

## THE FWBO INTERNATIONAL URBAN RETREAT

June 20-27<sup>th</sup> 2009

### A mindful walk

We are going to start by cultivating body awareness in a daily 'mindful walk'. I'm going to ask you to do this every day this week and then continue doing it until the end. Of course you might forget, or you may choose not to do the mindful walk - we'll come to that later. As we progress, I'll be suggesting new approaches to the walk, approaches that explore the particular mindfulness theme we are exploring on that week.

You will be more likely to remember to practice your mindful walk if you set-up for it well - if you think ahead to the issues you are likely to face. As I've already said, if you plan carefully you are more likely to succeed - and by 'succeed' I mean actually do it! Here's how to prepare.

1. *Think of a walk you do every day.* It's important, wherever possible, to choose a walk that you already do. If you add a special mindful walk to your daily routine, chances are you won't be able to keep it up. The walk should be no longer than twenty minutes and no less than five minutes. Over twenty would be too demanding, less than five would hardly be a walk at all! You might like to choose the first 10 minutes of your walk to the train station, or your walk to the bus stop, or nursery.
2. *Describe your route.* Using your notebook, describe the walk you have chosen in as much detail as possible. Visualize it in your mind - 'I walk past the newsagents, the drycleaners, and the chemist, then I turn right down such-and-such road with the park on my left...' Writing about it, visualizing it, will help you remember to do it. It will serve as a prompt. I can't stress enough how remembering to be mindful is going to be the key to this whole course. So, write it all down. If you can, draw a picture of your walk - it doesn't matter if you use stick men and lollipop trees - it will all help you to remember. The more detail the better.
3. *Jot down any issues you might face.* Try to think of any possible obstacles you might face in trying to be mindful of your body during your mindful walk. For instance: you might meet people you know in the street, or you might have no set routine. Perhaps your routine is very different at the weekend? Perhaps you're a cyclist?
4. *Try to think of creative ways of resolving those issues.* What solutions can you come up with? You could plan a weekday walk to the tube station and a weekend walk to the local park. You could dedicate the first 10 minutes of your bike ride to mindfulness - noticing your backside on the seat, and your feet on the peddles. You could park your car a little further away from work, or get off the bus a stop before your usual. Write down what you decide. Be as specific as you can: one walk per day, for so long, with such-and-such creative solutions to such-and-such possible obstacles.
5. *Review how it went.* The mindful walk will be our daily practice in full attention. At some time in the day (perhaps last thing at night or as soon as you get into work) write down whether you remembered to do it, and if you did what you noticed and how it went. I have provided a day-to-day review at the end of this chapter.

*4c: How to walk mindfully* Walking mindfully is not about walking in a deliberate or artificial way. You don't even have to walk slowly. Yes, in some walking meditation practices, you walk very slowly indeed, and this has value (especially for continuing the effects of meditation), but you will look rather silly if you try to get to work like that! We have been walking perfectly naturally up to now; the only difference in our mindful walk is that we decide to pay attention to it. Here are some specific suggestions for how to do that:

- *Bring your attention into your body and its movements as you walk.* Each time you get distracted simply bring your mind back to your body in a relaxed and natural way.
- *Bring your attention into the soles of your feet.* This is especially useful if you are speedy or anxious. Notice the weight of your body dropping through the soles of your feet and be aware of the support of the ground. Keep bringing your mind back to that.
- *Use a counting technique.* You can use this along with awareness of the soles of your feet. It will help you stay with your direct physical sensations. Using counting is a really good way of doing walking meditation, especially if you are very distracted or stressed. It is also a useful method of building up concentration when you first set out on your mindful walk.

What I suggest is that after each step you count 1 up to 8, and then backwards all the way to 1 again. Take a step and say '1' silently to yourself. Take another step and say '2', and so on up to 8. When you get to 8 count backwards to 1. Take a step and say '8'. Take another step and say '7', then 6, then 5 and so on. You could drop the counting after 5 minutes or so, or you could carry on counting for the entire walk.

- *Use words or phrases.* Be aware of your whole body while you walk and add phrases that help you stay with your experience. You could repeat the words 'walking mindfully', 'walking peacefully'. You might like to find your own words that connect you emotionally with the practice.
- *Walk and let go.* Be aware of your whole body, paying special attention to any feelings of worry or anxiety, either physical or mental. See if you can just let go of those worries and relax your body and mind as you walk.