

A Manual for Listeners



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⌘ Prelude ⌘

Paul Ferrini

“All anyone wants is to be heard, to be cared about and respected. These are universal human concerns. As a husband or wife, we should extend this caring and respect to our partner. As a parent, we should extend it to our children. As a community, we should extend it to all our members: rich or poor, black or white, able-bodied or disabled. ...

“Many of us believe that we listen, but it’s not true. Listening, if we did it deeply and fully, would totally transform our lives. ...

“Hearing others is a form of loving [others]. And love has never been successfully legislated. You cannot make somebody love another person, nor can you make someone listen to another.” (Paul Ferrini, *The Ecstatic Moment*, 78-9.)

Listening with the Heart

Written in 1987

Streetcar going by.
I remember that song.
"Did I hear you say
You completed the job?"
What made the energy so low in here?
Am I only listening with the ear?

How dull things get when I hear that way.
I think to myself:
"Can't you say something new?
Something different or true?
Why do you think I don't listen to you?"

Some of the time I get to be right.
The times when I'm not,
I hide or we fight.
But something is missing in all of this.
Without it we grow apart.

How describe that thing?
A reaching out.
A listening with the heart.
When I listen that way,
She seems glad that I know
How she feels down deep inside.

Not just a listening with the ear,
Where I catch her meaning and drift.
There's so much more
She seems hungry to say
And won't without knowing I'm here.

Not caught up in my thoughts,
Or wanting a smoke,
Or ogling the woman next door,
Or wondering why I don't love her these days
The way I did at the start.

With the heart, I listen in support of her,
In a way that buoys her in life,
In a way that raises the strength in her,
That feeds her and says she's alright.

I want to hear the all of her,
What lies under and over the words.
The sigh in her voice,
The ebb and the flow,
Her poise when she's clear and relaxed.

I want to hear the rhythm of her,
Her song, her ballet,
The playing of her.
I want to know the the life of her,
To enter and sit in her home.

- S.M. Beckow

Introduction: My Life as a Listener



Paul Ferrini: “When people are heard, they feel honored and respected. They can extend caring and courtesy to others who have different points of view. And so a variety of viewpoints and perspectives can be considered. The best decisions are made when this happens. ...

“When the ideas of people are not heard and they are not included in the decision-making process, they feel that no one cares about them. When children or adults feel cut off and uncared for, they react in hurt and angry ways. Any action that is taken on their behalf will be resented, if not opposed.” (1)

Many people consider effective speaking to be the crown of communicational skills. I consider the crown to be listening.

One of my self-chosen tasks in life is to promote listening.

Where did this interest come from?

In my family, I was the youngest of two children. I listened to my father, mother, and older brother but no one seemed to listen to me.

Just as Paul Ferrini says, I grew up wanting people to listen: “When the ideas of people are not heard and they are not included in the decision-making process, they feel that no one cares about them.” That fits for me.

I grew up a difficult child, putting a stick in the spokes of the wheel to get attention.

Meanwhile, one way I learned to get along with people, especially when I didn't know what to say (which was often), was to listen.



When I grew out of my status as the runt of the litter, I began to enjoy the wonderful experience of being listened to by my mother, Prue Beckow.

In fact this booklet is an acknowledgement of her ability to listen. I always wondered how she did what she did and that was one thing that led me to study the subject.

Interestingly I don't remember a single thing she said. Partly because she and I spoke in Broadway musicals: "All I want is a room somewhere."

But the greater part was that she simply enjoyed listening. We'd all smile when she said, "I'll put on a pot of coffee and you can tell me *all about it*."

She could be right down there with you through all your trials and tribulations. In her listening, she felt what you were feeling, getting it as deeply as one might go. Com-*passion* —> A "feeling with." I call that "being a second Self." Recreating the experience of another.

When somebody listens to me that way, I'm able to get everything out on the table, all the pieces, all the chapters of the book. I see what the lay of the land is, the whole message, what I've been missing or what's eluded me for as long as it has. If I have a realization, a real piece of work will have been done, requiring both speaker and listener.

I can speak of it in various ways. I now have had a sunburst of understanding. The pieces of the puzzle have fallen into place. The puzzle has become a picture.

I have an "Aha!" moment and a realization and feel my condition drop away. The truth has set me free. (2) Those are some ways of talking about it.

And the untying of the knot in consciousness was made possible by deep listening.



Back to our story. Fast forward to 1982.

When I studied counselling for my Sociology Ph.d. program in the 1980s, I relied on Jay Haley's *Problem Solving Therapy*. I would listen to the client for a while and then suggest a line of action.

There I was at the side of the road selling my solutions to passersby, hawking my wares, and no one was buying.

People wanted to tell their story. They wanted me to listen. And if I didn't, they resisted and rebelled.

So I finally threw my solutions out the window. No one was buying anyways. I may as well have been selling water by the river.

I fell silent and began to listen. I found my clients solving their own "problems." All I needed to do was to provide them with a hearing.

I observed that people's early lives existed for them as a puzzle and, if listened to long enough, they experienced release when their puzzle became a picture. They now saw what they had been overlooking all these years.

I found that a person's whole strategy in life, their whole way of being, could sometimes be set up or triggered by a single incident.

I called these triggering events vasanans, after Ramana Maharshi. Werner Erhard called them records. Linda Dillon calls them core issues. Others have called them old baggage, our gunnysack of resentments, etc.

Voila! I stumbled upon magic. The people who left my door had huge smiles on their faces. They did not know what I did - if anything. They just wanted to get home to tell their spouses what they discovered.

This, for me, made counselling effortless and painless. I could listen for hours. I was totally fascinated with other people's lives and stories. And I never had to wrack my brains for a solution to their problems.

Some Golden Age of Gaia readers may recall that I left my Sociology Ph.D. program because I had a vision in 1987. The vision came about because I applied a notion of listening theory to life.

As a result of listening to people, I saw that, when they found the missing piece to their puzzle, the puzzle became a picture.

Consequently I said to the universe, "If it's true that people's early lives are a puzzle, which then becomes a picture, could it be that life itself is a puzzle? And, if so, what is the picture that life is?"

I didn't expect an answer but immediately the front window of my car disappeared and I was left staring at a working model of life. (3)

That vision was one of the most influential events of my life and it occurred out of adapting listening theory to spiritual practice.

Listening is not on any curriculum that I'm aware of. Like such subjects as relationships, marriage, child-rearing, and communication itself, a subject of tremendous importance may not be taught in our schools to the best of my knowledge. Hopefully in the future it will be.

I owe a debt of gratitude to gestalt, encounter groups, rebirthing, vipassana, Zen, est, Enlightenment Intensives (EIs), Self-enquiry, and others, many of which are about listening to oneself or others.

My own study of listening was assisted by participation in Cold Mountain Institute's three-month resident fellowship, est's Communication Workshops, and Enlightenment Intensives.

My studies of listening have also proved invaluable when I presided for eight years as an adjudicator of refugee claims with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

But there's lots more. The more there is is the subject of this small booklet.

Footnotes

(1) Paul Ferrini, *The Ecstatic Moment*, 77.

(2) Jesus said that "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32.)

(3) For a description of that vision, see “The Purpose of Life is Enlightenment – Ch. 13 – Epilogue,” Aug. 13, 2011, at [http:// goldenageofgaia.com/2011/08/13/the-purpose-of-life-is- enlightenment-ch-13-epilogue](http://goldenageofgaia.com/2011/08/13/the-purpose-of-life-is-enlightenment-ch-13-epilogue)

⌘ What Listening is ⌘



Paul Ferrini: “Even when we agree that others should have a voice [in the decisions that affect them], it doesn’t mean that we are willing to listen. And, unless we are willing to listen, what does having a voice mean? What does free speech mean if we are always putting our hands over our ears?”

“Our society says that everyone has a right to speak, but it cannot make us listen. It cannot insure that we will hear what others say to us or that they will hear what we say to them. Hearing has always been optional. It has always been a matter of choice.” (1)

“We think that we hear one another, but we don’t listen very long or very deeply to each other. We are easily distracted by our own thoughts or by events happening in our environment.” (2)

How We Use Language

We use language in four ways:

- To read
- To write
- To speak

- To listen.

Of the four, listening is the most taken for granted and the least understood.

Notice all the courses on public speaking. Have you ever seen one on public listening? You've probably attended courses on communication skills, but how many of them even had a listening component?

What is Listening?

A bare bones definition of listening is an active process of receiving, interpreting, and responding to spoken and sometimes unspoken messages. (3)

The Global Listening Center put meat on the bones:

“Listening is part attitude, marked by genuine respect and regard for all; part skill, enabled by specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors; and part physical, driven by a host of physiological, sensory-motor, cognitive, and affective functions. Combined, these elements shape the perceptual lenses through which humans “interpret and *strive to* understand themselves, colored by each individual’s cultural background.” (4)

Poet Alice Duer Miller added that "listening means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told us.... You can listen like a blank wall or like a splendid auditorium where every sound comes back fuller and richer." (5)

Let me add my own interpretation. Listening involves (1) entering into a committed relationship of communication with another, (2) remaining aware of the whole range of their expression, (3) taking in, understanding and mirroring back what they wish us to understand and (4) remaining with the process until the speaker reaches release or the listener runs out of steam.

It requires us to open all channels of awareness to receive as much of the totality of the message as possible, without misunderstanding, without judging or evaluating.

