

Walking in Nature,
Returning to Ground













How do we respond?

Buddhism suggests that when we encounter affliction in life, we tend to respond through avoidance.

In particular we resort to the three poisons: Greed, Hate and Delusion.

We build up identities for ourselves and cling to things which offer a semblance of permanence and security.













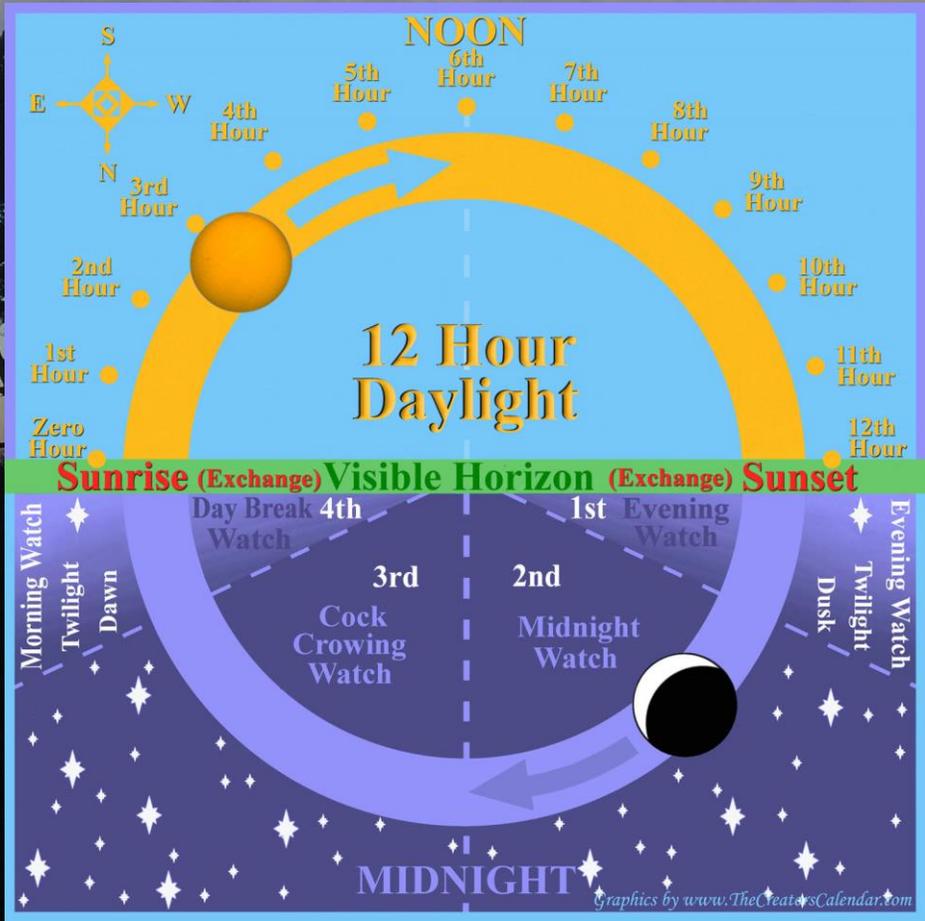


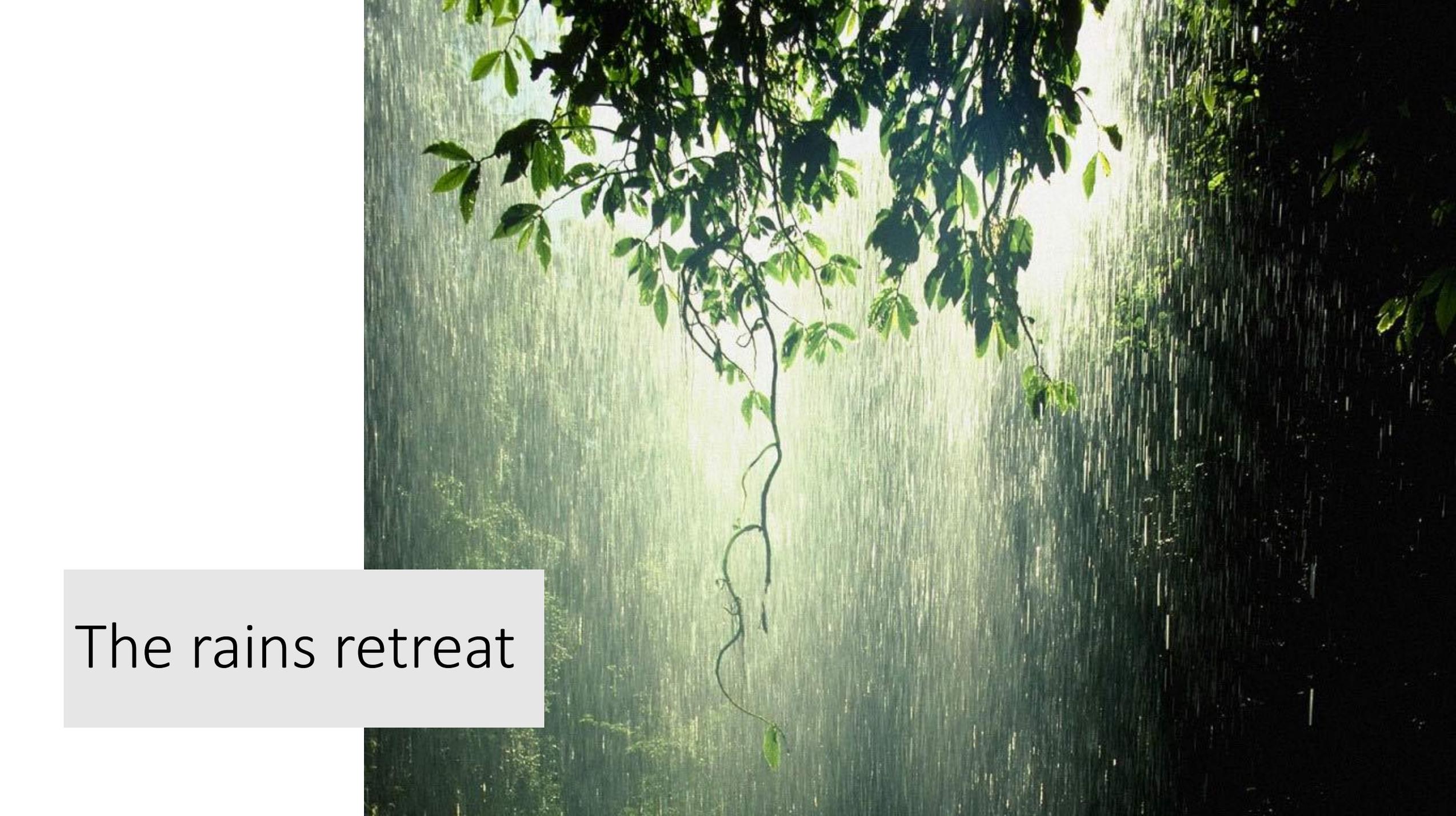


even in a person
most time indifferent
to things around him
they waken feelings -
the first winds of autumn

Saigyō





A photograph of a vine with green leaves hanging over a body of water. The vine is the central focus, extending from the top center towards the bottom. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding greenery. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green landscape. A light gray rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "The rains retreat".

The rains retreat



It is raining when we go to the bamboo grove to meditate. Light rain has been falling on and off all morning and Massimo warns us to be prepared to sit in the rain. Walking into the grove I feel a mix of interest and resistance.

