



Ideally, play this activity in a natural forest or a city park.

When we walk through a forest, nature's benevolence flows into us like sunshine. Beneath soaring pines and giant, spreading oaks, one's thoughts naturally become expansive and harmonious.

Begin your walk in the forest by finding a magical portal between two trees. Pass through the doorway, keeping your senses alert.

- 🍃 Feel the presence of the trees around you.
- 🍃 Follow their trunks high into the sky.
- 🍃 Observe their spreading branches.
- 🍃 Listen to the voices of the birds, and of the trees.
- 🍃 See and feel the wind flowing through the forest.
- 🍃 Smell and breathe in the healing woodland fragrances.

*"Between a human
and a tree is the breath.
We are each other's air."*

—Margaret Bates

RECIPROCAL BREATHING

Observe the surrounding trees absorbing the sun's light energy, making plant sugar, and discharging oxygen through photosynthesis.

An average-sized tree releases enough oxygen each day to sustain four people. Breathe deeply; fill your lungs with life-giving oxygen, given to you by your forest friends. As you exhale, gratefully return the favor, offering carbon dioxide to the nearby trees.

On the underside of a leaf are the largest number of tiny openings (stomata) through which air enters and exits a tree. Reach out and gently hold a leaf, bringing your nose close to the leaf's underside. Inhale the oxygen released by the tree and then exhale carbon dioxide into the leaf. As you breathe in and out, be aware of how interconnected you are with the forest, and of the reciprocal relationship all beings have with one another.

BECOME PART OF THE FOREST

If you could live in this forest by becoming a tree, what kind of tree would you choose?

Find a good place to stand. Close your eyes. Feel yourself rooted firmly in the earth—and living high in the sky.

Lift your face to feel the warmth of the sun. Bathe in the sunlight and open air.

For four and a half billion years the sun's gravity has held us in place—at the perfect distance—to safely send its light and warmth. Feel the sun's rays enlivening the whole forest.

Visualize your body as a leaf. Feel the sun's rays flowing into you, turning air and light into life. A large, healthy oak may have 250,000 leaves. Extend your arms and imagine you are all the leaves on a tree—each leaf receiving the light of the sun.

Gaze at the nearby trees. See how they reach into the sky. Eighty percent of a tree's mass lives in the atmosphere. A tree's substance comes not from the earth, but from the sky.

Observe the trunk, branches, and leaves of a larger tree. Where does the mass of the tree come from? The answer is—carbon, which comes from the carbon dioxide in the air.

Listen to the sounds of the forest—close by—and far away.

Open your eyes. See the many varied expressions of forest life surrounding you: the trees—bushes—birds—rocks—grasses and flowers.

To deepen your sacred bond with trees, and with all life,
repeat the following words from Melissa Krige's Tree of Light Meditation

As the forests exhale so we inhale.
And as we exhale so the forests inhale.
In giving we receive and in receiving we give.

As you inhale and exhale, feel yourself giving and receiving breath and life from the nearby trees and the other forest inhabitants.

Find a place where there is a beautiful forest canopy overhead and where the ground is relatively clear. Now close your eyes and lie down on your back. Repeat *The Guided Tree Imagery* poem:

Roots going down,
reaching
through damp earth deep.
Down, down,
holding me here.

Open your eyes and look at the trunk and then the branches of a large tree.

My great round trunk,
massive and slender,
solid yet yielding,
carrier of life.

My long limbs
stretching out for space,
tips tickled by the wind,
touched by the sun.

All forest creatures
take shelter
within me, beneath me.

Roots anchored deep,
limb lofty high,
I abide in both worlds
of earth and sky.

Enjoy the peace of the forest as you repeat (twice) Hazrat Inayat Khan's sentiment:
My heart is tuned to the quietness that the stillness of nature inspires.

1 Around 95 percent of a tree's substance (carbon) comes in the air. The other five percent comes from nutrient-bearing water from the soil. Trees acquire carbon from the CO₂ in the air through the process of photosynthesis and release back in the air O₂ and a little H₂O.

2 Only one percent of a tree is alive. A tree grows outward from its trunk and skyward from the tips of its branches. The deadwood, comprising ninety-nine percent of its body, provides the foundation for the tree to climb ever higher in the sky.



To Practice

Find a captivating spot outdoors, such as a flower-filled meadow or a forest glade. Sit down (or remain standing) and rest both hands, palms down, lightly on the thighs.

During this exercise you're going to observe natural phenomena that capture your attention: for example, the texture of a tree's bark, a field of flowers waving in the wind, or a bird calling deep in the forest. Don't think about what you notice; just let your awareness flow from one observation to another.

