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## Caṅkama Sutta

The Discourse on Walking | A 5.29  
Theme: The benefits of walking meditation  
Translated by Piya Tan ©2015

### 1 Meaning and usages of *caṅkama*

**1.1 MEANINGS.** The word *caṅkama* (or *caṅkamana*), both as adjectives or as nouns, can mean (1) the act of walking, walking about, walking up and down;<sup>1</sup> or (2) a place for walking up and down, a raised walkway, a terrace (for walking).<sup>2</sup> In the Caṅkama Sutta, it clearly has the first sense, that is, the act of walking. It does not specifically refer to “walking meditation,” but subsumes this sense.<sup>3</sup> [1.2]

#### 1.2 WALKING AS MEDITATION

**1.2.1 The 4 postures.** Walking is one of the 4 human postures. The other three are standing, sitting and lying down or reclining. **The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) reminds us to be mindful in all the 4 postures, thus:

Furthermore, bhikshus, a monk,  
(1) while walking, understands, ‘I walk [‘Walking’].<sup>4</sup>  
(2) Or, while standing, he understands, ‘I stand’ [‘Standing’];  
(3) Or, while sitting, [57] he understands, ‘I sit [‘Sitting’];  
(4) Or, while lying down, he understands, ‘I lie down’ [‘Lying down’].  
In whatever way his body is disposed, that is how he understands it. (M 10,6), SD 13.3

**1.2.2 Full awareness. The Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122) gives an expanded version of this exercise.<sup>5</sup> Except for highlighting the 4 postures, the exercise of this section is actually found in the “Full awareness” (*sampajañña*) passage which immediately follows the quoted passage above. In **the Sāmañña-phala Sutta** (D 2), this passage is called “mindfulness and full awareness” (*sati sampajañña*) (D 2,65).<sup>6</sup>

Both these Suttas describe these 4 postures in a broader context of mindfulness, thus:

While walking, standing, sitting, asleep, awake,<sup>7</sup> talking, or remaining silent, he is clearly aware of what he is doing.”

*Gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuñhī, bhāve sampajāna, kārī hoti.*

D 2,65(7) @ SD 8.10 @ M 10,8(7) @ SD 13.3.

#### 1.2.3 Walking to overcome drowsiness

**1.2.3.1 The Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58) records a famous instruction by the Buddha to Moggallāna, when the latter has difficulty with his meditation. Walking meditation is, in fact, the 7<sup>th</sup> of the 8 methods<sup>8</sup> for overcoming drowsiness or torpor (*middha*), described as follows:

If, Moggallāna, that drowsiness still would not go away, then, Moggallāna, you should, perceiving before and after, determine in walking back and forth, turning your senses inward, keep-

<sup>1</sup> M 112,11/3:112,32; S 4:104; A 1:114,11; Miln 216,3; Vism 108,20.

<sup>2</sup> V 1:15,26, 2:120,3; D 1:105,21; Tha 271; J 2:273,24; B 1.5; Vism 292,29 f. On its specification and defects, see J 1:7.

<sup>3</sup> See Ency Bsm: caṅkama.

<sup>4</sup> On the tr here, see SD 13.1 (3.9.3).

<sup>5</sup> M 122,11/3:122 f @ SD 11.4.

<sup>6</sup> D 2,65 @ SD 8.10.

<sup>7</sup> “When asleep, when awake” *sutte jāgarite*. Comy glosses *sutte* as *sayane*, “lying down, sleeping.” See SD 13.1 (3.6.2).

<sup>8</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> “method” is to mindfully rest (because we are then really tired (A 7.58,9), SD 4.11).

ing your mind from straying outward.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that when you do so, that drowsiness would go away.<sup>10</sup> (A 7.58/4:87), SD 4.11

1.2.3.2 In the phrase, “**determine in walking back and forth**” (*pacchā, pure saññī caṅkamam adhiṭṭheyyāsi*) here, *pacchā, pure saññī* has a simple spatial meaning: be mindful of what is behind you, what is in front of you. The important phrase *pacchā, pure* is also found in **the Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 51.20), where it simply refers to the whole practice, from beginning to end<sup>11</sup>—a sense which is also applicable here. For effective practice, both senses should be applied (albeit, noting that the latter meaning prevails).