Speech, glance, gesture, expression, tonality, pitch, intensity – we hear and understand them all. And what I especially listen for is the secret speaking, that has to be unpacked or raised to awareness.

I as the listener endeavour to remain open, alert, and receptive. I'm aware that any exchange may be the one that contains the message the speaker wants me to hear.

Types of Listening

Communication produces three results: rapport, intimacy, and restoration.

Each result has a type of listening appropriate to it.

Social Listening

Social listening is fun and results in a back-and-forth and give-and-take that promotes enjoyment and cooperation.

The features of this type of listening are acceptance, loyalty, and interest. Joking, kidding, teasing, bonding, building team spirit, creating collegiality, comradeship, friendship.

Results are that people like you, like being around you, seek you out, and want to work with you.

Intimate Listening

Intimate listening goes more deeply into matters. It lets both people's guards down and reveals them to each other.

Sharing, revealing, letting down the barriers, letting down one's guard lead somewhere. Deeper, more sincere. Hurts more and feels better than social listening.

Restorative Listening

Restorative listening is a deep form of listening whose purpose is to release an individual from the limiting or confining influence of a deeply-felt upset, issue, or belief into a restored sense of well-being. Most of this booklet will be on this form of listening.

It's listening for the meaning and causality of an upset or issue and, with it, an end to or relief from tension or pain.

I'm listening as well for the speaker either increasing their boundedness by moving away from the truth, for whatever reason, or increasing their release by coming closer to the truth.

Listening is Largely Missing in the World

Normally we don't often get high-quality listening. Our society doesn't emphasize it; few people practice it. And we may or may not be so fortunate as to meet one of those people who do practice it.

As far as I know, the vast majority of people turn their ear to their partner and listen while going over the shopping list in their mind. Their hearing doesn't amount to much. It doesn't lead to anyone's understanding or release.

Their partner ends up feeling that they haven't been listened to, no one cares enough to listen to them, etc. And then the arguments begin.

To really listen to another, one has to put one's agenda and ego aside and that's hard for most of us to do. We enjoy injecting our opinions and feeling wise, useful, clever.

We advise the other on what to do. We intrude ourselves into their process. We don't give them much of a turn at speaking. That's fairly common in our society.

Moreover, our automated world has much less white space than our manual world did. People complain of having too little time for anything but keeping up. We're

on our digital devices more and more often, paying less and less attention to the world outside.

Moreover, listening skills are seldom taught. We may even be unaware that we are not listening, just as we may be unaware that no one is listening to us. But the lack of listening we get and give may be matters that bring us to a therapist.

Not being in touch with ourselves, going against our own grain, wanting to know our own mind on a matter can, if left unaddressed, result in profound holding patterns in the body. Wilhelm Reich called what resulted “character armouring.”

Many people end up in pain because of what they’ve withheld from communicating or don’t know about themselves. To help them out of their knots, they need to be heard deeply.



This world is sorely lacking in forums at which discussions could go on, without interruption or heckling, aimed at promoting listening, understanding, and unity.

As a society we’ve basically ignored listening as a social activity. Few of us were taught listening in the family or school. We’re a society fixated on the power of the lips and ignorant of the power of the ear. We have ways of speaking about language as it’s spoken and written, but fewer ways of speaking about language as it’s heard.

Consequently, very few people listen. And of those who do, very few really, really listen - listen for clues, metaphors, tone of voice, feelings, hand movements, hidden commands - there’s so much to listen to and any one piece can be the one that completes the puzzle.

Like the woman who said that she used to walk into the ocean, found it cold, and would quickly run out again. Was that the way she was in relationship? I asked. And pop. She saw why it was that she constantly left relationships after only a few months.

Or the number of people who have sicknesses that reflect statements like "pain in the neck," "pain in the backside," etc. The colitis sufferers like myself who "cannot stomach the world." Or all the people who've been called "lazy no-good good-for-nothings" and are now Type A personalities. Or "worthless tramps" who are now totally-indispensable members of any team they join. How does that happen? (6)

Very few people get the opportunity to be listened to long enough to get out all that's really troubling them.

If we could just give people the time they need and listen - yes, we may need to make a comment now and then to clarify or to show them that we have our ante in the game, to remind the speaker audibly that someone is there and following them - then people would have the one resource they need (listening) to really get at what's troubling them.

They have the opportunity to lay out everything on the table and see the connections, the progressive development of the difficulty, and how they ended up where they are. Almost always, they arrive at an "Aha!" that clarifies the matter and sets them free of it. (It may take repeated cuts to do so.)

Our society caters to our needs and pleasures. It provides food, clothing, etc. It offers vacations, thrills, etc.

But it doesn't seem to cater as much or as well to the really basic requirements we have to be emotionally and spiritually well. Or if it does, it doesn't allow such an expense to end up being paid for by medicare or tax money. And many people therefore can't afford what's available.

I hope that some day professional listeners get paid under medicare or funded like education. But right now listening is not accepted as a therapy.

I know some people will respond that "psychotherapy is paid listening." I'm afraid that I've found poor listening is as common among psychotherapists as it is among the general public.

Moreover, the generally-accepted and -practiced fifty-minute hour seldom works. It's too short a time. It's eaten up by opening shares, arrangements, payment, etc. People need open-ended time if they're really going to get into the heart of the

matter.

And people may take a while to get into it.

When they're into the discussion, they usually become committed to the exploration and the last thing they want to hear is "Time's up! See you next week!" Ouch! That in itself often shows up like a perpetration.

Additionally, many professionals are oriented towards offering solutions, sometimes unwanted, instead of just getting what the patient or client wants to say.

In some cases, they may be geared towards figuring out what medications to prescribe and their line of questioning may be oriented towards that rather than being open to what the patient or client wants to say in a truly agenda-less environment.

Paul Ferrini: "When we really 'hear,' we feel acceptance, compassion, love, respect. We don't want to give the other person a lecture or try to fix him or her. We just feel good that the person felt safe enough to communicate honestly with us. ...

"When we really 'hear' another person, we hear ourselves. We know it could be us talking. There is that equality. There is that rapport." (7)

I can truly say that there are very few things I enjoy doing more than listening. It's one of the best gifts one person can give another. It's one of the most closely guarded secrets in human society. And it has more power to heal than anything I know of in our world.

There's nothing more satisfying that I know of than looking at someone's face light up because they now know the matter that has escaped them all their life and made their life hell.

The most I listened to another was eight hours. Others four hours. And I listened for those many hours without advising them once. Whatever it takes for them to get what it is that eludes them is fine with me.

Footnotes

(1) Paul Ferrini, *The Ecstatic Moment*, 78-9.

(2) Ibid., 80.

(3) This definition draws on those of Thoughtco (<https://www.thoughtco.com/listening-communication-term-1691247>), Skills You Need (at (<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html>), and Toolshero (at ong others. [https://www.toolshero.com/communication-skills/listening-comprehension/.](https://www.toolshero.com/communication-skills/listening-comprehension/))

(4) Global Listening Center, A Definition of Listening at [https://www.globallisteningcentre.org/definition-of-listening/.](https://www.globallisteningcentre.org/definition-of-listening/)

(5) <https://www.thoughtco.com/listening-communication-term-1691247>)

(6) It's called "living a script."

(7) Paul Ferrini, *ibid.*, 80.

What Listening Offers

Listening is a most important skill at this time in our history to assist anyone who's hurting. And a lot of people may be hurting when mass arrests are revealed and some of their favourite people have been caught in the net.

There's more to listening than meets the ear. Way more. This whole booklet is about it.

Listening is probably the easiest and most appreciated way to show we care. The deeper we go in our listening, up to the point of release, the more the speaker, in my estimation, feels cared for.

When I find myself able to put the ego aside and really hear another, I expect something magical to occur.

Sharing that flash of understanding with another, that release from problems that have been plaguing them for years is a truly magical for me. Isn't that what psychiatrists and psychologists are hired to do? Help release us from our pain?

Listening is the best way, I think, to assist a person to release themselves from that pain.

In my books, it's the greatest gift one person can give another, save love. Listening is the alchemy of transformation and the speaker is himself or herself the alchemist. We're simply the catalyst.

Committed listening helps us untie the knots that bind us and restores us to our original balance and innocence. It has the power to cause a realization ... and more. It has the power to set the speaker free from an unwanted condition. And more.

Solving problems is hard. Dis-solving problems is easy. Listening dissolves problems.

To share deeply, people have to have a long enough go at it; they have to have our undivided attention.

So many people have never been listened to. It's sad really. Enough listening to really follow some leads they want to pursue and a willingness to stick with it until the picture emerges.

I predict that clients will return to a therapist, if they need to return at all, in inverse proportion to the depth of their listening.

I can think of no exercise that leads to love and unity more, better or easier than listening. Being a second Self for another, which is what I aim for, allows us to share their lives and to understand deeply how it is they got where they are. I feel bonded with those I listen to.

I get to know them better than their own relatives may. It's therefore, in my opinion, an honor and a privilege to give someone the gift of listening. I frankly see it as tantamount to a sacrament in service of the Mother.

What Listening Requires

Listening requires more of us than simply turning our face in another's direction and catching words thrown at us. That's communicational baseball; at most a precursor to listening.

Listening means deeply and fully hearing what another wants and doesn't want, needs and doesn't need. All these are puzzle pieces that need to be laid on the table.

