

The Power of Extraordinary Listening

Creating Extraordinary Wealth
Through Extraordinary Communication

R. Moon

The Power of Extraordinary Listening
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The Power of Extraordinary Listening

Some of the people I listened to Carol, Jim, Chris, Dan, Marshall, Barry, Greg, the Aikido of Marin dojo and the Kami

The Power of Extraordinary Listening
Alternative (sub)-Titles – Choose your favorite

Listening Creates Wealth
The Art of Extraordinary Listening

A New Common Sense
Don't Get Mad, Don't Even Get Even, Get What You Want!
Listening: The Action of Peace
Listening: The Action of Change
Listening: The Action of Relationship
Listening: The Action of Communication
Listening: The Action of Community
Listening: The Action of Connection
Listening: The Action That Creates Peace

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A Note on gender bias and my use of language: Rather than choose He or She or alternate or use s/he . . . I choose to refer to an individual as they, implying he or she or both or neither or something else. I am aware that it is not the established method, but then again neither is anything else in this exploration.

A letter from Geoff Moore, Chairman of the Chasm Group

Richard,

I very much believe in this thesis. I think listening opens a portal to the immortal in us, that the divine is the ultimate listener, and thus as we listen we ground ourselves in the divine, and its attributes infuse our behavior. It is such a gift when someone truly listens because it creates a place where we can park our sorrows and burdens as well as our triumphs and enthusiasms -- both of which are barriers to being in the present. I encourage you to pursue this line deeply.

My best to you, Chris, and whomever else supports you in this work,

Geoff

Geoffrey Moore
Chairman, The Chasm Group

Preface

The Purpose: The Creation of wealth

This book is designed to increase the wealth of the world.

It is said of late that our wealth does not reside in our money or our physical resources. It does not reside in our industrial plants or even in our high-tech industries. Modern myth characterizes our wealth as our knowledge base. Our knowledge base gives us the power to use all the other resources to create our lifestyle. It is an important delineation in our understanding of wealth. However, we can differentiate it further.

The creation of our wealth emerges from our ability to learn! The Oxford English Dictionary says in defining wealth: “Wealth is to the spirit what health is to the physical body.” When your body is in good condition you are healthy. When you live in a spirit of learning and creativity you are wealthy. Wealth is more an attitude than a number.

Learning and creativity allow us to create and continually re-create our knowledge base. Together learning and creativity lead to new possibilities and new solutions that improve the quality of our lives, individually and collectively. Learning which begins with attention stimulates creativity.

Learning and creativity depend on the ability to focus attention on a clear perception of one’s experience. I describe this process with the word listening. Listening as I use the term represents the full spectrum of attention. It is much more than noticing and recognizing sound and words. Listening includes the meaning that we make which informs the totality of our thought, feelings and action. It describes our interaction with an unfathomable creation, with an infinite totality that extends beyond our imagination.

I use the word listening to open a doorway into an exploration that words cannot describe, only point the way. I have chosen the word

extraordinary to suggest listening in a way that allows us to hear subtle and significant meaning that we might ordinarily miss.

Extraordinary Listening is an inquiry into how our natural reactive processes default into self-protective behavior that impedes communication, thinking, and the way we create our world. Resisting our reactivity blocks listening. Reactivity becomes intelligence in the process of extraordinary listening.

Extraordinary learning depends on my ability to listen to what is going on around me, including extending my awareness beyond its present limits. And extraordinary creativity depends on my ability to listen to what is going on within me including that which I may not have yet begun to sense.

From individuals to families, from companies to societies, within nations and across the global network, the quality of our life together grows from the quality of our communication.

Communication affects the bottom line of every company and creates the wealth of every society.

Our ability to talk together grows out of our listening. The quality of our listening, the spirit with which we approach life impacts our success and fulfillment. Consciously and unconsciously we are always developing the quality of our listening. Our mental and emotional state is the basis of the way we engage in the world, our spirit of engagement. The meaning that we make, which begins with and grows out of our listening, more than any other single factor defines the quality of our lives.

Communication takes place on many levels. Both with close friends and perfect strangers there is often communication without words per se. Communication takes place in connection. Listening is the quality of our connection with ourselves, each other and with the world. Extraordinary listening consciously connects us with everything in creation. Ignite the desire to listen, and opening and connecting happen naturally, effortlessly.

Listening is an invaluable contribution to creating wealth. When a society is designed to facilitate contribution wealth flourishes. That is what listening looks like when a society does it.

“Proper listening is the foundation of proper living.

Since both the benefits and the dangers inherent in listening are equally great I am of the opinion that listening ought to be a constant topic of discussion in one's own mind and with other people. This is especially so because it is noticeable that most people go about the matter in the wrong way: they practice speaking before they have got used to (*developed the power of*) listening.”

Plutarch

Prologue:

In the summer of 1999 I had an experience that changed the direction of my life. I was leading peace-building work with a group of thirty-five young adults from the various factions in Bosnia. Several groups I work with had brought them to the U.S. for leadership training. Together we went to a remote Island on Lake of the Woods in Northern Minnesota for several weeks. In addition to some lessons in leadership, we divided into five groups and everyone went out on a five-day canoe trip.

I will venture to say for everyone involved, it was one of the strongest connections we have ever made. Though I do not speak their language, I found myself laughing with them at jokes I did not

understand. When we returned the other team leaders described a similar experience.

After watching these young people, whose relatives had perpetrated unimaginable horrors on each other, play and laugh together my heart was somehow different. I saw them speak and listen to each other in ways I would never have imagined. I cannot describe to you my feeling because what I saw and felt was beyond the power of words. The optimism they showed and the hopes they shared gave me a feeling of possibility, an extraordinary experience of love.

At the closing ceremony in Washington D.C., I was asked to encapsulate what we learned. It was an honor to be asked, yet, it was overwhelming trying to describe such a powerful experience in a couple of minutes. Years of meditation could not have produced the emptiness of mind I felt trying to know what to say. That inner silence was deafening. My life seemed to build up to that moment in time. Finally, suddenly, out of that emptiness the idea emerged in a few simple words: The action that creates peace is listening.

After this experience I began a new approach to life and my primary study of Aikido. There is a Japanese word ‘zanshin,’ which I translate as learning without end. It means on-going attentiveness and connection. For this study I have chosen to translate it into English as ‘listening’. Listening goes beyond a verbal exchange. Listening includes how well we pay attention and how we form what we perceive into meaning. Listening, in the broadest meaning I am creating for the word, is the act that connects us with the universe, throughout the totality of time-space. Though few of us listen with that quality of attention I suddenly knew it was possible. More than possible, it is our bestowed mission.

I began calling my school Zanshin Ryu. Since few understood the term or could even pronounce it, I translated it into English as, Extraordinary Listening. I then expanded the vision to include the phrases: Listening creates wealth. Listening is the action that creates peace, a beautiful world

All this started when I was first asked to teach in Bosnia. Of course, I felt honored to be invited, but my reactive reaction was I did not

really want to go to Bosnia. I had heard such horror stories about the way the people there treated each other that I could not imagine wanting to be around people like that. As much as I wanted to help, experiencing that aspect of the human psyche seemed more than I felt ready to handle.

In retrospect I can see why I found the request so hard to accept. I preferred staying in my separate world judging them as somehow other. I comforted myself by thinking I was different. At a distance I could safely think they must be a horrible people. That way I did not have to identify with the aspects of myself that echoed with the stories that had made the news in my country.

I know now that what I was afraid of was seeing myself. What terrified me the most, when I got to know them as individuals and as a culture, was how close we all are to that edge of violence and horror. The lengths we will go to, to escape our fear, knows no bounds. Once we take that path there is no end to it.

I have traveled a bit in my life and enjoy people most everywhere I go. But what was so surprising to me was the depth of the way I was touched by these people across all three cultures. I enjoyed everyone that I met. The women were attractive with an irresistible warmth that I still find difficult to define. The camaraderie with the men seemed so easy and so natural. Their spirits touched me in a way I had not expected. I quickly found myself having the warmest feelings and the strongest affections for them.

I remember one of the young men who went on the canoe trip with me, both for his endearing quality and his enthusiasm for learning. One night around the campfire he said, "I think the Bosnians could be the happiest people on earth." That night as we watched the campfire burn, laughing, arms around each other, heads on each other's shoulders, I knew he was right. Bosnia had something wonderful to teach me.

I saw that anything is possible. The future of the world is in our hands and we could choose to do something extraordinary with it. I also knew that if we fail to choose the spirit of love, what awaited us was sadness and horror beyond belief. I saw it in the eyes of a

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young girl whose father and brother had been killed on the same day, for no real reason. They are passionate humans who people the Balkans. That passion can be used for the creation of wealth or its destruction.

I was reborn that night and through my experience with them. In a way I owe them, especially the young people on the planet, my love and the commitment of my life. I can never live up to it but I am blessed to have something to strive for. I thank you all my friends. I will never forget you.

The Study at a Glance

The Purpose:

Extraordinary listening creates extraordinary wealth.

The Principle:

Listening is an act of intent.

The Process:

Input stimulates a mind/body reaction

Reactivity colors our listening.

Resistance increases the interference of reactivity.

Listening increases learning, understanding and wealth.

The Practices

Listening To Your conversation

Listening to Our Reactivity

Concentration / Emptying

Listening To Their Conversation

Modes of Attention

Questioning

Listening To THE Conversation

Creativity & Learning

Contribution & Wealth

Introduction:

Communicating Creates Community

Communication directly impacts our ability to live together, to learn and teach, to make friends and to do business. Our ability to talk together translates to the bottom line of every company and creates the wealth of every society. Communication is critical to the effectiveness of any team and the happiness of every family. Yet too often we accept poor communication as inevitable. That's the problem!

Diplomatic communication between countries can generate relationships of war or peace. Harmony creates wealth. That is why the words, peace and prosperity go together as do the words, war and devastation. When countries can listen to each other, when they can speak to each other and are heard, they enrich each other through trade and cultural exchange. When they cannot, they tend to develop fear-based relationships, arms races and war. Nations are made up of people. The psychology is similar. Diplomacy between nations, or the quality of communication between individuals, sets up a relationship of friendship and support or distrust and antipathy.

The spirit of our communication, the way we connect initially with ourselves and then with one another, develops the character of our communities and the quality of our lives. Listening implies learning how the world seems to another, better understanding what is important to someone and why. Listening is how we include another person's knowledge and perception to expand ours and how they include ours to expand theirs.

The way we listen and form meaning is the most powerful point of leverage in our lives. The quality of our communication is precious. Improved human relations will come about through improving the way we pay attention to ourselves and one another.

I remember watching a couple on the edge of divorce. The pain stimulated anger. Once the anger seemed more important than the love, *it* took their attention, blinding them to the love. Their reactive responses to the fear, real or imagined, controlled their behavior.

They said things and did things to each other that I think would have shocked even them, if they could have seen themselves from a distance. What I found the most disturbing was I knew how much they loved each other.

I felt frightened watching their interactions. I remember my reaction to my fear. I remember telling myself that I would never treat anyone that way, especially someone I fell asleep next to. I wanted to think I was somehow different. Like my resistance around going to Bosnia, I did not want to face the fear we all share. I did not want to bear witness to the effects of our failures in handling that fear. In divorce as in war, we somehow slip into destroying anything good another might enjoy. In the process of intending to hurt them we sacrifice our spirit and our wealth.

When we are careless about how we create meaning, we create pain and hurt instead of listening and understanding. Once you start it is hard to stop. Instead of creating peace, helping each other focus on, and succeed in, getting what we want, we create war. If we saw the effects of the way we talk and listen to ourselves and each other, if we understood the power of our communication in the creation of our world, I have to believe we would bring a higher quality of attention to the way we generate and share meaning!

There are endless stories about business failures based on the inability of the leaders to listen. I cannot count the number of executives I have sat with who were having difficulty communicating with each other. These are some of the brightest and most capable people on the planet. They earn salaries in multiples of what most people can even dream about. These people held in their hands the responsibility for thousands of employee's lives. They were responsible for millions of customers. Yet no matter how capable, no matter how well paid, no matter how educated we are, and I will add no matter how much we love each other, once reactive behavior takes over our attention, once resistance to reactivity becomes defensiveness, none of these things matter.

The experience emphasized for me how important it is to pay attention to the way we communicate. Listening is a most difficult and valuable skill. If at those critical moments, we could see

ourselves, our actions and the repercussions of our behavior, I have to believe we would act differently. I understand our feelings are intense. It is human in a moment of passion to react without thinking. When I fail to pay attention to my reactive energy it drives my actions. Please don't misunderstand me. I am not of the persuasion that the answer lies in repressing our passion. It lies in understanding, which even more than charity, begins at home.

Understanding comes easiest when you can talk to someone in their language. And everyone speaks their own language. The only way to learn someone's language is the same way you learned yours; listen.

Invaluable Contribution

Listening is an invaluable contribution yet because listening seems passive people fail to notice how critical it is to communication. We are a pragmatic, action-oriented culture. We like to see the results of our actions. We think making a contribution means having something to say. We want them to listen.

People who want to improve their communication skills believe the leverage lies in learning to speak more effectively. We want to know how to motivate other people to act or think in certain ways. Once we want to change them and fail to value learning, we don't listen. When our learning ceases, possibilities diminish.

Some people think that the speaker has a function while the listener does nothing. They think that speaking takes study and care, but benefits will accrue from even a careless approach to listening.

Plutarch

I was once asked by a friend to help a group of doctors and nurses who ran the operating rooms of several large hospitals. They were under tremendous pressure to work together effectively, life and death pressure. He suggested to his group that I share the seminar on listening. One highly placed physician responded, "Is there any

value added from listening? " We should know better. But watch yourself in conversation. We don't.

Speaking transmits but it does not mean there is communication. The power of communication comes out of listening to what is being said. No matter how beautiful a song or how eloquent a speech; "communication doesn't mean anything if nobody's listening."

The value of discerning compassionate listening is immeasurable, extraordinary. Imagine if you could improve your communication with everyone that you encounter. Take a moment and envision what that might be like. The principle is so simple as to be deceptive. Pay attention. You will be surprised at what your attention can buy.

Listening is the action that creates peace. The words peace and prosperity go together because focusing on what we want to create generates wealth.

The Tribal Council

Commonwealth is a synonym for community. Being in community allows us to share wealth with each other. It allows us to increase learning and stimulate creativity enhancing the wealth we hold in common. Feeling part of the common wealth affects how we relate to society, whether that society is a large nation, our immediate tribe or team, a relationship with an individual or anywhere in between. In order to feel a part of the tribe, our name needs to be on the tribal roster and we need the right to have our voices heard in the tribal council. The tribal roster means we are considered in the distribution of the wealth of the tribe. The tribal council means our view is heard.

When someone listens, it is a sign of respect. Respect is critical to building relationships of trust that are the basis of a family, a project team or a larger community. Trust is essential to building a healthy economy. When we demonstrate that we can hear each other's needs and that we will honor and respect them trust is generated. Listening

doesn't mean agreeing. Listening means we are willing to perceive each other's needs and include them in the equation.

When people are not considered or allowed to speak it inhibits their willingness to accept and support decisions and the rules of a culture. It is important to each of us that the information and intelligence we bring is included in the collective intelligence of the group's thinking about an issue. Once listened to, if our input has been included (voice in the tribal council) and our welfare considered (name on the tribal roster), people usually find a willingness to accept a group decision that they may not initially support.

Not being seen, not having a voice diminishes one's sense of value. Ignorance breeding ignorant behavior comes from being ignored. Value is created through paying attention.

When we are not listened to, we feel excluded. Children will behave badly to get negative attention rather than suffer no attention. How does that look in adults? It looks the same. It produces insecure behavior. In extreme cases not being heard can generate frustration to the point of violence, sabotage and terrorism. From the first stick used as a club, to the hydrogen bomb, from the war within to the on-going tensions throughout the globe, people feel unheard.

Terrorism exemplifies the extremes people will use to amplify their message until they do feel heard. Every workplace and school rampage can be traced back to someone not feeling seen, not feeling heard, feeling de-valued. They return the feeling by devaluing others.

Shunning, not listening to, not connecting with someone, is an intentional form of punishment. It is probably one of the most painful experiences in human existence. In some primitive tribes a person punished by being isolated from social contact would withdraw from life until they physically died. Apathy represents another response to feeling unheard. In most of our present day relationships when people are not listened to they don't actually die, they just stop sharing their input. They withhold their contribution killing the possibility of collective creativity.

When we listen, we generate a quality of thinking together where all ideas are heard. In a leadership of listening everyone is included. Ideas are evaluated openly. The best ideas are adopted. That is why the best leaders in the world are good listeners. They are learners. They draw on the intelligence of everyone in their group. They are able to include multiple levels and channels of input. A good leader would have listened to more than their immediate team. They would listen to different levels and departments in the organization. They would listen for different levels and ideas within an individual. They are able to listen to what is said. They don't block incoming information just because it doesn't harmonize with what they want to hear. They do not lie to themselves so they do not need to ask others to do so. Listening empowers a leader to grow and develop, echoed by the growth and development of those in their charge.

Free and open communication increases the capacity of a group of people who work together. It is a critical skill for all of us, because we live together. Dialogue, listening to each other with the intention of learning and understanding stimulates creativity. When we receive each other's meaning without defensiveness and pre-judgment the possibilities of communication magnify exponentially.

Listening encourages contribution and constructive participation. The simple generosity of listening creates a cycle of wealth. Attending to the quality of listening enhances the dialogue and nurtures our thinking together. Our collective intelligence creates our cultural architecture and in the long run the destiny of our lives. Collective contribution creates collective wealth. Listening together allows us to develop creative thoughts far beyond what we can achieve alone.

We could make a distinction between listening and hearing. Hearing means knowing what someone said. Listening implies opening our minds to grow and change because of the input. Whether you believe you agree or not, listening means openly and honestly considering, without prejudice or resistance.

Let me explain it this way. I heard a lot of the things my parents told me. I heard what they said and I knew what they meant. I just didn't listen. Listening implies action that alters who we are, a transformation of being that changes our destiny as individuals and collectively.

In a universe of constant change nothing stands still. Listening allows us to adapt to change. Change has never come at faster pace. To be able to adapt at today's pace of change our listening must be better than good; it must be extraordinary. In the modern world success will not be determined by what you know but rather by how fast you learn.

A Student of Listening

What is listening and what is its role in the art of creating the world we want? I find it interesting that I have never met anyone that said to me, "I am a very closed person you can only talk to me about certain things." It would seem most everyone sees themselves as, "you can talk to me about anything."

Yet, most people I have worked with have difficulty talking about their areas of conflict, though some have little trouble fighting with each other about them. Even those that talk about their conflicts have difficulty listening. It seems we always want 'them' to listen.

Almost every corporation I have worked in has a statement in their values saying their culture is open and one of candor. Invariably, one-on-one with most individuals, there's a definite sense that only certain areas are open for discussion.

We don't see ourselves as closed. We don't really see ourselves that much at all. We tell our stories about who we think we are, think we should be or wish we were. Listening changes all that.

Learning Without End

Life is a mirror of how well you listen. Experiment with developing your listening. Don't judge it at first. A week, a month, a year from now, see if things are different in the quality of your time, enjoyment and effectiveness. At some point in the future see if there is a visible shift in your life from this deceptively simple shift of listening. Simply by paying attention, the study of extraordinary listening has already begun.

A suggestion: The power of your study will increase if you keep a journal and jot down observations of changes. If you notice anything that interests you, even if it does not seem that important, keep a record.

We consider listening so little. As soon as you hear the title, *The Power of Extraordinary Listening*, or see it written, there is a stimulus. If you open to it the mind begins to wonder, "What is extraordinary listening? What is ordinary listening?" Then, if the inquiry lives with you, you will listen with a different quality of attention. Paying attention as you listen will change the way you are listening. Once begun, it is only a question of how intently and intensely you will focus your attention.

Communication, internal and external, shapes our lives and our relationships. When we listen, we think we listen to what someone means. What we actually listen to is ourselves making meaning. We make meaning by filtering what we hear through our thoughts, memories, beliefs and emotions. If we could tell the difference between what we hear and our filters, we could change human experience. The world changes when we change the way we listen!

The Power of Extraordinary Listening

"Sometimes you get what you want and sometimes you lose what you have. If everyone would listen to my song tonight, we could save the whole world."

Solomon Burke [1964]

The Power of Extraordinary Listening

The Principle

The Process

The Practices

The Principle

Listening is an act of intent.

The Value of Attention

Attention is our most valuable resource. Attention is the most precious gift we have to offer and the most important commodity we have to invest. Evaluating whether something is worth our attention is the most essential choice we make. How we invest our attention will decide whether we will create a world of peace and prosperity or one of conflict and destruction. Where is the highest return on the investment of our attention?

We spend and withhold our attention. How well do we evaluate the choice? Sometimes we generously give someone attention. Then there are times we cannot remember what someone just said.

The ‘Desire to Listen’ is the critical factor in how well we hear. When we want to, we listen. When we consider something to be of value, we pay attention. When we are distracted or defensive, it is because we give greater value to something else.

We have come to a turning point. We are moving from the information age into what I call the age of value. In the past it was said information is power. The information age has inundated us with more information than anyone could ever hope to process. The problem is not accessing information but information overload. As the overload of information increases the process of transforming information into intelligence pivots on how data is given value. In the age of value the focus of attention will be on valuing data intelligently. How we value information will determine the future.

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Enlightened valuing of data moves one towards clear perception, which is the basis of an effective strategy. If we can focus our attention on information that is valuable, we can increase the leverage of our attention. The quality of our attention creates our life unconsciously unless we make it a conscious practice by attending to our state of attention.

Awareness, Perception, Value and Meaning

The process is one of paying attention to how we pay attention. It is a listening to our listening. At first the concept of perceiving our attention can be subtle and elusive. After some practice focusing awareness into attention becomes a part of assembling meaning. Listening means extending the focus of perception into information and energy as yet unknown.

Attentiveness to experience comes out of a desire to listen. Attention properly tuned distills the most valuable information for divining strategy and action. Listening willingly considers new ideas and new ways of thinking. If you listen you will notice things you never knew. Listening implies receiving energy and allowing it to change who we are. Otherwise it is not listening. Failure to listen makes our actions inappropriate.

Listening is more than auditory. Along with hearing the words, listening integrates the body language, tone and mood of the person delivering the message. Extraordinary listening receives information about the state of the listener's attention as well as the speaker's. It includes the process of reactivity going on in all of the participants. It includes the context of the situation, our lives, the noise and the nature of our connection with the silent world. If you are extraordinarily good at receiving information you perceive a lot even when nothing is being said.

We perceive only a minute portion of the available data because we are inundated with so much of it and our senses are limited. As we sort through the data we do perceive, we filter out the majority of it. The quality of our listening decides what we pay attention to and

what we ignore. If believed to be of no value, data is discarded. If we assess certain data will have value for us we listen and begin the process of assembling the data into formations of meaning.

Since we cannot pre-assess the value of data, we tune out data before we even understand it. When we do that, as we must, we cannot know what we have missed. Only by listening can we assess what value it has. Even then the value of data changes depending on how we value other data we have.

Listening defines the focus of how we pay attention deciding which data will be received, what that data means and how it will be valued. In the information age we valued information. In the age of value the focus shifts to evaluating the process of valuing itself. Re-evaluating how we evaluate data allows us to create meaning that uses our resources aligned with our intentions. It allows us to create a world we would like to live in. Otherwise we are carried away on a river of information to a world of meanings, created in the past and untenable for the unfolding future.

The correct analogy for the mind is not a vessel that needs filling but wood that needs igniting - no more - and then it motivates one towards originality and instills the desire for truth.
Plutarch

If I Listened

Our assumptions about the value of information might cause us to miss its true value. Once many years ago I took a workshop with Joe Pass. In case you don't know him he is one of the greatest jazz guitarists that ever lived. I was broke at that time and it was a very difficult decision for me to spend the money on this workshop. It turned out that though he is a player 'par excellence' his skills as a teacher at least in a group setting did not match up. After several hours of less than coherent attempts to communicate what was important for a guitarist he admitted he didn't know what to teach and sort of gave up and asked if there were any questions. Someone asked about using a flat pick and the various styles. Joe gave a litany of the different styles he had learned as they evolved

throughout his career. Then he said, "I don't know what's right. Just play it the way you play it." That was the major transmission.

At first I left dissatisfied. I had spent a lot to hear what at first seemed like nothing in particular. Then a friend pointed out to me that I could choose to see it as invaluable advice from a master. If a friend of ours who was a good guitarist had told me the same thing it would not have meant as much. It could have been the same words but I would have listened differently. That was the value of credential. Of course it wasn't really the credential. That was like the fake feather in the story of Dumbo. The credential awakened my intention to listen.

Having one of the best guitar players in the world tell me to, "just play it the way you play it," was worth everything I had paid for it, if I listened. It set me free to follow my own path as a musician, if I listened. It supported me to be myself and better express the music within me, if I listened. The freedom it gave me removed many barriers to my creativity, if I listened.

I had the reverse experience in a seminar I was leading on extraordinary listening. When I teach, I introduce myself as a life long learner, because the subjects I teach have no end only deeper understanding that leads to further exploration. I always explain my intention with a comment a student made to me many years ago. After watching he was confused about my teaching process, he said he eventually realized I was not teaching. I was learning out loud. I took that as a high compliment. So I explained something like that to the group.

I found out through the feedback I got later that one individual upon hearing this checked out mentally. Apparently this individual felt that since I was not THE expert why should he listen to me. Once he had tuned out based on his valuing, he not only missed the experience. He wasted his time. If he had listened to his own internal conversation, it could have shown him the exact problem that we all have in listening. We prejudge the value of what is being said.

The focus of our attention is based on our intent. Based on assumptions we are not even conscious of making, about the value of the person speaking or what they will say, often we **intend not** to listen. Before we realize it has happened, we have created an intention other than listening. Not listening is also an act of intent. It can be conscious or not. More often it is not.

Our assumptions are part of the reactive process that can interfere in our listening. If I prejudged what I got based on my expectation of what would happen the tremendous value I received from my time with Joe Pass would have been lost. Conversely it had a tremendous impact my musical path. Potentially valuable information is worthless unless someone listens.

When we assess whether the attention we give to someone will be worth it, consider this. The value returned by our listening is more than the information we receive. We get value from the training and development of our listening skills. When you use your muscles they don't get used up, they get stronger. Improving our ability to receive makes listening worthwhile beyond to the import of the content someone shares.

If we practice any skill over an extended period of time, we get better at it. We develop through practice, conscious or not. If we unconsciously practice paying attention poorly, that is what we get better at. If we consciously practice paying attention in an open and focused way we get better at that. If we practice paying attention with an extraordinary focus, that is what we develop. Intention, knowledge and practice can create a power of listening beyond our present imagination. Then, when someone asks us for our attention we can chose to give it. We have a conscious choice. Once we understand that listening is an act of intent we can intend to seek what has value.

When our minds drift during a conversation, we have failed to intend to listen though we may have meant to. That choice of action is based on our valuing. It is not difficult to listen. As you ignite your desire to listen, opening and connecting happens naturally, effortlessly. The fundamental skill of listening is the ability to focus

our attention. This happens one way and one way only. We intend it.