1.2.3.3 The phrase, “**turning your senses inward**” (*anto, gatehi indriyehi [adhiṭṭheyyāsi]*) alludes to avoiding the mind being “narrow [constricted] internally” (*ajjhattam saṅkhittam*), and “keeping your mind from straying outwards” (*abahi, gatena manasena [adhiṭṭheyyāsi]*), to avoiding it from being “distracted externally” (*bahiddhā vikkhitta*). These are the last 2 of the “4 faults” (*catu, dosa*) in meditation practice, given in the **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 51.20).<sup>12</sup> [1.2.3.4]

1.2.3.4 **The 4 faults** (*catu, dosa*) concern how we apply or “walk” the 4 paths of spiritual success (*iddhi, pāda*) of enthusiasm (*chanda*) effort (*virīya*), the mind (*citta*), and (mental) investigation (*vīmaṃsā*), that is, they should *not* be

- |   |                            |                                   |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (1) too slack,                          | <i>atīlīna</i>             |                                   |
| (2) too tense,                          | <i>atipaggahita</i>        |                                   |
| (3) narrow [constricted] internally, or | <i>ajjhattam saṅkhitta</i> |                                   |
| (4) distracted externally.              | <i>bahiddhā vikkhitta</i>  | (S 51.20), SD 28.14 <sup>13</sup> |

“**Enthusiasm**” (or will, *chanda*) is a wholesome mode of desire or determination; not the worldly desire to “be” or “have,” but, especially in the context of samadhi, the desire to know or to progress spiritually. “**Effort**” (*virīya*) is the actual practice initiated and sustained to attain mental calm and clarity. Both enthusiasm and effort are found in the path-factor of right effort in its role as “requisite of samadhi.” “**Mental investigation**” (*vīmaṃsā*) is wisdom in its mode of inquiring or examining the reasons for progress or decline in meditation. Here, it is synonymous to “reviewing” our meditation. “Mind” (*citta*) here denotes samadhi or mental stillness itself.

**1.3 WALKING AS EXERCISE.** The Buddha is recorded as mindfully walking and down to stretch his legs and exercise himself.<sup>14</sup> Monastics, too, are admonished to exercise in this way.<sup>15</sup> All such exercises are done mindfully, in keeping with the decorum of true monastics. There were no notion of martial arts at all in early Buddhism, but arose later, especially in the Buddhism of East Asia.

<sup>9</sup> *Anto, gatehi indriyehi abahi, gatena manasena.* “Turning your senses inward” (*anto, gatehi indriyehi [adhiṭṭheyyāsi]*) alludes to avoiding the mind being “narrow [constricted] internally” (*ajjhattam saṅkhittam*), and “keeping your mind from straying outwards” (*abahi, gatena manasena [adhiṭṭheyyāsi]*), to avoiding it from being “distracted externally” (*bahiddhā vikkhitta*): these are the last 2 of the “4 faults” (*catu, dosa*) in meditation: see **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:276-281), SD 28.14. See §7n above on the first 2 of the 4 faults. On the 5 benefits of walking meditation, see **Caṅkamana S** (A 5.29/3:29 f), SD 76.3.

<sup>10</sup> See Nyanadhammo, “Walking meditation in the Thai Forest Tradition,” 2003. Accessible at [http://www.forestsangha.org/Ajahn\\_Nyanadhammo\\_Walking\\_Meditation.pdf](http://www.forestsangha.org/Ajahn_Nyanadhammo_Walking_Meditation.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> S 51.20/5:277 f @ SD 28.14.

<sup>12</sup> S 51.20/5:276-281 @ SD 28.14. See **Pacalā S** (A 7.58,7 @ SD 4.11) n on the first 2 of the 4 faults.

<sup>13</sup> S 51.20/5:276-281, SD 28.14; AA 1:49.

<sup>14</sup> See eg **Aggañña S** (D 27,1.3) n, SD 2.19.\*

<sup>15</sup> Upon Jīvaka’s suggestion, the Buddha allows an ambulatory for the monks to exercise, and a sauna for their health (*anujānāmi bhikkhave caṅkamañ ca jantā, gharañ cāti*, V 2:119).

## 2 Walking meditation

### **2.1 THE PRACTICE**

**2.1.1 Walking and the other postures.** *Caṅkama* (n) can refer to walking meditation [1.1]. If we mindfully walk in meditation, it should include the postures of standing, sitting and lying down, too. In other words, we should be aware of all the 4 postures as a continuous mindful flow of attention to every posture. When we step on the ground, it is like momentarily standing. When we stop for a moment, it is like sitting. When we stand mindfully a little longer, say to rest, it is like lying down.

**2.1.2 Going with the flow.** The idea here is keeping the mind in a smooth flow of mindfulness, that is, a full and broad awareness of the posture that we are assuming. This means noticing how one posture arises, stabilizes (for a moment or for a while), changes into another, and so on.

