

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, New York
“Art of Listening”
 Philomena Moriarty September 26, 2021

For several years now I have been a part of something called the Global Dyad Meditation Project. Managed by Simone in Germany, this global meditation involves two people listening to each other answering questions such as “Resting in this moment, what arises?” Opening to the heart of the universe, what unfolds? Simply being present, what do you feel in your body?”

We meet in what we call dyads. During a dyad we each answer the question for 5 minutes and listen to the other without comment or question. We sometimes call this holding space. **Pure** listening. Staying present inside of ourselves when listening. When speaking sharing what is coming up for us **in that moment**. I personally try to stay in touch with the physical and emotional sensations in my body, to stay in the present moment. I have met in dyads now with people living all over the world Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Vietnam, India and San Francisco, Atlanta, Austria - to name a view.

Last winter during some of the worst of covid I met with a woman on Zoom living in India. As we both answered the question “Resting in this moment what arises?” I listen to her. I am drawn into her internal world. In her world half a world away she is coping with COVID as well. In her lock down, she and her friends go to the roof of her building and dance. As I sit in my chair in East Greenbush looking into her eyes, I too am dancing in my mind on a building in India - full myself of the freedom and exhilaration of dancing on that roof. I join with her and her friends - all of us on a major lock down with a virus nipping at our heels but nevertheless celebrating our lives in those focused, precious moments together.

In Mark Nepo’s poem “Way under the Way” he states “this instant where one of us will speak and one of us will listen, as if no one has ever placed an oar into this water” She and I experienced together that moment where one of us spoke and another listened and realized the truth - of that awareness - specialness of that moment.

Mark brings us to THIS knowledge - the uniqueness of each moment we spend in another’s company.

When listening becomes an art we realize how unique each moment is. That to truly be with each other, we must bring the magic of presence. To hear, to respond with our whole selves, to hold each other and ourselves in this moment. To truly be with the other.

We experience the reality of Mark’s words: “Nothing compares to the sensation of being alive in the company of another.

Presence is one of the keys to listening. When we are present, we realize how unique each of us truly is. We can remember through the eons of time and space there has only been one of us, only one of the other

I am reminded of the song from my summer of 1970 Everything is beautiful in its own way, and especially the line “Everyone is beautiful in their own way” and the lines that follow: “We shouldn't

care about the length of His hair, Of the color of his skin, Don't worry about what shows from without, but the love that lives within."

So how are we to witness the beauty of others, and the beauty of ourselves, to celebrate the unrepeatable of all of us, to realize **everyone's** rare self.

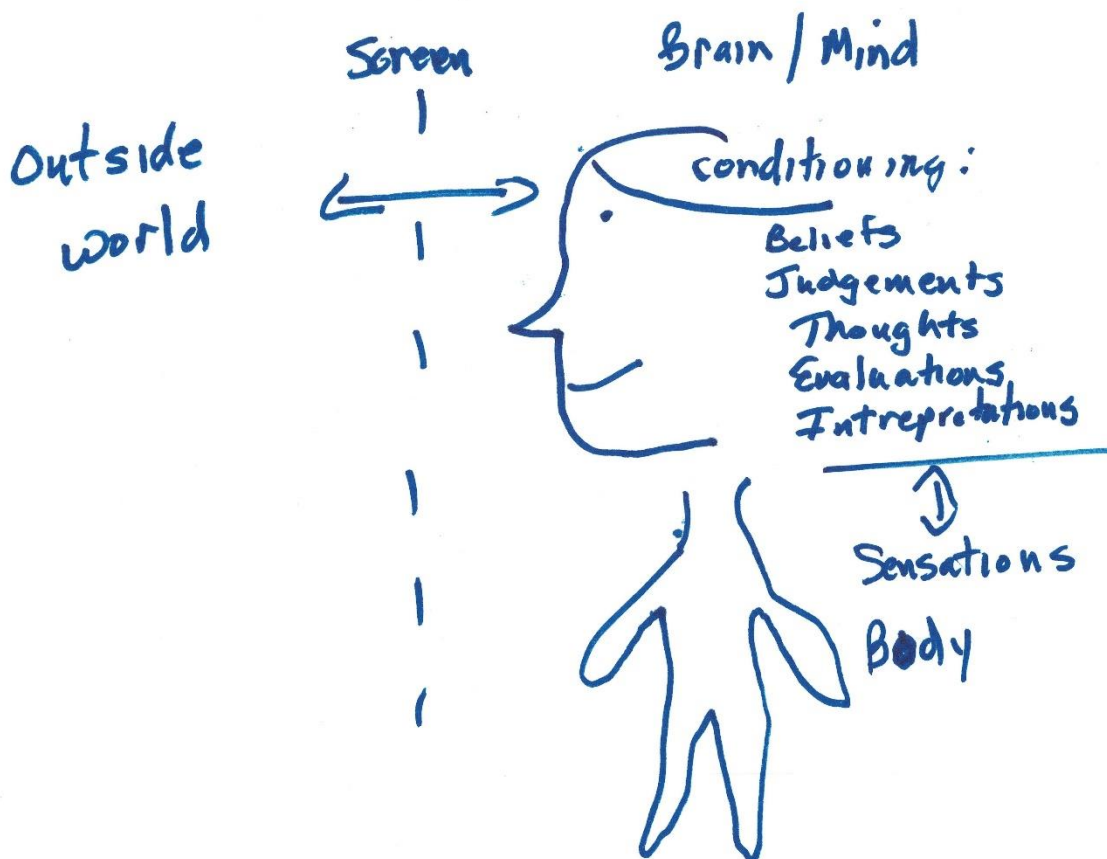
"One of us will speak and the other will listen as if no one has ever placed an oar into that water"

