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# Mind and Matter



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# Into the Woods

by Rosario Zavala, MSW, LCSW, CEAP

***“Allow nature’s peace to flow in to you as sunshine flows into trees.”***

***John Muir***

If you cannot remember the last time you spent some time in nature, then it is safe to say that you are overdue to go outdoors, or get outside. Many of us have good intentions to go for a walk at a nearby park after work, or on the weekend but often chores and other responsibilities get in our way. We tend to forget that being in nature helps us to reconnect with ourselves in a way that our smartphones and other electronics will never be able to assist us in accomplishing.

In 1982, Japan deemed Shinrin-yoku, which literally translates to “forest bathing,” as an essential part of their national preventive health program. Japanese medical doctors often prescribe this to young and older city dwellers affected by stress. Forest bathing is about immersing yourself in nature. This can take place in a forest as the name implies or in any other natural environment, such as a state park, beach or your own backyard. The term is not intended to limit the type of nature one selects, nor does it involve actual soaking. The goal of forest bathers is to intentionally go outside to relax with nature and, conversely, to allow nature to assist one to relax.

Forest bathing has become quite popular in metropolitan areas of the United States over the last several years. It is an activity you can do on your own, with a group of friends or with a certified guide. The key is to focus on the experience, using all your senses to take in your surroundings as you walk, sit or lie down; engage in deep breathing and involve a

contemplative practice in the process. The intention is to not try to get anywhere other than into a state of calm and connection with your natural surroundings.

Yoshifumi Miyazaki, a Japanese researcher and leading expert in the field of forest bathing, coined the term “Forest Therapy” in 2003 to refer to Shinrin-yoku backed by scientific data. Over the last 28 years he has conducted several scientific studies with adolescents and adults in Japan, which have found that spending time in nature leads to physiological relaxation which results in lowering high blood pressure, strengthening one’s immune system and improving one’s ability to recover from illness. Being in nature has also been found to reduce ruminative thinking and increase positive thoughts. In Miyazaki’s book, “Shinrin-yoku: The Japanese art of Forest Bathing,” he addresses how one may expand one’s experience.

In South Florida we are fortunate to have many accessible and well-maintained State Parks that one may visit alone or with friends and family to take in what nature has in store for us. As the temperature begins to cool down and the humidity level decreases take some time to engage in the important practice of forest bathing.

**Source: Haile, Rahawa, *Forest Bathing: How Microdosing on Nature Can Help With Stress*, The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 30 June 2017.**

## 8 MENTAL HACKS TO ACTIVATE

1. Protect your emotional well-being every day with the Big Three: Quality sleep, lots of water, and slow deep breathing.
2. Remember that happiness is a habit. You can rewire your emotional template each and every day.
3. Check your food and mood connection.
4. Pay attention to what you pay attention to. Common unhealthy tendencies include living in the past (leads to depression) and fearing the future (contributes to anxiety). Cherish this moment — it's the only one you've got.
5. Hug your family, friends and pets more. Don't forget yourself you need hugs, too.
6. Leave drama where it belongs: On Broadway or at the movies. Your central nervous system will thank you.
7. Look for the good in others. Look for the good in yourself.
8. Give yourself frequent breaks when dealing with stressful events. Your emotional energy is scarce and finite.

Source: Psychology Today

**“In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart.”**

**Anne Frank**

## DID YOU KNOW?

Getting involved with your community makes you more mentally resilient. According to a recent article in Social Psychological and Personality Science, belonging to social groups, increases psychological strength to endure and overcome physical challenges. The researchers suggest it gives us a sense of belonging and purpose.



## UPCOMING SEMINARS

First Time Homebuyers  
Mindful Waking  
Loving Kindness  
Building Emotional Self  
Awareness

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## FEATURED SEMINAR

### *Relax, Breathe and Let go!*

*This lunchtime training session is offered for those interested in building their capacity to consciously activate their body's relaxation response. The benefits of relaxation are more than simply a refreshed mind and rejuvenated spirit. You will learn specific relaxation methods you can use both at work and home to help you manage daily stressors. Take a break from the busy holiday season and join us in practicing this important skill.*

**December 11-13**

**Earn 150 Pure Wellness points (to a maximum of 300 points per calendar year) when you attend an FSAP seminar.**