



MEDITATION IS THE MESSAGE

HOW TO WALK MINDFULLY

**MAGGIE HUMPHREYS
&
LES SNOWDON**

BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF THE WALKING DIET

Maggie Humphreys and Les Snowdon have been enthusiastic walkers since childhood. Following the worldwide success of their first book *The Walking Diet* they have had several other books published including *Fitness Walking* and *Walk Slim* and have been at the forefront of initiatives to promote the benefits of walking for fitness and healthy living. They have been interviewed and featured more than 200 times in the press, on radio and on television. They believe that walking is the best exercise because it is accessible to just about anyone – and anyone can begin getting fit and healthy simply by walking out of their own front door.

See www.WalkWalk.co.uk for more about Maggie and Les.

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Maggie Humphreys & Les Snowdon

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Before commencing a fitness programme, check with your doctor first if you are unfit, sedentary, overweight, obese, pregnant, or have any medical problem, diagnosed or otherwise, that will affect your ability to exercise.

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MINDFUL WALKING – THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT

He who knows others is wise.
He who knows himself is enlightened.

TAO TE CHING

There was a time when I used to think that enlightenment was the search for meaning. I used to think that enlightenment was the search for God. I used to think that enlightenment was the search for a grand narrative that explained life, death, the universe and everything in it. But that was the problem ... thinking, that is! 'Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so,' says Hamlet in the most famous play in the English language. But now I know that enlightenment is simply waking up. Waking up to the sight of a swallow in a summer sky, the sound of church bells, the feel of the earth beneath my feet, and the touch of a neighbour's hand in friendship. Enlightenment is right now, in this very moment – if we wake up. The problem is that, in the Western world, most of us are Hamlet now, asleep inside our own heads. 'Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so ... words, words, words,' Hamlet agonises.

Enlightenment is empowering. Enlightenment is waking up out of someone else's dream. It was the poet, Shelley, who said that the world could be saved by poetry – only the poets know. But I believe that the world can also be saved by walking. Walking is moving poetry. Each walk is a poem in itself if you walk mindfully and touch the ground rather than step on it. Alan Watts, the philosopher and mystic, after a lifetime's practice with traditional methods of meditation, said: 'I went back to meditation, especially walking meditation, which I have always preferred to long periods of sitting ... I didn't think of myself as doing an exercise, but simply as exploring a state of consciousness.'

There is a need for us all to renew ourselves from time to time and take stock of who we are and where we are going.

'Know thyself,' the Greek philosopher Socrates said.

'If I am not myself, who else will be?' the walking philosopher and writer Thoreau said.

The longest journey we ever make is the journey within. Some people use prayer, others use traditional meditation and yoga techniques to prepare for the journey inward. The one thing they all have in common is the need for total relaxation, a letting go of obsessive thoughts and all the clutter and confusion going on in the mind. But the most important thing of all is the realisation that we need to make the journey if we are to be whole.

So where do we start?

It's wake up time. The eternal now is – right NOW! Enlightenment is the way, and as Lao Tse, one of the greatest enlightenment philosophers of all time, said: 'The way out is via the door.'

WALKING AND MINDFULNESS

Every path, every street in the world
is your walking meditation path.

THICH NHAT HANH

Mindful walking, walking meditation (WM) is an invitation to explore yourself; to deepen your understanding of yourself – the real self which is waiting to be discovered beneath the mask which is your everyday self. It is an invitation to be your own best friend.

Remember when you were eight years old and the sky was the limit? When the sky really was blue every day, the world full of fairy tale princesses, handsome princes and anything seemed possible. But then something happened – you grew up!

And you had to conform: at school, at work, in your everyday life. And your dreams dissolved as the harsh reality of earning a living and making your way in the world took over. You lost some of your sense of wonder and life lost some of its fizz.

Yet despite this sense of loss, you still experience times when you can make contact with your dreams and the deeper reality which is your real self – your centre, your authentic self, who you really are. Odd moments of reverie, daydreaming, times when you have the time to ‘let things happen’: daily fitness walks, weekends, holidays, times when you make some personal space for yourself.

