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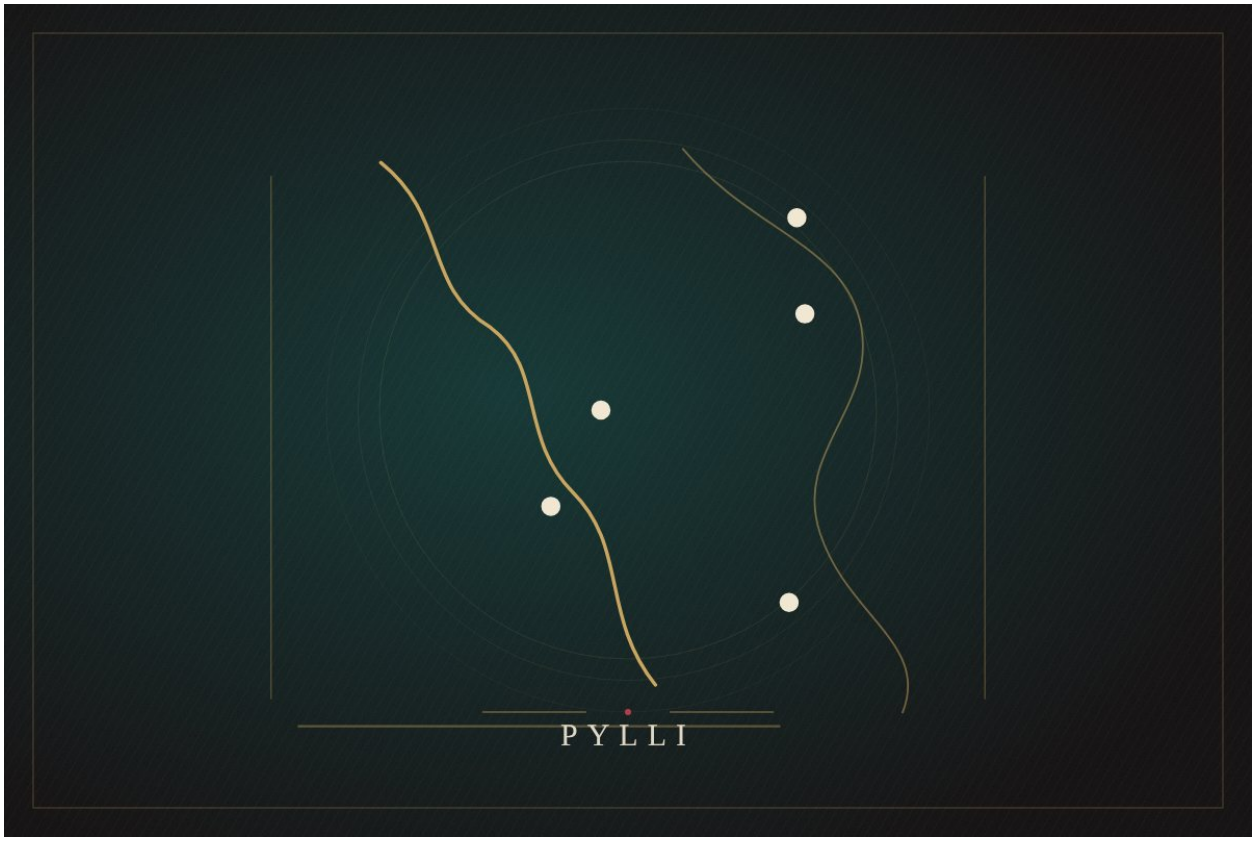
Awareness

"Forest bathing": what we know about shinrin-yoku, the Japanese practice of being in nature

How the term was born in Japan in 1982, studies of cortisol and blood pressure, the limits of the evidence and how to take a slow walk in a forest near you

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Translated from the Albanian original by the editors.



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In 1982 Japan's Forestry Agency used a new term in a national campaign: **shinrin-yoku**, which roughly means "bathing in the forest atmosphere". The idea was not to do sport but simply to be present in the forest: to walk slowly, to listen, to breathe, to notice colours and scents.

What studies have measured

In the following decades Japanese researchers such as **Qing Li** and **Yoshifumi Miyazaki** ran experiments in which participants spent time in a forest or in a city, and then markers of stress were measured. Many of these studies found that after time in the forest, levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, were lower, blood pressure and heart rate were slightly lower, and participants reported less anxiety and fatigue.

Some of Qing Li's studies also reported increased activity of certain immune cells after a few days in the forest, and linked this with aromatic substances released by trees. This idea is interesting, but it rests on very small studies.

How strong is the evidence?

Systematic reviews, such as the one by Michele Antonelli and colleagues in 2019, found that forest bathing is linked with lower cortisol levels. But they pointed out that many studies are small, with mostly young and healthy participants, and often without good controls. It is hard to separate the effect of the forest from the effect of rest, walking or getting away from work.

> *The forest does not ask you to get anywhere. It only asks you to be there.*

Why it might work

Nature offers a gentle kind of attention: the sound of leaves, the movement of light, birds. These draw the mind without tiring it, unlike screens and traffic. In addition, slow walking and calm breathing help the body leave its state of alarm.

A slow walk

1. **Choose a forest, park or hill** near you. Albania and Kosovo have many such places, often a few minutes from town.
2. **Put your phone on silent** or in your bag.
3. **Walk more slowly than usual** for 20–40 minutes. Distance is not the point.
4. **Stop a few times** to listen, to touch the bark of a tree, to smell the air.
5. **Breathe deeply** and notice how you feel before and after.

Sources

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