

Walking meditation

This article is an introductory summary of the teachings of Zen Master Thích Thông Triệt on the topic, mainly based on the oral teaching of Bhikkhuni Zen Master Thích Nữ Triệt Như given for the Fundamental Meditation Course. For a comprehensive in-depth understanding, the reader is encouraged to attend the complete nine-seminar teaching program and read the writings of Master Thích Thông Triệt that are being progressively translated into English.

Origins

In the days of the Buddha, there was a person named Jivaka who was the personal physician of King Ajātasattu. When King Ajātasattu became a disciple of the Buddha, Jivaka became the physician of the Buddha and his disciples. Jivaka advised the Buddha to recommend to the monks to do more walking about in order to maintain good health.

The Buddha used to combine sitting and walking meditation. He would do some walking meditation to stretch the limbs after a sitting meditation session, and he would do some walking meditation to energize the body before commencing a sitting meditation session. This is because when we sit in meditation, blood does not circulate freely in the legs, which makes them numb. Some walking meditation after a sitting meditation session would restore the normal blood flow to the limbs. Conversely, walking meditation can calm the mind, making it less agitated, and is good preparation for a successful sitting meditation session.

Practice steps

Walking meditation is different to normal walking or brisk, sporty walking. When we practice walking meditation, we practice meditation while we walk, and therefore we do not walk fast but just at a natural, comfortable pace.

We start with the left foot, followed by the right foot. We put the heels down first, followed by the whole foot and then the toes. We walk normally, because we would be unsteady if we walked too slowly and would have difficulty keeping our mind tranquil if we walked too briskly.

We keep our gaze in front of us, and do not look around. If we look around, our mind can easily get attached to objects. For example, if we see a moving object while we walk, we may follow it with our eyes and become attached to it. We look about two meters in front of us. This will help us to not get attached to the surroundings, while still seeing the way ahead and avoiding any obstacles.

When we practice walking meditation, we have a theme: “Walk and only be aware of walking”. This means walking while keeping our mind free from wandering thoughts and maintaining our awareness of the walking. The walking action will stimulate ultimate touch. What we see and hear will stimulate ultimate seeing and ultimate hearing. Therefore all three sensory components of the wordless awareness mind are stimulated. We keep the tip of our tongue touching the base of the front lower teeth to stop wandering thoughts. This is sometimes called “walking in right awareness”. The term “right” does not mean “good” or “virtuous”. Right awareness is the awareness of the wordless awareness mind, it is awareness of the “here and now”. In other words, when we walk we are only aware of our walking, and nothing else.

Like the Buddha, we may get into the habit of doing some walking meditation before a sitting meditation session.

