

NAME

Practice of Drawing.mp3

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START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:00]**

The following is a message from Wellspring's congregation.

[00:00:06]

So in the days after the terrorist attack on 9/11, one of the teachers in the school I was TTN offered an after school retreat for anyone interested in coming to her classroom doing art as a way to respond to what had occurred. I had been teaching there for about three years then, and I ate lunch with her every day.

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And I always enjoyed art classes. I took several in high school and a couple in college and even considered at one point to have do something in that field as my career. And so I went to the space for retreat and I don't recall what art we practiced. I don't recall how many people showed up for a couple of weeks. But I do recall the space of her classroom and the big art tables, the easels killed in the back room, a student work adorning the walls hanging from the ceiling. The art was a way for us to get out of our heads and find some solace in each other's company. So the other interesting aspect of this was that she is a Quaker and so both during lunch and during this time, we were able to engage in discussion about what had happened. And at the time, I was still in the Army Reserve and I had no idea if I would get mobilized or what would occur with my unit.

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But more importantly, being in that space enabled conversations and a bridging of different viewpoints over what our nation's response could or should be. So when I learned of the theme for this message series, I was reminded how drawing and art seemed to be something that I had set aside and was something that maybe I could and should come home to. And that rekindling that practice could be a new spiritual practice for me.

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And as I thought more about it, the memory of being in her classroom during that time came up for me as well, how that space felt and what it could mean for me now and how such an activity could help me find some stillness.

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So what makes a spiritual practice? If you've been around Wellspring's for any length of time, you likely have had conversation with somebody about spiritual, your spiritual practice, how you do it, what is it, what it looks like, what's your commitment to it? What does that look like for you doing something on your own spiritual practice? So.

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And for me is the same. So after attending sporadically here, what turned me into a regular attender and then a member was taking the springboard of running as a spiritual practice that Ted Howe offered about five years ago now. And I was hooked.

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It combined running something I already loved with spirituality, which is which was something that I was seeking. And five years later, here I am. So there's a lot of tools that you can use in a spiritual practice, yoga, mindfulness, cooking, running more a lot of different items. The ideas behind such a practice are simple, yet powerful. What is it that you do with intentionality? What is it that you do with regularity? What is it that you do with any depth? What's this tool that enables you to slow down, to pay attention, to focus or to empty? And I think this is important to consider, too, the act is the tool and it shapes you. What tool you use over your life will vary and allow it to change over time, because each one can teach you something about yourself, can teach you something about others, and it can teach you about your your own spirituality. So let me read to you a passage from one of the books suggested for this message series, Everyday Spiritual Practice. And in a chapter about balance, the Unitarian Universalist Minister, Susan Manker SEAL writes, The deep meaning of spirituality is breath. Breath is the taking in of life, giving essence from the world around us and the release in turn of life giving essence. It is a metaphor for our

interdependencies, the fact that we change and are changed by our environment and a continuous play of creation. Spiritual practices are aimed at helping us understand that connectedness, to sense our oneness to the end, that our yearning is appeased in actuality.

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So creating art can make that space to enable you to find your breath, to find your center, to find your balance. But what distinguishes the making of art as a spiritual practice compared to the making of art as a hobby or a pastime? I think the key aspect here is intentionality. You can create art with regularity and with some degree of depth as your skill improves, but what's your intention when you sit down with the sketchpad or the easel? Setting that intentionality before your session, it makes this a very powerful practice, you may engage in different practices over your life, but when you approach drawing with the intention of being awake to the everyday divine to seek your breath and center, then it becomes a spiritual practice. And it's intentionality enables the spiritual to enter the daily, more mundane world. Spirituality is not just the province of those cloistered apart from the world, finding your regular practice, approaching it with intentionality and depth that enables you to experience this needed aspect of your life. I believe that makes us whole. Maybe you grew up in a tradition in which spirituality was once a week, that was that the rest of the week, that was something we do on Sundays or whatever day of the Sabbath was for you or spirituality was only done by those who left the world for some sort of monastic experience.

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But ours is a tradition in which the divine is with us daily in all of our experiences and moments if we are awake to it. And I have to say that while a part of me used to like the idea of maybe being that sort of hermit monk away from the world, the past 10 months of pandemic lockdown have kind of changed my thinking on the matter. One of the things I learned in preparing this message is the origins of the word worship, which has some bearing here.

