

Grounding and Centering For Activists

By Starhawk

from <http://www.starhawk.org/activism/groundcenter.html>

(10-15 minutes)

In an action, in any potentially tense or dangerous situation, we need to be able to stay calm, to feel our fear without letting it overrun us or turn into panic. Grounding is a technique that can help us stay both alert and relaxed when all hell is breaking loose around us.

Grounding begins with the breath. Try this: clench your stomach, tighten your muscles, breath up high in your chest. How do you begin to feel? (People often say, "anxious," "Tense," "Panicky.")

Now relax your stomach, let your breath drop down into your belly, into your toes as your belly expands. Do you start to feel different? For some of you, this might be hard to do. At first it might seem unnatural. Put your hand on your belly, breathe so that your belly pushes your hand out. Practice this, sometimes you need time before you can do it easily and naturally.

Now close your eyes for a moment. Imagine that breath pushing down through your feet, through the base of your spine, as if you were a tree pushing down roots. Let those roots go down through the floor, through the soil below us. Imagine they can feel something of the quality of that earth, what it likes to grow, how healthy it is. Push down through the waters under the earth, down through the bedrock, down into the fire below us. If there's still any tension or fear, let that go into the fire and just burn away into pure energy.

Now imagine you can draw some of that fire up. Feel it as the earth's living, creative energy, and bring it up through the rock and the water and the soil. Bring it up into your legs and feet and the base of your spine. Bring it up your spine and let your spine grow like a flexible tree trunk, reaching up to the sky. Bring some fire into your heart, into any place inside you that needs healing or extra energy.

Bring that energy up through your arms and out your hands, and up through your neck and throat and out the top of your head like branches that reach up to the sky and then spread around you and reach back down to touch the earth. They create a protective filter around you. Take a moment, look at that energy web, notice if there's any places that need to be repaired or strengthened. And notice how the energy in this room feels when we all do this.

Now feel the energy of the sun, shining down on your leaves and branches. Breathe deep, draw that energy in. Breathe it down through your leaves and branches, down through your heart and your belly and your hands. Take it in, feed on it like a tree feeds on sunlight.

Now open your eyes. Look around you, notice how other people look to you when you're grounded. Notice what's changed.

When you're grounded, when your energy is linked to the earth energy, you can still move. Imagine your feet have sticky roots, that can sink into the earth and then release when you move. Walk around a little, really feeling your contact with the earth, feeling those roots grip and release.

Now as you move, stretch your arms out to your sides, as far as they'll go, until you can't see your hands if you look straight ahead. Now wiggle your thumbs, and slowly bring your arms in until your thumbs are just visible on the edge of your peripheral vision. Notice how wide your field of vision can be. As you walk, breathing deep, grounded, activate that peripheral vision. Know that you can be aware of what's going on around you.

And now notice whether you are making eye contact with the people you pass. Keep breathing, stay grounded, keep your awareness wide, but now also make eye contact with each person you pass. How does it feel to be this present in a situation?

Now come back to stillness. As you breathe, feel where it is in your body this grounded place seems to live, and touch that place. Can you find an image for this grounded state? A word or phrase you can say? When you use these three together, touch, image, and phrase, you create an anchor to help you ground quickly in any situation. Try it -- use it.

Now relax. How did that go for you all? What did you notice?

Remember, the more you practice grounding, the more automatic it becomes. If you take even a few minutes a day to practice, you'll not only have better energy in your daily life, you'll be able to ground quickly and instantly when you're in a tense situation.

Grounding Practice Two

(5-10 minutes)

After teaching grounding, divide the group into two. They stand on opposite sides of the room. The first group is told that they will be a loud, screaming, charging group of riot cops, marching across the room. The second group is told to use their grounding anchors and walk through the line of cops. Give a clear start signal. After the first pass through, you can debrief and then reverse roles, or do both turns and then debrief the whole group.

After you've taught this to the group, it's good to give them a chance to practice it in hassle lines or a role play.