

**What Does It Mean To Be A People of DEEP LISTENING
Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima Zoom Service
Sunday, October 11, 2020**

Tech Host: Debra Kroon

Celebrant: Carole Sahlstrand

Message: Susan Kaphammer

Tech Intro and Reminders- Debra

Call to Worship: - Susan

“Why We're Here” by Rev. Erik Walker Wikstrom

Here, today, in this place and with these people,

May we listen so that we can hear;

May we hear so that we can feel;

May we feel so that we can know; and

May we know so that we can change ourselves and this world.

Chalice Lighting - Carole

Opening Song – Debra

Listening - by Lea Morris

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JMf0JbCQ5k&list=RDYyaidTfyxgl&index=5>

Note: be ready to pause/end at 2:06

Welcome and Comments - Carole

Sharing Joys & Sorrows – Carole

Sharing our Generosity and Commitment- Carole

Meditation – Susan

Selected from: **Listen! The Spirit Is Calling!** by John Saxon

Listen! Can you hear it? The Spirit is calling.

It calls us in the silence and through the noise of our daily lives. It calls us in the brightness of the day and the darkness of the night, in times of hope and despair.

Listen! Can you hear it? The Spirit is calling.

It doesn't matter what you call it for it has no name and has many names. The Spirit of Life, of Love. The Spirit of Compassion, of Hope. The Spirit of Justice.

Listen! Can you hear it? The Spirit is calling.

It's calling to you and to me. Calling us to greater wholeness, greater connection, greater service, greater love. Calling us to heal the brokenness within ourselves, in others, and in the world. Calling us to live more deeply. Calling us to beauty.

It's calling us to laugh and dance and sing. Calling us to live through life's pain and sorrow. Calling us to live courageously and kindly, to speak our truth in love.

It's calling us into community. It's calling us into the greater Life of all.

Listen!

Can you hear it?

The Spirit is calling.

(Silence)

Message

What does it mean to be a people of Deep Listening? And why should we devote a service to listening – after all, we've been listening all our lives, and I'm sure some of us have had lessons or workshops or read articles about the differences between "hearing" and "good listening." We are obviously well-practiced in listening.

A side note: With respect for those of our community and the larger world community who may be differently abled with hearing loss, please consider the terms around "listening" broadly as meaning the tending to vibration, sign

language, visual cues or other means of sensing what is for most people transmitted by sound.

I'm sure you've noted that the focus today is not just "listening" or even "good listening" – it is Deep Listening... as iterated in our call to worship, listening to hear, feel, know and change ourselves and this world. Such Deep Listening is certainly spiritual practice, spiritual challenge, spiritual gift, as so beautifully expressed in the meditation reading. The Spirit is calling, can you hear it? Listen!

We will explore deep listening in three aspects. The first, and perhaps the least familiar, least comfortable, least practiced, is listening to, listening within, and listening for ourselves, for our own understanding of ourselves as individuals in this world. The second aspect is deep listening in conversation, in relationship with another. And we will explore the role of deep listening in furthering our goals of social justice, our efforts to create a better world.

On Listening for Our Better/Deeper Selves

Rumi said, "The soul has been given its own ears to hear things the mind does not understand." Listening with the "own ears of the soul" is a challenging spiritual practice that takes time and patience. Gary Kowalski, in his poem, "Listening with the Heart" recommends:

Unplugging the TV, turning off the computer,
Quieting the mental chatter and distractions.
Maybe it means listening to the birds
And the insects, the wind in the leaves, the creaking and groaning of the trees,
... Sitting so still we can hear our heartbeat,
Watch our breath, the gentle whoosh of air,
The funny noises from our own insides,
Marveling at the body we take so much for granted.
Maybe it means listening to our dreams,
Paying more attention to what we really want from life,

The sculptor, Auguste Rodin, observed that we need to listen, “as if to hear from behind the wall the songs of birds who populate the secret garden.” Such listening is much akin to meditation, being open to what the Soul Matters Team calls, “A whisper of something inside / that seems to have known us / longer than we’ve known it.” It is in quietness and stillness that this whisper can be heard, understood, and accepted with the power to transform.

I had one such powerful experience as a working, single woman in my early 30s. I had ups and downs of depression but even the “good times” were tempered with a heaviness. At a long afternoon session at a retreat we participants separately got comfortable with floor pillows and closed our eyes. Instrumental music played softly and we were invited to listen inward. I listened... and without going into detail here, I heard and re-experienced the thoughts and feelings of my younger self. This “whisper of something inside” introduced me to what had created much of the heaviness that plagued me. Being able to hear what I had barely known and had not acknowledged relieved enough of its power that I could also hear an internal strength that had I could now know was with me.

