

WITNESSING

Practicing Presence



1

Think about the things in your life that change with time. Cut flowers in a vase. A garden plant growing in the Spring. A houseplant that is aging and dropping leaves. Find one of those things that noticeably alter with time.

Set aside time, each day, to "witness" your selected subject. Try to do this every day for at least a week. Longer if you wish.

To document your witnessing, either
(1) take a photo of the item each day, or,
(2) sketch or paint the item each day.

2

3

At the end of the practice (e.g. one week), compare the daily images you captured. Capturing the changes was in itself an act of witnessing. Take it another step further now, and write about each image in the series. Try to document the changes you observe. Practice simply witnessing, focusing on what you observe without judgment or personal insights. What details change over time? Consider size, color, shape, position, etc. Note if the changes are subtle or dramatic. Do you see more change on certain days?

After you have finished documenting the changes you witnessed, take some time to write about what the experience was like for you. How did it feel to simply be present and observe the changes? Note if you were watching something grow and bloom, or age and begin decaying. What thoughts did you have as you documented the changes? Write about anything that came up for you during the process.

4

5

Ask yourself:

- What was it like witnessing change in something that couldn't receive or respond to any input you might offer?
- In what ways might the practice of witnessing, help you in a hard situation, simply be present for someone else?
- How might this activity help you accept, or even honor, the passage of time?

Take it further...invite a partner to work with you.

- Invite someone else complete this exercise with you.
- Ask them to complete steps 1 through 5 above. They can either observe the same thing you did, or choose their own unique item to document.
- After you have both completed the process, connect and share the steps with each other.
- How did your experience differ from that of partner's? Did you think about the act of witnessing any differently when seeing the activity through your partner's eyes?

"I feel like it's almost an unbiased (medium), the tintype isn't saying, 'Oh this is an ugly thing and this is a beautiful thing.' It's just saying, 'This is all. This is everything. It is what it is.'"

- CARLA RODRIGUEZ

Imagine that you were going through something difficult, and just wanted somebody to be present with you. Would you consider it a gift to have someone with you, but not judging or advising you?

What in this activity might give you a new perspective on being present in a difficult conversation with someone?

Are there times you have had to accept, "This is everything. It is what it is." How did that feel?

