

# **INQUIRY**

## **A Way to Strengthen Connections in Relationship**

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Here is a model that encourages and promotes mutual support and cooperation between people, the deepening of relationships, the melting of conflict, greater understanding and intimate connection. The central mechanism of this method is a process of coherent listening, connection between the listener or listeners and the person sharing or speaking. In the simplest of terms this is a method for listening from and through the heart. This is a model that is especially useful for couples whether they are in conflict or are interested in deepening their relationship. Inquiry employs and promotes the principles of mutual support, cooperation, self and co-regulation, integrative tempo, understanding, empathy and compassion.

At the onset, I want to name that the primary effect of this method can be to bring two people into harmonic resonance with each other. Rather than one person dominating the process, the inquiry method allows the two people to discover common coherent and contingent rhythms or tempos that enhance their connection. They have the opportunity to fully engage in a “relational social nervous system” that includes both people in the dialogue. In many ways, the energy between the people becomes more important than the content. It’s the quality of the energy that fosters the cooperation more than the ideas in the content.

Another observable effect of the Inquiry method is that, as people deepen into cooperation with each other, they learn that the causes of their conflicts most often lay in the history of their ancestors, family systems and early pre-verbal life experiences. This can be very freeing because we have the potential to learn that the origin of the conflicts that we have with our loved ones may be the conflicting energy that was already in our family system before we met. We may be playing out the energy that we carry imprinted in our systems rather than being with each other in the depth of authentic connection.

On a greater societal level, we live in a time and place where competition, winning and financial gain are primary values in our culture. On the surface, these three values may be fine. Working for profit and financial gain with social awareness with the value of mutual support and cooperation supports the healthy distribution of wealth, resources and power throughout our populations.

However, the consequences of playing out these values without social awareness or mutual support and cooperation are that personal relationships can be easily fractured, children easily misunderstood, hearts broken, friendships ruptured, business partners in

legal conflicts and individuals or groups vying for power at the expense of others. In this atmosphere, the will for profit and power override the sanctity of the individual spirit. A corporate will for profit can override the most basic of human needs for compassion and connection. In this age, we are witnessing not only the disruption of our democratic republics but also the breakdown of our primary social and economic institutions as well as the rapid destruction of our planet's environment.

When our social nervous system is not engaged, we can lose empathy and compassion. Many of the methods used to socialize and educate children actually isolates them in ways that precludes the primary conception and birth rights referred to in the Preamble of the United States Declaration of Independence.

More than ever, there is a need to rebuild our social fiber from the ground up, from individual to individual, from parent to child, from teacher to student and from child to child. Here we are presenting simple models for communication that can, one person at a time, rebuild the connected fiber of our relationships and eventually restore the cooperative nature in individuals, relationships, social organizations, our families, communities, economies and governments.

The quality of inquiry presented here is commensurate with Marshall Rosenberg's "Non Violent Communication." However, the Non Violent Communication model focuses on how we communicate with each other from speaker to listener. The inquiry model is listener-focused and centers on how we listen. With the Inquiry Method, the attention is on how the listener listens and communicates that listening.

These are essential skills for all professional caregivers including psychological or somatic therapists, medical practitioners and teachers. Inquiry can be used for deepening connection between family members, couples, parents and children, siblings, friends and workers in business and government organizations.

This method requires that the listener and speaker be able to drop their respective egos enough so that both are able to make enough room for each other's thoughts and feelings. If one or both parties are not able to drop their egos, they will not be able to do the inquiry in the ways described in this writing. If one or both parties insist that they remain the focus of the inquiry, cooperative communication and exchange will not happen. Mutual support and cooperation especially, in the face of disagreement, is required for the Inquiry Method to support an optimal connection between the parties.

On an individual level, a purpose of the inquiry is to support the speaker to deepen into himself and for the listener to convey to him the full complement of being heard.<sup>1</sup> When the listener extends her attention in this way, the consequence is greater intimacy and understanding between the parties. The purpose of an inquiry is to strengthen the

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<sup>1</sup>To avoid the use of the word 'them', the speaker will be referred to as 'he' or 'him' and the listener as 'she' or 'her.'

connection between the parties, through mutual support and cooperation, effective listening, understanding and empathy. Ultimately, an inquiry has the potential to lead to listening from the heart with unconditional acceptance<sup>2</sup>.

