

# MEDITATIVE LISTENING

All we have to do is sit down quietly  
and listen to our feelings.

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# MEDITATIVE LISTENING

The spiritual life must be simple.

Psychology or philosophy can be as intricate as you like. But the spiritual life must be simple.

Simple in form, at least – so there is the illusion of simplicity. As I follow a spiritual path, however, I find it one of the most difficult things I ever tried to do.

It is easy to get caught in a tangle of words and fantasies, for we are all in a tangle already. More words, more tangle.

We have to cut through. We have to begin again.

Our practice, then, must be quite simple – as simple as possible. All we have to do is sit down quietly and listen to our feelings. There is no practice more certain, more elevated or more human than this.

Little by little, as surface agitations die down, we touch our true feelings. Once we are aware of these deeper feelings, we are able to discern the feelings of others.

When you sit with your own feelings, I call it *meditative communion*. When you discern the feelings of others, I call it *meditative listening*.

Meditative listening may happen in many settings: in a listening partnership or a listening circle, in sessions of spiritual accompaniment, during a retreat or in everyday life.

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# MEDITATIVE COMMUNION

I sit quietly with my feelings.

Day after day, I clear a little time to be alone, and I notice what I am feeling.

Nobody can tell me how to do this. I do it in my own time, in my own way. It is wholly individual.

What will happen, when I leave the silence free to work, I cannot say.

Little by little a sense of peace may come, a sense of stillness.

Once in a while there may be something more – a breath of healing, a moment of insight, a way forward.

It is like coming home.

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# THE LISTENING PARTNERSHIP

It is easy to ask a friend to be your listening partner.

When you meet, you divide the time equally. For half the time you are the listener. Then your companion listens to you.

When it is your turn to be listened to, the time is for you. You use it however you like. You say whatever you want. You may say a lot or very little or nothing at all. For some things are private. You will not say them now, perhaps not ever.

When you listen, you must keep track of your own feelings. Otherwise, you listen. No more, no less. The path comes from inside, not from the listener.

But the listener does have a certain freedom. The listener is not a slave. This is a plain, real relationship and human beings are profoundly relational. We are in this together. That is what is so helpful. We share the inward turn. We walk side by side.

The listener accepts you just as you are, is always on your side, and shares every wrinkle of your shifting feelings.

There is a natural cycle of listening: feeling and conveying, feeling-with and receiving.

At first, you may be silent, turning within yourself, feeling for some sense of what is alive or troubling you, feeling for what to say.

After a while, you can begin to convey some part of what you are feeling, some sense of what is stirring within. Words and images, sounds and gestures come, which give a voice to the joys and sorrows of your journey. They tell of your anxiety, unease or uncertainty.

The listener simply tries to hear what you say, to feel with you, to be in your world, sharing your questions and your journey.

But how are you to know that the listener is with you? When each thing you say is said back to you, one little bit at a time, plainly and accurately, perhaps in your own words – then you know.

When you feel heard a silence falls. In that silence more may come. Often it is something deeper: you can feel it just now forming at the edge of being.

Sometimes what comes is the next piece of the story. Sometimes it is a feeling for the whole story. Sometimes it is like grace, like a breath from another world.

Listening is as old as the campfire, as old as the well.

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# THE LISTENING CIRCLE

It is easy to invite a few friends to form a listening circle.

You tell them that this will be a space for empathy and self-empathy. You agree where to meet and for how long. You will share expenses.

Then the day comes. You meet. And nobody can tell you how to do this. The time belongs to you all equally, to use in your own way.

There are four things you may want to do in this circle: feeling-with and receiving, feeling and conveying.

You may want to sit in silence, feeling with others as they speak.

When somebody has spoken, you may want to say what you heard. In this way the circle stays together, and speakers know they have been heard.

When some feeling stirs in you, you may want to turn inwards.

And you may want to say what you feel – in your own words, in your own way.

Often the circle will fall silent.

The listening circle is many things. It is where we learn to be with our own feelings and the feelings of others. It is a place of love and tenderness, of friendship and community.

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# LISTENING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Our spiritual life can't stay forever in private. We have to bring our feelings into all our situations – to be aware of feelings, not only at special times, but throughout the day.

Sometimes I pause for a few moments, opening a little window through which I sense my feelings.

I offer little bits of listening to others, for very often empathy is welcome.

And I notice that these actions are contagious. What one does, others soon catch on to.

We listen to ourselves in solitude, we listen to our friends, and we listen in everyday life.

We listen for the sake of others and for our own sakes. In the end, there is no difference.

Listening is born in silence, in awareness and acceptance. In coming to accept myself as I am, I come to accept others as they are.

The way of empathy is a way of silence and love.

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# SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Today we are surrounded by voices. Each voice has something to say about the emptiness, unease and uncertainty that fester in our hearts. Each voice urges upon us some road to happiness. Each voice calls us to some path, some answer.

The answers are not in any of this. They are not outside us. The answers lie within.

Yet it is hard to find them alone. Perhaps it can't be done. And for this reason it may be helpful to find somebody who can offer you spiritual accompaniment.

