



REFLECTIONS

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the Unitarian Church of Calgary
Volume 1, Issue 1 • September 2014

What does it mean to live a life of Deep Listening?

September's theme:

Listening

**Sept 7 – Hear the Water
Flow**

Sept 14 – Deep Listening

**Sept 21 – Do You Hear
What I Hear**

**Sept 28 – The Lies We
Tell Ourselves**

We are here to fight against and heal spiritual disconnection, disconnection from our truest selves, from each other, and from needs greater than our own. Listening deeply, opening trustfully and serving boldly each restore and reconnect us. Most often that journey of connection begins with listening, deep listening and our culture usually omits the importance of and honing skills to deeply listen.

And so we take up this simple but precious task. Actually it may not be quite so simple. When we set our intention to really listen we learn right away that listening can be hard. Whether we're trying to hear others, our own voice, the earth, the holy, or life itself, it's easy to mess it up. Or forget. In the classic children's book, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, the main character meets a creature who sells words. This wise fellow says, "Business is hard these days. People hear but they just don't listen anymore." One wonders if we even remember what the difference is.

So, we aim this month to help each other remember—remember not just how to listen, but why deep listening matters. That's not something easily done on our own. I think we know that. I think that's why this month will be so precious to us all. I recall my dear Native American spirit brother Roderick saying "there is a reason the creator gave us two ears and one mouth." May we use our ears to deeply and truly listen.

Namaste,
Rev Debra

Upcoming Services

<p>September 7 <i>Hear the Water Flow</i></p>	<p>September 14 <i>Deep Listening</i></p>
<p>Description: When you think of the sound of water it often has a soothing quality, listening to waves on the beach, a brook or stream bubbling along. We use water to gather us back together as a community after the summer ventures. There are a few new faces on staff as well, Shannon Mang our new Director of Children and Youth Programs and Chris Rothbauer our Intern Minister, so come welcome them and all of us back together.</p>	<p>Description: We are in a yearlong experiment with Theme-based Ministry. One aspect of this will be small groups, Theme Listen Circles (TLCs). The very foundation of this concept is listening, deeply listening to each other, to the world around us and to ourselves. So just what is meant by deep listening and what is this Theme-based stuff all about?</p>
<p>Presenter Rev. Debra Faulk</p>	<p>Presenter Rev. Debra Faulk</p>
<p>Service Associate Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister</p>	<p>Service Associate Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister and Danielle Webber, Student Minister</p>
<p>Music Jane Perry, Music Director</p>	<p>Music Jane Perry, Music Director</p>
<p>** Please bring water to represent the insights received or places visited over the summer.</p>	<p>This service will include the Installation of the Board of Trustees</p>
<p>September 21 <i>Do You Hear What I Hear</i></p>	<p>September 28 <i>The Lies We Tell Ourselves</i></p>
<p>Description: Have you ever played that game of whispering something to someone and allowing it to travel around a circle only to be repeated as something completely different? This seems to be the case with the voice of climate change scientist. Any where else?</p>	<p>Description: Socrates once said, "To thy own self be true," but sometimes it's easier to lie to ourselves than it is to be true to ourselves. What does it mean to listen to ourselves, even when it's difficult to hear the reply?</p>
<p>Presenter Rev. Debra Faulk</p>	<p>Presenter Chris Rothbauer, Intern Minister</p>
<p>Service Associate Danielle Webber, Student Minister</p>	<p>Service Associate Rev. Debra Faulk</p>
<p>Music Jane Perry, Music Director</p>	<p>Music Jane Perry, Music Director</p>
<p>We will include a commitment ceremony with Shannon Mang, our new Director of Religious</p>	<p>This service will include a ceremony of Covenant with our new Intern Minister</p>

This Month's Pre-Meeting Spiritual Exercise: "15 Minutes of Listening"

An impressive few can be attentive and can listen deeply during every moment of their life—paying attention to and hearing the meaning of a moment no matter what that moment is. But most of us need a little help! Most of us forget to listen deeply... unless we're really intentional about it.

So that's what our pre-meeting spiritual exercise pushes us to do: be very intentional about deep listening. And it also asks us to try that in three different ways—knowing that different gifts come from different sources. In the coming week, give this exercise a try:

The First 5 Minutes of Listening: To the Everyday

Choose an everyday (think "mundane") experience: commuting, cooking, sitting in the park, sitting in a waiting room, or at Tim's, or on the street car. Pick one such regular experience, but be intentional about sitting there and listening—nothing but listening for five minutes.

