



LISTENING

LISTENING requires silence, patience, the tuning out of other sounds, and focus on one person, getting information and hearing the word that person is speaking.

When we listen, we create an environment for each other of understanding, consideration and cooperation. I serve the other through my willingness to let that other have personal likes, tasks, tastes, habits and opinions.

Listening helps me accept the other without attempting to change that other into my own image.

WE LISTEN WITH OUR EARS. Verbal sounds bounce back and forth on our eardrums. Sometimes they make sense, frequently they don't. We may tune out and turn off that which we don't want to hear. We pretend that we are listening but our inattention tells the other that he is not really important, that what he is saying doesn't really matter.

WE LISTEN WITH OUR MINDS. As the other presents an idea, we may calculate the response. We may find it important to prepare a defence, marshal an argument or prove to the speaker that he doesn't have all the facts. We often debate instead of dialogue. When the other touches the nerve endings of our biases we become defensive as our pet theories become threatened. We fear the change that may come if we open ourselves honestly to balancing another's thought with our own.

WE LISTEN WITH OUR EMOTIONS. If we do not like the way another looks, or if we do not like their tone of voice, if we do not like the other's "differences", we can get all tied up inside with anger, frustration, rejection, or even with hatred. We can pass judgement and write the other off as worthless or insignificant. Defensiveness on our part indicates an inability to understand what the other is actually saying. Our emotions can limit our capacity to provide the space for that which the other is offering. So we label the other as wrong or uninteresting and deny ourselves the opportunity to discover what their message really is.

WE LISTEN WITH OUR HEARTS. When we listen with our heart we stop playing the game of non-listening. We step inside the other's skin, we walk in the other's shoes, and we attempt to see things from their point of view. We establish eye contact, we give conscious attention, and we reflect our understanding of the other's words. We question, we attempt to clarify, and we understand that the other is important; we are grateful that the other trusts us enough to share deep, personal feelings.

Loretta Girzaitis from "Alive Now", May 1978