What do I mean by the word "spiritual"? People use this word in many ways. I mean something like this.

When I join a group or community, taking my lead from its traditions and values, I call this the religious turn.

When I go to a doctor or psychologist, looking for a correct evaluation and for medical or pseudo-medical treatment, I call this the diagnostic turn.

When I look outwards, seeking to act in society or to build a better world, I call this the political turn.

There is value in all these.

But sooner or later it is borne in upon me that I am part of the problem. I begin to look into my heart. I call this the inward turn.

Now I ask hard questions, "Who am I? What am I like? What in myself am I hiding from?" I try to be truthful with myself about my own feelings. Whatever shares that inward truthfulness, I call "spiritual".



What is spiritual accompaniment?

In spiritual accompaniment, somebody who is familiar with the landscape of feeling keeps somebody else company, whose feelings are clouded, narrowed or lost, who yearns for deeper understanding, struggles with a moral uncertainty, or trembles on the threshold of an unknown path.

Spiritual accompaniment is about listening with empathy and compassion, while somebody turns inwards to wait upon the wisdom of the heart.

Spiritual accompaniment invites us to shed our stories, and to feel directly what life is like.

Spiritual accompaniment frees us from the grip of false standards, and invites us to value the truly precious things in life.

Spiritual accompaniment is about accepting things as they are, and being at peace with change.

I offer sessions of spiritual accompaniment, either here in Glasgow or over the phone. Please get in touch if you would like to know more.

Rob Foxcroft

The Centre for Meditative Listening

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# ABOUT THE RETREATS

A retreat is time out of the world.

There is time to rest and time for the inner journey, time to look around, time to renew our sense of meaning, time to go more deeply into the heart.

There is time for meditative communion and meditative listening, time for the spiritual journey and time to offer one another spiritual accompaniment.

There is time to learn from each other, to hear what each one's experience has been. There is time to touch the central stream of feeling in ourselves and one another.

We may spend a little time with lines of poetry or contemplative literature, with music or art. We may write or paint or practise authentic movement. We may go walking on the hills, in the woods or by the water in the valleys.

Typically, people learn more about empathy and self-empathy in this gentle environment than through any amount of traditional, formal schooling.

And nobody has to take part in anything. You join in as much or as little as you like.

There is time simply to be.

Details of forthcoming retreats are given below. Please get in touch if you would like to know more.

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# SUMMER RETREAT IN ENGLAND

A residential retreat  
and advanced training in empathy

Facilitators – Rob Foxcroft, Suzanne Noël

Venue – Glenthorne, Grasmere, English Lake District

Dates – July 30<sup>th</sup> to August 6<sup>th</sup> 2012

The house is comfortable and welcoming. It is filled with the quietness of Quaker spirituality. The food is good. The setting is beautiful, in the valley of Easedale, a short walk from the pretty village of Grasmere.

Grasmere is a place made famous by the poems of William Wordsworth, who lived here. We may read some of his lines.

Please get in touch with us if you would like to know more about the Summer Retreat in England.

Rob Foxcroft and Suzanne Noël

The Centre for Meditative Listening

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# ORANGE-BLOSSOM-TIME RETREAT IN SPAIN

A residential retreat  
and advanced training in empathy

Facilitators – Vivien Stacey, Rob Foxcroft  
Venue – Tormos, Valencia, Eastern Spain  
Dates – February 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> 2013

The retreat will be held in a private house in a quiet, traditional village in the Spanish countryside, during the time of the orange blossom. The weather in Spain is already lovely, while it rains in England.

We will live together as a community, sharing the housework and cooking – it will not be much – and some meals will be made by local cooks.

We will spend some time meditating upon lines of mystical poetry, verses from the Spiritual Canticle of St John of the Cross.

Please get in touch with us if you would like to know more about the Orange-Blossom-Time Retreat in Spain.

Rob Foxcroft and Vivien Stacey  
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# LISTENING FUNDAMENTALS

Listening Fundamentals is an introductory training in meditative listening. We meet for three hours a week for eight weeks, a total of twenty-four hours of face-to-face contact.

In addition, you will be asked:

- To spend ten minutes every day in meditative communion
- To form a weekly listening partnership (one hour a week)
- To meet the other students in a listening circle (two meetings of two hours each)
- To practise meditative listening in everyday life at home and work.

After the introductory training in meditative listening, participants receive a Certificate in Meditative Listening and a Certificate of Professional Development.

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# PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

Meditative listening is for you and for the other person. It is always a personal matter, a matter of the spirit.

Meditative listening is designed to be simple. Everything likely to be troublesome has been patiently eliminated from the system. So you might practise year after year and never have occasion to turn to a professional for help.

Yet meditative listening is not only simple. It is refined and intuitive, subtle and single-minded.

Any approach to the spiritual life must be wholehearted and unequivocal in its commitments. This approach relies upon two profound commitments: the first, to self-empathy; the second, to the development of empathy for others.

So you may want to undergo training after all: to illuminate your own spiritual life, or with a view to practising spiritual accompaniment, or to integrate meditative listening into your professional life, or maybe for all these reasons.