Don't go in with an agenda. Don't think ahead about what you are "listening for"? Just listen. Afterward, take some time just to breathe and let it sink in—maybe this will be a minute, maybe you will need a day.

But after you take the time to let the five minutes of listening digest, write down what you "heard"—not every detail of what you heard, but what stuck out for you, what "spoke" to you. What sounds among the many sounds had "something to say" or "grabbed you."

Here are a few questions to help you with your reflection if you need them:

1. What sound had you not noticed before? What sound had you been missing?
2. What sound did you most like? Most dislike?
3. How did you feel when you were done?

The Second 5 Minutes of Listening: To Another Person

Really listen to an important person in your life. Your spouse, child, parent, neighbour, close co-worker. Whoever you pick, the important part is that you really listen. We hear the words, but often we simply do not listen. So for five minutes, let their words be what matters most.

Don't think ahead about what you plan to say in response. Don't offer them your wise advice. Ask helpful questions that help them keep talking and express themselves, but do not interrupt. Maybe just let the silence be; let them fill it when it happens rather than you rushing in. But for five minutes, pay attention to them and to their words.

Warning: don't tell them that this is an assignment!!! Don't ask them out for coffee so that "I can listen to you for five minutes." Just find five minutes during a naturally arising conversation to focus your attention and ears in this intense, intentional way. And then, like before, take some time afterward to let the experience sink in, and then write down what you "heard" and what happened.

Here are some questions to help:

1. Was it hard? Why? Did you have to fight the temptation to judge? To interrupt? To break the silence? To give them advice? Did you not know how to listen? Did they not seem to know how to talk? Or know how to trust talking?
2. What surprised you?
3. How did you feel? How did they seem to feel?

The Third 5 Minutes of Listening: To Voices Usually Tuned Out

Finally, take five minutes to open your ears to that which you usually—intentionally or unintentionally—close your ears. Think broadly. Maybe it is the voice of that talk show host who shouts all the time. Maybe it is one of those “stupid TV shows” that you think are the source of everything wrong with our culture. Maybe it is the voice of someone left behind: the homeless person or pan-handler. Think carefully about what this will be. The process of choosing will be just as rich as the process of actually listening. Indeed, be sure to listen to yourself as you try to sort out your choice.

As you reflect on these five minutes of listening, ask yourself: What happened to me as I listened?

Readings

Remember that these readings serve as “jumping off points.” They are not here to tell us how to “do it right.” Rather they serve as windows into how others have thought about what it means to be a person of deep listening. Hearing about the journeys of others, we are better able to think through our own.

There’s a lot here. Don’t attempt to absorb or analyze it all. Rather, think of it as a treasure chest that you are sifting through to find the jewel that speaks most strongly to your heart. Come to the meeting prepared to share the selection that resonates with or speaks most powerfully to the story of your own life right now.

“If we want to support each other’s inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard.”

- Parker J. Palmer

“I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again...Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well.”

- Margaret Wheatley

“We are really alive when we listen to each other, to the silences of each other as well as to the words and what lies behind the words.”

- Frederick Buechner

“Listening is being willing to be changed by the other person.”

- Yoga master Judith Lasater

“Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force...When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. Ideas actually begin to grow within us and come to life... When we listen to people there is an alternating current, and this recharges us so that we never get tired of each other...and it is this little creative fountain inside us that begins to spring and cast up new thoughts and unexpected laughter and wisdom... Well, it is when 5 people really listen to us, with quiet fascinated attention, that the little fountain begins to work again, to accelerate in the most surprising way.”

- Brenda Ueland

“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.

“One of my patients told me that when she tried to tell her story people often interrupted her to tell her that they once had something just like that happen to them. Subtly her pain became a story about themselves. Eventually she stopped talking to most people. It was just too lonely. We connect through listening. When we interrupt what someone is saying to let them know that we understand, we move the focus of attention to ourselves. When we listen, they know we care. Many people with cancer talk about the relief of having someone just listen.

“I have even learned to respond to someone crying by just listening. In the old days I used to reach for the tissues, until I realized that passing a person a tissue may be just another way to shut them down, to take them out of their experience of sadness and grief. Now I just listen. When they have cried all they need to cry, they find me there with them.

“This simple thing has not been that easy to learn. It certainly went against everything I had been taught since I was very young. I thought people listened only because they were too timid to speak or did not know the answer. A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well intentioned words.”

- Rachel Naomi Remen, from Kitchen Table Wisdom

“Our problem is that sound is not important in our culture. We know the world from the visual, not from the other senses. I had to be taught other ways of understanding.”

