

Description of Meditation Activities

Walking Meditation

Walking can be another wonderful opportunity to cultivate mindfulness. Movement can strengthen our awareness, and sometimes is a more accessible object for meditation than the breath.

Formal walking meditation techniques vary in different streams of Theravada Buddhism. In the Burmese tradition and on Insight Meditation retreats, meditators usually walk alone, rather than in a line or a circle, as is done in other Buddhist traditions. The invitation is to walk back and forth between two points about 20–30 feet apart, which helps us to let go of “getting somewhere”. We practice walking just to walk. Choosing a place to practice at the beginning of the walking period also eliminates spending most of our time deciding where we should walk. We should try to stick to our chosen place, because we are often confronted with desires such as, “This place is too noisy. I should walk around the back of the building”. But the back area is too cold, so we have to search for a warm spot. But alas, to our horror, the only warm areas are filled with other people and we cannot do walking meditation unless we are alone. By now thirty minutes have gone by, so we decide to give up. When you have selected your place, divide the walking meditation into three parts. During the first part, perhaps 10-15 minutes long, walk a little more slowly than you would normally. During the second, also about 10-15 minutes long, slow down even more. In the third, the remaining time you walk, move quite slowly. It is also fine, instead of breaking your walk into three stages, to choose one of the paces and walk back and forth at that speed. As in all practices in this tradition, what feels appropriate to you, given the conditions, is what you should do.

~Arrianna Weisman & Jean Smith, “The Beginner’s Guide to Insight Meditation”

Eating Meditation

Try to make the meal a meditation from beginning to end. Meditate as you walk to the dining hall, as you wait in line, and as you partake of your meal. After the last bite, you may want to sit for a while and savor the delicate after-energies that infuse the body following a satisfying meal.

Yoga and Stretching

These are also considered meditation periods, during which you should maintain a formal technique of body awareness. We are grateful and thank those who are providing their gifts to lead these sessions to enhance our retreat experience. These sessions are also done in Noble Silence.

Yogi Jobs

Volunteer opportunities, such as ringing the bell, tidying up the tea table, etc., are opportunities to practice, bringing your full attention to the task. Moving slowly and with intention, and noticing each breath as you complete the task, is good practice for bringing the mindfulness of retreat to everyday life.

