

LISTENING— A WAY OF LIFE

Most people think that listening is what we do when someone else talks. Actually, we can expand the meaning of the word *listen*. Listening in a larger sense means receiving everything at all times.

Listening can be a way of life, an attitude toward all things, an open posture to the world. We can listen fully to the joy and pain of other people, to our thoughts and emotions, to our bodies, to nature, to music, to circumstances, to the lessons of the past, to our dreams of the future, and much more.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines the word *listen* this way: “To make a conscious effort to hear; to pay attention; to heed...” Listening fully means paying exquisite, close attention.

When you pay attention, your world gets bigger. You can see this for yourself. Just put this book down for two minutes. Close your eyes and notice everything you hear at this moment. Next, open your eyes and notice all the colors you see.

Congratulations. You’ve just entered a new world, larger and far richer in sights and sounds than the world you inhabited two minutes ago. Of course, you didn’t physically go anywhere—you just opened up your field of awareness. The difference between

your former and your present state might be as sharp as the difference between waking and sleeping.

Listening means receiving whatever the world is “sending.” And at any given moment,

the world is sending plenty—thousands of tastes, sights, aromas, sounds, textures, ideas, and bits of information just waiting to be noticed. There’s the shaft of sunlight streaming in the bedroom window, the sight of a full moon on a clear summer night, the fresh scent of the earth after a rainstorm, the sound of a sleeping baby’s breathing, the wave of pleasure that spreads through your body when you bite into your favorite food. If we’re not careful and conscious, we might tune out this symphony of sights, sounds, and sensations.

Then there’s listening to our intuition—a way of knowing that goes beyond logic and evidence. Using our intuition means tuning in to the still, small voice inside us as we make choices. Often we call that voice a hunch, lucky guess, inspiration, discovery, or *aha!* When people who face a major decision talk about “sleeping on it,” they’re allowing time for their intuition to speak.

We can also listen for guidance from deeper inside us or beyond us. For many people, spirituality means listening to God, Nature, the Creator, a Higher Power—whatever you wish to call the force that helps you see the sacred in the everyday and moves you to care about others.

When we adopt listening as a way of life, we create an invitation for the world to “speak” to us. When people sense that we’re receptive to their ideas and feelings, they feel safe to open up. Of course, we can always offer a literal invitation. We can ask them to speak about anything from their last vacation to their most intimate concerns. And we can deepen that invitation through listening with full attention and full acceptance—that is, full love.

When we understand that listening means receiving everything, we discover that there’s a lot to hear.



wake up to the world

For one minute, make an effort to list everything you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste. On a separate sheet of paper, write as quickly as you can, jotting down notes in single words or short phrases. Don't worry about making a complete or accurate list. Simply capture in words whatever you can in the available time.

After one minute is up, pause briefly and relax. Then review your list. Circle any sights, sounds, or other sensations you do not normally notice. After doing this and waking up to a new world, complete the following sentences:

I discovered that I ...

I intend to ...