## History

In the early and mid 1970s, for a period of four or five years, I studied with a true Adlerian psychotherapist, Henry Stein in San Francisco, CA. Henry is the director of the Alfred Adler Institute of NW WA. Henry is a champion of Adler's primary principle and measure for psychological health: to have the ability to be cooperative with others, be in connection with others and to sustain one's own autonomy at the same time. Think about it. To be cooperative with others without sacrificing or compromise one's self for the sake of cooperation or for the sake of the group. This kind of cooperation works for both individuals and the whole group. It is win / win!

It has been decades since I've seen Henry and worked with him. In the 1970s, Henry was a master of what he referred to as the Socratic Method of Inquiry. As his client and student, I experienced Henry forming and delivering questions with such amazing perception and timing that I was supported to access the depth of myself, not just intellectually, but in a way that allowed me to feel deeply into the source of my core emotions and beliefs<sup>3,4,5</sup>.

When Sandra and I were in the process of separating in 2006, our friends Cindy and Ian Rawlinson introduced us to the work of Russell Sutter in Sebastopol, CA. Russell taught us a simple and profound approach to communicating, that he refers to as the "Inquiry Form," At that time, Russell had us share and listen in defined roles: one as speaker, the other as listener. He had the listener repeat what the speaker said, using the speaker's own key words and phrases with no additions or subtractions and without any attempt to evaluate or interpret. The listener takes responsibility for how much tracking she can hold at one time, then signals to the speaker for a pause. After repeating as closely as possible, the listener checks with the speaker for accuracy and corrects when necessary. Each time, the listener repeats only as much as she can accurately repeat word for word, phrase by phrase.

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<sup>2</sup> In October of 2015 Anna Chitty began a Body Into Being training module by having the group do a modified exercise that included listening from the heart with unconditional acceptance. She was introduced to the exercise by Franklyn Sills during the summer of 2015 in Boulder, Colorado.

<sup>3</sup> Stein, Henry T., Ph.D., Director & Senior Training Analyst, Alfred Adler Institute of Northwestern Washington, 2565 Mayflower Lane, Bellingham, WA 98226 or via email at htstein@att.net.

<sup>4</sup> Stein, Henry T., Classical Adlerian Depth Psychotherapy, Volume I, Theory & Practice: A Socratic Approach to Democratic Living.

<sup>5</sup> Stein, Henry T., Classical Adlerian Depth Psychotherapy, Volume II, Creative Case Analysis: Uncovering the Fictional Final Goal & the Counter Fiction that Hides In It.

This process inspires levels of mutual support and cooperation between the couple. The speaker supports the listener to fully receive what he is saying by making room for the listener to repeat what she is hearing. In this way, the listener demonstrates her recognition of what the speaker is saying in the spirit of “getting” the other and not adding one’s own agenda<sup>6</sup>.

At first this way of speaking and listening can feel awkward and contrived yet, amazingly, with a few minutes of practice, a difficult conversation can open into a sense of empathy, recognition, feeling heard, a felt sense of settling and spreading in the energy between the speaker and listener as well as a deepening sense of connection between the couple.

Russell shares about the essence of the Inquiry Form that he uses in his work:

The inquiry form I learned from Ba and Josette Luvmour, certainly has its roots in the Socratic method and Plato’s inquires into the nature of life. In my work with couples, I’ve been developing a particular emphasis on what I call the, “muscle of empathy”. This is where the listener runs the inquiry and works with ‘her’<sup>7</sup> inner material, reactions and projections, while still keeping the focus on the speaker. This is my work. Keeping the listening space open above all else is the operating value, then paying close attention to how that breaks down. The practiced ability to hold your own reactivity and story, and continuing to attend to the other, is the basis of healthy relationship. The couples I work with that welcome this challenge are often the ones who are able to penetrate to the deepest aspects of themselves and others<sup>8</sup>.

In our collaborative work together, Mary Jackson<sup>9</sup>, Tara Blasco<sup>10</sup>, and I have found the Inquiry Method that Russell employed to be simple and extremely valuable for work with couples, parents in all phases of preparing for partnering and raising children, to Womb Surround Process Workshops and in our teaching. This model has become a central feature to promote clear communication between parents in our family research clinic, Building and Enhancing Bonding and Attachment (BEBA), in About Connections and in the Castellino Prenatal and Birth Training.

