

padh yatra: a journey of dialogue

Each of us may be able to recall a time in our lives when a long walk helped us to clear our heads, feel refreshed, and generate positive energy for the future. Often, our next steps would become clearer with each step of the way. So why not introduce 'walking' as a dialogue process in your next conference or meeting?

Walking – alone, in pairs, or in a small group – offers meaningful opportunities for dialogue. Being in motion can lead to co-motion, both within us and among us. Our senses open up, the blood begins to circulate, and the mind and heart begin to flow. We connect to the environment around us – the air, the landscape, our fellow creatures, are all integrated into our conversation. We begin to enter into a more natural rhythm – a rhythm that we have control over. Indeed, the ground we walk on helps to 'ground' us; it offers a context from which we can root ourselves. The possibilities of a specific 'place' begin to open up. In pairs or small groups, walking helps to set the stage for co-creation. A kind of intimacy and joy emerges in the dialogue, which can often lead to new directions for collaboration and work.

India has a rich tradition of *padhyatras* (long journeys by foot). Local people would embark by foot for political, spiritual, cultural (artistic) and entrepreneurial reasons. This most simple (and fuel-efficient) means of travel is both humbling and invitational. By foot, one poses no threat to other people or to animals and, in fact, can readily access and interact with others. Many new companions can thus be found for one's journey. Moving at a human-pace also reminds one of his/her own capacities and relationships in the world. Learning would then follow – both through walking the path, as well as upon reaching one's destination.

Today, various people are re-inventing the *padhyatra* as a tool for dialogue with communities. Anil Gupta and the Honeybee Network, based in Gujarat, facilitate *shodh yatras* (journeys of research), where people are invited to walk approximately 100 km over a week-long period to meet local villagers and learn about their unique innovations. In 1999, Ekta Parishad, based in Madhya Pradesh, held a six-month long *padhyatra*, covering over 3500 km, to generate a movement of support around tribal land issues. The walking activists stopped in each village along the way to learn about local issues.

Try setting aside some space in your next conference for walking, either silently alone or with others in the group. The boost of energy may lead to new directions, collaborative visions, deeper connections, and much more! After all, we make our paths by walking them...