Normally we see the world through the looking glass. Everything is reversed. We think talking is strong and listening is weak. That we separate them out is a sign of the fragmentation of our thinking. Giving is receiving and receiving is giving. When we give our attention we receive knowledge, information and ideas. When we receive someone by valuing their input we give them the gift of being valued.

We can change our relationship to life with a clear intention to do so. Consciousness develops ability into power; otherwise behavior is conditioned through habit. Intention is a discipline. It is something that can be enhanced. An enhanced quality of attention and listening improves all relationships.

Paying attention to our listening connects thought and feeling unifying our being. In a deeper state of connectivity what we perceive changes. As we concentrate our attention, we will hear things that we had previously not noticed. We will see options that a moment before did not exist enhancing our ability to initiate whatever we feel called to do.

Unless we see life as a unified system, we fail to value the quality of how we pay attention. How we pay attention forms the decisions that design our actions. Our actions determine the course of our lives. Listening is the foundation upon which that creation is built.

The Process

**Input stimulates a mind/body reaction
Reactivity affects our listening.**

Imagine two people talking. Person A's comment is misunderstood. Suddenly the tone of the conversation changes. Person B acts agitated. The first person makes inferences. Things are said without thinking. Both leave feeling upset.

As they turn the conversation over in their minds they have two different responses. Perhaps person A through the reactive feelings and thoughts that were generated in the exchange starts defending what they did to themselves. They pay attention to data that supports their belief that they were right. They ignore data that does not.

Let's say person B notices they were reactive. In listening to their reactivity and seeing their fear and defensiveness they wish they had handled it better. Later person B calls person A and explains their confusion seeking to understand instead of defend. A clearer communication ensues. Person A apologizes for their impatience. They both hang up feeling better.

How they have heard what was said affects how they feel. How they feel, affects how they think. How they think, affects how they act. How they listen affects what they understand. The total process divines the quality of not only their relationship but influences their experience of life.

In the Beginning

The story above is simple but it is one of many examples of how our interactions affect us. I chose one where the reactivity is obvious because I wanted to exemplify that every stimulus activates mental, emotional and physiological reactions.

We imagine thought to be somewhat ethereal, not having actual substance. It is in part a physical substantive process. Every situation, in fact, any input stimulates a somatic process that affects both the mind and the body. Thoughts and feelings affect the release of chemicals in the body. Chemicals in turn affect the tone of thoughts and feelings. The cycle of stimulus-reaction ripples into infinity.

In a personal example I was at a party a number of years ago. The woman responsible for managing the facility where I taught came up to me and said, "I want to talk to you about your class. I asked what she wanted. She said, "Can we do it on Monday?" I said, "OK".

I spent the rest of the weekend and Monday morning wondering what she wanted. Most of the scenarios I created were based on the idea that there was a problem around the use of the facility. I spent two days in anticipation. When we met, she simply wanted to share some appreciation for the class and to tell me how she had applied the principles.

During the neurological process we call thinking, the mind-body system goes on alert. It adopts a defensive emergency stance until it ascertains a level of safety. Until I was certain the input was not a threat I was defensively preparing myself to handle what I imagined was coming. My automatic reaction was to adopt "a better safe than sorry" posture, not consciously but reactively.

New data stimulates a process of evaluation, a re-calibration of information, a disturbance of our thought patterns. Once stimulated the neurological reactions send directives to the mind-body system. Hormones release to prepare for possible action. There is a 'gut' reaction including changes in the muscle tension, heart rate, and the

breathing pattern as well as in quality of thought and the emotional tonality. A posture is adopted. Disturbance in the neural system ripples through our emotional experience affecting how we feel, our thinking, our speech, the translation of our meaning into words and the translation of their words into meaning.

I describe reactivity as the process of stimulus – perception / thought - meaning, that takes place in our felt sense / our somatic awareness. Psychology further describes these reactions through what are called 'the innate affects'. (See below) Our reactivity affects our state of attention, the quality of our listening, the entirety of perception. Reactivity is a major factor affecting our behavior and interactions.

Every perception stimulates the process of evaluative awareness. When you are surprised, startled or challenged notice your reaction. As you develop skills in monitoring your body's reactions to stimulus, you will increasingly notice changes. When someone says, "I need to talk to you," you may or may not be apprehensive but you are stimulated. Mentally we begin to conjecture what they want. A response goes on in the somatic realm. It is disturbing yet disturbance of our understanding is necessary for growth.

When you stimulate a neuron it reacts. Disturbance in our thought system is the first step in the process we call learning. Disturbance in the emotional realm is the beginning of growth.

The functioning of thought is an ongoing process of synaptic activity. Ordinarily we don't notice the process. We just react. If we do notice we are reactive we tend to control (read suppress) it. Reacting to our reactivity by suppressing it stresses our system and limits our ability to listen to the intelligence of our system and learn.

**Is it live or is it reactivity?
Most people can't tell the difference!**

Neurons react to stimulus. That is what neurons do and as long as they are alive it will not stop. As long as we are alive our reactivity will not stop either. The functioning of the brain and nervous system is an ongoing energetic process. While we evaluate incoming

stimulus the physical body goes on alert. Energy floods the system. The energy of reactivity shows up as an exciting of our vitality. An electrical-chemical process gears up to prepare for whatever action might be needed. Due to the amount of stimuli we receive it is not surprising that we behave reactively.

Our reactivity developed from a survival mechanism. Sensing the environment for survival purposes over billions of years evolves into a way of being. While we assess how important or threatening we deem an encounter, we are genetically coded to defend and protect until the significance of the stimulus is understood. The process of reaction takes place before conscious thought. In that moment, we tend to be more interested in keeping things out than letting things in. Nothing else gets attention until we handle our first valuing for safety and survival.

Reactivity is going on. Our body in a state of stimulation floods with chemicals that stimulate yet other chemicals, all of which are affecting the somatic processes. As breathing goes on, even without any conscious intent, similarly, this psychosomatic activity goes on primarily beneath the conscious awareness. Perception is based on these reactions so we don't want to shut them down.

The thalamic, limbic and cortical functions of the brain represent action, feeling and thinking. The various messages sent by different parts of the brain; how we feel, what we think and how we act, may diverge. It takes time to collate them into a coherent picture. This re-calibration takes place at a slower speed than our first primitive response. We need to slow down and allow our understanding to grow. The accuracy of our perception depends on the quality of our listening, the quality of our attention.

The reptilian brain sees binary choices about survival. It was designed to eat and keep from being eaten. There is little room for considerations of other issues. The reptilian brain processes information too simplistically to be adequate in our complicated modern environment. Yet it votes faster and louder than the higher regions of thought.

In pressure situations the speed of our reactivity increases heightening our tendency to respond without adequate evaluation of our actions. In Emotional Intelligence, Daniel P. Goleman described this process with the picturesque term ‘being hijacked by your amygdala.’ I might describe it as the reptilian response dominating the other functions of thought and feeling.

The higher functions of the brain process complexity but at a much slower pace. Once the thalamic/reptilian region has taken over, the ability for objective evaluation gets lost. We default to reacting without processing our primal reactions through the higher faculties of thought. Unconsciously we are driven into self-protective behavior.

The system reacts to every stimulus, imagined situations as readily as to actual ones. The system then prepares for the work it will have to do or imagines that it will. Thinking of highly charged situations our system begins to respond as if the situation were occurring. Neurotransmitters flood our systems simply from daydreaming. This reaction is going on to a greater or lesser degree of intensity with every thought and in every interaction that we have.

What are we listening to within ourselves when we speak to others? Where we coming from? What voice, what urge within us speaks? Unless we are aware of our reactivity, we tend to communicate our reactivity louder than the content we intend. Our responses need to be re-calibrated to the modern challenges that will define our success as a species.

Listening happens through intent. Otherwise we act out of conditioning. We default to the fight/flight response reacting against the energy by either trying to control it or avoid it. Failing to receive the intelligence of the process dramatically limits our options.

Resisting our life energy produces the symptoms we identify as stress. There is a tightening in the body and a sympathetic narrowing of the focus of the mind. Muscle tension drains our energy and freedom of movement. Correspondingly the mind fixates, limiting our ability to clearly discern or create new meaning. Fixed thinking inhibits creativity.

The soma, the psyche and the corpus are aspects of one system. Together they make up a unified field of being. Psyche (mental - emotional), soma (feeling - sensing - knowing) and corpus (physical- electrical-chemical, kinesthetic) affect each other. If you affect one you affect them all; they are interdependent. When we tighten in resistance, it echoes in the thinking, feeling and behavioral domains.

Without the awareness of reactivity we listen through a set of defensive mechanisms, believing the meaning we perceive to be the intended communication of another. Though we have developed conventions of diplomacy to mediate it, we communicate through layers of defensive reactions. Our ability to recognize and be aware of reactivity, however, can lead to a different response. Listening to reactivity instead of resisting it dramatically changes the way reactivity affects our communication. Resisting reactivity distorts communication whereas listening to it clarifies communication and enriches understanding.

Knowing reactivity is going on is the first step in extraordinary listening. Learning to accept it is the next. The third step, learning to listen to the process of reactivity, allows us to turn the energy of reactivity into power. By power I mean the possibility to create change rather than operate out of habit, to do something other than be swept away by the waves of reactivity.

People seemingly drown in an ocean of information, or they cling to shallow water. Rather than fighting for survival, extraordinary listening, when practiced as an act of intent, becomes surfing, riding the wave of meaning allowing action to flow from a larger understanding.

We want to de-escalate the interference, not the reactivity. The reactivity is energy, information and life itself. Listening to the energy rather than unconsciously listening through it transforms what seems like interference into intelligence. Surfing the ocean of reactivity means drawing on its power to create wealth in our lives and the lives of others.

The Defenders and the Drifters

In the listening study we identify several common reactive tendencies that interfere with listening. One is to get defensive and another is when our attention drifts to all the memories and thoughts that are active in our brains. Both are compulsive behaviors meaning they happen without or even in spite of our intention.

Drifting and defensiveness debilitate our listening. We can look at both tendencies through one lens. “What does this mean to me?” is the first level of value to be assessed. There is an assessment however quick and however subtle that evaluates whether the incoming information is in any way threatening. Until we identify the level of threat a defensive stance is adopted. In a defensive reaction, whatever the tactics, the goal is self-protection. We may act with hostility or retreat or try to disarm the threat through denial, logic or emotion including friendly connection.

Defensiveness becomes invisible because it happens so fast. It is so prevalent, so much the baseline of our organisms, we may not even notice it. Since my defensiveness is polished, common and almost automatic, I did not initially see myself as defensive. However, as I began to pay attention I noticed how quickly input stimulated a reaction to defensiveness. When I could catch it, I sensed an unconscious preoccupation with protecting myself. It did not even seem to matter that the potential of threat was minor or imagined.

Gradually, I came to observe my behavior as remarkably defensive. It was not easy to look at the degree of defensiveness with which I engaged the world. As I was able to laugh at myself a bit, it became easier. Then I began to notice similarly reactive behavior in others. Defensiveness seemed all too common.

Certainly there were times when the discussion seemed open and relaxed, yet reactivity and defensiveness seemed the predominant ingredients of communication. Being willing to look at my reactions allowed me to go beyond being unconsciously controlled by them. I began a practice of noticing my reactivity especially when resisting it seemed to trigger my defensiveness. Paying attention to my defensiveness seemed to offer a choice. I gradually

went from being a victim of it, to seeing it. Seeing it as a process developed the ability to work with it.

Once the assessment reads negative, not threatening, we progress to the next level of processing. Then we assess if the incoming information has other importance to us. Since fear of not having enough time is common, reactivity can include someone threatening our limited time availability. One way we defend ourselves against time encroachment is by letting our minds drift, wandering to the other things that we have to do or other things that interest us or distract us.

Drifting happens either because the individual or their topic bores us, or someone's speech stimulates our thinking and we get lost in our own thoughts. Particularly if the demands on our attention are severe once something is deemed non-threatening our mind drifts to what we assume has greatest value.

Often, without realizing it, we begin speaking before they finish. Input stimulates thoughts, memories, assumptions and ideas that can take the mind along infinite tributaries and away from the moment. If we are too polite to begin speaking over them or to just walk away we begin our internal dialogue following our own thoughts rather than theirs. In either case we lose the conversation.

Everyone drifts and defends to some degree though an individual may tend more towards one or the other. The topic, the tone of delivery, our state and relationship to the messenger all influence the forms reactivity takes once triggered.

The problem arises not so much from our reactivity, which has a positive purpose. Rather the breakdown comes from our unconsciously reacting out of the upset or disturbance. If we are unconscious of our behavior and boil over on the other person, our reactivity intensifies theirs. When they return that by boiling over on us, communication can break down completely. When neither of us can see it, when their reactivity and our reactivity collide, like the collision of two opposing weather systems, you have the makings of a perfect storm.

When our attention focuses in the moment we are able to effortlessly receive what is being said. When our attention drifts to other times, places and subjects we seem to wake up a moment later realizing we were doing something other than listening and that we have missed what has just been said. We could simply apologize and ask them to repeat themselves. However that frequently does not happen. Issues of value, status, inclusion, - - inhibit our ability to correct for the effects of drifting. If we could summon the courage to overcome any embarrassment, we could at a minimum complete the communication.

It would be preferable if we were able to maintain the focus of attention and not have to repeat communications. Though let's be clear, spending the time repeating communications is still a giant step beyond miscommunication, especially if the information is important. In both cases of the drifters and the defenders the same process of centering our somatic awareness into attention brings us to an increasingly effective and efficient quality of communication

There are many topics about which we can carry on a rational discourse. However, when someone mentions something that we are sensitive about or have a high charge of energy around an unconscious somatic reactivity begins to 'take over'. The energy of reactivity can cause upset and produce inappropriate behavior. The desire not to be hurt is appropriate, however our reactive behavior may not be, depending on our ability to listen to, our reactive process

Have you ever had someone irate at to you about something inappropriate? Regardless of the input it creates a bifurcation point. One of two things starts to happen. Either you begin to react defensively or you begin a process of listening. We are all reactive. When you can allow for that in your listening, you can usually extend some empathy, patience and understanding.

The question arises, when we're reactive, how do we see our self? Commonly we don't. Reactivity is unconscious. We often don't see the effects of our behavior until it is too late and so fail to correct to a more effective listening. It's fairly easy when you are the one who is calm to see that another person is out of sorts. It is another matter

to see it in our selves, when the heat is rising and the Mercury is boiling over.

When as an observer you watch someone get defensive in a heated discussion it is usually easy to see where and when they lose it. If we could see ourselves from the outside as it were, we could probably relatively easily chart a rational course that is effective in creating positive outcomes. “Listening” to my reactivity, allows me to “listen” beyond it.

A common first reaction to our defensiveness seems to be defensiveness. Then it seems to become an epiphany. As I began the listening work, I shared it with a client and friend. He told me the next time we spoke that simply being aware of the process had changed his perception of the process of communicating. He began to notice the reactive energy during instead of after an interaction. Noticing the process of reactivity increased his ability to choose listening and noticeably improved the quality of his interactions. My experience has been similar.

Another friend describes waking up, so to speak, in the middle of an argument with his spouse and asking himself, “What difference would extraordinary listening make here?” He said it wasn’t easy to make the shift of attention but it changed the tone of their conversation to one of increased understanding.

Once we see our defensiveness, we can consciously allow for this natural, self-protective, genetically coded behavior. Notice your reactivity and defensiveness and it will be easier to see the process going on in others. Notice it in others and it will be easier to see the process going on in you. Instead of reacting to each other’s reactivity we can listen for deeper meaning. Once we simply intend an open state of listening, we interact with greater intelligence. Understanding reactivity enhances our ability to hear the intent behind the words, intent of which even the speaker may be unaware.

Getting and using all of the wealth that comes from learning depends on a willingness to process reactivity, defensiveness and resistance. It takes extraordinary listening to process the reactivity as well as the content. Intention alone enables transcending self-

protective behaviors to hear what lies beyond them. I don't see the question as; "can you control the world?" I'd rather explore life's possibilities?

We design our lives based on data assembled into information and information translated into meaning. The way we process information brings our lives into form. When I am in a defensive attitude I resist new information. Defensiveness blocks listening, I shoot first and ask questions afterwards.

Reactivity, Defensiveness and Interference

Whether we notice it or not, when stimulated we immediately have a visceral response. For some people and in some instances the reaction is strong and clearly noticeable. For others it can seem subtle to the point of invisibility. Especially if the reactivity is subtle it may seem unimportant. However, the reverse is true. Reactivity affects communication. The less we are aware of the reactivity, the more insidious the disturbance of the interference the reactivity causes.

A friend who is a pilot tells a story about almost having an accident due to misunderstanding the tower's directions. In this case electrical activity rather than emotional reactivity caused the interference. It would not have been a problem IF the pilot and tower had been aware of it. Formally, all directions are re-checked, but amidst the volume of information, we get casual about communications. Once the misunderstanding became obvious they understood what had happened. Correcting the flight path was then easy. They rechecked their signal, allowed for the interference and landed the plane safely.

As we all do when we assume we understand each other, they had gone to short hand form of communication. In many cases there is no problem but in something as critical as take off and landing, or the beginning and end of conversations and relationships precision counts and miscues can be critical. Usually to avoid this kind of situation the pilot re-states the communication and has the tower reconfirm it. When the communication is important so should we.

Not seeing our emotions affecting our communication compounds a serious problem. Have you ever worked with someone who was upset and unaware of it or pretending otherwise? If so, you are well aware of the effects of denying how we feel. When we act, out of touch with our feelings, we send confusing signals. It does not create communication lines that are open and clear. Once we see our reactivity and allow for it we can improve the quality of our communication. I state the obvious but clear communication gives us the information that enables us to align a relationship or divine an intelligent course of action. When we do, we improve our effectiveness, our wealth and our lives.

Reactivity and defensiveness often exist below the conscious level. When we discuss the topic calmly most everybody knows reactivity and defensiveness cause interference in communication. Yet the majority of groups probably do not discuss it unless they are taught the value of working on it. Rather the opposite it is seen as unprofessional. Once on the screen it becomes an open topic allowing a team to choose the quality of their communication.

The following is a story from a client, the CEO of an Internet company.

Just yesterday I was in a discussion with the founder of my company and I started to go off. I mean I got angry. Richard had talked about recognizing going to different levels of emotion. Again we all know this stuff when we have a calm conversation about it, but we often seem to forget it in the middle of a crisis. When the emotional temperature rises enough what we call common sense starts to seem very uncommon.

So I stopped in the middle of my flare-up and said, “OK I've gone to Def-con three or two and so I'll cool back down.” Everybody laughed. We could talk about it easily because we all shared the awareness and all had the same vocabulary. So it was a way to say, “OK I'm done with my flare-up. I am going back to listening now.”

From “The Business of Listening, Zanshin Press

Misunderstanding increases tension, inter-personal or international. If you can remember an experience of not understanding someone or of not being understood you know how frustrating it can be. Our reactivity which, when listened to produces guidance, will, when

left unattended, default into fear and defensiveness. Our reactivity can drive us into scenarios of fears imagined and created. It can keep us responding to information from the past as if it were true in the present situation.

If we react to someone it affects our ability to listen. If we resist recognizing our reactivity we assume the meaning we interpret is created externally. Resentment builds. If we express upset or anger, which for us is now real, it creates animosity, especially if we express it in a public forum. Expressing our reactivity may feel better for the moment of release. However, it commonly increases their reactivity, limiting their ability to listen to us. Once this cycle starts, it is self-perpetuating. Our fear and defensiveness generate a reciprocating echo in others, businesses have been ruined, marriages and friendships destroyed, wars fought.

Some conversations you probably wish you had never had. Perhaps like the people in the story at the beginning of the chapter, you got upset. You may have gotten into an argument and left feeling worse than when you started. There may be some people you are still upset with. You just have to think about them and you can feel the reactivity start. The war is still running. If we do not like an experience we resist it. War describes a state of fighting against what we don't want.

Listening Increases Learning and Understanding.

Through studying the process going on beneath the surface of the conversation, I sense that if we designed our conversations to make sure that everyone's needs were heard we could be more than efficient; we could be creative.

Although we have all had defensiveness interfere in our listening, we have likely also had moments of intense listening. In some conversations you leave feeling better. You feel more connected. As understanding increases the excitement may increase the liveliness of the conversation but the inter-personal tension between people diminishes. In a case like that reactivity is listened to and enriches communication.

If you have ever had a night talking with a friend until early into the morning, you may still remember the sense of connection you felt more than you remember the content. When we openly share each other's thoughts there's a sense of excitement, enrichment, creativity and fulfillment. As we move towards understanding, unity and harmony the sense of peace increases. Peace describes a state where we focus on creating what we want.

Enjoyment and Disturbance

Picture a continuum between two different states of attention. There is the state of 'enjoyment / nourishment' and there is the state of 'it might be threatening'. The difference between the two states is the difference between (1) where our neurons are enjoying what is (nourishing) and (2) when they are stimulated in a way that alerts the natural defensiveness (threatening). I represent them with these simple pictures.

Imagine yourself at a national park, enjoying a beautiful sunset. The colors have gradually begun to change. You can feel the natural beauty affecting your state of being. You are not even thinking about how late you can park in the lot. Out of nowhere a ranger comes up and says, "Excuse me," which is 'rangerese' for "I need to talk to you." For most of us, by the time the ranger has come up and said, "Excuse me," the state of 'enjoyment' that we were watching the sunset in has changed to, 'is there a problem? What does this mean to me?' on its way to, 'It might be threatening'.

For some people the response may be total overload. Again for others the shift may be so subtle as to be unnoticeable. However, if you learn to listen to your reactivity, you will see it is always present to some degree. Substitute your boss or spouse, (you fill in the blank) for the ranger and see if you can recognize your reactivity. Most of us would reply with some form of, "can I help you?" but by then the enjoyment of the sunset is receding. It may not even be a memory by the time we are in the conversation.

Imagine the possibility of being able to quickly handle the reactive charge in such a way as to be able, without losing the enjoyment of the sunset, to say to the ranger, "What can I do for you?" In an extraordinarily open state we have the capability of both processing the reactivity and enjoying the sunset. In a state of extraordinary listening we can handle life's pressures while enjoying our lives.

Accept that whenever you are stimulated there will be a reaction. As you begin to recognize this tendency you will probably notice the presence of reactivity more often than you may have expected. As you monitor your reactivity you become increasingly sensitive to it. For a time, it may seem you are becoming more reactive. That is not the case. The value of your attention is increasing.

Even with the intention to pay attention, you will only see your defensiveness at some moments and not at others. Often you will not recognize you reacted till after an event has taken place. Most people never recognize it. They could, if they were listening.

Receptivity

The joy of being in communication is a reward in itself, especially when we share feelings held deeply within us and ideas that excite our imagination. Imagine a state of communication focused on understanding rather than defensiveness, looking good or winning. The vision may be utopian, still if we practice who knows what might be possible. Listening is the strongest point of leverage we have to improve the odds of attaining truly open communication.

When we listen through our reactivity it distorts our listening. It colors our thinking. Habits of emotion, belief and judgment inhibit our ability to listen and change when new input suggests we should. We assemble meaning based on limited data. We infer and assume meaning. Our perception may fail to accurately describe the situation for which we are designing a strategy.

When our listening includes the energy, reactivity becomes part of the content and enriches the meaning we form. Hearing meaning at an extraordinary level of connection and understanding increases the intelligence of our strategy and action. Extraordinary listening

allows us to draw intelligence from disturbance rather than be victim to it. Attentive we can choose a direction. Unconscious it chooses us.

Extraordinary listening begins with noticing how reactive we are. If we notice the direction of the conversation toward increasing reactivity or toward increasing receptivity, we can adjust for it. Through the study of extraordinary listening we can hear what we really intend to say as well as what they really intend to say.

The higher the reactive charge the lower the level of receptivity. When someone seems tense or overloaded, don't you sense they are less receptive to what you have to say? Do you remember trying to talk to someone who was so upset or distracted they could not hear you? There were moments when the rush of business was so intense and so much information was being transmitted so quickly that I could not be sure that my partner heard everything that was important. Sometimes I knew he heard me. Other times I suspected he only heard the points that were most important to him. Of course the same was true in reverse, only I was less aware of it.

Sensing Reactivity

When we see that other people are moody we work with it or around it. People do that with us but we are much less likely to notice it in ourselves. I remember as a child knowing there were certain times to ask permission and other times when it was the wrong thing to do. I bet you had this sixth sense with your parents/boss and your children/team members will have it with you. The problems seemed to arise when I could not tell the difference or probably should have known better but was too reactive to listen to my intuition. Reactivity not only colors how we hear others it colors our ability to hear our inner selves.

Beyond sensing when to speak with someone extraordinary listening implies knowing when to make changes in our lives and when to initiate changes in our world. It whispers about what changes we should make to fulfil our destinies.

“Feel the force Luke”

Some Questions to Stimulate Thinking

Can you remember an instance of having something to say to someone knowing it would be hard for the other person to hear? Have you ever been in a conversation and had your idea or thought rebutted, before you could even finish presenting it? Did you ever notice yourself doing that to someone else?

Did you ever talk to someone when they were in a bad mood and wish you'd waited? Did you ever wait for someone to be in a better mood before raising a particular subject? Are you aware other people do that with you?

Did you ever wait until you were in a better mood before talking to someone else? Can you sense your tone/mood/attitude affecting your thought process? Can you sense what your reactivity does to the connection you have with another person? What if we could see our mood when it is blocking communication? What if we could see it AND change it?

Think back on a conversation where you noticed reactive behavior. What triggered it? How did it show up? For me someone just has to say, "I need to talk you."

Who in your life stimulates a noticeable sensory reaction? What conversations disturb you? Visualize yourself in a situation like that. Perhaps you remember a conversation where you left upset? What did you feel in the way of physical and emotional reactivity? Take a minute to remember how it felt. In contrast, if you can remember a conversation where understanding increased, bring back the feelings you associate with that memory.

What if you could, on occasion, enter a conversation knowing that you will be listened to patiently? Can you imagine the difference in our communication if we started with this feeling? What if we had an agreement to give this to each other? Can you feel how different the quality of our communication would be? Can you imagine how that might affect our relationships and the creation of our society and our world?

When the charge is intensifying and people feel an increasing need to express their point of view, the most powerful contribution to communication is listening. The power that brings conversations into balance is a willing intention to extend listening. By intent alone we develop the ability to notice how the affects of reactivity color our conversations. Listening does not just happen. Reactivity just happens. Listening is an act of intent!

The Innate Affects

Listening stimulates a mind/body reaction. We can learn to trace symptoms of reactivity through what psychology calls the innate affects. Sylvan Tompkins, whose work leads this field, defines affect as “the innate physiological response pattern to a given set of external and internal stimuli.” He identifies the innate affects:

Interest / Excitement
Enjoyment / Joy

Surprise / Startle

Fear / Terror
Anger / Rage
Distress / Anguish
Shame / Humiliation
Disgust

In a general sense the energy of emotion if allowed to flow moves above the line into excitement. The energy of emotion if resisted seems to bounce around below the line looking for an acceptable form of expression. Tompkins notes that shame is triggered any time there is an impediment to one of the two positive affects, excitement and joy.

Listened to, the innate affects can create a road map that enables us to arrive at a chosen location of being. Unless we learn how to utilize their intelligence, the visceral response of the innate affects colors our ability to listen in a clear and open state.