Just as in breath meditation, we watch the breath in and out, and so on, so, too, in walking meditation, we watch the various aspects of our postures as each arises, changes, passes away, or flows into another posture. We are not watching anything “fixed” here; for, a posture is but a moment, as it were. So, we are actually watching impermanence in the arising, falling and changing of the postures. If our mind is fixed on this smooth flow of change, then mental calm will arise on due course.

When we direct our mind to note the flow of rising, falling and changing of our postures, and we note their impermanence, we are then practising the perception of impermanence. This is what is known as “insight” (*vipassanā*) into the true nature of our body, that is, it is always changing. When such a noting is sustained, it leads to the arising of wisdom, an understanding of the true reality that is joyful and liberating.

### **2.2 BENEFIT OF WALKING MEDITATION**

**2.2.1 The “walking” sign is long-lasting.** The Commentary on the Caṅkama Sutta, commenting on the phrase, “(it) is long-lasting” (*cira-t,ṭhita*), explains that “if one has acquired the concentration-sign (*nimitta*) while standing up, it is lost when one sits down. If one has acquired the sign while sitting, it is lost when one lies down. But for one who has resolved on walking up and down, and acquired the mark in the mental-object of what is moving, it is not lost even when one stands still, sits down and lies down.”<sup>16</sup> (AA 3:236)

**2.2.2 Walking meditation and dhyana.** When walking meditation is done—and we are fully engaged in watching the meditation sign in a particular posture or in a flow of postures [2.1.2], then it is possible for us to attain the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana. However, because of the nature of walking—we are moving with the body, and our posture keeps changing—we can at best attain only the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana where there still are initial application and sustained application (*vitakka, vicāra*), that is, some rudimentary thinking process that keeps up with the moving mental object.

Once we rise beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana, it would be impossible to move any more as all bodily functions (as we know them) cease to function. This means that when we attain any dhyana higher than the first, we would remain in one of the non-walking postures. The most famous example of this is the Buddha standing and gazing at the Bodhi tree with the “unblinking eye” of dhyana, which occurs in the second week after the great awakening.<sup>17</sup>

**2.2.3 Walking and the attainments. The Pacalā Sutta** (A 7.58) records the Buddha instructing the elder Moggallāna on how to use walking meditation as one of the 7 methods for overcoming drowsiness [1.2.3.1]. The commentary on the Caṅkama Sutta, explains the line, “the samadhi attained through walking,” thus: “By fixing the attention on the walking, a certain [one or other] samadhi of the 8 attainments is attained” (*caṅkamādhigato samādhīti caṅkamaṃ adhiṭṭhahantena adhiṅgato aṭṭhannaṃ samāpattīnaṃ aññatara, samādhi*, AA 3:236).

The 8 attainments (*aṭṭha samāpatti*) here are, of course, the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*) and the 4 formless dhyanas (*arūpa jhāna*). These 8 attainments, along with the “cessation of perception and feel-

<sup>16</sup> *Cira-t,ṭhitiko hoṭīti ciraṃ tiṭṭhati. Ṭhitakena gahita, nimittaṅhi nisinnassa nassati, nisinnena gahita, nimittam nipannassa. Caṅkamaṃ adhiṭṭhahantena calit’ārammaṇe gahita, nimittam pana ṭhitassa ’pi nisinnassa ’pi nipannassa ’pi na nassatīti.*

<sup>17</sup> MA 2:184; UA 51; BA 8; J 1:77. See SD 26.1 (5.2.2).

ing” (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*), form the well known set called the “9 progressive abodes” (*anupubba,-vihāra*), which constitute the full meditative range of the Buddha and the arhats.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted here that while it is possible to attain the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana with walking meditation, it is not impossible to any dhyana beyond that because of the mobile nature of walking [2.2.2]. However, walking meditation can serve as the basis for such attainments. In the case of Moggallāna, he would have stopped walking on attaining the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana, and then sits down in meditation to go on to attain the other dhyana, right up to the sphere of nothingness. Then, having awakened as an arhat, he goes on to attain the 8<sup>th</sup> abode, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, if he wishes to.

### 3 Walking and lovingkindness

**3.1** Another way of understanding how walking meditation can produce a concentration-sign that is “long-lasting” is to examine it in the context of the cultivation of lovingkindness. We have seen how the mindfulness of walking, along with those of all the other postures, are not separate “meditations,” but as the same flow of “moving” meditation [2.2.2].