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It appears that the words derived from the old English words we are, which means worth or value and , not saying either those words correctly, which means to shape. So engaging in worship then is to shape something of value. And this seems to fit when we are making art because we are shaping the page. When we draw, we are shaping the clay in our hands at the pottery wheel or shaping the colors when we paint or weave. And if we have the intentionality, we are shaping our spiritual life. We are becoming a whole. So compared to other practices, making art as a spiritual practice allows for a deep touch deep tactile response. Our fingers are incredibly sensitive. And when you're blending pastels or throwing clay or painting, it activates something beyond just your mind and it gives you immediate feedback in a way that other practices may not do. And as you go deeper and further into the practice, the more you're able to notice how you respond to it. So if you practice meditation, you may have done body scan type exercises in which you draw your attention to individual parts of your body when drawing, especially when you're using pastels or charcoal or similar things. This is very readily done. I notice how it feels in my hands, how the amount of pressure I exert changes, what the page looks like using my fingers as a tool to blend the colors or shade the objects I'm trying to draw. It helps me become more fully present in that moment, and that seems to be ultimately what a spiritual practice enables you to do being present. So what I want to do next is to help us all become more present through art. So the neat thing about the message this month, the thing about the message is that last month members of Wellspring's got these very lovely care packages. And if you missed the making of behind the scenes video, you really do need to check that out on the YouTube channel and don't go don't go see it now. Look at it later, but you do need to check it out. It's a hoot.

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So in the care package was this very lovely blank notebook.

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Right, blank, no lines, and I really love Notebooks. Unlined, lined, graph paper, what have you. I got to say, if it's lines, it's got to be college ruled. That's just the way it is. Sorry, but this one is really nice because it is unlined. OK, doesn't matter which direction. Sideways, top the bottom. You can write a note, you can draw something, crayons, markers, what have you. You can make an airplane do some origami. The possibilities are really endless. So I'm going to use this and a pen and maybe you have a favorite pen or pencil like me, but maybe you don't. But you just need something a little. Right. And I want to share with you a simple practice. This is closer to a mindfulness exercise that involves drawing rather than a drawing practice first, if that makes sense. So take a moment. Have your piece of paper and pencil or pen. I'm going to turn my notebook sideways like this. And what we're going to do is follow our breath with the pen.

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Here's the pad.

[00:11:46]

Landscape style on its side, and this is simple, we're just going to find a comfortable, upright posture, your. Feet firmly on the ground, if you're sitting, this is about connecting with your breath through drawing, you want to start about halfway down the page and you're just going to really just inhale and move up, move the pen off the page.

[00:12:14]

When you exhale. Go down. Inhale up. And exhale down. We're following our breath. We inhale up. Exhale down.

[00:12:36]

This is simple. We're helping regulate our nervous system. And exhales Do you go down? This is an image of what we are experiencing with our breath. This could be a different way of meditation for you or mindfulness.

[00:12:58]

We inhale up. And we exhale down.

[00:13:05]

I feel the pen against the paper. I feel that our hands.

[00:13:15]

He's breathing in. Reading out.

[00:13:25]

Well, again. And breathing out.

[00:13:33]

If your mind goes somewhere else, that's OK. Let's go back to where the pen is. Focus on your breath.

[00:13:43]

This is something you can do, you like me, and you tend to just look at screens all day and talk to people and text and type words, you know, this returns us to something a little bit more.

[00:13:57]

Analog. And we exhale. This is vinyl. Not digital.

[00:14:12]

And we exhale down. It's going to help us.

[00:14:19]

Regain. And Hala. And we exhaled out. Maybe this is something you can do each morning when you get up. Or maybe each night before you go to bed or maybe during the day. We exhale, we go down.

[00:14:42]

Recenter ourselves is important.

[00:14:48]

We exhale down.

[00:14:52]

Serve as double duty, you can do this as a self care exercise, part of a routine. Reminds us that we are all here and present.

[00:15:07]

Spending our moment. And we exhale down.

[00:15:17]

We can pause and so a little bit of drawing meditation exercise for us today. So how does this connect to us as well? Springers.