- Bernie Krause, sound recordist, Wild Sanctuary

“Listening is not passive. It's hard work to listen with an open heart rather than an analyzing mind. It requires putting aside judgment, categorization, and evaluation and instead just hearing the story that is told, and the feelings behind it. Some people say they can feel themselves shift from their minds to hearts when they are listening. Some describe deep listening as a sacred experience.

“It is the mind's nature to think, and so even the most experienced listeners repeatedly will slip into judging and analyzing. When you realize that this has happened, gently set aside your thinking for later and open your heart. Buddhist meditators, who face the same problem, speak of treating the mind like a beloved but sometimes inappropriate child who wants to show off to guests. ‘Not now, sweetie,’ says the kind parent. ‘You go and play and we will join you in a bit.’ Similarly, when we are listening and notice that we are commenting to ourselves about what is being said, we can tell our minds, ‘This is not the time for analysis. I just need to hear this story.’

“Most people need a few experiences of simply being listened to before they can really believe that just listening is enough. In time, we discover that to be listened to is a way of being loved, and that listening is a way of being loving.”

- Christine Robinson & Alicia Hawkins, Heart to Heart

“Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk.”

- Doug Larson

“Listening is an art that comes from a quiet mind and an open heart. Listening uses all of your senses and it is a very subtle skill. Listening, just listening - not only with the ear, with your being. Your being becomes the instrument of listening. Your sensing mechanism in life is not just your ears, eyes, skin sensitivity and analytic mind. It's something deeper in you. It's some intuitive quality of knowing. With all of your being you become an antenna to the nature of another person. Then for the relationship to remain as living Spirit one of the best ingredients to put into the stew is truth.”

- Ram Dass

“We can translate ‘deep listening’ as compassionate listening, that is, to listen with compassion, or to listen with love. We hear with one aim only; we don't listen in order to criticize, to blame, to correct the person who is speaking or to condemn the person. We only listen with one aim, and that is to relieve the suffering of the one we are listening to.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh

“I beg you to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the question themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search right now for the answers, which could not be given you, because if you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually without ever noticing it, live your way into the answer.”

- Rainer Maria Rilke

"To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the 'music,' but to the essence of the person speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows, but for what he or she is. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning."

- Peter Seng

“The Peace of Wild Things”

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— Wendell Berry

“Unlike seeing, where one can look away, one cannot 'hear away' but must listen ... hearing implies already belonging together in such a manner that one is claimed by what is being said.”

- Hans-Georg Gadamer

“Silence is not a thing we make; It is something into which we enter. It is always there. All we can make is noise.”

- Mother Maribel of Wantage

Questions for Discussion

1. Of all the readings this week, which one particularly spoke to you? Which one captures a piece of what it means to you to live a life of deep listening? Or how you long to live a life of deep listening?
2. What were you taught about “deep listening” growing up? Don’t just think in terms of meditative practice. How did others listen to you? How were you told to listen to others? What did you listen to? Nature? Stories? Music? Friends who led you astray? Mentors that helped you own who you were?
3. When has engagement with our congregation taught you something new about what it means to live a life of deep listening? When has it challenged you to embody “deep listening” in a new, more meaningful or needed way? We’re not just talking about sermons or classes here. Relationships, watching our fellow UCC members, hearing stories about others living out their faith often provide the most powerful lessons and stimulate the most life-changing choices. This is your chance to think back, notice how this community has made a difference in your life and, by lifting up the story, to say thanks!

Extra Resources

Clip from Notting Hill: <http://bit.ly/1qXZCfP>

Clip from Patch Adams: <http://bit.ly/1nSxeul>

Failure to Communicate: <http://bit.ly/1nSxhXn>

**TED Talk: 5 Ways to Listen Better:

<http://bit.ly/Z5TnQG>

Looking Ahead

The content for these packets is a group effort. I welcome submissions of your ideas of readings, stories, videos, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises for each month’s topic. While not everything will make it into this collection, it is useful for our worship team and our group facilitators. You can send submissions for October’s topic of “Purpose” by the third Sunday, September 21, to debra@unitarianscalgary.org

Themes for 2014-15

September – Listening
October – Purpose
November – Courage
December – Connection

January – Character (ethics)
February – Passion
March – Freedom
April – Sustainability

May – Honesty
June – Imagination

Theme-based Listening Groups (TLCs) for 2014-15

We will begin monthly Theme-based Ministry Listening Groups in the coming year. For those interested in joining a group, registration will take place this month. Watch the e-news for more information.

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