Most training is about learning skills, but this one is more subtle: it is about developing sensitivities. Sensitivity grows over time, through an accumulation of experience. The process can't be hurried.

Recognising that we live in a world tightly guarded by forms of recognition, I offer various forms of acknowledgment of any training you do.

Each time you come to me for an hour of spiritual accompaniment, it counts as one hour of training in meditative listening.

The short retreat (for example, the Orange-Blossom-Time Retreat) counts as thirty-five hours' training in meditative listening.

The long retreat (for example, the Summer Retreat) counts as fifty hours' training in meditative listening.

Participants in a meditative listening retreat receive a Certificate in Meditative Listening and a Certificate of Professional Development.

The Diploma in Meditative Listening will be awarded when you have met all the following requirements:

- You have received the Certificate in Meditative Listening.
- You have been selected for training in meditative listening.
- You have completed two hundred hours of face-to-face training in meditative listening.
- You have written a substantial work of personal experiential exploration (roughly twenty-five thousand words).
- And you feel ready to receive the Diploma.

Please get in touch with The Centre for Meditative Listening if you would like to know more about training.

#### NOTE

*I continue to act as a Focusing Co-ordinator for the Focusing Institute, training Certified Focusing Professionals and Focusing Co-ordinators; and I act as a Mentor for the British Focusing Teachers' Association, training Focusing Practitioners, Teachers and Mentors. Training in Meditative Listening counts towards these programmes.*

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# ABOUT LINEAGE

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Meditative Listening is a form of Focusing, part of the rich diversity of Focusing approaches. Equally, it is a form of the Person-Centred Approach, part of the person-centred family.

I meditated for many years upon the writings of Carl Rogers, Gene Gendlin and their colleagues, looking for a central line.

All the time, things were falling away. Though what is left is lean, it is faithful to the tradition. I trust what I have now because it is rooted in my direct experience.

And Meditative Listening is not only in this tradition. It belongs to something much older, much wider and more universal: to ancient traditions of spirituality and humanism; and behind them, to the aboriginal lineage of human empathy.

For empathy belongs to nobody. Empathy is the essence of our humanity.

So I do not speak as a representative of Carl or Gene. I speak for myself alone. I have taken nothing upon authority. And I would never ask you to speak for me; only of what you have found out for yourself.

What is unique about Meditative Listening?

Carl says that people need to receive empathy. Gene adds that people need to practise self-empathy. Meditative listening adds a third dimension: that people need to offer empathy to others. These are the three dimensions of our practice.

A human comes into being through empathy for other human beings. This third dimension has frequently been lived, but seldom said.

And I do not like to give up on anybody. Once I give up on anybody, soon I give up on everybody.

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# ABOUT ME

Rob Foxcroft

The Centre for Meditative Listening

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UK phone: 0141 943 1449

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I teach empathy and self-empathy.

I offer spiritual accompaniment and lead retreats.

I am a musician, a poet and a contemplative.

I live in Glasgow (Scotland) with my wife and family.

I play the piano – mostly Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert.

I love to be in wild nature, to walk on the hills or sit by the sea.

As a child I loved canoeing, and used to build drystone walls.

2012

Diploma in Spiritual Accompaniment (The Norwich Centre)

2011-2012

Studying spiritual accompaniment with Brian Thorne, Caroline Kitcatt,  
Stephen de Brett and Chris Bulpitt

2010

Founded the Centre for Meditative Listening

2001-2005

Created *Focusing and the Power of Philosophy* – five advanced weeklong seminars, with Kye Nelson, Campbell Purton, Barbara McGavin and Rob Parker

1994-present

BFTA Focusing Mentor

1994

Co-founded the British Focusing Teachers' Association

1992

Certifying Co-ordinator (The Focusing Institute)

1989

Focusing Trainer (The Focusing Institute)

1988-1992

Studying Focusing at the Focusing Institute in Chicago, with Ann Weiser Cornell and others, and in individual sessions with Gene Gendlin, Mary McGuire and Bebe Simon

1982-1985

Studying the Person-Centred Approach with Senga Blackie

1980-1989

Developing Creative Piano Playing, an approach to music-making through free composition and improvisation at the piano

1974-present

Slowly evolving the Meditative Listening approach from many sources, partly through wide-ranging artistic, historical, psychological and spiritual explorations, but mainly through the experiences of ordinary life and whilst sitting beside a piano

1974-present

Teaching the piano

1974

BA (Music), Emmanuel College, Cambridge

1972

Made a commitment to bring the Person-Centred Approach into all aspects of my life, work and relationships

1972

Read Virginia Axline's book, *Dibs in Search of Self*

1971-1974

Studying musical composition with Philip Radcliffe

1966-1981

Studying the piano with David Smith, Russell Lomas, Guy Jonson,  
Maisie Aldridge and Sulamita Aronovsky

1969-present

Ongoing experiential studies in comparative religion, including the  
Christian, Islamic, Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian traditions

1961-1975

Studying the cello with Bill Wildman and Paul Ward

1961-1971

Studying singing with Neil Chaffey and Susan Gorton

1961

Began to compose music

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