Sharing a preliminary outline copy of this article with Anna Chitty in 2014, I learned that she follows similar structures and methods for an advanced training course for Somatic

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<sup>6</sup> Russell Sutter, Private communication 11/13/15. Russell can be reached at 8630 Medved Lane, Sebastopol CA 95472 USA or via email at [rjsutter@sonic.net](mailto:rjsutter@sonic.net).

<sup>7</sup> I changed Russell’s word ‘their’ to ‘her’ in keeping with the construct this paper where I am having the listener referred to in the feminine and the speaker as masculine.

<sup>8</sup> Russell Sutter, Private phone conversation in the summer of 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Jackson, RN, LM, RCST, see [www.birthconnection.com](http://www.birthconnection.com).

<sup>10</sup> Tara Blasco, PhD, RCST, see [www.tarablasco.com](http://www.tarablasco.com), [www.beba.org](http://www.beba.org)

Oriented Therapists that she calls “Verbal Skills<sup>11</sup>.” These methods are also a central feature for the Body Into Being training that Anna and I teach.

As we practiced the inquiry process in our work, the method has developed in ways that we feel are complimentary to the forms that I originally learned from Henry Stein and Russell Sutter.

### **Primary Purposes, Means and Goals for Inquiry**

The **purposes** of an inquiry are to support the speaker to deepen into his own being, to discover into the depth of himself and the truth of his being; and, to support the parties of the inquiry to deepen into their connection and increase mutual support and cooperation between them.

The primary **means** for inquiry as we practice it, is listening with an intention to really hear what the speaker is sharing with empathy, the absence of judgment and a sense of open possibility. This is done by repeating key words and phrases, and / or repeating word for word, what the speaker is saying in a tempo or rhythm that allows for an opening sense of settling and spreading in the energy of the conversation. Repeating the words is not a verbatim act. As Russell Sutter states, “in the spirit of ‘getting the other’ without adding your own agenda that the listener repeats the speaker’s words<sup>12</sup>.”

The **goals** of inquiry are to promote heartfelt connection between the listener or listeners and the speaker, clarity in communication and a sense of coherence within the self, individuals and the relationship.

### **Listening Forms Introduction**

The listening forms are a progression of listening methods that strengthen the listener’s reception and recognition skills. They provide the speaker with the opportunity to feel seen and heard. (These forms became clear to me through collaboration with Anna Chitty and in conversation with Charlotte Janus).

Each form can be applied individually by itself or they may be combined as the situation and moment call for. If you are new to this way of listening, we initially suggest that you practice each of the first three forms individually. As you practice, you will eventually be able to combine the forms and apply them in ways that spontaneously fit the needs of many situations.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Chitty, Colorado School of Energy Studies, 4900 Nautilus Ct N #210 Boulder, CO 80310. [www.energyschool.com](http://www.energyschool.com).

<sup>12</sup> Russell Sutter, Written communication, 11/13/2015.

<sup>13</sup> The listening forms presented here became clear after separate conversations with Anna Chitty and Charlotte Janus.

The listening forms are:

- Simple listening with presence.
- Listening with the reflection of single words or phrases.
- Listening and repeating word for word every phrase that is spoken.
- Combining the three forms above and asking key questions that support deepening.

Discussion of these four listening forms will follow later in this article after the Basic Inquiry Structure is presented.

### **Three Roles**

The Inquiry Method is designed for two people who are engaged in a challenging conversation or who simply want to deepen in their connection. You do not need to be in conflict to use this method. However, if a challenge in communication arises, shifting to the Inquiry Form can be of significant help.

There are often three people involved:

1. A listener
2. A speaker. This is the person who receives the inquiry
3. A skilled facilitator

Following are the basics for each of these rolls.

#### **The listener**

In its most basic form, the Inquiry Method is primarily a listening centered practice, whereby the listener demonstrates that she is sincerely receiving what the speaker has to say.

The listener listens with the intention to support the speaker to deepen into himself. The listener takes charge of how much information she can take in and fully comprehend. Initially, the listener accomplishes this by repeating back to the speaker what the speaker says word for word, phrase by phrase. The listener only takes in as much information as she can accurately repeat back. It could be a word at a time, more usually it's a phrase or two, or a complete sentence. Some people may be able to do more. Most listeners actually attempt to remember more than they are able. The listener focuses on hearing and repeating back key words, phrases or exactly what she is hearing whether or not she agrees with what the speaker is saying. In fact we make lots of room for divergent views and perceptions. This process is not about agreement. There is full permission for disagreement and different perspectives. Inquiry is about listening, deepening and connecting.

