

Walking Meditation with *shinrin yoko* (Japanese “Forest Bathing”)

This post will present a short-form of instruction for walking meditation (Thick Nhat Hanh, 2015) and an introduction to the Japanese health practice of “Forest Bathing.” For people interested in a wider range of mindfulness information and skills please refer to my own blog called mindfulhappiness.org; for people interested in scientific research supporting the benefits of walking regularly in nature please refer to www.natureandforesttherapy.org/the-science. Below I have listed just a few documented health benefits from mindful walking in natural areas. Known health benefits are: improved immunity/more NK cells; reduced blood pressure; reduced stress reactivity; improved emotional mood; improved sleep patterns; increased energy level; improved mindfulness; improved level of personal happiness; and, exercise.

Here are abbreviated instructions for walking meditation. Begin with positive intention to walk mindfully, then take a few slow, deep breaths. Remain silent. Place your hands and arms where they are comfortable, and with a level head gaze gently 2-3 feet in front of you. Paying attention to the feelings in your moving body, breathe in and lift one leg then place it on the earth with your exhalation. Be mindful in each and every step you take. Repeat this at your own rate, and notice the peace and joy you attain. If your mind becomes distracted, gently return attention to your mindful walking. No self-criticism! While appreciating the solid earth under your feet, dedicate all of your awareness to the simple act of mindful walking in nature. There is no need to think about other things, evaluate, make associations, tell stories in your mind, or talk with others. Simply walk mindfully. Have gratitude for your body, nature, your heart and your inner peace now. On your return, open up your senses and allow nature to enter fully.

For more information refer to Thick Nhat Hanh (2015). *How to Walk*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax. See also www.natureandforesttherapy.org/the-science AND mindfulhappiness.org A. R. Quintiliani, Ph.D.