

Thoughts and Non-Thoughts. On the Mindfulness of Forest Immersion

by Richard Hood Jan. 20, 2023

Allow the forest to inundate your senses.

Your arrival undertaken. This change of space concertedly chosen. Vast openness surrounded by endless green presently absorbed. A toehold to a vibrant reality of renewal. A rich adventure with but one step more fully to embark. Unfurling with all its newness. The excitement and the very immediacy of it. And indeed, what is to come. These things can be the catalyst to power you straight to the present moment of being.

This scene in fact, reminiscent of a cherished photo for which you are now an integral part. So very different than your surroundings were only but one hour ago, yesterday, possibly all week. In the midst of fresh abundance, let stress and all your daily concerns slough and fall away. ...As leaves from a tree in fall, as antlers in winter. No longer of service to you in this place of wonder. Instead heeding new mandates of rejuvenation and integration. ...The self with the natural world.

The natural world and forested areas particularly are humanity's ancestral home. It is no accident, on the contrary, it is certainly by design that such areas resonate. Viscerally evoking with sustainment because so much of our evolutionary trek was spent in the midst of fertile tree-lined hills beneath a grand canopy.

Consider your appreciation.

Be grateful for the moment and for this experience. And for you, yourself. Absolutely. ...For those you share your time with.

Allow your perspective to broaden. Your mind's eye to loosen its gaze. Its resolve unfocused somewhat as you take in all the sensory data conveyed and available without any particular attention paid to the detail of any single element.

Now zero in deliberately to what most fully and directly speaks to you. The message you are seeking. The message that has perhaps sought you out in particular. The opposite of what you were doing just a moment ago. And yet this process itself is such a natural transition. Not unlike flicking a light switch on or off. And even the polarity of this attunement in any given moment is really not too different at all. The two positions on or off, with more similarities than divisions.

Touch a tree. With your palm flush, pressed upon the bark of its trunk. Yes. Feel the texture and the energy that is unique in this singular experience. A communal expression of time and place, and entirely dependent on yourself and this exact tree. Do the same with another tree. And as you scan with your mind feel how utterly different this tree seems. And how indeed, its touch is quite unique.

Listen for the wind high in the canopy. The whirl, the rattling dance, the whisk of leaves. Trace its path with your mind. Hear the nuance. Listen as its pitch rises and falls. Its path and its intensity. Follow with your mind as if you too were high above soaring along.

Hear the birds and their distinct communication. At certain times there can be so much. Each species and so many songs at once. Their richly textured vocalizations engaged in a subtle dance of veiled rituals that have been commencing for eons. Maybe today there is one special one that smiles.

Consider the satisfying clomp of shoes on supportive ground. Or the crunch of pebbles under foot. Enjoy as you skid and slide, and perhaps lose balance a bit, or even fall. Just get back up. Enjoy your body's inherent reflexes. Safeguarding and helping you to traverse even in the uncertainty of mud. Balancing, bending, flexing a knee, moving forward.

Discern the aromas of timelessness. The memory of the woods. Perceptible humidity, river stone, leaves at different stages, evergreen freshness, complex forest notes intermingled with subtle flora qualities, and of the soil itself, both sustaining and distinctive.

Feel your breath rushing in and rushing out. The bellows to the fire of life within you. Your heart shouldering the work. Keeping time with the unspoken rhythm in the air. And connecting you fundamentally to the forest. Right here. You belong.

One thousand shades of green. Always, one thousand shades of green. Rejoice.

The bursting growth at every scale. Little details of moss. Probably a lot of moss even high up. Mushrooms closer to the ground. And of course, feathery ferns. The great diversity of the forest and all its supported creature inhabitants down even to the microscopic. That if we try hard, we might begin to get a sense of their existence. But we can never quite be sure. The line between what truly is and what can eventually become, a demarcation that nearly evaporates, to usher things born simply from the will of the imagination alone.

All that, the breathtaking mystery and the comfort that we are fundamental ourselves. The dichotomy that we are grand in ways infinitesimal, while otherwise simultaneously insignificant. We are truly dwarfed by the forest. And if we tend our duty of stewardship, this very forest will far surpass us with continued longevity.