



WALKING PRACTICE: CENTER TO CENTER

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Intention & Invitation: The nature of this practice is to honor and make more room in our heart for the unique lived experience of another... those we pass by, those we work with, those who we disagree with, those who we don't understand. The act of walking allows for our imperfect understanding of others to evolve in ways that are moving, open, and unhurried.

After having walked with thousands of beautiful humans, I can say with utmost ground and confidence that my passion for healing, love, justice, and personal transformation has grown and deepened in life giving ways from this simple (and not so simple) act. *Note: Center to Center walking invitations are not "walk and fix" experiences. These will not "solve and resolve" conflict and difference. These are intentional approaches to humanize, open, and deepen a journey into difference, connection, story, lived experience, and understanding.*

This walking practice can be a great tool for teams, groups, decision-making bodies, family/romantic relationships, friendships, neighbors, people who you want to better understand, and more. I especially recommend this practice with one other person (or breaking off into pairs if in a group setting, perhaps switching pairs every 10-15 minutes). The shoulder-to-shoulder nature of this practice is profound.

Consider one or many of the following situations for engaging this practice:

- *Facing tension, hard discussion, and confrontation*
- *Deepen relationships* (movement, side by side, regulating body/brain to listen in more open/undefended ways)
- *Creative brainstorming, body wisdom and team discernment* (planning conversations, idea generating, body-based processing, intuitive awakening, inviting nature)
- *Human dignity* (specific individuals or groups who challenge you or your group – especially when someone's (humanity) is in question – perhaps based on class, religion, politics, race, age, disability, sexual orientation etc.)
- *New, cross-cultural, outside immediate circle connecting* (better understanding and relating with those who are different than you or those who you haven't met or connected to yet)
- *Verbal language barriers* (moving in this way, especially with some very basic verbal or written language understanding, can free us to push our capacity to communicate in other non-verbal



ways – engaging our bodies, our facial expressions, our hand gestures, and our interaction with the environment around us)

- *Breathing, breaks, and fresh air* (a genuinely healthy practice to get the blood flowing and colleagues, family, relationships healthy and awake)

Pre-Practice:

- *Location, Resting Options & Time of Day:* Consider a quieter and a somewhat flat location (park, residential streets, rural dirt road, greenway, abandoned railroad) so you have an easier time listening and connecting. You can of course do this walk anywhere, just keep in mind what might distract from attention and connection. I highly suggest scouting your route before so you are not distracted by navigating. I would also keep an eye for benches, tables, and rest areas in case you discern that the group or your walking partner would benefit from sitting for a few minutes. Conversation and practices like these can open deep vulnerabilities. While this can be life-giving and healing, it can also be exhausting and even devastating depending on the topic and connection. Having places to sit, rest, and honor whatever is coming up will bless your experience.
- *Duration & Needs:* Try to walk and connect in this way for at least 30-40 minutes. If you are walking with someone (or a group), be extra sensitive to the timing and unique needs of who you will be walking with (food, transportation, accessibility, clothing, comfort, children, other barriers/realities). Be flexible and open. Arrive early, be okay if they are late, and try to not have any hard lines around time before and after.
- *Prompts, Questions, Stories:* Once you have a good idea of your route and who will be joining you might consider (as the initiator/facilitator) writing down or printing off a few questions, talking prompts (especially if this a team and you're wanting to go into specific conversations), or specific stories so people can read them to one another and engage them while walking.
- *Grounding & Pre-Facilitation:* Wherever you begin your walk, consider taking at least 2-3 minutes for breathing and grounding. If you are with a small group, you might ask the group to form into a circle. You might also facilitate invitation to take a few deep breaths – all the way in and all the way out. Inviting everyone (or if solo, yourself) to move from the mind, into the heart, and into the body. If you are in a group, you might offer a few prompts for people to feel the wind against their skin and their feet against/rolling on the Earth. Grounding before you begin walking can help you and others move with more presence, patience, and attention. Simple guidance can go a long way for personal and collective calming as fast-paced, consumer-centric culture crowds and violates our relationship to time and to the things that are (deep down) most important to us. Considering you might be going into uncomfortable conversation, intentionally bringing up tension, or going into more vulnerable/fragile places, having a few extra facilitation tips might help:
 - o *Naming at the beginning that you will be sharing some hard or possibly difficult things.*
 - o *Naming that you might not necessarily know where this is all going, but it's important for you to share so you can move forward, so (we) can move forward together.*
 - o *Any affirmations up front and afterward, if that feels right and is relevant.*
 - o *Naming that you might not use the best words or say things in the most respectful or perfect of ways. Noting that you are working on being more transparent.*



- *Naming that you are imperfect and that after you share, you want to give plenty of time to listen to the other voices/experiences.*
- *Naming that you (or the group) will set aside some time towards the end of the walk for unpacking things, consider next steps, and offering of feedback on how things were shared or presented.*

Begin Walking: Depending on your group or walking partner, (and after a grounding exercise) you might start the first 10 minutes with simple movement, breathing, and catching up. Allow the oxygen and blood to flow. Allow the sky and the trees to join in. Allow some of what stacks in the mind to slowly fall away as you move. If your walk has been set-up with a formal conversation topic from the beginning, you might ask your group or walking partner if they are okay with just moving and connecting for 10 minutes or so before diving in. You might offer to your friend or to the participants that, more than anything, you want to just move, catch up and connect. If your walking invitation is open-ended, you might have the first walk be simple and light. Perhaps the second or third walk could move into deeper themes. Trust your intuition. Trust the natural world around you. Trust movement. There is no perfect way to do this. Eventually shut off your mind and any expectations you have. Know that it will feel full of imperfection, as it needs to. Humanity needs more people trusting and flowing in and around imperfection. Humility has the capacity to free us in such needed ways. Allow the unhurried movement of your bodies guide you into a calming form of connection.

As you walk, you might consider the following invitations to bring additional life to your steps:

- *Stop to touch and notice a mature tree. Look up and invite your group or walking partner to connect to its size, life, and color. Feel the bark. Notice the roots. Notice how her branches reach into the sky.*
- *Kneel to listen to the sound of a running creek or stream. You might even touch the water and invite your group or walking partner to do the same.*
- *Bring snacks with you and midway through, stop to rest at a bench or table and share some of your snacks (sharing, sensory, energy, break/breathing).*
- *If you hear birds, stop for a second (perhaps under the canopy of a tree) to listen to them more fully, to honor them, to spot them.*

As your walk ends, be extra mindful to have a few minutes of reflection and feedback. If it's a group, ask the group to form a circle. Have the group or your walking partner share a few words (always optional) from their time walking. This helps to reinforce why this practice is good and it helps to deepen trust and connection. You might also ask for any feedback on the route, the pace of the walk, and how your various invitations felt. This can be so helpful to you, to them, and to any future invitations. End your walk with gratitude and perhaps with a deep breath and a meaningful reading that leaves everyone in wonder.