

# Ancient Forms of Ecotherapy

by Shoshanna Katzman



**E**ver since the advent of 21st century technological advancements, people tend to distance themselves from nature in favor of engaging in television, computers, and gaming during downtime. This conundrum has become the subject of numerous research studies exploring the role of ecotherapy to enhance quality of life.

Stemming from modern psychology and environmentalism, this form of therapy refers to the ability to interact with nature to enhance healing and personal growth. According to ecotherapy, too many people have lost contact with nature, rejecting an essential aspect of their being – coming from its belief that people are part of a “web of life” and their psyches are not separate from their environment.

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*Ecotherapy reconnects a person with their natural life rhythms and supports methods that reduce stress, regulate emotions, and improve mental health.*

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Overall, research in this field has found that nature reduces stress and helps develop a more positive outlook. Similarly, increases in positive emotions promote well-being and a stronger sense of security. Evidence also suggests that ecotherapy programs help improve cognitive decline, attention deficit disorders, PTSD, and even dementia. On the other hand, not benefitting from a natural environment leads to greater distress, reduced well-being, and slower recovery time from physical and mental illness.

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*The Chinese medicine exercises of Taiji (Tai Chi) and Qigong can be considered ancient forms of ecotherapy.*

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What the ancients knew for centuries to be true is now being confirmed by these scientific studies.

Taiji and Qigong emphasize the importance of connecting and living in harmony with the forces of nature. This is believed to promote inner peace, vibrant health, and longevity. They emphasize inner connection, grounding, being in the moment, and

slowing down – as does ecotherapy.

Taiji and Qigong practitioners stretch and perform outdoors when possible – allowing them to create greater harmony between mind, body, and spirit while taking deep breaths of fresh air, connecting with themselves, and communing with nature. Similarly, ecotherapy is a way to experience connection to nature as a healing partner as they garden, sit under a tree, or walk in a forest.

Performing the slow, meditative Taiji and Qigong movements while in nature strengthens a practitioner's role as intermediary between heaven and earth. They consciously draw heavenly yang energy downward through the crown of the head and into the body, while drawing yin earthly energy upward through the soles of the feet. Doing so enhances overall health by building qi flow and balancing yin-yang energies.

Practicing these ancient exercises also strengthens the macrocosmic/microcosmic connection, helping them realize they are an integral part of something much greater than themselves. Similarly, people's lives are seen as part of a greater system of interaction – as ecotherapy views individual well-being and planetary well-being as inseparable.

These ancient exercises also inspire and support one's quest to:

- ✿ Alleviate joint pain
- ✿ Feel more tranquil by reducing stress and anxiety
- ✿ Open and cultivate flow of qi (vital energy) throughout the meridian pathways
- ✿ Stabilize internal organ systems – including building heart and lung function
- ✿ Manifest wholeness through establishing physical and energetic alignment

Ecotherapy and the Taiji and Qigong systems of movement are derived from different cultural paradigms yet have

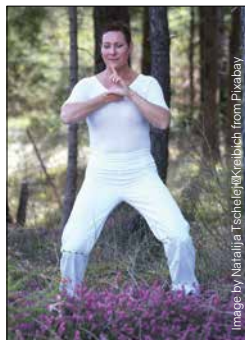


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overlapping principles. They share much in common and can be employed to complement each other. For example, when taking in the beauty of “the great outdoors” while “forest bathing,” you could stop by an old oak tree and practice some Taiji or Qigong movements. This most certainly allows you to avow yourself of the best that the East and West has to offer.

Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S. has been director of Red Bank Acupuncture & Wellness Center ([www.healing4u.com](http://www.healing4u.com)) for 35 years in Shrewsbury, NJ providing acupuncture, Chinese herbal consultation along with Taiji and Qigong private and group classes. She is author of “Qigong for Staying Young: A Simple 20-Minute Workout to Cultivate Your Vital Energy”, co-author of “Feeling Light: The Holistic Solution to Permanent Weight Loss and Wellness” and recently released “Center of Power: Life Mastery through Taiji” a comprehensive online curriculum ([www.yourcenterofpower.com](http://www.yourcenterofpower.com)). For more information call or text 732.758.1800.

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