



Listening

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina
Covenant Group Session

Based on session by Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, January 2012. Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson (The Rev. Glenn H. Turner, adapted)
Modified by Paula Massey, January 2022.

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you’ve said, and forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

~Maya Angelou, American author, poet, dancer, actress and singer, 1928-2014.

Personal Check-in: Share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Reading, Introduction to the Topic

“When I ask you to listen to me and you start by giving advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn’t feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as it may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you listen, not talk or do—just hear me.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy.

And I can do for myself. I’m not helpless. Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

But when you accept as simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and get about the business of understanding what’s behind this irrational feeling. And when that’s clear, the answers are obvious and I don’t need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what’s behind them.

Perhaps that’s why prayer works, sometimes, for some people—because God is mute, and He or she doesn’t give advice or try to fix things. God just listens and lets you work it out yourself.

So, please listen and just hear me. And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn, and I’ll listen to you.”

~Ralph Roughton

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. Think of a time when you felt truly heard in speaking to another person. What image comes to mind when you think of that time? What feelings do you remember having? Is there anything you would like to say to this “great listener” out loud right now, maybe something you wish you had said at the time?
2. What do you wish people would do or say more often as they are listening to you? (Examples?)
3. What most gets in your way when you are trying to simply listen well to someone? (Examples?)
4. Would you like to share any reflections on the “Intro to the Topic” piece above that have not already been mentioned?
5. Are there things we might do in this group to improve the quality of listening?

Readings – see below

Sitting in Silence (Reflect on the questions and readings, as you prepare for sharing)

Sharing - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share responses to one or more of the session questions.

(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)

Open Discussion -This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing Words

To communicate is the beginning of understanding.

To feel is the beginning of self-growth.

To touch is the beginning of involvement.

To love, the beginning of all that will ever be.

~Nancy Ceranowicz

Announcements /Plans

Personal Check-out As we close today, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Readings

There are people who, instead of listening to what is being said to them, are already listening to what they are going to say themselves. ~ Albert Guinon, French Playwright

Listening is about being present, not just being quiet. ~Krista Tippett, American Journalist and Author

So when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it. ~ Jiddu Krishnamurti, Indian philosopher, speaker and writer

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

~Doug Larson, American Columnist and Editor

Listening is such a simple act. It requires us to be present, and that takes practice, but we don't have to do anything else. We don't have to advise, or coach, or sound wise. We just have to be willing to sit there and listen. ~Margaret J. Wheatley, American Author

Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.

~David Augsburger, American Anabaptist author

Listening is not merely talking, though even that is beyond most of our powers; it means taking a vigorous, human interest in what is being told us. You can listen like a splendid auditorium where every sound comes back fuller and richer. ~Alice Miller, Polish-Swiss psychologist, psychoanalyst and philosopher

When you talk, you are only repeating what you know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.

~The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet

The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words. ~ Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, American author

Deep listening is a kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of another person. You can call it compassionate listening. You can listen with only one purpose: to help him or her to empty their heart.

~ Tich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist monk, peace activist.

Our collective listening to one another affirms the value and uniqueness of each voice.... Students who excel in active listening also contribute much to the formation of community.

~ bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress (1994)*

To say that a person feels listened to means a lot more than just their ideas get heard. It is a sign of respect. It makes people feel valued. ~Deborah Tannen, American author

There is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen. ~Rumi, 13th-century Persian poet

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed; it wants simply to be seen and heard. ~Parker J. Palmer, Author, Educator, and Activist