When we are excited, it can be hard not to talk. We get so stimulated, it can be hard to quiet down and listen. When we are frightened, protecting ourselves is an automatic reaction. If we can think at all, we can only think only about how to protect ourselves. If fear has shifted into anger, we reactively think about hurting anything that frightens us in order to stop the fear. It is not conscious. It is reactive.

We go into these pre-conditioned patterns of meaning in response to various stimuli. Our mood does not usually seem a conscious choice. Rather it is something that seems to come on of itself. These patterns happen so quickly and unconsciously that we are unaware of the influence they have on how we feel, think and act. We underestimate the incredible power of these reactions. They color every aspect of our existence.

(More on The Innate Affects see Appendix 1)

Our state of being affects our listening, our thinking and how we interpret information. Similar to the way a computer's operating system organizes data, our system of thought, creates an operating system that organizes data and information into meaning. Mood, beliefs and thought are like mental-emotional software programs through which we form meaning, on autopilot. Without realizing it, we accept our interpreted meaning as if it were a precise description instead of inference filtered through our mood.

We then surface an abstracted map of reality that is unique to us individually. Our map is an abstraction, a concept, a construct. It can be very different from the actual territory. When the affects consume the attention, listening disappears. The content is distorted by rather than enriched by the innate intelligence.

Have you ever had the doctor test your knee reflex? Defensiveness is a reflex. If you have ever bumped your crazy bone or been bruised and had someone accidentally touch you on that spot you understand the propensity to react. We often overreact if we even think they might touch us somewhere that is sensitive. If they were to touch you somewhere else with the same degree of intensity you might not even notice it. You would not have anything near the reaction that happens when someone touches you where you are sensitive. This is equally true in the emotional realm; it is just easier to see it in the physical realm.

Reactive behavior results from inability to handle the energy of reactivity. People yell, become violent, cry, shut down or withdraw due to the disturbance of the affects. If we are uncomfortable with our affective reactions, we resist anything that stimulates them. When verbal input causes disturbance, we intend not to listen

putting us out of touch with what is going on with ourselves and our environment. In a state where we are not sensing the environment clearly, we will not interact with it effectively.

I am often asked, "How do I stop the innate affects from upsetting me? How do I stop the disturbance they cause?" These are the wrong questions. The affects are a part of the energy of reactivity. We cannot be alive without the natural disturbance that comes from the affects. They are a part of us, of life, like breathing and circulation. More than that they are part of a larger system of intelligence. What we learn from listening to their messages allows us to evaluate and realign, how we negotiate the world.

A better set of questions would be, "How do I work with the power of the affects in a positive way? How can I use the energy and intelligence of reactivity to improve my communication instead of letting it interfere?" Is the message of reactivity about the situation we are experiencing? Or is it a carry over from something else coloring the interpretation of the moment? How do I process reactivity in a way that allows me to live openly in a state of learning without end?

New information challenges our conclusions. The inconsistency between new data and our present assumptions about reality occurs in the somatic realm, the sensing feeling knowing aspect of being. Part of the difficulty in understanding the innate affects is there is so much input so fast. Similar to the way computers crash from overload, people reach a point where they cannot process any more stimuli. Our response to stimulus can inspire wonder or overload us and prevent listening. The ability to listen, increasing our creativity instead of increasing our defensiveness, is the gating factor to learning and knowledge. The practice of listening develops a non-resistant relationship with what can otherwise be overwhelming stimulation.

The Innate Affects Color Our Listening

How you listen affects what you receive, what you think about and how you think about it. If you listen with the intention of hearing what is wrong you will hear problems. If you listen with the desire

to connect you will hear feelings you can empathize with. If you listen to close a deal you will hear points of leverage. If you listen to be of service, you will hear ways you can help. If you listen with the intent to support and heal you will hear needs. How we listen colors what we hear.

The 'innate affects' color our state of being, our mood and how we receive input. The following examples show how we try to communicate intangible feelings into words. We might say, "I was so angry, I saw red." Did you ever have the blues? How about turning green with envy or calling someone who is frightened yellow? These moods affect the any message, incoming or outgoing.

Here is an analogy using colors to give a picture of the process of how reactivity colors communication. We might describe someone sad or depressed as having the blues. In our analogy this means when they are thinking to communicate 'white', they may mean 'white' but colored by their mood, it comes out with a 'blue' tone. In other words, thinking they are communicating 'white', they actually communicate 'blue'. If we are angry our reactivity colors the message 'red'. When we add the 'red' of our anger to their 'blue', we hear something like 'purple'. If they thought they asked for 'white' and we give them 'purple', naturally a conflict occurs. When you talk again about the conversation, you will swear that they said 'purple'. They will look at you like you were crazy and swear that they said 'white'.

When someone's reactivity colors their communication, plus our reactivity colors our listening, the communication can get very confused. They mean 'blue' but their yellow reactivity causes them to send 'green'. We hear it through our 'red' reactivity and the color is unintelligible. Who is to say how the communication comes across? Especially if we are angry and we project it out it increases the interference. If we stifle or repress our anger we never clear the communication.

When this type of scenario occurs they feel we were not listening, even though we may have made the most sincere effort. The misunderstanding increases the reactivity and its interference even

though each of us thought we were clear. We were attentive and thought we heard. We feel attacked and respond in kind re-stimulating defensiveness, increasing reactivity, increasing defensiveness. This quality of communication degenerates causing severe consequences.

What we finally receive may have little connection to what was sent. The confusion can easily be compounded because what we hear may be a color/meaning that we don't recognize or understand. Since it may not make 'exact sense' we infer what they mean and think we are hearing them. We not only react to the meaning we form. We are driven by it.

Then we act on our inference as if it were the intended meaning. If our inference is incorrect, we operate on communication that was never made. Multiply this distortion by every communication that follows and you know where we end up. Unless we slow the process down and clarify what they mean, until we create understanding, maybe we should not call it communication.

In an example of diplomatic communication there is an unconfirmed story about the atomic bomb. According to the story a communiqué was sent through diplomatic channels to Japan warning them of a terrible weapon that had been developed and would be used unless they surrendered. According to the story the Japanese responded with an obtuse message. The message said something to the effect that it would take time to prepare the Japanese people for such a dramatic change in policy. The allies did not understand the need for a prolonged process to prepare the Japanese people for surrender and heard refusal. The rest is history, an extreme example.

Similarly imagine the complexity of two people communicating unconsciously through conflicting waves of affect. At varying degrees of intensity in all of our communication, ordinary listening leads to infinite, even if subtle, misunderstandings. Listening through reactivity colors what is heard. We do not distinguish it from the meaning we receive.

I called a friend to wish him happy birthday. Then I called his brother who is very busy to remind him in case the birthday had

slipped his mind. Since I could not reach him I left him the simple message that, "I just wanted to remind you that it is your brother's birthday in case you forgot." I did not know whether or not he had forgotten. I simply called him as a reminder in case he had, so he could have the opportunity to wish his brother a happy birthday on the day itself. The next time I checked my messages, there was a message from this individual, with an explanation several minutes long, of why he had forgotten his brother's birthday. Then he went on to explain in effect, how he really intended well and that he actually was a good person.

He had heard criticism for having forgotten his brother's birthday. I had had no such intention. My only intention was to remind him because I knew he would have wanted to call his brother and wish him a happy birthday. My innate affects may have caused me to unconsciously communicate in a tone that added to his response. Of course I could then infer that he felt I was not a good person for making those incorrect assumptions about him. From an objective point of view we can probably guess where that line of communication might end up.

A close friend tells a story about one such misunderstanding. He had just come in from emptying the garbage. His wife suggested he take the garbage out. He said I just did. She said, "No you didn't. It's full." They started to get in to an argument when due to his listening practice he realized what they must sound like. There was too much of a charge on such a simple misunderstanding. Finally he went over to the kitchen garbage can and brought it to her showing her it was empty. She said, "No I meant to take out the main garbage can downstairs." We might laugh about this kind of simple misunderstanding. If we catch it soon enough it is funny. However, it is the kind of simple misunderstanding that a can throw a tense relationship, personal or international, into a crisis.

If I'm hurt and you touch me where I am bruised I might feel that you hurt me and expect an apology. I might go a step further and infer you intended it. Perhaps a more accurate statement might be that you touched me and it hurt. Remember my friend flying the airplane? To clarify communication, whenever possible feedback the communication and do not act on it until it is confirmed. That

quality of attention keeps me from blindly accepting my perception of your intention.

Once you pay attention to the reactivity, once you see it mediating how you receive information, it is a short hop to see how our reactivity colors our ability to make meaning. If we can listen to rather than through our reactivity, we can trace it back, identify it and allow for its interference. We hear a clearer communication with less distortion. We can hear the affects coloring the message.

By including reactivity's contribution, instead of interfering in the conversation the reactivity then becomes part of the understanding we assemble. Only the intention to listen beyond ordinary reactivity keeps me from accepting my perception as your intention.

Listening means ongoing attentiveness, not stopping at the preliminary or even subsequent understandings of a situation or message. It generates learning without end.

Clear and Honest Feedback

Even though someone has an issue they might like to discuss with us, they may feel they lack the skills to handle a difficult conversation. They may never manage the courage to speak up. Or if through frustration and anger, someone finally explodes with their feelings, the message may come out in an offensive way, reinforcing defensiveness and retaliation. At that point open communication is dead.

One of the misunderstandings of this type I'm grateful for supposedly took place in Nazi Germany during the war. Goering commander of the air force was overweight and the story goes, Hitler and those close to him ridiculed Goering for it. He was intimidated and as a result afraid to face Hitler's wrath. Afraid to displease his commander, Goering gave him false information. When Hitler would ask if they had enough planes and resources to successfully attack a given target, Goering always said yes. As a result Germany launched attacks they could not properly support. This caused further debilitation of their air power and hastened Germany's demise.

Creating an environment of open communication is critical to information flow, which in turn affects the success of any project or relationship. Not only does reactivity interfere in the ability to hear; reactivity constrains people's willingness to speak to us. No one wants to give feedback knowing it will result in hostility or defensive repercussions.

In a defensive mode, feedback can be seen as criticism and a suggestion heard as if it were an attack. Reacting in a mode of, 'the best defense is a good offense', we may attack the source of the critique causing people to be less candid with us. In this way our reactivity blocks information before it is given. As a result we receive less information with which to divine a strategy for a given task or life in general.

A new manager who I was coaching told me a story about having given candid feedback to a manager at his previous job. Though the manager had asked for the feedback he did not receive it well. The relationship deteriorated until my client decided to leave and seek employment at a new company.

He was now in a position where his new manager was asking for feedback. Needless to say the previous experience colored the meaning he made of this manager's request. The interesting turnaround in this story was he himself had recently been promoted to manager and was now frustrated that the people he managed would not respond to his requests for honest feedback.

This is a good man. I sincerely believe his only interest was in being a better manager. I am quite sure he would have been very responsible with the feedback he received. However the system in place made it unlikely that he would get the feedback he needed to be the best manager he could be. The inability of the team to share honest feedback debilitated their ability to serve their larger goals.

We began the slow process with his manager and their team of developing an understanding of the risks and benefits of open communication. We worked on recognizing our reactivity and

began some first level skills for handling it effectively. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

If you ask someone for confidentiality regarding information you share with them and they fail to honor your need, how open will you be with them regarding future information? The relationship between authority and responsibility is critical to the success of any family, team, company or community.

How do you feel towards someone who considers your needs irrelevant? How do you feel towards someone, when they oppose you in getting your needs met? In contrast how do you feel toward someone who supports you in getting your needs met?

If we practice listening beyond our reactivity, the limits of possibility expand. Listening creates a state in which we grow and learn together. A sincere intent to listen improves our ability to understand each other, to live and work together effectively. The magic of extraordinary listening has the possibility of creating extraordinary wealth.

Generous Listening

Communication is requests and acknowledgment. As Marshall Rosenberg, founder of the Center for Non-Violent Communication (www.cnvc.org), once said so poetically, “All any one ever says is please and thank you.” Inevitably requests accompany any content communicated even if it is simply, “please receive my acknowledgement.” People are always asking for something.

Either we listen for someone's needs, defend against hearing them or simply ignore them. The skill with which we listen to needs and reactivity, critically affects the tone of any conversation we have. When we listen for someone's requests, we maintain an open line of communication. When someone's needs are respected interference dissolves. Respect generates a reciprocating echo, as does disrespect.

One of the most powerful processes we teach and one of the simplest is turning indictments into requests. If we take the time to

listen, translating statements of blame and judgment into statements about needs becomes a conscious practice. Blame dissolves into a spirit of positive action. When we can listen to another person's statements of blame or judgment as if they were statements of unmet needs, we can help articulate the need. Once interests are on the table they are easier to satisfy.

My business partner taught the exercise of turning indictments into requests to the head of a large energy conglomerate. This executive told him that this one simple process had changed the quality of communication within the executive team and the team's effectiveness had visibly changed.

Looking after our needs at the expense of others we are solving the small equation. Conveying our respect for and support of someone's needs does not mean surrendering our needs. Surrendering our needs creates another form of the small equation. Respect means to look again, it means working together to come up with the best options to solve the total equation.

Primarily people communicate feelings and needs. The difference is sometimes the communication is clear and sometimes convoluted. Direct, honest and clear communication of our needs balanced with diplomacy, sensitivity to their needs, usually works best in asking for what we want.

It is a problem when people communicate in a convoluted manner on purpose. Sometimes however, they may not be clear themselves about what they want or need. They may also not know how to express it. Whatever the reason, when people are unclear it can be like detective work searching around for the hidden needs and requests of the person speaking. Extraordinary Listening implies intentionally listening to understand beyond the communication itself to the meaning and intention behind it.

Once we recognize reactivity in our listening, we can release from compulsively reacting to the reactivity, theirs, or ours as if it were the conversation. If we pay attention to our reactivity, and understand that what we hear has been filtered through reactivity,

we can listen beyond the reactivity. From that state of awareness we can help our partners in communication do the same.

As an act of intent, listening transforms reactivity into information. Without that intent, we do not communicate. Without that intent, our reactivity provokes their reactivity. When that happens, what we call communication is a series of reactions that transmits established signals. It does not create new meaning. Then we are carrying on two conversations where everybody is talking and nobody is listening.

Good clear communication takes tremendous attention and intent. I can almost guarantee however, when your listening apprehends the essence of a communication, when we work together effectively and live together harmoniously because we understand each other, it will have been well worth the effort. Whether accomplishing a specific task or working toward a larger goal of improving our community, understanding is the best thing in the world!

When you put out good energy for people they usually return good energy. When you treat people poorly they usually return your treatment in kind. Listening is giving of yourself and your attention in a way that can help others to listen better. When you fail to listen it does not inspire receptivity. Extraordinary Listening is an act of intent to receive another person's contribution until they feel complete. You know someone feels heard when they finish speaking and want to listen.

Developing Our Quality of Listening

Here are several ways to practice the awareness of the mind body connection in the process of listening. Don't work at them. Playfully explore them to see what insights come to you.

Visualization I

Tensing – Releasing: Picture yourself out in the woods. You think you hear some thing and freeze. You stop to listen, to understand it. There is a tensing to make sure that everything is okay. Then you let go and move again. Watch the process. It is a

pattern. Repeat the tensing and releasing until your sensitivity to your somatic state becomes a conscious practice.

Visualization II

Intent to listen: Imagine you were lost in the woods, listening for the sound of a car, any sign of civilization. Picture yourself listening for the faintest whisper of something that you might recognize. Imagine you thought you heard something very, very far away, so far away you really couldn't tell if you imagined it, or not. Picture the quality of your listening if you were that open, listening with that degree of intensity. Notice it as a psychosomatic process. Notice the changes that take place through the unity of the mind body system.

Intent to not listen: Now imagine that in just a minute there is going to be a very loud noise near you. Can you sense how you might change the quality of your listening to prepare for that? Notice the physical and emotional changes as well as the mental ones.

Learn to recognize and distinguish going from one state --open listening, to the other state -- protecting yourself from input overload. In one situation you are getting more input than you want - you are trying to shut out noise and disturbance. In the other state you want more information and do not want to miss any. Practice shifting from the intent to listen, to the intent of shutting input out. Slowly go back and forth between listening and defensiveness (if I may continue to re-define the word). Listen the way you would to make sure that you do not miss a sound you thought might guide. Then shift to shutting out what someone is saying as an intrusion. Then practice shifting quickly. If you play with this practice you will know when you do which. As a result of that knowledge you will come to choice.

Visualization III

Exploring the empathic connection! Think about people you are open with. Listen the way you might listen to someone you like or someone with credential.

Now think about the opposite way you treat information. Notice the way you might listen to someone who annoys you, whose competence you question or for whom you have no respect. Practice opening and closing your willingness to listen. Repeat the practice until it is so obvious you can see which one you are doing when you do it. Play with doing it on purpose where it is easy. Then practice doing it at will in conversations that matter. Develop listening as a skill, a conscious choice.

Art

We learn most skills in life well enough to function. We learn to walk well enough to get from one place to another. Few of us study movement to the level of a master gymnast or master dancer. We breathe without thinking. There is a study in the science of yoga called pranayama. It is in a sense, the art of breathing. Pranayama takes breathing to a level of awareness, a level of capability, beyond anything imaginable by someone who has not studied and breathes in an ordinary way.

Like the air we breathe, we use our senses so frequently we take them for granted. Listening is such a common everyday experience that ordinarily we listen without attention to the process of listening. We rarely pay attention to the quality of our listening. Imagine elevating listening to an art that improves our lives. If we practice with extraordinary attention, we can transform the power of listening to a level unimaginable by someone who listens at a common level.

A defensive, reactive, isolationist mentality may protect us from some threats, but it will not solve the present challenges that we face. The defensive reaction of hiding in our shell does not work, at least not for the turtle that winds up as turtle soup. It will not work

for two reasons. One, because the world is rife with problems, critical to our sustainable existence, that will not go away. Two, because life is a desire to grow and learn, and that happens through interaction. Listening allows us to share in knowledge, speeding up learning exponentially.

As population density and the speed of communication increases, as our tasks and technology become increasingly complex, the forces driving reactivity will only increase. If we want to understand the world better and interact with it more effectively, we must develop a new level of perception. We need to listen beyond our present skills. Whether your conversation is verbal as in business and education or kinesthetic as in sports, dance and martial arts, listening is the base line of communication.

Our ability to communicate and to learn will develop the awareness that designs the future. As the world globalizes, what will end up creating the greatest wealth will be the spirit in which we connect and through which we transact. Through practice we can gain greater ability to choose our state of listening. Without practice we could not even establish ordinary communication. Why stop just when we approach the edge of the extraordinary.

The most successful nations and societies will interact effectively, extraordinarily effectively, with people from different cultures. The most successful businesses and individuals will be unbound by the limitations of a given culture and see through to the essence of harmonious human interaction.

The knowledge of extraordinary listening will not do your work for you. You still have to do it. You and you alone are responsible for the quality of your listening. If, however, you intend listening differently, the difference will echo in your life. Depending on our intent, listening can be either a way of traveling or just an occasional stop in a foreign land.

Thunder and lightening

Spring tension releases

Rain soaks the earth

In a similar cycle

In a familiar way

Life unfolds anew

Listening in Three Easy Lessons

Listening To Your conversation

Listen to yourself – feelings, thoughts and experience
What is unnoticed? / What is unconscious?

Listening To Their Conversation

Listen to every nuance you receive
What is unsaid? / What is unheard?

Listening To THE Conversation

Listen to the future - the whisperings of creativity -
The edge of perception
What is unknown? / What is unfolding?

Skill 1

Listening To Our Conversation

Listening to Our Reactivity

The first skill is listening to one's self. Applying the principle that listening is an act of intent goes beyond listening to our selves, but it starts there. It includes listening to our content, intent, history and affect. The system of being, thought and action, includes a series of neural-chemical reactions interacting with and triggering thoughts and feelings that stimulate further neural-chemical reactions in a seemingly endless cycle. We react to every stimulus. Then we react to our reactivity. Once we understand reactivity we begin to see it happens to all of us, all the time. It is human nature.

Most of us are not in touch with our reactivity. We do not ordinarily listen to our reactivity. We usually unconsciously express it for someone else to listen to it. When that happens we lose the intelligence reactivity potentially offers our lives. Watch yourself in conversation with others. There are probably topics you avoid with certain people or where you 'walk on eggshells' for fear of activating their reactivity. If we pay attention we can see where we do that with others. Can you identify people and topics where you do that in your life? Given a moment most of us can. What if people could talk together without that impedance?

What we cannot see as well is where other people do this with us. Most importantly we do not see where we do it with ourselves. That blindness affects every aspect of our communication. What if we could use our reactivity as power the way a sailor uses the wind? A good sailor reaches their destination even if the wind is blowing the opposite direction of where they want to go.

Unless we sufficiently value the information transmitted through the emotional affects, we do not learn to pay attention to that information. Where rational thought dominates, value is given to making decisions without emotion. As a result we are not trained to understand the wisdom or the language of the emotional affects. Yet they contribute an important aspect of our total intelligence. Our process would be equally incomplete if we made decisions only from emotion without the rational aspect of the psyche.

The somatic intelligence conveys important information. Depending on how we respond to our reactivity, it can limit our thinking or enhance our intelligence. Yet, we tend to sense it as disturbance and repress it. We do not see it as intelligence. Then, instead of listening to our reactivity, we react to it. Because we are uncomfortable with the messenger, we miss the intelligence of the message. Trying to shut out our somatic experience, which we can't, diminishes our intelligence and our wellbeing. In our tendency to avoid or suppress these subtler processes a part of our creativity is forfeited.

Resistance to the energy of life debilitates us. Resistance to any aspect of our mental emotional reactions inhibits and in many cases blocks creativity limiting our ability to create options and solutions. A sense of not having options produces hopelessness negative thoughts and a victim state of mind.

Listening to our reactivity, including the information it contributes, increases our ability to function in harmony with the totality of ourselves. Without an awareness of reactivity, the wisdom to see its value and the ability to translate its messages into information we can use, we miss worlds of meaning. Learning to process the totality of our listening experience develops extraordinary, wisdom and wealth.

There is intelligence happening at an extraordinary level. The cognitive awareness is only a part of our total intelligence. The psyche extends far beyond what we normally process through the conscious mind. Science estimates we use approximately five percent of our brains. What if we could increase the percentage we 'listen to'? What does that imply about what might be possible?

Listening to our conversation creates an integrated system of body, mind and spirit. Through listening, thinking and feeling amalgamate into a unified field of awareness. Listening, implying paying attention in all domains, connects us with the whole universe, throughout the totality of time-space. The intelligence of a unified field of awareness opens possibilities we cannot yet imagine. New perception previously invisible forms solutions previously nonexistent.

We learn to process our reactivity by sensing its message. Listening to one's self includes reading the inner symptoms of defensiveness and conflict that occur within, as well as externally with others. Extraordinary Listening includes noticing the electrical-chemical conversations, the neural-muscular changes and the emotional responses.

We do not really feel what is going on as we feel. We do not know how we think. We often do not even know exactly what we think. Take almost any word you think you understand. Try and define it precisely and I suspect you will understand what I mean -- sort of.

“ The hardest thing to comprehend is comprehension.”

Einstein

To begin the listening work it is not critical that we delve all that deeply into our process of reactivity. Though the study has value, we do not have to understand its incredible depth and subtlety in order to start. In the beginning it is sufficient that we understand three things. (I.) That reactivity is happening in response to every stimulus whether we notice it or not. (II.) How we process reactivity is affecting our perception. The reactive processes of the soma, psyche and corpus are our perception. Those processes drive the way we make meaning and in turn the strategic thinking that divines our valuing and our action. And (III.) we can affect the effect of reactivity on us. By listening to our reactive processes as a part of the total meaning we form, we vastly increase our intelligence.

The state of presence that I am calling listening includes attentiveness to what is foreground and background within our attention. Extraordinary listening engenders a field of awareness where action, feeling and thinking happen in transaction with each other.

The nature of the ego is that when we exercise it, it takes us out of the present. When we engage in ambitions, anxieties, or anticipations, our ego is skipping ahead, and we miss the guidance of the Creative in the present

moment. When we engage in anger, judgement, and condemnation - whether toward others or ourselves - our ego is looking backward, and we cannot see the Sage's clear solution to the present situation. In either case, the result is misfortune.

If a thought, attitude, or action is not in accord with the principles of acceptance, equanimity, humility, and gentleness, do not indulge in it.

The I Ching, ancient Chinese book of wisdom

Listening to thoughts and feelings together affects the way they interact. Perceiving the signals of the subtle forces, as well as the obvious ones assembles an infinitely greater intelligence. A unified field of attention unfolds an extraordinary awareness.

The listening work changed an experience with a neighbor. We had agreed to meet to discuss a difference of opinion about an issue in the community. In the process I had sent him an E-mail regarding some of the thoughts I had about the issue. I spent a considerable amount of time trying to phrase my thoughts in a way that expressed my concerns about the issue and the community. The message he returned by E-mail said. "I have seen and heard enough of you to know that we have no common ground for conversation. Cancel our meeting." I felt he was shunning me, critical not just of my thinking but also of my being, of my self. I unconsciously reacted in anger and adopted a fighting mode.

'Listening' to my reactive process I realized why the system is programmed to fight rather than experience vulnerability. In a fight for survival we are trained to take advantage of an adversary's vulnerability. It is protective. From early on in our evolution we are programmed to override our vulnerability. We shut down pain and fight back against what ever has hurt us. We deny acknowledging the pain, at least till we have won the fight. Then, when we are safe, we go back and lick our wounds. Anger is a defensive reaction against feeling the pain. It is not conscious. It is a genetically coded survival reaction to the fear of the threat.

As I began to notice my anger I came to realize it was an avoidance of the feeling of vulnerability that I did not like. Based on the practice of listening to my reactivity, I disciplined myself to listen deeply to the feelings that were upsetting me and driving me unconsciously to anger. I did not want to admit it but my feelings were hurt, compounded by the fact that my pride was hurt. I felt this person had demeaned my value as a person. What I heard in their behavior of shutting down our conversation was colored by my feeling shamed, which compounded my reactivity to my pain. At the ordinary level of listening, unconsciously and emotionally I was fighting for survival

The emotional affects his treatment re-stimulated were not pleasant. Due to the awareness described above I understood viscerally the propensity to avoid listening to our reactivity. I wanted to hurt what hurt me, not feel an experience that seemed painful. Before I realized that I was hurt my affect moved into anger. I wanted to fight back against the behavior that had caused me pain, but thanks to the listening work I was able to feel at a deeper level of listening the pain behind the anger.

Summoning the intent to listen to my pain took strength, discipline and courage. As I disciplined myself to listen to my reactive response, my listening reached an extraordinary level. I understood what had happened to my neighbor. He had become reactive because of the experience of past pain around this issue. It had occurred before I had ever moved into the neighborhood. Without realizing it, this individual had assumed our conversation was a precursor to experiencing that pain again. Since he could not listen to his reactivity he reacted to it. The fear became real for him. He had reacted through a typical fight flight response to the fear of pain. In this case he had chosen flight. Maybe I should say flight had chosen him since his reaction was unconscious and reactive.

My neighbor did not know how to listen to his reactivity so he did not have the power to see his process. He did not have the option at that moment in time to see we were not in a fight for survival unless we made it so. We could have been in a dialogue for the creation of mutual wealth but once he believed it was a fight to avoid the pain, his thinking made it so. If it had not have been for my study of

extraordinary listening I would have believed my reactive description also. I would have seen him as my enemy in a fight for survival. My goal would have been to avoid the pain by winning or avoiding the fight before my pain caused me to become vulnerable.