The key thing for the listener is to let every phrase and sentence land. And to communicate to the person sharing, letting him know that he is being heard. This process naturally slows the rate of information exchange down so that both the listener and the

speaker are able to integrate what the speaker is sharing. This method supports the speaker to actually hear himself in new and revealing ways.

Apart from repeating what the speaker is saying in key words and phrases or word for word, the listener can often have an impulse to make a comment or share his or her perspective about what the speaker is saying. In this method, the listener refrains from doing so until later. When the listener begins to share her perspective too soon, the speaker can be pulled off his intention or the flow of what he is attempting to say.

A listener may have the capacity to perceive nuances in the feeling tone and energy of the speaker's expression.

As you build listening skills in this method, you will begin to perceive nuances in the feeling tone of the of the speaker's expressions; from his voice, language, posture and movements.

### **The speaker**

Even though the Inquiry Method is a listening centered practice, the inquiry is focused on the person who is speaking. The speaker is supported to deepen into himself, and at the same time, the intention for the inquiry is to support the speaker and the listener to connect with each other.

In order for the speaker to know that he is being heard and understood, he needs to perceive that the listener is hearing him. The responsibility for hearing is not just on the listener. The speaker needs to use his eyes and ears to actually see and hear the listener receive what he is saying. The listener may be doing a fantastic job of hearing the speaker, yet, if the speaker does not perceive the listener hearing him, he will not know that he is being heard.

A slow enough tempo provides the space for the speaker to see and hear the listener receive him. If the speaker is in a hurry to get all the content out, his focus will be on the content and not the connection with the listener. The speaker has to support the listener to actually hear what he is saying. One of the best ways the speaker can support the listener to perceive that he is being heard is to slow the tempo of his delivery. This changes the focus from the content of the conversation to the energy of being in connection. Slowing the tempo actually enhances both the reception of the content and the connection between the parties.

Integration is necessary for connection. The energetic exchange and connection is as important as the sharing of content and understanding what the speaker is saying. Stories that involve historical traumatic imprints often tend to speed up the tempo. It is not just that the speaker is speeding the tempo up to avoid underlying feelings. The energy of a traumatic history in and of itself can increase the tempo of the narration. The tempo speeds up easily, negating the ability of both the listener and the speaker to integrate and deepen into what the speaker is saying. Space between the words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs and a slow enough tempo are essential for the integration and connection

between the parties in the conversation. It seems that the integration of what is being said and the deepening of the connection happen in the spaces between the words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs.

If the speaker continues speaking and keeps adding more and more information, he runs the risk of talking over the listener or flooding the listener's ability to actually take in what he is saying. Under these conditions, very few of us will be able to hear and integrate what the speaker is saying. This is why the listener needs to be able to have choice about how much information she takes in at any given time.

Often the speaker has an intention to communicate a challenging message to the listener. How the speaker delivers his message can be significant to the future of the relationship. The parties may have feelings of animosity toward each other, may be in need of repair in their relationship, or may need to find respectful ways to complete the relationship and move on.

However strong the message may feel, it is the speaker's responsibility to deliver his message in a kind way. If feelings of animosity are so strong that the speaker's ability to deliver his message is impaired by anger, rage, withdrawal or freeze, it means that the speaker needs additional support to sort through these emotions and work independently from the other party until he can do so. This can take the form of a good private counseling session or a discussion with a friend, other than the person toward who he feels animosity.

An Inquiry is not the place to offload anger and rage. It is the place to find the words that express how he feels in ways that effectively communicate to the listener.

A study of Marshall B. Rosenberg's, *Nonviolent Communication* is strongly recommended. His book is full of eloquent and healing ways to communicate even the most challenging messages.

Anna Chitty suggests taking an approach where some preparatory statements are made before delivering the core message. Statements like, "I want to reassure you that I value our relationship. I want to strengthen our relationship. And, I want to share with you how I was effected by what you said<sup>14</sup>."

Ideally the speaker would ask the listener if she is willing to hear what he has to share. This incorporates the "principle of choice" into the inquiry. By giving the listener the choice to say yes or no to his request, the speaker is increasing the opportunity for connection between them and the likelihood that his message will be heard.

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<sup>14</sup> Anna Chitty, From a talk she and I gave during the Body Into Being Training, Module 3, Ojai, CA, June 2015.



## **Changing Roles Between the Listener and Speaker**

At some point in an Inquiry conversation one of two things generally happen.

