



# THE LONG ROAD TURNS TO JOY

A GUIDE TO WALKING MEDITATION

Author of *Happiness* | Thich Nhat Hanh



# THE LONG ROAD TURNS TO JOY

*A Guide to Walking Meditation*

Thich Nhat Hanh



PARALLAX PRESS  
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

Parallax Press  
P.O. Box 7355  
Berkeley, California 94707  
www.parallax.org

Parallax Press is the publishing division of  
Unified Buddhist Church, Inc.

Copyright © 1996, 2011 by  
Unified Buddhist Church  
All Rights Reserved  
Printed in Canada

An earlier version of this book, *A Guide to Walking Meditation*, was published by Fellowship Publications, Nyack, New York, in 1985 and is now out of print.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Front cover photo by Simon Chaput  
Back cover photo © David Arnott  
Historic author photo of Thich Nhat Hanh  
from the original edition of *A Guide to Walking Meditation*.  
Calligraphy on page 1 by Thich Nhat Hanh  
Cover and book design by Gopa & Ted2, Inc.

*Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Nhat Hanh, Thích.

[Thiền hành yếu chỉ. English]

The long road turns to joy : a guide to walking meditation / Thich Nhat Hanh.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-935209-92-8

1. Meditation--Buddhism. 2. Buddhist meditations. I. Title.

BQ5618.V5N5313 2011

294.3'4435—dc22

2011010793

1 2 3 4 5 / 11 12 13 14 15

## CONTENTS

Anyone Can Do It 3

The Present Moment 4

Everything Depends  
on Your Steps 5

Walking Like a Buddha 7

Aimlessness 11

Taking the First Step  
of the Day 13

Touching Peace 14

Walk in Peace 15

Smile Like a Buddha 17

Regaining Our Sovereignty 18

Touching the Earth 19

Healing Mother Earth 21

Conscious Breathing 22

Counting 23

Breathe Naturally 24

A Marvelous Balance  
of Mindfulness 26

Stay with  
Your Breathing 27

Getting More Fresh Air 28

Improved Circulation 29

A Pact with a Staircase 31

[Interbeing](#) 33

[Using Words Instead  
of Numbers](#) 34

[I Have Arrived](#) 35

[Our True Home](#) 37

[Here and Now](#) 38

[Nirvana](#) 39

[Ground of Being](#) 40

[Touching the Ultimate  
Dimension](#) 42

[The Pursuit of Happiness](#) 43

[Walking with a Child](#) 44

[Happiness Is Not  
an Individual Matter](#) 46

[Walking When Angry](#) 47

[Nourishing Steps](#) 49

[Walk for All Beings](#) 50

[It's in the Way You Walk](#) 52

[I Walk for You](#) 53

[Gratefulness](#) 55

[Walking in Difficult  
Moments](#) 56

[Walking in the City](#) 59

[Living Deeply](#) 60

[Walk like a Tiger](#) 61

[Formless Practice](#) 62

[We Need Time](#) 63

[The Path of Awakening](#) 64

[A Flower Blooms beneath  
Each Step](#) 66

You are the Gardener 68

[The Miracle Is  
to Walk on Earth](#) 71

The Seal of an Emperor 72

[Return to Earth](#) 73

This Wondrous World 74

Walking in the Pure Land 75

With Each Step,  
a Breeze Will Rise 77

[Breathing and  
Walking Gathas](#) 79

[Empty Footprints](#) 83

[Take My Hand](#) 84

[Through the Deserted Gate](#) 86

Kiss the Earth 87

[The Earth Is Waiting for You](#) 88

[The Welcoming Path](#) 89

[Come Back](#) 90

Welcome Back 91

[The Path Is You](#) 92

[Walking Peace](#) 93

[Peace Is Every Step](#) 94

[I Have Arrived \(music\)](#) 95





I have arrived  
I am home  
in the here  
in the now  
I am Solid  
I am free  
in the Ultimate  
I dwell



## ANYONE CAN DO IT

Walking meditation is meditation while walking. We walk slowly, in a relaxed way, keeping a light smile on our lips. When we practice this way, we feel deeply at ease, and our steps are those of the most secure person on Earth. All our sorrows and anxieties drop away, and peace and joy fill our hearts. Anyone can do it. It takes only a little time, a little mindfulness, and the wish to be happy.

## THE PRESENT MOMENT

The Buddha was asked, "What do you and your disciples practice?" and he replied, "We sit, we walk, and we eat." The questioner continued, "But Sir, everyone sits, walks, and eats." The Buddha told him, "When we sit, we know we are sitting. When we walk, we know we are walking. When we eat, we know we are eating."

Most of the time, we are lost in the past or carried away by the future. When we are mindful, deeply in touch with the present moment, our understanding of what is going on deepens, and we begin to be filled with acceptance, joy, peace, and love.

## EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON YOUR STEPS

The seed of mindfulness is in each of us, but we usually forget to water it. We think that happiness is only possible in the future—when we get a house, a car, or a degree. We struggle in our mind and body, and we don't touch the peace and joy that are available right now in the blue sky, the green leaves, and the eyes of our beloved.

What is most important? Many people have passed exams and bought houses and cars, yet they are still unhappy. What is most important is to find peace and to share it with others. To have peace, you can begin by walking peacefully. Everything depends on your steps.



## WALKING LIKE A BUDDHA

The Buddha loved to walk. For the Buddha, walking is a way to remind oneself that mind and body are two aspects of the same thing. Walking is as simple as putting one foot in front of the other, but we often find it difficult or tedious. We drive a few blocks rather than walk to “save time.” When we understand the interconnectedness of body and mind, the simple act of walking like the Buddha can feel supremely easy and pleasurable.

When you take a step, you can touch the earth in such a way that you establish yourself in the present moment. You arrive in the here and the now. You don't need to make any effort at all. Suddenly, you are free—from all projects, all worries, and all expectations. You are fully present, fully alive, and you are touching the earth.

When you practice slow walking meditation alone, you may like to try this: Breathe in and take one step, and focus all your attention on the sole of your foot. If you have not arrived fully, one hundred



percent in the here and the now, don't take the next step. I'm sure you can take a step like that, because there is Buddha nature in you. Buddha nature is the capacity of being aware of what is going on. Buddha nature is what allows you to recognize what you are doing in the present moment and to say to yourself: I am alive; I am taking a step. Anyone can do this. There is a Buddha in every one of us, and we should allow the Buddha to walk.



## AIMLESSNESS

In Buddhism, there is a word, *apranihita*. It means wishlessness or aimlessness. The idea is that we do not put anything ahead of ourselves and run after it. When we practice walking meditation, we walk in this spirit. We just enjoy the walking, with no particular aim or destination. Our walking is not a means to an end. We walk for the sake of walking.

A. J. Muste said, “There is no way to peace, peace *is* the way.” Walking in mindfulness brings us peace and joy, and makes our lives real. Why rush? Our final destination will only be the graveyard. Why not walk in the direction of life, enjoying peace in each moment with every step? There is no need to struggle. Enjoy each step. We have already arrived.



## TAKING THE FIRST STEP OF THE DAY

Walking on the earth  
is a miracle!  
Each mindful step  
reveals the wondrous Dharmakaya.

We, too, are of the same nature as these wonders of the universe. We do not have to walk in space or on water to experience a miracle; the real miracle is to be awake in the present moment. Walking on the green earth, we realize the wonder of being alive. When we take steps like this, the sun of the *Dharmakaya*, our true Buddha body, will shine.

## WALK IN PEACE

If you look deeply, you can see all the worries and anxiety people imprint on the earth as they walk. Our steps are usually heavy, filled with sorrow and fear. We feel insecure, and our steps reveal it.

This world has many paths. Some are lined with beautiful trees, some wind around fragrant fields, some are covered with leaves and blossoms. But if we walk on them with a heavy heart, we will not appreciate them at all.

When we were one or two, we began to take tottering steps. Now, we have to learn to walk again—slowly, with joy and ease. After a few days of practice, you will know how to do it. When I see you walking with deep comfort and peace, I will smile happily.

## TOUCHING THE EARTH

When he was challenged by Mara—who personifies delusion—the Buddha touched the Earth with his right hand and said, “With Earth as my witness, I will sit here in meditation until I realize true awakening.” When he did that, Mara disappeared.

When we feel irritated, insecure, angry, or unhappy, we too are visited by Mara. When that happens, please touch the Earth deeply with your feet. Please practice walking meditation. The Earth, our mother, is filled with deep love for us. When we suffer, she will protect us, nourishing us with her beautiful trees, grasses, and flowers.





## HEALING MOTHER EARTH

Walking mindfully on the Earth can restore our peace and harmony, and it can restore the Earth's peace and harmony as well. We are children of the Earth. We rely on her for our happiness, and she relies on us also. Whether the Earth is beautiful, fresh, and green, or arid and parched depends on our way of walking. When we practice walking meditation beautifully, we massage the Earth with our feet and plant seeds of joy and happiness with each step. Our Mother will heal us, and we will heal her.

## COUNTING

While walking, practice conscious breathing by counting steps. Notice each breath and the number of steps you take as you breathe in and as you breathe out.

If you take three steps during an in-breath, say silently, "One, two, three" or "In, in, in," one word with each step. As you breathe out, if you take three steps, say, "Out, out, out," with each step. If you take three steps as you breathe in and four steps as you breathe out, you say, "In, in, in. Out, out, out, out," or "One, two, three. One, two, three, four."