

**Part Two:
The Original Walk**



**Chapter 2:
Introduction to Walking Meditation – Janet Style**
• As I Walk I Am

Introduction to Walking Meditation – Janet Style

“Peace and happiness are found where we are now, in the breath we take now. Real relaxation and peace happen when the past falls away, the future falls away, we stop our racing minds and walk into our own inner silence.”

– Janet Gallagher Nestor

Walking Meditation is a practice that can facilitate an awakening to the awareness that joy is within each of us all the time. We learn we can touch joy at any moment we choose to touch it. We no longer believe joy is an occasional event that happens by some random circumstance. We know where to find it. Because we know joy is an innate part of us, we are comforted and able to trust.

I began practicing Walking Meditation long before I even knew of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnam-born Buddhist Monk who is the modern-day Father of Walking Meditation. My personal practice grew out of my love for Tai Chi and the practice of conscious walking that is included in Tai Chi instruction for developing balance and inner awareness. During my morning walks, I began to practice Tai Chi walking. Doing so shifted my focus from an “exercise” walk to a kind of walk that was not only physically refreshing and strengthening, but also emotionally and spiritually renewing. Below, I share my experience with the style of Walking Meditation that I developed for myself and used to strengthen my body, heal my spirit and change my life.

Walking Meditation (1996)

When I began practicing walking as a form of meditation, I was very focused on understanding and developing my own flow of Chi (energy). Moving meditation suited me perfectly. I walked my dog in the mornings and took much longer walks with her in a wooded area on weekends. Combining Walking Meditation with walking my beloved Dalmatian, Petie, seemed like a perfect idea and an exciting opportunity for companionship as well as personal growth and healing.

Listed below are the directives for Walking Meditation that I devised for myself. The Walking Meditation practice strengthened my spiritual journey, helped me open and expand my definition and perception of love, and strengthened my relationship with nature and with myself. I

felt more secure and safe. I was able to work on my breathing, which was a deep physical health issue due to allergies. I was not combining my stepping with my flow of breath at the time, but walking to increase my breathing capacity, which in turn helped me to soften and relax my body.

Directives for Walking Meditation:

1. Create an intention for the walk. The various intentions I created for my walks are similar to these.
 - To feel content and at peace at the completion of the walk
 - To feel more deeply connected to myself and Creation
 - To experience a peaceful flow of energy during the walk
 - To embrace and honor nature and her healing qualities
 - To softly increase my physical endurance
 2. Stand quietly in Wu-Chi (emptiness) at the beginning of the walk. We stand in this way until we feel grounded and connected to self and nature. To do this, we stand with our feet about shoulder width apart, weight evenly distributed between each foot, knees slightly bent, back straight, hips tucked in and neck aligned with the spine. Our chin is slightly tucked so that our neck is straight. Our eyes have a soft focus. We breathe evenly and deeply, visualizing the breath as a silken stream. We allow our self to feel rooted into the ground, perhaps by visualizing roots growing from the bottom of our feet into the Earth. We give thanks to the strength of the Earth and to the strength within. As we stand, we check in with our self, observe and note any aches and pains, and observe and make note of our general state of well-being. Once noted, we relax and enjoy simply being present with Creation and our self. When we are content in the present moment, with mind quiet and spirit grateful for our connection to the universal energy flow that exists between all things, we begin to walk and fully enjoy our opportunity for mutual sharing.
 3. We use the act of walking for focus. We notice our footsteps as they touch the Earth. We allow ourselves to become energetically aware of each step, the feeling of each step and how our body moves through each step. The noticing allows our mind to stay in the now and keeps it from reliving the past or pre-living the future. There is no problem-
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solving during this walk. We notice only our steps, our body while taking each step and the comfort and quality of our breathing. The secondary benefit of our focus is an increasingly more positive relationship with our body and its function.

4. Use the walk to connect with nature. There is great solace in the healing power of nature. Make friends with her. Notice new growth. Notice the sounds and smells and the life-force of nature. Notice the blossoms, the foliage and the animals that come into view. I made friends with a particularly large old pine tree. I stopped by to physically touch her and speak to her each time I walked. Her presence was particularly healing for me. I hope my appreciation helped her quality of life as much as she helped mine. I asked her if I could have a small piece of her magnificent old bark to carry with me. I placed it in my car to remind me of what is possible and to encourage my inward focus and connection to all that is.
5. We walk until we are at the end of our walk and then return to our starting location.
6. At the end of the walk we stand in Wu-Chi. We check in to see if we have achieved our intention. The check-in is not a pass or fail, but a noticing that provides insight. Has the walk helped to increase our feeling of well-being and our sense of connection to self and life? How do we feel physically in comparison to how we felt at the start of the walk?