The problem is that for many of us there are not enough of these experiences to make any real difference to our lives and spur us into action. For brief moments we have a vision of what we could be like; for brief moments we discover again the child within, trying to break out and express itself; for brief moments we become our own best friend. And all we had to do was ... but ... if only ... and then life comes crowding back in upon us again with its incessant round of ‘getting and spending’, as the poet Wordsworth called it.

What we need is a way of getting back in touch with our ‘inner best friend’, without having to wait for our busy lives to make time for us. We have to make the time ourselves. We have to set aside the time to get back in touch with ourselves.

Although walking can improve the condition of your heart, help you control your weight and improve your general fitness, many walkers may not realise that mindful walking can actually change their attitude to life itself and their state of consciousness.

Mindful walking combines the benefits of exercise with the meditative tradition of the East, where spiritual and psychological health is valued as highly as physical health, where the body and soul are treated as a whole, and where self knowledge is prized above all.

Fitness walking stretches our bodies; mindful walking stretches our minds and our souls. The secret of mindful walking consists in knowing how to walk, how to breathe, and how to smile at ourselves – for we take ourselves far too seriously. Tension, anxiety, stress,

depression, insomnia, and the thousand and one problems that cause physical and mental trauma are all symptoms warning us that we are out of balance.

Mindful walking restores that balance – helps us find something that we had lost, or perhaps forgotten. Mindful walking helps us smile at ourselves, and at everybody we meet along the way. Mindful walking sets free the creative force within; helps us re-discover our ‘inner best friend’. Mindful walking makes us whole.

FITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

I took a walk. Suddenly I stood still, filled with the realisation that I had no body or mind. All I could see was one great illuminating Whole.

HAN-SHAN
16th CENTURY ZEN MASTER

Echoing the Zen master, the walker Hal Borland said: ‘All walking is discovery. On foot we take the time to see things whole.’ The search for wholeness is the goal of mindful walking. We walk to discover our ‘inner best friend’, ‘our better self’, the self that puts us back in touch with our deepest reality. Indeed, even in the 19th century, in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, with its mass migration of people away from the land to the city, the poet Wordsworth was able to express his concern about our loss of ‘self’: ‘When from our better selves we have too long been parted by the hurrying world.’ And in modern times, the walker-writer H I Brock has suggested that walking can help regain this loss of self: ‘The land of our better selves is most surely reached by walking.’

When we talk about ‘the meaning of life’, ‘the inner person’ or ‘enlightenment’, we are seeking our better selves. And the way to do that is to get away from the hurly burly of the day, slow things down, relax and still the mind. And the easiest way to do this is to walk mindfully.

When you try to sort out your problems with thought alone; when you try to discover meaning and a deeper understanding of life with thought alone; then you become stuck in the workings of the conscious mind – your day to day mind, the mind that is causing you all the problems in the first place. If you use your mind to work on your mind, you will end up more confused than when you began. You get caught up in a mental experience; the mind is muddled with ‘interference’ and ‘brain noise’. And in this kind of disturbed state it is impossible to see clearly and to see things whole.

The answer is to get outside of your mind, cut the noise out of your system; and the way to do this is to move your body; to make your body and your spirit fit; and the easiest way to do this is to walk mindfully. Fitness of the spirit energises us. As we pay attention to the movement of the body, removing from our mind all the clutter of chaotic thoughts, suddenly the mind relaxes and clears. Think of the effect a stone has if you throw it into a pool. The stone hits the water, causing waves of interference, then gradually the waves subside and the pool clears again. Your mind is like that pool much of the time, with sensory events bombarding it from morning to night – all types of noise: crowds, traffic, telephones, mobile phones, TVs, social media, muzak and a thousand anonymous forms of mind pollution. But when you walk – when you use mindful walking and walking meditation to still the mind – then you suddenly become aware, let go of all the clutter which is filling up your mind, and you can see things whole.

