*they expect me to be ...*’ without being clear who ‘they’ are and whether their opinions are valid. It may state ‘*it needs me to do this*’ without knowing where ‘it’ is. In other words, these programs obscure the agent of our actions – compulsive programs based on fear/insecurity. This obscuration is called ‘ignorance’, *avijja*. Clarity (*vijja*) is needed.

*Avijja* is the basis of underlying dispositions called ‘tendencies’ (*anusaya*). Among ones you’d expect, such as the tendency to greed and to ill-

will, are such tendencies as the disposition towards ‘becoming’ (*bhava*), or building a self-image; and tendencies towards views. As these well up into circumstantial life, they form outflows (*āsavā*) that flood our minds. Ever heard the inner voice proclaim that ‘*I’m right*’– or the even more insidious one that ‘*I’m always wrong?*’ Who is that? Is walking right or wrong?

As views so often form our foundation for life – views about politics, aesthetics, customs, religion – they frame our conversation, friendships and even our identity. They are also the first of these tendencies that can be relinquished – through recognizing that views are always sketches of a reality that is fluid and subjectively felt. Views may be handy at times for making approximate decisions, but basically, they’re attempts to steer a river. So the foundation for Dhamma practice is Right View, that is, the perspective on whether mind-states, attitudes, actions and views flow towards wholesome results or not. This view encourages you to trace the source of your subjective world in the shifts, drives and fog of the heart.

Through contemplative practice such discernment establishes clarity. And this develops into the understanding that leads to the end of stress: that all manifest experiences are subject to change (*anicca*), to being incomplete (*dukkha*), and are not controlled or belonging to a self (*anattā*). Such a view leaves reality open and free.

Whereas tendencies and acquired programs go against this view, walking is especially easy to see in terms of these characteristics. It's always changing – otherwise there is no walking. It's always non-arriving – once you arrive, you stop walking – and pretty soon, you move on. As for 'not-self': the mechanics of walking aren't based on your identity – only a living body with functioning legs and energy can walk. (And that can change.)

In order to establish clarity, programs can be opened up by dhamma-inquiry. For example, to look into agency with the inquiry 'Who?' 'Why?' is a useful probe to send into a '*It should be like this.*' And '*How does this feel in my body?*' is universally applicable. They reveal the emotional habit that powers our programs. Through managing that, we can withdraw energy from it, or get it in perspective.

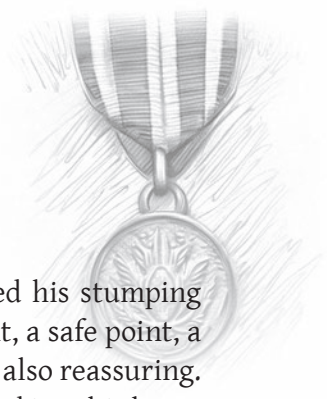
Don't forget that although the offspring of ignorance are many and vigorous, the *citta* has extensive beneficial qualities, qualities that are inherent but can be developed to support clarity and dispel ignorance. Any book on Buddhist practice will inform you of 'support faculties' 'paths to success' and 'enlightenment factors'. Any correct meditation will encourage mindfulness, goodwill and wisdom. But here I would briefly mention qualities that walking in particular brings forth. **Resolve** (*adhiṭṭhāna*)– walking keeps on going, so you can bring persistence into your practice. **Energy** (*virīya*) is part of that, and in walking you get the

support of the steady vitality of the engaged body. Finally: **dhamma-inquiry** (*dhammavicaya*) – your attention and awareness are encouraged to move through the entire body as it moves. So you get less stuck in states, and can explore how they change.

What you'll move towards is a blend of balance and supple strength. That then becomes a guiding sign for your ongoing sitting meditation – and your life.

## SIDETRACK

### WALKING LIKE THIS



*'It's like this now ... it's like this now. ...'* The memo fitted his stumping pace – left foot, right foot – and gave his mind a point, a safe point, a moment at a time. The jab of pain in his right leg was also reassuring. It was *here*, manageable, in reliable flickers that reached into his lower back. After he came out of military hospital, they'd told him that he'd never get the flexibility back in his right side, and that he'd always have a limp ... but at least he had a leg. The left leg and side did most of the work. Twelve paces up and down the corridor.

The rest of the meditation group were sitting in the room in the centre that they rented on a weekly basis. They were good people, and he enjoyed the company. Easy and accepting, they knew how to listen. He had a chair by the door, where he'd listen to the recorded talks that they played. That's how he'd picked up his meditation phrase. Simple, it brought him back to the immediate present, and, as he never felt that comfortable being in the room when it quietened down and the lights went dim, he took it with him to the corridor outside.