Each of us has the opportunity to glimpse the depth of loving insight and experience available through a regular practice of meditation. Any restorative, awakening practice is an ongoing process. Our awareness increases a step at a time over a period of time and continues as long as we practice. Each day a new pathway of understanding opens up to us, and each of us has our own special window of experience that is important for our growth.

As I Walk, I Am

Earth is my home.

Her foliage brings softness and beauty,
and provides the breath of life.

Everything about her brings attention to divine beginning.

My footsteps touch Her peacefully, and I know.

My eyes gently focus on everything and nothing, and I see.

My mind is quiet and free of worry, and it refreshes me.

My breath flows softly in and out, and my senses
are heightened.

My body is alive, as I fully experience my wholeness
and the miraculous nature of each footstep.

My awareness is expanded, and I acknowledge
and honor the Presence within me.

My being merges with all that there is, and I am at home.

My totality celebrates life.

Creation is part of me and I am part of Her.

As I walk, I am.

– Janet Gallagher Nestor

Pathways Combine – A Mindful Approach

~ Unity ~ Understanding ~ Consciousness ~

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

– Lao Tzu

Opening to the Reality of Now

*Healing as we walk ~ Learning to be at home with our self ~ Living joyously
~ Understanding our possibilities ~ Contacting our quiet inner self ~
Embracing the mutuality of all life ~ Gaining awareness of the meaning of
life ~ Focusing on now ~ Breathing mindfully while walking*

Life is a journey. We share our journey with family, friends, work associates, spiritual friends, and many professional helpers. Our journey is also shared, consciously and unconsciously, with various organizations and institutions that exist within our local, national and world communities. And even if we don't realize it, life is a broad and profound journey shared with the living bio-energetic system of Planet Earth. The Earth provides directly or indirectly everything we need to sustain our life. As our world civilizations have evolved from rural agrarian communities into industrial and technological societies, we have become increasingly distanced from our innate nature. We miss the simple pleasures and realities of life. Professionals can help us do everything. Doctors and nurses take care of us when we are sick, help us in times of serious illness and death, and facilitate the birth of our babies. Professionals manage our money and take care of it in banks. Professional farmers plant and grow our food. Others manufacture our clothing, build our homes, help us find jobs, clean our homes and maintain our lawns and gardens. We can even call someone to go to the pharmacy or grocery store for us and have them deliver everything right to our door. We are distanced emotionally and physically from the basics of life: the miracle of a garden sprouting little green leaves from vegetable seeds; the joy of harvesting a field of potatoes or picking apples from an orchard full of fresh fruit; the taste of fresh warm milk obtained by milking a cow; the birth of a colt and the sight of it standing in the first minutes of life to nurse from its mother; the simplicity of having a cup of fresh cold water from an underground spring. It is not surprising that many of us do not have a personal

relationship with our magnificent Earth home. We do not even have conscious awareness that a personal relationship with Earth and all of creation is possible.

Like many of us, the Earth is ailing and feels alone in her struggles. We have ignored her needs for so long that she is suffering from our carelessness, and her ability to function is threatened. She needs us to care for her, love her and nourish her so that she can maintain the ability to sustain us. Walking Meditation is one of the positive healing pathways we can take for ourselves and those we love, and this includes the non-human citizens of the world and the Earth herself.

In the beginning we practice Walking Meditation because we want to try something new and because it is a peaceful, harmonious, spiritual practice. It facilitates higher levels of inner awareness and deep relaxation. We learn self-acceptance, to be at home within our self and enjoy the experience of conscious, mindful being. We learn to stop our racing mind, relax, embrace joy and become fully present and now-oriented. Eventually, we practice Walking Meditation because it is a gentle spiritual pathway to gratitude, balance, feelings of personal solidarity and safety. Because of our practice we learn to live within the energy of love. Within that love we find a lifestyle that is inclusive and welcoming.

- **With each step we leave our energetic footprint**

When we walk in our usual unconscious way, our mind is full of the business of life ... past, present and future. As we walk unconsciously, we carry our worries and woes along with us and often attempt to dump our anxieties, concerns, and sorrows along the way. With each step of our unconscious walk, our mind is wandering from topic to topic. We use our walk to chat with a friend, talk on our cell phone, plan our day, worry about our family, or work through fears and life stressors. With conscious intent we leave behind the energy of our fear, anger and frustration. We are unaware that the negative energy and stress dispersed without conscious thought becomes a burden to the Earth and to all other people who spend time walking where we have walked. When we walk consciously and mindfully, the opposite result is obtained. As we walk in joy, compassion, and peace (with the purpose of deepening our connection to our own joy), we create a consciousness of these virtues for ourselves, the Earth and for other people to experience and enjoy as they walk where we have walked.
