

Ten Lessons On Spiritual Walking Practice

by Samuel Lewis



1. Walk

Walking is one of the first arts which can be taught to children. It is not usually looked upon as an art, but in teaching children how to draw and how to dance, some knowledge of walking as an art or even as a science is helpful. We do not usually take this seriously, and we do not see that without some knowledge, not only uncontrolled fatigue but also emotional problems arise.

The principle of Path appears in several religions, not only in their mystical aspects but in many ceremonies and rituals. Circumambulation of an altar or shrine may even be regarded as an important act of devotion. The very word 'path' signifies that which comes from the feet treading; it almost means 'what is footed.' It is now important to study the Walk both as a physical exercise and as a super-physical endeavor, making both movement and rest the most fundamental things in life.

No doubt out of Walking came circumambulation and other rituals, and these all culminated in pilgrimages of some sort. In many rituals or pilgrimages the shoes are discarded—sometimes one is even compelled to go barefoot. Moses was told to take off his shoes because he was on holy ground, but both the ritual and the importance of this have been lost in the West.

In Sufism it is stressed that the physical Body is the temple of God. This was also taught by Jesus Christ in both the scriptures and in other writings attributed to him. Why has it been overlooked? Institutions have been made more important than human beings. The non-acceptance of the human being as created in the divine image has set all religion off in the wrong direction.

In the consideration of Walk, the feet themselves are connected with shrines. When one does the Lotus and other postures, the human Body is the shrine and the feet are accordingly tucked either under or over the legs. When one uses an external shrine, one may walk around it. But if one agrees with Kabir that God is everywhere, one can learn in Walk that the Body is the real temple and that every place is the holy shrine.

With this attitude we not only learn to Walk but also to overcome fatigue without giving any consideration to the fatigue. The Hebrew Bible states that the Creator does not slumber nor sleep. Not only whoever is conscious of the Divine Presence, but even every organ of the Body, filled with divinity, will be able to function as if belonging to Eternity rather than to time.

2. Breath

It should be recognized that before we can run we must be able to Walk. By the same token, even before we Walk we should be able to breathe; breath is life. As the Western world has developed its own knowledge and sciences without consideration of breath, it is very important to take into account this neglected fundamental of our being.

Breath currents have energy values as well as chemical and mechanical ones. These are studied in Sufi mysticism and also in the works of Rama Prasad. If one stops breathing, functions also stop, and some Indians identify 'prana,' the breath, with life itself. We cannot say they are wrong; it depends on definition and explanation. But to define does not mean to explain and neither definition nor explanation are the functioning itself.

It cannot be emphasized too much that life depends on breath. Our willing has nothing to do with it. If one ambles, if one slouches, one does not manifest magnetism. From the very

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beginning of discipleship, talibs [students] in Sufism are given instructions in breathing which aid in increasing both magnetism and the capacity for vitality.

One can understand some of this with music and its effect; especially the effects of marches, whether military or not. They first impel the Body to walk, then to walk in rhythm and thirdly to feel vitality. This gives some idea as to how to increase magnetism. And the first thing which should be learned is to breathe in rhythm.

We can learn from the infants who use rattles and drums and metal objects which supply rhythm. Melody is something else and is concerned with mind. At an early age, before the mind is properly developed, children respond to rhythm and make rhythms themselves. The use of rhythms help one to walk and to walk properly.

The other thing needed is posture. We require posture in repose in the practices of meditation. We require dynamic posture in Spiritual Walk, to have the back straight and the head perpendicular. Someone has written on 'back breathing;' this is proper when the currents go from the base of the spine upward. It has untold advantages and yet is one of the most fundamental and simple things in life.

Therefore one of the first lessons is proper posture, proper breathing, proper rhythm. And these help also to overcome fatigue.

3. Thought

The human Body is such that its operations are associated in some way with the nervous system; in other words, there is no action without involving some kind of thought—conscious, subconscious or even unconscious. Thus, also psychic power is involved.

We can learn much from a study of Nature, especially of the animal world. We can learn how the nervous system develops, first into the muscular system, then to the gradual evolution into specialized organs. Anatomy is analytical and does not always help one to understand principles. Physiology is dynamic and sometimes the study of physiology throws light on psychology but the reciprocal is also true. Or, as the Buddhists teach, Mind and Body are one (not to be accepted too literally).

From Nature we can also understand instinct, although this does not always come through study. Instinct may be called the unconscious or underside of insight. It shows that humanity lives in a universe of mind although it is not necessarily aware of it. This becomes apparent when there is coordination of thought, effort and action; then the personality becomes properly integrated.

It is more necessary to feel than to think about one's movements. Thinking about action alone can become a wearing thought and use up the mental magnetism. But if the mind is permitted to wander too much one can lose direction. Therefore in the practice known as Walking Fikar one must have a particular path, preferably a straight line. It should be in fields or what are called 'jungles' in the Orient, meaning where one does not meet people or vehicles.