My study allowed me to listen to my reactivity instead of listening through my reactivity. Once I had done so I had the extraordinary experience of hearing, at least in my imagination, my neighbor's process of making meaning.

When we are off base, if we align differently the experience can change significantly. Since my neighbor was unwilling to talk to me I could not express my insight to him. I maintained however, a state of mind where if the opportunity arose I could make an overture of peace. In the meantime I was careful not to send signals of anger that might continue driving his unconscious reactions in the direction of fear.

Living in generous feelings instead of anger was enough to make it well worth the effort I sustained to listen to my reactivity instead of listening through it. In addition I held in my inner conversation the intention for peaceful relationships where otherwise I might have unconsciously added to the war.

Eventually he asked for some help with his house because he knew I had just gone through what he wanted to do and he wanted my knowledge. Because of the listening work I was able to respond positively. We have spoken a number of times and our relationship has continued to improve. When I see him instead of feeling angry or upset I smile, internally and externally. He is a good man and I hope our friendship continues to grow.

I am thankful for the listening work. I know all the great teachers taught that love is the answer, but when the intensity is great and the emotions boil over, that can be hard to hear. The listening work helped me process the energy in a way that allowed me to create something positive that could have gone the other way, something I would have had to live with for a long time. Listening to our reactivity enables us to discern when our fears are more reactive than perceptive.

Our participation affects our listening good and bad. Some days we listen better than other days. On the good days we focus our listening more effectively. We intend to understand instead of defend. On the bad days, often as not, we unconsciously do the opposite, defending instead of intending to understand. We are always moving between increasing reactivity or receptivity. Our position along that continuum is controlled by the quality of our attention, the quality of our listening.

Self-reflexivity

Extraordinary listening is presence in the moment. Have you ever overheard people talking and thought to yourself, if they could only hear what they sound like they would not behave that way? At those moments obviously they do not see themselves with the objectivity that you do. They may or may not know they are out of control but in either case, they cannot correct for it.

It is easy to see the external pressures in our lives but the internal pressures the ones we create for ourselves are almost invisible to us like water to a fish. We are so immersed in our own mode of thought we can't see how thought affects our perception. Instead we project our inner conflict on visible things in the outer world.

We do not see our actions as irrational from an irrational mindset. Acting irrationally means we have lost the power of rational thought. When someone behaves irrationally, colloquially we say they 'lost it' meaning their rational view of a situation. Losing self-reflexivity means we no longer see our interaction, in relationship to a larger context.

As you become self-reflective you increase self-awareness. You can see yourself interacting from more than your own point of view. Self-reflexivity means we can see ourselves participating in the larger environment and complete the feedback loop, which implies acting from a self-reflective state. It means paying attention to experience AND adjusting accordingly. Self-reflexivity generates the power to create intelligent change.

As a species we are so busy doing, we don't seem to notice our quality of being. When we talk we usually fail to listen to how we sound. During an intense situation if we resist the information of the innate affects we lose self-awareness. Only part of the intelligence functions. Have you ever 'woken up' in a conversation and noticed people were staring at you? Have you ever noticed it happen to someone else? You may have gotten loud or said something inappropriate not realizing for a moment where you were. Without paying attention to the emotional content we react without realizing it. Imagine what our behavior might look like to an impartial witness, if there were such a thing.

When the affects hit, their influence on our behavior is powerful. The less aware we are, the more influence they have. Not listening means that we don't sense the experience of our somatic process. We don't hear what's going on for us in terms of how we feel, our emotional content or the physical reactions in our own bodies. The emotional experience that we are having affects the quality of thought. They are interdependent.

How many times have you looked back at your actions and not been able to believe what you did? Did you ever think to yourself regarding your actions, you must have been out of your mind? I would guess all of us have at some point in time said or done something we wish we could take back, something we would have never done in our 'right minds'.

Our state sets the tone or filter through which we describe experience to ourselves, the way we assemble meaning. Input stimulates reactions that we may or may not notice. Without self-reflexivity we accept whatever we feel strongly about as 'the truth'. We cannot sense the reactivity interfering and affecting the way we make meaning.

"When pride and memory argue about what happened,
pride always wins."

Goethe

If you have ever had a conversation with someone about something they did not want to hear, you understand how difficult it is for

meaning to be heard when there is resistance. If we bring our self-reflexivity to bear, we see this is no less true for us than it is for anyone else. Open impartial listening does not just happen. Reactivity just happens. It takes intent to make the shift into a state of listening to our conversation until we are clear enough to hear theirs clearly.

We all lose our perspective on occasion. So we often speak with one another to help with our self-reflexivity. The reflectivity of another is part of why our communication is so important. That is why to it can be so valuable to make the distinctions necessary to improve communication. Listening differs from trying to get someone else to substantiate our thinking.

When we listen to our conversation, we can hear that we filter meaning through the reactivity of the moment. When we listen extraordinarily well we can sense how our present reactivity is based on the past. Failure to listen leaves us continuing a previously designed strategy that may no longer be appropriate to the present moment.

Listening to your conversation means getting in touch with yourself and how you feel. It enables you to know what's going on for you and effectively adjust the way you are participating.

“There is the surface part that a person is aware of, his conscious thoughts. And there's a subsurface part within each person described as repressed or subconscious. We might say he has two bosses. When both bosses give orders the person finds it difficult to communicate.

When there is a conflict between two people they can sometimes settle their differences by communication with each other. They talk things over until there's a meeting of minds. When there are conflicts between the two levels of the person's mind, communication is also needed to settle the differences.

In other words we need to listen to our self."

Ralph Nichols, Are You Listening?

A little attention has enormous value in understanding our natural reactions to surprise, startle and the other innate affects. Since we cannot really see ourselves objectively, self-reflexivity can be like the instrument panel and controls that allow a pilot to fly an airplane when visibility is less than optimal. Operation can only be conducted safely and effectively by continually checking the instruments and adjusting the controls. By paying attention to the symptoms of the innate affects we can see our action in relation to a larger context and improve our alignment to accomplish our intended outcome. With self-awareness we can continually redefine what is significant. We can ask ourselves, "Why are we doing this? Are we achieving desirable outcomes?"

The possibility exists of operating from a state of balance and alignment. But if we lack knowledge of that possibility or we are upset enough not to see it as a choice, it may as well not exist.

Extraordinary Listening implies listening to a larger conversation. It means paying attention to the way that you speak internally and externally. It means listening to your tone. It includes listening to the quality of your attention and listening to the reactivity of the other person as they receive what you say. We usually pay more attention to one in favor of the other. Imagine listening from the 'inside out' and the 'outside in' at the same time, with both qualities of listening informing each other.

The reactivity activated by our response to stimuli interferes in our perception of the subtle forces. Extraordinary Listening is an almost instinctive knowing that any data may change our perception of reality. It is an open state of attention that receives reactivity's message until the reactive response is understood as a part of our intelligence affecting the formation of meaning.

The three brains, the medulla – the reptilian brain, the cerebellum – the mammalian brain and the cerebrum – the human brain, that control thought - feeling – action, vie to be heard. Each gives

witness to its perception. We then get caught in the confusion of which description has what value.

Unifying our higher thinking facilities and our immediate sensory impressions generates creativity. The whole system exhibits intelligence when the aspects are listening to each other. Wonder and inquiry ensue increasing our creativity and with it our freedom to act.

In the listening work we call the automatic action in response to stimuli, reactivity. Sensing to perceive AND translate the stimulus-reactivity process into meaning we call listening.

Sensory Awareness & Defensiveness

Picture the focus of an animal in the wilds, sensing the environment, smelling the air, looking to some degree but mostly listening. It is difficult to sneak up on an animal in the wilds because of the attunement that animals have with their environment. The ones that survive have developed an incredibly sensitive attention. Virtually any stimulation triggers their reactivity. They attend to an electromagnetic sensing of the presence of stimuli that might indicate danger. In the study of animal behavior it is called the proximity sense.

As humans we also have a proximity sense. It is part of our system of awareness. However living in cities, riding on buses and in elevators we have trained to ignore the signals of the proximity sense. In our world because of the quantity of noise and stimulus we shut down a lot of it to block the volume of input.

In order to live in civilized environments we learn not to listen. We shut both stimulus and our reactivity out of our perception because of overload. We do so as an automatic, self-protective reaction. Instead of translating the energy's information into intelligence we defend our attention against its disturbance. It is natural, inevitable to some degree but can be problematic in that the energy of reactivity transmits information if we listen.

The energy that I am identifying as reactivity might also be described as the response of the vital life force. Blocking or ignoring the processes of our nervous systems creates a dichotomy. Every society expects its version of proper behavior and in some form enforces its definition by disciplining those who fail to conform. We are controlled by these expectations both consciously and unconsciously. The confusion between the natural reaction to our energy signals and our conditioning inhibits our ability to effectively process the input our energy response offers. A tension ensues between the natural flow of life energy and the expectation of what we call civilized behavior. As a result the energy gets resisted and repressed. Tension in the system over time causes stress.

Most of us give more attention to 'saving face' than we care to admit. We learn to conceal the innate affects. In public we behave as if everything were fine though we may feel to the contrary. Many of us have perfected our act to the point where we believe it to be true. This causes us to resist recognizing the affects coloring our moods. As a result our internal messages go unheard. When the affects finally get loud enough, their meaning can be misheard as coming from the person speaking.

During the process of assessing the import of stimuli the body-mind system goes on alert. It prepares to defend or attack until the situation has been comprehended and the needed action defined. That can take an undetermined amount of time during which the system adopts a defensive attitude. Since we may not really understand what is going on in a complex situation we may spend long periods of time in a defensive mode. Due to the quantity of stimulus in our modern world we can easily live our lives in a state of defensiveness.

Whether you are actually under attack, or only think you are under attack, the emotional/energetic consequences are similar. Survival mechanisms activate that are artifacts of our evolutionary history and hard-wired into the reptilian brain. They are strongly biased toward defensiveness, resistance and counter-attack. When these reactions activate in a conversation they color the information that

transmits another person's meaning. In that state clear understanding is unlikely.

Flare-ups of certainty chain one to reactive defensive behaviors. Disregarding our reactivity keeps us operating in habitual, self-justifying patterns. Slavery to past meaning causes the repetition of the same thoughts and associated behaviors every time one is placed in "similar circumstances". From a defensive state of attention we exclude new information that could create new meaning and change our strategy. Imprisoned in our systems of thought, we reinforce our convictions making listening, learning and growth difficult if not impossible.

There is only one way out of this familiar cycle, seeing our behaviors without hiding them behind self-protective descriptions and excuses. Choosing to act out of intention rather than react out of habit cannot happen until we see our defensive reactions and understand how they affect our perception. Listening to our conversation includes listening to our defensiveness. The problem is we do not like to think of ourselves as defensive.

Look at the amount spent on defense. It says something about the mentality that creates our world. As thought cannot see itself we cannot see our degree of defensiveness. We do not see it because it is not usually conscious. It is reactive. When we feel a need to protect, it should activate our self-reflexivity. What are we feeling? What do we need, in order to feel safe enough to listen in an open spirit? Defensiveness, if we can see it, should be a sign to check our instruments and adjust our controls. It means we have placed ourselves in opposition to someone else's idea instead of trying to understand their meaning and purpose.

As awareness is curative we should be aware that we are always assessing the need to protect ourselves. Bringing our habits into the light changes their power in our lives. As we pay attention to habitual reactive patterns of behavior, we hear our selves in new ways. Listening to our reactivity allows us to create myriad options and possibilities before choosing action.

Def-con: Seeing our Defensive Reactions

The U.S. Defense Department consciously adopts a posture of readiness based on their assessment of the threat of an enemy attack. This is termed their defense condition or “Def-con”. The defense condition represents the level of expectation of attack. It also represents the readiness to handle an attack.

In the lowest defense condition the reserves are home and most of the planes are in the hangars. At some level the planes are on the runway and fueled up and the reserves are called up. At the next level we go on alert and the planes are in the air. At the next they begin moving toward their targets waiting for the order to attack. At the highest level the planes are on attack run toward their targets.

The armed forces may not be the first thing we think of when we look for models of self-awareness. They do however have a constant monitoring of how defensively they are postured. They do it intentionally. Most of us do not.

Reactivity / Def-con rating:

Attention is always in flow. The simplest distinction in listening to our reactivity is distinguishing between increasing and decreasing reactivity in our selves. Reactivity resisted increases defensiveness.

Think of someone with whom you tend to have strong reactions. Do you recognize your defensive reactions? What are the indicators that help you to identify your reaction? Are there particular situations that cause your Def-con to increase? Assuming your Def-con varies with different people, how do you distinguish the difference?

Rate your def-con in interactions with:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| * your boss | * your spouse |
| * people who report to you | * your children |
| * your competition | * your parents |
| * strangers | * your friends |

We can use our own version of the Def-con scale to distinguish between increasing and decreasing reactivity in ourselves,

particularly when it turns into defensiveness. Here are three examples of Def-con scales to assess your defense condition.

Def-con 1. I trust you will advocate for my needs in my absence.
Def-con 2. I trust you will advocate for my needs in my presence.
Def-con 3. I trust you won't advocate against my needs.
Def-con 4. I fear for my emotional safety.
Def-con 5. I fear for my physical safety.

Def-con 1. Listening
Def-con 2. Impatience
Def-con 3. Resistance
Def-con 4. Excuses
Def-con 5. Quarreling

Def-con 1. Dialogue – open spirit /deep listening
Def-con 2. Conversation – friendly sharing at a safe level
Def-con 3. Discussion – different positions / convincing
Def-con 4. Debate – definite win – lose / evidence and facts
Def-con 5. Arguing – emotional insistence of right and wrong

Intentionally noticing our defensive reactions is a practice. If we do, it develops our awareness. What are the indicators and distinctions you notice within yourself? Create a scale of your own.

Def-con 1.
Def-con 2.
Def-con 3.
Def-con 4.
Def-con 5.

During the cold war, when the United States raised their Def-con the Soviet Union raised theirs and visa-versa. Your Def-con affects those with whom you interact. Do you notice that as people get more defensive, it increases their tendency to attack? So naturally being around someone who is defensive raises your expectancy of an attack and your Def-con increases. As your defense condition intensifies it provokes their defense condition in an ever-increasing cycle. Defensiveness creates a reciprocating echo.

The higher the reactive charge the lower the level of receptivity. Listening brings the reactivity to the surface of awareness. Seeing our level of defensiveness allows us to assess whether our Def-con level is appropriate for the situation. Then we need the technology to be able to communicate to our ‘forces,’ our thoughts, feelings and actions, the appropriate level of response. Then we have the possibility to make choices about the direction of our attention. In the face of reactivity, we either go down the path of increasingly defensive behavior or by intent alone we adopt the path of listening.

Listening Lowers the Def-con

When we are tense, mentally physically or emotionally, we are resistant to listening. Our reactivity shows up in our mood, in the tension we hold in our muscles, as well as the certainty we have in our thoughts. Our muscle tension reflects our reactivity.

Resisting reactivity increases our defensiveness driving the formation of meaning in unconscious ways, creating unintended consequences. In that state, all we hear is our own internal defensive conversation. Listening is the faculty that de-escalates our defensiveness by including the energy of reactivity in our meaning. When the reactivity has been intentionally listened to it enriches the meaning we form. When we are unaware of our reactivity it throws us off course.

Misunderstandings devolve into enmity. Once we are enemies and we de-value each other, our interactions range from subtle forms of sabotaging each other to out and out war. We attack the positions of others preemptively defending ourselves against them. We thoughtlessly drain incredible resources into unproductive behaviors. Emotional, verbal or physical wars may be fought for valid reasons. Too often they are fought based on avoidable misunderstandings.

One day I was listening to a highly respected professor from Yale University on a radio talk show. His credits were numerous, his knowledge voluminous. He was tenured. He had written more books than a lot of people will read. It would seem, if anyone should have felt confidant in who they were, this professor should

have. Yet when a caller spoke with an intense charge of frustration about the professor's lack of recognition for authors from his culture none of that mattered.

The professor immediately got defensive, however his style was a condescendingly civilized and erudite defensiveness. In a rather breathy voice he proceeded to say, "yes my dear I have read all those authors that you mention." The clear message of the communication was, "I am right and you are wrong. My position has value not yours." The hostility escalated, the caller's openly, the professor's disguised.

After several moments of arguing and antagonism the host of the program hung up on the caller who was even more frustrated than when he had started. Without a doubt he was not only frustrated but clearly angry and to my thinking understandably so. The professor was also upset and the tone of the program had been colored. The sadness from my point of view was how useless and unnecessary defensiveness had just created a mini war. Everybody, host, professor, caller and a large audience of people, had been negatively affected.

Both these gentlemen clearly had the intelligence to deal with their reactivity and defensiveness, if either party had seen the option and with it the value in choosing to do so. Instead they reacted defensively rather than intending to listen. They parted feeling more wounded and defensive than when they had started. Both left upset, as I daresay, were the majority of the audience. Intelligence alone is not the solution. It can be used to enhance defensiveness as the professor demonstrated. Shifting the quality of our attention to one of listening is an act of intent.

Not only did defensiveness color the communication of the moment, I venture to say it colored the thoughts of both parties into the future. No doubt the increased charge of frustration, hurt and anger they felt will find its way to expression in some future exchange. Their hypersensitive behavior will continue to increase a cycle re-enforcing defensive reactivity. I couldn't help wondering how many relationships had experienced serious fissures based on

as simple a reactive defensive exchange that in turn became the basis of all future communication.

The input of the caller in the above story stimulated disturbance in the professors thought process. The professor's natural reaction was to get defensive. If he had known the simple principle that listening is an act of intent, he could have chosen to listen and thereby changed the world. Without that knowledge and power he was doomed, as we all are, to continue a cycle of war, pain and suffering. He could have created prosperity and generosity.

Without the self-reflexivity of 'listening to his conversation' the professor's reactivity reacted to the callers reactivity. Defensiveness destroyed the intention to listen and a wealth of learning was lost. These are the outcomes produced by war instead of peace.

All it would have taken was a moment of understanding from the professor. He could have simply thanked the caller for the suggestion without further comment. On a higher level of generosity he could have acknowledged the authors that the caller had mentioned were good authors and thanked the caller. By doing so he could have given validity to the caller and his point of view. The caller would have gone his way feeling that he had been heard and that he had made a contribution, which under his anger was what he wanted to do. The professor could have continued the show knowing he had been generous and that the dialogue had been enriched by positive input, regardless of the callers tone.

If either one of them could have located themselves on their Defcon scale they could have intended to lower their rating, I feel assured their worlds would have been changed for the better. They could have become agents for peace. But the trouble with reactivity is that it sets a process in motion that once you start can be almost impossible to stop.

Defensiveness happens so unconsciously, we can find ourselves miles down the road before we realize we took the wrong exit. If we fail to process our reactivity, we may never find our way home. The action that creates peace is listening. Listening is an act of intent.

Tuning into the source and quality of our thoughts is the practice I call listening to our conversation. In order to listen to my conversation I have to learn to handle the energy of reactivity.

“If you do not take the responsibility for your own reactivity you can be sure everybody else will have to.”

The ability to adapt to a changing situation grows out of exploring alternatives to our common reaction of self-protective defensiveness. We tend to defend against new information as if it were an assault on our knowledge, beliefs or person. An open spirit of listening to unfolding change, produces a natural alignment of our lives and the world.

When someone has something to say and they feel it is not heard, they say it over and over again, probably louder and louder. Once they feel heard, they can move on to something else. In the same way, when we ignore our reactivity it continues to affect us until it is heard. As we experience our reactivity, by receiving it, we dissolve resistance. Listening to the reactivity until its message has been heard completes reactivity’s mission.

Listening to ourselves enables us to see our impulsive, emotional and intellectual reactivity. Feeling the reactions going on allows the information of the innate affects to increase the input from which we draw our picture of reality. Once listened to, the reactivity dissolves into energy potentially available to us as a creative resource. Energy enables and guides us to make needed changes realigning our perception increasing the effectiveness of our strategy.

The somatic awareness that shows up as reactivity is intelligence. What makes input usable to a computer is the operating system that tells it how to understand the data. An operating system that responds to the energy of reactivity by receiving it as data transforms reactivity into information. Attention and open listening utilizes reactivity. Then the energy becomes an ally informing the design of future strategy. Opening to the moment, allowing and fully sensing into experience, appropriate techniques and strategies emerge without limit.

We create meaning with or without intent. Listening generates a state where instead of defaulting to conditioned behavior, action forms out of presence. Extraordinary listening means we are in touch with and attentive to the source of creativity.

Creativity is like bringing something home from the hunt to feed our tribe. Once I sincerely want to listen, then we can explore unfolding ideas together. Bringing together the power of collective intelligence supercedes our abilities as individuals. We can contribute to the wealth of our team, our company, our family and our society. We can function at a level beyond what was possible with ordinary communication.

Notice the Color

Picture yourself in an important conversation or speaking to a large group. Are you aware that the body reacts? Does your volume or tone change? Can you notice how these reactions affect the way something sounds to you and the way you sound to others? Extraordinary listening implies listening to what's going on internally as well as what someone may say.

When something important and or difficult to hear is being communicated, a visceral reaction of energy moves through the physical body. We notice reactivity in others. We can often see when they get defensive, angry, loud etc. It can be obvious when we watch others argue. It is much harder to see it in our selves.

Reactivity is the intelligence of our system communicating to us. If we do not speak the language, the disturbance of reactivity can seem distressing and trigger fear. Then we automatically and unconsciously adopt a defensive posture. Disconnected from attention, our reactivity like an impetuous child, becomes the basis of erratic thought and surges of impulsive and even destructive behavior. In whatever form fear drives us to react rather than listen. The charge of reactivity can electrocute perception disabling our ability to receive or hear anything.

Shutting out its information is a form of war, fighting against. Peace is simply slowing down to listen, attending to what calls you. When we are frightened we need to train ourselves to receive what may seem like overwhelming input. When reactivity happens that is the moment to give the energy of fear a voice in the council as part of THE conversation. That is the moment to increase the level of attention, instead of reactively increasing our defensiveness.

As we listen to our fears and protective mechanisms we bring them into the light. Listening enables us to act with intelligence delineating strategies in the present world, instead of reactive to the past. An extraordinary listening happens when the mind opens its connection to the whole of life. An intense energy of listening is freedom from self-protective reservations and barriers. The process of listening, listens them away. Take a deep breath and open the channels of communication. Intend listening to the intelligence of the energy of reactivity.

Stalk clues of reactivity. Notice the somatic footprints reactivity leaves. These disturbances can be noticed but usually are not. Notice your heart rate, your breath, and your muscle tension. Notice your sense of security, your sense of comfort and ease, your sense of connection or isolation. All these clues reflect somatic activity.

Did you ever have a conversation with somebody and for no reason you intended, end up in an argument with them? There you are all of a sudden entangled in a conflict that no one really wanted to start. Ever get into an argument with someone you love, over something you realized in retrospect you didn't care that much about?

My relationship with my wife is one of the greatest sources of wealth in my life. Though our conversations are generally productive I remember one particular instance where she and I had slipped into one of those potentially contentious discussions. She noticed the reactivity was escalating. All of a sudden she looked at me and said, "You know what? I am upset at this moment. Give me some time to settle down and understand what I am so reactive about."

That was it. The argument was over. By taking a moment, grounding the charge, by paying attention in a new way, she had changed the field of energy, the field of awareness. We had a conversation of our diverse views, not an argument. Her listening to her conversation created an educational exchange leading to learning and understanding instead of war leading to destructive behaviors.

As sunlight is a disinfectant, awareness is curative. Behavior ceases to be unconscious when we pay attention to it. When we intend to, we can notice resistance and reactivity. Consciousness of the reactivity allows us to create multiple options, to see our behavior as a choice. We can then choose to listen. When we listen, we transform our relationship with the reactivity and in turn transform our relationships with each other. Reactivity just happens. Listening is an act of intent.

Assessing a truer picture of what's going on increases our ability to interact effectively with our environment. To interact intelligently implies increasing the level of our attention. Re-assessing how we understand the world updates our thinking and aligns our actions with our intention. It is easy to react to what we first define from a partial read of our perception. It takes discipline and patience to allow the data to assemble a holistic picture before we react. The return on the investment required is however extremely high. The earlier story about hearing what was behind my neighbor's anger changed my world.

The ability to distinguish unfolding meaning from reactive interpretation happens when we listen to our state of being. Extraordinary listening allows us to process reactivity, memory, expectations and content as parts of an exquisite tapestry of meaning.

Listening to reactivity, instead of unconsciously listening through reactivity, allows communication beyond reactivity.

Concentration

The ability to listen requires concentration. Through concentration, awareness is transformed into the power of attention. Concentration enables us to focus our attention on what is being said.

The word concentration means the action of being with center. Concentration means our connecting our internal focus, our central core of being with external interaction without losing attention to either. Connecting our internal sense of awareness with the situation we are engaged in implies knowing which is which. Inter-action implies our participation affects the unfolding of the situation.

Let's look at centering through the physical body and then see if we can apply the principles to the realms of the mind, the emotions and in the realm of the spirit. Here is a quick introduction to centering through a physical exercise.

