

I offer this Tu Bishvat meditation for cultivating an intimate connection with a single tree to remind us all of the essential role trees play in maintaining a healthy planet, as well as the vital importance and obligation we have to protect our forests in all of their magnificence and diversity. I suggest sitting in a hard backed chair for this practice.

I honor that visualization does not come easily for everyone, and I recommend that we all take an opportunity now to go to a window. And study the form of a single tree for a few moments. Stop the recording while you seek out a tree and attempt with the best of your ability to hold its image or a sense of it in your mind.

Then return to a comfortable place on your chair and start the MP3 again.

Sitting with your trunk long, raise your shoulders up toward your ears, roll them back and down, allowing your hands to rest gently in your lap or on your thighs. Feel the heavy bones in your legs, sink down. Rooting deep into the chair, supporting you. Close your eyes; soften your jaw, tip of your tongue slightly touching your front teeth.

Perhaps a little smile will emerge on your face as you begin to release a bit more into this moment. Maybe not. No judgment either way. This is a time to simply be present with open awareness deliberately. Exhale slowly.

Pause, holding the empty space where seeds of imagination might grow. And now inhale. Consciously aware of the breath, feeling your body from belly, stomach, chest expanding. Exhale slowly again.

Inhale, resuming your natural breathing rhythm. No need to slow it down or control your breath in any way. Just breathe.

Come back to the tree in your memory if you're able and feel yourself. Approaching it. Maybe you're curious or excited or cautious. Take a moment to check in with your emotions, whatever they are, as you get closer to the tree.

In your mind's eye, when you are very near to the tree, reach out your hands examining the texture of the bark.

Again, if you're not a visual person and imagining something that's not actually in front of you is not possible, that's perfectly fine. Instead, observe what arises within you when I mention the imagined experiences. Others may or may not be having. Always anchoring yourself back to your breath.

Now, if you have conjured the tree and your hands are upon it, do you notice smooth areas, rough areas?

Is it cold or warm beneath your fingers? Your palms?

Is it sticky, wet, dry?

Are you aware of fragrance?

Note the variety of colors present on the bark, the shadows, the light, any moss or lichens. That may add their own unique hues and textures to the surface of the tree.

Are you aware of sounds from the tree? Sometimes even in winter. A breeze might elicit a keening song or the tree you're remembering is growing foliage. The leaves may rustle or shush a soothing melody, or then again, you may just be experiencing the sound of your own breath.

Now lean into the tree, the back of your chair, feeling your back against its sturdy strength, spine to spine.

Breathe with it.

As you exhale, you are supporting its growth with your breath. As you inhale, you are nourished by the tree's. Generous gift of oxygen.

Continue breathing together. Aware of sensations, emotions, and thoughts as they arise and pass.

If a particular story or compelling sensation tugs at your attention, be aware of the desire to follow that branch. Then with clear non-judgmental compassion, return to breathing in what the tree breathes out, and offering your breath back to the tree. As you exhale,

Let's sit this way silently for a few more moments, and I'll ring a chime to let you know that our practice is coming to a close.

As our sit together ends, you may wish to put a seal on your meditation practice with a traditional Hebrew blessing in honor of the Jewish New Year's celebration of trees. Baruch amo. Blessed are you a God source of life who has filled our world. Beautiful things. Recognizing that the traditional Hebrew may not resonate for everyone listening to this recording. They offer now an inclusive interspiritual seal for our practice as well. Sacred essence of all Being, who has guided me to this place.

I thank you for creating this beautiful tree, for the precious life sustaining blessings exchanged as we breathe in harmony.