

Listening - a Meditation

By Jim Pescud

To truly listen to another person, or to truly listen to anything at all, requires our full attention, our full involvement.

Usually our mind is full of thoughts about our life, what we did yesterday, what we will do tomorrow, maybe a conversation we had a year ago. Judgements, likes and dislikes are often prominent. When we are engaged in a conversation all of the above are probably going on, plus we may be strategising, working out how to manage a particular outcome in the conversation.

Under such conditions, we are not really being present for the person we are talking with, we are not truly listening to what their wants and needs might be. We certainly aren't listening beyond the words, to that person's very being. We are being present basically for ourselves.

Have you ever deeply listened to another person talk, listened not just to their words, but to their tone of voice, to their body language, to their energy, to what their very being is trying to say? We are capable of picking up all this information, and using it to be fully with the other. However, we are usually so caught up in our own mind stuff, our own agenda, that we close off to all but the bare minimum of what the other person is communicating to us.

To truly listen is to be open, to be fully receptive, to turn towards the other with a soft willingness. Am I describing listening or am I describing compassion? They are starting to sound very similar. That's not a coincidence. To truly listen we need to move out of our head and into our heart. We can listen with our heart. Try it, actually imagine receiving sound through your heart. You need to allow yourself to be a little vulnerable, drop your guard, be inquisitive. This can feel a bit scary, but it's also exciting. This is not a thinking process, so drop thoughts about what this is like. Experience without thoughts, allow your heart to lead. You are reaching out, beyond the ego self, beyond the ever repeating self referential noises of the mind. You are allowing 'the other', as we perceive the outside world to be, to come in. What we find is that the so called 'outside world' is really an extension of our inside world. It isn't a threat because it isn't other. It is you - if you relax and let it be.

There is a meditation, which over time, will open your being to this way of listening. You can practice by listening through your heart, or you can listen in any way that feels right. Eventually, with practice, you start to let go into the meditation and the heart takes the lead. The thinking mind calms down, space opens out and the heart, at last, has the opportunity to be a part of the dialogue, not only between yourself and others, but within yourself as well. You can feel this in your body - a calmness, a depth, even a purring or vibrational tone in your torso - and there is a greater connection with your emotional life. When you connect with your emotions in a fully conscious way, you can tap into your emotional intelligence. This is the place of true wisdom, heartfelt wisdom.

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Sit for a few minutes, let go of the domination of thinking, close your eyes and just listen to sounds. If names and images of these sounds come to mind, let them go, simply hear sounds as sounds, not

as the sound of a truck, or an aircraft, or a dog barking – just allow sounds to be sounds, no more, no less.

Hear sounds arise out of space, stay a while, then dissolve back into space. Whatever sounds come into your consciousness, just be aware of them. Don't go chasing after any particular sounds, or try to cast any sounds out of your awareness. Have no preferences at all. Be a hollow receptacle – sounds come, then they go. Relax into this flow of the appearance and disappearance of sound.

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Having practiced this meditation for a few weeks, see if you can use some of the skills learnt through the meditation when in conversation. Yes, you will need to do some thinking in the conversation, but with less of the usual mind chatter, you may be able to listen to the whole person you are with. When your receptivity and openness has grown, you may start to get a sense of the person behind their words. This is a heart connection. It is the way of compassion, it is the way of true listening.

Jim Pescud and Jenny Cornish will be running a Breathworks Mindfulness for Health, 8 week course, at the Yoga To Go Studio at Petersham commencing Sunday 18th October and finishing 6th December. See Breathworks Australia web site for details www.breathworks-mindfulness.com.au

This mindfulness based course is designed to assist those living with stress, chronic pain or illness. However, the course can also be undertaken simply to learn how to be more mindful. The quality of life for course participants, no matter the reason for attending, can be greatly improved through the practice of truly being aware.