

FOREST BATHING

A Sky and Earth Touched Me Wellness Exercise

by Joseph Bharat Cornell



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

To Practice

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.

*"I hear the wind among
the trees playing celestial
symphonies."*

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

RECIPROCAL BREATHING

Gaze into the sky . . . and locate the sun. 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.

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

— Margaret Bates

Continue walking and feel yourself united with all that is.

Use the words of **George Washington Carver** to open your heart to all creation:

*"All flowers talk to me and so do hundreds of little things in the woods.
I learn what I know by watching and loving everything."*

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 — and face the sun.

Close your eyes. Feel yourself rooted firmly in the earth — and living high in the sky.
Feel the rays of the sun warming you. Bathe in the sunlight and open air.

Visualize your body as a leaf. Feel the sun's rays flowing into you, turning 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.

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.

All these things live with you in cooperation and harmony. Delight in the benevolence and unity all Life shares.



Find a beautiful place in the forest and reflect on the following thought:

“All terrestrial things are essentially celestial.”

— John Muir

This insight is especially true for trees.

In what ways do trees and forests inspire you?

What noble qualities do you feel trees express?