Listening can involve unravelling a jumble, like pick-up sticks. Or it may require developing the "chapter headings" people so often speak in. Or it may mean 'cracking the code' in which another is speaking – the secret meanings or different voices who are speaking.

It may require us to recreate in our imagination the emotions the speaker may be feeling. It may, for instance, demand that we try on an experience and see what it's like; that is, to walk a mile in their shoes.

Listening isn't taking matters on so deeply that we come down with symptoms. But it is tasting the experience, getting the feel of it, and seeing how we'd feel if that happened to us. And seeing where those experiences might lead.

It's more intimate than the listening most people do but not dysfunctional in that we don't take on the condition.

⌘ Restorative Listening ⌘



What is Restorative Listening?

Restorative listening involves (1) seeing when a person is upset, gripped by an issue, or imprisoned in an interpretation and (2) listening in a committed way until the upset, issue, or interpretation has been fully explored and released.

Restorative listening uses any available, workable means to review the whole story of a speaker's upset, listening until release appears as a smile, an insight, or some other form of relief, shift, or transformation.

In restorative listening, we're listening to restore the speaker to a state of completion.

After years of observation, I've concluded that people come back from serious upset when I listen to three things with them: (1) the history of the incident, (2) the present-day consequences for the speaker, and (3) how they feel about it all.

It's my task as the listener to receive their message, understand it, and mirror my understanding back, in a step-by-step process that ultimately ends in an "Aha!" moment and release from pain. (The truth has set them free.)

Our goal is that dawning awareness, that experience of insight, discovery, revelation, the penny dropping, eureka, aha!

Listening over a long-enough period of time creates a critical mass of insight that can lead to release.

The Aha! may come when enough puzzle pieces are put on the table so that the puzzle suddenly becomes a picture.

We see it. We now know what's going on. We get the picture. Once we do, the puzzle releases its grip on us. No more pain.

When the speaker experiences release, we take that as the signal that the upset has lifted and our session is complete. In most instances people just want to leave quickly and get home to share what they've discovered.

Conventional listening catches only the spoken word. But restorative listening listens well below that, below the upset even, to the deeper self that is crying out to be heard and understood.

Put another way, the restorative listener takes in gesture, expression, and metaphor to get below the surface of the upset to the truer meaning underneath. They listen to the inner speaking that the speaker has decided is too dangerous to utter but wants to be "divined."

Perhaps the person is dramatizing or perhaps they're understating and the truth emerges when their points are emphasized. What's appropriate to do emerges on an individual basis.

One may have to be quick to catch an interpretation as it's spoken. If I let a life-interpretive comment pass, the conversation may move onto other things and release may be delayed or might never happen. My job as a listener is to catch the interpretation and feed it back to the speaker in an appropriate and timely manner.

In conventional listening we seem to do the bare minimum. Often we store away what the person said, remembering the words only, and remembering them only for a short time, resolving to take in only what can later be seen to be important, as we

judge matters to be. This is listening in name only.

Listening done well relieves people of any compulsive need to speak. Speaking can often be compulsive until a person has been - or knows they will be - deeply listened to.

For some people, being listened to once completely is an utterly new and joyful experience.

I've seen very few upsets that yielded to Problem-Solving Therapy, but few upsets that didn't yield to listening. To put the matter another way, in my view, "fixing" doesn't fix us, but the truth sets us free. And the truth emerges through getting a full opportunity to say what's so for us to a committed listener.

Listening is often considered passive when effective listening is anything but. The best listening is very active and can involve quick and deft entries into momentarily-glimpsed openings.

What does Restorative Listening Contribute?

I'm convinced that most people come to a therapist to be heard.

I don't mean being heard on a single point, or even a few points, before the therapist takes back the agenda; I mean being heard on their entire story.

By the time people get themselves to a therapist's office, in my experience, their story has become so involved that they no longer know it or understand it themselves. Their first priority is to tell it.

The role we want to play is as a second Self to the speaker. It takes commitment for a listener to relate to us that way.

Our being a second Self to the speaker or client, our *being there* for them, being *present* plays a key role in the rare event of inner perception that happens, if it does.

The listener helps the speaker over the rocks and through the creek - first and foremost by *being there* - non-judgmentally *present* to the speaker.

And then feeding back. I would rate feedback as a distant second to *being there*. Completion can happen in the absence of feedback, but it is unlikely to happen in the absence of the listener's *presence*.

A large measure of the speaker's satisfaction lies in seeing that someone else got the story as they told it. Speakers want to be "recreated" or "gotten" as they have gotten themselves.

The Second Self is outside the upset and holds the space for the speaker to turn the puzzle into a picture. It allows the speaker the opportunity to put everything on the table and see what they've been missing up till now.

We're there to assist the string of incidents and responses to come out, not to show how wise we are, not to follow our own avenues of investigation. We're there to see what the message is our speaker wants to convey to us. The speaker may not know what that message is, in the beginning.

The Most Important Listener is the Speaker

Clients tell their story, not simply for the therapist to hear, but for they themselves to hear as they speak it. They're the most important listeners in the therapeutic relationship.

If you think about it, when one writes an account of something that happened, it doesn't often convey emotion well. The smilies and other emoticons recently invented don't recreate the emotion with the same intensity with which it was originally experienced (or resisted).

Speaking has the advantage of allowing speakers themselves to hear the emotion that is blocked or that flows attached to any particular segment of the story. I've heard people say, "I didn't know I felt that way" or "I didn't realize how much that event affected me."

While it's important that they get their own drift, it's also important that they get the substance and intensity of their own emotional response to the situation.

MXD:MNR

When I was practicing listening, I used to say that what I aimed for was allowing the speaker to present their most basic upsets, conundrums, etc. (maximum danger) in a manner that posed the least possible risk (minimum risk). Maximum Danger: Minimum Risk or MXD:MNR I called it.

The secret, if there is one, was to be non-threatening. I'm the listener. I think of myself as "having a light touch" or "being light."

As I said above, to listen in this manner means to serve as a Second Self, a "sacred partner," we'd say these days. We double, or quadruple, the person's ability to see into themselves by seeing along with them, feeling and realizing along with them.

It can give them the feeling of strength and courage to look at things (MXD) they might not have been willing to before.

Our Aim is Completion

Completion in the speaker is what restorative listening and speaking aim to bring about.

Completion is the experience of relief and release that accompanies the truth of the situation being told or revealed.

To arrive at a point of completion in the case of a deeply-entrenched issue, Enlightenment Intensives (EIs) taught that one has to deliver one's communication with at least the original intensity of emotion with which the resistance or blockage was constructed in the first place.

If I wish to wail when I think of my Mother dying in a housefire, then I must wail. If I want guffaw when I think of something the principal did in elementary school, then I must guffaw. I won't arrive at a point of completion by merely saying "I want to wail" or "I want to guffaw."

Now that can be embarrassing for some. That embarrassment may stop them from speaking and thus from completing. That same embarrassment may be what has stopped them all their lives.

To a large measure, the extent of my listening, revealing the extent of my commitment to their completion, may be what induces them to focus in and go for a complete communication, in spite of how embarrassing it may feel.

I've seen people at EIs go through deep psychic wounds. The EI listener provides the enfolding arms, so to speak, that make intense, restorative sharing possible.

On the odd occasion, the speaker may experience release and the listener may still be unsure. Just the same, the listener should release the speaker and allow them to go on their way. The speaker may ask to continue if they need to.

Completion arises immediately following a moment of intense inner insight, which has been called an Aha!, a gestalt, a direct experience of the truth, a transformational moment.

From my experiences of higher-dimensional bliss, I'd say that the difference between a spiritual realization and a therapeutic release is this. In the former, bliss elevates us to such a height that we can take in the situation unbrageously; that leads us to realizations, which we take with us when we return to everyday consciousness.

In the latter, what we lack in elevation we achieve in breadth. We get to lay all the puzzle pieces on the table which allows us again to see the whole situation and gives rise to insight.

If I hold on to the old way, the Aha! might have few lasting consequences. But if, in the midst of an Aha!, I completely let go of the old way of seeing and openly stand with the new, I might have an experience of the truth that's so profound as to

bring about a completion of my unfinished business and a release from the knot in my consciousness and musculature on that issue. Or more.

This is what restorative listening, in my books, aims for.

With the occurrence of this aha!, speakers arrive themselves at the “solution” to their dissonance or “problem.” There’s no need for me to find or sell a solution to them at that point.

Completing Our Unfinished Business

Step out of the clown suit.

Remove the face paint.

Forget the performance and the rehearsed lines.

Step out of your own skin.

Show me your original face.

Tell me who you are.

⌘ How to Prepare ⌘

When to Listen

People want to talk often when they experience too much joy or too much upset.

Joy-full people who aren't heard often grind their feelings down and suppress themselves. Then they say that no one cares, no matter how well they do.

An upset is a present-time interruption in well-being, related to earlier, similar events.

An upset occurs when we feel our button has been suddenly pushed – alarms go off and we feel ourselves irritated or frustrated.

Upset people usually see the cause of their upset in other people and project their anger onto them.

An issue by contrast is a strongly-held preference regarding a way of being or acting that conditions our acting and thinking in the future, based on our interpretation of a situation.

An interpretation is a persistent view of one's self and/or the world that establishes the "box" within which thinking and acting take place.