Meditation and awareness begin with the body. ‘Sit as little as possible,’ wrote the philosopher Nietzsche. ‘Give no credence to any thought that was not born outdoors while one moved about freely – in which the muscles are not celebrating a feast, too.’

Mindful walking helps you do this. Mindful walking is a total experience. You were born to move – your body, your heart, your mind and your spirit. Moving the body and spirit is what recreation really means: re-creation, putting you back together, making you whole.

As you walk and your body ‘feels’ the rhythm, ‘becomes’ the rhythm, you will find that you become involved in a process, a flow, like a river, and it’s this flow experience – the flow of breath, the flow of the body, the flow of air around you – that slows and stills the mind and spirit. Mindful walking invites us to be, to become, the authentic ‘better selves’ that we really are.

Mindful walking is a dynamic process. It energises us, awakens us, and stills our mind. We begin to experience what can only be called ‘the walker’s high’. When you have been walking for a time and you fully relax, your mood can change and give you a physical and spiritual uplift. Some people think that this is because the body releases powerful brain chemicals called endorphins into the bloodstream. But we feel that it is perhaps more to do with a change of perception, from the everyday conscious mind into ‘the higher mind’ – the intuitive mind: our better self.

As we walk mindfully, everything begins to slow down (except us, that is). Away from the stresses and strains of the day, we regain our senses. And as we listen to our own silent rhythm, to the sacred drum – the pulse of life itself, our own heart beating – we become one with the basic rhythm of the universe; the ebb and flow of the oceans, the daily motions of the planets, the movement of the seasons.

Walking mindfully, we become whole.

I WALK, THEREFORE I AM

Few people know how to take a walk.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The conductor Sir Thomas Beecham said that music frees us from the tyranny of the conscious mind. Walking can have the same effect. The rhythmical effect of walking has a musical quality about it, and it is the measured beat of the right foot alternating with the left that helps to break down the negative patterns of inactivity and stress.

Walking frees us from the tyranny of the conscious mind; it helps us to look inside ourselves, to see ourselves clearly, away from the noise and distractions of modern living. Mindful walking is a natural therapy which promotes a sense of peace and rhythm that we all need in our lives.

Rhythm is all around us: it pervades the Universe. Modern physics sees matter as 'being in a continuous dancing and vibrating motion whose rhythmic patterns are determined by the molecular, atomic and nuclear structures' according to Fritjof Capra in *The Tao of Physics*. Some mystics, philosophers and poets also see the material world in the same way – as a dynamic universe that moves, vibrates and dances. When we walk we move, vibrate and dance with it.

The composer Gustav Mahler tells the story that he was once stuck in the middle of writing a new symphony. He was stuck for weeks. No matter how hard he worked, the notes did not come. Then one day he was being rowed across a lake. Suddenly the rhythm and movement of the oars through the water created rhythms in his own mind and the notes for the opening of the next movement came to him.

Mindful walking can be like this. With practice, once you get into a rhythm and really begin to relax and let go, walking can stimulate a meditational state similar to the deep meditational states of yoga and other disciplines.

I walk, therefore I am. I use mindful walking to be with myself: to get away from the noise and distractions of everyday life. Out there on the road the mind suddenly clears. It is lifted out of the confused chatter that often goes on inside and it sees, as if for the first time, like a child.

THE INNER GAME OF WALKING

Man's main task in life
is to give birth to himself.

ERICH FROMM

We hope that we have persuaded you that mindful walking will help you find your 'better self' and show you the way to become your own best friend. Once you have discovered the benefits of fitness walking for health, fitness and weight loss, you will want to go further and discover the additional benefits provided by mindful walking.

Mindful walking, WM, begins with relaxation and the feeling of letting go. Mindful walking has nothing to do with goals or objectives. Use fitness walking to get fit, improve your cardiovascular system and lose weight; use mindful walking to encounter a deeper self-knowledge, greater concentration and serenity.

