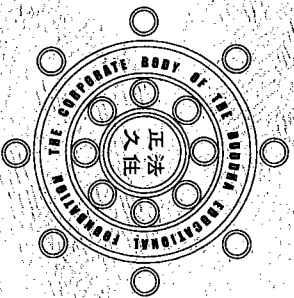


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**Namo Amitabha!**



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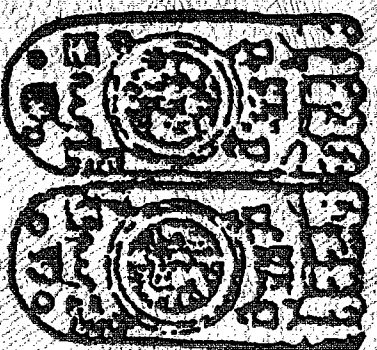
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**A GUIDE TO**

**WALKING**

**MEDITATION**



**THICH NHAT HANH**

**A GUIDE TO WALKING MEDITATION**

translated from the Vietnamese

by

**ANH HUONG**

edited by

**Joseph Bobrow**

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## About the author

Thich Nhat Hanh was born in Central Vietnam in 1926, and he left home as a teenager to become a Zen monk. He founded the School of Youth for Social Services, Van Hanh Buddhist University, and the Tiep Hien Order. In 1966 he was invited by the Fellowship of Reconciliation to tour the United States to describe to us the enormous suffering of his people. Because of his fierce neutrality, he was unable to return home, and he was granted asylum in France, where he is head of a small community of meditators and activists. Nhat Hanh is the author of 66 books in English, French, and Vietnamese.

## YOU CAN DO IT

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Walking meditation is the practice of meditation while you are walking. It can bring you peace as you are practicing it.

When you practice walking meditation, take slow, relaxed and serene steps, with a half-smile on your face. You should step like the most leisurely and unpreoccupied person in the world. While taking such steps, let all worry and sadness fall away. In order to be at peace, you should be able to take such steps. It is not difficult at all; you can do it. Everyone can do it, if he or she really wants to be at peace.

## GO WITHOUT ARRIVING

In this busy life, we often feel rushed by some kind of pressure. We often have to hurry. But where are we rushing to? This is a question we rarely ask ourselves. Walking meditation is like taking a walk; we do not set ourselves the goal of arriving at a particular destination in a particular length of time. The purpose of walking meditation is walking meditation itself. The important point is to walk and not to arrive. Walking meditation is not a means; it is the

end. Each footstep is life, each footstep is peace. That is why we don't have to walk hurriedly. That is why we slow down our steps. Walk, but don't walk - walk but do not be pushed ahead by any purpose whatsoever. In this way, when we walk, a half-smile blossoms on our face.

### **RELAXED STEPS**

In daily life, our steps are weighed down by worry, anxiousness and fear. Our life might only be a succession of months and years of worry. So our steps cannot be relaxed. The earth is so beautiful, with so many wonderful paths on it. There are narrow paths with bamboo trees growing on both sides; there are paths bathed in the fragrance of rice fields, paths lined with beautifully colored autumn leaves. But we are rarely aware of them and often cannot appreciate such paths. It is because we are not relaxed and our steps are not relaxed steps. Walking meditation is practicing how to take relaxed steps again. At the age of about one year and half we start to walk totteringly. Now, by practicing walking meditation, we will take those tottering steps again. After a few weeks of practice, we can take stable, peaceful and natural steps. These words are written to help you begin this practice. I wish you success.

### **LET WORRY FALL AWAY**

If I had a Buddha's eyes, I would be able to look at your footprint and see clearly the traces of worry and sorrow that you leave on the earth's surface as you walk by, just as a scientist uses a microscope to see the microorganisms present in a glass of water taken from the lake. Walk in such a manner that you leave only peace in your footprint; this is the secret of walking meditation. But if you want to walk like this, you should know how to shake off sorrow and worry.

### **WALKING IN THE PURE LAND**

If I had Buddha's feet, I would take you to Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land, or in Christian terms, I would take you to the Kingdom of God. The scenery up there is very beautiful and peaceful. But once you get there, how will you walk? Are you sure that you will not leave behind traces of worry and sorrow of this worldly life in your footprints on the Pure Land? If you bring sorrow and worry with you and imprint them on the Pure Land, you will make the Pure Land impure. To be able to live in a peaceful world, you should be capable of taking peaceful steps right here on Earth.

