



The Listening Heart
How to Bring Yoga to Life
~Reverend Jaganath Carrera~

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Turkish proverb

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Are your Yoga practices a little dry? Are you not satisfied with your progress even with all the effort you've put in? Try cultivating a listening heart. It will energize your practices and bring them into daily life in a way they may have never been before. A listening heart can turbo charge progress in all facets of Yoga.

To listen, to *really* listen - to the thoughts of others, to music, your own thoughts and feelings, to be attentive to a scripture, novel, piece of art, the wonders of Nature, or to God – is a powerful and transforming act.

True listening is more than hearing or noticing. It is the state of complete receptivity. It occurs when we give ourselves over to another person, event, or object without judgment, defensiveness, presumptions, or impatience. In this act, our egos fade from the center of attention. In place of personal opinions, biases, mistaken impressions, and even our insights and skills, is the rich and meaningful reality of the other.

To listen requires an effort, while just hearing has no merit. A duck hears also.
Igor Stravinsky

The radical receptivity helps us to integrate new and enlightening perspectives into our lives. We will benefit from viewpoints that we may have never seen on our own. We will even benefit from perspectives that we disagree with or that make us uncomfortable. Through these insights, we gain insight into our common struggles, dreams, and joys. Soon, we will notice that a listening heart cultivates loving kindness and compassion in us.

Imagine the transforming power that a listening heart can have on any relationship. How many marriages and friendships could not only be saved, but enriched? What miracles could we see if conservatives, liberals, and those that have given up on the political system all gave themselves over to true listening? To listen is to be transformed; to discover the joy of finding yourself more at home in a perplexing and complex world.

From listening comes wisdom, and from speaking repentance.
Italian Proverb

The listening heart is a powerful force for helping others in pain. How many times have we been faced with a friend or loved one who is grieving or depressed? How helpless we can feel at our inability to find the right words to say or thing to do.

Here is something that always does at least some good and no harm: listen. Be fully present to them. You don't need to find any word formula to take away their pain. Be with them. Listen to their pain. Share it. Embrace it as your own.

There is great power in the simple act of listening. There is no more powerful act than giving your time and loving attention to another. This time is priceless and

irreplaceable; it represents your very life force. Freely offered to someone in need, it delivers a healing dose of comfort and support.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.

New Testament, James 1:19

When we truly listen, our mind becomes clear, calm, and focused. We leave our thoughts and burdens behind and focus on something outside our daily cares and concerns. We discover a state of mind that is open, supple and light. The doors to wisdom and the higher spiritual experiences are flung wide open. The listening heart practices a form of meditation.

There is a common misconception that spiritual growth requires a regular and massive infusion of ideas and practices. To the contrary, it is only when we empty ourselves of self concerns and thoughts that we gain insight. That is why the highest sacred teachings of India are called *shruti*, *that which is heard*. The most subtle and profound insights are not gained by thinking, speaking, or action. Profound glimpses into the highest truths are attained by listening to the point of total absorption (samadhi), where listener, and listened to, are one. There is no more direct or reliable path to ending ignorance and the suffering it brings than bringing a listening heart to bear throughout your day.

To cultivate a listening heart, we need to put into practice being attentive, patient, and receptive.

Attentive

To be attentive is to temporarily leave behind your opinions, emotional reactions, and responses in order to focus attention on what is before you. Here are just a few ways to practice attentiveness:

- In your conversations, frequently check that you are indeed paying attention to the words of the other. Don't spend time trying to formulate your response while someone else is speaking. You'll be surprised at how much you will grow and learn and how much more appropriate and wise your responses will be.
- The next time you hear what sounds to you as unusual music, don't let your mind wander to judgments. Stay open, listen carefully to the sonic images that come to you. You may or may not come to enjoy the music, but you will certainly learn from it and appreciate it. Also practice this with new or unfamiliar art, cultural traditions, lifestyles, food, and other faiths.
- Have regular quiet meditative time during which you can hear your own inner thoughts. Get to know yourself better. If we don't pay attention, some of these thoughts can sink to the subconscious where they may cause stress and anxiety.

Patient

New ideas, unfamiliar views can make us uncomfortable. Our minds may treat them as threats to what we've grown accustomed to and that we depend on as always being the same.

New input needs time to uncover its essence, its importance, and its beauty. Be patient with yourself and your ability to understand new ideas. Your reward will include a more open mind and greater compassion and understanding. Change always means stretching beyond our comfort zones.

Receptive

Receptivity is closely related to humility and courage. In order to become and remain receptive, we need to welcome what is being communicated, and have the courage to face a possible shift or expansion in our way of thinking.

Humility comes when we acknowledge that we have much to learn. It is only the empty cup that can be filled, not the one filled with, or attached to, its own knowledge and accomplishments. If everything to be known were grains of sand on a vast beach, what we know is only a handful. Yet, what we know in the name of Yoga and spirituality, and what we carry with us in the form of a focused mind, is something priceless.

*Know how to listen, and you will profit even from those who talk badly.
Plutarch: AD 46 – 120, Greek historian*

One of the greatest human fears is to be seen as silly or hopelessly wrong. It is a fear greater than death. But keep in mind, that every mistake, every bit of ignorance erased makes us wiser and stronger – better able to live happy, productive lives. Have no hesitation at encountering your own shortcomings; If we can't see them, we can't overcome them.

Yoga practices yield their sweetest, most practical fruits in the presence of a life lived with loving kindness. We also need a clear, focused mind to navigate the unexpected twists and turns of life. A listening heart brings the compassionate heart and clear, tranquil mind needed to discover the greatest gift of all: the experience of our True Nature, the Self, the God within.