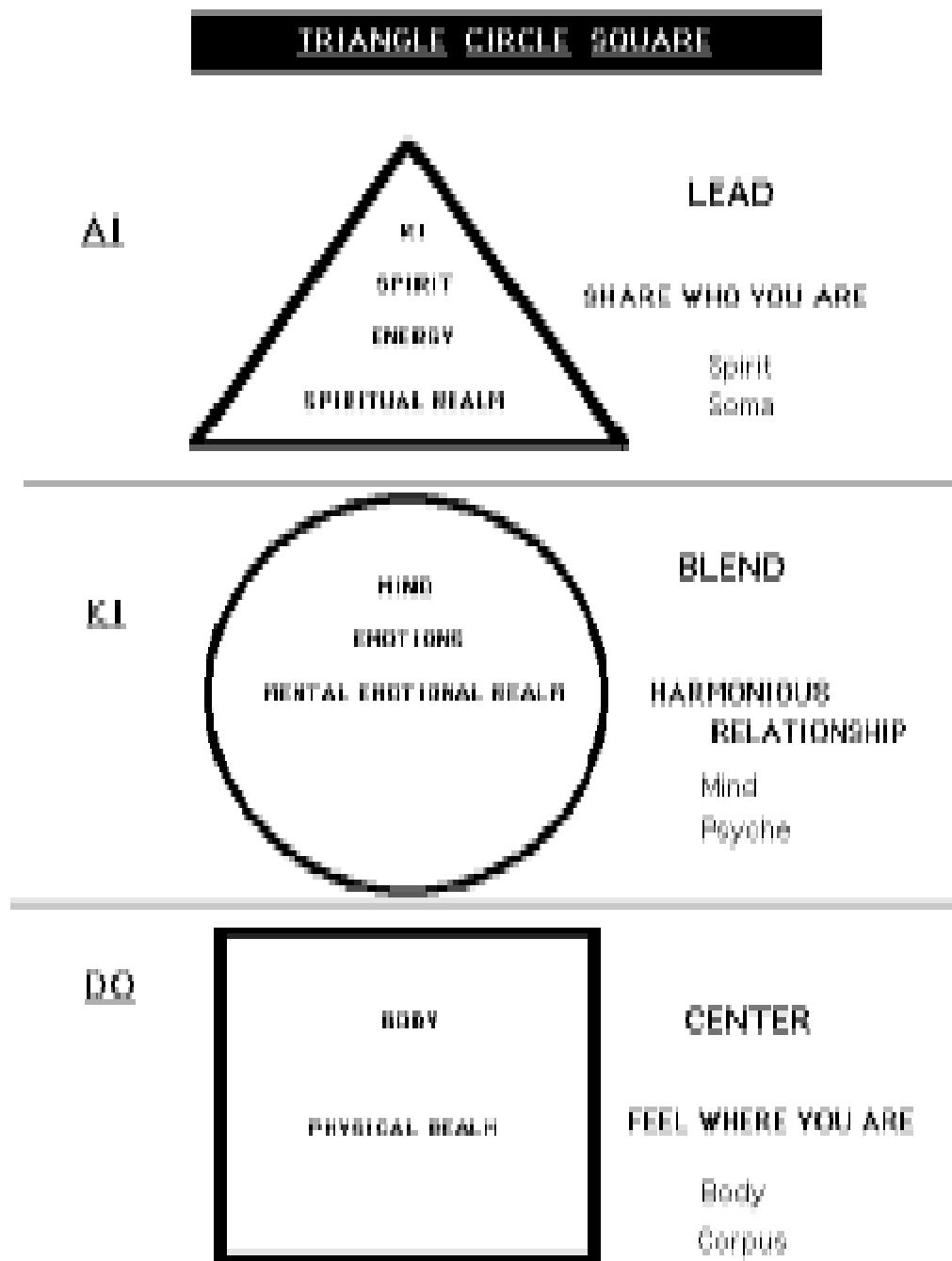
Lean your torso to the right a few inches. Take an extra moment in this position to feel every subtlety in your physical and emotional experience. Then lean to the left paying the same quality of attention. Now rock back and forth slowly and gently between the two directions. Gradually diminishing the degree of leaning let your body come to rest in the center. Notice the difference in feeling when you are off center. How do you know when you locate center? What are the indicators? Practice the exercise in three dimensions left / right, front / back, and up / down. As you repeat the exercise you may notice certain changes.

When I do this exercise with groups and ask how they experience the difference there seem to be several common responses. (a) Physically there is a relaxation of the muscles and the breath releases and deepens. (b) In the emotional realm people describe feeling a sense of ease, more confident and open. (c) In the mental realm people described feeling clearer, more focused, and the sense of a sharper attention.

Off center we are required to tense the muscles to hold our bodies in an unbalanced posture. As the tension increases we compensate by physically contorting our bodies adding to the tension. Tension builds gradually over time making it possible to become so accustomed to our state of muscle tension that we do not notice it.

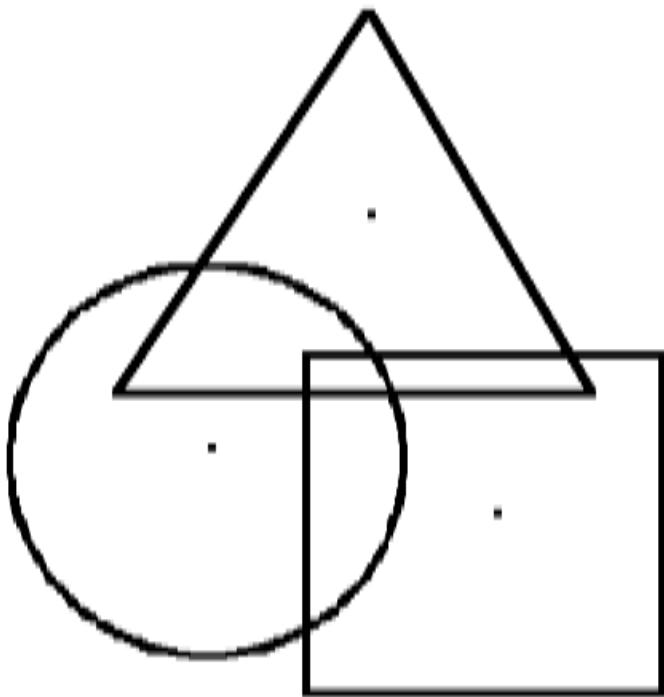
Our thinking and our emotional tension can similarly be invisible to us.

Look at people's posture and facial expressions under stress. We quite literally get bent out of shape. We get bent out of shape emotionally as well as physically. If we do not correct we calcify in these attitudes and postures.



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A BAD DAY

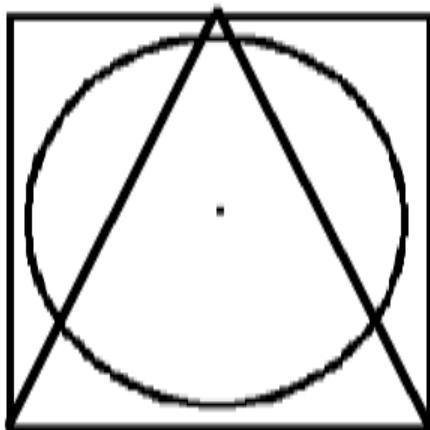


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When we center physically the body comes into a balanced alignment. This allows the muscles to relax and let go of holding against gravity. When we align a centered posture the skeletal structure supports our weight and the muscular system can release any excess muscle tension. Centering produces balance. When we center, we relax. When we relax our energy flows. As we relax we free up the held energy for intentional use.

When we are off center emotionally we have a hard time being effective in any relationship. Posture, physical alignment echoes in one's mental, emotional and spiritual alignment. As attitude affects posture, posture affects attitude. Centering emotionally we feel a confidence and security allowing attention to focus on listening rather than defensiveness.

A GOOD DAY



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Who I am, how I move and where I choose to go in my life affects and reflects my thoughts, feelings and sense of self. Change any aspect, physical, mental or emotional and it affects the whole system. When you change your relationship to center, how you feel

and how you are changes your relationship to any situation. In a larger context our relationship with the universe changes.

Morihei Ueshiba O Sensei, the founder of Aikido showed abilities that seem like miracles compared to an average person. He was able to handle multiple attackers with seemingly little effort. He emphasized centering, unifying mind, body and spirit as the fundamental principle of his ability. When a student said, "It's easy for you. You are always centered." O Sensei responded, "My students think I'm always centered. However, that is not true. I get off center as frequently as you do. I simply recognize it sooner and get back faster."

I have worked with a number of executive teams in a broad array of industries. A majority of the work was in high paced start up environments in the Cellular Telecommunications Industry. As part of the leadership development work we taught executives to center as individuals and with their teams. One group under tremendous pressure reported facing a difficult situation where everyone started talking at once and no one was listening. One of the members remembered the centering exercises we had done with them and caught the group's attention. He suggested they take a minute and get centered. The team agreed and took a moment or two to shift in to a more centered state of attention. They handled the conversation well and solved the problem. Centering made the difference in helping them respond effectively to the crisis.

One of the personal clients I coached was the president of a large startup. He headed the main division of a nationwide telecommunications company based on a new technology. He was on a conference call using their new technology to communicate with a large group of potential investors during the IPO of their new venture. There was difficulty with the technology and the call was scrambled. When they were able to re-establish the connection he went on to complete the conference call in a calm and centered manner with focused concentration on the important aspects of the conversation.

After the call was over both the chairman and the president of the parent company called to complement him on his demeanor. They

could not believe the way he responded so calmly under such tremendous pressure that could have meant life or death for their enterprise. Earlier on they had teased him about the centering practices that he had insisted his team do. They changed their tune and said it obviously had had an effect. This company grew to a market value of over twenty billion dollars.

Another story that demonstrates the power of centering and its effect on listening took place during the international peace building work that we did in Cyprus. It was one of the first sessions where the groups from both sides of the conflict had been brought together. It started off very well but at one point the conversation began to heat up. The volume of reactivity began to increase and take on a hostile tonality. The participants were beginning to stand up and shout. The chances for any progress seemed to be disappearing quickly.

We had trained the leader of this session in centering and she had taught centering to both groups when she had worked with them separately. She asked them for their attention and reminded them of the centering practices. She suggested they take a moment and get centered. They did and the demeanor of the conversation changed to one of reconciliation. The group remembered the purpose of their work, began listening to each other and went on to have a very successful joint session, the first one of its kind in Cyprus.

Being off center is not really the issue. We are thrown off center continually. An airplane going from San Francisco to Honolulu is off course ninety percent of the time. It is, however, constantly re-aligning. Otherwise it would end up at a very different destination. Listening corrects your course. When you are really listening to what's going on in your experience you are constantly adjusting, using information in a very positive way. In touch you will naturally make corrections towards a direction appropriate for you.

It is not the correcting that is hard. Centering is easy to do. Seeking a balanced state is natural and effortless. Similarly it is not listening that is hard. The difficult part of the practice is we lose touch with ourselves. Out of touch losing our center and with it our concentration, we fail to re-center. The challenge is presence, ongoing

attention. A state of presence requires continually returning to our experience at each moment. That level of ongoing attention requires intention and training.

At some level of pressure we go into control, avoidance or overwhelm. Some people are not sensitive to how they feel or interact in the world. They lose center and don't realize it.

Conversely some people are so sensitive they can hardly function in the world. Everything throws them off center causing them to avoid any intense situation. In both cases it is a misunderstanding.

Centering develops both sensitivity and strength and balances them. Training enables us to increase our sensitivity and focus our awareness.

We handle emotionally difficult situations better on some days than on others. Through practice the shift into presence goes from taking a moment, to an instant. Occasionally in life, things happen so fast that we do not have that opportunity. More often than not, we can take a second, line up to a better state of awareness and function more effectively. If we are conscious of the choice and the process, we can unify thinking and feeling and operate from our totality instead of operating 'out of sorts'.

It only takes an instant to lose our concentration but it also only takes an instant to re-connect to center. We can straighten our posture and settle our energy and find a place of concentration where we feel creative possibility in listening to each other.

Centered, people or situations do not scare or intimidate us the same way they do when we are not based in our power. Presence allows us to listen creatively.

Centering affects one in relation to the degree of precision with which we center. Practice over time develops a higher degree of sensitivity and produces increasingly refined states of center. We go from sensing being off center by inches to fractions of an inch.

In the early stages of training, unifying mind, body and spirit may take a moment. With practice we return to a centered state faster. It becomes a few seconds, then a fraction of a second. Eventually correction occurs during the action or conversation. When we notice the signs of reactivity and defensiveness and simply re-align.

Spiritual training should enhance our ability to function at peak state. To function effectively, I need to feel if I am 'off base' or 'right on' physically and emotionally. Once I tune into my state I know how to center. Centered I naturally act in harmony with myself. From a centered state, not only are we more effective, our authenticity guides the direction of our lives.

Physically when we lose regain our balance walking or riding a bike the process occurs so fast, thought if there is any, shows up after the correction. We may not think about it but we have practiced quite a bit to receive the messages of our 'proprioceptive awareness' - action without the separate process of thought. If we bring a greater attention to centering in the mental, emotional and spiritual realms perhaps we can develop our skill in those domains to a proprioceptive level as well.

Off balance we bring less ability to any situation. When we are off balance we can be pushed around easily. This is as true emotionally as physically. When anyone is off center they are more vulnerable to outside influence. Sales people are taught to take advantage of ambivalence in a prospective buyer's thinking. They learn to press for the sale when the customer is vulnerable -- when they are off center emotionally. When I studied centering through the art of Aikido, my teacher admonished us, "Don't sign a contract in the middle of a rush."

My yoga teacher used to share a similar teaching in another way, He used to say, "Don't do anything under pressure." How often after being pressured into a decision, have you wished you had acted more slowly? How often have you reacted in a situation only to wish you could make the choice over?

Situations of greater pressure require a higher degree of center. The faster a potter's wheel goes the more centered the clay on it needs to be or it flies off the wheel and ends up spattered on the walls. When the energy of stimulus startles us reactivity increases. The pressure on our system throws us off center. As our reactivity speeds up our minds we get frantic. We 'lose' it. We end up with defensive, 'off the wall' behavior. As we handle increasing energy, reactivity and

power, we require increasingly precise attention to center to handle the intensity of the pressure.

When mind and body cannot communicate we get ‘out of sorts’ and act incoherently. When we are in resistance to and pushed around by our energy and emotions, we lose touch with our essential self. We cannot access the sensory input that we need to assess a situation intelligently.

Aligning a centered relationship between the mind and the body can happen almost instantaneously with practice. In the beginning, however, it takes time to *feel where you are*, another phrase I use for listening to our conversation (see Life in Three Easy Lessons: Aikido, Harmony and the Business of Living, Zanshin Press). The practice of centering enables us to respond to the pressure of stimulus and reactivity and design intelligent action.

When we *Feel Where We Are*, the practice connects mind, body and spirit into a unified field of consciousness. We hear any conversation differently because in a centered state we are different. Centering means our perception is different. As our perception gets clearer the decisions we make are different.

Startled we tense up whether it is appropriate or not. The awareness that enables us to center ourselves physically resonates throughout our beings centering the mental, emotional and spiritual realms. Centering automatically aligns a harmonious relationship within and without lowering our Def-con and allowing us to listen without resistance. Centering generates the concentration needed to handle life’s complexity.

Step one in achieving concentration is the shift of awareness into direct connection with present experience. If you hold onto the past, long for the future or resist the present, you war with the universe. We do not function at our peak regretting the past or worrying about controlling the future. Presence develops by ‘feeling where we are’, continuing to focus attention on our experience and the state of our energy. ‘Feeling where you are’ frees you from holding on to where you were. Every spiritual teaching teaches a similar principle. “Be here now. Be in the moment.” Presence is fundamental to ability.

The ability to center in the face of pressure is power because though the stimulus may seem external our reaction is internal. Continually entering into the moment means awareness and sensing increase and with them perception. Our acuity is sharper. Our life seems simpler, less confusing. The edges, the defined limits of our identities open, expand outward and our boundaries become more permeable. Connection increases to what we once called the outside world. With intention we could take an extra second and shift into an attitude of extraordinary listening. The outcomes in the world are an after-effect.

Chris, my business partner, used to coach the staff at a hospital. One nurse he had worked with came back to him with this story. I think it exemplifies in another way how our state of being influences more than we usually notice. She worked on the maternity ward. She said that whenever she came into work inevitably one or more of the infants would be crying. If she would try to calm one down another would start. She would get hurried and more of the infants seemed to get upset.

One day after studying the practice of centering she decided to try it in her world. She said when she came on to her shift several of the children were crying but she took a different approach. She brought a chair in and set it in the middle of the room. She started her centering practice and used her breathing and their crying as a listening practice. After a moment or two she could feel that she was much calmer. She was more in touch with herself and felt empathetically connected to the little ones. In another moment all the children quieted down.

A leader has the same potential in an important meeting. That meeting might be a business team and it might be a family. The pool of energy is the same. Centering changes the experience of communication, for us and those around us.

If we sit quiet, we notice how actively our mind behaves. For some of us and at certain times just sitting still can be difficult at first. Relaxation happens in stages. Gradually we become more aware of our internal conversation, our breathing, our emotional state, our state of mind. After a few moments the pieces come together.

Please don't misunderstand. It is not as if once I learned how to breathe correctly then I wouldn't have to do it again. The practice is centering, not being centered. The practice is concentrating, not being concentrated. The shift from defensiveness to one of listening is an ongoing practice.

Centering / listening is like breathing.
Once in the morning is not enough.

(Excerpt from, The Power of Harmony In the Realm of the Spirit: Quantum Aikido and the Unified Field, Zanshin Press)

The Breath as Dialogue: Breathing as a tool for listening.

We can use listening to our breathing to practice relaxing and receiving input. The exercise has two phases, one external the other internal. External breathing is the movement of the air into and out of the lungs. Internal breathing is the absorption of oxygen into the blood and individual cells. External breathing is easy to sense. Internal breathing is infinitely subtler. In the beginning of listening to the internal breathing the experience verges on imagining the sensations but they become increasingly distinct with practice.

The breath, usually an unconscious act, affects us differently when we make it a conscious practice. Feel the impulse that activates the breath. Are you listening to it? If the impulse to breathe is vague hold your breath a few seconds. It gets very obvious. Receive its guidance in terms of how fast and how deeply you breathe.

Relax into allowing the rhythm and depth of the breathing to match the impulse activating the breath. An ease of breathing comes from being in sync with the impulse that activates the breath. The breath seems to breathe itself. When we breathe in sync with the natural impulse of the body, we do so because we are listening. Breathing becomes a different experience in a state of receiving. So does listening in any other domain.

Phase II

Sense into the breath as if you could feel breathing at the cellular level. Which areas of the body does the breath seem to vitalize? Are there areas where it does not seem to penetrate? When we feel the muscle tone change, when we let go to the change and we take part in the change, I call that listening. Going with the flow does not mean 'hanging out' around the flow. Going with the flow is not a passive 'giving up' to the flow. Listening implies you have to be present, involved and engaged. Listening starts with contributing the energy of attention to an experience and it completes when attention is altered through the experience of listening.

Excited – Breathe and relax

Distracted - Feel and center

Defensive – Empty and receive

Excited, distracted or defensive - breathe, feel and empty. Listening does not occur in an ungrounded state.

Emptying

There is a story about a Zen master filling a seeker's teacup. He pours until the cup is full and continues to pour as the tea spills over until the student yells, "Stop! The cup is full. It can't take any more." The master says, "Likewise your cup is full. If you wish to learn you must first empty your cup."

Watch yourself in a conversation that is important to you. Especially when you're stimulated in a conversation, notice how the affect of excitement can make it hard to listen. When you find yourself interrupting someone unable to listen you are too full of your own thoughts to hear. To listen you need to empty your cup.

The reactive mind is full of its own activity. It can confuse our ability to hear what is being said. Marshall Rosenberg who I mentioned earlier (p. 61) tells the story of inviting two at risk youth who were standing back with their arms folded to come over and join a class he was teaching. They did not respond. He asked them what they heard. They replied, "You told us we had to come over

and sit down." What they heard was someone bossing them around. We tend to hear what we expect to hear.

Congress is a classic example of full cups, fixed mindsets and an inability to listen. The Clinton impeachment debacle exemplified this perfectly. After many months, hundreds of hours of debate, tens of thousands of pages of documents, millions and millions of words and tens of millions of dollars; the vote they took probably ended up within one vote of where it would have been, if they had voted immediately after the issue surfaced. This is so because all anyone did was posture and pontificate. Nobody listened. And everyone was so busy talking so emphatically, they couldn't even hear that they weren't listening.

Communication doesn't mean anything, if nobody is listening!

Congress is so strange. A man stands up and speaks. Nobody listens and then everyone disagrees. Now everybody likes to pick on Congress because it so easy. Still, they do represent us. The propensity exemplified in their behavior exists in all of us. We accept input that confirms what we believe. We tend to adapt input to support the meaning we have already defined. Input that does not support our beliefs and that we cannot adapt we simply discredit and ignore. In one way or another we shut down information that disturbs our beliefs and our thinking. Or we hear it to mean what we want it to mean.

I love the story about a woman who came up to Sir William James after he gave a speech on the cosmology of the universe. She said, "You are wrong Mr. James. It is not like that at all. The world is a crust of earth that rests on the back of a gigantic elephant that stands on the back of a gigantic turtle. James asks, "And what is that turtle standing on. "Why Mr. James, another turtle of course", she says with a sly smile. Not wanting to crush her with his vast scientific knowledge, James politely asks, "Yes, and what is that turtle resting on Madam? She says emphatically, "It's no use Mr. James. It's turtles all the way down!"

I was visiting a Hawaiian friend. We went down to the beach to play music with several of his friends. I started playing a chord

progression that was unfamiliar to one of the guys. He started to play one he was familiar with assuming that was what I had started playing. We all do this to some degree or other. In the absence of understanding we fill in the blank. We impose our own meaning on experience.

Emptying releases tension in the body and fixation in the mind. It opens our thinking and clears emotional content. Emptying creates an unencumbered state that minimizes the way we tend to color meaning. It does not mean the reactivity has gone away. Listening is a state in which the reactivity is included in a larger tapestry of meaning.

Listening is an ability to suspend the, "I know," long enough to learn something. When we have emptied, people can talk to us without having to swim upstream against our emotional charge. Emptiness allows the space for apparently inconsistent ideas to cohere into new meaning.

Emptying is an essential skill to listening. It is both simple and sophisticated. Most of us can relax a little and let go of some of the tension we hold muscularly. It is a simple process. Yet we do it infrequently. We rarely practice it with the intention of developing the skill to a higher level. A master of Tai Chi or yoga has taken relaxation to levels of mastery that transcend ordinary abilities.

To empty our selves of opinions and beliefs and experience the world anew at each moment is an infinitely subtle and sophisticated practice. To empty our selves of attachment to mood and listen, until the forces of reactivity source power instead of debilitate it, is a life long study. It is difficult but valuable beyond measure.

Listening describes how perception and meaning bring us to the point of action. The effectiveness of action depends on the quality of perception and analysis. When our state becomes clear enough and the aspects of body, mind and spirit unify, listening includes data beyond the five senses. Listening means developing ongoing attention and describes a spirit of learning without end.

Reactivity colors the meaning of what we are receiving. When we are not conscious of it we have no power to correct for the interference. Reactivity happens. The subtler the dimension the harder it is for us to see. Our experience all too quickly devolves into a description that we make about what happened. Most of our description is based on habit. We all tend to hear songs we know. Listening is a different process. As such it creates a different reality.

In ordinary listening we equate how we experience the world with reality. Our system of thought becomes so dominant that it can claim not to exist and believe itself. The more cherished our beliefs the harder it is for us to look at them. Developing a healthy spirit allows us to listen in a clearer state of emptiness where we can listen for meaning and deeper understanding.

Unless we study some form of listening at an extraordinary level we cannot distinguish what happens from our reactions to it and the descriptions we make from them. We carelessly assume our description is what happened. Even though we may be able to understand the theory behind what I am describing, at the speed of life it can be almost impossible to maintain the distinction.

It is difficult for us to go deeply into the inquiry that unlocks the structures of thought and the hold they have on our thinking. We must intend to listen to our own prejudice. If we do not it runs us blindly. However, once we start to notice these reactive behaviors they become increasingly visible to our perception. As we notice them, we may begin to recognize how much our listening could improve.

We probably already know that we don't listen that well, so we try to make up for it by talking a lot.

*When the inner dialogue stops
the world collapses
and extraordinary facets of ourselves surface*

Castenada's Don Juan

Exercises for Emptying

Here are three exercises for emptying. They combine breathing practices and visualization.

I. As you breathe in, imagine all the reactivity you can sense within you being drawn into the air in the lungs. Hold the breath in for a second. Then consciously exhale clearing reactivity from you. Do this once or twice exhaling forcefully. Intend clearing your mind/body/feelings. As you practice clearing your reactivity with the breath, pay attention to any change in your somatic awareness and muscle tension. Notice if changes in the way you feel affect your ability to listen in an open state with less static interfering in the communication.

II. Again using the breath, breathe in. On purpose tighten your body up slightly to simulate being startled and tense. By exaggerating the tension we become more aware of it. Then relaxing as you exhale picture all that tension and reactivity draining out of your feet (if you are standing) or your sitz bones (if you are sitting) into the ground until there is nothing left. Repeat as needed.

III. Recall an empty time. Did you ever have a day or an afternoon where you were free of obligations? Can you remember enjoying free time with nothing to do? Remember the sensory imprints, sounds, sights and smells. Bring back as best you can the feeling of a relaxed empty time. Amplify the feeling.

IV. Taking a long deep breath slows our minds down slightly, grounding the charge of reactivity and allowing us to relax a bit. As we relax we listen at a new level of perception.

Doing these exercises once is an experience. Practice means doing them repeatedly. With practice, the process of emptying develops to a level of skill that exceeds what we might imagine possible.

Listen

I do not know if you ever examined how you listen, it does not matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind in the leaves, to the rushing waters, or how you listen in a dialogue with yourself, to your conversation in various relationships with your intimate friends, your wife or your husband...

If we try to listen we find it extraordinarily difficult, because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our background, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate we hardly listen at all to what is being said...

In that state there is no value at all. One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of attention, a state of silence, in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me, it is possible to communicate.

. . . real communication can only take place where there is silence.

Krishnamurti

Skill 2

Listening To Their Conversation

Listening to Their Reactivity

Extraordinary listening as an act of intent begins by listening to our conversation. The second skill set of extraordinary listening, I describe as listening to their conversation. It implies the quality of attention that we give to the incoming energy from another person or any external source. It includes listening for content, intent, history and the inevitable reactivity that accompanies any human activity.

Seeing our reactive processes, it only takes a small step to understanding they happen to all of us, all the time. The system of neural-chemical reactions, thoughts and feelings goes on in everyone with whom we speak. Our reactivity to every stimulus includes reacting to their reactivity stimulating further reactions in a seemingly endless and potentially ever increasing cycle. When we learn to listen to our reactivity it helps us to listen to theirs instead of mistaking their reactivity for their intent.

‘Reactivity stimulates reactivity.’ Extraordinary listening allows us to de-escalate the process of taking reactivity personally and responding defensively. Instead we can create an atmosphere of listening and creativity. Intending to listen generously allows us to process the energy of reactivity effectively. Developing the skills of listening allows us to consciously choose between peace and prosperity or conflict and destruction. Without the ability to listen our reactivity chooses our destiny for us. (See below War and Peace and Wealth, p. 160)

Conversation & Intent

The word converse derives from a root meaning to turn towards together. In a conversation we intend affecting the unfolding development of the conversation and the situation. Our sense of the

purpose of conversation, however accurate, changes how we listen. When we change our listening, we change communication. We change what is possible.

Listening on multiple levels, to reactivity as well as the content helps everyone involved understand an increasingly coherent perception of the forces at play. If we listen for their purpose or purposes with extraordinary attention, we may understand more than they may have the ability to sense or articulate.

People do not always say what they mean. Often they do not know themselves. Sometimes people think about what they want to say beforehand. Often people speak without being clear about their intention. Some times we speak to understand ourselves. Clarifying what they want, whether they are clear or not, is the art of listening to their conversation. We do it not just for them. We do it for ourselves as well. Extraordinary listening offers us a richer field of meaning.

Clarifying intention focuses the investment of attention and increases effectiveness. Producing desirable outcomes is easier when you are clear about what you want to produce. Identify what success looks like and you are more likely to achieve it. Clarifying intention belongs equally in the art of listening to your conversation. I mention it here because it is so critical in understanding the message of another person. Listening to their conversation implies understanding more than their intent. But it starts there.

People communicate for various reasons. Sometimes we speak to communicate information for action, learning and creative process. Sometimes we seek reflection. The triangulation between our perception and that of another allows us to cross check the meaning we have assembled. It allows us to assess our alignment on an issue.

People converse to confirm our information or our thought process. We seek to validate our thinking and our value of being. We connect to receive acknowledgement. We want to know that our name is on the tribal roster, that we are seen and that we count. We

speak to connect with another person, to set the tone of our future relationship. Conversation serves both a civic and a social function.

Conversations complete when the communication satisfies the different reasons people converse. Listed below are seven distinctions, seven possible descriptions of why we converse. It is possible, in fact common, to have multiple purposes for a conversation. Each may have several sub-sets but these are the basics.

