

Deeper Dimension of Walking Meditation

In our daily life, we walk a lot. For most of us, walking is simply a practical act to move ourselves from one place to another. It becomes an automatic movement, done habitually and often unconsciously. People rarely bring conscious attention to walking, except perhaps in special contexts such as fitness training.

But in Buddhism, walking is an integral part of meditation practice. It can carry us from the mundane to the supramundane. The Buddha himself practiced walking meditation extensively and encouraged his disciples to do the same.

To inspire people to practice walking meditation, the Buddha pointed out several benefits:

1. Walking meditation supports healthy digestion.
2. It enables one to travel long distances, even into old age.
3. It cultivates energy and the strength of perseverance.
4. The samādhi (deep concentration) developed through walking meditation is often more stable and reliable than the samādhi attained through sitting meditation.

Let us explore these points more deeply to see their practical implications.

1. Support for Digestion

A common difficulty when practicing sitting meditation right after a meal is drowsiness. Instead of forcing oneself into sitting meditation with a heavy stomach, it is wiser to do walking meditation. This is beneficial not only for the quality of meditation but also for one's overall health.

2. Strength for Lifelong Practice

When we look at the Buddha's life, we see that he was truly a man of the road. Except for the annual rains retreat, he continually traveled from village to village, often covering long distances — even in his old age. He lived until eighty, and he passed away while journeying toward his homeland. Walking meditation nurtures this enduring strength.

3. Energy and Perseverance

Walking meditation may look simple, but in intensive practice it can feel demanding. At times it is boring, exhausting, or feels like an invisible wind is pushing against you. Yet when you cross your limits, it instills a powerful quality of perseverance. This energy becomes invaluable, not only in deepening meditation but also in overcoming difficulties in daily life.

4. Samādhi for Daily Living

The concentration developed in walking meditation is especially helpful for “living meditation” in daily life. Consider this simile: a tree has three parts — the roots, the trunk, and the leaves with flowers and fruit. Likewise, meditation has three parts: sitting, walking, and living. Sitting meditation is like the roots, walking meditation is the trunk, and living meditation (including working meditation) is the foliage and fruit. Each part is inseparable and mutually supportive. Walking meditation serves as the bridge between sitting and living meditation.

The Essential Point of Walking Meditation

Traditions preserve many methods of walking meditation. While their techniques differ slightly, they are all beneficial if we understand the essential principle:

Walking meditation deepens the experiential understanding of impermanence and non-self.

This is not theoretical knowledge, but direct realisation through mindfulness of walking. As our insight into impermanence and non-self deepens, we gradually free ourselves from the suffering caused by clinging and mistaken self-identity. Mindfulness developed through walking is the vehicle for this liberation.

The Role of Non-Self

The Buddha's teaching of non-self (anattā) is not a product of abstract philosophy or scientific speculation—it is empirical and experiential. In his second discourse after enlightenment, the "Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-Self," the Buddha repeatedly declared:

"This body and mind are not me, not mine, not my self."

To practice walking meditation effectively, then, mindfulness must be supported by wisdom. We should repeatedly recollect this teaching while walking, remembering that the body and mind we observe are impermanent and not truly "ours."

Many meditators think mindfulness means applying close, concentrated attention to the meditation object to see it clearly in detail. Such attentiveness indeed brings benefits—such as calmness and reduced distraction—but this is only half the point. The deeper dimension of walking meditation is awakening to the true Self beyond the body-mind identity.

The conditioned body-mind "self" should be observed objectively: arising and passing away, destined to decay. Yet behind it, the unbounded source—the origin—becomes clearer. This is what the Buddha called *yoniso manasikāra*, "right attention," which is essential for walking meditation.

A Gentle Reminder

Nevertheless, one need not force this realisation. With sincere and perpetual practice, the deeper dimensions of walking meditation naturally unfold.

With metta

Bhante Anuttara