If one has a goal, physical or mental, while walking, it brings all the magnetism together. It is a living concentration. For instance, a loving person going to meet his or her beloved is endowed and imbued with a living spirit which makes action easier, fatigue disappears.

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If we practice a ‘Toward the One’ Walk, whatever be the goal or purpose, walking becomes much easier. Other sacred phrases may also be thought or repeated, consciously or unconsciously.

4. *Spiritual Walk*

The Spiritual Walk is one connected with esoteric training and development. It may be begun in the Buddhist fashion by simply counting the breaths, a fixed number, or a certain number. Or it may be done in the Sufi fashion which is not too different, except there are accepted cycles like 4, 10, 14, 20, 33, 100 or 101, etc.

Very often it is a good idea to encourage applicants and neophytes to walk and to watch the breath. This is the actual discipline in some Sufi Orders. What is most important is to learn the relationship between God and humanity, between breath and life, and thus pass beyond the gates of so-called death.

Next, one should breathe concentrating on ‘Toward the One’ with both inhalation and exhalation. This can best be done by ‘leaning’ on the breath, giving it more emphasis, but one can also take so many steps to each breath. This is somewhat more complicated. In between these two stages comes walking while listening to music; in this practice attuning to the rhythm is most important. Those who have had training in meditation and this Darood (‘Toward the One’, etc.) will find the latter practice easier and more comfortable. It comes naturally.

As one breathes in and out with the concentration ‘Toward the One,’ all the essence of the universe can enter with the breath and also all the poisons can go out of the system. If this is not sufficient one can be taught other sacred phrases, but for a group ‘Toward the One’ is very good. Besides, a group so joining builds up magnetism. As the group progresses from Spiritual Walk to ceremonial or ritual and from ritual to dance, the dynamics and magnetism of both person and group increase. The capacity also increases for the divine baraka [blessing-magnetism] to manifest on the earth-sphere.

If this is assigned as a spiritual practice, it should be in blocks of 100 steps, adding one at the end (101, 301, etc.) But in a group, blocks of ten are sufficient: 10, 20, 30, etc.

The group may also benefit from meditation; especially any attendant musician should be skillful in meditation. In the absence of a musician (or musicians), suitable music should be used, not too loud but with definite rhythms which can be easily appreciated.

5. *Inhalation and Exhalation*

The subject of inhalation and exhalation looks very simple, but it is actually very complicated and important. It sometimes takes years to understand all the activities which benefit when one is inhaling and the activities which benefit when one is exhaling. This is an important part of mysticism, although athletes will also appreciate it.

In throwing or tossing it is important to work with the exhalation and in receiving or catching with the inhalation. It is also beneficial to learn this from life and not to memorize the series of activities which benefit from inhaling or exhaling. Strange as it may seem, there are also activities which benefit the inhalations and the exhalations. That is to say, there are actions which benefit breaths and there are breaths which benefit actions.

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In walking uphill, the inhalation is important. If one loses breath, one loses magnetism; if one controls breath, no magnetism is lost. When one controls breath and magnetism, the probability is that one can walk much longer and take more difficult ascents. However, there is nothing to be gained here by trying to show prowess. Regarding the human Body as the divine temple is important. As one gains from the all-pervading power of space every effort at climbing benefits.

There are also schools of esoteric development which utilize mountain climbing. This is more complex than ordinary walking. We cannot compare them for each has its mission and its effectiveness. Symbolically, the Path is pictured as going up a mountain and there is much benefit, after people can walk a long time without fatigue, to make an endeavor along this line. There are also pilgrimages to high mountains and any earlier training will prove to be beneficial for those who wish to go the Andes or other mountains.

As climbing depends mostly on inhalation, so going downhill depends on exhalation. If one exhales properly, one's footing will be more sure. Every step should be an exercise not only of the feet but also of the breath. Pupils should even practice in their rooms so that they are aware of their breath and its connection with all physical movements, but most of all with walking.

If this lesson is given to children when quite young, they will build foundations from which they can benefit all through life. The early formative years are most important. Then the walking practice can develop into games and rituals, and this will make the lessons pleasant. Both children and adults should be encouraged to stop occasionally, to be assured of their breath. If there is a group or party, the tempo should be as slow as possible to accommodate the slower ones, but not so slow that they become dominant. It is necessary to improve; therefore, attunement with the teacher is most important of all.

Of equal importance is posture. The back should be straight except when climbing requires a partial stoop and descent a partial leaning back. Even here the back should be as straight as possible. One acts as if one were breathing up the backbone. This can be true at all times, and the lessons in meditation must not be lost when the Body is put in motion.

Zen Buddhism says, "Zen is everyday life." It is not so when we make a doctrine of it. It is so when we practice it at all times.

