

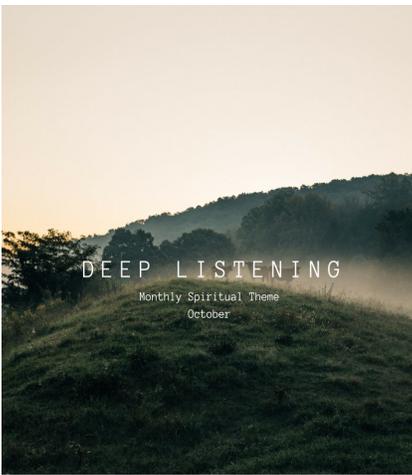


The Path

The Spiritual Theme Newsletter of the First UU Society of Burlington

Deep Listening | October | 2016

What Does it Mean to be a People of Deep Listening?



Introduction

“When someone deeply listens to you, it’s like . . .”

How would you fill in that blank? John Fox’s poem, which is featured in the “Words” section of this month’s *The Path*, offers several ripe metaphors to describe what it feels like for him to receive deep listening. I would love to hear yours! Of course, we could also engage in a reverse version of that exercise, too. Maybe it’s easier for you remember a time you *weren’t* listened to. Can you remember how you felt? Angry? Discouraged? Discounted?

I, too, know both the balm of deep listening and the pain of not being heard. But I also know that, despite years of professional experience in listening, I—like all of us—can fall short as a listener. Any number of things get in the way of my capacity to listen, but in my life, a chief culprit is being in a rush. When I am hurrying from one thing to the next, I sometimes miss important words and messages from loved ones. And when I am in “busy mode,” it becomes especially challenging to “listen within,” to hear and pay attention to the voice of internal wisdom and guidance.

This month at the UU, we invite you to consider what it means to live a life of “deep listening.” Through our recent October services and “Building a Listening Congregation” workshop, we have already explored listening as a prerequisite for congregational health, a tool for conflict transformation, and as a way of engaging with the world. In the coming weeks, we’ll delve into the importance of silence and cultivating our ability to listen to the “inner voice”, then wrap up our month by attending to the voices of our ancestors through a multigenerational Day of the Dead celebration.

The practice of deep listening is a powerful way to live out our UU principles. When we listen deeply to another person, we affirm their dignity and worth. When we listen deeply for the voice of the sacred—both within and beyond—we affirm our deep interconnection with the web of life.

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And as a participant in our recent listening workshop observed, listening is also a crucial practice for the times in which we live.

As the tenor of this election season tacks against meaningful connection and “holy listening,” it becomes an ever more crucial—and counter cultural stance—to pause, to find a stillness, to give. Like any practice, it’s something we must work at, and something we must keep returning to, when we fall away and fall short.

I look forward to sharing this journey with you!

Love,
Rev. Mara

Self-Care for the Spiritual Journey

When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, as theme-based ministry and our related Themes are designed to encourage, there’s always a chance we will encounter some tender spots and/or find ourselves revisiting challenging times in our life histories. Therefore, it is important, when doing deep spiritual work, to have trusted companions and adequate support on the journey, and to know you are welcome to care for yourself and your spirit along the way, engaging in the theme to the level that’s comfortable for you. These companions can take many forms: trusted friends and loved ones, teachers and mentors, therapists and coaches.

Likewise, please know that we on the First UU team are here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. Please reach out to find out more about the pastoral and spiritual care available in our First UU community or to seek referrals to other related resources. Rev. Mara is our first point of contact for pastoral care. She may be able to set up a time to meet you, or refer you to Andre Mol, our ministerial intern; caring lay leaders through our Care Network, or outside resources. She can be reached at revmara@uusociety.org or 802-862-5630 x. 24.

A Refresher on *The Path* and Theme-Based Ministry

After a summer hiatus, *The Path* returns this month, guiding us deeper into our 2016-17 program year. *The Path* introduces each month’s spiritual theme, which we then explore in greater depth through our Sunday worship services and other programming. We join dozens of other UU congregations who are also doing “theme-based ministry,” and who share resources and wisdom through the Soul Matters Collective, a network founded by our Rochester, New York UU congregation. Due to other demands of starting up the new year, we’re a bit late getting out our October edition, but look for upcoming issues of this, our monthly spiritual theme newsletter, to come out on the first of each month.

