

Spiritual Listening Practices

Spiritual listening is at the heart of all relationships--it's the antidote to that missing piece, that longing for connection, belonging, and communion which seems to be so common in our culture today. This type of listening creates a sense of community. When we are open, curious, and attentive to others in this way, we discover a deeper, sacred connection; we are in relationship.

“When was the last time you had a great conversation – in which you heard yourself saying things you’d never said before, and received things you hadn’t thought of – that made your heart sing – and that you remember days and months afterwards.” John O’Donohue

Spiritual listening is embodied listening, in which we become a listening presence to all of life. Spiritual moments are often sourced with our five senses – sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch, as well as our intuitive sense. This exploration is offered as a series of prompts, to expand the way we think about listening and spirituality. Engage with all eight of them in one session, or divide them into 2 or 3 shorter sessions. Have paper and pen handy so you can pause and journal - either after each question or at the end of your session.

Find a comfortable place to sit where you will be least distracted. You may want to light a candle or burn some incense. Welcome the stillness. Breathe. Invite the great Mystery into your life. Create more space for love and freedom to emerge. Hold space for the patterns that connect. Spirit and soul dimensions are sources which make everything flow in new ways. Slowing down we find our rhythm, our own natural rhythm.

“Think about the distinction between looking at a window – describing it in detail, perhaps, and looking through a window – which opens up a whole new world to experience.”

Mary Sharratt

Listen to your body

What is your body telling you? Is it time to rest, eat, move? Does it need to stretch? Dance? Play? Is it too warm, too cold? Are there aches and pains that need tending to? Think about a time when you were grateful for your body. What was that like? What would it take to feel connected to your body again?

“You have permission to rest. You are not responsible for fixing everything that is broken. You do not have to try and make everyone happy. For now, take time for you. It’s time to replenish.”

Laurel Bleadon-Maffel

Listen to your mind

What is your mind telling you? Where are you stretching? Whose voice are you listening to? What are you reading? What are you being called to learn now?

“Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.”

Mary Oliver

Listen to your heart

What is your heart telling you? What do you notice when your heart breaks open? What makes your heart sing? Create a space in which you can unfold.

“There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action. And because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours, clearly and directly. To keep the channel open.”

Martha Graham

Listen to your emotions

What are your emotions telling you? What are you feeling? Take time to dwell there. Be present. Have a sense of curiosity about the emotion. Reflect on the experience.

“Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay closest attention. They are not only telling you about the secret of who you are, God may be speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where you should go next”.

Frederick Buechner

Listen to your soul

What is your inner voice telling you? Check in with that still place deep inside of you, where you begin to remember who you are, and get in touch with your own deep wisdom. Listen for what wants to be said next. Breathe. Practice patience. Pay attention to the yearning of your soul.

“What is this precious love and laughter breeding in our hearts? It is the glorious sound of the soul waking up.”

Author unknown

Listen to the silence

What is the silence telling you? What do you hear when you find yourself in stillness? Surrender to the emptiness. Let go. Journal, meditate. What do you notice beyond the silence? Open yourself to new possibilities.

“Stillness is our most intense mode of action. It is in our moments of deep quiet that is born every idea, emotion, and drive which we eventually honor with the name of action.”

Leonard Bernstein

Listen to the earth

What is nature telling you? What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear? What is the land telling you? Notice vegetation, and keep looking. Remember to look upward as well. What are you resonating with?

“Nature is ever at work building and pulling down, creating and destroying, keeping everything whirling and flowing, allowing no rest but in rhythmical motion, chasing everything in endless song out of one beautiful form into another.”

John Muir

Listen to your life

What is your life telling you? What are you present to? We each have deep wisdom in us. What if we held ourselves in reverence? Listen to your life, the mystery of it, the ups and downs, and the grace. Be tender with yourself and with others. Remember that we are human beings, not human doings.

“I want to truly live my life instead of watching it go by because I’m too busy to enjoy it.”

Mary Sharratt

These prompts begin with the words *listen to*. You might also want to revisit them using the language *listen for* and *listen with*. Use this as an opportunity to imagine all the different aspects of listening that we have forgotten or neglected.

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