

Ten Lessons on the Walk

by

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(Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

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 the teaching of children how to draw and also 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 there is not only uncontrolled fatigue, but also emotional problems arise.

The principle of **path** appears in several religions. It is not only in their mystical aspects but in many ceremonies and rituals. Circumambulation of an altar or shrine is also important, even 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 endeavour, making both movement and rest the most fundamental things in life.

No doubt out of walking came circumambulation and other rituals and these all culminate in pilgrimages of some sort. And in many rituals or pilgrimages, the shoes are discarded—even sometimes one is compelled to go bare-foot. Although Moses was told to take off his shoes because he was on holy ground, both the ritual and its importance 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. The substitution of an institutional church as an important structure, and the bypassing of Man as the creature of God, and the non-acceptance of his being created in the Divine image, has set all religion off in the wrong direction.

One thing almost obvious in the consideration of Walk is that 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, then there is Walking. But if one agrees with Kabir that God is everywhere, one can learn to walk so that the body is the real temple and that every place is a holy shrine.

With this attitude we not only learn to walk but also overcome fatigue without giving any consideration to the fatigue. The Hebrew Bible states that the Creator does not slumber nor sleep, and 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, and by the same token, even before we walk we should be able to breathe, for breath is life. As the Western World has developed its own knowledge and sciences without consideration of breath, it is now very important to take into account this neglected fundamental of our being.

Breath-current has energy-values as well as chemical and mechanical ones. These are studied in the 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 is 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 beginning of discipleship, talibs in Sufism are given the 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 impel the body to walk, to walk in rhythm (a second item) and to feel vitality (a third item). 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 connected with mind, but at an early age before the mind is properly developed, the children respond to rhythm and make rhythms themselves.

The use of rhythms helps 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 walking, to have the back straight, and the head perpendicular. Some have written on “back breathing” and 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 the proper posture, the proper breathing, the proper rhythm. And these help one 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 or subconscious or even unconscious. Thus also psychic power is involved.

We can learn much from a study of Nature, especially of the animal world, of the relation of the development of the nervous to the muscular system first and 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).

There is the understanding of instinct, which does not always come through study. Instinct may be called the unconscious or under-side of insight. It shows that man lives in a universe of mind though he is not necessarily aware of it. But when there is coordination of thought, effort and action, then the personality becomes more 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 Fikr** one must have a particular path, preferably a straight line, and 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 magnetisms together. It is a living concentration. For instance a lover, going to meet his or her beloved, is endowed and imbued with a living spirit which makes action easier and fatigue disappears. If we practice a "Toward the One," whatever be the goal or purpose, walking becomes much easier. And therefore also sacred phrases may be thought or repeated, consciously or unconsciously.

4. Spiritual Walk

The spiritual walk is one connected with esoteric training and development. It may have begun in the Buddhist fashion by simply counting breaths, a fixed number or a certain number. Or it may be done in the Sufi fashion which is not too different, excepting 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 orders. What is most important is to learn the relationship between God and man, between breath and life, and thus pass beyond the gates of so-called death.

Then one should breathe concentrating on **Toward the One** with both inhalation and exhalation, the same phrase. This can be done best by leaning on the breath, but also one can take so many steps to each breath. This is somewhat more complicated. In between comes in listening to music wherein the rhythm is most important. Besides, those who have had training in meditation and this **Darood (Toward the One, etc.)** will find it easier and more comfortable. It comes naturally.

As one breathes in and out with this concentration, 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 sacred phrases, but for a group **Toward the One** is very good. Besides, a group so joining builds up magnetism, and as the group progresses from Walk to ceremonial or ritual and from ritual to dance, the dynamism and magnetism of both person and group increase; and also the capacity for the Divine Baraka manifesting on the earth-sphere increases.

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

However, the group also benefits from meditation, and especially any attendant musician should be skillful in meditation. In the absence of the musician or musicians, suitable music should be used, not too loud, but with definite rhythms which can easily be appreciated.

5. Inhalation and Exhalation

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

Thus 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; or strange as it may seem those 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.

In walking uphill, the inhalation is important. If one loses breath, one loses magnetism; if one controls breath, then no magnetism is lost. And when one controls breath and magnetism, then 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; it is regarding the human body as the Divine Temple that is important. And 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 endeavor along this line. For there are also pilgrimages to high mountains, and any earlier training will prove to be beneficial for those who wish to go to the Andes.

As climbing depends mostly on inhalation, so going downhill depends on exhalation. If one exhales properly, one's foot-holdings will be more sure. Every step should be an exercise, not only of the feet but also of the breath. Therefore, pupils should practice, even in their rooms, so that they are

aware of their breath and of its connections with all physical movements, but most of all with walking.

If this lesson is given to children when young, they will build foundations from which they can benefit all through life. And the early formative years are most important. Then the Walk can develop into games and rituals, and this will make the lessons pleasant.

Both children and adults should be told to stop to be assured of their breath, and if there is a group or party, the tempo should be as slow as possible to accommodate the slow ones, but not so slow that they become the dominants. It is necessary to improve, and therefore attunement with the teacher is most important of all.

