

Advice from a Married Monk

I can't tell you how many times it's happened. I'm telling a friend something really important, and I sense that he's not listening. To me, nothing is more frustrating. Of course, my friends will tell you how often they've tried to tell me something and I wasn't focused on them!

I was a monk for eight years, and I've been married for almost as long, and I know, from experience, that when we don't listen — to others, ourselves or the universe, this wide world finds more painful ways to deliver our message.

For years, I was a counselor and worked with many couples. It was both fascinating and frustrating. Listening to people not listen for an hour is oddly educational. The empathy I learned from such tragedy! I would ask one partner to do a simple mirroring exercise — listen to your partner for sixty seconds, and then repeat verbatim what was just said. You know what? Not one person in ten could do it. It took try after try, and even then they needed help. I never ceased to be amazed.

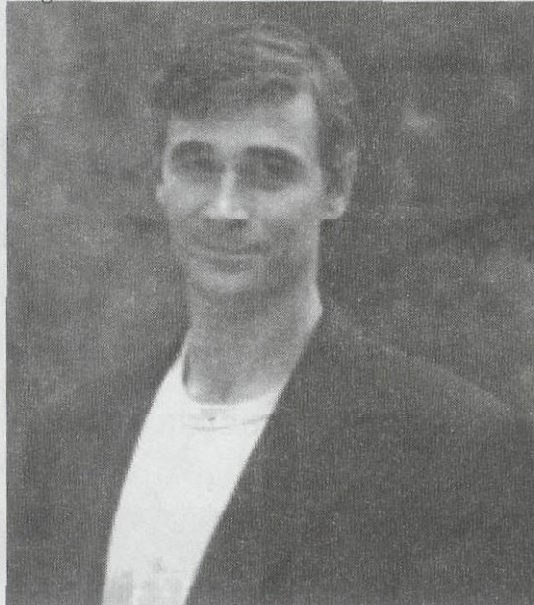
Finally, it hit me. The reason the man didn't actually "hear" his partner was because he COULDN'T! He was in such a charged state, feeling her emotion so strongly that he literally couldn't hear her words. Instead of listening, he had already begun interpreting, judging, defending, and planning his response. Wow! And we sometimes call ourselves conscious.

With what I've learned, here's the key issue — intention. If I am speaking to someone, and I have an "unspoken" hidden agenda, (i.e. trying to change them) the listener will feel my MOTIVE more than my WORDS. Believe it or not, this dual communication is happening in almost every conversation. These lapses-in-listening and unconscious agendas may not seem like huge things, but in my experience, they are the "straws" which make up the

bricks which build our separating walls. And every break-up is triggered by a "last straw," which finally breaks the camel's back.

These dramatic days, the world is so small that communication is more important than ever. Without true empathic

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listening, there is little chance of learning, and maybe even survival. The German, Bismarck wrote, "War is the continuation of negotiation...by other means." Indeed! War and terrorism are just languages to those who have lost hope in words.

We've all tried to change others, and it's a paradox. The harder we try, the less they change (and usually, the more they resist). However, it's a fact that we all HAVE changed others. No doubt, a friend has told you, "What you said the other day really had an impact on me." There's a reason for that response. When we unconsciously influenced our friends, it was because we were not trying to change them. Instead, we were stating something that was deeply meaningful to us, with no agenda to change them. This is why external conditioning is limited.

Look at the word "education." The Latin root literally means, "to draw out from within." Was that our experience in school? Along with instruction, did our teachers stimulate our creativity and originality, and ask (and listen to) what meant the most to us? If so, we will probably remember such teachers for the rest of our lives. Such is the power of listening and love.

However passionately, speaking is only half of a two-way street. Without real listening, there can be no learning. And I assure you, no love. So, here's a simple technique if you're frustrated with somebody over something:

- 1) State what is most meaningful to you (using "I-feel" phrases).
- 2) Ask what is most meaningful to them.
- 3) Pause...until they finish speaking (the hard part).
- 4) Repeat EXACTLY what you heard, then ask if you heard correctly.
- 5) Ask more questions, and pause again.

If you can do this, with a genuine intention of learning more about the other person, you will eventually open up intimacy and trust. Why? Simply because it's a law of life. Of course, our fear is that we won't get our own needs met, if we try to serve the other person. The paradox is that if we love them by such listening, sooner or later, they will respond to us.

Monks and married people learn these things.

Greg Mooers, who was a monk for 8 years, has a degree in quantum physics. He is a public speaker and author of "Our Heart Virtue." His CD's, workbooks, and interactive website www.Lifecamp.com are the core of a revolutionary process of self-discovery that has inspired Olympic gold-medalists and Academy and Emmy Award winners. Call 310-428-0400 for details.