The Path is based on a template created by the Soul Matters folks, but is then added to and edited by Rev. Mara and our Theme Team, which this year includes First UU members Melinda Lee and Kenneth Russell. It is also a collaborative process! We welcome your submissions of readings, stories, videos, books and movies for any of our upcoming themes. For theme submissions to be included in the relevant edition of *The Path*, the team will need to receive them a month prior to publication. For example, we need to receive your submissions on the December theme of “**Expectation(s)**” by **November 1**. Do feel free to send materials in for upcoming themes at any point up until the one-month-prior deadline!

Our favorite part of *The Path* is that it provides us with exercises, questions, and materials to engage with throughout the month, so we can truly take what we do on Sunday mornings out into the world with us, as we live our daily lives. For those of you who have signed up for a Theme Circle, you will have a chance to share with your small group your experience engaging the theme and your reflections on it. (If you’d like to learn more about Theme Circles and/or sign up for the spring season, which will begin in February 2017, please contact themecircles@uusociety.org.)

Spiritual Exercise: 5 Minutes of Listening

We invite you to try one of the 3 “5 Minutes of Listening” exercises below. If you are in a Fall Theme Circle, you will have an opportunity to share with your group your experience of the exercise: how it felt, what you learned, etc. Here are the options (and if you’re feeling ambitious, you are welcome to try more than one!):

A. Listening To the Everyday

Choose an everyday (think “mundane”) experience: commuting; cooking; walking in the park, sitting in the doctor’s waiting room, standing in the meetinghouse foyer after a service. Pick one and then sit and do nothing but listen for 5 minutes. Just listen. After the 5 minutes ends, take some time just to breathe and let it sink in. After you have digested write down what you “heard” - not every detail of what your heard, but what stuck out for you, what “spoke” to you. What sounds among the many sounds had “something to say” or “grabbed you”?



B. Listening To Another Person

Really listen to an important person in your life. For 5 minutes, let their words be what matters most. (If you attended last Sunday’s Building a Listening Congregation Workshop, you’ve had some recent practice with this.) Try to avoid interrupting or steering the conversation to you. Instead, ask questions that invite the person to continue sharing. Consider reflecting back what you hear so they know you’ve heard them. If there’s a silence, let them fill it when it happens rather than you rushing in. And then, as with the above exercise, after letting the experience sink in, jot down what you “heard” and what happened. What “spoke” to you most?

C. Listening To Voices Usually Tuned Out

Take 5 minutes to open your ears to that which you usually—intentionally or unintentionally—close your ears. Think broadly. It could be a person you encounter in the course of your life, or something on the radio or television. It could be the sounds of the natural world at your favorite park. Think carefully about what this will be. The process of choosing will be just as rich as the process of actually listening. Indeed, be sure to listen to yourself as you try to sort out your choice. Again, take some time to digest your experience, then write down some reflections about it.

Questions for Exploration

Through the course of the month, we invite you to consider and reflect on the questions below. If you are in a Fall Theme Circle, you might come to your group prepared to speak about one or two of them.

1. What helps you engage in deep listening?
2. What gets in the way of deep listening for you?
3. What did you learn about listening growing up?
4. Is there anything that is really challenging for you to listen to? Why?
5. How would you describe the role of listening in your spiritual life? Has being part of a UU community affected your listening (or not)?
6. Can you think of a time someone else listened deeply to you? What was it like?

With Children and Young Families in Mind

*In this year’s editions of *The Path*, we plan to include resources that adults might share and enjoy with children. (We also think adults might appreciate these all on their own!)

Henry David Thoreau and the Still, Small Voice (story)

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/sing/session5/220433.shtml>

One Square Inch (story and related videos):

One Square Inch

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/sing/session7/229956.shtml>

Soundtracker: A Portrait of Gordon Hempton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROWl0eh9BLo&feature=related>

One Square Inch of Silence, from the documentary "Soundtracker"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0xHfFC_6n0&feature=related

The Overflowing Cup: A Zen tale about listening

A learned university professor of East Asian Studies visited a Zen master at a temple in Japan. The master received the professor in his private room, and a young student brought in tea. As soon as the professor had seated himself, he began talking to the master without pause about his understanding of Zen philosophy. He was eager to say as much as he could in the short time he had with the Zen master.

The Zen master said nothing as he poured tea for his guest. The professor did not notice the master’s silence as he kept on talking and talking - in fact, he felt, and believed he sounded, wonderfully inspired.

