

Mindfulness Meditation Practice with Forest Bathing:

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Once you find a pleasant place in the forest to sit (there are often welcoming benches along trails), take three deep breaths. Immerse yourself into your surroundings, while you continue to breathe slowly.

Begin with seeing: Take in the view of trees, sky, clouds, etc. Receive the blessing of rich oxygen and breathe with the trees. Then, offer Gratitude to the trees for giving us shelter, food, homes, furniture, shade, beauty, and oxygen. Thank the trees for their ancient wisdom, their deep connection to the earth and to each other and for holding you in kind regard and compassion.

When you are ready, move to awareness of hearing: Listen to the sounds of the forest such as the tree branches swaying, the birds singing, squirrels rustling on the ground or leaping in the trees, and so on. Also, be aware of the sounds of humanity like a distant or close road, people walking by talking, and airplanes flying overhead. Receive the pleasant and unpleasant sounds as a whole experience, with the pleasant sounds in the foreground. Together they create the reality of your experience towards the acceptance of what is. Thank for forest for its rich sounds.

Next, move your awareness into smelling: inhale the luxurious aroma of pine needles, decaying trees, and wildflowers. Allow the scents to fill your lungs as you breathe in peace and exhale calm. Thich Nhat Hahn had a meditation whereby you repeat those words as you inhale and exhale. You can use other words as well. Offer your Gratitude for the richness of smells that are an elixir of the forest.

The last sense to explore is textures and touch: notice the vast array of surfaces around you. The patterns of bark on the surface of the tree that may be rough or smooth, the feel of the bench beneath you and the feeling your feet on the earth, and the variety of patterns and surface qualities on leaves all around you. Please do not touch any plant that you do not know, such as a plant that can cause allergic reactions or is toxic. But, if safe to do so, stroke a nearby tree trunk and caress a soft petal of a flower such as a wild iris (gently of course). Take in the quality of the textures and how you respond to them. Offer your Gratitude that you can be present here and have the ability to feel these wondrous feelings.

Focusing on your breath, if you feel safe to do so, close your eyes or close them slightly, and be still. As you continue to be aware of your senses, immerse your being even more deeply into the forest. Begin to grasp there is no separation, no forest, no you. You are a part of everything, you are nature, you belong here. This is your home. Flow with your breathing and feel the beautiful oneness with everything as you expand your awareness to encompass your home, your city, your country, and the entire earth. Stay as long as you like into this deep state of being and peace.

When you feel or need the time to come to a close, slowly open your eyes and recite the Metta Prayer or any other prayer before you quietly take your leave...but the forest is never separated from you, you will carry it with you. wherever you go.

Metta Prayer: *Lovingkindness to Self and All*

May I be well.
May I be free from pain and suffering.
May I be safe.
May I live and love without fear.
May I be held in compassion and love
as I walk happily on this earth.

May you (*think of loved ones, friends, acquaintances*) be well.
May you be free from pain and suffering.
May you be safe.
May you live and love without fear.
May you be held in compassion and love
as you walk happily on this earth.

Repeat the above as you extend your lovingkindness to people everywhere on this earth, strangers, and those who might be considered "enemies".

Complete the prayer with extending your lovingkindness to all beings, including the trees, in addition to all creatures on this earth:

May all beings be well.
May all beings be free from pain and suffering.
May all beings be safe.
May all beings live and love without fear.
May all beings be held in compassion and love
as they walk, fly, or swim happily on this earth.