Each time you see something, gently press a fingertip on your thigh to note the observation. Counting this way helps keep your concentration fully focused on your observation. Touching the leg also helps you feel that everything you see is part of you.

Use the ten fingertips on your hands to count your observations in batches of ten. Start with the tip of your left hand's little finger and count across to your right hand, ending with its little finger. Go across as many times as you like. Two to three times (twenty to thirty observations) works well.



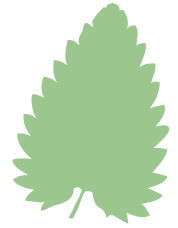
Another way to play Nature and Me is to focus on one object, such as a tree or a boulder, that has many interesting features. With each observation, you will discover more and more detail about your subject: perhaps you will notice its silhouette or shape, its color and texture, its immediate environment. The suggested number of observations for this version is fifteen to twenty. Children and adults who are more scientifically inclined usually prefer this second version of Nature and Me. After finishing this exercise, players enjoy sharing their discoveries in small groups.

*“With an eye made quiet by
the power of harmony, and
the deep power of joy, we
see into the life of things.”*

— William Wordsworth

a LAKE is LIKE the MIND

A Sky and Earth Touched Me Wellness Exercise
by Joseph Bharat Cornell



To Practice

Find a tranquil pool of water in a stream or pond. The pool should ideally be small enough to give you a feeling of intimacy and serenity.

The pool of water should be at least eight inches deep. Collect six stones each about the size of a duck's egg. If the pool is tiny, gather proportionally smaller stones.

A lake's surface—like the human mind—is always changing. Sometimes the lake is calm and serene; other times a breeze, falling leaf, or splashing fish might ruffle its surface. In every case, the lake's placidity is disturbed by something external to itself. The mind is strengthened by meditation so that passing phenomena don't disturb it, just as the lake's deeper water remains unruffled no matter what happens on its surface.

To begin the exercise, find a comfortable place to sit that overlooks the water. Place your six stones beside you and gaze at the water, letting its placidity calm you. Do your best to stay in the present moment.

Every time you notice you've become distracted and are no longer grounded in the here and now, cast a stone in the water. Carefully observe each stone's splash and the ensuing ripples spreading outward—how the water (representing your mind) is disturbed and no longer mirror-like. Note the impact inattentive thoughts have on one's awareness.

It is normal to have thoughts during meditation. The trick is to let the thoughts pass by without seizing and embellishing them. When the stone's ripples start to dissipate, feel yourself letting go of all thoughts, and delight in the joyful serenity that comes with living in the present.

Keep gazing at the water until you have thrown all the stones.

Peace and awareness require stillness of mind, just as the surface of a lake must be completely calm to perfectly reflect the sky. Only in stillness can you discover the hidden depths of your spiritual nature.





To Practice

PREPARATION:

One of the best ways to relax the body is first to tense it. Then, as you relax, you will find a release of tensions you didn't even know existed. Begin your meditation experience by practicing the following two relaxation techniques. The first exercise relaxes your body, and the second calms your mind.

1. Inhale and tense the whole body, then throw the breath out and relax. Repeat this exercise three times to help rid your body of unconscious tensions.
2. The breath reflects one's mental state. As the breath becomes calmer, so does the mind, and vice versa. Before you meditate, relax by doing this simple breathing exercise:

Inhale slowly counting one to four, hold your breath to the same count, then exhale to an equal count. This breath cycle is one round of "even-count breathing."

You may either increase or decrease the number of counts as you find comfortable, but keep the length of inhalation, retention, and exhalation equal. Practice "even-count breathing" six times.

WATCHING THE BREATH MEDITATION:

As the breath becomes calmer and more refined during meditation, you may experience a joyous feeling of peace. Practice the following meditation technique to help calm your breath, your mind, and your whole being:

Inhale deeply, then slowly exhale. Wait for the breath to come in of its own accord, and watch its inflow. As the breath flows out naturally, again observe the movement. Don't inhale and exhale deliberately, but instead simply be an observer.

Notice and feel the movement of breath on the inside of your nose, with your attention on the breath itself, not on the nose.

Be particularly aware of the rest points between the breaths. Enjoy the peace, and the feeling of inward release and freedom that you feel when your body is without breath.

Practice for ten minutes if you can. When you finish observing your breath, continue to sit quietly and enjoy the stillness and serenity you feel.

*"All good things come
from stillness"*

— Joseph Cornell