

**Baltimore Yearly Meeting
Faith and Practice Revision Committee
Proposed Advices, Queries and Voices**

Listening: Queries

When is it hardest for me to be ready to listen?

To what extent do I open myself to the risks of listening? How have I been changed by deeply listening to another?

What gets in the way when I seek to translate the ideas, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of another into familiar terms? When is this most likely to happen?

Listening: Advices

Speak with your own, authentic voice, using the terms true to your experience. Encourage and welcome others to do the same. Hearing truth as others understand it is a way of deepening your own faith.

Just as compassionate listening can be a healing experience, inattentive conversation can be unkind and hurtful. Undivided attention is a precious gift.

Read between the lines. Listen between the words.

Listening: Voices

Listening is a rare happening among human beings. You cannot listen to the word another is speaking if you are preoccupied with your appearance, or with impressing the other, or are trying to decide what you are going to say when the other stops talking, or are debating about whether what is being said is true or relevant or agreeable. Such matters have their place, but only after listening to the word as the word is being uttered. Listening is a primitive act of love in which a person gives himself to another's word, making himself accessible and vulnerable to that word.

William Stringfellow, *Friend's Journal*

Simple, respectful, prayerful listening is at least as good for the soul of the listener as for the person listened to.

Patricia Loring, *Listening Spirituality* p 163

With the gift of listening comes the gift of healing, because listening to your brothers and sisters until they have said the last words in their hearts is healing and consoling.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty

When listening, Friends need to be aware that certain words carry powerful emotional weight for them personally, and that they may hear meanings which reflect their own emotions and sensitivities rather than the intentions of the speaker. Each person is encouraged to be faithful in using the language which feels authentic and appropriate to their message, and those listening are encouraged to hold the actual words as lightly as possible, while seeking to be open to the Spirit which enlivens them.

New England Yearly Meeting, 2006

As we learn from each other, we may initially need to translate the words other Friends use to describe their faith, much as we would a foreign language. With practice this becomes easier, and although we may never adopt their language as our own, we are enriched and brought closer to each other by the ongoing practice of being able to listen outside the comfort of our own religious vocabulary. We rejoice in the Grace of a God who speaks to each of us in a voice we can understand, but who also provides others to help us understand those things which are outside our own experience.

New England Yearly Meeting, 2006

BYM Proposed Advices, Queries & Voices

How falsely a listener may construe what we say if he takes only our words. Our words are often halting and many times plainly not what we mean. Back of what we mean on the conscious level, there is almost always a deeper unconscious meaning that is at work.

Douglas Steere, 1955

I am not talking about listening with the human ear. I am talking about “discernment,” which means to perceive something hidden and obscure. We must listen with our spiritual ear, the one inside, and this is very different from deciding in advance what is right and what is wrong and then seeking to promote our own agenda. We must literally suspend our disbelief and then listen to learn whether what we hear expands or diminishes our sense of Truth.

Gene Knudsen Hoffman, 2003

Authentic listening is an act of love. To listen is to become vulnerable, to risk being drawn into someone’s suffering, to expose our assumptions to challenge. Listening can require great courage, which is why we will often tolerate injustice or even strike out in violence rather than risk listening.

Beyond Borders Newsletter

You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time.

M. Scott Peck

The fathomless depth of the listener who can go beyond words, who can even go beyond the conscious meanings behind words and who can listen with the third ear for what is unconsciously being meant by the speaker, this fashion of attentive listening furnishes a climate where the most unexpected disclosures occur that are in the way of being miracles in one sense, and the most natural and obvious things in the world, on the other.

Douglas Steere. 1955

It is a powerful discipline for the “listener” to try to listen without agenda, without the compulsion to help, abandoning the need or desire to appear knowledgeable, wise or comforting. There may be no more tellingly difficult spiritual practice than the effort to receive what is being said by someone else hospitably, without editing, without correction, without unsolicited advice. Yet it is this open listening that makes room for the Spirit of God to be present in the midst of the interaction, illuminating and guiding what is taking place... As we listen in this way, particularly in the beginning, we often learn more about ourselves than we do about the person we are trying to hear. We learn the limitations of our hospitality, where our resistances to the reality of the other person lie, how we require others to conform to our ideological structures and ways of expression before we will receive truth as they see it, how unprepared we are to trust in the capacity of others to work out their own solutions with divine assistance.

Patricia Loring, 1997