1. The speaker completes sharing and the focus of the inquiry will switch to the listener. This gives the listener an opportunity to become the speaker and to respond to what she has heard.
2. Or the listener gets to a point where her system backs up with responses that make it challenging for her to keep listening. This will require the pair to switch roles before the speaker may have completed his communication.

Space can be made for the listener and the speaker to change roles. It is important that when they make that change, they actually agree to do it and they name the new roles. The new listener can say sometime like, "I'm listening now." Likewise, the new speaker can say something like, "I'm sharing now."

Changing roles requires an adjustment in what each party is doing. Space must be given for each party to establish themselves in the new role.

If the speaker is incomplete, the two need to change roles back to the first combination of speaker and listener in order to complete the inquiry.

### **The skilled facilitator**

A whole book can be written on the role of the practitioner. For the purposes of this article, comments on the practitioner's role will be brief.

The role of the practitioner is to model the inquiry approach, to support and coach the parties in the inquiry, and to establish and sustain the structure of the inquiry method.

It is not the practitioner's job to interpret or analyze. It is the practitioner's job to get him/herself out of the way so that he/she is in service of supporting the listener and the speaker to share and connect.

Below is an approach that is an outgrowth of the BEBA Clinic, the CPB Training, the work that Russell Sutter models, and the Socratic approach that Henry Stein used with us in the 1970s.

There are myriad ways to structure an inquiry. The structure suggested below is one way.

The first step is to explain the basics of the inquiry process to the parties. Often, after explaining the basics of the inquiry method, the practitioner can model the role of the listener. A ready application, as Russell Sutter suggested at the beginning of this article, can be with couples.

A next essential step is to establish the intentions of each party in the inquiry. The practitioner's job is to support the establishment of a clear set of intentions that are grounded, spoken in present tense, and doable. During intention setting, the practitioner listens for clarity not specificity. Intentions can be very general or very specific. The important part is that the intention is clear. As stated before, intentions are spoken or written in present tense, "My intention is . . ." Basically, intentions are statements of what each party in the inquiry wants for themselves from the session and/or their relationship. They do not have to agree. The two parties can have very different intentions.

The intentions set the baseline for the session. At the end of the session or any time afterward the intentions can be revisited. It is relatively easy at that point to assess the degree to which the intentions have been met during the inquiry.

While each party is stating his/her intention for the session, the practitioner has the opportunity to begin to model the listening process by repeating key words, phrases or word for word what the intention setter is saying. It's very useful to write intentions down.

The next step is to establish who will speak first and who will listen first. If the listener is able to accurately reflect what the speaker is saying, that is a sign to continue. Often the listener may not be sure of how to do that. Here the practitioner can model for the listener how to listen and reflect. In this way the practitioner can step by step teach the couple to use the inquiry form. As the listener is able to actively reflect back what she is hearing, the practitioner can back off and simply coach the couple in the conversation.

More will be added to the listening and practitioner components after a discussion of the four listening forms.

### **Four Forms of Listening**

- Simple listening with presence.
- Listening with the reflection of single words or phrases.
- Listening and repeating every phrase and word that is spoken.
- Combining the 3 forms above and asking key questions that support deepening and connection.

### **Listening with Presence**

Listening with presence is the practice of listening with the intention of being centered, relaxed and interested. It is also listening with the intention to listen in a way that allows us to hear and integrate what is being shared in real time, moment to moment. It is listening with a sense of being a witness. In short, it is listening from and through the heart with a sense of unconditional acceptance.

Listening with presence is a way of showing interest and curiosity that gives psychic space for the speaker to form his words and share the truth that he knows from within. Listening with presence shows empathy for the speaker's experience even when we disagree with what the speaker is saying.

Some of you have the awareness of where you are placing your attention. Attention occupies time and space. Each of us has the capacity to move our attention close to the speaker or further away. We can make our attention highly focused or more diffuse. If the listener's attention is too close to the speaker or moves into the speaker, he may not be able to be clear and may feel uncomfortable. If the listener's attention is too far back, she and the speaker may lose the felt sense of connection.

