

# Tree meditations

Branch out to discover the inner you through some simple tree meditation. Words Jill Lawson

Nature has a lot to offer those who choose to ascend upon the practice of meditation. Much can be learned from observing the relationships within the natural world, and if we decide to explore this knowledge, we grow to be sagaciously self-integrated in the art of mindfulness. As we absorb the concepts of nature and gain wisdom through contemplation, man-made stressors fall by the wayside. When we associate ourselves with the harmonious and adaptable characteristics of the wild, we release our self-imposed illusions that keep us from experiencing the natural flow of joy and tranquility.

By focusing on elements in the outdoors, we can change our perspective and ultimately improve how we feel on the inside. Choosing a point of reference to guide us toward a state of peacefulness depends on our needs at the time of meditation. In an effort to instil confidence and security, we may find the following meditation on trees particularly helpful.

As trees have a system of roots that nourish, feed and create growth and stability, we too have energetic roots that govern our ability to meet our basic needs. This mindset reflects the quality of our 'root chakra'; an energy centre that originates at the base of our spine and is associated with our legs and feet, much like roots of a tree.

For example, if we imagine ourselves rooted like a tree when the winds of change blow in our direction, we will demonstrate the ability to sway and bend, unharmed at our core. In addition, our hope may dry up and fall to the ground like browned leaves in late autumn, but after a winter of reflection and connection to our inner storehouse of energy, we will reawaken in the spring of self-renewal.

If it is possible, perform this tree meditation under or near a tree, particularly one that is familiar, as just viewing it will bring back the lovely benefits of the practice. If this cannot happen, visualise being close to a tree or in a group of trees.

As most meditation practices are performed in a comfortable cross-legged seated position, tree meditation is done whilst standing. It is

important to stand on stable ground free from distraction or moving objects. If your balance is compromised, you may place your hand onto, or lean with your back against a tree or a wall.

When you are ready to begin, stand with your feet hip width apart. Take a moment to rock side-to-side to assure equal balance and stability in both legs and feet. With a deep breath in, stretch the crown of your head toward the sky. With a long exhale, bring your awareness from the base of your spine, down to your legs and feet. Do this a few more times until you are standing as tall as you can, feeling solid and grounded in your root chakra.

Close your eyes and picture the roots of a tree coursing below the surface of the ground. See these roots gathering up life sustaining nutrients as they cut through rocks and tight crevices, letting no obstacle deter them. Realise the steadfast power of these roots as the unwavering foundation for the tree. Absorb that same determination into your core, and visualise your own energetic roots burrowing into the earth, providing everything you need to thrive.

Now imagine your tree swaying effortlessly in a gentle breeze. Notice its fluidity and grace as the branches bend and yield to the wind. Picture these winds picking up speed and observe how your tree adapts without protest, as if patiently dancing with whatever comes its

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way. Like your tree, feel yourself standing in one of life's momentary storms that rush and swirl haphazardly around you. Practice the same flexibility, allowing your mind and body to sway gently to the rhythm of poise and contentment. Feel your energetic roots providing you with a solid foundation, and be confident in your ability to go with the flow. Embrace the sensation of moving freely with the winds of change knowing your roots are there to support you through the most turbulent storms.

Some trees experience a transformation in appearance by shedding their leaves year after year, yet they still thrive at the core. Leaves reveal the character of the season, just as our own expression discloses the din of aging. While a tree may not be able to turn dying leaves back to green at will, it does teach us to acclimate to our environment as necessary. Just as it is inevitable that vibrant leaves fade to brown, our looks also change as we age. By embracing and adapting to the seasons of life, we can lighten the impact these changes have on us.

With your mind's eye visualise the leaves of your tree changing colours from lush green, to brilliant yellow to dry, shrivelled November brown. See the leaves pirouette to the ground leaving the branches bare and exposed. Imagine winter depositing a layer of snow on each branch, and the tree stilling to endure the scarcity of light. Appreciate your own outwardly appearance as a temporary, ever-changing fact of life. Withdraw from your senses as you travel inward to your core, finding sustenance through moments of deficiency in the passing of time. Slow down your thoughts of self-judgment and tune into the everlasting beauty that lies within you. Maintain this image of sustainable, vital, inner beauty for as long as you wish.

When you are ready to emerge, do so by celebrating your rebirth and renewal, with the promise of rooting down securely as your spirits rise toward the sky. Imagine your skin glowing radiantly like the new lime-green leaves of spring that reflect the light of return. Embrace your supple and graceful qualities that enable you to yield to life's stormy weather just like the bending branches of a forgiving tree. Express confidently your colours of change by trusting in your ability to withdraw into nourishing introspection, later to blossom brilliantly and more beautiful than ever before.