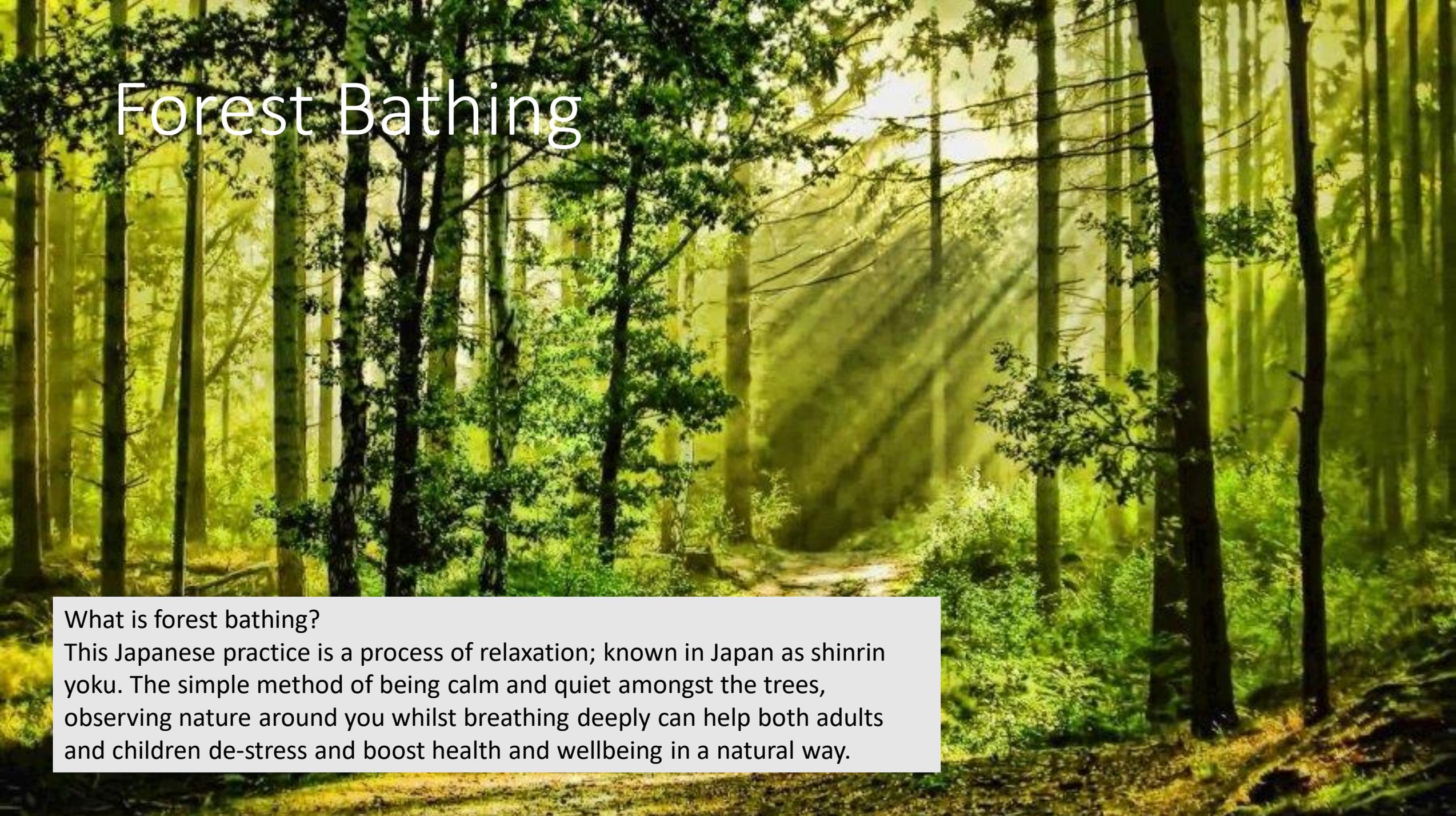
Soon drops of water are landing on my head and arms. I see the cloth of my trousers scattered with a growing number of round patches as the water creates spots on the dry fabric.

The sensation of water dripping on my body is not actually unpleasant when I stop resisting it and relax. Drops continue falling on my knees, my shoulders, and my head. They touch lightly, like fingers tapping me. I sit, letting them arrive, noticing the pattern they make.

The drops on my legs meet up and water drips through the material of my trousers onto the ground. I am getting soaked. I notice my tendency to tense against the wet, but then remember to find my curiosity and relax. I sit, enjoying the musical rhythm on falling drops.

Acorns Among the Grass (Earth Books 2011)

Forest Bathing

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, slender trees. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a dappled light effect on the forest floor. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of green, from vibrant lime to deep forest greens. The scene is peaceful and natural.

What is forest bathing?

This Japanese practice is a process of relaxation; known in Japan as shinrin yoku. The simple method of being calm and quiet amongst the trees, observing nature around you whilst breathing deeply can help both adults and children de-stress and boost health and wellbeing in a natural way.



There is the case where a monk — having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building — sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

satipatthana



Standing on the earth with my bare feet, I reconnect. I feel the solidity of the ground beneath me.

I breathe deeply and as I do so, connect to the life giving air of the planet.

