



In many spiritual traditions, walking is more than exercise. The Buddha walked as a means to mindfulness -- quietly, contemplatively, immersed in the present moment. Jesus walked as a form of prayer to the Father, often in a solitary, rugged place. For them, the mind and body are deeply connected, not separate entities, and the act of walking is a path to the Divine, a Higher Power, God.

Most of us don't walk that way today. We buzz along on concrete sidewalks, our minds whirring in a dozen directions. Or we suit up and clock our route, checking our heart rate along the way, logging in our 10,000 steps. What we don't do is walk with intention. We don't set one foot at a time mindfully to earth, heel to toe, heel to toe, establishing ourselves in the here and now, connecting to the ground and the heavens, letting our steps be our meditation.

## Shambala (walking meditation)

Step onto the wooded path. Observe your feet, planted firmly on the earth. Notice the sky, the clouds, the treetops. Feel the air touch your face. Listen to the rustling, chirping, crackling. Smell the mossy dampness.

Set your walk's intention. Perhaps you are walking for clarity. For comfort. For remembrance. For forgiveness. For healing. For peace. For understanding. For wisdom.

I often invite the spirit of my mother on my walks. We walked hundreds of miles together over the years, and our quiet steps connected us deeply. She is gone now, but I often whisper, "Mom, would you like to come walk with me today?" Frequently a red cardinal, my "totem," appears at that moment and I know my feet are her feet, my heart is her heart. And we walk together.

Whisper prayers as you walk, to God or Mother Nature or the Universe. Ask for something to be put in your path, an object of nature, to slip in your pocket. Keep that talisman close and let it remind you of your intention, the groundedness of your steps.

As you come to the end of the path, set your intention free and pause to acknowledge stepping from your Shambala to your present.

I have arrived. I am home. In the now. I am solid. I am free. In the ultimate I dwell.  
– A Zen Buddhist poem

I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.  
– John Burroughs

Namaste.

**SOUL  
STRETCH**  
YOGA