

Meet the Spirit of the Forest

By Shane ShadowEater

This guided meditation is a primer to encounter the spirit of your local wilderness. It can also be used to encounter the spirit of human places. Before you start, pause the recording and find a comfortable place, where you can close your eyes and be undisturbed. If safety is a concern, bring a friend to watch over you. You can even do the primer meditation in shifts. Also bring a bag or bin to collect litter, and gloves or a trash claw. Showing respect for an area by picking up litter goes a long way toward proving you are worth the spirit's time! Plus, it's an activity that heightens your senses and activates your curiosity. You will use that curiosity to interpret signs of contact later. Don't forget a journal you can write and sketch in!

When you are comfortable somewhere, like a park bench or a blanket in a meadow, let's begin.

There are two ways we come to knowledge, the first is believing or disbelieving something is true. The second is through experience. Our science based culture has made us really good at believing and disbelieving. Our goal is to use the imagination as a sensory organ, but in order to do that, we must take a break from fact checking. Then, we'll create a person or animal with the imagination, which can be visual, auditory, or tactile. That imaginary person is the avatar that the spirit of the forest can use to communicate with us. Your imagination can be pictures, words, or feelings, any combination of them will allow you to enjoy this encounter.

Let's start with box breaths. For this meditation, a box breath is simply a long, slow inhalation with an exhalation that takes the same amount of time. Between each inhale and exhale, we'll also pause for a few seconds. Start by inhaling for ten seconds, holding for five seconds, exhaling for ten seconds, then holding again for five seconds. After that, let your inhalation and exhalations last for however long they take for you to get a deep full breath. Just be sure to keep the pauses the same time and the breathing in and out at the same time. Deep, slow box breaths.

Say aloud, "This work is to meet the spirit of this beautiful space and to show our respect for nature by cleaning up litter."

Now we'll awaken our own senses of connection and turn them within. We will dedicate our slowest and largest box breaths to each part listed. During each inhalation imagine pulling in energy to flood the area, and on the exhalation, imagine the energy pushing out any stagnation and dirt to be carried away on the breath. Let's charge and cleanse our:

- Eyes (do a slow box breath)
- Ears (do a slow box breath)
- Nose (do a slow box breath)
- Lips (do a slow box breath)
- Tongue (do a slow box breath)
- Neck (do a slow box breath)
- Lungs (do a slow box breath)

- Stomach (do a slow box breath)
- Skin (do a slow box breath)
- Hands (do a slow box breath)
- Feet (do a slow box breath)

Now on this inhalation imagine pushing all that energy from your physical body into your imaginal body.

With your eyes still closed, imagine you are wearing a lab coat and goggles. This outfit represents our believing and disbelieving way to see the world. Please take them off, and put them aside for later. They have their uses, but not for this activity.

Now, imagine one of your favorite people. Do you see them waving? Could you feel them give you a hug? Can you hear them greeting you? This is and isn't your loved one. Let's call this imaginal version of them an avatar.

We use different parts of our brains to interact with the world. We use the most of our brain power when interacting with other people. In order to make the most of our spirit encounter, we are going to imagine the forest as a person or animal.

What would this place look like as a person or animal? Take a moment to imagine all the details of your forest ally. There is no right or wrong image. No one's image needs to match anyone else's.

Have you got it? If anyone needs more time, just raise one hand, and lower it when you're ready.

Now, imagine that your forest ally is talking with my voice. The woods, hills, shrubs, streams, stones, and animals of this space are my physical body, but I am also a spirit. If I want to interact with you in your imagination, it will be in the form of the forest ally you just created. I can also give you hints of my presence in the physical world. My message can be:

- Strange or friendly actions from birds and animals
- Feeling a wave of emotion wash
- Ringing ears or the sound of drumming
- Sulfery smells like rotten eggs or matches
- Patterns in shadow or leaves

These signs are like my spoken language. Trust your ability to know what I am telling you.

The forest spirit bows to you. Bow your head in return. Then your ally walks away into the forest and disappears from view. To show appreciation for this beautiful place, we'll remove any litter we can safely pick up while staying on trails. It's also important we don't disturb habitats, so don't trample brush and make sure there aren't any bugs in the trash you collect.

Slowly begin to wiggle fingers and toes. Stretch your arms and legs. When you are ready, open your eyes.

Now it's time to enjoy the physical space. Without music, talk, or other distractions, walk the area, pick up litter, and open up your senses and imagination. Please remember to smile and be nice to others. It can be easy to feel angry at litterbugs while picking up, but being nice can convince some people that picking up after themselves and others is important.

Don't forget to journal what you've experienced. If you visualized the spirit, draw a sketch. You

can continue your relationship with this spirit by taking home a stone, where permitted, and painting a surface into a scene or your new spirit ally. Then put it on your altar. Welcome it to participate in your rituals and call for help if needed.

A fun exercise to try, once you are familiar with the Genius Loci is to print a map of the area, then use a pendulum to mark an X for a place the spirit resides most strongly or needs human help with something. Start by holding the pendulum in one corner and say, "show me the X coordinate", then wait until the pendulum begins to rock back and forth. Lay a ruler or straight edge down to note the line, which will lay diagonal across your map. Then move to an adjacent corner and say "show me the Y coordinate" and allow the pendulum to swing. Mark the place where the lines converge. Then, if circumstances allow, go to that place, or as close as you can get.

Then sit peacefully, enter gnosis, and go into the Imaginal world is your Genius Loci there? Look around the physical world, does something need your attention? Does a small stone or branch call to you? It may be your new friend's talisman so they can accompany you home!

Don't forget to leave chopped up fruit or a smear of honey for the local animals.