You can use walking meditation to break the pattern of obsessive thoughts and tension. You can use it to centre yourself inside your own experience and give yourself an overview of what is happening inside – what is really happening, not what you thought was happening. Walking meditation will give you control over your life.

How does it work?

There is a saying that the mind is like a drunken monkey. Think for a moment about the daily traffic of sounds going on inside your head, from the minute you wake up to the minute you go to bed. Think about the constant voice-over in your mind as a continuous sound track superimposed on an endlessly rolling film.

That is what the mind is like much of the time. And then think what it would be like to slow it all down and feel that it is you who are in control, and not the machinery that is controlling you. The key to walking meditation is to keep your mind focused on what you are doing.

Mindful walking is a game: an inner game that you need to learn and practise. It's a new way of looking at things, seeing things in a different way – a different light. And it's learning how to listen. This is how Hermann Hesse expresses the feeling in the treasured classic *Siddhartha*: '... how to listen, to listen with a still heart, with a waiting, open soul, without passion, without desire, without judgement, without opinions.'

WM goes beyond linear thinking and helps you find creative solutions to problems. It puts you back in touch with your better self, and shows you how to get back in touch whenever you want to. It is strong medicine; stronger than alcohol, drugs and tranquillisers. Yet it is a positive addiction, gentle, harmless, and freely available to everyone.

This is what Alan Watts, the philosopher, mystic, and advocate of walking meditation, said of it: 'Let your ears hear whatever they want to hear; let your eyes see whatever they want to see; let your mind think whatever it wants to think; let your lungs breathe in their own rhythm.'

When we talk about WM, we don't mean thinking about our problems – that is thought. WM is a process, a flow experience, the letting go of conscious thought. WM shows you how to handle what's going on in your head. You become aware of the clutter, the 'brain noise', the confusion, the never ending 'inner newsreel' of daily events. WM lets things just happen. It doesn't force events. It helps you let go – helps you wait and listen.

WM helps you collect information about yourself: how you feel; how you react to distance, speed, your surroundings, the seasons. There are few times when we are really with ourselves. WM allows us to be with ourselves; to be more receptive and aware; to focus on the here and now – to surrender to the intensity of the moment.

The practice of meditation is a mind-body process, and the purpose of walking meditation is mindful awareness. The Indian classic, the Bhagavad-Gita, advises that: 'Patiently, little by little, a man must free himself from all mental distractions.' It is by concentrating on 'one point' – on one thing at a time – that the mind is stilled and centred. Then energy, vitality and creativity flow out of it like the rays of the sun.

There is a creative force and power that exists in rhythm. All nature has rhythm in it: the earth, sun, moon all move with a definite rhythm. To be successful, music must have rhythm. When we have a rhythm in our movement, we become stronger and fitter physically and spiritually. WM creates this sense of rhythm when we walk mindfully and become aware of our movement.

Oliver Wendell Holmes in *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* had the following to say about the mental and physical pleasures of walking:

The pleasure of exercise is due first to a purely physical impression, and secondly to a sense of power in action. The first source of pleasure varies of course with our condition and the state of surrounding circumstances; the second with the amount and kind of power, and the extent and kind of action. In all forms of active exercise there are three powers simultaneously in action – the will, the muscles and the intellect. Each of these predominates in different kinds of exercise. In walking, the will and muscles are so accustomed to work together and perform their task with so little expenditure of force, that the intellect is left comparatively free. The mental pleasure in walking, as such, is in the sense of power over all our moving machinery.

Start WM the way you would start fitness walking – slowly, doing a little at a time. Don't push yourself too quickly. Get into your stride, build up a walking rhythm, and then experiment with different mindful walking techniques. The following section, **WALKING MEDITATION**, will help you get started. These meditations are all included in our latest eBook: *The Urban Walker – How to Upgrade Your Mind, Body and Spirit in 30 Days*, available from Amazon at <http://tinyurl.com/mq5hkvb> and from our website at www.WalkWalk.co.uk

WALKING MEDITATION

He who treads softly goes far.

