

Northwest Astrology & Tarot Salon at Breitenbush

My tarot counseling students mentioned that they would love to be able to see our group at Breitenbush in the future. I understood that over the three years that we have studied tarot counseling together, that we have grown close and would like to see each other again.

Later, I began mulling over ways that a re-gathering might work. I started with a small idea of a study group but then the idea grew and I decided to put on a salon and invite a lot of people. A salon is an old idea, a gathering of people of like mind to discuss a topic of interest. I had never been to a salon, and so looked up the definition and then got to work forming the Northwest Astrology & Tarot Salon. I would hold it at Breitenbush Hot Springs a unique intentional community in the Oregon Cascades.

Japanese Forest Healing Studies

Recent literature and scientific studies validate what we know intuitively is true, that being with intention in a forest sanctuary is healing. A recent Japanese study gathered evidence supporting the efficacy of what they term “forest bathing” as a natural therapy by investigating its physiological benefits using biological indicators in outdoor settings.

Heart rate variability analysis indicated that the forest environment significantly increased parasympathetic nervous activity and significantly suppressed sympathetic activity of participants compared with the urban environment. Salivary cortisol level and pulse rate decreased markedly in the forest setting compared with the urban setting. In psychological tests, forest bathing significantly increased scores of positive feelings and significantly decreased scores of negative feelings after stimuli compared with the urban stimuli. The results from this study support the concept that forest bathing has positive effects on physical and mental health, indicating that it can be effective for health promotion (Lee J, Park BJ, Tsunetsugu Y, Ohira T, Kagawa T, Miyazaki Y, 2011).

In an earlier Japanese study the physiological effects of "Shinrin-yoku" (taking in the atmosphere of the forest) were examined by investigating blood pressure, pulse rate, heart rate variability

(HRV), salivary cortisol concentration, and immunoglobulin A concentration in saliva. The findings in the forest area compared to the city area were: 1) blood pressure and pulse rate were significantly lower, 2) the power of the HF component of the HRV tended to be higher and LF/(LF+HF) tended to be lower, 3) salivary cortisol concentration was significantly lower in the forest area. These physiological responses suggest that sympathetic nervous activity was suppressed and parasympathetic nervous activity was enhanced in the forest area, and that "Shinrin-yoku" reduced stress levels. In the subjective evaluation, and 4) "comfortable," "calm," and "refreshed" feelings were significantly higher in the forest area. (Tsunetsugu Y, Park BJ, Ishii H, Hirano H, Kagawa T, Miyazaki Y, 2007).

As these studies describe, immersion in the forest enables us to open our senses to the sounds and sights that our ancestors lived daily. In the middle of all the questioning, one has to also ask: Does one of the answers to that deep feeling of homecoming lay embedded in our DNA? Do we still resonate with our Earth Mother because so many generations of our ancestors lived close to Nature? Perhaps, but one thing is certain: In this setting it becomes easier to notice the little things in nature, things we generally take for granted or are otherwise too busy to see. For example, we may observe the way flowers turn their nature-painted faces in honor of the sun rotating across the southerly sky as it has since the beginning. In this place one has time to gaze in wonder as sunbeams mix it up with a light mist that filters through the tree branches in an explosion of dramatic light rays that playfully mingle with the landscape below.

So what do retreats in the forest have to do with healing in this country? At a material level, the sensual beauty of the forest is integrated with other facets of the forest experience to change our biochemistry. Mentally, our way of thinking slows down to a pace that a deep part of ourselves can enjoy being one with all of Nature. Metaphorically, and at a deep sensual level, we stop and smell the forest as one would a rose.

Individual Factors that Alters our Senses

- Fresh air
- Freedom from technology
- Absence of the ever present noise of contemporary society
- Simple whole foods

- Immersion in natural hot springs
- Olfactory stimulation of forest fragrances
- Escape from artificial light

These are but a few of the material conditions that effects our time spent in the forest. And, on a deeper level, what about the archetypal energies that surround and permeate this angelic elevation of Mother Earth?

We live in a multi-dimensional world waiting to be acknowledged and experienced and the mountains are a good place to make contact with the rich life that lies within, while being supported by the divine energies of the forest. The bounty of benefits gleaned from a *forest immersion experience* is yet one more way that every culture experiences healing. Time with the natural world of visual sensuousness, rhythms, patterns and silence bring us home to a place where cares evaporate for a time and is replaced with a sense of oneness with all of Nature.

As a highly sensitive person, I'm especially aware of my environment and inclined to enjoy introverted activities like being alone with my studies, gardening, raising grandchildren, and communing with the Universe and Nature on a regular basis. These days, I find didactic conferences jarring to my sensitivities and I would really rather be somewhere else. I enjoyed them for their teaching for around 30 years but now, in my 60s, I feel done.

Lately, I have had yearning for a different kind of event. An event where there is no pressure to perform, and is lightly structured to enhance the overall experience. One or two discussion circles a day will stimulate the intellect and the rest of the time the participants can take care of the body by taking a hike, soaking in hot tubs, enjoying the sauna, getting a massage. And because of this salon, the participants at Breitenbush can now also get a tarot or astrology session with some of this generation's finest intuitive teachers....a balm for the soul.

Everyone benefits from this type of gathering. This interactive event isn't just for the masters of esoteric studies. You'll learn from many teachers in an atmosphere of fun. Some teach with higher learning and experience under their belts, some teach by experimentation, and some teach by being the beginner. Bring your mother, your daughter or your boss. Anyone can join in and glean what they might need and may be searching for. Come with an inquisitive mind and by the end of the salon, you will have learned something you can take home and use. An overall healing magic comes with this experience in the deep forests of Breitenbush, and you will remember this feeling for a lifetime.

References

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Bio: Toni Gilbert, the originator of the salon, is a Transpersonal Counselor with a background in holistic nursing, and author of two books on archetypal psychology: “Messages from the Archetypes” by White Cloud Press and “Gaining Archetypal Vision” a Schiffer Books publication. She also teaches a Archetypal Tarot Counseling™ course. You may reach her through her web site at www.tonigilbert.com

The Salon will be held November 10th, through the 13th 2014 at Breitenbush Hot Springs, Detroit Oregon www.breitenbush.com