Some people experience their upsets with storm and thunder. Others go more deeply into themselves and experience their upsets silently. Some glare; others stare with glassy eyes. Few expect to encounter someone who can listen and who cares to.

If we were to look at an upset under the microscope we'd see that its course is as follows. In the flow of time, something is said or done that triggers us. We feel an upsurge of strong emotion.

We begin to block or resist others and begin to act according to a role. We withhold. We reach a peak and explode. After the release of our explosion, we

gradually return to normal, only to survey the damage that we've done.

If we experience repeated major upsets, we may reach a breaking point. At that stage, we draw a conclusion about affairs or life. From our conclusion, we create an interpretation of life. We make numerous decisions based on our conclusion and interpretation.

Soon these matters result in a rule being formed and issues arising which tell us how we're to behave in future so as to avoid falling into the same upsets again.

These conditioned ways of acting become our identity, the "box" from which we don't stray. As listeners, we can listen for all these clues to the "box" in which the speaker has imprisoned himself.

An upset usually follows a loss or defeat of some kind. It can arise from blocked momentum or thwarted intentions, frustrated expectations or undelivered communications.

People in an upset experience strong emotions carrying them too far up or too far down for them to maintain unblocked relationship with others and with themselves. They usually relate by tensing the musculature of their bodies, reducing awareness, or withholding communication or participation. They may retreat into an act or role that has value for them as a survival strategy or coping skill.

An upset usually grows until we reach a peak of emotional experience. We often say or do things which we normally suppress. Although we think our present circumstances determine how we respond, listening shows us that our response is predominantly coloured by our past experiences.

We cast contemporary people in past roles belonging to parents or friends, making them stand-ins and saying things to them that properly should be said to the originals of their type.

After fully expressing ourselves from inside the upset, we may feel temporary relief, but we leave a trail of damage and residue in our path, like a tornado ripping

through town.

We may have gone out of relationship with our loved ones and now must work our way back in. We may feel obliged to make our damaging actions right and not cause further damage.

We may have committed ourselves to courses of action that we later regret. Our family and friends may hold us at arm's length afterwards. In some cases, treasured relationships may end.

Restorative listening involves recognizing when an individual is caught in an upset, gripped by an issue, or imprisoned within an interpretation.

And it involves using a range of approaches to facilitate the speaker's sharing in such a manner that the speaker himself or herself moves towards release.

Create a Safe, Secure Environment

Create a safe, secure environment for speaking, free from interruptions and distractions. Put the phone on mute. Close the door. Put a sign up saying "Do Not Disturb."

Make sure you're not disturbed. Undivided attention is required if you're to provide a "second Self" for the speaker.

If you've made an appointment for restorative listening, avoid making any other appointments that morning, afternoon, or evening. Avoid having to say to your speaker that you must go.

Have enough water, glasses, and kleenex. Visit the washroom beforehand. Have a pad and pencil to make notes for things to do later, rather than getting up and doing them.

Stay with your listening once begun. Buckle up and go along for the ride. Don't get up repeatedly or make a phone call. Ask permission if you need to go to the

bathroom. Don't interrupt to ask. Wait until you make a comment and then tack it on.

Be sure you and the speaker have an agreed-upon "contract." Be sure to have the contract straight before you begin. If you agree not to leave a person until release, then don't.

Make the other person the number one focus in your life from starting point to release.

Certain relationships come with boundaries on what may be spoken about. I do not share with my work supervisor the personal details of my family life.

⌘ How to Listen ⌘

Good Listening is Invisible

A really interesting aspect of restorative listening is its apparent invisibility. A restorative listener may gently steer a conversation, through mirroring and questions, but, if they've done their job well, it'll be seamless and invisible.

It follows that we may get no reward from it save the satisfaction that we provided the space for the person to reach their own realization. The extended listening we provided is not offered in many other places in our society. That space was our gift to them.

Of course, the best listeners make the process seem effortless anyways, as if a string of words miraculously flowed from the speaker's mouth, even if the speaker started out seriously withdrawn.

The speaker may say that they enjoyed having a conversation with you or that you're a brilliant conversationalist.

I always chuckle when I hear this. I didn't say very much of anything.

Most speakers don't realize that, if things go well, you'll say very few words and they'll do most or all of the talking.

Nonetheless, they may gravitate towards you after that, aware that something happened with you but not knowing precisely what it was.

Your role may never be revealed. So if anyone is out for glory, listening is definitely the wrong field.

Resist the temptation to be acknowledged by someone in release. Send them on their way, lest you create a new upset.

If I feed back, at all I do so in a very brief fashion, but not in so full a manner that I keep them from leaving while still in touch with the full majesty of their inner seeing.

I find that knowing that I have been fully heard increases my confidence in the validity and intensity of my own work. But the listener who keeps me fixed on themselves by holding me in a session past this point, who insists on giving me advice at this point on a matter they see as important, can cause me to utterly lose touch with my insight and thereby lose much of the value of the session.

To see this, one has only to listen to a speaker describe the listening session they were just in, which they usually will do with no reference to the listener, as if the listener played no part of the matter.

This again calls for egoless participation from us. Just as we put our agendas aside during the listening session, so here in not expecting acknowledgement for our role if we did our job right, we're called upon to put our egos aside again.

Listening is an excellent spiritual practice for taming the ego, which leads to a quiet mind, stillpoint and spiritual experiences.

What Listening is Not

Paul Ferrini: "If judgments come up, remember that you aren't listening: you're judging." (1)

George Mumford: "A key reason for knowing yourself with compassionate clarity is so you can hear another person without your stuff getting in the way." (2)

Listening is not:

- Ignoring the other person
- Listening to our own thoughts
- Counselling and advising
- Diagnosing and prognosing
- Deflecting the speaker
- Being impatient
- Discounting the speaker's feelings or beliefs
- Justifying
- Excusing

- Blaming and shaming
- Being sympathetic or sarcastic
- Preaching, moralizing, or lecturing
- Denying and minimizing
- Ordering and bossing
- Admonishing and accusing
- Ridiculing and belittling
- Threatening and bribing
- Interrogating and analyzing
- Playing "twenty questions"
- Defending ourselves

The interesting thing about this list is that it names many of the practices that pass for sharing and listening these days.

Footnotes

(1) Paul Ferrini, *The Ecstatic Moment*, 79.

(2) George Mumford, sports psychologist and meditator, A.G., "Deep Listening," *O Magazine*, May 2001, 239

What to Listen for

When we communicate with one another, we use more than just the spoken word to get our message across. We use vocal tone, pitch, gesture, spacing, and silence.

Moreover, we couch our messages in metaphors and images, whether consciously or not. All of these the listener would want to catch. The listener needs to spread their net widely to trap it all.

Restorative listening uses all available, workable means to get the whole story of a speaker's upset out, listening until release appears as a smile, an insight, or some other form of relief, shift, or transformation.

Listen for patterns - motifs, persistent complaints, themes - and allow the full shape or scope of what's happening to dawn upon you.

Watch for metaphors that unlock meaning. Starting out, everything is grist for the mill. (That's a metaphor!)

The listener may expand a metaphor, re-experience a feeling, or hear the whole history of the upset. They may draw on their own native savvy or from formal theories like Neurolinguistic Programming, Transactional Analysis, or Client-Centred Therapy.

However, this approach is an alternative to counselling and advising per se. Here we simply listen and understand. The serious listener knows the power of listening to facilitate release from upset.

We listen to the person sharing and "get" where they're coming from or, if it triggers something in us, we share what got triggered ("call ourselves") without judging, evaluating, or advising the speaker.

I'm often confronted with a fork in the road in which one fork leads to snideness, bitterness, blame, and so on, and the other to acceptance, forgiveness, and responsibility. As a listener, I'm open to travel either fork, as the speaker wishes, but my ultimate vote is for the latter. I'm a biased openness. My bias is towards resolution of the upset, the truth being told, the speaker being OK.

What I listen for is the secret speaking, to unearth that I as the listener may need to know about the following:

Traumatic Events

- Story
- Conclusion
- Decision

Resulting Patterns

- Vasanas, core issues, old baggage
- Acts, scripts, and roles

Belief systems, interpretations

Historical Clues

Buried memories
Contextual Clues
Conceptual framework
Feelings

Likes and dislikes

Investments
Intentions

Behavioral Cues

Tone
Pitch
Intensity
Expressions
Gestures
Moves
Dress
Settings
Spacing
Timing
Metaphors
Imagery
Slang and jargon
Comparisons
Emphases and pauses

How Might We Listen?

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Passive or active?

Listening is often considered passive when effective listening is anything but. The best listening is very active and can involve quick and deft entries into momentarily-glimpsed openings.

Stay Calm, Receptive and Connected

If a person is to get through blocks and phobias, the listener has to remain calm when they reveal themselves to us.

Only by remaining calm, receptive, and connected is the speaker induced to go deeply into the truth.

I'm like a looking glass in which they judge their acts through observing my response. So if I respond with alarm or disgust, they may feel quite self-conscious and ashamed and be unable to go deeper.

See the Other Person Objectively But Experience Subjectively

Listen neutrally but committedly. Imaginatively recreate the speaker's experience as they describe it.

“You can only hope to find a lasting solution to a conflict if you have learned to see the other objectively, but, at the same time, to experience his difficulties subjectively.” (Former U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in Diane Dreher, *The Tao of Inner Peace*. New York: Harper, 1990, 236.)