Even then, it wasn't easy at first to walk for long in the silence, unaware of what was behind him. But the reminder that the group

was in the adjacent room, the steadily repeated phrase, and the uneven gait – they all gave his mind a grounding. Sometimes it would sink into the rhythm, then jump out to check the walls on either side of him. ‘*All clear,*’ he’d think. ‘*It’s ... like ... this ... now.*’

More recently in those dips into the shuffling rhythm, a memory would rise up ... of swimming when he was a boy. He was a dreamy kid in those days, playing at being a strange water-creature. To be held by the soft strength of the river as it opened around him – what that was like ... If he lingered on it, the memory helped his chest to open and his shoulders to relax. It could also be like *this* now. ‘*Like ... this ... like ... this ... like ... this.*’ When he carried that, the other memories held back and the space felt different, less hard and edgy.

And if he came into his chest as it turned with the walking ... at times it was as if there was a light strapped to it, a light whose main beam probed an arc in front of him. Like the rifle he used to carry on patrol. All safe. ‘*No harm,*’ he thought. ‘*No ... harm ... be ... well ... no ... harm...*’ It felt precarious and shaky, and things were tingling inside. But he knew he wanted to keep walking. ‘*Like this ... like this ...*’





# Questions & Answers



Q I like the idea of walking meditation ... but I don't have much space. And I don't have much time.

A I appreciate that, in city life, it's not easy to find a path you can do meditation on without other people intruding or thinking you're crazy. And homes are constricted. But when I was in Thailand, I walked inside my small hut (on account of mosquitoes) and that measured six or seven paces, wall to wall. Nowadays, I sometimes use a woodland path near where I live. It's not absolutely straight, or even – but I doubt if the paths in the jungle at the time of the Buddha were utterly smooth and straight. We're humans, not trains. However, clearing unnecessary stuff out of your sight is important, as this supports a felt sense of space.

Also, when you get familiar with the body's natural way of walking, you can use that in your daily life to check the momentum of mental directives. Most of us walk a lot more than we acknowledge: two minutes to the bathroom, four minutes to the car, fifteen minutes to the station. I walk in airports when waiting for a plane. If you start walking in the right direction, then let go of 'to' and just walk, you'll find that will help you stay balanced in the present wherever you go. And if you're travelling on wheels, don't race ahead with your mind.

Even more universal is the benefit of developing ‘walker’s mind’. When you’re out hiking, the paths aren’t always straight and clear, and sometimes they disappear. The land gets swampy, there’s a rockfall, a way has been fenced off – you have to be prepared to negotiate your way in accordance with what’s happening on the ground. Sometimes you can’t get through by going straight ahead, you have to backtrack a little and go left. Sometimes you have to pause, test the ground and cautiously scramble. Life is like this. Learn to be aware of what’s around you in all respects: other people, precedents and consequences. Be prepared to wait until a harmonious and balanced way forward gets clear. Above all, avoid the mental habit of going round in circles, rehashing the same old plans and narratives.

Q What do you mean by ‘feeling’ and ‘felt sense’?

A In English, ‘feeling’ refers to what the Buddha’s language covered by three terms: *vedanā* – the quality of pleasure or displeasure, physical or mental; *saññā* – meaning, perception, my immediate take on things, as in ‘that remark felt offensive’; and *saṅkhāra*, the movement of the heart, as in ‘I feel pretty excited at the idea.’ In this colloquial presentation, I’m referring to any of these. The exact Pali translation depends on how the word ‘feeling’ is being used.

Feeling is crucial – ‘*all dhammas converge on feeling*’<sup>1</sup> was the Buddha’s remark. This is where input is registered and responded to, and its impressions mark and shape the heart with shock, grief, love, happiness, anger – and ease. So this is where body, mind and heart have to support each other by means of the pleasant feeling that comes with wholesome conduct and meditative skills.

However we may take an *idea* – like ‘mindfulness’ or ‘compassion’ – and try to apply what we *think* it means, without actually getting a feel of what’s happening in the *citta*. You have the right idea, but you aren’t necessarily applying it to the right place in an appropriate way. This is where the ‘felt sense’ is a guide. It arises where *saññā* touches the *citta*; it’s the resonance that occurs when a meaning or impression arises in the heart. Energy shifts and you ‘get it.’ If you’re mindful of that, or compassionate towards it, there will be a skilful resonance and a change for the better. With skilful states, you might get brightness or uplift, or even an image.