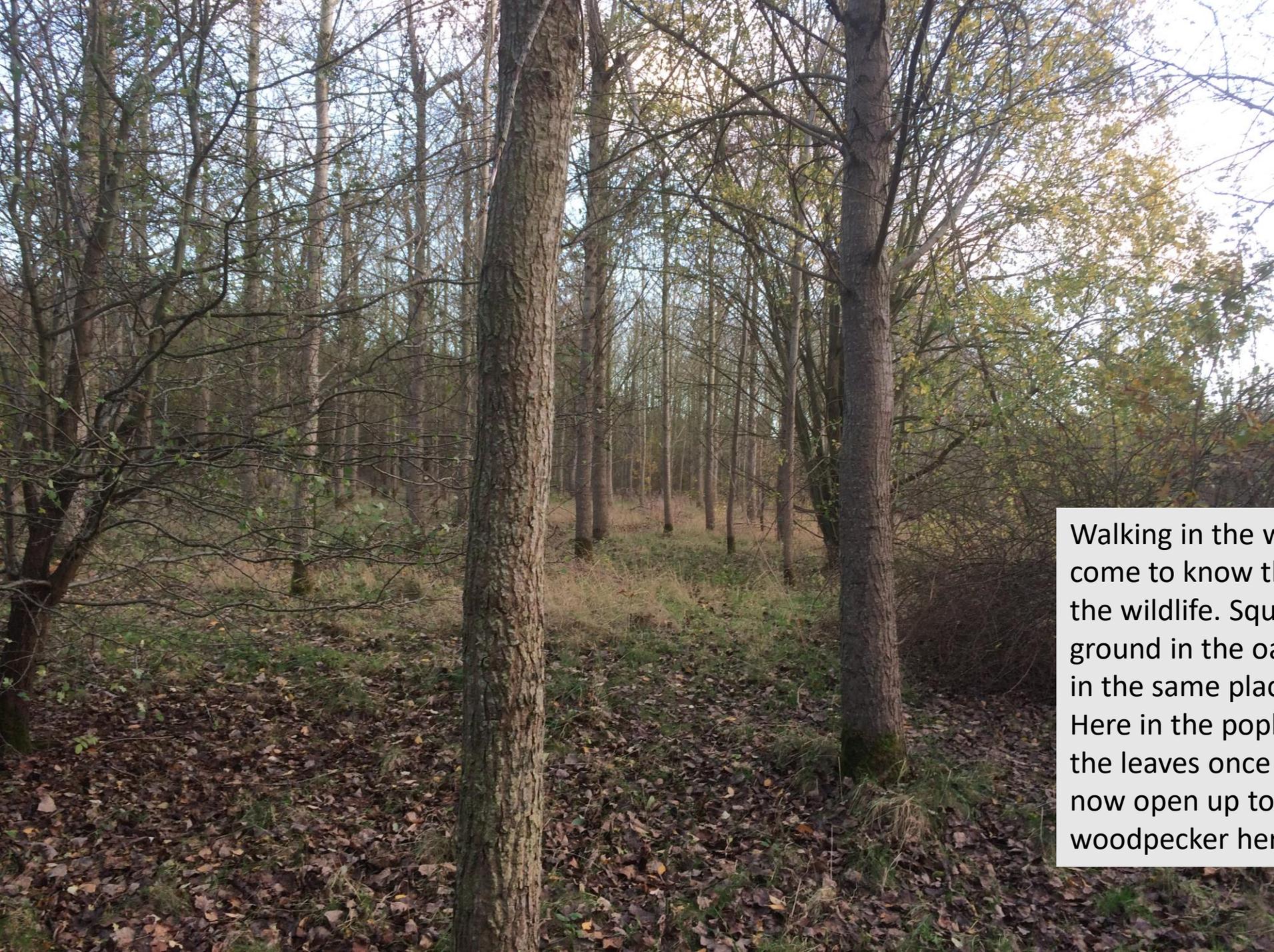
I trust in this moment that all that I need is here. Everything is just as it is.

'Awe Walks' Boost Emotional Well-Being

A regular dose of awe is a simple way to boost healthy 'prosocial' emotions such as compassion and gratitude, according to a new study by researchers at the UC San Francisco Memory and Aging Center (MAC) and the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) – a partnership between UCSF and Trinity College Dublin to improve brain health worldwide...,

“Awe is a positive emotion triggered by awareness of something vastly larger than the self and not immediately understandable — such as nature, art, music, or being caught up in a collective act such as a ceremony, concert or political march. Experiencing awe can contribute to a host of benefits including an expanded sense of time and enhanced feelings of generosity, well-being and humility.” UC Berkeley psychologist Dacher Keltner, PhD

<https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/09/418551/awe-walks-boost-emotional-well-being>



Walking in the woods and the meadows, I come to know the trees and the plants and the wildlife. Squirrels scurry across the ground in the oak woods. A jay is commonly in the same place among the cherry trees. Here in the poplars, it is lighter and where the leaves once danced, the bare branches now open up to sunlight. Once I saw a woodpecker here, but he isn't around now.