For decades we have experimented with exercises wherein two people work with where they place their attention in relationship to each other. This practice can help to establish harmonic resonance, add depth to the connection and establish the felt sense of a state of presence with each other:

1. Preparation—Do a centering exercise with each other. Sit quietly facing each other. Feel your buttocks on the surface you are sitting on and your back against the surface you are leaning on. Feel your feet on the floor. As you do this, establish a sense of center for yourself.
2. Each of you has a sense of your present age. Look around the room with your present day eyes and see what is actually in the room or space you occupy and who is actually there with you.
3. Have a sense when you are looking at each other that your attention is placed within yourself and behind your eyes.
4. When you establish eye contact, have a felt sense of where you meet. Talk with each other about how that feels. If your attention feels too close to the other person, move it back to within yourself.
5. Talk with each other about how you feel doing this exercise.

Listening with presence is listening with an intention to be thoroughly inclusive and with unconditional acceptance. Being thoroughly inclusive is to have an intention to see and hear the person we are listening to, and to perceive them as being more than the words they are speaking. The intention is to see the speaker in his humanness as a remarkable human being with a unique history and with wounds, to accept them unconditionally.

The listener is not listening with an intention to agree or disagree. The listener is listening for the purpose of receiving the speaker's message and including that message in her sphere of listening. This is not about agreement. In fact, we can listen and hear what a person is saying, totally disagree with them, still connect and strengthen a healthy bond with that person, and/or repair an injured relationship.

Listening with presence includes listening with an intention for mutual support and cooperation. During the inquiry practice, the mutual support and cooperation is about supporting ourselves and the other to deepen into ourselves and to connect.

The intention during an Inquiry or any other time, for that matter, is to listen with a sense of presence.

### **Listening with and offering the reflection of significant words or phrases**

There is an exercise that Anna Chitty uses in her Practitioner Verbal Skills Training designed for body workers and that she leads in the Body into Being Training that she and I co-teach. This exercise is a great way to build listening and reflection skills. The speaker gets the felt sense of how it feels to be given verbal reflection with presence and unconditional acceptance. Together, the dyad, gets to experience how this way of listening and reflecting affects the energy, resonance and cooperation between them.

Before doing this exercise, it is important to prepare by doing a centering exercise together, so that as a couple you can establish a felt sense of settling and connection before you begin the exercise.

This exercise consists of a listener and a speaker. The speaker shares something that feels important to him about his process or life. During the sharing, the listener repeats individual words or short phrases that touch her heart or in some way deeply connects her with the speaker. Some of the words or phrases that the listener repeats can convey more meaning or weight than other words or phrases. These words or phrases can appear empowering or resourcing to the speaker. Other words and phrases may appear to have some constriction in them. Considering the speaker's readiness, the listener simply repeats these words or short phrases in rhythm with the speaker's sharing. This is not to interrupt the person. It is to emphasize those words or phrases and show that they are registering with the listener.

The tempo of the sharing needs to be slow enough so that there is enough space for the listener to repeat the key words and phrases. Indeed, as the tempo slows and the listener repeats, a harmonic resonance is observed to form energetically between the speaker and the listener. This resonant field serves to strengthen the quality of connection between the two.

During debriefs of this exercise, speakers often report how they feel heard in ways that supports them to settle deeply within their beings. Both speakers and listeners often report a deep sense of connection with each other.

This is an excellent exercise for couples to do with each other. Anna and I suggest that the couple practices this exercise during easy relaxed conversations. This will strengthen both of their communication skills and the mutual support and cooperation between them.

Each of them takes a turn as speaker and then as listener for a short period of time. Then the two of them share with each other how it feels to them to do the exercise and what they each learned in the roles of speaker and listener.

That concludes the exercise. The whole exercise can take about 20 minutes.

Room needs to be made for a wide range of responses. This practice may not feel settling to every person who is sharing. Speaking while hearing words and phrases being repeated back may feel unsettling to the speaker. If that is the case, simply pause and re-anchor within your center, and see the person with whom you are sharing. At your present age, in the present moment, are you able to perceive this person as a safe person to confide the content or story you are sharing? Sometimes it just takes slowing down enough so that the speaker can integrate the experience of being accurately reflected. Other times it's just that, as a team, not enough attention was given to establishing relaxed connection with each other. If the activation in the speaker is strong and persists, it may mean that he opened into a traumatic implicit memory. If this is the case, then discontinue the exercise. Settle and set an intention to work through that material with a skilled practitioner.

### **Listening and repeating each word or phrase that is spoken.**

Listening and repeating each word and phrase that is spoken is the basic form that Russell Sutter taught us. This basic form is described above in the history section and the practitioner section offers specific steps. You may find it useful to go back and review those sections. If not continue reading.