CHINESE SAYING

Walking is as natural as breathing. Chuang Tzu, the Chinese teacher, tells us: ‘The true man breathes with his heels.’ The feet allow us to collect energy from the ground. The alternating rhythmic motion of the arms and legs is similar to the inhalation and exhalation of the lungs when we breathe. Breath control and traditional sitting meditation is one way of learning to meditate; another way to meditate is to walk mindfully.

In the early 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had this to say about the meditative effects of walking: ‘My body has to be on the move to set my mind going ... I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs.’

To relax and get back in touch with our souls we need to slow down. Stepping back from the relentless motivations and beliefs that drive us, we can step forward with our walking meditations into a new way of seeing and believing – a way which teaches us to be gentle with ourselves and others. So try the following walking meditations that will help you get into your stride and walk mindfully.

Awareness Walking

In order to have peace and joy, you must succeed
in having peace with each of your steps.

THICH NHAT HANH

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and teacher, in his *Guide to Walking Meditation*, said: ‘Your steps are the most important thing ... they decide everything.’ So walk mindfully today and become aware of your movement through the air. Feel the spring of your heel and toes as they propel you forward; feel the pull of your muscles in your feet, legs and hips; and feel the rhythm of your arms and legs. Stay with these feelings and explore them.

Awareness walking is walking meditation – focusing on the rhythm of the breath and the rhythm of each step to induce a state of deep relaxation and self-awareness. Adding a mind-body technique to walking can provide greater relaxation and stress management, and can turn a routine fitness walk into a creative, rejuvenating experience. Begin by breathing deeply from the abdomen. Let your lungs breathe in their own rhythm. Stay with this feeling for a time, then focus on how many steps you take as your lungs fill and how many steps you take as they empty. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to include both breath and steps. Counting steps and watching the inhalation and exhalation of your lungs helps you touch the basic rhythm of life. Try counting steps from one to 10 on every second step, take a few silent steps, then begin again. If you are not comfortable with this, try counting to a different number.

Movement Meditation

Begin this meditation by concentrating on your body movement and walking rhythm. Feel your feet as they touch the ground – heel, ball, toe. Remember, ‘the true man breathes with his heels’. Stay with this feeling and imagine yourself striding confidently through life. Then bring your awareness into your legs and hips. Experience the pull of muscles in the feet, legs and hips – feel how they move as you stride. Stay with these feelings and get to know them. Then concentrate on your arms swinging in counterpoint to your legs. Now focus on your ‘centre’ – three inches below your navel, what Taoists call your ‘dan tien’, your life force energy. This is your powerhouse where all your energy and movements originate from. Imagine a string extending from this centre stretching you upwards towards the sky. Keep your head balanced, looking straight ahead and walk tall. Then put all these movements together in one perfect rhythm and flow. When we have rhythm in our movement we become stronger physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Counting Breaths

This is easy to do. As you walk, count your exhalations up to four and begin again. If you lose track – because you think of something else – then bring your mind gently back to the task, and continue counting. You don't have to stick with counting up to four – experiment with any number counting up to 10.

Remember that the air we breathe is a gift of love from the universe. Counting breaths is a way of getting back in touch with the basic rhythm of the universe; the inhaling and exhaling of our lungs is like the ebb and flow of the oceans and the movement of the planets. The purpose of counting breaths is to concentrate on one point. Don't be put off this task when other thoughts intrude and you start thinking about what you are going to eat later or what you are going to watch on television. Simply bring the mind gently back to counting breaths. Another method is to pick out a lamp post or a tree a few hundred yards along the road and count your breaths until you get there. This will help you to anchor your mind and focus awareness. After a few weeks you will experience increased concentration, awareness, and you will have mastered a simple way of stilling the mind.