- Conversations for action
- Conversations for learning
- Conversations for creativity
- Conversations for connection (and understanding)
- Conversations for acknowledgement (and status)
- Conversations for validation (and triangulation)
- Conversations for distraction (and enjoyment)

People speak to fill an infinite variety of needs. By listening we satisfy many of them; listening is what makes satisfying the rest of them possible. Listening includes much more than receiving transmitted data.

There is so much being communicated that is not being said. We need to listen beyond what we hear. The spirit of our listening, a spirit of wonder, a willingness to visit new worlds, allows us to hear beyond what we might expect, affecting all the interactions that follow. We generate value from sharpening the focus of the lens of attention that is our listening. When our ability to listen to their conversation is extraordinary it can change the way they can hear themselves.

Connecting

Traditional communications training describes two forms of speech. One is to inform and the other to persuade. These are in the realm I call civic. Important and often overlooked is the need to connect. Connection with one another is basic to life and our larger community. We frequently overlook the importance of connection

much like we overlook the power of listening. Listening creates the connection that turns speech into communication.

The universe is a system of inter-related forces. Connection is the baseline. Nothing exists in isolation. The isolation that people experience grows of a failure to listen to the connection they have with each other, the planet and the forces that create and sustain the universe itself.

From herd to group, from tribe to society, the quality of our life together grows from the quality of our listening. I told the story earlier (p. 16) of a group of doctors and nurses where someone said, “Is there any value added from listening?” No one challenged the statement! As the story exemplifies we believe transmitting the content, issuing directives and taking action to be important. Connection is assumed or ignored. Listening is invisible.

Think about it. Imagine the quality of conversation over a phone system that you could only speak into and not receive. Imagine speaking into your phone without dialing, with no one picking up, with no connection. Until it is established, the connection is fundamentally important and remains so throughout the transmission. Since connection makes the transmission of content possible, the quality of connection determines the quality of transmission. The quality of connection is equally important on the receiving end.

In many conversations the need to connect stays below the surface. In a love relationship the connection may seem to be more important than the content, though the divorce rate may hint otherwise. In a business relationship we may presume the opposite. I have learned to listen differently.

Being Seen and Being Heard

In professional environments people often assume we came for work not to socialize. That assumption may lead us to believe the need for connection is not important. Before I understood the importance of the process of establishing connection, I sat in meetings of executives making decisions about business, watching

behaviors that did not make sense to me. In the middle of a decision making process the direction of the conversation seemed to go askew. Eventually it became obvious to me that something else was going on. Conversations were going on within the conversations that were going on.

Obviously there were issues of influence, power and control. It was not uncommon for people to argue about business strategy or business process. Some of the obvious things causing interference were the issues between people. People playing politics to advocate for their position or enhance the power of their organization within a larger organization happened, although less than I might have expected.

Commonly I sensed people posturing for position, either with the leader or with the other members of the group or for the number of people they will get to hire. I assume most people who have been in these environments have seen similar dynamics. Yet the more companies I consulted with, the more cultures I experienced, the more I sensed what I was noticing was something else. I could tell I was missing something. So I kept listening.

The conversation within the conversation that kept interesting me did not seem to pivot on anything external. All of a sudden someone would be off on a tangent that seemed personal in nature. It seemed off the topic and not about the decision being made. The group would find a way to play catch, so to speak, to digress widely in an informal banter that appeared to come out of a desire for social intercourse.

These were not exactly issues of status, though they probably had to do with being seen as having value. The process I was watching had to do with being seen, as a person. The need for people to feel connected to and part of the group and have the group recognize them as such, seemed to subsume these conversations.

It caught my attention because it happened often when we were under tremendous pressure to resolve issues and had limited time for the meeting. These digressions seemed unimportant until I understood connection. Eventually I came to understand that

because the flow of power is so dynamic and changes depending on many factors, testing and re-setting the structure of how power flows in a conversation was an important and constant subtext.

People were seeking and clarifying their connection with others. It allowed people to feel out where they stood with each other in terms of the critical issues of trust and inclusion. That told them how open they could be and where they could have influence.

When this process seemed to go well it increased connection and with it the group's ability to take risks with each other. Their ability to think outside the box expanded. I began to understand that this process of people interacting to feel a part of the group and to define their position within the group and explore the level of trust, rather than an interruption, was a very important part of the meeting. I worked with teams of varying levels of effectiveness. The phenomenon I witnessed happened more with the good teams. The dysfunctional ones seem to have less ability to open into this quality of conversation.

In meetings the pace of business magnified by the desire to appear competent and knowledgeable can limit dialogue for sharing and learning. Even less time is officially afforded to establishing connection. On the phone you dial the number and wait till someone answers. In face-to-face meetings we establish connection in conversation. Japanese culture has a ritual of conversation that serves the process of establishing connection. They begin with a period of conversation seemingly unrelated to the issues at hand. It is considered uncivilized to fail to prepare the connection before business begins.

Once I understood this process I began to look for ways to honor it before a session. Since they seemed to play catch with the conversation, I might bring a ball to throw and literally play catch with it before the meeting started. People would notice after a moment or two if individuals were excluded and throw the ball to people they might have had nothing to say to in the meeting. It helped people connect. Once the flow of energy started, almost like an engine warming up, communication opened and a deeper listening ensued creating a higher quality of thinking together.

Connecting enables everything else people do together. It establishes a pool of collective intelligence that enables coordinated action. It creates a quality of attention that is not available to the intelligence of the individuals. Creativity thinks in ways beyond what is presently so. Thinking together creatively allows us to move beyond working on what must be done, to exploring the limits of what might be possible. More than anything else, collective intelligence depends on the quality of connection, the quality of listening between people.

The Power of Vulnerability

On occasion I witnessed another interesting phenomena. When we began to talk about the various needs that drove conversations people occasioned a stronger need to publicly deny their needs than to satisfy them. At first this was more confusing to me than anything I had seen previously. As my study grew I realized that verbalizing needs exposes us and makes us vulnerable.

Thus I began to understand our programming for hiding our vulnerability. Until I understood the power of the innate affects I could not make sense out of the behaviors I saw. Once I understood how the affects work I began to understand what a complex and sophisticated process it is to speak with people of differing values. Without trust, vulnerability becomes a serious issue. Truly exquisite creativity cannot happen where defensiveness is the rule and trust is lacking.

The less secure people are the greater the tendency to defend their values and ideas against open examination. Often values and rules remain unspoken. For instance most hierarchical power structures have the unspoken rule that one is always courteous to a superior. Conversely in many cultures a superior may talk however they like to a subordinate. If someone challenges that assumption from a culture where that rule is not sub-text tremendous upset can occur.

When we consider openly what is covert or sub-text we disturb the system. We risk incurring the wrath of those who resist change and feel the need to be protected by the form. Listening to their

conversation includes hearing their needs for safety. When we do, we can extend our regard. Sincere regard allows us to speak in ways that would not be heard without our ability to hear and honor their need for safety. However when we protectively resist our wonder about the possibility of change and improvement, we shut down possibilities that could change the tone and outcome of our interactions.

Frustration and Completion

When you cannot communicate with someone it can be very frustrating. Think of a conversation that matters to you. Imagine someone speaking to you and not being able to understand what they are trying to tell you. Imagine someone not understanding what you were saying or why you felt the way you did. Incomplete communication diminishes trust and increases tension and the feelings of isolation.

Contrast that with an experience that was the opposite. You must have gotten together with somebody you haven't seen since when and the next thing you know it is 3:00 in the morning. You have been talking about everything. You open yourself to their influence in an attitude of trust. It might not have been verbal. You might have been watching a sunset together. And if someone had asked you what you had spoken about you might not even remember the topics. It is likely though you still remember the feeling of connection. When you establish connection with another person tension and isolation decrease. When we listen we feel connected to and a part of what is going on.

In sports events when people cheer together a connection happens where everyone feels part of a larger event. It can be a great feeling for those who participate. It can diminish the feeling of isolation.

Intimacy comes from sharing deeper aspects of our selves with another person and being received. Being received by another makes it possible to receive our selves in a deeper way. Both intimacy and listening imply an opening to the world, connecting with other people, a larger community, and a sense of being part of

life on the planet. That is why listening is so important to peace and prosperity.

We want intimacy, yet we protect ourselves from it. Someone getting close physically, emotionally, even mentally, triggers reactivity. There is a natural tendency to assess the need for protectiveness when someone or something encroaches on our space. Once the affects ignite, our protective defensive reactions happen automatically.

Listening to your conversation is important because self-awareness makes listening to their conversation possible. When connection to what is essential for us, has been developed to a level of comfort and trust, we can open ourselves to listen to what is significant in the conversation of another without fear. When we lose our connection to our self then we fear being manipulated. That anxiety diminishes when we are grounded in our own experience, truly listening to our self.

When we are secure in our ability to stay in connection with our conversation, we naturally connect with one another. We can listen to their conversation without self-protective reservations and barriers. As the intimacy increases the intention to listen must adapt balancing listening to their conversation with listening to ours. In touch with our own listening someone's influence does not threaten. It enriches understanding. Staying open and continuing to receive is a developable skill, an act of intent.

I spoke once in a community meeting. My position upset many of the participants. Inevitably I triggered the reactivity of people who were frustrated and scared. Several people reacted angrily. They obviously did not understand why I had taken the position. One called me a hypocrite. I could have gotten angry. Instead the study of extraordinary listening allowed me to hear his need for more information. After the meeting I went to speak with the individual. After hearing the information I shared, he apologized shook my hand warmly and said, "I just didn't understand this coming into the meeting."

Fearing that my comments would be related incorrectly to others not in attendance, I sent out to a letter to clarify my position. The same individual I spoke to at the end of the meeting sent me a letter that though not really unkind was clearly frustrated and somewhat angry. It started with the phrase, “Are you nuts?”

Luckily I was in a good mood when I received it and due to the listening work could get beyond my immediate reactivity. So instead of being offended I was compassionate. I somehow sensed this person had a sincere heart. So I wrote him back thanking him for asking me rather than by telling me. I also told him I thought nuts was rather a kind word and that if I had been angry I was sure I would have gone quickly to a word like stupid.

Though I was clear with him that I would continue to exercise my rights I thanked him for the note of kindness that I could find in his letter regardless of the sarcastic tone. I shared my disappointment that our differences in viewpoint had prohibited him from seeing me as a person who was simply trying to find a solution. I then extended to him an open invitation to contact me. I suggested that if he would be willing to talk with me I would buy the coffee.

At that point I had an occasion to go out of town to teach at a friend's school. During my visit with my friend he gave me some very honest feedback. He said that I was taking out my frustration on him and asked me what he had done to deserve it. In the process of explaining what I had been going through I began to look at myself. It helped me see I was letting my reactivity and defensiveness decide the course of my life. I apologized and asked him to forgive me, which, he generously did.

I thought I had been handling the frustration and anger that had been building up inside me fairly well. Thanks to his feedback I felt challenged to do considerably better. That intention allowed me to listen and hear the interaction of my reactivity with the group in my community. My empathy and compassion increased and my anger diminished. I began to feel a generosity of spirit that had clearly been lacking when my friend pointed out to me how I was behaving. I returned from my visit in an open state and I acknowledge him for his contribution in helping me make that shift.

When I got home the next night there was a message from the individual I had written the letter to, accepting my invitation to coffee. We got together several days later and had what I will describe as a very good conversation. We both took responsibility for our relationship, got to know each other a little better and left on a note of friendship. I have the warmest feelings in my heart for this individual and the sincerest respect that he would spend the time with me to allow us to get to know each other.

I have not only gratitude for his openness but because of it I extend a greater generosity to the others that reacted to what I said. I have a deeper appreciation of why they feel the way they do. When I pass his house I sense the openness and possibility of friendship we shared during our conversation instead of the negative feelings I started to have about the community. It is a wealthier feeling to live in appreciation than resentment.

I am not suggesting we should stay open to everyone and to everything all that time. There are people who will take advantage of your trust; people who want you to do something more in their interests than yours. Take care of yourself. Yet, the listening work makes us aware that our automatic protective defensiveness can get in the way on occasion when it is not appropriate and make a bad situation worse. Poor listening skills increase frustration. Completing communication frees energy for creative possibilities.

That we may never reach the end of what is possible in understanding one another should inspire us. It offers the possibility for infinite listening, learning and growth. When we receive the connection we have with another person we create a larger field of collective intelligence. When we listen, we arrive at a new level of understanding that enriches our communion with everything. When we connect there is a sense of enthusiasm and engagement, of stimulating each other's creative thinking and inspiring each other's dreams.

Modes of Attention

Here is an exercise in the visual domain to explore how we pay attention. Then we can apply it to our listening. First, look around the room very quickly noticing as many things as you can. Try to comprehend the room by looking at as many objects as you can, as quickly as possible. Imagine a flashlight in the dark flitting from one thing to the next. Notice the quality of your attention.

Now, observe the room a second time. This time relax and slowly receive what comes to you. Without effort or trying to see, simply receive what you see. Open and allow vision to come to you. Imagine a candle filling the room with light.

I call the first state of attention 'Looking' or 'going out'. In that state we fragment the whole and look at parts. The whole is inferred by going out to look at separate things or pieces of the whole. I call the second state 'Receiving' or 'centering.' It implies receiving the whole where everything is seen in relation to everything else. That shift of intention produces a shift in perception.

One person who did the exercise described the difference between the two states as, "details versus the big picture". Another person said, "When I was going out to look I felt I had to do something. It was an effort. When I received, I didn't have to do anything and yet I felt like I was able to see better." Both going out to look and receiving have their place but serve different masters.

When we listen in the mode of 'going out to understand' attention tries to assemble understanding from fragments. Listening in the mode of receiving allows meaning to form from a collection of the total data. Patiently receiving what someone says allows meaning to form, to assemble holistically. When we react to input, we ambitiously hurry to understand. It is more a task of doing. When we receive, understanding assembles of its own as a creative birthing. Understanding is not something that you do. Understanding is something that happens.

A sense of time pressure makes us feel the need to understand quickly. In an emergency it is important that we are receptive to all the data and input that is available. Especially then we tend to think that we must react quickly and infer that we will not have time to

clarify what has been said. As soon as the information comes in it begins to be interpreted. ‘Going out’ tries to form meaning faster than meaning forms itself. If we evaluate too fast, carelessly, we degrade the process.

When we try too hard to understand what someone is saying the tension interferes in our listening. Tension separates listening and speaking. The blood vessels constrict sending less oxygen to the brain. The harder we try the less we hear, the less we understand. As a result of tensing up we often overreact.

Going out it is easy to get lost looking at the facts. And in a state of fear and defensiveness, we can assemble facts to prove whatever we want them to. Opening to experience receives data that we would otherwise miss. Receiving takes in the meaning of the ideas. Listening is the action of choosing to receive. Centering is the action that makes it possible.

Rather than struggling to understand what someone means, receiving describes a relaxed interest. If, after listening in an open mode you are unsure as to the message, you can ask for clarification based on what you have received. By reframing the process of communication with an emphasis on listening as receiving, we are less likely to put our meaning on someone else. We increase the likelihood that we will understand what they mean rather than make up our own stories based on previous understanding. When the information that is being communicated is valuable it becomes all the more important to receive it.

It may seem counter intuitive to do less to accomplish more. One software engineer I worked with, struggled with the idea of receiving because it seemed to him at first like doing nothing when he felt that he had to process so much information. He was used to tensing to perceive the quantity of data his position required. He was unaware it had become a habitual mode of thinking.

I had him repeat the exercise several times and I could see the understanding slowly grow in his sub conscious awareness. Eventually it surfaced in his conscious mind. It was like watching a light bulb go on. Receiving is a shift in the quality of attention. It is

why we enjoy listening to music. We don't figure it out. We receive it. We let it affect us.

Under pressure most of us tend to function in the frantic flashlight mode 'looking out' at details because there seem to be so many of them. We fail to take the time to light a candle of receptivity, perceive the whole situation first and then define the problem.

Buckminster Fuller, the inventor of the geodesic dome and one of the brilliant minds of the 20th century who emphasized the theme of doing more and more with less and less said, "once you clearly describe the problem properly you are 75 to 90% of the way to solving it." Receiving the whole problem increases the elegance of our solution. It is usually well worth the time.

Acting on the assumption that there is not enough time causes us to act without full understanding, which almost invariably costs more time than a clarification would have taken. Often it is simply because we are distracted, somewhat lazy or undisciplined that we fail to hold our attention in a receptive mode long enough to understand. There is never enough time to do it right, but there is always enough time to do it over, unless of course there is not.

We often go out to listen to others, sincerely making an effort. However, in going out to the person being listened to, we lose an important part of the conversation. Instead of staying centered, connected to ourselves and receiving, we listen to their conversation but fail to listen equally to our own. Both are part of THE conversation.

Meaning assembles in the sub-conscious as well as the conscious mind. When we 'go out' we often only understand what is on the surface. The power of extraordinary listening comes out of a unified field of consciousness that includes listening to the full spectrum of awareness, theirs and ours.

As a musician I have seen and experienced repeatedly that when someone efforts to play well, they lose the receiving mode. When they go out they lose their connection to the band and most importantly to their inner listening. Either they play out of sync or

their playing is uninspired. I saw Keith Jarret play once. He plays from improvisation and easily rates among the best musicians in the world. At the concert I watched him struggle with this same process. At one point in the concert he lost the state that sources his playing and he quickly knew it. He tried several times to start in but ‘going out to play’ he could not find the source of music within himself. He finally walked away from the piano and listened to the band, ‘receiving’.

I sensed he felt he should get back and perform and he wanted to, but I could see he was still in an efforting mode. The mind was telling the body to play and to play with inspiration but it doesn’t work that way. To play with inspiration you must relax and open to receive the muse. His body was tense and I could feel he was not in the same flow as during the last piece. In our terms he was ‘looking’ to play or ‘going out’ to play. He sat back down at the piano and tried to start in but could not. It was forced. To me it was a sign of what an incredible musician he truly is that he could tell in just a few bars that he didn’t have it. He got up and walked around again.

After relaxing and shifting his attention into a state of receiving the music he picked up a tambourine and played along until the simple enjoyment engendered a trance that seemed to take him away. I could see it happen and it was beautiful to watch. In an effortless state he went back to the piano and the music poured out of him. It took the room to another plane.

There is something about relaxing, opening and receiving that makes communication an entirely different experience. Input stimulates so much activity and reactivity that in response to it we become overactive and lose our center. In that state our receptivity seems to close down and we cannot hear the underlying message in what someone is saying. We fail to get their meaning. Our tension, efforting and reactivity interfere in our ability to receive. When we cannot hear, we do not play or speak well.

Receiving: Slow Down To Go Fast

I am sure we have all been interrupted in conversation. Again we are less aware when we do it because it is usually reactive not conscious. When the energy starts to speed us up we get in such a rush we cannot even let someone finish before we start in with our reactive response. Sometimes the reactivity to stimulus sets us in motion so quickly we talk without hearing. We rush off on the need for action without listening. We hurry up and 'handle the task' without being clear enough about what is needed.

In our hurry to act we miss information that could save us time or make our action more effective. Including sensory and emotional data with the intellectual data may seem a slow approach. It may seem like we are processing too much unnecessary input. Excluding pertinent information is not the answer. Receiving is.

Receiving allows processing multiple possibilities simultaneously. It is a faster way of assembling the most effective understanding at each moment. When we notice our mode of attention we can choose receiving vs. going out. As we practice we can learn to stay in a receptive mode. Most people stop receiving to analyze. With practice we can continue to dynamically include new information during our assessment and strategizing.

Here are a couple of examples that though simplistic show the process:

First level: basic problem, "the clock isn't working."

Second level: general need "fix the clock."

Third level: specific solution, "change in the battery."

If we rush off on the first impression of a situation and buy a new clock it can be a waste of time and resources. If we wait until the second statement, we may take the clock apart looking for the problem and not be able to put it back together. At least we may spend considerable time and energy that is unneeded. If we can wait until the third level of data we can take simple effective action.

Here is another example at a more internal level.

First level: basic problem, " short of breath, oxygen deficit"

Second level: general need " air "

Third level: specific solution, " relax and breathe "

We are more effective if we can listen with patience. The first level may send us into panic attack exacerbating the problem. The second, though correct information is not effective as it stands. The third, the solution of breathing with its guidance to relax makes it not only the right choice but because we absorb more oxygen in a relaxed state it makes our action increasingly effective.

Listening for understanding implies not just understanding what someone or something means. Complete listening also includes understanding how to respond. Consciously choose the quality of receiving and meaning grows, as an automatic process. Absorbing oxygen happens when we breathe. The more we relax the greater the level of oxygen absorption. In a similar way, receiving, listening in an open state of attention becomes understanding. The more openly we receive the deeper the understanding.

When reactivity dominates our thinking we act without understanding. Centering and emptying shifts us into a state that receives and assembles the whole message. Meaning becomes increasingly coherent and affecting both action and relationships. When we listen openly to the total information, a clarity surfaces that enhances our ability for simple and effective actions.

In the early years of my consulting, our company did a lot of work developing problem solving, communication, and decision-making skills with executive teams. One set of tools we used was group initiative processes. In these processes a group of executives are given artificial problems to solve that were usually somewhat physical in nature. Various challenges were used as metaphors for the business problems and processes dealt with in the work environment.

There were several styles of response to these challenges that seemed to happen repeatedly. They illustrate what I am describing. The first relates directly to what I described above. Not feeling there is enough time produces a state of stress. Stress narrows our thinking.

There is a story about one problem-solving initiative where a number of teams were put into a maze created by hedges that were too high to see over. There were however, a few ladders lying around throughout the maze. Each team was asked to find their way out within the shortest amount of time possible.

One team succeeded where many failed and they dramatically surpassed the time of any of the other teams that did succeed. This team, whose score was minutes ahead of the next best time, was asked how they had done it. The team reported they had picked up one of the ladders and climbed up to get a bird's eye view. With this information they easily found a solution and got out. When this team asked the others if they had seen the ladders the response was, yes they had but felt they did not have the time to climb on them. Reading this I know it sounds too easy, almost unbelievable.

We saw a similar mentality show up repeatedly with teams who were in a hurry. When we would begin to describe a problem before they understood the problem they would immediately begin to solve it. They would often jump ahead, talking to each other about how to solve the problem and not hear the full description. They missed information that could have critically affected their response.

As a result they often began solving the wrong problem or they began solving the problem with incomplete information. The rules for an exercise encourage the learning of specific principles. Because they wanted to get to work, they missed many of the rules. Then they would have to come back and ask or we would stop them for violating rules they had not heard. They ended up having the serious problems of having to redo or undue important work because of their failure to listen. Frequently finding them selves in trouble because they had used their time inefficiently, they would accelerate their behaviors rather than adapt their strategies. They lost track of learning as the goal because the drive to solve problems is such a natural reaction. In these cases seeing their reactive drive for action causing their failure to listen became the most important lesson.

The businesses we worked with were under tremendous pressures. Inevitably that kind of environment naturally attracts hard charging, driven, ‘get it done’ people. Like a dog is hard wired to chase small moving objects, these people solve problems almost compulsively. Lest I sound like I am sitting in judgment let me confess, I am of that type

Over analyzing definitely reduced the effectiveness of some teams. However, the hard driving teams seemed to have as much trouble as the analyzers. Extraordinary effectiveness comes out of a balance of perception, analysis and action, what I call extraordinary listening.

The other way this overly reactive problem-solving compulsion seemed to show up was in what we identified as the ‘loudest voices’ syndrome. It seems that volume and assertiveness rather than intelligence tends to prevail under the pressure of crisis situations. A very selective listening ensued. In a similar vein someone's idea might have been given more weight based on their position in the hierarchy of the team rather than the effectiveness of the idea.

Often a workable or correct solution would be offered but was not heard over the excited collection of the people who were speaking loudly and rapidly. I cannot count how often a suggestion was offered by one of the diminutive women with a quiet voice that would have solved the problem. Yet, everyone was so involved in the reactive interactions dominated by the loudest voices and assumptions of value based on position in the hierarchy that the solutions offered were not heard or worse. They were heard but ignored. As a result, reactivity these people were unaware of and unable to process overshadowed information that would have made them successful.

The teams who seemed to be able to converse, to receive each other’s ideas and listen to each other had a higher success rate. Those who could not perceive the excitement interfering in their ability to listen may have worked ‘harder’ but it did not usually pay off. Solving the wrong problem is the long way home.

We listen to what we believe has value. We tune out background noise. We tune interpersonal communication in or out in the same

valuing process, if we don't value the source of the information. If reactivity gets tuned out instead of listened to it reflects what we believe will have value. Our assessment of value is often incorrect. Failure to value the right information is why so many good ideas never see fruition. Valuing the wrong information is where those 'hair-brained schemes' come from.

Driving intensity may solve problems in a crisis but miss many unseen possibilities. The power of receptivity is vastly underestimated. Intention and practice shift us into an open and creative state, a mode where we seek and receive information instead of reactively defending against it. Through changing our listening we can change the world.

Time Well Spent

Although listening is only part of what is required for effective communication when we get reactive, we forget how important it is. Reactive, the ability to receive information from others and to hear our own creativity easily gets drowned out. When we get reactive enough we forget listening completely.

Listening requires the courage to open up to the possibility that our ideas and perceptions are wrong or incomplete. It implies the ability to generate enough inner quiet to hear our conversation and their conversation. Only then do we open the possibility of hearing the conversation.

Numerous studies show more of our time is spent listening than talking. Still, we tend to relegate it to a much smaller percentage of importance in the way we pay attention, thinking what is important is what we say. Balancing the qualities of the creative and the receptive produces a powerful synthesis we call extraordinary listening.

We do not realize that the quality of our listening changes the value of what is said. We miss what a powerful vehicle it is for creating wealth. Simply valuing listening causes your listening to improve. Improve your listening and watch the skill of people speaking to you improve.

Receiving Meaning

Have you ever seen someone talk for a while before they realized they were not making sense? Eventually they may have realized they were not clear themselves about what they wanted to communicate. My guess is you have seen it all too often. Have you ever found yourself speaking longer than you intended to? Yet, still felt you hadn't communicated what you meant? A fragmented state stutters or rambles. When mind, body and spirit unify and receive each other's meaning intention transmits without resistance.

When our speech is ineffective it is not so much that we do not know the words. We are out of touch with what we intend to say. When we lose touch with ourselves we need to listen to ourselves, to regain connection to what we mean. Then putting it into words is effortless. There can be value in speaking to clarify what you need but that can only happen effectively if you are listening. Listening is receiving. Receiving allows meaning to form whether clarifying the meaning transmitted from someone else or the meaning we wish to transmit.

When reactivity and the affects cause interference in our thinking we find ourselves struggling to communicate. Our resistance can cause us to lose touch with what we are feeling. When we fail to receive our own meaning it indicates we are feeling some level of stress. Under stress the peripheral vision narrows, as does our thinking. Stress limits our ability to think in broader terms. Under stress it is difficult to express ourselves. When we tighten up in reaction, it can be hard to speak at all. Struggling to find the right words or fighting to dominate someone's opinion we are probably 'going out' to communicate.

A relaxed state facilitates our ability to form meaning into language to effectively communicate what we intend. When we clearly understand our own intentions, when we listen clearly to ourselves, our articulation reflects that clarity. If we relax and receive our own meaning, our ability to speak improves. Words form as of them selves, seemingly without effort.

