



The Walking Meditation

by Kenda Riggs

“Every path, every street in the world is your walking meditation path.” ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

“The point of a maze is to find its center... The point of a labyrinth is to find your center.”

As you head into the summer, I hope you find some time to rest, pause, reflect, and most importantly, restore some of your energy. It has been a very busy school year. Teachers often describe feeling tired at this time of year and are really looking forward to the summer break to try to replenish. Whether you plan on having a busy summer filled with activities and travel, or a more laid-back relaxing summer, be sure to take the necessary time for you. Remember to do the things that will be most helpful and make you feel good in your mind, body, and soul.

While you are away from teaching for the summer months, if you don't already practice, why not try some meditation? Meditation is a practice that can reduce stress, increase calmness and clarity, and promote happiness. Even just a few minutes per day can make a difference. In particular, mindfulness meditation is about paying close attention to the present moment, especially thoughts, feelings, and sensations. When we think of meditation, we often think of stillness, whereby someone is seated with their body relaxed and eyes closed, which people find extremely beneficial. Others, however, may find stillness difficult to do which is why it is important to have an awareness of other forms of meditation practice.

What is Walking Meditation?

Walking Meditation is a form of active meditation that takes place while the body is gently moving. This form of meditation occurs with open eyes and an active body. Some people like the idea of a walking meditation because it allows them to meditate while engaging in an active lifestyle. It is easy to practice, and enhances both physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

To begin, simply stand in place and become aware of your entire body. Start with awareness of your feet. Your feet help balance your body and they are always adjusting to help you remain balanced. Notice how

your weight is distributed on both feet and the feeling of your toes touching each other. Take a moment and become aware of your standing balance before you start with your walking meditation. Take five deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you do this, try to release any stress or negative energy.

Now that you have more awareness of your body, start walking with your chosen foot. When you take this first step, pay attention to how the step affects your entire body. Notice how each joint moves and interacts simultaneously to create a smooth walking motion. Focus your attention on your belly and chest. Let your shoulders hang freely and your arms flow naturally, as you breathe in and out. Pay special attention to how the wind moves around your body as you walk. Focus your thoughts on the things around you and the things going through your mind. If you have an overall tone of negativity or positivity, just notice it without judgment. During this walking meditation the point is to just be aware...slowly walk and breathe.

Keep your eyes softly focused on the area ahead of you. Do not look at any one thing in particular, just be alert and open. Try to achieve a balance of external and internal awareness. Continue meditating in this fashion for as long as you like. When you are ready, slowly stop your walking meditation and find a place to stand once again without walking and become aware of your standing, balanced self. Feel both feet fully and notice their connection to the earth beneath you. You have now completed your first walking meditation (Modified version taken from Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2014)

The Labyrinth

While some people like to do an in-the-moment walking meditation, others prefer to have a structure to follow like a labyrinth as an active walking meditation. A labyrinth is not a maze; rather it has



one clear pathway in, through the center and back out, which, like life, can offer many twists and turns. Research has shown that labyrinth walking can result in an increase in your focus and calm, along with a reduction in blood pressure. Labyrinths are used world-wide as a way to quiet the mind, calm anxieties, recover balance in life, enhance creativity and insight, self-reflection, and stress reduction.

As you enter the labyrinth, walk at a slow, relaxed pace, and follow the path to the center. As you walk, pay attention to everything you hear, without judgment. Listen to the sounds around you, like the birds chirping or tree leaves rustling. As you slowly walk, breathe deeply, and allow your shoulders to relax downward. If you feel any muscle tension, take a few deep breaths as you walk. Focus on the air you breathe to help relax your muscles.

As you continue to slowly walk, start noticing what may be around you. Really notice the colour, shape, and type of objects. Notice your reaction to what you see and try not to pass any judgement on what you see. Remind yourself you are just seeing, not judging. When thoughts and words come into your mind, release them, bringing your focus back to just seeing the world around you.

Sometimes choosing a peaceful word or phrase as a mantra to repeat while doing a walking meditation can be helpful. Some ideas include *I am peaceful*, or *This too shall pass*, or *I am going to be okay*. For some, listening to relaxing music while doing a walking meditation can also be nice. As there is no set ritual for walking a labyrinth, it is essential to enter the

labyrinth slowly, calming and clearing your mind. And when you reach the center, pause and reflect, then take your time slowly walking back out when ready.

There are labyrinths located worldwide, including a few in our own province. If you are interested in checking out an outdoor walking labyrinth, you can visit one at Bowring Park in the west end of the city of St. John's in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Finger Labyrinth Meditation

If you are not able to practice a walking meditation, there are handheld labyrinths that you can use with your finger as a meditative practice. Take deep breaths to begin to relax and focus. Place your pointer finger from your non-dominant hand on the entrance of the labyrinth. Slowly trace the pattern of the labyrinth with your finger allowing your mind to clear from extra thought and focus solely on following the path of the labyrinth. "Walk" to the center of the labyrinth and rest momentarily, taking deep breaths observing how you are feeling. Retrace your path out of the labyrinth. Sit back, breathe deeply, and relax. Observe and reflect on how you are feeling again.

Wishing you all a wonderful, rejuvenating summer break!

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