Meditation is about increased awareness, concentration and self-knowledge. Whether you relax naturally into it, or use one of the above methods from *The Urban Walker – How to Upgrade Your Mind, Body and Spirit in 30 Days*, just go with the flow. If you find your mind wandering, gently bring it back to walking mindfully. Find a walking rhythm to suit you and stick with it until it becomes a habit.

Do the meditations as long as you need to. You are not working towards a goal. All you are trying to do is relax and centre your mind. If you can do that, then you will be able to get away from the hurly burly of life any time you want to by walking mindfully.

MINDFUL WALKING AND CREATIVITY

Only the man who can relax is able to create,
and ideas reach his mind like lightning.

CICERO

What we want to know is who we are; how we can be happy; how we can make a success out of our lives. And what we are really trying to do much of the time in all our mad, confused, chaotic ways is to separate the prose from the passion that we so desperately need. Our lives are prosaic and humdrum enough; we need more passion, enthusiasm and love to make it all worthwhile. We need something to take us out of ourselves, so that we can be the 'better selves' that we know we can be. We need a 'lift'.

On the road, you get that lift – walking meditation gives you that lift. On the road you find answers to the great questions of life. WM opens the mind to the mystery of life; and opens the heart to the mystery of itself – the god within. This is what enthusiasm literally means: entheos (Greek for 'the god within').

WM is a creative way of distracting the conscious mind from its everyday routine and opening it up to the energy and power of the 'higher mind' – the 'intuitive mind'. This is the lift that you need – what the psychologist Abraham Maslow refers to as a 'peak experience':

They tend to change a person's view of himself in a healthy direction ... they may change his view of other people and his relationships with them. They can change more or less permanently his view of the world ... they can release greater creativity, spontaneity, expressiveness, idiosyncrasy.

This is what other creative people have to say about the power of 'peak experiences':

One's eyes are suddenly opened; oneself and the world appear in a different light, are seen from a different viewpoint ... the process can be described as a series of ever widening experiences which are felt deeply and which transcend theoretical, intellectual knowledge.

ERICH FROMM

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within ... yet he dismisses without notice his thought because it is his. In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

I can remember the very spot in the road, when to my joy the solution occurred to me.

CHARLES DARWIN

Peak experiences shake us awake, summon up meaning and open us up to the magnificent possibilities that we are as human beings. Our eyes are opened, and we see the world in a different light. The poet, the musician and the philosopher have always known this and it is why they are able to create works of genius. Your peak experiences may not urge you to

create works of genius, but in your own special way, they will help you to become a better person – a ‘better self’.

KEEPING A MINDFUL WALKING DIARY

The length of my walk is the length of my writing.

THOREAU

WM will help you relax, give you power over your mind, and open up the pathways to your 'better self'. If you practise WM regularly, you will soon be able to make contact at will with your intuitive mind, and the 'peak experiences' that it generates. You can then use these creative insights to improve your life, your work, and your relationships.

Generating intuitive insights is one thing – remembering them is another. There is nothing more infuriating than walking along and being shaken awake by an 'intuitive flash', only to find that a moment later the experience has dropped out of your mind as quickly as it entered, and it cannot be recalled.

The answer to this is to keep a mindful walking diary. Keeping a diary helps to keep you motivated and gives you the satisfaction of observing the progress you have made. Your peak experiences are discoveries to be recorded and treasured.

Write them down, and after a few weeks look through your jottings to see if there is any sort of pattern in them. You may find that from the fragments that spring up during walking meditation, a pattern does begin to emerge. Make a poem out of the fragments, or a word collage. Try word association games and see where the patterns take you. You will be surprised where your intuitive insights could lead you. Suddenly life, love and the universe could become clearer. And your efforts will all seem infinitely worthwhile. Like the poet William Blake, you will see and feel things that change your perception:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

AUGURIES OF INNOCENCE

Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life. Become an inner walker. Play around with mindful walking – let it play you – and see where it takes you. And remember, you are your own best friend.

WHO WERE THE MINDFUL WALKERS?

