
Meditating in Nature

There are two ways to meditate in nature. One is to visit natural environments and bring along a meditation cushion or mat, or not. In this way, you can be a part of the surroundings during your meditation. The other is to either open the windows to the sounds of nature or use a natural sound recording while sitting within your home or meditation space.

Either form can help you deepen your meditative equipoise. There are differences and similarities between both forms. The obvious difference is that an indoor nature meditation is easier, can make comfortable use of inclement weather and if using a natural sound recording, is not limited to the variety of sounds or natural views available in a populated setting.



Encountering a natural environmental meditation means letting go of the need to control the setting. A meditation practice outside an area populated by humans offers a variety of interesting opportunities to develop meditative equipoise. Balancing one's mental chatter with the sights, sounds, smells, and sensory awareness of nature is an immersive meditation experience. A breeze playing with your hair, a leaf falling beside you, the smells of vegetation around you, and the sound of birds or water flowing become the meditation you are having.

When your meditation practice has been limited to a studio or indoor class, it's easy to just naturally believe your mind's tendencies to conjure up intrusive thoughts is somehow competing with its "true nature"- that of stillness. This is a notion that can mislead meditators for years. It turns out a chattering mind is not a spigot that can be turned off anymore than one can turn off the sound of

chirping birds. It's the "sitting with" the experience of things going on that is the bedrock of stillness not the absence of any sensory awareness. In fact, the first time you meditate in a natural environment you may discover it's not as peaceful as you imagine it is supposed to be.

There is nothing quite so unnerving as the absolute silence at the top of a mountain. Even the wind approaches this meditation space with reverence. There is nothing so buffeting as the sounds of a waterfall drowning out even your own thoughts. Your ancient, unmoving rock surface meditation space is a stark contrast to the volume of water crashing into the pool beneath the falls, the waves cresting the riverbanks, or stream trickling down a creek.

How to meditate in nature:

Begin with careful intent. Be aware our human minds are powerful tools that are often overwhelmed with self-importance. Our bodies are not so easily led astray. When you focus your mind on your breath and the sounds, sights, and touch sensations in your surroundings, you bring your mind and body into a realm of oneness. Separation is only imaginary.

To meditate with nature is to become more fully aware of your natural state. We think of the earth and the sky as separate things - different elements of our world. But look carefully to the horizon, where the sky meets the earth or the sea. That boundary line is not real. For as you approach it - it moves away. It is apparent but never to be reached. The sky begins at the surface of the earth - we walk in that imaginary space. It is said that the *sky* is male and the *earth* is female. We walk in their embrace. Our natural state is one of unbroken wholeness.

When you can sit within the turbulence of sound and sensation and become the meditation you are having, you have found equipoise. This is the balance point between your mind and your surroundings. If you are not too bothered or too ecstatic, you can be said to have found true stillness. It's within and without at the very same moment.

..... Rock On

For a selection of downloadable natural sound recordings and guided imagery, visit The Cafe at www.mindstreamcenter.org