In order to use this form, both the speaker and the listener have to agree to cooperate enough to work in the form. This is instead of paying attention to the conflict or challenges you are faced with using the form. If you get off track, return to the basic form. Stay with the listener repeating word for word what the speaker is saying so as to come into a greater state of cooperation and the feeling of a resonant flow between you.

Remember, with this form of inquiry, the listener needs to control how much she takes in at any given time. At first, most listeners attempt to take in more information than they can accurately repeat back. It may be surprising to the listener how few words she is able to accurately repeat back. If you are the listener do not be dissuaded if, at first, you can only remember one word at a time. Let that be your starting place. Practice will increase your capacity to add more words, phrases and sentences. Listeners, give yourselves full permission to not get it 100%. It is truly OK to not get what was said with total accuracy. If that happens, the speaker can simply repeat what he said. Then the listener can attempt repeating it again. Stay with the process until the speaker feels the listener receives what he said. Keep practicing. Like learning all new skills, it is repeating the skill over and over again that opens the neural pathways that support the listening and builds competence.

My flute teacher, Gary Roba<sup>15</sup>, gave me a particular long low East Indian bamboo flute called a bansuri. On receiving the flute, I felt that the holes in this bansuri were so far apart that the fingering positions were beyond what I thought I would ever be able to handle. At that point, I wasn't able to make any acceptable sound with that flute. He told me to keep practicing it, and eventually I would be able to play it. It took me 4 months of attempting to coordinate myself with that flute before I was able to just make a decent sound. Interestingly, attempting to play this bansuri improved my ability to play all my other flutes. Now I'm able to play that bansuri with satisfying sound and have made friends with the flute.

Similarly, the Inquiry Form can help us learn to be eloquent listeners and communicators. At first the process may be quite challenging. Yet, the challenge of becoming a competent compassionate listener is not more difficult than conducting an adversarial challenging relationship.

### **Combining the 3 forms above and asking key questions that support deepening and connection**

There will come a time in the development of your listening skills when you will naturally begin to combine listening forms. Each one of the listening forms may feel more appropriate at different times during the inquiry. If the speaker is feeling heard and received, repeating single words or phrases may support deepening and connection. Or simply listening, receiving what the speaker is saying and asking questions from the depth of your curiosity and compassion may be what supports deepening and connection. You will notice different things: something that doesn't feel clear to you; a hint of conflict in the speaker's voice; a word or phrase that feels particularly dense or compressed to you; places in the speaker's flow that break; or a gesture that emphasizes the intensity that may awaken the listener's curiosity leading to a question that opens and deepens the inquiry. It is most important to be aware of your own internal responses and the energy of what you are hearing.

### **Summary Of The Structure**

Following is a step by step summary of the structure for an inquiry conversation:

1. Agree to use the Inquiry form for the discussion you are about to have.
2. Spend a few minutes doing a centering exercise.
3. Each person sets an intention for the discussion.
4. Determine who will speak first and who will listen.
5. Engage in the Inquiry.
6. When the discussion is complete, make short statements as to how doing the Inquiry was for you.

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<sup>15</sup> Gary Roba is an exceptional practitioner and teacher of several forms of bodywork and a graduate of the CPBT. Search You Tube for Gary Roba.

## **An Exercise For Couples**

This exercise is a good way to begin to experience the process of engaging in an Inquiry. Even if you are very experienced at using this form, this is an excellent exercise that can clarify and deepen your relationship.

There are several steps to this exercise, do them one step at a time.

### **1. Make a list of what is working in your relationship.**

By yourself or with a skilled listener, sit down and make two lists. Make one list of what is working for you in your relationship. This list can include appreciations you have for your partner and how you are together.

Example of list one, (what is working):

- I love to play with my partner.
- I enjoy listening to music with him/her.
- I love how he/she parents our children.
- I love him/her.
- I enjoy sharing similar interests together.
- I enjoy cooking with him/her.
- I love to hear his/her voice.
- I love our intimate times together.

### **2. Make a list of what is challenging for you in your relationship.**

Example of list two, (what is challenging):

- I feel unheard.
- I have to get angry to get her/him to listen.
- I miss being intimate with him/her.
- I feel blamed.
- We are not spending time together.
- We argue every day.
- I am losing myself in the relationship.