Manage Your Participation; Stay Out of the Process

Don't distract or impose your point of view.

Don't draw attention to yourself or say something cutesy-pie or flashy. Leave yourself out of the process. Focus on the other person.

I had to throw away my need to feel important and instrumental in the success of their inquiry, which they were perfectly capable of running themselves, if only someone cared to listen.

Don't have the session be about what a good boy am I. Never try to make a point that arises from or handles your own discomfort. Handle it silently yourself or put it aside.

Keep your questions short, devoid of theory, devoid of excuses. Speak Peter Rabbit English. Don't slow the speaker down or hang them up by using theoretical language or latinate diction.

Don't ask questions that deflect the speaker from his or her train of thought.

Never frame a question so that it jerks the other person out of their process by leaving them wondering what you said or where you're coming from. Be plain and simple. Never say out of the blue something shocking like "Do you hate men?" Say instead "I'm curious to know if events left you hating men."

Never ask a question like, "I don't mean to imply that you don't know what's best for you, but could it be that the mystery of what happened could be solved by knowing what he did after you did what you did?" Ask instead: "What was his reaction?"

Don't suggest or imply that the speaker is speaking on many levels lest you jam the person into their head instead of leaving them vulnerable and open.

Speak to the commitment stated or implied in their speaking. Make it right. Accept it.

Speakers can form or base their identity in the moment on the listener's reaction to what they're saying. Be aware of your reactions and their possible impact.

To ensure that the speaker will say whatever needs to be said, keep your responses short, engaged, but neutral. See that you avoid excessive or dramatic responses that will push or pull the speaker away from what's there to be said naturally. A speaker may cave in in the face of your emotional display. Caving in is not release.

If you really want to keep it clean, drop expressions of sympathy too. Just share what the original share triggered in you, knowing that all shares, positive or negative, are a step towards completion.

Words indicating closure include "OK," "Well..." Spoken at the wrong juncture, they can confuse and trouble the speaker. Watch their use or else clarify that you were not intending to close the session.

The discussion needs to be about the way the speaker thinks and feels, not about the way the listener does. It needs to be about the speaker reaching their own conclusions, and not about ours. This again calls upon the listener to be egoless.

Identify with the Speaker; Accept Their Version as at Least Provisionally True

I identify 100 percent with the speaker. Otherwise no rapport is established and sharing remains superficial.

I don't listen for credibility. This is not a trial.

I accept whatever answer they give me as true for them. If it's not 100% true in the beginning, when they see my trust in them, they may soon begin to tell the truth more deeply.

How the situation feels to the speaker is, in my eyes, more important than how it actually was. As listeners, we're asked to make the emotional truth more important than the historical truth if we're to listen from upset to release.

Let the speaker tell his or her version as if it were the plain truth for them. The truth of the situation will come out faster this way than if you correct them at every turn.

I accept that many statements they make could be a mixture of truth and falsity or exaggeration. I hold to that part of what they said that *was* true, healthy, or productive. I ignore the rest for the purposes of restoration.

Or I interpret what they say so that the truth is extracted from it and ask them if my understanding is correct.

Especially if I feel the unhealthy aspect of the message is not central to my understanding of the upset as a whole but is simply a knee-jerk response which we can talk about another day, if need be.

I don't judge them resorting to the self-serving bias and puffing themselves. We may need to look underneath the spoken word to the secret speaking that the speaker may not even be aware of.

I ask myself: “If this were me, what would I be wanting to convey? What would I want other people to know most?” I use the information contained in my answer to guide my further listening.

Everything Shared in a Listening Session is Significant; Don't Miss the Significance of Anything

I treat everything a person says in a listening session as significant. If it isn't, when the person sees I'm listening that way, they usually leap at the opportunity and go deeper anyways.

I observe and may remark on body posture, hand, face and bodily gestures, pattern of rising and falling intonation, emphases, slang, everything. Never in an obtrusive manner, but with gentle questions, which I quickly abandon if offense is taken.

I also might periodically hear a favorite expression or hear a significant pause, which I'd mirror back. Anything could cause the breakthrough.

Allow Them Their Chronology, Order, and Depth

Accept whatever the speaker may say as the very next thing to be said, no matter how it sounds to you. Accept that it was constructed as a string and the logic of construction may not be apparent to us and may be as simple as “and then, and then, and then.” Think of their points as being dishes that arrive by a dumbwaiter. One dish arrives, and then another, and then another, with no other logic than linear sequence.

Let them take deeper and deeper cuts at their story. For it to be fully told, they may need to take one narrative cut, in which all events are told; one emotional cut, in which their response to events is told; then one contextual cut, in which they shorten it up and see if they understand the whole picture; etc.

Get the emotional truth first and the actual truth later, if necessary.

Avoid “Fixing”

Most listeners surrender the impact of their listening by hiving off into advice soon after they believe they know “the answer to the speaker’s problem.” Nothing the listener “knows” is as important as anything the speaker learns so let them talk, even if you think you know “the answer.”

When I’m speaking and another is listening and they begin to advise me rather than listen, my heart often feels like it’ll break. I wish they’d be quiet and just listen.

I can’t hear their advice over top of my upset. I often just say, “Yah. Yah. Yah” and hope they’ll fall silent again. If they go on too long, the thread is broken, my train of thought is lost, and I drop the idea of trying to tell them anything. They’ve shown me that the session is about them, not me.

Fixing responses generally say to the speaker, “You should (do/think/say) this and then you’ll (feel/be/do) better.”

But, if you really look deeply, fixing responses come from the underlying assumption that the wheel is broken and needs fixing – that there is something wrong with the person that needs being made better.

What the people whose advice I follow say is that “fixing” responses tend to shut down the process of further sharing.

First of all, people do not want others to think there is something wrong with them and may back away from sharing further.

Or they may back away from sharing something that might be interpreted negatively and so they don’t swing out and tell the full truth. Sharing becomes dressed up in “positive,” Polyanna garb.

Or they hear advice that may be irrelevant or upsetting and stop sharing because they don’t want to have to disagree with the person making the suggestions.

I know some of us work with people and believe that we are being compassionate and helping people by telling them what they “should” do.

But I'd most recommend just leaving the other person with their share. Leave them having been heard by us.

Good listening almost always makes the felt need to supply advice superfluous. And the speaker's "aha!" is the goal, not the listener's.

Never Blame or Hassle Them

Never blame or hassle the speaker. Don't encounter them or tell them they are full of malarkey. Don't contest the speaker's interpretation. Don't use anything the other says against them. Express no hostility. Earn the other's trust and keep it.

Don't Minimize

Don't deny or minimize the speaker's upset or situation. That includes saying "Don't be upset." The speaker is upset and wouldn't be with you if they were not.

Accept resistance

If you try to sell your interpretation to a resistant speaker, they may close down. Let it go and go back to the last point of agreement and begin again. Watch for the delicate signs of resistance – the clouded brow, slowed-down delivery, drooping shoulders, etc. The discussion needs to be about them, not you.

Listen to their resistance; then go with it rather than against it. If the person refuses to discuss an obvious aspect of the subject, allow them the space to refuse. If the speaker resists your interpretation, don't force it upon them.

Drop it and drop it completely. Be prepared to stand there not comprehending. Listening is not a place for know-it-alls. It's a deeply humbling experience.

I operate on faith that the speaker knows what needs to be said and just lacks a listener.

If the speaker resists my interpretation, I drop my point and go back to the last point of agreement. I don't know the speaker's life. There may be very good reasons for being resistant. I honour it and go *with it*, rather than *against it*.

If I try to sell my interpretation, people back off or close down. I watch for the clouded brow, slowed-down delivery, and hunched shoulders and ask if I've said something that needs attention.

Even if the speaker is unwilling to discuss it, the fact that the matter has been raised is usually enough to clear the air or result in the initiation of a line of speaking that eventually clears it.

If I fail to comprehend what the speaker said, based on my feeding back to the speaker and them confirming or denying the accuracy of my understanding, I'll go back to the last point of agreement and start listening again.

Build your understanding from the progressive sharing of the speaker. Check out how your developing understanding matches their intention in sharing – ask yourself -- and the speaker -- if you are on the right track.

Remain Open; Don't Prejudge

On many subjects we listen from a place of already having made up our mind. If the topic comes up, we feel we know all about it. We hear through this filter of “always-already knowing” or prejudging. This mode of listening can severely skew a session.

Think of listening to a beautiful woman (or handsome man) whom we hope is sexually interested in us to see how always-already listening works. Every word she says is inspected for evidence of sexual interest and everything that shows no indication of that is quickly discarded. We have an always-already listening for sexual interest in this example and it colors our listening.

What we're doing is channelling other people's communication through our filter. Meanwhile, they have their own worries, hopes, and fears and are speaking from that matrix. If we truly want to hear what they're communicating rather than what we want to hear, we'll have to put our always-already listening aside.

My always-already listening is that things never work out. I therefore am a

listening for complaints, breakdown, failure. I'm very guarded and phrases like "everything's fine" or "it's easy" or "I'll do it" don't come easily to my lips. If we listen from our already-listening, the speaker can end up despairing of being heard.

We can often detect another person's already-listening by their intonation. An extreme intonation may reflect an earlier trauma which the person does not want to repeat.

