

**2011  
International Year  
of Forests**

Becoming  
a Tree

You can do this exercise anywhere. Ideally, you should be outside, standing on the earth, in some natural place. But you can also do it indoors or in the midst of a city.



Stand in a comfortable position, with your feet about shoulder-width apart, knees lightly bent. Stretch and release any tension. Take some long, deep breaths into your belly. Feel your feet on the ground.

Imagine that, like a tree, you can extend roots into the earth, from your feet and the base of your spine. With your eyes open, notice if what you see changes as you extend your roots down.

If there is anything clouding your awareness or interfering with your ability to be present, take a deep breath and imagine letting it go down through your roots into the earth, to become compost.

Feel the living fire deep in the heart of the earth. Breathe some of that energy up through your roots, into the base of your spine and your belly, up your spine as if your spine were the flexible trunk of a tree. Feel it warm your heart and throat, and reach out through your arms and hands. Let it move up through the top of your head and out like the branches and leaves of a tree. Let those branches come all the way down to touch the earth, surrounding and protecting you. Again, notice what changes.

Feel the sunlight (or moonlight or starlight) on your leaves and branches, and breathe it in. Feed yourself on the energy, just as a tree feeds on sun. Draw it down through your head, heart, hands, and belly, down through your feet into the earth. Look around you and notice what you see, hear, smell, and feel.

While you've used the image of a tree to help you ground, you don't want to be stuck to the ground or immobile. So imagine that the roots in your feet are stretchable, that when you pick each foot up the connection remains. Or you might use the image of the Ents, the tree people from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, who stalk the forests on their treelike feet, with their toes spreading and gripping the ground with each step. Looking up and around you, not down at your feet, begin to move, remembering to breathe.

Imagine that your feet have sensors. Pick each foot up and set it gently and slowly down, letting it tell you about the terrain beneath. Keep your ankles loose and your knees springy. Move slowly around the space, feeling how you can keep your connection to the earth with each step. Notice how quietly you can walk. Notice how loud is the squeak of your shoes or the swish of your clothing.

Look, listen, feel, smell, be. Like a tree. Imagine, experience, life as a tree. Then slowly return to your human self. Graciously thank the trees - the trees around you, the trees in your local area, the individual trees and the populous forests - for the lessons they have taught you, for the life they share with you, for their very being.