6. Preventing Fatigue

The attributes of God [in Sufi terms, these sacred phrases are called the Sifat-i-Allah] may be used to help overcome any shortcomings. Loss of breath is actually one of the greatest of shortcomings. We do not notice it. We find that many people who are very emotional, who are selfish, who are inconsiderate, do not breathe correctly. When we get them to take slow, rhythmical inhalations and exhalations, it has a profound effect on their character. This is because, as the Bible teaches (but unfortunately religion does not accept), "God is Breath."

The phrase 'Ya Hayy' [one of the Sifat-i-Allah] may be translated 'O Life,' but it is not 'Life' as a concept or thought. The very vowel efforts show that the life is connected with both breath and vowel formation. People who are subject to fatigue easily, who cannot carry out any project because the mind wanders, benefit by repeating audibly or mentally this phrase 'Ya Hayy.'

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In practice there are two ways to use it. One is on the inhalation: every time one starts to breathe in, one may think this phrase. The other way is to think the phrase every time one takes a stop with the right foot. Either method has some advantage.

A slightly more complicated exercise is to think 'Ya Hayy, Ya Haqq,' which roughly means 'O Life, O Truth.' Actually the 'q' or guttural sound helps to bring the effectiveness down to earth. If people often repeat 'Ya Hayy,' they could be drawn above the denseness of earth, even to ecstasy. For many this is good, especially in the material civilization. For the young this is also good, for they live in a less dense atmosphere.

But by repeating in sound or thought 'Ya Hayy Ya Haqq,' one keeps balance—not too much inwardness, not too much outwardness. One might almost add that people who are extroverted by nature gain from 'Ya Hayy,' and people who are introverted by 'Ya Haqq.' For a group, it is best to use these phrases together.

In Spiritual Walk, one usually starts by concentrating on the thought of the sacred phrases until one is well aware of their effectiveness—how they control and magnetize the breath. If this basic lesson is learned, it will help much more when persons or groups advance to rituals and dances.

7. *The Use of Centers*

'Hara' is a Japanese word for centering in the navel plexus, the bundle of nerves in the abdominal region. This centering is much used by those who practice meditation. Meditation has been taught sitting in lotus postures, and this often tires or fixates certain muscles. The muscles must be unstrung, this tension should not be allowed to remain too long.

There are lazy people both in the Orient and Occident who devote much time to sitting. Some even are under the delusion that sitting itself is spiritual emancipation and has a connection with samadhi [the experience of merging with the cosmos]. Nothing could be further from the truth. For the folding in of the Body involves the folding in of the mind.

Sufis use the symbol of the dot and circle for concentration; this is also emblematic of contraction and expansion. The Hara Walk is essentially a contractive Walk, and it brings all the benefits of this contraction. For instance, it helps in concentration, it helps to synthesize and to produce what has been called 'integration of personality.' Those who practice Hara are certainly of one piece.

They do not have wandering minds. As they keep the Body under control, at the same time they are keeping the mind under control, and this builds up the will. It also makes possible long endeavor and so is another way of overcoming fatigue.

This Hara practice corresponds to the negative or emptying side of the Sufi sacred phrase 'La illaha el il Allah.' [There is no reality, except for Oneness.] This first side [There is no reality...] is called 'fana' by Sufis and helps toward self-effacement. It has been assumed and wrongly assumed, that this negative effacement also produces liberation. That is only one side of it. In any case, no mechanical means, no rules, no rituals, nothing controlled by humanity alone can liberate the human being. Nonetheless, this practice brings the control of nafs, the ego, and its benefits are enormous.

We can read about Hara in books by Japanese (mostly) on Zen. But we can also read (and

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the superficial writers do not seem to know it) of its limitations and dangers. Like the Sufis, the more advanced Zen Buddhists use the heart center. They use it in walking practice and meditation. So it is always beneficial to practice a silence before effort—walking, gymnastics, dancing or anything—and to feel the breath. First one learns the ways of breathing and then one may practice the centering.

Some of these practices are found in the book, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* [By Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps]. Many of the practices emphasize Heart-centering. Nevertheless, it is advantageous to practice the muscular Hara, to integrate the Body as well as the personality. This can first be done by either walking the presence of a teacher or by following the examples set forth by a teacher.

8. The Use of Centers — II

If we study the lives of dancers, especially in this modern age since centering has been discovered, we can see its advantages and disadvantages. Isadora Duncan discovered the Hara center and used it. She did not have a teacher; she used it and unwisely abused herself, becoming more emotionally unstable and uncertain. Her life reflected her dancing and her dancing her life.

At the opposite end was the great Nijinsky who used the head centers. He could almost levitate. He rose from the denseness of the earth. His body became ethereal, and at the same time his mind became ethereal. Like Isadora Duncan he was unbalanced, but in the opposite direction.