Find a Common Language

I remember a woman I dated long ago who looked her love at me while I listened for it. I spoke my love in words and she watched for looks and waited for actions.

But I did not send loving looks to her and she did not speak words of love to me. We went through months of incomprehension and disappointment before we finally parted company.

Use the terminology the speaker understands. In terms of modality, listen for whether the speaker is a seer, hearer, feeler, toucher, etc. In terms of context, listen for whether they use the language of art, sport, business, computers, etc.

Recreate their upset in the language they use. Many communicational breakdowns occur because people speak different languages and don't feel heard or understood. They haven't found a common denominator.

Speak a common language. Though we speak English to each other, there is a sense in which we still talk different languages. One person may speak parenting; another, the Wild Country. If one person speaks computerese, speak it back if you can. Talk with byte. Learn the person's program. Know his or her operating system.

If someone else speaks Whistlerian [Whistler is a ski mountain in B.C.], then head straight down the hill (watching for moguls), be willing to jump, and go for the gold.

If you can't understand their language, propose another. "Do you like football? Good. Well, when the quarterback doesn't know where the wide-end receiver is after the ball is hupped..." Etc. Communication is difficult without a common language.

Be Curious

The key to the success of listening is for the listener to want to listen completely, fully, 100 percent. Often to do this, the listener must create the speaker's undeveloped communication as a mystery, a puzzle, a conundrum, which the listener has an acute interest in helping to reveal or know.

Be curious. Make the translation. Supply what's missing. Discover the missing pieces that will turn the puzzle into a picture.

If the speaker is dramatic and exaggerates, divide by two or ten or whatever factor you need to. If the speaker understates, multiply by two or ten.

If the speaker is accurate verbally but ingenuine emotionally, supply the emotional truth, and vice versa.

Hear the point that's being made, the point that's being implied, and the point underneath it all. Have the other person see that you see the point that is being made. Do not raise the implied point until the time is right.

Draw the Speaker Out

I recall once talking about an upset to a listener who wasn't listening. I wasn't feeling restored, I felt some relief from talking about my upset and listening to myself but I nonetheless left a residue of blame generated from resentment at not being listened to.

My friend was alternately silent or absent-mindedly commenting "yah?" This mode is nonetheless what society often thinks of as "listening."

What he could have been doing was taking the initiative by drawing me out and reconstructing the upset with me, treating it like a puzzle.

To do this, we may need some useful prompts:

How do you feel about...?

What do you think about...?

What would you like to do?

I'd feel...; is that how you feel?

I'd think...; is that what you think?

I'd want do...; is that what you want to do? What would you have done if ... occurred? Tell me more about...?

Can you elaborate on...?

I'm not sure I understand.... Can you give me more details? I'm curious to know about....

Are you willing to...?

So you're saying....

So you feel...?

So you think....

So you're saying....

So what happened for you was....

Is that the whole story?

Tell me about it.

I'd like to hear about it.

I'm not going anywhere.

I'm listening.

Feed back sparingly

Paul Ferrini: "Don't respond in any way except to acknowledge that you have heard. If you are responding, you have stopped listening." (Paul Ferrini, *The Ecstatic Moment*, 79.)

We need to demonstrate that we're listening to the speaker; hence, appropriate feedback is essential. We need to demonstrate that we're there for them and that we're committed to getting to the bottom of the upset.

To feed back, the listener should reply using many of the speaker's own words if possible.

Feedback is used (1) to confirm our guesses or hunches about what the speaker is saying, and (2) to mirror back the listener's impressions, if appropriate and timely.

The process is foolproof in the sense that, if the listener has heard inaccurately, the speaker will correct them. So whether or not I get their drift the first time, I'm sure to get it as a result of their correction.

As my practice of listening progressed, I felt less and less inclined to intervene in any way in a speaker's communication. If I did intervene at all, it would be to confirm with the speaker that I was "in the game" – that is, that I was both listening and willing to share, if needed, at the same level of commitment that the speaker was sharing from.

All it took would usually be one instance, at the most two, of a comment like "yes, I've been in that situation myself" to establish with the speaker that I was in the game.

To offer feedback at critical junctures of the story might help the speaker over a moment of helplessness or confusion. It might take the form of a question to confirm my understanding. "Am I correct in thinking that you said...?"

My feedback might take the form of mirroring. Mirroring would consist of statements like "you look hurt" or "you sound confused." If successful, this feedback would furnish the speaker with the information needed to go deeper and see what the roadblock consisted of through seeing the source of the hurt or confusion.

My use of questions and mirroring, however, would be kept to a minimum.

Everything they said I hold in confidentiality. Nothing they said would I bring back to them in a way that was confrontive.

I'd advise others starting out in listening to avoid interpretations for months, if not forever.

I'm still reluctant today to offer my interpretations of the speaker or their situation. I've proven myself wrong so often that I question the value of it.

Instead I concentrate on observing the accuracy of my listening and spreading my awareness like a net to catch any unintended gestures or interpretive nuances in the speaker's communication.

There has to be a degree of engagement. But not so much that the listener is redirecting the speaker or influencing their share in any way.

Here are some useful ways of expressing mirroring:

- Sounds/sounds like x
- You sound/you sound like x
- Looks/looks like x
- You look/you look like x
- I hear you/your x
- I see you/your x
- I'd feel x about y; how do you feel?
- I'd think x about y; what do you think?
- I'd want to x; is that what you want?
- I'd feel x; is that how you feel?
- What I'm hearing you say is X.

Watch for the Speaker's Cues as to Our Errors

Misunderstanding can lead the speaker into frustration. A lack of attention from the listener may lead the speaker into irritation. A lack of grounding may lead the speaker into resignation.

When these outcomes occur, the speaker may feel cheated and incomplete. Or they may feel despondent, thinking that he or she is not worth listening to.

Watch for the speaker's own cues and make the correction without needing to discuss the speaker's particular issue.

Confirm Your Understanding

The listener's job is to hear and understand every sentence and every word. Confirm your understanding if you're unclear.

Don't miss a point in the argument. You may have to hold the speaker to make sure that you don't fail to comprehend a point. But if you allow them to continue while you've missed something, your confusion may become obvious and they may feel frustrated. Ask their pardon. Explain why you've missed a step. Ask them to repeat it and then allow them to move on.

Picking up the point we missed also establishes our integrity as a listener - we may make a mistake, but we correct it.

Go Back to the Last Point of Agreement

Never would I disagree with what the listener was saying; I was sure that they knew what they wanted to say. It wasn't that they lacked understanding of what was happening. It was more that they lacked someone who cared enough to invest the time to hear them completely.

But sometimes listening would get out of synch and a breakdown occurs.

When I encounter any resistance from a speaker, get something wrong, or space out, I abandon my inquiry and return to the last point of agreement. I keep backing up until I find that point and then proceed again.

I take the decrease in resistance that I hope results (or increase in ease) to indicate that we're back on track.

The same steps can be taken to call up forgiveness in ourselves. We too can back up and find the last point of agreement with ourselves.

Both the speaker and the injured party usually seem quite content just recovering the last point of agreement, without blame or resentment, and starting again.

Listen to the Full Score, All the Layers

I consider it our job to listen to every word that is said – and more than just the words – the gestures, the spacing, the tempo, the intonation, metaphors, implications, etc.

I listen fully and closely, but not rigidly. If I space out and miss a point, I apologize, go back, and pick up the point I missed.

I suggest the listener really get our partner's experience, as far as is safe. Be there with your partner as long as they need. Allow them to get the full story out, until they have that sunburst of understanding, that moment of recognition of what is really going on here.

Don't rush the process. Watch for their cues as to your own shakiness in listening. They may remove eye contact from you, not because they are involved in a certain mental process, but because you seem restless and they are confused.

Or they may feel you're invoking premature closure, and they don't want to stop. In this case, drop your agenda and return committedly to listening. They'll probably return eye contact as soon as they receive and confirm your indications of commitment.

I also think of it as listening to layer after layer of people's speaking. One layer may be their thoughts; another, their feelings; another, their needs; another, their priorities; and still another, what *really* triggered the upset.

I also listen for different voices. I noticed in myself that my constant comment was not just one voice. I detected two. One was my persona as a Complaining Child and the other was my persona as an Adult.

This is what I mean by different voices.

The same speaker may cycle through voices that range in argumentation from “I don’t want to exercise” to “I should exercise” to “I don’t know how to exercise” to “Try it. It’s fun.” The one may represent an initial position, the next a response to it, the third a protest against the response, and the fourth an enabler helping us out of resistance. All are unique voices, each of whom has a complete argument to sell.

I don’t obtrusively draw the different voices to the speaker’s attention, but may unobtrusively work them into my mirroring at some point. They reside as useful information in the background of my consciousness.



The minute we share an upset, in our search for release, we clear the space for the next upset to come up. The upsets usually come up in reverse chronology: the latest first, working towards the earliest. Listening is often like travelling back through the ages in a time machine.

Let them take deeper and deeper cuts at their story. For it to be fully told, they may need to take one narrative cut, in which all events are told; one emotional cut, in which their response to events is told; then one contextual cut, in which they shorten it up and see if they understand the whole picture; etc.

Get the emotional truth first and the actual truth later, if necessary.

The person may not speak the actual truth, but may instead say what is emotionally true for them. Even though they are exaggerating, for instance, the truth is that the way they are describing the situation is the way it felt for them. Appreciate that the way they are speaking is in fact the emotional truth for them.

