

Listening Is the Way In

by Rodney Smith

"You can hear a lot by listening - Yogi Berra (modified)

We sometimes forget that listening and meditation are the same thing. In fact, meditation can best be summarized as the art of listening. Listening requires us to be open and receptive rather than closed and opinionated. Since we are so prone to influencing, altering, and controlling the input of our lives, we usually do not have a conditioned readiness to listen. Instead our minds seem to interfere with listening by critiquing and commenting throughout the listening process. Instead of inclusively receiving the information as it comes in, we often attend to whether we agree or not with the content. Like light shining through a colored filter, our reactions color the content with our opinions and conclusions. What we are willing to listen to is what we already agree with, the rest is dismissed. From this perspective, listening is confirming what we already know rather than being available to anything new.

We feel if we genuinely open to what is being said we may be affected by it. We may have to change. We defend against having to change by refusing to open to any information that holds that threat. Our mind is conditioned to reflect back its own view and to hold off anything that intimidates. We listen to the world and we hear our own voice, we view the world and see our own reflection.

The art of listening is continually screening the wheat of the new from the chaff of the old. It is a confrontation with the habits and defenses of our minds. To open to the new, we have to allow the old reactions and opinions to be just what they are. We listen through our reactions not in spite of them. Any additional reactivity further confuses the listening. Our reactions are part of the story of our listening but does not shut us down to new possibilities.

We have nothing to fear from new information. Open listening will not persuade us to do what our hearts tell us is unwise. Listening openly is the heart in action, and the heart holds its own discriminating wisdom. It will show us a universe very different than the created world of our minds. In this new world we have more liberty to be who we are and more tolerance to allow others the same freedom.

May we all learn how to listen.