

Mindfulness in Nature
with Ashley Dahl, MSW, CMT-P of OpenSpace Mindfulness
for NAEOP

Practices & Resources

PRACTICES

All of these practices can be done be done seated, standing, supine or walking.

Steady Earth Breathing

Feel points of contact between your body and surfaces below. Begin to notice the presence of earth supporting and holding you. Can you allow your body to be completely held? Inhaling from feet upwards sense earth's qualities of steadiness, stability and strength being received into your body. Exhaling downwards and out of bottom of feet, allow your body to release what isn't needed in the moment (holding, tension, thought patterns, etc.) You may also begin by imagining setting down anything presently weighing you down, allow earth to hold it for you (with the option of picking it back up afterwards or leaving it with earth to compost.)

Sensory Awareness

Take a few moments to settled into your body and then bring moment to moment awareness to your environment through your sense gates:

Eyes / Seeing – With eyes open drink in the colors and shapes and light present in your surroundings. Soften or close eyes and notice how light and shadows shift. You may also look within, noticing your energy – is it bright? Muted? Steady? Shifting?

Nose / Smelling – Turning attention to your natural breathing rhythm can you detect any scent or fragrance in the spaces around you? Are they familiar? Novel? Pleasant/Unpleasant/Neutral? Is there an emotional fragrance or mood present within?

Mouth / Tasting – As you breathe, what sensations arise in your mouth? Can you detect the presence of humidity in the air? Freshness? A taste? Turning inwards, what is your current mind or emotional state? Does it have a particular taste or texture?

Ears / Listening – Move awareness next to ears, listening to ambient sounds. Notice the way you need not reach for sounds, but can simply allow sounds to touch your awareness? Notice the impermeant nature of sounds, as they arise into being and dissipate. Can you let go of sounds and simply be with the experience of sounds? Is it possible to listen to outer landscapes as you listen within? Do you notice your energy or mood shifting? Any other natural expressions of impermanence?

Skin / Feeling – Resting attention then with the organ of your skin. Get curious, what does the topography of your body perceive and feel? Temperature, air flow, stillness other sensations? Is it possible to perceive outer landscapes as you also feel into inner landscapes?

Finally, take a few moments to sense inner and outer landscapes with all your sense organs. Explore resting in sensory experience.

Elemental Nature

This practice can be done outdoors, or indoors with imagination. Spend a few minutes or more noticing what your body has in common with the natural world around us.

Earth – Noticing how the matter that comprises trees, plants and soil is the same matter found within our soft tissues. Minerals present in rocks and mountains are present in our bones. When we eat plants, it turns into the substance of our cells. What we no longer need, we excrete, and it goes back into earth to be composted and transformed into plants and food for other life forms.

Water – Becoming aware that the water in our tears, blood, synovial fluid, etc. was once snow melt or rain, or part of a river. That the water we excrete goes back into the environment, perhaps into the soil, perhaps into the air as humidity, eventually turning back into snow, rain, mist, river, etc.

Air – Attuning to the ways that we relationship with trees and plankton as we breathe – our cells are nourished by the oxygen they provide while their cells are fed by the Co2 we offer. The breeze that flows through grass and branches may also move across our skin.

Fire – Bringing attention to the element of fire in nature. The sun provides warmth, fire helps to clear and transform matter. We have these capacities within. As our heart pumps blood our body is warmed. We have organs that can also clear and transform – our minds can digest thoughts and inspire action while our digestive system turns food into matter and waste.

Ether (or Space) – Sense the presence of spaciousness in the natural world – space between branches, space for birds to fly, for air to travel, water to flow. Can you also sense spaciousness within you? Space for your lungs to expand as you inhale? For blood to flow? To make a choice over simply reacting?

Presence of Joy

This practice can be done outdoors, or indoors with imagination.

Option 1 – Using any or all of your sense gates, notice what captures your attention and makes you smile. What do you find beautiful? Brings you a sense of delight? Take a few moments to savor whatever lights you up, noticing any corresponding sensations in body.

Option 2 – Turn your sense gates towards a spot around you and get really curious. What is surprising? Gives rise to awe or appreciation? Take a few moments to savor whatever lights you up, noticing any corresponding sensations in body.

BOOKS

Awake in the Wild by Mark Coleman.

Black Faces, White Spaces by Carolyn Finney.

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall-Kimmerer.

Healing with Nature by Rochelle Calvert.

The Nature Fix by Florence Williams

When the Light of the World Was Subdued Our Songs Came Through edited by Joy Harjo.

Have questions? Interested in additional resources?

Feel free to email Ashley at hello@openspacemindfulness.com.