This is also useful when one feels stuck in unwholesome states: you ask yourself, ‘*What is the feel of this?*’ And instead of ‘confused’ or ‘irritated’, you refer to the embodied sense, not the verbal label. Hence the felt sense – which may be a sense of oppressive denseness, or of a tangle,

1. At A.10:58

or of weight. Then you float the inquiry: ‘*What does this need?*’ Put aside any verbal answer about what you should do, and you might get an embodied direct response – an image of light, or a sense of space or some other resonance.

Feeling is the quality of direct experience; we get something when we feel it. Until then, it’s just an idea. The Buddha remarked that whenever there’s a breakthrough in terms of realization, that is also felt<sup>2</sup>. You might say realization is accompanied by a feeling of relief.

Q How do I ‘drop’ my awareness to my abdomen?

A As an example of how this happens, ask someone to slowly move their hand towards your body – maybe to the shoulder or abdomen – and notice what happens. ... When their hand gets quite close, you’ll feel that part of your body light up. If you close your eyes and move your own hand towards your face, the same thing happens. Right? Your body’s awareness, or receptivity, heightens to receive that impending contact. Its awareness has moved and heightened. Now, you can do the same thing with your *citta* or heart. The way I’d put it is: Get really interested in what’s happening in, say, your forehead,

2. As in: There is effort to attain what hasn’t been attained. When that stage has been reached, there is also feeling based on that. (S.45:11)

the centre of your chest, the palms of your hands, soles of your feet ... etc. Relax these areas, and just be curious in a friendly way. Any of these areas will then come to the fore of your attention; they might even warm or tingle. In this way, you build up a focus that's sensitive.

I imagine that we'd agree that sustaining a focus is one of the necessary features of meditation ... but how you do that is important. Now we could prioritize attention: decide you're going to focus on your feet or your diaphragm or wherever, then apply yourself to that. What would be the state of your awareness then? I imagine you'd be aware of focusing and fixing your attention, with the aim to keep it on that chosen place and eventually get concentrated. That is, you'd be receptive to your ideas and intentions and efforts. Hmmm. How tuned in is that? It's all about your notions of meditation and getting a result, and very little to do with your body. And your awareness receives that attitude and motivation – it's all about doing and trying. You'd be mindful of that. How does that feel?

Now the approach that I'm recommending is to get interested and sensitive. Like you're listening. You turn an open interest towards your body, maybe an area that's easy to sense, like your hands, or to an entire mode or posture, as with walking. So how does a body walk? Get interested to feel it in its movements and shift of weight and balance. Get interested in putting other things aside for a while;

get interested in how the skin feels, and how it knows the space immediately touching it. In this way, your *citta*'s intention is led by interest. It can gently explore the sensations and energies that are happening in the body. It can extend its basic friendliness, and that makes the experience comfortable but alert.

It can only do that if your mind relaxes a little and allows awareness to take the lead. Awareness is a fundamental property of the heart, and bringing it to the fore in a comfortable but fully conscious way is a means to free the heart from agitation, despond, and passion. So in walking (as in the other postures) you extend awareness to the steady and comfortable base of the body. Mindful of that, you'll find that the vital energy of walking, or of breathing, is the most brightening and comfortable theme for your practice. As awareness settles into that, attention builds up, mindfulness strengthens and embodied energy comes to the fore. That energy is not forceful, nor is it doing anything other than maintaining living presence. Unlike the mind, it's not doing anything other than being what it is. So mental intentions and preoccupations can drop away; you don't need them. Sensations quieten down and the *citta*'s awareness collects into itself. Isn't this what is meant by *samādhi* (concentration)? An awareness that's free from hindrances and unified?

Well, I seem to have veered off topic! Or maybe it's an aspect of the ongoing one. That is: how do you bring stress and pain to an end? Where can you find the support and resources to dig out some embedded stuff and tap into joy? In what mode can you keep this practice going through the ups and downs? The beauty is that you have the potential and the resources right here. In a nutshell, there's a wisdom that naturally clarifies out of your mind as you clear the obstructions. And that discernment, that wisdom, is based on awareness. So get interested in that, and learn to move it, extend it, soften and steady it. This will be for your long-lasting welfare and benefit.

