

Wise Listening (2 of 5) Listening to What is True

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to the second talk on wise listening. It is really a fantastic thing to become a listener: to listen well to ourselves and others.

I want to read a short poem by a Japanese poet named Shinkichi Takahashi:

“I don't take your words
Merely as words.
Far from it.

I listen
To what makes you talk –
Whatever that is –
And me listen.”

So it's not just listening to what people have to say. That's certainly important, especially if they want us to understand. But it's also listening to what makes them speak: what's the motivation? What's the underlying inspiration or movement to speak? While there's the message of the words, there's also the message of what's making a person say what they're going to say. Is it a movement to feel more connected to you? Or to pull away? To avoid you? Or is it a movement to praise themselves and get affirmation? Or to apologize for themselves and somehow make themselves smaller in relation to you? Is it because they want to get something from you? Or is it because they want to support you and see what they can offer you? Are they saying what they are saying because they feel safe with you and feel a sense of friendliness or connection? Or because they want to be safe and they are trying to create some sense of that? That list can go on and on. If we only take into account the literal meaning of the words, we might miss a huge part of what is really happening in the conversation.

To go along with the teaching last week on right speech, where the second criterion for right speech is “Is it true?”, for wise listening we can ask: “What's most true here?” or “What's really true?” Sometimes the literal meanings of the words might be true enough, but this is not really the truth that needs to be expressed – what's happening here for the person.

As an example, if a person is praising you, you might get distracted by the niceness of the praise. But if you listen to what's behind the praise, it might be that they feel insecure and they are looking for some way to make themselves feel safe in your presence. Perhaps if they praise you, you will relax and not threaten them. If that's what's true under their words, that's a powerful and important truth to recognize. When we offer them genuine care, then we take that into account and maybe the praise is not that important. What is important is that we show them that they have nothing to fear with us.

If what they want is to try to manipulate us to get something, that's important to see. That's actually more true than the words, which might be deceptive. If what's true is that they are trying to trick us into getting something from us, then how do we care for them? Do we simply cut them off and say no or avoid them? Instead, we can keep asking more deeply, “Why? What drives them to want to try to get something from me?”

Are they afraid? Are they insecure? Are they poor and desperate? What's happening for them?" The idea of listening for what is most true in others is a powerful gift we give to people. What is most true for this person here now? We can go deeper, under the words, and ask, "What is most true?"

My suggestion, and the assumption that I operate under, is that if you can find what is most true in yourself and others, you will discover beauty. You will discover something precious, something tender, something that is easy to love or care for or be generous toward. Even when people have the worst behavior and horrible words of hate, we can listen for and be present with what is behind the words and attitude of hate. We can look for what is most true at the depths of who they are. I'm not saying this is universal but even though the person is an adult, we might find a scared three-year-old. No one ever cared for their fear and this never got resolved. The hate is just an expression of trying to be safe or having a temper tantrum to get attention.

I'm not assuming that all hate is this way. But the theory that I like to operate under is that if you go deep enough to find what is most true, you will find something beautiful. I won't claim that's always the case but very often if that is the assumption and we listen for it, that beauty has a chance to come forward. It has a chance

to be discovered. But if we don't have that theory, then it will never be discovered.

So listen for what is most true. What is the most important thing here? What is the root of all this behavior that we hear and see? Listen. Be available. Sense.

I love the idea of this kind of listening as availability. We don't rush people. We are not probing to get to the bottom unless they are asking us for help with exploring something. There is just a deep sense of availability. The lesson of that kind of listening and availability is that we can be complete; we can be at ease; we can be at home in this world in that availability. We are just available for what's here. We are not anxious or greedy about what's here, with expectations, or wanting it to be different. There's something very powerful about just feeling and sensing that this is good.

When I was raising young children, I saw how significant the attitudes of the adults around them were. If they were anxious, they were teaching the kids that the world is a dangerous place and they should be anxious. But with parents who had a sense of being at ease and at home here, even when things were challenging, the children would learn the lesson that this world is a place where they could feel at home and at ease, even when there were challenges.

The idea is to listen and be available as if there's nothing else we need to do. We are just content and happy to be present here, available, and to be a listener. I think listening for what is most true is medicine for many people.

I believe to listen, hear, and sense what is most true here well, we have to have done it for ourselves. We don't do this while searching into the future. We listen while arriving here and being available so that what is deep inside of us can stop being shy and feel okay to come forth and reveal itself. We create in ourselves an attitude of welcome and availability to ourselves and others.

If these words about listening today seem interesting to you, you can experiment with listening for what is true during the day. Be a little bit wise about the time to do this. Don't do it automatically everywhere you go with all conversations. You might see what happens to you if, in your mind, you ask yourself the question "What is most true here behind the words this person is speaking? What's making them say what they're saying?" Don't probe or stare at them microscopically, but rather, be available to sense and feel. Be available almost as if you're really asking that question. If you are available, maybe something will be revealed. You don't have to figure it out.

Thank you very much and I will look forward to tomorrow.