

One Meditation #5, May 2025: “Nature Bathing— Hanging Out with Birds, Bees, Water, and Trees” (May. 4, 2025)

Welcome to the fifth issue of One Meditation—one more meditation—and thank you for being here. Please consider sharing/forwarding. Monthly subjects range from modern to ancient, Western to Eastern, and scientific to spiritual. For more info, see below. – Richard

ONE MEDITATION #5, May 2025: NATURE BATHING—HANGING OUT WITH BIRDS, BEES, WATER, AND TREES

What if your country encouraged you to meditate? Japan proposed exactly that in 1982. Tomohide Akiyama, director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, invented and promoted *shinrin-yoku*: “forest bathing”: mindful sensory awareness of nature. Two-thirds of Japan is covered by forest. Its religions of Zen Buddhism and Shinto and historic influences of Taoism and Confucianism all hold nature in high respect. Now forest bathing is spreading in the West.

Akiyama knew that research documented its health benefits. Recently in “The effects of forest bathing,” Siah Chiew Jiat examined 51 studies involving 3554 participants. The practice regularly leads to a slower heartbeat, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, and better health in general—also outcomes of meditation and mindfulness.

In fact, recent studies indicate that sound alone may be enough. For example, in “Effects of nature sounds,” Song et al. demonstrated that delivery of oxygen was better, “heart rate was lower, and parasympathetic nerve activity [physical calming] was [greater] when hearing nature sound than...urban sound.”

But is nature bathing new? In his essay “Consciousness” in *The Incarnate Word*, twentieth-century scholar-mystic Sri Aurobindo restates a 3000-year-old Hindu idea that even matter has a “slumbering consciousness” within. It is present, he suggests, not just in plants but even in mineral elements such as rock.

Karen Armstrong in *Sacred Nature: Restoring Our Ancient Bond with the Natural World* details how since ancient times, religions have encouraged nature meditation. In the West, Judaic scripture describes Yahweh and Elohim (two of its primary names for God) as being present in sky, earthquakes, thunder, lightning, and a burning bush. In Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth often retreats alone to the hills and the Sea of Galilee to reconnect more deeply with God. Islam teaches preservation of and respect for nature and describes the Prophet, Muhammad, as meditating on and off for decades in wilderness caves near his home.

In the East, says Armstrong, Buddhism encourages us to find interconnectivity or “interbeing”—and the blissful, loving Buddha-nature—in every smallest part of the creation. Zen Buddhism recommends practicing mindfulness in gardens and forests. And Taoism tells us the universal spirit-energy—Qi, the Tao, or the Dao—flows throughout

human, animal, and plant life everywhere.

Is your interest in nature bathing based on spiritual or scientific principles, or both? It doesn't matter. Practice is easy. Simply walk or sit (or even exercise) in a natural setting. Then immerse yourself in its sounds, sights, scents, and/or sensations. You may mindfully observe it, practice your choice of meditating, or simply lose yourself in its vastness or fullness. Elise Ingram describes many such methods in *Forest Bathing: Mindful Meditation Connecting You to Nature and Eco-Consciousness Through the Practice of Shinrin-Yoku*. "Find the right forest," she states; then apply mindful observation and attention, breathwork, scanning of your body, or other techniques.

In my own practices, I walk twenty-thirty minutes each day along a wooded lake, which enhances my focus. At home, thanks to my nature-mystic wife, we have art of the outdoors and several old, large plants we invite to live with us. We play videos of rushing water and singing birds. And we tent camp up to six weeks each summer. All of this makes us calmer, more present, and mindful in the natural world.

In *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred*, Victoria Loorz, a Wild Church founder, describes what we find in forest bathing as "relational": "The skies, the waters, the deer, the forests: these are speaking all the time" (p. 89). How might you spend more time with birds, bees, water, and trees?

[Forest bathing: Cutting-edge studies by Japanese researcher \(19 min.\)](#)

Next Month: BUDDHA'S BOWLS – WHAT WATERS DO YOU CARRY?

Peace, Strength, Joy

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Previous Issues

Jan. 2025, #1: **"What Is Meditation?"** Science says it is a conscious calming of body and mind. Practitioners define it as aware attention for inner growth. **Recommended Book:** Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson,

Altered Traits: Science Reveals Meditation Changes Mind, Brain, and Body

Feb. '25, #2: ***“What Are Four Main Focuses in Meditation?”*** *The first two are within (immanent), and outer (transcendent). Either of these can be paired with two others: open waiting, or one-pointed focus. Recommended: Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness*

March '25, #3: ***“Why Breathe Deeply?”*** *Science says a breath cycle of 8+ seconds triggers parasympathetic-system calmness, which lowers pulse and blood pressure rates, decreases anxiety, and increases self-awareness. Recommended: James Nestor, Breath—The New Science of a Lost Art*

April '25, #4: ***“Why Chant, Sing, or Hum?”*** *Rightly done, each calms the nervous system and mind, leading to better inner attention and silence. Recommended: Golding and Golding, The Humming Effect: Sound Healing for Health and Happiness*