### **3. Translate list one, (what is working) into appreciations of your relationship and your partner. Examples of translating "what is working:"**

- I love to play with you.
- I enjoy listening to music with you.
- I love and appreciate how you are with our children.
- I love you.
- I appreciate how we explore our similar interests.
- I enjoy cooking with you.

- I love the sound of your voice.
- I love being intimate and making love with you.

4. Translate list two, (what is challenging) into what you actually want.

- I want to communicate in a way that supports each of us to truly be heard.
- I want to be able to communicate with you with kindness, respect, caring and compassion.
- I want us to be together in ways that supports our intimacy and trust together.
- I want us to make time to be together.
- I want us to organize playtime together.
- I want to have time and space to explore my own creative being and autonomy without sacrificing our relationship.

5. Take your lists into an inquiry with each other. Establish which one of you will be the speaker first and which of you will be the listener first.

6. Then one of you shares your appreciations for the other. The listener receives each appreciation one at a time and repeats what she heard from her partner. Pay attention to how you feel giving and receiving appreciations to and from each other and how the energy between you changes and feels. Talk with each other about how sharing this way feels.

7. Next have a conversation about what you actually want. Do not share what is not working. Empower yourselves and your relationship by sharing what you want. Use the Inquiry format. When one shares, the other listens and reflects back what they are hearing. Do not try to problem solve while you are sharing what you want. Save that for the next exchange after you both have a clear understanding about what both of you want.

8. Make a single list of all the “wants” that you both have in common. Which of your “wants” are the same?

9. Now, have a creative conversation about how to make what you both are in unison about what you want in your relationship come about. Continue to use the Inquiry form.

10. Look at the wants that are different. Have a creative conversation about how you can support your partner to have that for him or herself or not. You may or may not want to support some of the “wants” that your partner has.

How you cooperate with each other during these conversations will determine how you proceed with each other. Each of you has choice. Neither of you is obligated to do what the other wants. Each person in the relationship has the right to come to the other from a position of choice.

Be sure to share with each other how it feels to be in conversation this way.



Any time you become argumentative with each other it is a sign that you need support from a skilled third person to have the conversation you are having. Arguments are a prime indicator that, as a couple, you need support from a skilled professional to listen, to connect with each other and find your way into effective communication.

Summary of the steps of the “What’s Working/What’s Challenging Exercise:”

1. Make a list of what is working in your relationship.
2. Make a list of what is challenging for you in your relationship.
3. Translate list one, “what is working” into appreciations of your relationship and your partner.
4. Translate list two, “what is challenging” list into what you actually want.
5. Take your lists into an inquiry with each other. Establish who will speak first.
6. Share your appreciations for the other. Use the Inquiry Form. Do this both ways.
7. Have a conversation about what you actually want. Use the Inquiry Form. Do this both ways.
8. Make a list of the “wants” that you both have in common.
9. Have a creative conversation about how to bring what you both want into action.
10. Look at the “wants” that are different. How can you support each other to realize those wants or not.

### **Closing Comments**

Thank you for reading this article. I hope that you are able to use it as a guide to increase your capacity for eloquent listening.

The central focus of this method is on compassionate listening. It may appear that emphasis is also placed on receiving the content of what the speaker is saying. While it is indeed important to receive what the speaker is saying and understand what he is meaning to convey, it is more important to pay attention to the feeling of the energy and the quality in the feeling sense of the connection.

Inquiry is not about agreement. Even in significant disagreement, presence and the quality of listening can often provide a fertile ground for connection and compassion between you.

Arguments, especially when they go unresolved, indicate that you need skilled support to listen, connect and hear each other with your differences.

The parties engaging in an inquiry have the opportunity to discover that the energy that constricts their connection may well have existed in their histories long before they met and even before they were conceived. An effective inquiry opens the opportunity to perceive that the way a couple is being together, the way entangled conflict erupts in

their relationship is rarely about the content of what they are saying. Rather, it is strongly influenced by the energies of long forgotten imprints carried over from their early lives and even before their conceptions. Indeed, we have the opportunity to discover that it may even be as if our ancestors are in conflict rather than the immediate statements or behaviors that appeared to trigger the present conflict in the first place.

It is my hope that we are able to use these guidelines to strengthen our relationships and increase the mutual support, cooperation and love between us.

Lastly, it is my hope that these methods find their way into our civic and political processes, so that together we can find and implement actual real solutions to the substantial challenges we are facing on our planet today.

Respectfully,  
Raymond Castellino, DC, RPP, RCST.  
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