The poem, “Labyrinth,” by Rev. Leslie Takahashi reflects my experience in noting that such listening is not always easy or clear or straightforward.

...Listen in the twists and turns.

Listen in the openness within all searching.

Listen: a wisdom within you calls to a wisdom beyond you and in that dialogue lies peace.

Gregg Levoy, in his book *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*, acknowledges that “listening is hard work. The discipline,” he continues, “of paying close attention to ourselves, so the vital signs that blip across the screen of our lives in forms such as dreams, intuitions, feedback, and longings, will help us know what our calls are.” He suggests that we approach this “hard work” of listening with curiosity and with the willingness to deal with what we may hear.

Maybe you recognize, as I do, times when a decision is made or change of direction is taken and there is a sense that finally I did what I had needed to do for some time. The practice of deep listening offers the chance to understand and act earlier on what you somehow know rather than just seeing the signs in retrospect.

Curious questions include: What do you hear, and what does that tell you about yourself and your being in this world? A story related by Susan Strauss illustrates how our experiences and our inner work impacts what we hear in the world.

Gerry was walking down a sidewalk in Washington D.C., with a Native American friend who worked in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It was lunchtime in Washington. People were husslin' and busslin' along the sidewalks, and car honks and hurried engine noises filled the streets. In the middle of all this traffic, Gerry's friend stopped and said, "*hey, a cricket!*"

"*What?*" said Gerry.

"*Yeah, a cricket,*" said his friend. "*Look here,*" and he pulled aside some of the bushes that separated the sidewalk from the government buildings. There in the shade was a cricket chirping away.

"*Wow,*" said Gerry, "*How did you hear that with all this noise and traffic?*"

"*Oh,*" said the Native man. "*It was the way I was raised ... what I was taught to listen for. Here, I'll show you something.*"

The Native man reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins ... nickels, quarters, dimes ... and dropped them on the sidewalk. Everyone who was rushing by stopped to ... listen.

It is important to ask, What is my focus? Susan Strauss, queries, "We with our busy lives, rushing down highways and byways, preoccupied with our own inner thoughts and expectations, what do we hear?" And, I would add, what does that mean for our experience of the world? What we focus on to hear can be a choice, but only if we listen.

The Rev. Scott Tayler reminds us that, “We don’t just listen for clarity and guidance, / we listen to become larger.” That is, I believe, that we listen to more fully occupy ourselves, our knowledge, our gifts and our talents. We listen to ourselves to move more fully into being who we can be, who we are meant to be.

On Listening to Each Other

Listening, clearly is a factor in relationships, with deep listening offering understanding, connection, and comfort to both the speaker and the listener. But how difficult is such listening?

Do you, as I often do, divide my attention between listening and formulating what I might say next? Particularly if you are often alone or in situations with little conversation, you may feel a pent-up reservoir of thoughts and ideas you are anxious to share once you are in conversation. Although it is clear that listening requires pauses in our talking, that can be more difficult than we wish. Alice Deur Miller reflects this: “Listening is not merely not talking, though even that is beyond most of our powers; it means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told us.”

Although we have listened all our lives, we may need to be intentional in developing the deep listening that strengthens bonds, heals hurts and creates a spiritual space between individuals.

Joyce Sutphen begins her poem, “How to Listen” with:

Tilt your head slightly to one side and lift
your eyebrows expectantly. Ask questions.

Delve into the subject at hand or let
things come randomly. Don't expect answers.

Forget everything you've ever done.
Make no comparisons. Simply listen.

Key phrases: Ask questions... Don't expect answers...Make no comparisons... Simply listen. Easier said than done, but how we listen can matter a great deal.

Rachel Naomi Remen's work in medicine has taught her much about listening. "I suspect that the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. And especially if it's given from the heart. When people are talking, there's no need to do anything but receive them. Just take them in. Listen to what they're saying. Care about it. Most times caring about it is even more important than understanding it. Most of us don't value ourselves or our love enough to know this. It has taken me a long time to believe in the power of simply saying, "I'm so sorry," when someone is in pain. And meaning it."

Rachel's observation that "most of us don't value ourselves or our love enough" reinforces the basic need I spoke to of doing the hard work of listening to ourselves to become more confident and complete to be in our world. A spiritual practice of deep personal listening makes interpersonal listening at a deep and generous level more possible, benefitting both the speaker and the listener, as expressed by Henri Nouwen.

"The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you."

