



GROUNDING 101

Release Stress And Anxiety By
Connecting With The Earth
and Yourself

by Jenny Wood, M.Ac., Lic.Ac.

Dear friend,

How are you doing these days? Truly?

Uncertainty in so many aspects of our lives, coupled with our culture's fixation on busyness and achievement, can cause us to feel anxious, depressed and overwhelmed. How are we to successfully cope with the ongoing demands of our daily lives, not to mention staying healthy in our bodies and minds and contributing wholeheartedly to our communities?

What if there were a simple way for you to bring balance to your life? What if you could cultivate inner peace and serenity no matter the external circumstances?

When I was a kid, my friends and I used to think we were funny when we said, "Let's make like a tree and leave."

But trees don't do that, do they? Trees stay in one place. They root deep down into the soil, stand tall and firm, and get all they need from the dirt, the air, the sun and the rain.

They know who they are and the part they play in the web of life.

Might trees hold some wisdom for us humans, whose busy lives make us look more like human do-ings than human be-ings?





I invite you to imagine.

Imagine that you are a flourishing tree.

Your roots reach down, down, down into the rich, dark soil.

Your trunk stands stable and firm, nourished by the water and nutrients drawn up through your roots.

Your bark perfectly protects your tender inner core.

Your branches reach for the sky, your leaves green and healthy and vibrant.

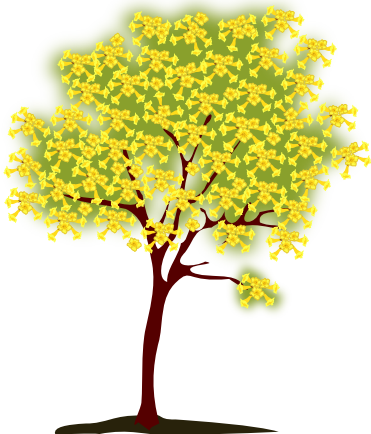
You breathe in. You breathe out.

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.

This is you.

Thriving, well-nourished, connected with earth,
reaching for sky.

Connected with other trees through your roots and the nutritive network under the ground.



Because you are well-nourished,
you effortlessly give to others.

You give beauty - a place to climb -
shade - maybe even medicine or food.

You know who you are. You instinctively
know the part you play in the web of life.



This is what “being grounded” looks and feels like.

Connected with earth. Reaching for the sky. Relaxed. Aware.
Breathing in. Breathing out.

Protected, richly supported, knowing instinctively who you are
and what part you are playing during your lifetime on the earth.

Let’s explore how GROUNDING can help you in your life.





GROUNDING is a practice that brings you into the present moment. By connecting mindfully with your body and with the earth beneath your feet, you will learn how to release stress and anxiety on an ongoing basis. You will feel more present with yourself and with others and will be much more able to cope with the demands of life.



Our modern lives, while generally comfortable, are mostly detached from the natural world. By living inside houses, controlling our climate, and eating food out of packages, we are physically comfortable but cut off from the cycles and rhythms of nature. Our near-constant attachment to screens intensifies that disconnect.

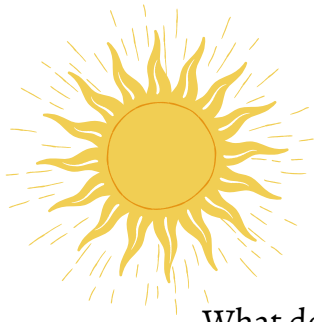
Our bodies and brains evolved while we were living outside in the elements, directly in touch with nature's cycles and rhythms. Research has shown that failure to consciously nourish that connection leads to anxiety, depression, existential angst, and feelings of disconnection from self and others.

But the good news is that we are *inherently* part of nature. There is no way we can escape. In order to find inner peace and centeredness within the busyness of modern life, an enormous step we can take is to remember and strengthen our conscious connection with the greater whole.



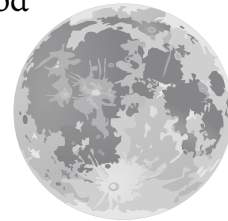
Grounding, connecting consciously with your body and with the earth below your feet, has instantaneous benefits of reducing stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed, as well as providing a long-term way to start coming back into harmony with the rhythms of nature.



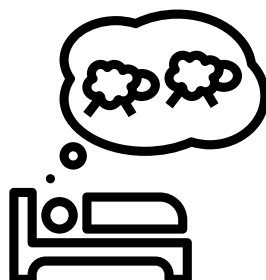


What does that mean, rhythms of nature?