Suddenly though, the professor realized that the Zen master was still pouring tea, even though the small bowl he was pouring the tea into had long since overflowed and the tea was flowing out onto the floor in a steady stream. “Stop! What are you doing? Don’t you see the bowl is overflowing?” said the professor. “Ah.” said the master, “As are you. Just as the bowl cannot hold any more tea when it is overflowing, how can I teach you anything when you are already so full?”



Words

“When Someone Deeply Listens To You”

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.



Resources

When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.

When it overflows and touches your
skin, you are loved.

When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

- John Fox

"I suspect that the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. And especially if it's given from the heart. When people are talking, there's no need to do anything but receive them. Just take them in. Listen to what they're saying. Care about it. Most times caring about it is even more important than understanding it. Most of us don't value ourselves or our love enough to know this. It has taken me a long time to believe in the power of simply saying, "I'm so sorry," when someone is in pain. And meaning it.

One of my patients told me that when she tried to tell her story people often interrupted her to tell her that they once had something just like that happen to them. Subtly her pain became a story about themselves. Eventually she stopped talking to most people. It was just too lonely. We connect through listening. When we interrupt what someone is saying to let them know that we understand, we move the focus of attention to ourselves. When we listen, they know we care. Many people with cancer talk about the relief of having someone just listen.

I have even learned to respond to someone crying by just listening. In the old days I used to reach for the tissues, until I realized that passing a person a tissue may be just another way to shut them down, to take them out of their experience of sadness and grief. Now I just listen. When they have cried all they need to cry, they find me there with them."

- Rachel Naomi Remen,
Kitchen Table Wisdom

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard."

- Parker J. Palmer

We are really alive when we listen to each other, to the silences of each other as well as to the words and what lies behind the words.

- Frederick Buechner

We can translate 'deep listening' as compassionate listening, that is, to listen with compassion, or to listen with love. We hear with one aim only; we don't listen in order to criticize, to blame, to correct the person who is speaking or to condemn the person. We only listen with one aim, and that is to relieve the suffering of the one we are listening to.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

I said to my soul, be still and wait . . . So the darkness shall be light, and the stillness the dancing.

- T.S. Elliot

I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again . . . Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well.

- Margaret Wheatley



Listening is being willing to be changed by the other person.

- Judith Lasater

Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk.

- Doug Larson

I have often regretted my speech, never my silence.

- Anonymous

Silence is not a thing we make; It is something into which we enter. It is always there. All we can make is noise.

- Mother Maribel of Wantage

The earth has music for those who listen.

- Shakespeare

Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.

- Hermann Hesse, *Wandering*

A few days ago I walked along the edge of the lake and was treated to the crunch and rustle of leaves with each step I made. The acoustics of this season are different and all sounds, no matter how hushed, are as crisp as autumn air.

- Eric Sloane

The hum of bees is the voice of the garden.

- Elizabeth Lawrence

Videos and Websites

Listen to nature: 400 recordings of wildlife:

<http://www.bl.uk/listentonature/main.html>

Bernie Krause TED Talk: The voice of the natural world

http://www.ted.com/talks/bernie_krause_the_voice_of_the_natural_world?language=en

TED Talks to help you be a better listener:

http://www.ted.com/playlists/92/listen_up

Several episodes of Krista Tippett's NPR program *On Being* touch on listening. Here are links to some of them:

Rachel Naomi Remen:

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/listening-generously/124>

David Isay:

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/david-isay-listening-as-an-act-of-love/6268>

Mary Oliver:

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/mary-oliver-listening-to-the-world/7267>

Frances Kissling:

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/frances-kissling-on-listening-beyond-life-and-choice/123>

"It's Not About the Nail" – a video spoof on the challenges of listening-not-fixing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHrOg>



Resources

Books and Movies

Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*

Douglas Stone, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*

“The Horse Whisperer” - Listening to the wounded places inside

“Ratatouille” - Listening to that which we are called to be

“Whale Rider” - Listening to that which we are called to be

“Stranger Than Fiction” - Listening, even when we don't want to hear what is being said to us

“Mr. Holland’s Opus” - Listening and not listening

“Quiz Show” - About not listening to your moral compass

Credits

This edition of The Path draws on archival material from the Soul Matters Collective, of which First UU is a member.

Creative Space

Use this section to write, doodle, and create!

AHA! Moments

Notes