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
Strong and content I travel the open road.

SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD, WALT WHITMAN

Philosophers, poets, writers, musicians, and creative people of all types have been enthusiastic walkers – and for good reason. George Trevelyan, who wrote the classic *History of England*, said of walking, ‘I never knew a man go for an honest day’s walk for whatever distance, great or small ... and not have his reward in the repossession of his soul.’

Aristotle, who was known for the Peripatetic school of philosophy, would discourse with his students while walking around the grounds of the Academy. Emmanuel Kant walked every afternoon, and Rousseau said of his walks, ‘Never have I thought so much, never have I realised my existence so much, I have been so much alive.’

Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge and de Quincey were all inveterate walkers. It was estimated by Wordsworth’s friends that during the course of his life he walked 185,000 miles in the English Lake District, which inspired him to ‘see into the heart of things’ and to write about:

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

Dickens, Samuel Johnson, Boswell, Ruskin and Jane Austen all used their walks to free the creative mind. Beethoven and Mozart both took to the woods to discover their own ‘creator spiritus’. Would Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* exist but for his walks in the Vienna woods?

Would Mozart have given us *The Marriage of Figaro* if he had not sought inspiration in the open air? Not only men of genius but ordinary people have been discovering for centuries that walking has a special quality about it. Mindful walking frees us from the tyranny of the conscious mind and lets the intuitive mind breathe.

THE INTUITIVE MIND

Get out of your mind at least once a day.

ALAN WATTS

No one really knows how intuition works, but split brain research has given us a clue. Researchers have discovered that each side of the brain, the right and the left, processes information in its own way. Although the brain as a whole works together, one side or the other tends to predominate for a specific task.

Our left brain is verbal, objective, logical, analytical, linear and conscious, whereas our right brain is non-verbal, subjective, intuitive, holistic, spatial and unconscious. The problem for many of us in Western society is that we tend to be left brain dominant. We live in a society which values masculine, objective, analytical skills at the expense of feminine, subjective, intuitive skills.

If we are not careful, it is easy to become trapped in our own rational, linear thought patterns. We go on day after day in the same old way, often unhappy with our lot, but not knowing how to change it. We become stuck on a giant treadmill that turns forever without stopping.

The great Swiss psychologist Carl Jung summed up the modern Western way of thinking when he said that 'we think with our tongues'.

We need to give the right brain a chance. We need to free the intuitive mind. We need to let go and relax, for this has always been the first step in seeking the wholeness that we lack. You could say that we need something to inspire us. Inspire means literally 'breathe into'. We need to let go, relax, and let the intuitive mind breathe into us its spirit. We need to walk.

As you progress with mindful walking and walking meditation, you will experience moments when you feel that everything suddenly becomes clear. At such moments life is filled with a significance which it normally lacks.

Mindful walkers have described the feeling as follows:

When I am alone, as it were, completely myself ... walking after a good meal ... ideas flow best and most abundantly. Whence and how they come, I know not; nor can I force them.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

I can see the whole of it at a single glance in my mind. All the inventing and making goes on in me in a beautiful strong dream. But the best of all is the hearing of it all at once.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

As I went along, thinking nothing in particular, only looking at things around me and following the progress of the seasons, there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza at once.

A E HOUSMAN

JOURNEYS IN INNER TIME

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)

T S ELIOT

There are few times when we are really alone with ourselves. We are always too busy. We say that we never have time. And yet we make time for almost everything else: eating, drinking, working, making love, entertainment and sleeping.

Time seems to be an elusive element in our lives which tends to get out of control, and if we are not careful it ends up controlling us. Time measures change: change between one hour and the next, one day and the next, and so on. In the short run we talk about having no time, losing time, spending time. 'In the long run,' as the great economist Maynard Keynes said, 'we are all dead.'

