

Dr. Felicia Darling

Connect to Nature. Breathe more. Live Happier.

Yesterday, I was feverishly typing on my laptop, working on a project with an impending deadline. You all know the drill. My posture was bad. My shoulders were tense. My neck hurt. I was shallow-breathing. After an hour, I stood up and peered in the mirror. My perfect posture had melted, my chest was caved, and my under-eyes looked seared. I felt disconnected from my body and from nature and needed a breathing/movement/nature break. I did some diaphragmatic breaths, hip circles, shoulder rolls, and side stretches. Then I took my dogs on a quick jaunt by the creek path. Nature revived me.

Connecting with nature regularly, reduces stress and anxiety, improves happiness and life satisfaction, lowers blood pressure, reduces obesity, improves eyesight, and helps us live longer. Many studies found that when we experience awe in nature, it lowers stress and makes us happier. This awe can be from gardening, spying a butterfly, hearing the song of our favorite bird, finding special rocks, touching a kindred tree, gazing at the stars, or visiting the desert or ocean. This positive effect of nature is in part due to the fact that it lowers cortisol levels, reduces muscle tension, and lessens demands on our cardiovascular system. The same benefits are found in Qi Gong, Yoga, and meditation.

Connecting with nature is connecting with our bodies and breath in ways that bring us freedom and joy. We are products of nature. We are the fruits of the miracle of birth. We are nature. Connecting with nature is inhaling and exhaling freely and fully. It is the ecstasy of eating a juicy apple or plum from our neighbor's tree. It is drinking clean water from an elegant glass or sitting with our long-time friend to savor homemade blackberry pie. It is connecting to our bodies during meditation or blissful movement. That is why practices like meditation, Yoga, Qi Gong, and dancing are so important. They connect us to nature. They connect us to our natural selves, our best selves.

We have great opportunities here at Pueblo Serena and in Sonoma to connect with nature. We have the path up back by the bocce ball courts, Fryer Creek Trail, Vallejo Mansion Park, and Jack London Park—to name just a few. Also, this winter and spring, at the Clubhouse, we can take Yoga (Felicia) on Mondays, *Hour of Bliss* (Felicia) on Sundays, and Qi Gong (Taras) on Wednesdays. I look forward to connecting with you all in nature.

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