Develop any relevant chapter headings

Every sentence a person says when talking about an unwanted condition or vasana (archaic reaction pattern based on earlier, traumatic events) can be treated as a chapter heading with a lot more under it if we'll listen.

That is, their initial statement told the subject they'd like to communicate on and had to be unwrapped or unbundled.

I could encourage the person to unroll any heading and had to be watchful for what was being said that was really key. A word, a metaphor, a conclusion, a decision - you never knew when the one thing would be said that was crucial to their release from the unwanted condition.

I check to see that there isn't more on the subject the speaker wants to say before going on to the next topic.

Treat what is said as a series of linked comments. As soon as one comment is finished, look for the next link and draw it out.

I put great weight on the first thing that comes to a person's mind and the first thing that's said.

When I use the upset clearing process, (1) I ask the mind to shoot me up a picture associated with the earliest similar incident to the one that triggered me. The mind is an obedient servant and does so.

Here too, it seems to me, the mind shoots up its own version of truth in the first cut, hot off the press.

I've often found the situation is as the speaker has represented it in the first cut. It's just that no one has listened long enough to get the details. And the speaker has not had a good enough listening to get their own drift and intentions. They may not see the significance of a decision they've made. They may not have had a chance to really look at all aspects of the situation facing them.

Successive Passes

Discussions of this sort generally follow the pattern of talking about a normal time followed by an upset and then consequences which flowed from the upset. The intention is to recover the normal time again.

But to do that, we may have to take successive passes.

The listener needs to treat the process like a jigsaw puzzle, where one piece has been fitted into the picture while others remain off to the side. The speaker may not have the full picture by the end of the first pass.

Often the puzzle does not become a picture until the speaker makes at least one more pass, during which they explore the emotional truth of the subject.

They may also make a third pass to see if anything has been left out. But when they experience release, they usually have no trouble stopping.

Another way of saying that is that people often seem to take three cuts at their story: one for what happened; the second for how they feel about events; and the third as a review.

That seems to be a “normal” cycle of speaking. But always it may be interrupted by an epiphany, an “aha!” whose hallmark is the sudden onset of release.

What Blocks Us from Hearing

Our own unfinished business blocks us from deep listening. As a speaker at EIs, I used to go through the same story - like the story of my Mother’s death in the housefire – again and again, seeing where the remaining resistance lay until I was finally complete with it.

As a practice, I consulted my in-breath to see if there were any holding patterns left as I inhaled, any drag. When there was absolutely no drag, I knew I was complete. I could breathe again, literally.

But that kind of time to process is not currently available in therapy as it is currently set up; that is, out of the fifty-minute hour.

Usually, we don't know what our unfinished business is until it is revealed to us as we go through our own speaking about it. However, if we listen to ourselves, we can sometimes pick up the ring of inauthenticity, which to me is the hallmark of unfinished business.

If restorative listeners have unfinished business, it can have several impacts. It can cause them to listen imperfectly. The more unfinished business, the shorter the attention span and the greater the impulse to interrupt.

Incompletions can also cause their speaking to sound unprofessional and unconvincing. Therapists who try to talk authoritatively over top of them look unprofessional and sound unconvincing to me.

If I hear the ring of uncompleted business in my own voice, I own that I am unfinished in the area and put aside any agenda that arises out of that business.

While restorative listeners may have trouble speaking over top of incompleted business, they may have far less trouble listening. In EIs, since the listener does not intervene in any way in the speaker's communication, the impact of the listener's unfinished business on the speaker is reduced that much more.

Should We Listen to Stories?

A Golden Age of Gaia reader asked what I think is an important question that I'd like to share here. He said:

"At some point (sometimes) in the listening process it seems like the speaker is merely going in circles. That is, s/he is just continuing (wallowing?) in their 'story.' To simply continue listening, at that point, feels like I am being of little service; rather, maybe even being an enabler.

"Many teachers have helped me the most by choosing not to listen when 'my story' becomes too long winded....since this can keep me further entrenched in the illusion.

"So, while I do hugely value listening, I wonder how these approaches are compatible."

In my experience, repetition can signal an important juncture reached.

If the person is going in circles, they may either be trying to get at what lies at the heart of the vasana (archaic reaction pattern born of earlier traumatic incidents) and are having difficulty or they may wish to be fed back to before they move on (perhaps because what they're saying is important and they don't want us to overlook it or perhaps because they need to know we're listening before they reveal more). They may be hovering on the brink of plunging into the heart of the matter.

Shall I trust this listener or not? Dare I venture into deeper waters? The worst thing they may fear is that they'll go deeper and we'll stand up and say "Time's up!"

We can always ask: "Is there significance to the fact that you're repeating yourself? Is there something I need to know?"

It could also be that the speaker is putting out an organizing principle, usually a metaphor, that they're not sure is an organizing principle, and so they're waiting for us to react to it. Or they may not get the significance of the point but in some unknown way (and so they repeat and repeat).

I know that the conventional wisdom is not to listen to story. But what we're offering the other is a chance to lay everything on the table so they can see the whole depth and breadth of their situation and what it guards them from, fosters in them, loses them, wins them, etc. Somewhere in there is an "Aha!" Story is part of that reveal.

When I counseled people using Problem-Solving Therapy, most did not listen to me. They simply wanted to tell their story. So why fight it? Somewhere in the story lies the key to release. And it's vastly easier and more efficient than to keep coming up with solutions nobody wants.

Consequently I don't support the view that we shouldn't listen to story. Most people who advise against listening to story, I think, are saying they don't feel they have time to listen long. If they don't, I question whether their listening will be effective.

Rushing listening diminishes its value.

Story has been formed out of the vasana (core issue) and constitutes the breadcrumbs that will lead them and us back out of the deep, dark forest. We just have to be adept enough to work with it and committed enough to stay with it.

The reward is great. And they will seldom get the same opportunity or results from a practitioner who uses the fifty-minute hour.

Usually people's stories come out as narratives, organized by the structure then, and then, and then. Listen patiently through the whole story.

If people do not find release telling the story the first time, let them go through it again and again, until release occurs.

Sharing

Sharing is the great equalizer. The feelings of a prince are worth no more and no less than the feelings of a pauper.

Watch what happens when the owner of a large company shares with a customer. The minute the owner says how he feels, he places himself on an equal footing with the other. That information is exactly what the customer wants and makes the owner visible and vulnerable. And visible and vulnerable is where we need to go, I say.

I think that's why folks in positions of authority, like policemen, shy away from saying how they feel. And I also think that's why the steady diet of crime dramas on TV keep us in our male, logical brain and is probably designed to do so. No one says how they feel.

Feelings are what people want to know about most. They tell us how we're taking something. They give our point of view. They push us to act. They tell what direction we'll go in. So they're an important piece of information and one that most people leave out of their shares.

Our shares are born equal and sharing makes us equal. And being equal is just a hop, skip and a jump from being one, I'm willing to wager. So I think sharing is a step towards unitive consciousness.

So tell me how you feel. Tell me what's there for you. What's coming up? And let me do the same. I want you to know me deeply, truly as I am. And I want to know you in the same way. I really do.

⌘ Listener's Interventions ⌘

⌘ Release ⌘



Listening for Release

For those of you who think you may end up listening until hell freezes over, people have an end to their string, in release.

Release is a restoration of well-being, in the case of listening, through a sudden realization or insight into an upset, conclusion, act, or issue.

When we know the truth of our situation, we experience release from the tension patterns or “character armouring” (to use Wilhelm Reich’s term) that we create in ourselves to protect us from having to see, recognize or act on a painful truth.

Just as an upset, issue, conclusion, or interpretation is self-defined, so is release self-instigated and self-triggered.

When a speaker has an insight into something, they’ve made a connection between two similar things or conditions, a cause and its effect, a part and a structure, or another relationship.

Given that an upset is a space in which we feel withdrawn, depressed, and pained, the arrival of a smile on our face may mean that we’ve found the bottom line, missing piece, or big picture.

But that smile may simply cross our features and disappear. The listener has to be alert for the fleeting smile which, if they have the forethought to ask about, may bring release in that very instant.

Often when I've asked a person what the fleeting smile was, what they've confided has completely caused the upset to lift. Perhaps they've seen what they could have done to address the situation and didn't do. Perhaps they see that they knew the unfortunate outcome was coming but couldn't be bothered to take preventative steps. It could be anything but it shifts them from being the victim to being the responsible actor.

Whatever the reason, the smile is one of recognition that the upset need not be there, need not be pursued, and can be released. It's our job to spot it and gently bring it to the speaker's attention with a request to comment.



I use the fact that the truth will set me free to fashion a yardstick to measure my progress listening.

I've observed that people can tell a truth and experience some release; then another truth and experience more release.

I can therefore tell whether we're making progress by watching for signs of release - a smile, increased enthusiasm, a relaxed brow, an unbending of legs and arms, etc.

If no release at all, then we may be barking up the wrong tree.

Release may come from seeing a missing piece of the puzzle or it may come as the result of seeing the big picture or a hidden agenda or an unacknowledged intention.

An example of release is the case of a young woman who was trying to understand why she entered into relationships but quickly left. In the course of talking about her early life, she said that she used to walk into the waters of the ocean and get

cold feet and quickly walk out. I asked her if that was how she was in relationships as well and insight, followed by release, occurred.