And yet despite the fact that time can be elusive and can appear to control us, there are times, rare occasions, when we catch a glimpse of something greater, more meaningful times when we are totally alive and whole. It can happen listening to a piece of music, reading a poem, watching a film, falling in love, staring at the stars. On such occasions we become unaware of time. We talk about time 'standing still'. Certainly time slows down and we become unconscious of it.

We have all experienced the feeling of time distortion. Waiting for a bus or train, we are conscious that time is passing very slowly – five minutes can seem like 20. And yet when we become fully absorbed in something that interests us, we experience the opposite – an hour can seem like 10 minutes.

This is because time, clock time, is a phenomenon of the conscious left brain. Waiting for a train, we are still carrying around with us all the 'mental baggage' of the day – we may be tense, angry, even fearful. Time drags. But when we do something that fully absorbs us, we let go of all the 'mental baggage' and relax. It is only then, when we fully relax and let go, that time appears to stand still and life becomes more meaningful.

Unless you are an ardent jogger, 20 minutes of jogging may seem endless to you. You go out all geared up to get fit, but the effort required is too great. You are anchored in your conscious mind. You are anxious for results. Time drags. Mindful walking can produce the opposite effect. You can walk for 20 minutes and it can seem like five. You can walk for one hour and it can seem like 20 minutes. Time does not drag – you lose track of time. You are in another dimension.

To understand time we need to grasp that there are three different kinds of time, and that we live constantly in three separate time zones.

There is social time which we can also call clock time – experienced time, time that is measured in minutes, hours, days, and weeks, and time which we organise our lives by in diaries and train schedules, time for birth, growth and death.

There is cosmic time, or Nature time, which we experience as the infinite: the expanding universe, the 13.8 billion years back to the Big Bang, the seasons and evolution.

And there is inner time. Inner time has nothing to do with clocks, calendars or social conditioning. It has nothing to do with the expanding universe or the seasons. Inner time is a time when we are alone. It is a time when we are truly with ourselves, when we can reflect and remember just who we are.

Inner time is what mindful walking is all about. We leave behind the weight of clock time and social time and on the road we find ourselves, and discover the inscape of our deepest selves.

The story is told of a Zen master who was invited to give a lecture to his students. The students assembled in a great rectangular hall and sat waiting patiently for the master to arrive. Outside it was raining and the only sound inside the hall was the sound of the rain tapping against the roof.

When the master arrived, he sat down before them, and he too waited patiently, listening quietly to the sound of the rain tapping against the roof.

Suddenly the rain stopped. The master got up and asked the students to follow him outside. The students eagerly followed the master as he left the building and began to stride briskly away from them towards the hills in the distance, as though rapt in a trance. The students had to hurry, for the master had long legs and he was already starting to leave them behind.

They took a circular route across the hills, and then down through some woods near a stream, before returning to the great rectangular hall. During the journey, no one had spoken. And no one could remember how long they had walked or how far.

The students assembled again in the hall, and the master sat before them. They waited and waited, anxiously expecting the master to speak and impart his wisdom to them.

After a time the master quietly stood up; he said that the lecture was over, and left.

The sound of the rain needs no translation.

ZEN SAYING

THE ROAD AHEAD

Not I, not any one can travel that road for you,
You must travel it for yourself.

WALT WHITMAN

So what do we find on these mindful walks as we tread the path to enlightenment? If we knew the answer to that question we would know the answer to the meaning of existence itself. We walk mindfully to discover something about ourselves that we did not know, or we had forgotten. We walk simply to be ourselves – whatever that means, for your mindful walks will tell you something different from ours.

We can only tell you that the days when we do no mindful walking we feel incomplete, as if something is missing. As much as possible, we try to keep our minds focused during the day on making sure that nothing prevents us from getting out and enjoying our mindful walks. For mindful walking works not only while you walk, but it carries over to affect the whole of the rest of your life – your relationships, your work, your hopes and your dreams.

There is an ancient legend of a man who travelled the entire world in search of buried treasure. After a lifetime's search he returned tired and weary to his home village where a child pointed out to him that the treasure he had been seeking was inside himself.