



Linda's T'ai Chi Weekly Handout March 6, 2022

Forest Bathing



The recent sunny days here in Bellingham inspired me to revisit a subject I have written about in previous handouts. Forest bathing emerged in “Japan in the 1980s as a physiological and psychological exercise called *shinrin-yoku* (“forest bathing” or “taking in the forest atmosphere”). The purpose was twofold: to offer an eco-antidote to tech-boom burnout and to inspire residents to reconnect with and protect the country’s forests. (“National Geographic”)

The concept of forest and nature emersion is not new. Many cultures recognized the health and wellbeing of being “with” nature. The Japanese, however, fully embraced this form of ecotherapy. In the 1990s, researchers began studying the physiological benefits of forest bathing, providing the science to support what we innately know: time spent immersed in nature and connected to the natural world is good for us. Japan is credited with the term *shinrin-yoku* -forest bathing.

Forest bathing is not hiking, mountain climbing or sitting among the trees on our cell phones. Forest bathing is a complete immersion in and with nature, using all of our senses to connect with the world outside of ourselves.

Qing Li, the world's foremost expert in forest medicine, shows how forest bathing can reduce our stress levels and blood pressure, strengthen our immune and cardiovascular systems, boost our energy, mood, creativity, and concentration, and even help us lose weight with the goal of longevity.

There are many books about forest bathing but I discovered “Forest Bathing” by Dr. Qing Li originally published in 2018. What drew me to this particular book is the glorious photography. I bring this book to you as one resource about forest bathing. If this topic is of interest, there are many good books from which to choose.

Dr. Qing Li is the world's foremost expert in forest medicine. A medical doctor at Tokyo's Nippon Medical School, he has been a visiting fellow at the Stanford University School of Medicine and is a founding member and chairman of the Japanese Society for Forest Medicine, a leading member of the Task Force of Forests and Human Health, and the vice president and secretary general of the International Society of Nature and Forest Medicine. (From his biography)

Excerpted from Dr Qing Li book:

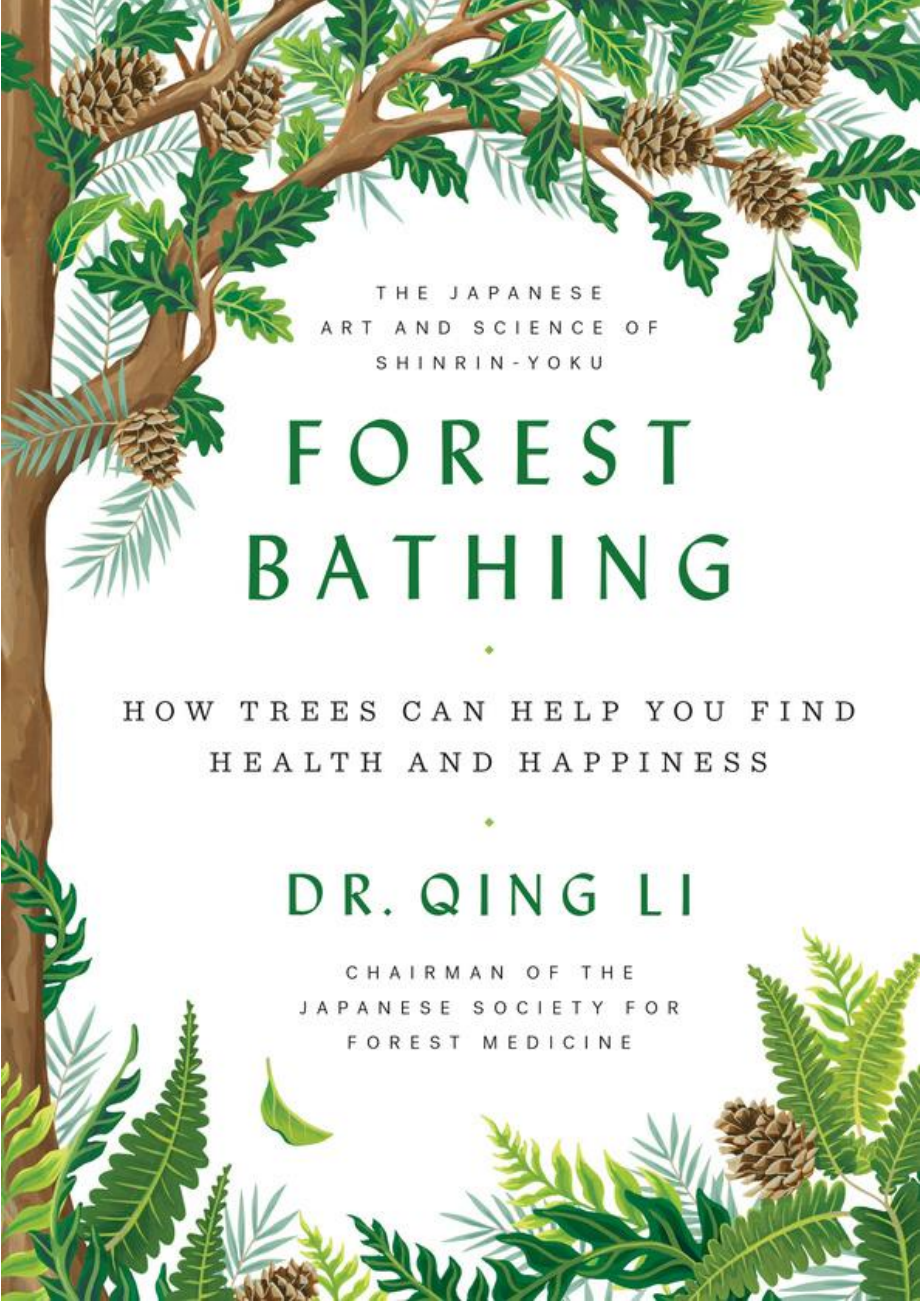
“The key to unlocking the power of the forest is in the five senses. Let nature enter through your ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands and feet. Listen to the birds singing and the breeze rustling in the leaves of the trees. Look at the different greens of the trees and the sunlight filtering through the branches. Smell the fragrance of the forest and breathe in the natural aromatherapy of phytoncides. Taste the freshness of the air as you take deep breaths. Place your hands on the trunk of a tree. Dip your fingers or toes in a stream. Lie on the ground. Drink in the flavor of the forest and release your sense of joy and calm. This is your sixth

sense, a state of mind. Now you have connected with nature. You have crossed the bridge to happiness.

When it comes to finding calm and relaxation, there is no one-size-fits-all solution – it differs from person to person. It is important to find a place that suits you. If you love the smell of damp soil, you will be most relaxed where the natural landscape provides it. Then the effects of the forest will be more powerful. Maybe you have a place in the countryside that reminds you of your childhood or of happy times in the past. These places will be special to you and your connection with them will be strong. First, find a spot. Make sure you have left your phone and camera behind. You are going to be walking aimlessly and slowly. You don't need any devices. Let your body be your guide. Listen to where it wants to take you. Follow your nose. And take your time. It doesn't matter if you don't get anywhere. (The art of doing nothing) You are not going anywhere. You are savoring the sounds, smells and sights of nature and letting the forest in.

Peace

Linda



THE JAPANESE
ART AND SCIENCE OF
SHINRIN-YOKU

FOREST BATHING

HOW TREES CAN HELP YOU FIND
HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

DR. QING LI

CHAIRMAN OF THE
JAPANESE SOCIETY FOR
FOREST MEDICINE