

Revitalize with Forest Bathing

by Shoshanna Katzman



Looking for a nature therapy that will resolve burnout and revitalize the soul? Then you may want to explore *shinrin-yoku*, a term coined back in 1982 by The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. It translates as ‘forest bathing’ but has nothing to do with water. Rather, it is the act of immersing and soaking in the healthy energy of the woods. Forest bathing clubs, guides and tutorials have even formed to

help people learn how to partake in this restorative experience.

Forest bathing helps to establish a more positive body image. Another study found that being in a forest environment lowered cortisol (stress hormone) level, pulse rate and blood pressure when compared to an urban environment.

Another interesting fact has to do with essential oils – known as phytoncides – which trees and plants emit to protect flora from parasites and germs. When inhaled, these natural antimicrobials provide an energy boost and promote immune function. In addition, they decrease inflammation, reduce oxidative stress, enhance sleep as well as reduce cortisol and blood glucose levels. When going on a forest adventure it is best leave electronic devices behind. This allows one to be more in the present moment while walking mindfully or sitting amongst the trees observing and taking in their natural beauty.

Knowing the profound healing benefits naturally empowers the forest experience. In addition, methods have developed to enhance ability to gain profound benefits. For example, many forest bathers practice qigong to set the mood and increase ability to sense

the subtle energy of nature. The following qigong exercise can be practiced for a few minutes for this very purpose:

Find a level place to stand under the canopy of the forest with feet parallel and shoulder-width apart. Extend your arms outward at shoulder height with palms upward toward the sky. Drop your shoulders and elbows allowing your arms to round downward. Gently lift your crown upward and drop your weight down through your body and through the soles of your feet into the earth. Stay grounded as you clear your mind of extraneous thoughts, tune into your breath and look through your hands into the forest. Feel and immerse yourself in the physical and energetic sensations that arise. Bask in the rejuvenation of your mind, body and spirit. Then take a moment to reflect on your experience, then shake yourself out and continue soaking in the restorative benefits of the forest.

Continuing with a leisurely walk through the woods and allow your body to be the guide. Savor the power of the forest through engaging the five senses of touch, taste, vision, hearing and smell. Experience becoming more connected within yourself as you reconnect with nature. Know that the increased mental clarity and creativity derived from this experience will help you in all aspects of your life. Check out the Association of Forest and Nature Therapy or the Global Institute of Forest Therapy and think about giving forest bathing a try soon.

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