To Tree Yourself

Take yourself into nature and find a tree to spend some time with. I am using *tree* as a verb here. To tree yourself means letting a tree become a real point of contact for your own experience of being grounded while having room to open up. The intention is to experience yourself in your full stature and strength, whole and intact, with room for all of you to be present. You will work with the tree itself and then use creative expression in whatever form feels right to you to give your experience a form you can see and develop.

Walk until you find a tree that draws your attention. Stop beside it and give yourself time to take in its particular shape. Look at where the trunk meets the ground and follow its direction upwards. Let your eyes continue along the branches into the space around them. Move closer if you want to see a particular detail, then step back far enough to take in the tree as a whole.

As you look, stay aware of your own position. Feel the ground beneath your feet and notice how you stand while your gaze moves upwards. Allow your posture to adjust naturally. Give your attention enough time to include both the place where you are standing and the space your eyes can reach above you.

Stay with the tree until you have a clear impression of what you have been looking at. You do not need to decide what the tree means. Let its actual form be the starting point for your own work.

Now take out your chosen creative materials and a sheet of paper. Begin creating from your encounter with the tree. Your creation does not need to reproduce the tree accurately. Let the part of the tree that held your attention determine where you begin, and allow your hand to follow its form as you remember it.

As you work, give attention to the space around the tree as well as to the tree itself. The open areas between the branches and the sky beyond them belong to what you have seen. They influence how the tree occupies the page. Let them become part of your creation.

Continue until the image has developed enough for you to look at it as a whole. Put down your materials and take a little distance from the page. Follow the movement of your own gaze across the image. Notice where it settles and where it can travel further. Stay with the actual arrangement of forms and spaces before trying to explain what it means to you.

Return to the experience of standing beside the tree. Remember how your feet met the ground while your gaze followed the trunk upwards. Look at your creation again and notice how your body responds to the image you have made. Let this response be part of your encounter with the creation.

Now make a change to the image that gives the upward movement more room. Work with the forms on paper and the space around them until you can see a difference in the way the image opens. Allow your hand to find the change. You do not have to plan its appearance in advance or make it conform to an idea of what a tree should look like. Let the tree's form occupy its full space in your creation, with the strength of its upward movement visible to you.

When you pause, look at the image before and after the change as part of the same creation. Notice what has become possible in the space you created. Let the expanded form show the tree occupying its full stature, with the space around it available to it. Notice what happens in you as you see it this way. The change needs to be visible to you, even if you cannot yet put its significance into words.

Bring your attention to yourself while looking at the altered image. Let yourself experience what it is like to inhabit your full stature and strength, feeling whole and intact. Allow this to be a direct experience of the fullest expression of yourself that is available to you now. Stay with what you actually experience; there is no particular feeling you have to produce.

Stay with this experience and find words for what it is like to be fully yourself in your own strength and wholeness. Let the wording emerge from what you have actually experienced. Shape it into a short saying you can remember and return to when you want to reconnect with this sense of yourself. Say it aloud while looking at your creation. Notice whether the words bring you back into the experience; adjust them until they fit what you feel as your own.

Stand up and allow the experience to register throughout your whole body. Notice how you meet the ground and how your body occupies the space around you. Let a movement arise that expresses your experience of being fully yourself, whole and in your strength. Carry out that movement while saying your saying aloud. Repeat it until you can recognise it as your own way of returning to this experience. Adjust the movement if it does not feel like yours. Give yourself enough time to experience this before you finish.

Keep your creation as a record of your own encounter with the tree. When you return to it, you can see the form you first created and the change you introduced. Your creation can bring back the words you found and the movement you chose to anchor the experience in your body. Use them when you want to reconnect with the experience of being grounded in your own full stature and strength.