It is unwise to practice with the centers in the head for the purpose of Spiritual Walk until one has practiced with at least the Hara center. This gives balance. Sufism constantly emphasizes balance, but mentally-minded people often think if they have the words or thoughts, they have something. They have nothing until they are able to control centers and not be controlled by them. Besides, knowledge of breath is important, it may even be more important than centering.

Centering has a glamour which breathing does not, yet breathing is fundamental to life. We cannot live without it. So the pupil should certainly practice Hara; when the hold of Hara is very great, under wise guidance Head-centering may be tried. But if not, then Heart-centering. The Heart center is near the center of the Body, and also in the unseen it is near the center of the personality.

In addition, certain attributes and qualities physically manifest through certain organs. If this were not so, the animal world would not have advanced, for in the lower creatures all functions are found in minuscule in all the cells. Differentiation, evolution and advancement all go together.

This would suggest that there is a centering in abdomen, a centering in head and a centering in thorax near heart—each with its purpose. As most people are weak they have to begin with Hara. After they are strong, they can practice Heart-centering with no end to advantage.

Head-centering is mostly needed to increase Joy, Bliss, Lightness, rising above the denseness of the earth and material-mindedness. One should not, however, become the slave of it; one is not more 'spiritual' just because one becomes more ethereal.

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9. The Feet

When we become concerned with centers, we are likely to suppose that some parts of the Body are more to be venerated than others. There is a lesson in the First Epistle to the Corinthians in the Christian Bible to the contrary. Unfortunately, Christianity as a religion has not taught much about the nobility of the body, that the body is the temple of the divine spirit. It has become part of the Sufi Message to emphasize this.

No doubt it is easier to impress people with Abdomen-centering, Heart-centering and Head-centering. But Sufis have always been taught to watch their feet, and to feel that they are treading on God's earth.

There are breathing and other practices by which one learns to feel the magnetism go in and out through the feet. These practices can first be tried sitting, perhaps best with only the heels touching the ground. Then one can feel the magnetism while standing and afterwards while walking. One can concentrate on the feet.

The Japanese, concentrating on the abdomen, rid their minds of useless luggage. The Sufi dervishes use their feet, and also rid their minds of useless luggage. The ridding of luggage is more important than the method. What is needed is a method that works, not a philosophy about a method, which can be very confusing.

As one feels the breath go out the feet, this also helps one to overcome fatigue, as well as feel courage and direction. This practice also impels the breath to be felt through the whole Body. Then the Body acts as one. One has a whole Body, and the whole Body is the divine temple.

Again it has been taught that the last shall be first. We may begin with the head; we end with the feet. Each can produce the sense of oneness and this sense of oneness is most important in every school of spiritual development.

10. Tasawwuri

Tasawwuri is an advanced practice which requires a teacher, usually a living teacher. One does best by performing Tasawwuri either in the presence of a living teacher, or when one has a firm impression of the teacher in the mind, it can be done in the teacher's absence. Or when the teacher manifests and brings a great blessing, Tasawwuri can be performed easily.

There are several ways of acquiring Tasawwuri. One is to see the teacher and even follow the teacher while walking. Another is to be deeply impressed, so that one is aware of the teacher's rhythm.

There are practices in concentration called Murakkaba which enable the devotee to advance along this line. Practices mean practices and not thoughts about such subjects. These thoughts are often the gates to the worst kind of delusions and self-centeredness. People may have the philosophies but neither the knowledge nor the wisdom. They do not know if they really can get into the rhythm of the teacher.

Sufic concentration (Murakkaba) requires devotion. Love, devotion and attunement are the best requirements. Then one feels, sometimes even sees the teacher, so to speak, without any physical contact. So one usually starts with the living teacher. But at the same time, the teacher may not be perfect and in turn may be practicing the rhythms of Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad or other illuminated souls. Besides those named there have been a multitude

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of saints and some of these have been particularly respected. And others may manifest or impress their vibration upon a devotee. A devotee may need a particular kind of attunement to awaken certain qualities within. No better way can be used than the proper concentration and breath attunement followed by the practice of Spiritual Walk.

There is another form of Tasawwuri used in the circumambulation of shrines. This has reached its highest degree in walking about the Kaaba at Mecca with the practice of Tasawwuri Muhammad. This no doubt is the highest, hardest and also most rewarding practice. But being highest and hardest, it is like walking up a steep cliff, and it is better to learn to walk first, then climb slopes. Besides, the objective is to reach the summit, not necessarily to climb in a certain manner, for all ways lead to God.

Once one learns the principle, then it can be applied in all kinds of ways. There is yet another practice called Akhlak Allah which is to feel God, that one is in God's presence, that one is walking within God and God is walking within one. This is most beneficial and everybody can learn to do that.

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