To look, to wonder and to be
curious..



Awe Walks: a sense of perspective

The researchers also asked participants to take selfies at the beginning, middle, and end of each walk. Analysis of these photos revealed a parallel, visible shift in how participants portrayed themselves: people in the awe group increasingly made themselves smaller in their photos over the course of the study, preferring to feature the landscapes around them. At the same time, the smiles on participants' faces grew measurably more intense.

“One of the key features of awe is that it promotes what we call ‘small self,’ a healthy sense of proportion between your own self and the bigger picture of the world around you,” Sturm said. “To be honest, we had decided to do this particular analysis of participants’ selfies on a lark — I never really expected we’d be able to document awe’s ability to create an emotionally healthy small self literally on camera!”

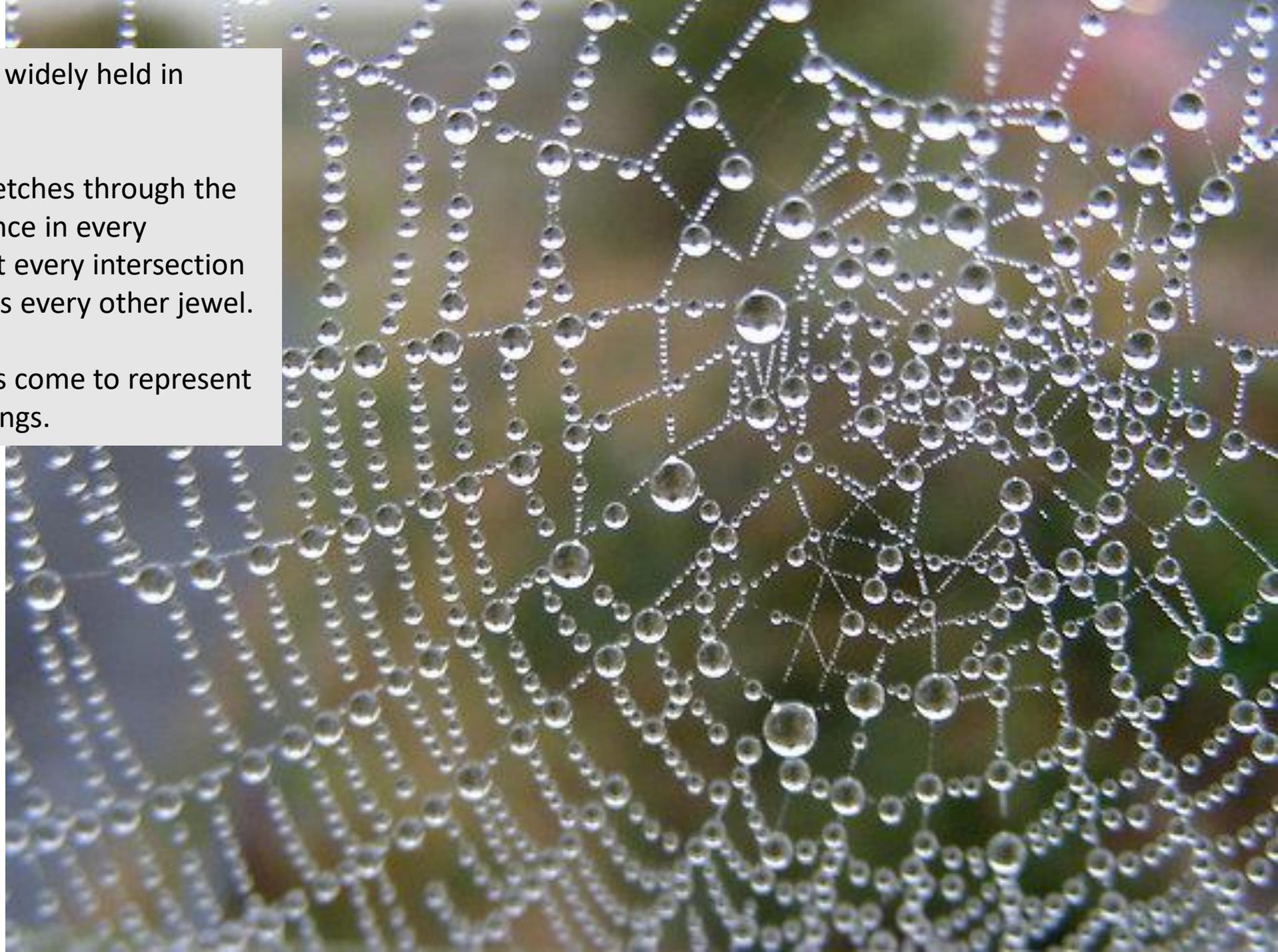
We are part of something bigger



The concept of Indra's Net is widely held in Mahayana Buddhism.

Indra's net is a net which stretches through the universe for an infinite distance in every direction. There are jewels at every intersection of the net. Each jewel reflects every other jewel.

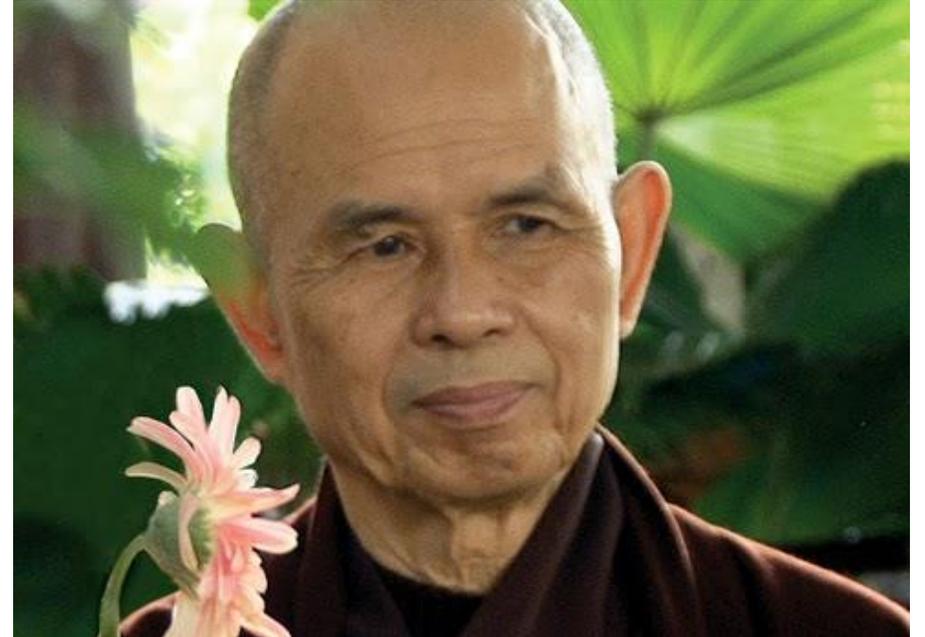
The symbol of Indra's net has come to represent the interconnection of all things.



Interbeing

Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term interbeing to describe our dependence on one another and on all the other aspects of life

"If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow: and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are."