Well, consider the circadian rhythm. For nearly four billion years, most of life on Earth evolved under a consistent pattern of alternating bright days and dark nights. The word “circa” in Latin means “around,” and “dies” means “day;” hence the word circadian refers to the 24-hour rhythm of sleep and wakefulness by which most organisms have lived for eons. Research has shown that the circadian rhythm also influences the molecular biology of individual cells and organ systems, and that when this rhythm is disrupted, a host of disorders can occur, including obesity, premature aging, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart problems.



So, we live in houses with artificial lighting keeping us active into the night, as well as screens emitting their own artificial light and energy that keep our nervous systems aroused as long as we stay connected with them. American Sleep Association studies show that 50-70 million American adults have a sleep disorder. This is not surprising considering our disconnection from the natural rhythm of day and night, coupled with the stresses of living in our modern society.

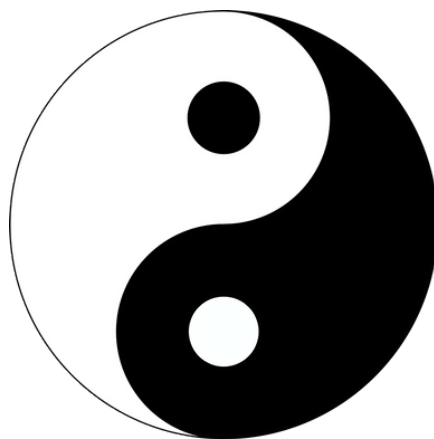


Think about other natural rhythms, such as the cycle of seasons. The fluctuations in light and temperature throughout the year affect plants and animals. For example, when warmth and light increase in the springtime, plants are signaled to sprout. Increasing warmth and light causes them to grow bigger, eventually flowering and fruiting according to their genetic code. When they have fulfilled their potential, their natural lifespan is complete, and they start to wither, finally withdrawing their life force into death or hibernation in the wintertime. Similarly, animals are born, grow, flower to their ultimate potential if lucky enough, and then move into old age and eventual death.



These are the rhythms of nature that govern all species, all of the seasons of our lives. Unfortunately, our modern culture values youth, vigor, and productivity - spring and summer energy - to the exclusion of age, wisdom, and quiet - autumn and winter energy. We are pushed to live constantly in the spring and summer, always energetic, busy and looking outward, neglecting our natural need for the autumn and winter energy of quiet, rest and inner reflection.

Think about the Yin-Yang symbol, which was created in ancient China more than 2000 years ago.

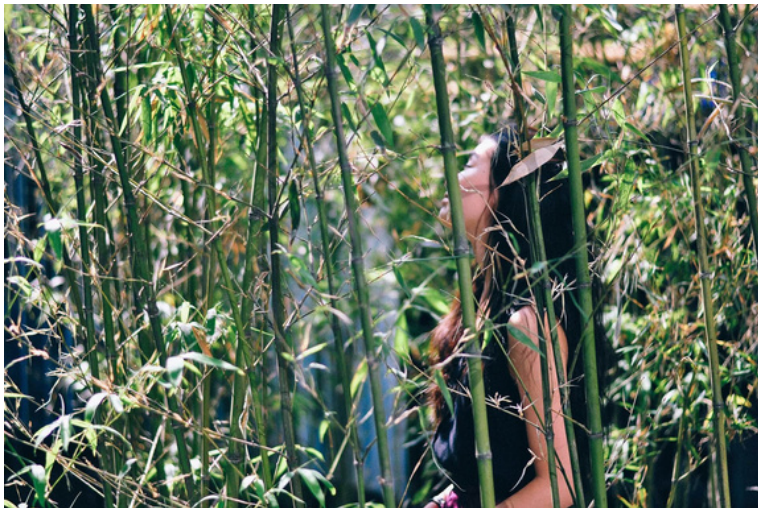


The Yin-Yang symbol shows life in balance. The light side symbolizes daytime, spring and summer energy, and the dark side symbolizes nighttime, autumn and winter energy. The dots inside each half indicate that the energy is always flowing, always moving. The dawn will always come, no matter how long the night, and spring will always come, no matter how hard the winter. At the same time, the vigor of summer will always give way to the withering of autumn and hibernation of winter. This is the way of things, the law of nature.

