

The Sacred Art of Listening

Nourishing Loving Relationships

by Tara Brach



*To listen is to lean in softly
With a willingness to be changed
By what we hear.
– Mark Nepo –*

What happens when there's a listening presence? When we're fully in that listening presence, when there's that pure quality of receptivity, we become presence itself. And whether you call that God or pure awareness or our true nature, the boundary of inner and outer dissolves and we become a luminous field of awakens. When we're in that open presence we can really respond to the life that's here. We fall in love.

This state of listening is the precursor or the prerequisite to loving relatedness. The more you understand the state of listening – of being able to have the sounds of rain wash through you, of receiving the sound and tone of another's voice – the more you know about nurturing a loving relationship.

In a way it's an extremely vulnerable position. As soon as you stop planning what you're going to say or managing what the other person's saying, all of a sudden, there's no control. You're open to your own sadness, your own anger and discomfort. Listening means putting down control. It's not a small thing to do.

We spend most of our moments when someone is speaking, planning what we're going to say, evaluating it, trying to come up with our presentation of our self, or controlling the situation.

Pure listening is a letting go of control. It's not easy and takes training. And yet it's only when we can let go of that controlling that we open up to the real purity of loving. We can't see or

understand someone in the moments that we are trying to control what they are saying or trying to impress them with what we are saying. There's no space for that person to just unfold and be who they are. Listening and unconditionally receiving what another expresses, is an expression of love.

The bottom line is when we are listened to, we feel connected. When we're not listened to, we feel separate. So whether it's the communicating between different tribes or religions, ethnicities, racial groups or different generations, we need to listen. The more we understand, the less we fear; the less we fear, the more we trust and the more we trust, the more love can flow.

Isn't it true that to get to know the beauty and majesty of a tree

You have to be quiet and rest in the shade of the tree?

Don't you have to stand under the tree?

To understand anyone, you need to stand under them for a little while What does that mean?

It means you have to listen to them and be quiet and take in who they are

As if from under, as if from inside out.

Tara Brach is senior teacher and founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington. She is author of "Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life With the Heart of a Buddha" (2003) and "True Refuge - Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart" (2013)

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