[00:15:30]

I would suggest that making art relates to our Wellspring's DNA. We talk about how the divine is available to us in the holiness of our everyday experiences, bringing your attention to what's there with you each day. Helps, and the older I get, the more I realize that the quotidian world, this everyday world is really can be a source of great spirituality if you are awake to it. It's like the well-known Thich Nhat Hanh, when you are doing the dishes, do the dishes be there

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Now be present to what is in front of you, don't think about what you want it to look like or what it was in the past, but be awake to the possibility of what is present in front of you and within you.

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And that's where art and drawing can come in, because if you take an art class of any sort, you're likely, you know, drawing class, you're likely going to be asked to draw some really mundane object that you see every day. Maybe you don't pay any attention to it first. So recently, I took an online class with the Philly Art Center, and I spent about three or four weeks, you know, in that class drawing the same small array of three little Christmas candles arrayed on a table. And imagine how much I learned about those candles during that time, each uniquely shaped and shadowed the glass of the one candle container, trying to capture its highlights and the shadows within it, getting lost a bit in all of that, getting lost in figuring out how to make the shadows of this pine cone candle look the way I wanted it to look and then consider how that carries over. When you are not making art, you can begin to recognize

the beauty that is always there in front of you if you're awake to the possibility. So for our last exercise, what I'd like to do is for you to have a notebook or paper, pencil or pen, something to draw with and pick an object that you would like to focus on. And we're going to take a few minutes to sketch out what we see.

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Ok, so for this last drawing, we have our day to day object so Candle can kind of see like so we have some shadows here where the lights are. The highlights, a different color top. And what I'm going to put over here, you're not going to be able to see it, but I can for us to draw. And I have my pad sitting out all ready to go, boom, however you want to put it into it. Portrait style, landscape style.

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I'm going to do it landscape just because so and I'm going to use pen so you can see it. I want you to approach this with the confidence of a small child, a four year old who's just been given a brand new set of markers and crayons and a big old piece of paper. And they're ready to go to town because they have beginner's mind there. They know they're artists and so are you. The end the end product really matters much less than the process here. So sometimes it's easier to start with, kind of like what's called a gestural drawing where you just kind of like just sort of just kind of get the proportions right. You know, you just kind of, you know, draw some circles here. We have the sides of the of the glass container. We have a simple little bottom and then we can. Then work a little bit more on that and while you draw. You're going to see some time lapse videos of some of the things that I did during the course of my drawing class recently, I guess. And I'm kind of putting myself out there because my profession is definitely not artist by profession is something other than that. And I know some of you are real artists with a Capital A.

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And so I'm being a little bit vulnerable here. So there we go. Wow, you're doing this. You want it. You want to kind of look at the object more than the your pencil and paper that and you want to imagine, like, OK, that is flowing within. From the drawing to my pencil and paper, so that I have a sense of what it is and. That way, you just kind of let your mind do it and you'd be present, you know, to think about how the pen feels in your hand, how the pencil feels in your hand is a chalk. Is it pastels that a crayon is a marker. So skinny, is it fat? Is it thick? Think about the sound that the pen is making on your paper. Think about. Your feet on the ground, you're being present, maybe you're imagining Bob Ross, he's talking about little happy accidents because that's the attitude we need. Maybe you want to draw Bernie's mittens. It doesn't matter what it looks like. If you get stuck, you don't like how it looks. That's OK. Tear out the page. Start anew. That's the president's part. That's the part. Just like in meditation. Get off track, that's OK. Come back to it.

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And revisit it again, so thank for thank you for sticking with this and with me during this message.

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Maybe a little silly, maybe a little serious I wish for you today, is that you see the beauty of the everyday things and you find your own stillness.

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You live in blessing. Amen. Will you pray with me?

[00:21:48]

God of our understanding, divine creative spark that drew the world and all the creatures within it into being, we describe our prayers of gratitude upon the universe. We color our worship with joy and love. We sculpt our hands and hearts into those that heal. We weave our souls and spirits into the interconnected whole. And we say, thank you for letting us see the beauty of everyday things to be present, to be awake to those experience for the prayers I've spoken and the prayers unspoken. But on the hearts of all those here, I say Amen.

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END OF TRANSCRIPT