Our state of energy affects those around us, as we are affected by them. If we achieve a centered state, it creates a resonance that supports others in operating from a centered state as well. If another person speaks to clarify what they need you can offer them the power of your listening. When we openly receive their communication it helps them hear their conversation better. A receptive mode of attention allows the message of another person to form into meaning. Relaxed, they feel natural and tend to speak easily and clearly.

The beauty in receiving the formation of thought allows it to poetically form into words when we speak. Equally mysterious is receiving words into the formation of thought and meaning when we listen. Listening to their conversation means receiving openly on all levels without striving for their meaning or imposing yours. An intentional state of listening allows extraordinary communication to take place. Listening and speaking in a state of ‘receiving vs. going out’ gives birth to communication that has a natural eloquence.

Listening it Away

Listening enables you to hear. Everyone knows that. But to listen is not what everyone wants. Everyone wants to be heard. What everyone doesn’t understand is that listening also enables you to be heard.

A mother and her son who were arguing over the care of the son’s daughter approached me for help. The reactivity had reached a state where they could not talk to each other but only argue at escalating volumes. I simply insisted they take turns speaking until one person was done. I used the Native American tradition of the talking stick. I handed the stick to the mother with the agreement the son would listen as long as she held it. She talked for some time until she felt finished and then she handed him the stick. As she listened because she had completed talking he was able to speak without the fear of being interrupted.

They traded the stick several more times. The degree of listening it provided discharged the energy that had been so intense it had blocked their communication. Eventually they set the stick down

and were able to converse because their listening had changed the tone of the conversation. When they thanked me at the end for what they said had been an exceptionally good conversation I pointed out to them that I had done very little. Their listening to each other was all that it took to transform their relationship and their ability to work together.

Listening receives someone's meaning and empties their need to speak, which is why they spoke to you in the first place. Sensing another person's desire to speak building up allows us to help them discharge the energy that is activating their need. Your sensitivity to their energy can help them get in touch with it. When they complete their expression, it allows them to listen in an open spirit. Only then is meaning exchanged freely and openly.

The combination of our reactivity, our mood and thinking, influences their reactivity, mood and the tone of their thinking, re-stimulating ours, etc. This reciprocating cycle creates the aggregate field of communication. Reactivity either reinforces defensiveness unless the relationship we adopt with it deepens listening. When we practice listening to our reactivity, we can hear their reactivity diminishing our propensity to react to it.

Intentionally activating listening shifts the tone of the conversation from one of defensiveness to a receptive quality that produces understanding. Aware of reactivity we listen to another person with a higher degree of empathy. We can listen beyond another person's tonality to the desire driving the communication. Understanding someone's attitude and feelings, without taking the message personally, reduces the static that interferes in hearing their meaning. When we listen beyond the reactivity with a sincere intent to receive, they can viscerally feel they have been heard.

When I started seeing the power of this practice I was quickly given an opportunity to test it and develop my skills. Often I do not even want to listen especially to someone who is in a reactive state. When that happens, I try to think of this story. It helps me remember what can happen if I intend to listen instead of resisting the energy of reactivity mine or theirs.

I was helping coordinate a consortium of four large corporations trying to put together a multi-billion dollar project. Someone in charge of the teams for one of the companies came to me. They wanted to complain about an issue that they thought I should have handled differently. By the time they came to talk to me the situation was over and done with and nothing could be changed. By then they had built up an intense charge of energy that came out in the tone and language of their expression.

Though I naturally had a defensive reaction. I dealt with my reactivity by centering instead of projecting my reactivity outward toward them. I listened to the energy appearing as defensiveness until it had completed its message to me and melted away. Doing so enabled me to be open to the person's input until their charge had been dissolved.

I did not argue with them at all. I listened giving my attention to them instead of letting it feed my defensiveness. Once I was in that state and because I intended to, I did not counter their points with reasons or excuses. I did not turn them around into attacks as I reactively would. Instead, I was able to listen to my conversation, process my reactivity and receive the concerns that lay behind what they had to say. I listened to everything they had to say. It was not easy but our relationship and the project were important to me.

When they finished I was able to reflect back to them the needs and concerns that impelled them to come to me. I assured them I understood what was important to them and why. I verified my understanding in a way that let them hear my commitment to our mutual success. And I delineated a path of action for future situations that took all of this into account.

Once they knew their message was received and understood, they had completed their expression in terms of our communication. They were done, and it was over. No exclamation points. They did not stomp out. I did not throw them out. They left satisfied.

Because the communication was complete, there was no leftover charge the next time we saw each other. The opposite was true. We had a better connection because I had shown willingness and a

capacity to listen. In doing so I had generated an alliance between us to solve the problem that concerned them so dramatically. They had a chance to say whatever they wanted to say. They were satisfied they have been heard. A conversation where your response honors their concerns usually ends with some variation of, "Thanks for listening."

We increased the degree of trust in our ability to work together. They knew they could talk to me and I could listen. Our future relationship had a new ground of being. And we modeled a positive behavior into the culture of the consortium. I still think of them with a sincere fondness. It could have gone the other way. It often does.

Once someone is in a reactive defensive mode achieving communication can seem impossible. If they are unconscious of being driven by their affects, extraordinary listening is required to make up for their lack of attention. It can be a bit like trying to make friends with a wild animal. Allow me to restate the obvious. Reacting defensively to their defensiveness increases the cycle. Listening is an act of intent to consciously receive the intelligence locked up in our reactivity and the reactivity of another. Listening without defensiveness and resistance allows us to hear intention. Instead of inferring meaning when reactivity colors a conversation, Extraordinary Listening deepens understanding and produces harmonious relationships.

Focus your intention on listening well. Watch the quality of your intention to receive. Someone's emotional tone is part of their message. It communicates the intensity of their passion around the issue and their ability to manage the energy of it. Take in the information without taking on the emotion.

Rather than talk against what someone is saying, listen until you understand. When you can reflect their message back correctly, you can at a minimum work on the right problem. By listening you know what to contribute in the conversation. Listening, more than talking establishes connection.

This kind of process can be difficult. It may take longer than you wish. However, if you can listen to their reactivity and maintain

your center while you do, you will be able to hear the meaning beyond their reactivity. When you fully engage in experiencing the gestalt of your meaning, their meaning and the conversation, then you can add something harmoniously, increasing the value of everyone's contribution.

Questioning

Listening includes asking questions to deepen the conversation and enrich understanding. At a minimum good listening enables us to ask intelligent and incisive questions. If you are listening to their conversation and yours, you naturally know what and how to ask to increase understanding. Good questions improve communication by helping them understand what we do and do not understand.

One who asks a question may seem a fool for the moment.
One who fails to ask remains a fool forever. Ancient Proverb

Questions are a listener's tools. They can be used to clarify though we need to be aware they can be used defensively. If you are listening to your conversation you can be clear about your intent. Questions as a tool for learning come in many styles.

Open - What did you mean by . . .?

Stating - The way I think about this is . . . What do you think?

Challenging - I differ because . . . How do you see it?

Requesting - Would you mind rephrasing that differently, to help me understand you better?

Confirming - Did you mean . . .? Rephrase their input in your words. See if they confirm your understanding.

Clarifying - I could understand that to mean either . . . or . . . Please help me understand your intent.

Apologetic - I'm afraid I didn't understand that. Would you

mind repeating what you just said?

It is OK to fail to understand. What is the cost of going forward without understanding? The time spent in seeking understanding is well spent.

Depending on the subtlety and complexity of the topic, preface your questions with statements of what you do understand as a jumping off place. Verify what you heard and confirm that you are in sync about what you perceive. Then pinpoint to the best of your ability what you need to understand or clarify. Lead them by asking for what you sense to be the next level of clarity.

Since we listen faster than we talk, it naturally happens that our mind rushes ahead or drifts off into distracting thoughts. Forming questions helps re-direct our attention on the subject matter.

Questions can help keep our mind on the subject rather than letting it wander. Listening, sensing into your questions awakens and focuses your attention. As you listen, form questions that can help clarify their meaning, for you and for them.

We would like to appear bright enough to understand what someone said. No one wants to be seen as slow. However, if the subject matters, we must summon the courage to ask what we need in order to understand. If we do not we fail to learn. If we yield to the temptation of inferring, we run the risk of acting based on incorrect information. Confirming our understanding assures our action is confluent with our agreement. At today's high pace it seems we cannot afford the time. The reverse is true.

Some, motivated by a kind of embarrassment and an unwillingness to involve the Speaker, stop themselves from asking questions; and fixing the speech in their minds, just nod as if they understood. Others, influenced by excessive desire for recognition and vain competitiveness, try to show how sharp they are and how quickly they learn by claiming to understand the speech before they have got the point - and so miss the point.

Plutarch

Five steps to effective communication

1. Listen – receive the whole message. Listen for the main points.
2. Question - seek clarity on anything you wonder about.
3. Understand – frame your perception as a coherent thought.
4. Confirm – state your understanding as a question and verify it.
5. Act

The Process of Transmission

The steps of completing a phone call indicate quite a bit about the process of communication. Let us look at it through both the human and mechanical processes.

A phone call

- Step 1: it begins with intention – we signal this by picking up the phone
- Step 2: we must know the number
- Step 3: we must dial the number correctly
- Step 4: we wait for them to answer
- Step 5: we greet each other, we acknowledge each other and -
 - the fact that we are about to begin a conversation- if we are polite we make sure this is a good time for them to have the conversation
- Step 6: we converse, which is the body of the conversation
- Step 7: we acknowledge completion of the conversation
- Step 8: we close the conversation

A Conversation

- Step 1: we intend to communicate
- Step 2: we seek their attention
- Step 3: we receive their attention
- Step 4: they acknowledge an intention to communicate
- Step 5: we greet each other.
 - This, usually done with the formality of the question, “how are you?” It is rarely what we are asking. It is a statement of acknowledgement and of our connection.
- Step 6: we converse, which is the body of the conversation
- Step 7: we acknowledge completion of the conversation
- Step 8: we close conversation

Improving the quality of connection will transform communication. Once the connection is established and the lines are clear, once they

are listening, then talking can have incomparable value. Unless we want to rehearse, there is little use talking into the phone until: we pick it up, dial the number and they pick up the receiver and acknowledge listening.

We can use the transmission of sound on a phone call to understand communication process.

Step 1: We speak sound into the mouthpiece

Step 2: Sound is translated into the movement of air

Step 3: Which is translated into electromagnetic pulse

Step 4: Which is then translated into electrical energy

Step 5: The electromagnetic energy is translated across distance

And the process is reversed

Step 6: The electrical energy is translated into magnetic pulse

Step 7: The magnetic pulse moves the speaker diaphragm

Step 8: The speaker translates the movement of air into sounds

Step I: we intend to communicate

Step 2: we sense what we mean to communicate

Step 3: we distill our intention into an idea

Step 4: we translate our idea into words

Step 5: we transmit the words

And the process is reversed

Step 6: they receive the words and translate them into ideas

Step 7: they translate the ideas in to what they assume we mean

Step 8: they translate the our meaning into what it means to them

Skill 3

Listening To THE Conversation

"Aikido does not call relative affairs good or bad but keeps all beings in a constant state of growth and development and serves for the completion of the universe."

Morihei Ueshiba O Sensei, founder of Aikido

Learning

The creation of our wealth emerges from our ability to learn! Our wealth lies in the spirit of learning and creativity!

Learning is what allows us to create and continually re-create our knowledge base. Together learning and creativity lead to new possibilities and new solutions that improve the quality of our lives, individually and collectively. Learning stimulates creativity. Creativity begins with the ability to learn.

Learning is the basis of improving our lives. Learning creates and extends our power. The meaning we make from an experience allows us to engage in the future with increased intelligence. Attention is the basis of learning. What we pay attention to designs and forms our strategy for life. Developing and exercising the power to listen not only enables us to listen when someone speaks it also develops the power to listen to our dreams.

Why did so many people look out at the ocean's horizon and believe the earth stopped with their ability to see? Others saw the horizon as the threshold to imagination. Each of us has both those tendencies. Can you imagine the meaning you would make from the horizon of the ocean if you did not have the power of composite learning? How will we create meaning from whatever exists on the horizon of our knowledge?

Many were satisfied to stay within the world they knew. They would never have considered exploring the edge of the unknown. In many societies the spirit of wonder was opposed, the spirit of exploration ridiculed, repressed and even punished.

The challenge of developing awareness may seem immense to the point of intimidation. Listen to the immensity. Let the inquiry inspire listening. We either practice listening as a sacred art or defend ourselves against disturbing information, re-enforcing past beliefs. Either life stops at the horizon of what is visible to us or we choose to see the gateway to a New World, in what we cannot understand in another person. That is our choice on the edges of perception.

"Some people see things as they are and ask why. I see things that never were and ask why not!"

Anon.

The world is constantly feeding us data. We tune out most of it. When we listen we learn. When we are young almost everything interests us. Some people stop learning early. Some never stop.

I have a friend who is fascinated by the concept of learning through play. He did a study on 50 top athletes and why they excelled. The consistent theme that surfaced can be condensed in this concept. It seems to have been instilled in them when they were learning to play. When they were young the question they were asked was not, "did you win or lose?" Rather it was, "what did you learn?" That focus of attention kept them in a spirit of growth and development rather than in one of comparison and frustration. Clearly they came in with special gifts. What they did with them, focusing on learning and development, is what mattered.

I went to hear Jim Sochor speak once. He is an incredibly successful coach. He has one of the best records in his division, won 18 consecutive conference championships, then a college football record. Sochor also served as the athletic director at UC Davis from 1988 to 1991. He was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame as a coach in 1999. But that is not what makes him successful, at least not in my opinion. This man impressed me as having an incredibly wealthy attitude.

Someone asked him what do you say to your players about winning and losing? And what do you tell them about potential? Sochor said, "We don't talk about winning." The questioner's mouth

dropped open, literally. Then Sochor said, "I figure you can do one thing at a time really well. You can think about winning and losing. Or you can focus on playing the best game you can play. Our only interest is in playing the best game we can at each moment. We don't talk about winning and losing. And as to potential, what we tell our players is; potential is what you lose with."

Our fate, what we are given, where we are born, things that happen to us matter but we cannot change them. What matters is the development of our potential into ability. What we can do is make choices about the meaning we will make out of our experiences. We can make choices about the focus of our attention and how we will apply our vital energy.

Our life's destiny forms out of the choices we make. The spirit we develop through our choices determines the fate of our lives. Nowhere in our lives is this truer than how we choose to interpret data. How we assemble data into information forms the meaning on which we base every decision.

What does electricity mean? Its meaning is different to you, than it was to Ben Franklin or Thomas Edison. When Ben Franklin flew his kite what did it mean to him that lightning was electricity? The time he lived in was a time of great discovery. The same energy of electricity had another meaning for Thomas Edison who persisted in a very long study of how to sustain the light that electricity could create. He explored numerous applications of its power. His was a time of great inventions. Each of these great men was influenced by the time that they lived in. However both were listening to something beyond it.

Fire instilled fear in primitive people before they learned to handle it. Electricity meant little or nothing to the majority of people before the era of Ben Franklin. Lightening was a disturbance that created fear in the minds of most people. Prior to its use as fuel, oil was thought useless. It only ruined farmland. It was eventually seen as a source of power. Many forms of energy and power meant little to the people of their times. Reactivity is seen as little more than disturbance to be avoided our repressed for those who live in the world of ordinary listening.

If we believe our thinking, our thinking stops at what we believe. If we question our thinking and our perception, we live in a state of ‘zanshin,’ on-going attentiveness, learning without end. When we live in a quality of wonder and inquiry our ability to listen to one another, to see beyond what is, enriches our vision and creates a world of infinite possibility.

Learning Beyond The Known

Our ability to learn and work with others, both of which empower creativity, pivots on the quality of our listening. In ordinary listening, we tend to hear meanings we know and understand. Any input that we receive is heard and interpreted in relationship to what we believe to be so. Our expectations color our listening. The ability to learn exists in relation to our intention to release our imagination and go beyond what we comprehend. It takes courage to hear information that challenges what we believe or wish was true.

“It is a rare person who wants to hear what they don’t want to hear.”

Dick Cavett

What, about the meaning we make from our experience, causes our listening and imagination to stop at the horizon of what we think we know? What causes us to listen beyond the known? If you ask yourself what you will do with your life, that sets in motion a certain dynamic of thought. If you ask yourself what your life would do with you, what will you allow yourself to hear?

Our challenge is to let go of the known, what we believe and that with which we are identified. Listening creates learning, where knowing only repeats what is already known and believed. Learning results from intentionally suspending judgment. [Suspending in the meaning of holding something up to look at it] Suspending judgment, emptying preconceived views that we hold, diminishes coloring a situation with our prejudice. When we can empty, we can

listen with less prejudice and resistance. Receiving information clearly, openly, is the gating factor of learning.

That is why suspending our first interpretations of a communication brings such value. If we know we're interpreting through habitual reactions, we can listen to ourselves as we form meaning. We can listen to how past meaning influences how we assemble data into information.

Perceiving how the affects mediate the conversation of another allows us an opportunity to sense what lies behind their mediated expression. Paying attention to the same process in ourselves includes all that is being said and the whisperings of something more. Including the content plus everyone's reactivity we hear THE conversation. Increased understanding is an automatic and inevitable outcome.

When people develop patterns of behavior without conscious attention, we might call that conditioning. Conditioning re-enforces habituated response. Recognizing habituated response patterns enhances our ability to sense beyond them to the essence of the conversation. Connecting our attention beyond what someone is saying enables what is implied, unsaid and unknown, to be heard in the conversation.

Listening at a conscious level requires training, intention and practice. It is a developed ability that moves us beyond the unconscious, reactive, conditioned inability to listen. Listening means seeking what is significant to our selves and to another. Once we listen to how we come to our conclusions and why something is significant to us, we can learn how others make sense to themselves. We can seek to understand the conclusions of another person and why something is significant to them.

These questions are almost impossible to ask without people becoming defensive. The quality of listening required is not just skill. It is more an attitude, a spirit of seeking understanding. Only sincere empathy conveys to another that we are not simply gathering data to better plan our attacks.

When we find the security to trust one another, when we can speak without defensiveness, we can delve into another person's viewpoint. Each individual has a unique system of ordering information. Each person selects data by a unique value system. Without input from someone else, using the same data points, we tend to repeatedly come up with the same conclusions. The pictures that we create as individuals are so limited in the scheme of things. When we include the views of another the possibility of interconnections goes up exponentially. Value accrues from understanding the way another person sees the world.

When we relax, receive our own meaning and process our reactivity, communication flows. When you listen in a relaxed and open state the quality and quantity of information available increases, dramatically increasing the power of thought. Listening to another person can stimulate thought and enhance understanding. Creativity develops beyond what we can achieve alone. Then, perhaps together we can delineate a larger significance. Only when we listen beyond the known do we sense something extraordinary going on in the conversation.

Transacting

Life mirrors our listening. If you want to know how well you are listening, look at the quality of your life. If you want to know how well we are listening, look at the quality of our communities and the relationships between societies. We are always creating our culture even as we are created by it.

Listening establishes a state of effective transaction. When I communicate with another person, if I talk too much or too little, important input is likely to get lost. If the conversation takes on an adversarial tone more energy goes to defensiveness than creativity.

Whenever you are having difficulty with anyone or anything in your life, you can choose to see it as an opportunity. You can choose to receive it as the universe hinting at the possibility to improve your listening with yourself, the situation or the gestalt that includes both.

Information brings our lives into form. Listening, receiving information crystallizes the experience of life. Extraordinary listening receives input beyond the thoughts and meaning either individual is capable of AND transforms understanding into something beyond what we know when the conversation starts. Rather than a technique that we do to them, listening changes us. If we listen we are affected.

Life in balance reflects a larger harmony. Fragmented it appears as parts struggling for dominance. Listening to THE conversation is an action of attention. It includes the realm of ordinary listening and also pays attention to what is unknown. Though the unknown seems out of reach it is whispering to us. If you listen you will hear something. If you listen, it will take you beyond what you understand.

Extraordinary listening helps everyone in the conversation to clarify what they intend and distill what they are saying. An attitude of sincere listening helps others express their ideas easily. It is in our enlightened self-interest. Ease of communication facilitates working together effectively. It makes us more productive whether that productivity serves the market place directly, produces friendship or serves for the creation of knowledge.

As self-protective reservations and behaviors diminish, the correlates of information that connect increase. Possibilities extend to infinity. A holographic sensing emerges. As the distillation of information makes thought increasingly valuable, information and knowledge enter the domain of wisdom. Extraordinary listening means more than your brainpower plus their brainpower. Extraordinary listening is more like your brainpower times their brainpower to the power of your intent to listen. The exponential depends on dissolving the reactivity into the shared meaning until you can listen to THE conversation.

We can learn from listening to the way we listen. It doesn't matter if we are listening to the auditory sound of the wind or kinesthetically feeling it blow across our face. Listening is the start of a chain of learning that leads to insight, reason, truth and inexorably to greater personal and social responsibility.

When we give the gift of listening, the giving transforms our spirit. The beauty of listening is that the transformation extends to the person to whom we are listening. That in turn influences the tone of THE conversation. Listening changes everything about thought action and feeling. The change may be dramatic. It may be incredibly subtle. But when listening occurs, transformation results. When people listen, when the dialogue is truly open, it can be much more than a good conversation. Sincere open communication changes the way we live together.

The Whisperings of Creativity

On the edge of imagination and creative vision lies an undiscovered world of new ideas, thoughts, possibilities of actions and interactions. Aristotle called the senses the windows of the mind. A blind person perceives through the other senses in an extraordinary way. Imagine an extraordinary realm of awareness beyond our senses. Imagine senses we haven't discovered yet and the information they might offer us.

On the edge of what we know, are the subtle whisperings of information, not yet fully perceived by the conscious awareness. Listening to what I call the 'whisperings of creativity', accesses knowledge beyond conscious knowing. The whisperings imply subtler dimensions of guidance. The spirit of listening transforms the subtle whisperings into intelligence. The greatest artists and inventors heard a voice beyond knowledge. Intending listening to what we cannot hear transports us to a new world of learning.

It takes an inner quiet to hear the voice of inspiration. The pace of change seems to only accelerate, as does the speed of life. Inner stillness can seem nearly impossible to attain in the face of the level of stimulation of our modern societies. In resistance we become victims to our energy. Naturally we get defensive. Defensiveness blocks learning and creativity. Connecting with the center of our experience allows the energy of reactivity to become an ally. Centering, listening, gives us access to the power of the universe.

Without the ability to learn we fear any new encounter. We seek to stay in situations that we understand. It makes sense to be afraid when we cannot learn but then our fear increases our defensiveness increasing the cycle. Creativity, the ability to adapt to change intelligently, releases us from the dilemma. Creativity transforms reality.

When our body tightens, to the degree that our muscles lock up, we fail to sense our experience. Tension in the physical domain impedes movement and perception. A tense muscle cannot feel nor move freely. Resistance in the emotional realm blocks the psyche and its awareness. If we are rigid in our attitude we have severely limited our options whether in movement or response to life. A lot may be happening to indicate guidance, but if we are rigid in body or in our mindset, the information doesn't get through. A resistant spirit cannot hear the whisperings of creativity.

In the simple act of listening to your body, you can feel the change in muscular tension. When you listen carefully to your emotional content you can hear it affecting your thoughts. If you listen to your emotional state you can feel shimmers from memories of past experiences coloring your mood. If you listen to your thinking, you can sense the flow of thought down conditioned pathways. Listen with an extraordinary intent and you can hear beyond the patterns of thought.

A physical teacher teaches through words and visual demonstration. Creativity surfaces through listening in a subtler dimension, listening to ideas that at first appearance seem indistinct or unreal. Listening into the unknown enables us to hear the whisperings of creativity. Listening to the whisperings on the edge of perception puts us in touch with the creative process. Listening to the whisperings of creativity implies protecting new ideas coming into form from the loud and reactive voices of precedent and prejudice.

Our vision, inspiration and creativity are the source of what we produce. When we intend to listen to the whisperings of creativity, to the divine power, that quality of listening sets up a field of resonance between minds. That field of resonance, like the richness

of voices in perfected yet unique harmonies, takes us into new dimensions.

Listening to the whisperings develops creativity regardless of the realm i.e., business, art, conflict resolution, science, etc., to which the creativity will be applied. The 'whisperings' of creativity are always there. The question is are we listening?

Freedom in the creation of your life

We become this tendency that we have, to hold a fixed attitude. It's locked in our muscles, in our belief systems, in our thinking patterns. It is something we're so used to; we do not even know that it is there. Tensed up physically you cannot feel. Tensed up mentally you cannot listen to your thinking. If you cannot listen, how will you reach your dreams about what you want, let alone make them reality?

If you listen with increased sensitivity, you notice levels of tension you had not noticed before. When you feel, when you listen to your experience, tension releases. The release of tension frees up energy that becomes a resource to you in the creation of your life. When you let go of your holding pattern you feel yourself in a new way. When you listen, you find you are creativity. The Thalamic Discourses, Zanshin Press

Creative Contribution

Abundant wealth grows out of contribution. The value of connection allows us to share our creativity. Being seen and heard, sharing what we create is critical in the wealth of our lives. People need to contribute and have their contribution valued. Our ability to fulfill the need to contribute is not accessible in a defensive state. It becomes increasingly accessible in a state of openness, connection, and a state of compassion, of love. Having value and contributing value are somewhat synonymous. A healthy relationship of the individual with society includes contribution in both directions.

When human communication breaks down, there are natural forces at play. People need to contribute and have their contribution valued. People need to be seen and respected (tribal roster). People need to be allowed to speak and to have their voices heard (tribal council). The tribal council and roster ask little really. They are, however, as vital to our socio-emotional life as food and water are to sustaining physical life. Listening to someone satisfies these needs for inclusion and recognition.

If we do not listen well we fail to understand people's needs. When people's needs go unheard it destroys their bond with others and with the community at large. Respect for the values of a society grow out of the connection one experiences with that society. Connection is created when contribution is received. One whose contribution is not received, who fails to receive respect from the community, does not return respect to the community, i.e. does not receive the community's contribution including its values. Giving and receiving value is so essential to our beings that should the desire be thwarted, or the need go unfulfilled, the compensatory behavior becomes erratic.

When people feel unheard long enough inhibitions break down. Our bond with our tribe holds them in place. The bond between an individual and the community guides us into creative response to frustrations. The bond between people inhibits an individual from responding to rage by acting out through violent behavior. In the majority of instances of violence in schools and the workplace there were signs before the individuals in question lost control. People weren't listening!

Listening is an essential skill that when done well generates harmony. Understanding develops common ground from which to proceed in a harmonious relationship. We can move beyond the energy of reaction and its quality of disturbance to one of inclusion and creative interaction.

We fail to see the value of listening in producing wealth. As a result we fail to produce and invest a generous attention in the world. We could do it so easily and the return would be immeasurable. Is there any value added from listening? Absolutely! If we want to talk

about doing the work that will enhance our wealth, listen. Think about turning the rheostat up from zero senses to where you are. Now imagine turning them from there up to extraordinary.

