

Wise Listening (5 of 5)

Listening With Love

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

metta, loving-kindness, friendliness, intention, purpose, respect, care, appreciation, goodwill, timely, truth, judgments, biases, beneficial, support, grammar

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This is the fifth and final talk on wise listening, which borrows from the Buddha's criteria for wise speaking.

The fifth criteria is to speak with friendliness, to speak with *metta*, lovingkindness, or goodwill. If we're listening, to listen with love, with goodwill, with friendliness. It might be easier to listen with goodwill, friendliness, and generosity than it is to speak that way.

Sometimes when speaking, we don't know what words to say. Sometimes speaking, we can feel a

little bit like we're offering ourselves too much to someone else. Maybe it's the impact we're unsure of. If you walk up to a stranger or sit down with a stranger on the bus and you say, "I love you," who knows what's going to happen. If you sit with a stranger on the bus and listen to them attentively with care and love, it could get complicated. It's probably much safer to just listen with respect attentively as if the person is valuable and important, as if the person is worthy of being known, heard, and seen.

I suspect that there's a crisis in our society of people not being seen and heard and respected enough. We can respect them with our capacity to listen. Listening is intentional. It's different from just hearing. Sometimes in meditation, it's wonderful to just rest in hearing and be simple and quiet.

In our social lives things get enriched by our intentionality, by doing things on purpose. We can listen to someone on purpose – as opposed to not really making any effort to listen and just hearing them as we would hear the traffic or the birds outside. There's not much depth in that way of hearing others. Instead we can turn to someone and hear them out, listening to them on purpose with intentionality. Engaging with intentionality can be

multifaceted. Part of the intentionality is to listen to them with appreciation – with the sense that it's worth listening to them, that what they have to say is worthwhile to hear, and that it's worthwhile to be a witness to this person's life. We can listen with goodwill.

To call *metta* “goodwill” might be an easier approach than listening with love. Love gets complicated sometimes with so many meanings. It is a high bar for people to always love everyone. But even with people that we have trouble with, are challenged by, or even don't like sometimes, it might be possible to find goodwill, wishing them well, wishing them the opportunity to be heard. Hopefully, being heard, respected, and appreciated might touch something deep inside of them that is beneficial and helpful. As a result, maybe the person won't be as challenging.

Good listening is a form of love, a form of good will, and a form of respect and care for others. And so how do we do this? What are the means for this? I think it's helpful to think that listening with love, listening with goodwill, is not only having an attitude of goodwill. It's what we bring to the listening. The listening can be active. We can ask caring questions as if we want to know more and as if the person is valuable enough to find out more about

what they think and what their experience is like – just asking questions and appreciating what they've said.

For some people, it's very rare to be appreciated for what they say. Sometimes in group meetings and group situations there are plenty of people who are not appreciated when they speak. Some people are recognized easily by others. They have a lot bigger presence or have a status in society that maybe gets them in. People focus on them. Other people don't have that and people will sometimes overlook them. Sometimes someone will say something, no one will acknowledge it, and then a little bit later someone else says the same thing and they're acknowledged.

To pay attention, notice – are people being appreciated? Are people being listened to in meetings, in different situations? Who's not being listened to? Who's being overlooked? Can you listen? Can you fill in for the lack of attention or deep listening that some people all too often experience at places like meetings and social situations ? This is an active, purposeful, “Yes, let's listen. Let's pay attention here.”

The other way to be this active, loving listener is to not rehearse what you're going to say. Instead,

consider what the person is saying. Consider it and listen to what's not being said. Listen to the feelings, the emotions behind what they say. Listen to what they might be asking for without it being a question. Listen for what the purpose is for what they're saying.

To be actively involved in listening means to consider what others are saying more than what you're going to say. To listen with love is not to interrupt people but rather, to let them speak until finished. Of course, sometimes it's appropriate to interrupt. Sometimes the game, the playfulness of conversations involves a back and forth and interrupting, but that's in a context where it's appropriate and with people you're familiar with. At times, love means: don't interrupt.

For purposeful listening we consider what our purpose is for listening. Some of the purposes are these five criteria:

Listen in a timely way. Listen when it's really important to listen. Know when to listen in a conversation rather than to keep speaking and saying your opinions. Maybe you don't say all you can say every time you have something to say. Some people have a strong habit of wanting to get

things off their chest and get their opinions out there and be right. To speak in a timely way means to give other people a chance to speak and to hear.

Listen to what's really true. Purposefully look for the truth. That has a lot to do with reviewing ourselves so that we're not overlaying judgments and biases on top of what we hear. We want to be a clean listener.

Listen in a way that touches the heart. This is related to the idea of listening with love. Listen in a way that helps people feel safe or comfortable around you.

Listen for what's beneficial. Listen in a beneficial way. Listen for a way that supports you and others.

The last one is related, and that is to listen with goodwill.

These are all purposes that we choose to live by. There are times when this Buddhist practice of ours calls upon us to live an intentional life, a purposeful life. Listening is one of the interesting places for that, when we appreciate the difference between listening and hearing. We can hear without any sense of purpose at all. We enrich ourselves if we listen with purpose, provided it's the right purpose – a purpose

that feels like it comes from the depth of us and supports something that's beautiful and wonderful inside of us to flow on its own. We're not straining and stressing for the purpose.

It's a purpose that allows something to flower. One of the most beautiful flowerings we can have is love. What a great gift it is for our world to live a purposeful life where love is at the center. Listening is one of the expressions of love. If love is a language, listening is the grammar for that language.

Thank you.