

# **A DEEPER DIVE: FOREST BATHING INVITATION**

*Developed by Sandi Dallaba, certified Forest Therapy Guide*

During this unprecedented time as we follow the stay-at-home order, we can get outside, while practicing safe physical distancing, and enjoy all that nature has to offer. Nature is a great healer, not just of our bodies, but also of our minds. Research shows that forest bathing can reduce stress markers. As we are all facing individual stress during this global health crisis, it's our hope to provide you with an additional tool to reduce your stress and ease your anxiety. Forest bathing can be practiced outside your door, through a window, or looking at a live camera of a nature scene.

So, what is forest bathing? Forest bathing, also known as "Shinrin-yoku," is a practice of spending time outdoors in a natural area and being in the moment to enhance health and wellness. During a Forest bathing experience, healing activities are incorporated to make room for listening, stillness, reflection, and heightened sensory awareness.

Forest bathing tends to bring out two distinct responses in people. The first is that there are those who are considered 'nature noticers', meaning those who love all things green or moving. They believe nature is beautiful and interesting. They love being immersed in nature. The second is those that are 'metaphor makers', meaning nature turns them inward to find interesting things in nature that applies to their everyday lives.

The beauty of forest bathing is that every response is correct. There is no one right way to forest bathe. The point of forest bathing is to get people to spend copious amounts of time in nature, so that nature can do its work of healing.

## **An Invitation: Sit Spot**

The most basic invitation is a Sit Spot. This can be practiced anywhere. Even if you can't go outside, sit near an open window and let nature in. This activity is essentially an inventory of your senses. The purpose of the exercise is to practice sitting still and noticing everything around you for approximately five minutes per sense. This exercise should be practiced at a slower pace. Focus on the items that catch your interest. This is best practiced with an interval timer. Set the time for 20 minutes with five-minute intervals.

*Read items below thoroughly before starting your exercises, so you can keep your eyes closed throughout the exercise.*

### **Hearing: With your eyes closed, listen to the sounds around you.**

- Here are items to notice. You don't have to do them all - they are simply suggestions.
  - Which ones are human sounds and which ones are nature sounds?
  - What do you hear closest to you and what is farthest away?
  - Can you follow a sound and see where it goes?
  - Which sound is really calling out for your attention?

**Taste: With your eyes closed, can you taste anything in your mouth?**

- Maybe it's your breakfast or your coffee.
- What does your own mouth taste like?
- Now open your mouth and breath in. Can you taste anything at all?
- You might want to try making your lips into a straw shape and suck in the air. Any taste?
- Winter is the best time to taste the air, but after a rain is also a good time. Think about what's happening in your mouth.

**Touch: with your eyes closed, what does it feel like to be in your skin right now?**

- Are you hot? Are you cold?
- Try touching your skin. How does it feel to you?
- How about textures on your clothing? What do they feel like?
- If you're outside, reach down and touch the ground. What does it feel like?
- Can you feel different things as you reach around the ground?

**Smell: With your eyes closed, what can you smell?**

- If you turn your head a bit, can you smell different things?
- If you lift your nose, can you smell more things?
- Can you identify the smells with your eyes closed? Focus on one smell.

**Sight: With your eyes closed, and if you feel comfortable, try turning around slowly until you feel like it's right to stop.**

- Enjoy the sensations of being in that direction for a bit.
- Then ever so slowly, start opening your eyes as if it's first thing in the morning.
- What do the things in front of you look like? What do you notice most?
- How was it keeping your eyes closed for so long and then getting to see again?

Check out Pittsburgh's own certified Forest Therapy Guide, Sandi Dallaba on her website:

<https://www.pittsburghforestbathing.org/>