

Black History Month: Growing the Spiritual Practice of Deep Listening

The Spiritual discipline of **Deep Listening** is an advanced practice comprised of at least 5 spiritual practices:

1) **Wonder & Curiosity:**

“To wonder is to let in a sense of awe and openness, a sense of deep curiosity. It is to look upon the face of anyone or anything and say, you are a part of me I do not yet know. To wonder about another person is to open ourselves up to their thoughts and experiences, their pains and joys, their wants and needs. It's an orientation of humility. It's recognizing that they are as complex, and infinite, and vast to themselves as we are to ourselves. Wondering about another person gives us information for how to love them.”

Valerie Kaur, *A People's Inauguration & See No Stranger*

Our scriptures suggest that people, no matter how similar or different than you, are made in the image of God and they are your siblings in the body of Christ (Genesis 1:26-28, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Galatians 3:28). Jesus once asked the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” because he knew lots of different people were trying to define him (Matthew 16:13-19). That is no less true for people today. Lots of people are trying to define who we are and who others are. Holy curiosity roots that definition deeply in who God says we and they are rather than anyone else's definition.

Learn More:

Read:

- A Prayer for courage and curiosity, <https://twitter.com/elca/status/1282296155418824709>

Watch:

- Conflict is a place of possibility, <https://youtu.be/WfQeH3092Sc>
- The Danger of a Single Story, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en

Listen:

- Elizabeth Gilbert: Choosing Curiosity over Fear, <https://onbeing.org/programs/elizabeth-gilbert-choosing-curiosity-over-fear-may2018/>

2) **Listening to Understand:** To listen is to seek to understand someone.

“The goal of listening is not to change them, persuade them, compromise with them, or legitimize them. It's simply to understand them.”

~Valerie Kaur, *A People's Inauguration & See No Stranger*

In Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, Jesus listened to her without judgement (John 4). He listened in, through, and beneath her words to understand her

deepest truths, struggles and needs. Being seen and heard, the woman is transformed and runs back to the town to invite others to come and see. Listening to understand opens space for transformation.

Learn more:

Read:

- This excerpt from Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Rev. Mpho Tutu, in *The Book of Forgiving*
“Can you hold that space open for me?
Can you keep your questions and suggestions and judgments at bay
Can you wait with me for the truths that stay
hidden behind my sadness, my fear, my forgetting, and my pain
Can you just hold open a space for me to tell my story? “
- Listening as Spiritual Hospitality from the Henri Nouwen Society, <https://henrinouwen.org/meditations/listening-spiritual-hospitality/>
- Learning to Listen, from U Matter at Princeton University, <https://umatter.princeton.edu/connecting/listening>
- Check out these discussion cards rooted in listening to understand from the People’s Supper, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/595e51dbd1758e528030285b/t/615de8996bd4d66d529ddcaf/1633544345733/DiscussionCards_TheOppositeofHate_TP_S.pdf

Watch: Communication Skills: Empathetic Listening with the movie *Inside Out*, <https://youtu.be/t685WM5R6aM>

Brene Brown on Empathy, <https://newconversations.net/communication-skills-workbook/listening/>

Listen: Brene’ Brown’s Interview with Adam Grant, “The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know” <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-adam-grant-on-the-power-of-knowing-what-you-dont-know/>

3) **Knowing Thyself & Tending the Wound:**

When we experience sadness, anger, etc we tend to blame the person that triggers that feeling and want to change them, persuade them, argue with them, and even dehumanize them, rather than explore our negative feelings and tend our wounds.

Rather than react to the person who is speaking, knowing thyself involves asking “Why am I triggered by this person’s perspective or story”. Deep listening requires ongoing work in knowing thyself and tending ones’ wounds. A psalmist reminds us,

When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent. Selah.

Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. ~Psalm 4

Deep listening requires that during a listening session, you develop the discipline of acknowledging your feelings, maybe even writing them down, but not reacting from or to those feelings. Instead, those feelings become yet another thing you can be curious about and explore.

Learn more:

Read:

- 3 Ways to Better Understand Your Emotions, <https://hbr.org/2016/11/3-ways-to-better-understand-your-emotions>
- Check out the summary of *White Fragility* by Robin Di'Angelo, <https://www.robindiangelo.com/publications/>

Watch:

- You're Not Going to Believe What I'm About to Tell You! https://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe_clean
- Third Habit of the Heart: An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways from Parker J Palmers' Five Habits of the Heart, <https://couragerenewal.org/habitsoftheheart/three/>

Listen: Coming Soon...

4) Breathing

Job reminds his friends and us, "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." ~Job 33

This isn't a one-time event. Whenever we tune back into our breath, we tune back into God's Breath/Spirit. Our ancient siblings used the Hebrew word Ruach to describe the Spirit of God and when Greek became the prominent language, they used Pneuma, both of which can be translated Spirit or Breath. Connecting with the Breath/Spirit of God nourishes our capacity to wonder, tend our wounds, listen, tend the wounds of others and ultimately reimagine a future together. When we practice deep listening and start to feel anger, sadness, etc. and/or the desire to change, persuade, argue or dehumanize someone else, we intentionally pause and take some deep breaths, imagining the Spirit (that nourishes and connects everything) moving through us and then we can tune back in to the listening session.

Learn more:

Read:

- The power of breathing and mindfulness in an inner-city school: <https://www.upworthy.com/this-school-replaced-detention-with-meditation-the-results-are-stunning>

Watch:

- The Power of Mindful Breathing, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=417HH8IA9EU>

Listen:

- Breath Prayer: A gift of peace amid troubling times, <https://www.projectzionpodcast.org/a5-awaken-to-gods-presence-finding-calm-in-the-storm-breath-prayer/>

5) Community & Communal Discernment:

Everything we see, hear, touch, and experience is filtered through previous experiences, beliefs and cultural understandings. As we deepen in our walk with God, we recognize this and grow in humility, trusting diverse siblings to listen with us and share what they heard and experienced so we all can more clearly see God, one another, our future together, and the log in our own eyes and ears. This is the heart of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; or through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.” ~Ephesians 2

Learn more:

Read:

ELCA Social Statement: *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*,
https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Church_SocietySS.pdf?_ga=2.153705208.1737128204.1644600737-1317336163.1644600737

especially the “Church’s Responsibility in Society” and “A Community of Moral Deliberation”

Watch:

- Rev. Eric Law: Understanding Culture to Understand Yourself, <https://vimeo.com/56927461>
- Divided States of Bias <https://www.facebook.com/DividedStatesofWomen/videos/141691756548973>

Listen: Coming Soon..

If you are interested in more resources and communities that will help you grow in the practice of Deep Listening, please check out:

- The work of Rev. Eric Law and the Kaleidoscope Institute, <https://www.kscopeinstitute.org>
- The work of Latasha Morrison and the Be the Bridge Community, <https://www.facebook.com/beabridgebuilder/>
- The work of Valeria Kaur and the Revolutionary Love Project, <https://valarielkaur.com/revolutionary-love-project/>
- The work of Parker J. Palmer and the Center for Courage & Renewal, <https://couragerenewal.org/>
- The People’s Supper Community, <https://thepeoplessupper.org>

A Framework for Deep Listening

As you listen today note anything that stirs wonder/wow, ouches/wounds, or that you want to explore more. **Don't forget to Breathe!** After the listening session, fill out the questions at the bottom.

Wonder/Wow!

Ouch/Wound

I want to explore more...

Don't forget to Breathe!

What did I learn about _____?

What did I learn about myself?

What did someone else hear or see that I did not?

What am I beginning to imagine about our future together?