**The Karaniya Metta Sutta** (Sn 1.8), in its last but one verse, famously says:

While standing, moving, sitting,<sup>19</sup> or lying down, as long as one is not drowsy,<sup>20</sup>  
one should keep this mindfulness<sup>21</sup>— this is the “divine abode”<sup>22</sup> here, they say.

Sn 1.8 @ SD SD 38.3

**3.2** Note that in line a, “moving” (*caram*) is used instead of “walking” (*caṅkama*), or even the synonym, *gata* (“going, moving”). Although we have the sense of “walking” here, it connotes a broad moving action that would include the other three postures (standing, sitting, and lying down). This seemingly small detail becomes significant against the Aṅguttara Commentary’s remark that the concentration-object of walking is “long-lasting” [2.2.1].

**3.3** Of the 4 human postures, **walking** is the most comprehensive in that *it encompasses all the other postures*. So, we stand with lovingkindness, sit with lovingkindness, lie down with lovingkindness. All these postures should continuously (that is, without break) flow into one another. From any of these postures, we then rise and walk with lovingkindness. In this sense, all the other three postures are subsumed in walking meditation, of which it is said that the sign (*nimitta*) “is not lost (*na nassati*)” (AA 3:236).<sup>23</sup> — — —

<sup>18</sup> See (Anupubba) Vihāra S 1+2 (A 9.32+33), SD 95.1 + SD 95.2.

<sup>19</sup> **standing, walking, sitting | or lying down**, *tiṭṭhañ,caram nisinno vā sayāno vā* [§9ab]. These are the 4 physical postures (*iriyā,patha*, P 2:225, DA 1:183; cf BHSD: iriyāpatha). Mindfulness of 4 postures is a part of the meditation on the body (*kāyānupassanā*). This is the total cultivation of lovingkindness in one’s waking life. See (4.6).

<sup>20</sup> **as long as one is not drowsy**, *yāvata’ssa vigata,middho* [§9b], which Comy resolves as *sayāno vā yāvata vigata,-middho assa*, “as long as there is no drowsiness for him” (KhpA 250). As long as we are awake and mindful we should cultivate lovingkindness. The advice here is that we should maintain a heart of lovingkindness throughout our waking life. Indeed, all our meditation, including breath meditation, should begin with lovingkindness and be founded on it. With a joyful mind, it is easier to attain concentration and dhyana. Other possible alt trs are: “one should be undrowsing; during that while...”; “for as long as one is undrowsing”; “for the while that one is undrowsing”; “for as long as one is awake.” Alt trs by other translators: C A F Rhys Davids: “till drowsiness be gone from him” (Khp:R 1931: 159); E M Hare: “till overcome by drowsiness” (Sn:H); M Walshe: “Or he lies down, still free from drowsiness” (*The Lion’s Roar*, 1962:23); K R Norman: “As long as one is free from drowsiness” (Sn:N). On its meditative significance, see (4.7).

<sup>21</sup> **one should keep to this mindfulness**, *etaṃ satim adhiṭṭheyya* [§9c], we should cultivate it until we reach dhyana. This lovingkindness dhyana (*mettā jhāna*) should be maintained for as long as possible, and cultivated until we are very familiar with it. In the case of forest monks (to whom this Sutta is first taught) and similar situations, this meditation state should be maintained throughout our waking moments before going on to other practices. See (4.8).

<sup>22</sup> **this is the “divine abode,”** *brahman etaṃ vihāraṃ* [§9d]. *Brahma,vihāra*, lit “living like Brahmā” or “the state of Brahmā.” *Brahma* (adj) “perfect,” so that we can also render it as “the perfect abiding,” or “highest state, sublime state, brahma abode,” or on a more mundane level, even as “positive emotions, social virtues.” See (7).

<sup>23</sup> See also SD 38.3 (4.6), the 4 postures in connection with lovingkindness.

# The Discourse on Walking

A 5.29

- 1** Bhikshus, there are these 5 benefits of walking. What are the five? **[30]**
- (1) One can withstand long journeys. *addhāna-k,khama hoti*  
 (2) One can sustain striving. *padhāna-k,khama hoti*  
 (3) One is rarely sick. *app'ābādho hoti*  
 (4) What one has taken, drunk, chewed, tasted, *asitaṃ pītaṃ khāyitaṃ sāyitaṃ*  
 is properly digested. *sammā pariṇāmaṃ gacchati*  
 (5) The samadhi attained through walking is *caṅkamādhigato samādhi cira-ṭ,ṭhitiko hoti*  
 long-lasting.
- 2** These, bhikshus, are the 5 benefits of walking.

— evaṃ —

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