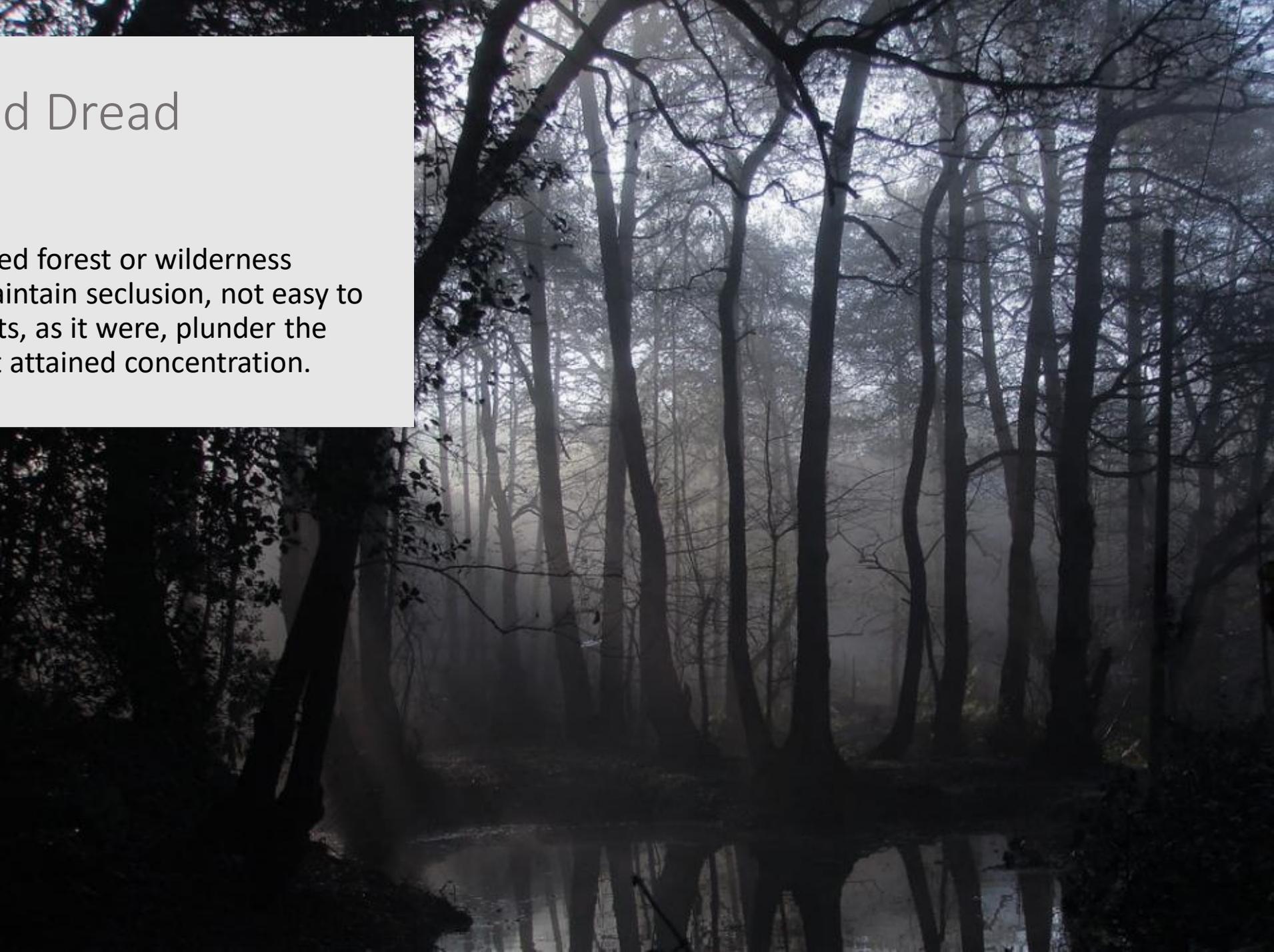


The mud is almost unpassable. We pick our way across the quagmire, trying to follow the steps of others, but sliding about nevertheless.

Sutta on Fear and Dread

Majjhima Nikaya 4

It's not easy to endure isolated forest or wilderness dwellings. It's not easy to maintain seclusion, not easy to enjoy being alone. The forests, as it were, plunder the mind of a monk who has not attained concentration.