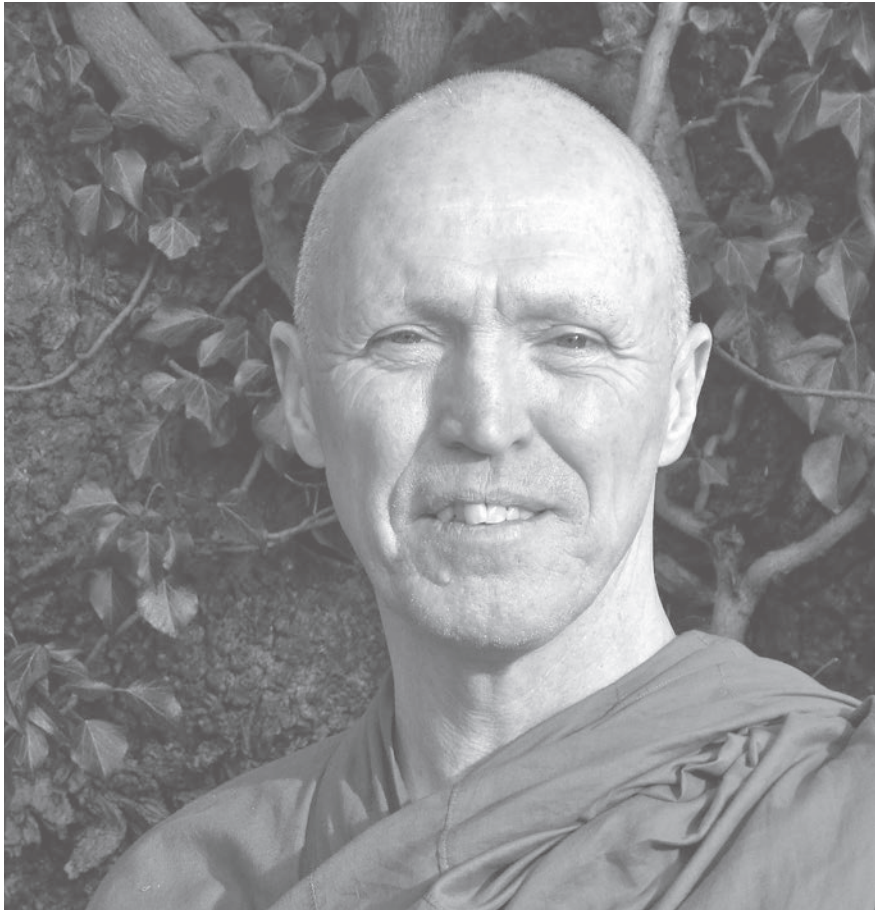
Q I'm a bit confused: is awareness in your heart, your body or your mind?

A Awareness is the receptive aspect of consciousness – *viññāna* – and in body-consciousness and mind-consciousness, it is particularly acute. These bases feel and formulate the input of sight, sound and touch (etc.) in terms of happiness and unhappiness, and ease and stress. Body wants to know whether something is a threat or a delight, preferably before physical contact occurs, and mind is set up to judge that in advance. This judgment is based on how the mind interprets or 'perceives' things. This is so important that the receptive aspect

of mind opens up to derive feelings out of what are only perceptions – and come up with responses. The deepening of receptivity allows consciousness to be ‘known’; i.e. there is awareness, *ñāna*, of what consciousness with its feelings is bringing in. Awareness is centred in the place of feeling and response – that is, ‘*citta*’ or heart.

The body also has a way of knowing. This is through the subtle energy network of the ‘inner’ body that tingles and tenses, reacts and relaxes. This knowing is experienced as presence. However *citta* does most of the day-to-day responding to all kinds of perceptions, meanings, memories and impressions. It is awareness plus. In this area, awareness can be trained – to withdraw from unwholesome responses, to move to locations in the body, to stay still and widen and so on. And the mind can notice all that, gain understanding and give suggestions to the heart as to its responses. At times, when the *citta* is at ease and steady, the mind can just stop, because no advice or comment is needed. Then the mental awareness is clear and still.

So, awareness can preside over all acts of consciousness, and also when consciousness stops. In pragmatic terms, I’d suggest you go to the quiet place in your heart.



## *Note on the author*

Ajahn Sucitto was born in London, England, in 1949 and became a bhikkhu in Thailand in 1976. He returned to Britain in 1978 and trained under Ajahn Sumedho at Cittaviveka and Amaravati Monasteries. He was abbot of Cittaviveka from 1992 until 2014, and still resides there (see: [cittaviveka.org](http://cittaviveka.org)). His website, [ajahnsucitto.org](http://ajahnsucitto.org), has links to his free-distribution books, articles, and talks, as well as news of upcoming teaching engagements.

# **A MOVING BALANCE**

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