Listening to an acquaintance or a friend can be particularly difficult in the face of distress. Parker Palmer reflected on a difficult time in his life. "I took comfort and strength from those few people who neither fled from me nor tried to save me but were simply present to me. Their willingness to be present revealed their faith that I had the inner resources to make this treacherous trek -- quietly bolstering my faltering faith." Such presence and listening in emotional situations changes both the speaker and the listener

Barry Svigals, the lead architect of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School, talked about how listening was an important part of the process of designing the new school in the wake of the tragedy. He reflects, “Listening also is something that changes the person who is speaking. It can be an encouragement. It can be that this openness can resonate in others, so that it is a shared openness. So in a way the person speaking is also listening to something that is larger than both of us who are speaking.” This describes sacred space created and shared by the individuals in conversation – “listening to something that is larger than both of us.” In speaking and listening they found understanding and the bonds of community.

Listening for wisdom within... listening in relationships... Deep listening... I'll remind us, is a spiritual challenge.

“To listen is very hard,” Henri Nouwen writes, “because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept.”

This freedom to receive, to welcome, to accept is key to listening as a factor in improving our world, a world that sometimes seems on the verge of apocalypse. The Rev. Sean Parker Dennison advises in, “How to Survive the Apocalypse.”

“First learn to listen
Not only for enemies around
Corners in hidden places
But for the faint footsteps
Of hope and the whispers of resistance...”

In the midst of the apocalypse, listen for hope. Author, John Mauldin explains why it is difficult to listen for the “good news” around us. “... we tend to tune into bad news more eagerly than we do good news. The media is partly to

blame, because murders, fires, and nasty weather sell advertising. But something deeper is at work. It's an instinctive bias toward watchfulness for danger. This behavior makes perfect sense as the consequences of ignoring bad news are higher. On the other hand, it distorts our collective perception of reality, which creates all sorts of consequences. Overcoming this bias takes an intentional effort."

This temptation of a constant diet of negative news can impact our attitudes and behavior as illustrated by the old story of the Good Wolf and the Bad.

One evening, an elderly Cherokee brave told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people.

He said, "my son, the battle is between two 'wolves' inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is good. It is joy, peace love, hope serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "the one that you feed."

What am I listening to? How am I processing this information? Am I feeding the way I want to be in the world? Are my listening habits strengthening or sapping my will and energy to be a force for civility, for healing, for good?

Increasingly, social interactions are fraught with divisiveness and distrust. Differences in politics extend to judgements of character and even worth. I have shared with some of you my distress in finding that a cherished young man I mentored in school who has become a friend is a solid Trump supporter. My feelings about him, my listening to him, is complicated by my judgements.

In the article, "How To Listen When You Disagree," Benjamin Mathes reflects on his experience manning a "listening table" at the 2016 Republican National Convention.

If there's one question I get asked more than any other question, it's this: How do I listen to someone when I disagree with them?

There are many ways to answer this. It takes a lot of forgiveness, compassion, patience, and courage to listen in the face of disagreement. I could write pages on each of these principles, but let's start with the one thing that makes forgiveness, compassion, patience, and courage possible.

We must work to hear the person not just the opinion.

When someone has a point of view we find difficult to understand, disagreeable, or even offensive, we must look to the set of circumstances that person has experienced that resulted in that point of view.

Get their story, their biography, and you'll open up the real possibility of an understanding that transcends disagreement.

Like the roots of a tree, our stories, which can create our beliefs, are completely unique, and also connected. It is through story that we can find common ground enough to co-exist in the face of great, often necessary, tension.

When you find yourself in disagreement, just ask one question:

“Will you tell me your story? I'd love to know how you came to this point of view.”

The truth is, if our love can hold space for paradox, tension, and disagreement, there's room for all types of beliefs and opinions.

Division is a choice.

Life isn't a Facebook feed.

Our love, our listening, must *bring in*, not *edit out*.

Dare to listen, dare to be quiet, dare to seek understanding; in the end, it's the people we need to love, not their opinions.

When in a situation where it is not possible to stop and actually ask, “Will you tell me your story?” I can myself that every person has a story that, like me, led them to where they are now.

A simple summary of “How to listen when you disagree” is provided by this quote by Frank Tyger: “Listening to both sides of a story will convince you that there is more to a story than both sides.”

The theologian, Paul Tillich, said simply, “The first duty of love is to listen.” If we are to love, love ourselves, love others, and love our world, we must listen.

I will close my remarks with the hymn, “Find a Stillness.” This reminds us that in finding the stillness, finding the silence, we can find the spirit and harmony.

Closing Song: - Debra

Find a Stillness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQg8NTjC0Qo>

Extinguishing the Flame -Carole