War and Peace and Wealth

It may seem that both creating what we want and resisting what we do not want would produce similar results but they do not, not at all. War directs all our energy towards opposing that which we do not want. Peace directs all our energy towards creating that which is desired. War attempts to impose ideas about how it should be. Peace produces learning and creativity through listening. Human life offers the possibility of discovering and creating what we want.

Intent is energy. We magnetize what we focus our energy on. Focusing on what attracts us generates living in a creative realm. Focusing on what we fear creates a defensive state. If we default to our defensive reactions, we define ourselves against what is. I have a friend. Maybe you know someone like him. In one case he spent so much time worrying about a situation that it was as bad as if what he had been worrying about had actually happened. In another, he put so much attention toward what he feared, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In international relations the same process goes on at a more complex level. The absurd and horrendous struggles over resources have destroyed more resources than anyone ever gained through the process. The power of our intelligence can be used in debilitating ways. Groups of incredibly intelligent people do incredibly stupid things. Certainly if we measure IQ, the brightest people around designed and built our nuclear weapons systems and strategy, a classic example of intelligence operating in a fear mode debilitates wealth. Set aside for a moment, the argument to about whether or not it was necessary. Let us imagine just for the purpose of conversation that something else might have been possible.

As congress debates how much of our tax money should go to protect Russia's nuclear arsenal from terrorists who would threaten the stability of society with them, think about this. Think about the amount of time, money and energy that went into a mad rush to

build nuclear weapons, weapons that if we are lucky will never be used and in the present era look far worse than useless. That amount could have changed our ability to educate the entire planet. If you add to that the cost of maintaining these weapons, housing and food could probably be included. The difference in the wealth of the world would be incalculable.

But set these factors aside for the moment. The costs described above pale in comparison to what we will spend trying to clean up the mess we've made. **And we will never be able to clean this up.** We face the problem of lethal toxicity on our planet from nuclear waste that in 25,000 years will be only half as dangerous as it is today. This problem will not be solved by putting nuclear waste at the bottom of the ocean in barrels of concrete that will dissipate in a hundred years or so. This is the legacy of our thinking based on the power of violence. Violence is the way we behave when we're not listening. The problem is, it creates a reciprocating echo. Once you start, you can't stop.

Building more nuclear weapons will never solve this problem. Of course we did not stop when we had enough weapons to destroy the "communist menace" - - that no longer exists. We did not stop when we had enough weapons to create nuclear winter and destroy the entire planet ourselves included. We did stop even when we had enough weapons on the planet to create nuclear winter a hundred times over. Strangely enough, we have not stopped yet. We are still building nuclear weapon material and it will take years to shut down the facilities that are presently on line. Does this offer you have an inkling of the value of listening over reactivity?

"If everyone would listen to my song tonight, we could save the whole world."

Fortune gave me the opportunity to work in some places where the level of conflict reached beyond what most of us can even imagine. What we saw there, the horror of the outcome was what happens when people default to pouring their wealth, intelligence and resources into war. Unfathomable energy had been used to create pain instead of being used to create harmony between people.

Mental, physical and economic power poured into destroying, instead of listening to the possibilities of creating wealth.

What if we focused our intent instead to listen for positive possibilities? Can you imagine what the world would be like if all the energy that had gone into war had been used to enrich our lives? Can you imagine the economy of Bosnia if all the money and especially the energy that went into the war and the reconstruction had gone into education and commerce? Bosnia would be, thousands of times over, the strongest economy on the planet.

Therein lies the tragedy. I have friends there who suffer the aftereffects of the stupidity of greed. They have and will suffer the long-term pain created by short-term thinking. That greed is driven by fear. Though it produced riches for a select few, it is not wealth. It does not come from nor produce a healthy spirit.

Peace is literally what you want. Peace is pursuing your interests. In peace we focus on developing. War is a form of resistance. War is defending your interests or attacking those of someone else. That is why the words, peace and prosperity go together, as do the words, war and devastation. The religious wars and nationalistic conflicts throughout the centuries of human history, including those going on at the present moment, demonstrate the costs of our unwillingness and our inability to listen.

When we are in a state of war, we are expecting, looking for and defending against threats. In a war we focus on destroying. We are looking to gain through violence an advantage over others that will offer us protection. War constrains our ability to think in peaceful veins. Focusing on what you do not want takes your attention off your vision and drains your resources from creating what you do want.

War within ourselves takes the form of internal conversations where we are convincing ourselves about something. When we project that out into the world we find ourselves trying to convince others of something. We try to control their thoughts, beliefs and actions. When we try to force someone to see it our way, the forcing causes both of us to tighten, further rigidifying our minds. You have to

tighten up to resist against something happening. You have to tighten against something to enforce your idea.

Einstein said, "Peace cannot be created by force, only by understanding." When misunderstanding occurs, listening is the essential skill of conflict resolution. Listening is the path to understanding. Listening is the action that creates peace.

As I said in the beginning, the people I met were beautiful creative individuals. They got caught up in something they could not control. They had not done it on purpose. It was reactive. It was like a nuclear or in this case social meltdown. Extraordinary listening might have provided the cooling rods.

The Challenge: Vision forms out of listening to the future. Vision given enough attention becomes reality. Is your focus on your vision or your fear, which is central and which is peripheral - which is foreground and which is background?

Only because I intend to, do I focus my energy, thoughts and dreams on what I want. By intention I bring them forward in my attention. I consider my fears about what might happen or not happen, but I use the information as guidance to accomplish my goal. By intention and practice I relegate fear to a subservient position in my attention. My discipline (and I wish I were better at it) is to continually transform my fear into a call to action to intentionally create what I want, not reactively destroy that which frightens me.

Destructive behavior does the opposite of creating wealth. Understanding develops common ground from which to proceed in a harmonious relationship. We can move beyond the energy of reaction and its quality of disturbance to one of inclusion and creative interaction.

When violence rules, whether a team, a family, a corporate culture or a nation the same thing happens, corruption of the human spirit. This is the greatest tragedy of all and the source of our suffering. When we mistake reactivity for intention, ours or that of another, and we act on that misunderstanding, we set in motion endless

cycles of contention that range from hurt feelings to war. Listening, understanding and peace will only occur when we are able to differentiate affective reaction from the message.

Developing an inner conversation of peace creates the time to listen to the forces of vitality within us, the whisperings of creativity. In a state of peace we are listening to what might be possible, to dreams of beauty. Listening for possibilities we reframe difficulties into ideas about what we might create. The quality of our listening could produce the understanding needed to take us beyond war.

I am not saying war is wrong. I am not saying living without war is even possible. Nor, am I saying it isn't. I am suggesting that we look at what defensiveness produces. Evaluate it as a strategy and creatively engage in the question. If we dealt with our defensiveness creatively instead of reactively, how might we live here together?

A corrupt system operates in favor of contribution by some to the exclusion of contribution by others. In a dogmatic system, contribution can only be given in a narrow and select form. Wealth becomes an issue. Listening translates to society as an opportunity for people to be heard, for their contribution to be made.

The quality and quantity of wealth grows in direct proportion to a society's openness for contribution. Increased ability to contribute creates greater wealth. A system that limits contribution makes it hard for people to contribute. Then it condemns them for failing to do so. Listening to THE conversation, including everyone's contribution, brings forward our collective intelligence, promotes infinite creativity and produces unlimited wealth.

If we develop society so people have a voice and an avenue for positive contribution we will see less anti-social behavior. I'm not suggesting listening is a cure all. I am simply suggesting listening produces a nurturing climate for developing good business and healthy people.

Greater wealth can be created through harmony and compassion than through repression and exploitation. If we aligned listening to creating and sharing wealth, we could apply our resources to those

goals instead of listening to our inflexible need to fight. The amount of energy that's wasted in interpersonal conflict could light up all the cities on the planet. The amount of energy that's wasted in international conflict could transform life as we know it.

The spirit of listening helps others create wealth in the world. Wealth is created in the feeling, the enjoyment, the experience, of making a positive contribution. We can give that to someone simply by listening, by appreciating his or her contribution.

By receiving, we honor what is said. In honoring a person's words and thoughts we honor them. When we honor someone we change our relationship with them. When we honor someone we change their relationship with themselves. We change their wealth.

Listening is a gift. Receiving is a contribution. When we receive each other's contribution in an open spirit we give each other value. Changing the wealth of the world is a transformation of spirit.

The structures of thought serve as the foundation for the structures of society. The freedom of a society lies in its openness to new thoughts and ideas. Free thought is the natural outcome of a sincere listening where everything, even our defensiveness, is heard freely. The quality of our listening sanctions a conscious freedom that will change the quality of our lives together.

A great deal of our wealth is our connection with other people. Our wealth includes the ability to tap the incredible human knowledge base. A part of our wealth is supporting and helping each other when we need it. In the dialogue, in an open listening without resistance, the flow of meaning is not driven in any specific direction. It unfolds out of the moment.

If we listen, we can hear what our environment needs to remain sustainable. If we want to contribute to a sustainable world, it is imperative that we listen to the voice of the whole. If we open our minds and hearts together, we can hear what our economic system needs to produce the greatest wealth for the greatest number of people. If we listen, we can hear what our political system needs to allow the greatest contribution by the greatest number of people,

balanced with the freedom of exceptional individuals to excel. When a society is designed to facilitate contribution wealth flourishes. That's what listening looks like when a society does it.

Our listening receives someone's contribution, giving their person and their contribution value. Listening to someone increases their value while increasing our value. Listening increases THE value. It creates wealth

Listening has no form. Though insignificant in its original simplicity the world does not understand its power. The world of itself submits to one who demonstrates the power of listening. Listening is to the world, what the streams and valleys are to the great rivers and seas.

Listening in One Easy Lesson

Listen to yourself
listening
to the unfolding conversation!

**Exercises
in
Listening.**

**Listening is a skill.
A developed ability**

Listening to Your Conversation

First exercise: Simple Quiet

Simple quiet is the first exercise of listening. Though subtle at first it is a developed skill. Sit quiet for a minute or two. For many of us quiet is uncomfortable. It only takes a moment and we feel the need to do something. We forget so quickly that we intended to be quiet. Without intending it we find ourselves starting the next activity or at least thinking about it.

It is the exact same compulsive reaction that causes us to interrupt someone who is speaking. Often without realizing it we begin speaking before they finish because we are stimulated by their input stimulating our own thoughts. Or if we are too polite to begin speaking over them, we begin our internal dialogue compulsively following our own thoughts rather than their conversation.

Quiet is a practice. Sensing is the domain of listening. Understanding is more a feeling than a thought, though it includes both. Listening includes the mind and body. They connect through the somatic realm.

Sitting quiet, stillness and relaxation allow the body to release tension and clear adrenaline and toxins. It generates an alpha brainwave pattern. The mind releases its obsession with thinking, allowing the somatic realm of feeling and sensing to open. We listen better to what we mean making it easier to put into words. We sense what another is saying beyond hearing their words.

Listening to Your Conversation

Second exercise:

Listening to the Impulse to Breathe

Listening to the impulse to breathe is the next exercise that changes the state of attention and the ability to listen. In a state of simple quiet, sense the process of breathing without doing anything about it. If you listen you will sense an impulse that moves the breath. If the impulse to breathe is vague, hold your breath a few seconds. It gets very obvious.

Simply from noticing the impulse that draws inspiration and drives exhalation you may want to breathe a little deeper and or slower. You may notice that you already have.

The most accessible tool to move us from reacting to listening is the breath. Our reactivity disconnects us from our ability to hear the pulse of the breath. Listening to it reconnects us to the natural rhythm of our own beings. The breath is the subtle link between mind and body and between the conscious and unconscious mind.

This is a great exercise for waiting rooms and stoplights.

Listening to Your Conversation

Third exercise:

Listening to the relationship between breathing and the state of tension in the musculature of the body

Begin with simple quiet. Notice the breath and feel the state of tension in the muscles. If that is too subtle and it can be on a tense day, begin by tightening up. Then release and pay attention to the feeling. Go back to the impulse to breathe. See if listening to it changes the tension in the muscles.

Watch the relationship between listening to the impulse to breathe and the state of tension in the musculature of the body. You may find an urge to move your body position slightly, perhaps even dramatically. Breathing, the tension in the body and the focus of one's attention are an interconnected system.

Ongoing attention to what the breath wants to do is a listening. Feeling how the muscles want to move, release and adjust is a listening. Feeling tension is releasing it. Through releasing, letting go, we reach a greater level of fluidity and strength: less effort, more power.

Visualization: Imagine, now or in the past, something you react to. Watch your reactivity influence the breath, muscle tone the emotional state. Don't do anything about it. Simply pay attention. Visualize the process of shifting attention to simple quiet, listening to the impulse that activates the breath. Notice if anything shifts in the breath, muscle tone and the emotional state.

Listening to Their Conversation

Fourth exercise:

Receptivity / Reactivity

A basic distinction in the application of extraordinary listening is the ability to distinguish between conversations of increasing charge and conversations of increasing meaning. With a little practice you should be able to tell very quickly the direction of a conversation. With that awareness you receive the signals when greater listening is required. You can see it coming before failing to listen becomes a serious problem.

Most of us are not in touch with our reactivity. Before, during and after a conversation if we see ourselves we should know if we were aware of increasing and decreasing charge. Notice if that awareness makes conversations more effective.

For the next 21 days, take several minutes at the end of each day and go over the one or two most important conversations. Assess the movements where reactivity increased. Notice the triggers that stimulated it. Keep a list of the triggers. Write them down.

Then go over the moments of receptivity increasing. Notice the intention that changes it. List the actions. Write them down.

If you miss a day or a week simply start paying attention as soon as you notice or remember. Do not use that as an excuse to stop your practice

Listening to Their Conversation

Fifth exercise:

Listening

Imagine you were lost and listening for the sound of a car or any sign of civilization. Imagine listening for the faintest whisper of something that you recognize. Then imagine you thought you heard something so far away you really couldn't tell if you imagined it, or not. If you were trying to listen to know which direction you should walk in to save your life, imagine the quality of your listening in that situation.

Picture yourself openly listening with that intensity. Now imagine that in just one minute there is going to be a loud noise near you. Can you sense how you might change the quality of your listening to prepare for that? Do you sense closing down?

Now imagine going from the state where you are getting more than you want - you are trying to shut out noise and disturbance, to the state where you are getting less than you need - you want more information. You do not want to miss any. Slowly go back to closed. Now recognize when you are keeping out input and practice quickly opening to make sure that you do not miss wherever sound you thought might guide you.

Listening to Their Conversation

Sixth exercise:

Connecting, practicing the process of opening the empathic connection.

We vary our openness to input. How much we open up to someone or close down is usually a reactive response. The application of this exercise increases our ability to make it a conscious choice.

Think about people you are open with. Think about the way you treat information they offer. Now think about people you close down around. Think about the opposite way you treat information they offer.

Practice opening and closing until it is so obvious you can see when you do it. Then practice doing it on purpose. Then practice doing it at will in conversations that matter

Watch the changes in the tension in the musculature of someone speaking. Notice their body in relationship to the breathing. Are they breathing in harmony with themselves as they speak? Does it affect the way you listen to them?

Listening to THE Conversation

Seventh exercise: Learning

Watch others in conversation. Make this simple distinction around their openness to learning. Do they value new information or do they seem protective of their present understanding? Do they seem threatened by people who see things differently? Or are they curious about how others see the world? Do they listen to the meaning of the message? Or do they seem to fill in their own? Do they respond more to the tone of the message? Are they aware of it?

For several weeks, at the end of each day, make a few notes to yourself about what you have seen.

After watching others for two weeks watch your self. Make the same assessments about your focus on learning or protecting. Are you threatened or curious? Does the tone overtake the meaning of the message?

Learning is a natural drive. Listening is the spirit, the intention, the attitude that enables learning. Attention is a spirit that is cultivated. It must be chosen and practiced daily, repeatedly. Otherwise reactive energy defaults into defensiveness and distraction.

Listening to THE Conversation

Eighth exercise: Transacting

Over the next days notice your conversations. Notice the difference in how you listen when you are interested and when you are not. When you are interested do you speak more or listen more? When you are not interested do you drift or engage yourself? In either case how conscious are you of the quality of your listening?

Rate the process of interacting with others by your ability to be present and available versus when you are victim to your focus of attention coming or going without your intention. Identify a range that you could turn into a scale of one to 10.

Each day rate your listening whenever you are conscious enough to notice.

If you have a digital watch, set the hour alarm as a reminder to monitor your listening quality.

By paying attention a deeper quality of presence begins to emerge.

Listening to THE Conversation

Ninth exercise:

Listening to the whisperings

Listening to the whisperings can be practiced in a number of ways. Before an important meeting write a few notes about what you think will be important. Check your notes after the meeting and see if you were listening to something.

Another possible option for practice is simply to take a quiet moment or two and write down what is important to you at that moment. If you can maintain a consistent schedule at about the same time each day you'll notice in a very short period time whisperings of a deeper intelligence surfacing.

We have learned to listen in ways that are rewarded by others. We need to develop a practice that connects us with THE larger conversation that unfolds our lives. If we do not, we hear shadows that never fulfill our dreams. Whether or not our dreams come true it is important that we are aware of them. Being true to our dreams starts with listening to them.

Tenth exercise:

Singing exercises for listening:

I know some of you will swear under the penalty of torture that you do not sing. But find a place where no one can possibly hear you and try this.

Exercise: play a note and listen to it and sing it. If you don't have a musical instrument find one. (If you are going to use that as an excuse, use the notes on a touch-tone phone.)

1. Play a note briefly. First experiment with trying to sing it immediately
2. Then try to replicate the note just from hearing it a little longer.
3. Then play and hold the note while you sing it
4. Then listen to it for a moment before you sing it
5. Finally listen until you can hear the note internally, until the listening becomes a visceral feeling in the body and then replicate the note.

The listening is actually a transition from hearing (eardrum brain stimulation) into a feeling of 'understanding' a pitch and tone. Being able to duplicate it comes from experience instead of thought.

For those of you who do not sing, give it several tries. It is not about how you sound. It is about experiencing what is possible in the development of consciousness and in your life. The risk is having to endure your self-judgement. The rewards are hearing messages that can change your life

Visualization

Take a moment to really imagine yourself in each of these states.

- A. Picture yourself so excited in a conversation at that you couldn't wait for someone to finish speaking, where you kept interrupting.
- B. Picture the most intense listening you have ever done, as if what were being said was the most important thing you would ever hear.
- C. Picture relaxing, breathing and listening in a quiet enjoyable fashion. Relax - relax to the next level - this can go on to infinity
- D. Practice concentration and centering while you listen to music.
- E. Practice simple quiet as you watch a sunset or simply watch the waters of a river or stream pass under a bridge

Appendix 1

Some Definitions:

Affect - the innate physiological response pattern to a given set of external and internal stimuli

Feeling - the conscious awareness of an affect

Emotion - the affect plus the results of the memories of all one's previous experiences with that affect

Mood - emotion sustained over time. Also described as an ungrounded assessment about the future that lives in the body

Mood Disorder - a problem with the system of thinking and feeling sustained over time affecting the ability to interact effectively

Appendix 2 Listening to People

Author(s):

Ralph G. Nichols; Leonard A. Stevens

Tests show that individuals retain only half of what they have heard immediately after hearing it and only one third of it within eight hours. Methods to improve listening should build an awareness of the factors that affect listening ability and should construct aural experiences that will produce good listening habits.

Appendix 3

AFFECT

The Innate Affects:

Interest/Excitement

Enjoyment/Joy

Surprise/Startle

Fear/Terror

Anger/Rage

Distress/Anguish

Shame/Humiliation

Disgust

Dis-smell

These nine affects may be added to any drive to give it intensity or power, but none of them have any intrinsic relationship to any drive. (For more on The Innate Affects see Sylvan Tompkins' site. <http://www.behavior.net/orgs/ssti/>)

The Compass of Shame

(from Donald L. Nathanson, MD)

Attack Self

|

|

|

Avoidance ----- Withdrawal

|

|

|

Attack Other

When the normal affect Shame/Humiliation is experienced, one's goal should be acceptance of the message and a changing of behavior to minimize this affect being triggered under these circumstances in the future. There is such a thing as "healthy shame", despite the impression Bradshaw and some of the other Self Help authors may give.

When people do not just accept the affective experience of Shame/Humiliation, they tend to automatically respond in one or more of the four ways:

Withdrawal - very intrinsic to the basic affect of Shame/Humiliation.

Range: a moment of breaking gaze and looking down or aside, to taking to bed and withdrawing from the world.

Demonstrates most clearly the power of shame to inhibit Interest/Excitement

Shame makes us feel "shorn from the herd", isolated, alone.

People will frequently say, "I felt like crawling in a hole." There is a strong sense of feeling "exposed". Chronic use of this pole is frequently called "Atypical Depression"

Donald F. Klein described a sub-population called "Hysteroid Dysphoria"

This was marked by the triad of:

Chocolate craving
Rejection Sensitivity
Applause Hunger

Attack Self

Range: mild deference to actual severe self mutilation.

Attack Other

If one is busy feeling superior to another individual or group it makes a great distraction from one's own sense of shame.

This is the pole that includes the anger response that Helen Block Lewis called "Humiliated Fury"

Range: disdain, sarcasm, and put down, to prejudice, all the way to "ethnic cleansing"

Note roots of 'sarcasm' sarc = flesh, casm = to cut

Avoidance

This is best thought of as distraction. This pole includes all the things we call addictions, including food, sex, gambling, spending, as well as substances. Here it is as if Interest/Excitement is 'kicked up' in defense of the shame.

Range: healthy interest in a hobby to a compulsive, relentless pursuit of a substance or activity despite life threatening consequences.

It is vitally important not to equate the affect Shame/Humiliation just with the emotion we know as embarrassment. Embarrassment is just one emotion that uses the affect Shame. Shame has many more and varied expressions and presentations, as will become apparent when considering the poles of the Compass of Shame.

Tomkins noted that shame is triggered any time there is an impediment to one of the two positive affects. If I am interested in getting you to notice me and you do not, shame will be triggered, even if there is no specific embarrassment. This 'shame as impediment' is an important to keep in mind.

Differentiating between Guilt and Shame:

Guilt is not an innate affect. It is an emotion consisting of shame plus some form of fear of reprisal.

Guilt feels like it is about something we have done wrong.

Shame feels like it is about our very essence being defective.

Guilt motivates us to confess.

Shame motivates us to hide. (nearly anything kept secret long enough begins to feel slimy)

The treatment of Guilt is confession. The treatment of Shame is exposure, provided it is to an accepting audience. This is one of the reasons that the 12 Step Programs are so effective for many types of 'addictions'.

Quotes

If mobile life forms are to manage the sheer variety of stimuli impinging on them, they must evolve not only with the ability to solve increasingly more difficult problems, but to store, link by association, and retrieve data about problems already solved, and also develop some way of ranking stimuli and problems according to their importance. It is the innate affects that provide the power to accomplish this latter task.

The six basic innate affects (interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, fear-terror, distress-anguish, anger-rage) are evolved, programmed responses to stimuli with highly specific qualities. They are triggered when the flow of data rises or falls over one or another gradient, or remains steady at one or another non-optimal level. The contour in time of each type of stimulus is mimicked by the contour in time of the affect it triggers, thus drawing our attention to the specific kind of importance associated with that stimulus. Affect is vitality; affect occurs only when something is significant; affect is about changing information. "Stability is that very rare special case of a rate of change which is extremely slow compared with the totality of the environment" (p. 354). Boredom is not triggered by lack of change, but by a steady-state non-optimal stimulus; boredom is an adult form of distress rather than an innate response to under stimulation (which can only exist in death.) We have evolved to "know" that some stimulus needs the highest level of neocortical cognition (accessible only through the gateway of consciousness) because an affect has told us so.

Tomkins postulated where the data from all of these subsystems is put together, and which produces conscious thought whenever affect is blended into the mix.

It seems unlikely that any event can enter memory unless it has first triggered an affect that causes it to enter consciousness, after which we use our best tools to solve whatever problem it presented.

Just as money banks have rules about deposits and withdrawals, the systems that together form the mind involve rules about the ordering of information.

All of a sudden, the act of remembering the set triggers an affect that now may come to color everything within the set itself. Furthermore, the nature and density of that affect is also dependent on whatever had already been going on when the magic word was uttered and the remembered set of SARS released like the genie from the bottle. As mentioned above, since the events that require

the retrieval of a memory are themselves full of affect, it stands to reason that memory itself is dynamic and ever capable of change through this process of magnification by the affect of the moment.

Both intuition and experience raise questions about that last statement, for all of us know how difficult it is to get someone to change the pattern of affects that we call an attitude. Once we have grouped sets of SARS on the basis of some perceived similarity, the group itself becomes a thing, an entity, a structure that is now (as a thing, an entity, a structure) capable of triggering affect and initiating a Stimulus-Affect-Response Sequence that could not have existed prior to the formation of that group. The highly cognitive act of forming the group results in an apparent reduction of the affect associated with the scenes involved, but a radical increase in the affect associated with retrieval of the set. The SARS formed when a grouped set of scenes now becomes a stimulus for further affect is itself part of a set of SARS that we can recognize as similar not on the basis of the actual events involved, but merely on the basis of the ways such groupings trigger new affect and new responses.

*Strange as it may seem, then, we humans have not evolved to process every novel stimulus as a novel stimulus. Rather, the brain has evolved so that we learn to assemble perceptions into sets and SARS into scripts; in this way we conserve vital storage space but also learn to misidentify potentially new experiences as if they had been known and understood before. Mobile creatures who were fortunate enough to develop an affect system (that conferred urgency and importance on data or stimuli that represented change and required the best neo-cortical attention) also developed the propensity for scripts that brought both far greater efficiency of thought and an inherent susceptibility to emotional illness. Once a set of scenes has been assembled into a script, with all the rules and regulations associated with so complex a psychological organization, it is far more economical for the mind to distort a new experience to make it fit this or another of our already-existing scripts. People who say "Don't confuse me with facts my mind is made up," are telling you the truth at a far deeper level than they might have known.

Vernon C. Kelly, Jr., M.D.
Training Director

In this paradigm, every interaction is motivated by affect and triggers affect.

This process is simplified further if the therapist remains attuned to the role of any interaction in promoting or hindering a couple's ability to maximize positive affect, minimize negative affect, and minimize the inhibition of affect. Through such simplification of interactive patterns that are befuddling to those encountering problems of intimacy, the therapist can provide clear methods of pattern alteration. And when special attention is paid to the action of shame on an interaction, the therapist can focus on the primary goal of removing impediments to intimacy. *Shame, like all of the innate affects, is an amplifier of its stimulus; thus, it turns all impediments to intimacy into further and more serious impediments to intimacy. In its presence, even small issues become impossible to resolve because both partners feel shorn from the other, isolated, distanced, and as if the other is not an ally. Remove shame, and new alliances appear.

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<http://www.behavior.net/orgs/ssti/>

Appendix 2

Neurotransmitters;
Acetylcholine

Norepinephrine (locus ceruleus in the pons, may be important in facilitating wakefulness, and attention (decrease associated with depression)

Glutamate- these three are ' excitatory neurotransmitters

Inhibitory;

dopamine (produced in midbrain substantia nigra) (deficiency= Parkinson's)

Gaba= gamma-aminobutyric acid

glycine (spinal cord)

serotonin (cells of the median raphe of the brain stem which projects to the hypothalamus,) (decreases assoc with depression)

Endorphins and enkephalins are produced in the hypothalamus - they have opioid like effects of analgesia and sedation

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