Of equal importance is posture. The back should be straight excepting 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 into motion.

Zen Buddhism says that 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 (Allah) may be used to help overcome any shortcoming. Loss of breath is actually one of the greatest of shortcomings. We do not notice it. We find 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 change of character. This is because, as the Bible teaches, but unfortunately religion does not accept—"God is Breath."

The phrase **Ya Hayy** may be translated, "O Life," but it is not "O Life" as an attribute 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**.

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

A slightly more complicated exercise is to think **Ya Hayy Ya Haqq** which roughly means, "O Life, O Truth." Actually the K or guttural sound helps to bring the effectiveness down to earth. If people repeated **Ya Hayy** often, 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 a balance, not too much inwardness and not too much outwardness. One might also add that people who are extroverted by nature gain from **Ya Hayy** and people who are introverted, by **Ya Haqq**, but for a group, it is best to use the phrases together.

In Walk this must be done mostly by thought 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 **solar plexus**, which is the bundle of nerves in the abdominal region. It is used much by those who practice meditation. Meditation has been taught sitting in lotus posture, and this often tires or fixates certain muscles. The muscles have to be unstrung. There must not be this tension 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 is spiritual emancipation, and has a connection with samadhi. Nothing could be further from the truth. For the folding in of the body involves the folding in of the mind.

Sufis have the symbol of Dot and Circle and this also is 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 it is another mode of overcoming fatigue.

This hara corresponds to the negative side of **La Illaha El Il Allah**. This 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. Besides, no mechanical means, no rules, no rituals, nothing controlled by man alone, can liberate man. But at the same time, it brings control of **nufs**, 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 the superficial writers do not seem to know about it—of its limitations and dangers. For like the Sufis, the more advanced Zen Buddhists use the **Heart** center. They use it in walking and meditation. So it is always beneficial to practice a silence before effort, walking or gymnastics or dancing or

anything, and feel the breath, learn the ways of breathing and then practice the centering.

Some of these practices are found in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. Many of them emphasize the heart centering. Nevertheless it is advantageous to practice the muscular hara, to integrate the body as well as the personality, and this can be done by walking either in the presence of a teacher or by the examples set forth by a teacher.

8. The Use of Centers (2)

If we study the lives of dancers, especially in this modern age since centering has been discovered, we can see advantages and disadvantages. Isadora Duncan discovered the Solar Plexus center and used it. She did not have any teacher; she just used it and unwisely abused herself. She became more emotional and uncertain. Her life reflected her dancing and her dancing her life.

At the opposite end was the great Nijinsky who used the **Head** center. 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 purposes of Walk until one has practiced with at least the Hara center. This gives balance. Sufism constantly emphasizes balance, but the mentally minded people think if they have these words and these 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, and then when the hold of hara is very great, under wise guidance, head centering may be tried. But if not, then heart centering. For after all, the heart center is near the center of the body, and also in the unseen, it is near the center of personality.

Besides there are certain attributes and qualities which manifest physically through different organs. If this were not so, the animal world would not have advanced, for in the lower creatures, all functions are found in miniscule in all the cells. Differentiation and 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, and each has its purpose. But as people are weak, mostly they have to begin with hara. After they are strong, they can practice with heart centering and there is no end to advantage here.

Head centering is mostly needed to increase joy, bliss, lightness, rising above the denseness of the earth and material mindedness. But one should not become the slave of it; one is not necessarily

more “spiritual” because one becomes more ethereal.

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 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 and heart-centering and head-centering. But Sufis have always been taught to watch their **Feet**, and that they are treading on God's earth.

There are breathing and other practices by which one learns to feel the magnetism go out through the feet. This can be tried by sitting at first, and perhaps best with only the rear of the feet on the ground (the heel). 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, using their feet, 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 method, which can be very confusing.

As one feels the breath go out the feet, this also helps one to overcome fatigue; also to feel courage and direction. This 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 and 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 his 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 he walks. Another is to be deeply impressed, so that one is aware of the teacher's

rhythm.

There are practices in Concentration called **Murakkabah**, 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 have the philosophies and neither knowledge nor wisdom. They do not know if they really can get into the rhythm of the teacher.

Sufic concentration, Murakkabah, 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. One gets into the rhythm of the teacher. But at the same time, the teacher may not be perfect, and he in his turn may be practicing the rhythms of Rama or Krishna or Shiva or Buddha or Moses or Jesus or Mohammed.

Besides this there have been a multitude of saints and some of these have been particularly respected. And others may manifest or impress. Or a devotee needs a particular kind of attunement to awaken certain qualities in himself. No better way can be used than the proper concentration and breath-attunement followed by the Walk.

There is another form of it, as in the circumambulation of shrines. This has reached its highest degree in walking about the Kaaba at Mecca with Tasawwuri Mohammed. This is no doubt 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.

But there is another way, called **Akhlak Allah** which is to feel God, to feel that one is in His presence, that one is walking within Him and He is walking within one. This is most beneficial, and everybody can learn to do it.