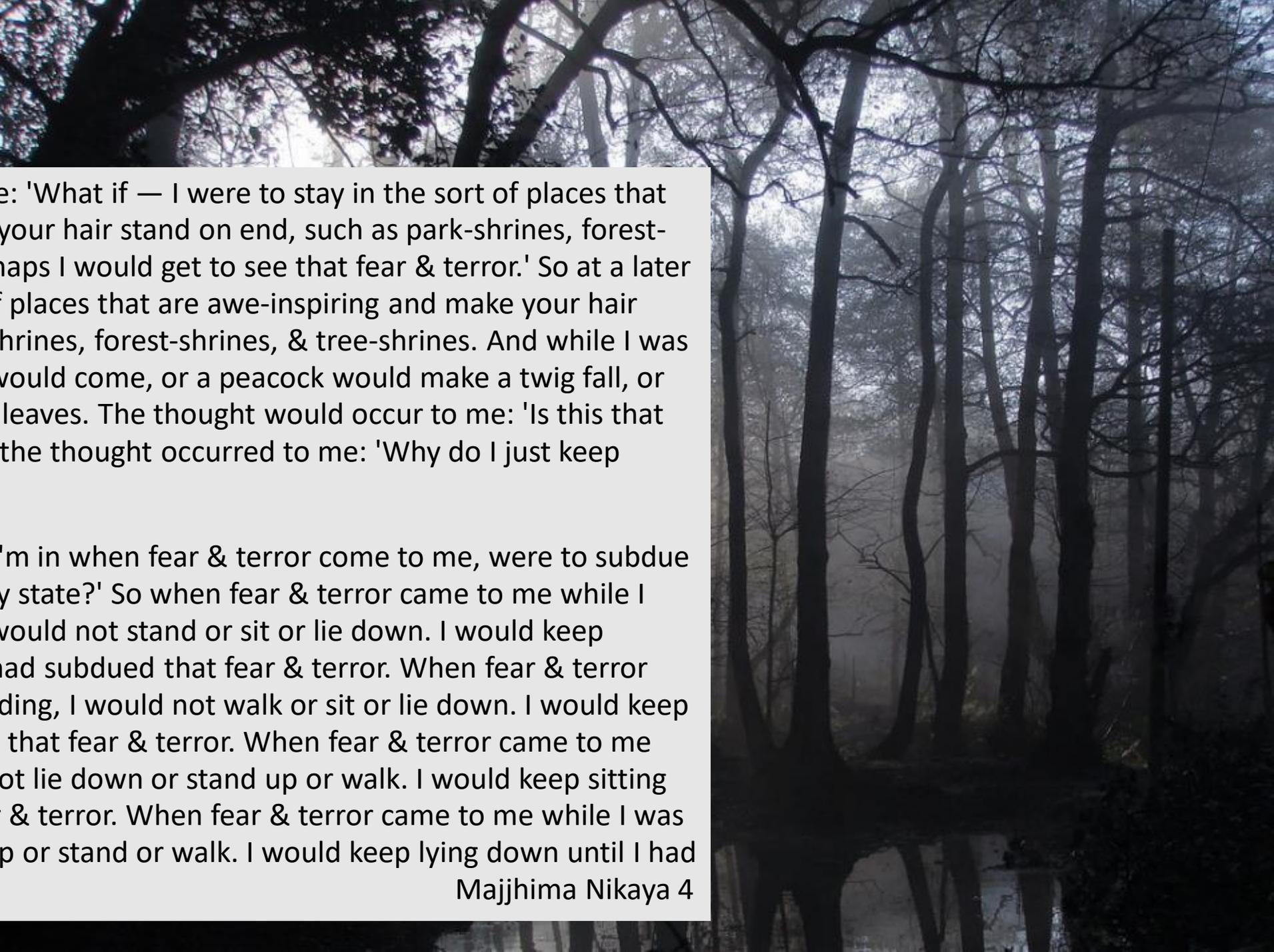


The brambles have overgrown the path in places. They snag my coat as I walk. No one had been this way for a while. As I press on, small birds in the willows to the side of me keep up a lively chorus.



take a good look
even the blossoms
of the old cherry seem sad -
how many more times
will they see the spring?

Saigyō



"The thought occurred to me: 'What if — I were to stay in the sort of places that are awe-inspiring and make your hair stand on end, such as park-shrines, forest-shrines, & tree-shrines? Perhaps I would get to see that fear & terror.' So at a later time ... I stayed in the sort of places that are awe-inspiring and make your hair stand on end, such as park-shrines, forest-shrines, & tree-shrines. And while I was staying there a wild animal would come, or a peacock would make a twig fall, or wind would rustle the fallen leaves. The thought would occur to me: 'Is this that fear & terror coming?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'Why do I just keep waiting for fear?'

What if I, in whatever state I'm in when fear & terror come to me, were to subdue that fear & terror in that very state?' So when fear & terror came to me while I was walking back & forth, I would not stand or sit or lie down. I would keep walking back & forth until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came to me while I was standing, I would not walk or sit or lie down. I would keep standing until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came to me while I was sitting, I would not lie down or stand up or walk. I would keep sitting until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came to me while I was lying down, I would not sit up or stand or walk. I would keep lying down until I had subdued that fear & terror.

Majjhima Nikaya 4



I look at the water blocking my path. Dead leaves have fallen into the old watercourse and are decaying. The water is dark with iron and stagnant, its surface tainted with an oily sheen. Yet the blue sky and the soaring willow trees are reflected in its surface.





The light of compassion that grasps us, illumines and protects us always

The darkness of our ignorance is already broken through

Still the clouds and mists of greed and desire, anger and hatred

Cover as always the sky of true and real shinjin

(Shoshinge)

not stopping to mark the trail
let me push even deeper
into the mountain
perhaps there's a place
where bad news can never reach me

Saigyo