So how do we come present?

One way is to open our minds and hearts to be curious about each other. To have a strong desire to know and learn about each other. In order to do that we need to overcome our natural tendencies to NOT listen, in fact to reset our beliefs such as "we have heard it all before or that there is something more important than listening at that moment.

Let us examine what prevents us from listening:

CHART



In Malcolm Gladwell's book *Blink* he informs us about how quickly decisions are made and while Gladwell celebrates our ability in my view there is a downside. When we make decisions in a blink of an eye we bring with us a boatload of prejudices, implied biases. Our patterned, conditioned brain decides what important data to focus on. What is important is driven by culture, family life experience and is distorted by Overgeneralization, Jumping to Conclusions, Minimizing the positive, Maximizing the negative. Reductionism etc.

It is the foundation of implicit bias in which we automatically formulate what we will hear and how we will respond.

So unfortunately, each interaction comes loaded with its own baggage. We enter our conversations with judgments, with conclusions about the other. Some of this may be obvious such as age, race, sex, dress, speech patterns to name a few.

We do not meet with the other with a spirit of presence but with a spirit of absence.

So what If we were to slow it all down, to not immediately do to the next thing, the latest Facebook post or Instagram post.

So if we were to meet with each other with curiosity, To hear the melody in another's voice, to begin to live in the perspective, the experience of each other. Each bringing a distinctive voice, a distinctive understanding of our and their world How beautiful might we find each other. I have met with people all over the world though Zoom. With each meeting I have come to see, know, and listen to people from many cultures. In the intimacy of our presence with each other we have given each other the gift of ourselves. AS Mark Nepo tells us it can become a spiritual experience. "When we meet like this, he says he may not have the words, but states nothing compares to the sensation of being alive in the company of another. It is God breathing on the embers of our soul." As we sit with another first endeavoring to stay in presence, in the present moment and then to bring an attitude of curiosity we can see each other.

One day I received a call from a dear friend, she called to tell me her husband had just died. He had been in extreme pain, and they traveled to the Emergency Room, believing his pain was a bowel obstruction they admitted him to the hospital. While my friend went home to get him clothes and toiletries, he died of a heart attack. I responded internally with shock and grief. What could I do?

What arises is our natural tendency to want to avoid pain. Our habits of trying to fix, the urge to make it better manifests. We want the pain to go away.

The art of listening teaches us there is nothing we can do but listen, to bring our presence to the other. To make space for whatever is happening for them. All I can do is listen, hear my friend speak, make space for what they need to say. We will also hold the other in curiosity not the curiosity that asks questions but the one that knows that we don't know and be willing hear the grief, the shock. All grief is complicated, and we cannot completely know another's but we can make space for their expression.

Finally in willingness to hold space, hold presence, to know that we do not know, We hold each other in our hearts. We suspend our judgements, our evaluations, our opinions. We hold each other in a spirit of lovingkindness.

Finally to look through with the eyes of lovingkindness. We embrace the energy of care and love that arises as we experience connection.

As Mark Nepo states: “We cannot eliminate hunger, but we can feed each other. We cannot eliminate loneliness, but we can hold each other. We cannot eliminate pain, but we can live a life of compassion” We, each of us hunger for connection, We, each of us, hunger to be seen, We, each of us hunger to be known and understood.

We see with clarity how like ourselves these unique beings, who have never existed before in the eons of time. The preciousness of this human before us.

In the name of efficiency or distraction we miss each other, we do not listen we do not hear.

For some of us COVID has slowed life down, we have learned through its absence the preciousness of being with each other

Let us be with each other now fully and truly present

As Mark Nepo states “stripped of causes and plans and things to strive for, everything we need or ask for is right here, in flawed abundance.

We are asked to experience meaning in the life that moves through the gills of our hearts. To embrace the fullness of what it means to be human being and not a human doing. To share of in the glory of being alive and together on this blue ball we call earth.