## THIS EARTH IS THE PURE LAND

One thing I would like to whisper to you is that you can take peaceful steps right here on earth, then you no longer need to reach the Buddha Land or the Kingdom of God. Worldliness and purity are just products of our mind. Once you are free and at peace, worldliness is purity, purity is worldliness, and there is nowhere you need to go. No need to use the Buddha's marvellous feet even if you have them.

## THIS EARTH HAS ALL THE MARVELS OF THE PURE LAND

In order to be free and at peace, you should learn to let worry and sorrow fall away. First, you have to observe carefully and see that this very world has all the wonders of the Pure Land. It is the worry and the sorrow that make us incapable of seeing these wonders. I often think that I would prefer this world of ours to the Pure Land. It is because there are things on earth that I like very much, such as grapefruit trees, lemon trees, banana trees, orange trees, pine trees and willow trees. I have been told that in the Pure Land there are precious lotus ponds, precious trees, paths covered with gold and silver and precious singing birds. I am not very fond of them. I do not like to step on paths paved with gold and sil-

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ver, or even on paths lined with marble here on earth. I like the sandy paths with green grasses growing on both sides. I like each one of the pebbles and the leaves which fall on the paths. I like the bushes, the streams, the wall-like bamboo hedges and the ferry boat docks. Once when I was a young novice, I told my teacher; "Teacher, I will not go to the Pure Land if it does not have lemon trees and grapefruit trees."

My teacher shook his head and smiled. He probably thought that I was a somewhat stubborn student. But he did not say whether I was wrong or right.

Now, knowing that worldliness and purity are just products of the mind, I am very happy. I am happy because I know that there are grapefruit trees and lemon trees in the Pure Land and also red sand paths with green grasses on both sides. I know that if I open my eyes mindfully and take peaceful stable steps, I can see the Pure Land. That is why I practice walking meditation every day.

## THE SEAL OF A KING

Choose a smooth path so you can practice; the river bank, park, terrace, forest, or small, tree-lined path. There are people who practice walking medita-

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tion in concentration camps, even right inside narrow, dark prison cells. It is good if the path is not rough or too steep. Slow down your steps and focus your attention on those steps. Be aware of each step you take. Step carefully and serenely. Step like a Buddha steps. As you step, imprint your foot on the earth's surface carefully, yet confidently, just as a king places his seal on an imperial edict.

The king's seal on the imperial edict can bring peace to his people or it can make them suffer. Your step is also like that. A peaceful world depends on whether you can take peaceful steps or not. Everything depends on a single step of yours. If you can take a peaceful step, you are capable of taking two peaceful steps. And you can take 108 peaceful steps.

### **YOUR STEP IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT ACT**

What act of yours is the most important one in your life? Passing an exam, buying a car, buying a house, getting a promotion? Many people have passed exams, bought cars and gotten promotions, but they are not at peace, they are not fulfilled. So the most important thing in life is to be at peace with yourself and to share that peace with other living beings. But in order to have peace you should be

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aware of each of your steps. Your step is your most important act. It decides everything. I light an incense stick, join my palms into a lotus bud and wish you success.

### **A FRESH BREEZE RISES FROM EACH FOOTSTEP**

In one monastery, at the beginning of the walking meditation path, there is a big stone with five words carved on top: bô bô thanh phong khô'i. It means "A fresh breeze rises from each footstep." Isn't that beautiful? This fresh breeze is joy, peace and liberty which blow away the sorrow of life and death and bring back the freshness of peace to our mind. Taking such steps you can help the world.

### **BEING AWAKE IN ORDER TO LET GO**

Worry and sorrow always cling to us during our life. How can we let them fall away? Take relaxed and stable steps: be awake and strong-willed. Be awake so that you can see that you are carrying the heavy luggage of worry and sorrow. Be strong-willed so that you can resolutely let it fall away. Worry and sorrow arise when you are preoccupied with the past and the future. Once we see our worry

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