Listeners can often sense when speakers have experienced release because they loosen up, smile, laugh, lose the need to talk, get excited when they've been otherwise down, or come down from excitement when they were up. People in release are flexible, present, alive. People in upset are mechanical, not-present, dead.

On the other side of the coin, if I see signs of increasing defensiveness and it isn't because of my participation, I look to see whether we're getting farther and farther away from the truth.

Thus the litmus test for whether our listening has been successful is whether the speaker is in release or not.

If in our listening, we stop short of release, we may leave the speaker literally aching. And yet, in some cases, we may need to do that. If so make another appointment for the earliest possible date to recommence.

People in release are flexible, present, alive. People in upset are mechanical, absent, withdrawn. What then is the acid test that listening has worked? The speaker will be in release.

After Release, Let the Speaker Go

Once the puzzle has become a picture, I leave the speaker alone. I don't send them back into the upset by asking further questions about it.

Don't ask for thanks or acknowledgment, either directly or indirectly. Leave them with the insights and understandings they've arrived at: that's what you've worked to produce so don't now bury those fragile insights under excessive talk or self-centred need.

If we drive a person back into the original upset with our questions, they may settle back into their original emotional state and forget what they arrived at, so powerful

is the trancelike quality of the puzzle.

In fact, most of my speakers usually wished nothing more than to complete our exchange and leave immediately. They seemed most interested in telling their loved ones what they'd just uncovered. My best contribution was to get out of the way.

Listening to Oneself

Unfortunately, good listeners are hard to come by. Until they're not, you may need to furnish yourself with the listening you need.

There are a number of ways to describe the process of listening to yourself. You could call it a two-handed internal conversation. You could say you make an object of yourself.

Any way you characterize it, you play both speaker and listener internally and simultaneously. Give it all you've got because you yourself need listening more than anyone, if you're to be there for another.

Teaching Listening

When I grew up, listening was not taught in schools or elsewhere in society. Only speaking was taught. Listening was taken for granted.

Edward Hall said that time has a voice and space speaks, but who is listening? I went through a collection of anthropology readers when I was in college looking for articles on listening, but I found anthropologists studying speaking in many cultures but not listening. Whatever the reason, listening begged notice, cried out for attention, and remained unnoticed.

Listening seemed to be regarded as a non-activity, a negative. Speaking was the activity, the positive. Perhaps that's why so many of us talk on top of each other: only speaking is valued. The speaker is the initiator, the contributor; the listener is seen as merely sitting there, passively, receptively.

But listening involves more than just sitting there, more even than just hearing. It involves seeing, feeling, being touched; it involves remembering, assembling, understanding; it involves feeding back, mirroring, and resolving.

Only by there arising a school of informed and competent listeners will listening come to public notice and eventually catch on.

Or we'll become telepathic, in which case the problem is solved. This may turn out to be the more likely scenario.

Our work lies in the time between now and then.

⌘ Appendix 1. ⌘

⌘ Upsets ⌘



Who me? I'm not upset.

What is an Upset?

(B) An upset is a troubling thought, with all its associated feelings, predictions, complaints, and so on, which has been triggered for a number of reasons, Because:

- The present situation in some way resembles a previous situation which was itself connected with shocking or painful events in the past.
- An intention has been frustrated.
- An expectation has been unfulfilled.
- A communication is being withheld. (1)

An upset shows up for them and for others around them as an interruption in their well-being characterized by:

- Strong emotions
- Diminished participation (or withdrawal) Increased tension
- Reduced awareness
- Diminished relationship (or animosity) Reaction

- Patterned, automatic, predictable responses.

When we're upset, it looks like the other person's input was crucial. It looks like what they do is determinative of what we do. We say: "You made me mad," which isn't true.

An upset usually grows until it reaches a peak of emotional experience. Things may be said or done that are normally suppressed. Although we think that our present circumstances dictate our upset, we usually find that their roots lie in the distant past. We cast contemporary people in roles and garb that belong to earlier people. After experiencing and expressing what is there for us, we usually find the upset subsiding.

But we're left with a residue of problems that we've created for ourselves and others in the meantime. We may have committed ourselves to courses of action that we later regret. We may have broken agreements and trust.

Our friends and family may hold us at arm's length afterwards. In some cases, relationships may end.

An upset can be triggered by our biological alarm clock. If you're a woman, you might be triggered on your 38th birthday, thinking time is running out for you to have a child.

Some events are not so much a trigger, as a threshold. What this means is that something painful occurs again and again until we are overcome by the cumulative effect.

An upset can lift through being communicated, but a loss may not lift in the same way. Only time may cause the pain of loss to lift.

Put another way, issues can be communicated but only time heals a wound.

What's the Source of an Upset

When human beings are beyond upsets, they can expect the heavens to open wide and angels in chorus to descend, whisking them off to God.

Upsets are a hazard of modern-day people being human. Our contribution can lie in helping people find the source of the upset or see the total picture so that the upset can lift.

Most upsets yield when we understand the person's present situation. If upset people are plunged into early-learned ways of meeting a threat — getting even, being snide, ignoring others, freezing others out — just acknowledge what they say (remembering that tomorrow it may happen to you) and get the full communication.



Almost never is the source of a serious upset in the present. The chief players in these early upsets, as we'd expect, are mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

Beyond these actors may come our childhood friends, neighbours, teachers, or ministers. Occasionally a stranger may intervene and cause calamity.

Any culprit in the present, thought to be the source of an upset, generally turns out not to be or to be simply a stand-in for some other earlier figure.

Our experience stopped at the moments where we felt shock and loss. In the worst cases of being stopped, we may have arrested our development. I recall being caught with my cousin, both of us looking at each other's naked bodies at age seven.

I am sure that a part of my sexual development stopped at that shocking moment of discovery and disapproval and left me feeling awkward and ashamed (i.e., a loss of self-confidence and self-respect).

Past, Present, and Future

The Past = History

The Present = Acts

The Future = Issues

When we're unable to communicate our situations, our lives become mechanical. We emphasize image management, scripting our lines and looks and folding everything into a self-serving history.

History

Our history is a finely-honed, self-serving narrative of selected past events, the recital of which supports our identity or interpretation of who we are.

The speaker often may not know the bottom line of relived experiences until he or she has gone through the layers of remembered feelings on the second pass.

Acts

Our acts are constructed, historical interpretations of what and how to be in life to produce the results we desire. They have roles and lines and looks, which we learn and try to perfect.

Issues

Our issues determine our future relationship with a person, place, or thing. If we "have an issue with them," that usually means we've rejected it and others should orient appropriately.

Footnotes

(1) This discussion draws on Werner Erhard's discussion of "records."

⌘ Issues



Kinds of Issues

Kinds of issues: exceptions, mild objections, strong issues, sacred cows, taboos.

Identity

Our identity shows up as a set of beliefs, histories, acts, and issues that we have relating to ourselves, our place in the world, and the like. It is:

- Preconditioned by our beliefs.
- Shaped by a history of major, repeated, and related upsets.
- Born of a commanding conclusion.
- Bent to a lasting decision.
Elaborated and enshrined in an act.
Walled in by issues.

Our identity is insufficient to hold who we really are. We have little chance of discovering who we really are from inside identity.

Our beliefs handle the timeless; our history handles the past; our act handles the present; and our issues handle the future.

Life Interpretation/Grand Motif

Your life-interpretation or grand motif is your life in a nutshell. “I’m not good enough.” “Nobody likes me.” There’s nothing wrong with a life-interpretation per se, if it serves us and is life-sustaining.

The Difference Between Issues and Problems

The difference between issues and problems is that issues are general, subjective, personal, and not measurable while problems are specific, objective, impersonal, and measurable.

A speaker may report a choice that has been offered another. A lot can be learned from the speaker’s discussion of choices. The range of choices offered may betray our bias or intention.

If both choices are negative, it can signal that the speaker is not in favour of the action being considered. If both choices are positive, it probably signals that the speaker is partial to the considered action.

While we may fool ourselves that we’re not being seen, others may look at how far or how little we’re prepared to go and read the state of our minds from it. “Well, he’s prepared to get into the car and come and pick me up but he’s not prepared to spend the afternoon together.” Translation: he has something else he’d rather do. Metaphors. Listen for metaphors like “cold feet” in relationship, etc.

Encourage the speaker to take the metaphor literally in order to suss up what is actually being said. The work of listening is to raise what may be deeply

unconscious to consciousness, in the process solving many puzzles. Raising metaphors and their significance to everyday awareness is one way it accomplishes its task.

Understanding the speaker may require “cracking their code” in which they’re speaking.

Most people do not expect decent listening. Therefore they telegraph what they say. Their initial statement tells the subject they’d like to communicate and must be unwrapped or unbundled.

They speak in chapter headings and unfold the rest of the story only when they are assured that the listener is really listening. Therefore, understanding the speaker may require unfolding the story.

I’m listening for understanding and not to advise, counsel, control, influence, etc. In fact I refrain from advising or fixing and simply "get" the other person. This is what makes listening listening.

The test of whether listening has been successful is whether release has occurred. Jesus said, the truth will set you free. And telling the truth to a committed listener will also set us free. If one has not experienced release, one has not told some aspect of the truth. There’s more to go.

We’re not listening for games, ulterior motives, the self-serving bias, image management, the dark side or shadow side. We’re listening for the truth and the truth alone. And the test for that is release.