With our modern culture's attachment to vigor, youth and productivity, we try to fight the dark half of the symbol, with the result that most of us are not living in harmony with the law of nature. As a culture, we are exhausted, stressed, anxious, and overwhelmed. Restoring balance and physical, mental and emotional well-being will require awareness, persistence and care. Care for your organism. Care for your loved ones. Care for the interdependent web of life on this earth, the survival of which depends on us humans remembering our own balance.

I invite you to contemplate whether you are interested in restoring balance and harmony to your organism. Doing so will mean starting to let go of your habit of over-doing and beginning to cultivate more be-ing.

What is the promise? Much more inner peace, calmness, and serenity. An ongoing connection with your inner self and its wisdom. A calm surety that you are living the life you are meant to live.



I invite you to return to yourself as a tree and to try this short visualization. You can sit or stand, although you might feel most relaxed sitting in a chair with your feet flat on the floor.



Close your eyes if that feels good to you.

Start to deepen your breath.

You can use counting to help, breathing in to a count of 4 and breathing out to a count of 8.

In-2-3-4, out-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. In. Out. In. Out.

Notice your mind. Is it going crazy, thinking about everything you have to get done, worrying about this or that?

Just breathe. Keep counting, lengthening and deepening your breath.

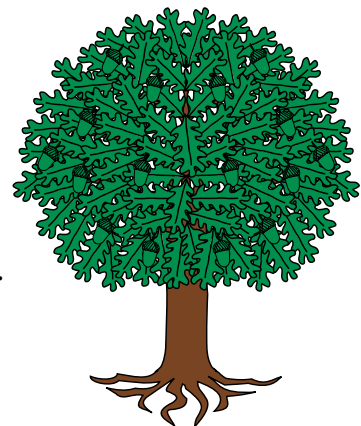
You can invite your mind to curl up in a corner while you do this exercise. Promise it that you will pick everything back up again when you are done. No worries. It can relax for just a few minutes.

Do not worry if your mind keeps grabbing for your attention. That's its job. Seriously.

The more you do this practice, the more you will understand the antics of what Buddhist teachers call the monkey mind. It's not a big deal.

You can watch it, let it do its thing, while you do your grounding thing.

Breathing in-2-3-4, breathing out-2-3-4-5-6-7-8.
In. Out. In. Out. In. Out. In. Out.



And now I invite you to bring your awareness to your body. Relaxing your shoulders downward. Resting your hands in your lap. Breathing in and breathing out.

And if your mind is grabbing for your attention, if you are off and running, just say hello to the mind and place it firmly and lovingly back in its corner. And bring your attention back to your breath and your body.

Can you feel your buttocks connecting with whatever you are sitting on? Can you allow your muscles to release into the chair or the sofa? Can you allow yourself to feel supported by it?

Just notice. Notice how comfortable or uncomfortable you are, both physically and mentally. And keep bringing your attention back to your breath and your body.

And now I invite you to imagine roots growing out from your buttocks down into the earth. Feel your feet flat on the ground, and imagine roots growing out from them as well.

Down, down, down, deep into the rich, dark soil.

Let your roots grow deeper.

The earth is miles deep.



Allow your roots to grow down as far as you like, exploring the warm, nourishing soil.

And then imagine your roots drawing in water and nutrients, up up up into your body.

These nutrients nourish your trunk, your branches, and your leaves.

The sunlight beams down upon your body, and your leaves turn green.

As you breathe in, your leaves absorb carbon dioxide, bringing it inside to nourish your body.

As you breathe out, you release oxygen for other life forms to ingest and thereby prosper.

Your trunk stands stable, firm, well-nourished, your bark protecting your tender inner core.

You are thriving. Well-nourished. Deeply connected with earth. Reaching strongly and serenely for the sky. Connected with other trees through your roots and the microscopic network under the ground.

You know who you are.
You know the part you play
in the web of life.

Breathing in. Breathing out.
Breathing in. Breathing out.

And when you are ready,
opening your eyes if you have
closed them, and bringing your
awareness back into the
environment around you.





Congratulations! You have explored what it feels like to be grounded, to be rooted within the web of all life.

Choosing to cultivate this practice on a regular basis will help you feel more peaceful and serene no matter what storms are swirling around you.

You can do grounding practice anywhere, at any time, except perhaps while driving. Try it at the dinner table, while waiting in line or at a red light, even to relieve anxiety while flying on a plane. You can take 30 seconds, 30 minutes, or even longer. Have fun with it, play with the practice, and see what happens as a result.

Please let me know of any insights you gained while doing the exercise. I look forward to traveling along the path of balance and harmony with you.

Warm regards,
Jenny Wood



art by Belinda Northcote

