

The Dewdrop Digest

Connecting Children, Youth and Sangha

Clouds in Water Zen Center

Sunday, March 2, 2008

Speaking and Listening from the Heart

This weekend, Clouds in Water is hosting Christina Baldwin who is helping us to deepen our practice of Council, the practice of speaking and listening from the heart.

Heart-to-heart communication and relationship is at the heart of Buddhist practice. By taking up the Way of Council as a sangha, we have strengthened and transformed our community. We have opened up a form of Buddhist practice that fosters awareness, intimacy and integrity in relationship - a powerful link from the *zafu* to our daily life as householders.

Listening is the heart of Council practice. Today in class, we will explore Listening From The Heart, which is practice that pertains to all the paramitas but most especially to precept practice, cultivating patience (relaxing into acceptance of our feelings and the situation), awareness, and wisdom.

Listening Activities for Home Practice

Be comfortably seated. Take three deep, cleansing breaths. Relax. Close your eyes and simply listen. Maybe you hear the hum of the lights, the chirping of a bird, or your own breath. Simply be aware, observe. After you've heard five (ten for older children) different sounds, raise your hand. (Pause) Notice how you feel. When you're ready, open your eyes and come back to the room ... Talk about what you heard.

For older children, continue: You may notice that with each sound, the mind quickly labels it as positive (pleasant), negative (unpleasant), or neutral. Let's open up to the sounds in the room with evenly suspended attention, allowing any responses or judgments to fall away, like a tree releasing a leaf in the autumn. Receive each sound, just as it is. No positive, no negative. Breathe in, attending to just the in-breath. Breathe out, attending to just the sound. No need to judge. Simply accept and include each sound as it arises. Breathing in, noting your in-breath. Breathing out, noting the sound. (Pause) When you're ready, open your eyes and come back to the room ... Talk about your experience. How was it different?

Variation: Go on a listening walk outside. For young children, do it in a follow the leader style. Follow a sound, stop to listen, then continue.

Suggested Family Discussion

- What is it like to listen deeply?
- What is it like to be deeply listened to? How do you feel during and after?
- What is like when you are NOT deeply listened to?
- What are the goals of the deep listener?
- What *state of mind* best supports deep listening?
- What are some ways that you can prepare yourself to listen deeply?

The Fourth Precept: Deep Listening And Loving Speech

As expressed by Thich Nhat Hanh

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

The Art of Deep Listening ...Excerpted, with permission, from "The Art Of Deep Listening" in Ian Prattis' *The Essential Spiral: Ecology and Consciousness After 9/11*

When was the last time anybody really listened to you? Maybe it was your dog or your cat because no matter what you say to them they are certain to love you. Even your pet fish is certain to love you, and be totally present when you talk to her. Yet, when was the last time that anyone really listened to what you wanted to say?

Often when we speak to someone, we know they are formulating rebuttals while we speak, or they are thinking about laundry lists, telephone calls or shopping trips. That person is not truly present with us.

Examine the other side of the coin – when was the last time that you really listened to someone else? We often have strong perceptions of the other, and it is our *perceptions* that we listen to, not the other communicating to us. Our listening is often filled with judgments and assumptions, which are what we take away from the conversation because we have not listened deeply to the person.

To truly listen requires that we find a way to drop our perceptions and judgments, in order that we can be truly present. Then we may be able to understand the other very deeply, and be of great support and service because of our capacity to listen deeply and compassionately.

Being present, listening deeply from a compassionate heart, speaking lovingly -- as a daily practice -- this is what the Fourth Precept of the Buddha is about.

Listening blessing

May you enter the universal door of deep listening and loving speech.

May you be fully present in all your listening and all your speaking.

May you be free of judgment, defensiveness and the urge to offer advice.

May you be aware, open, flexible, curious, interested, compassionate.

And may you be listened to with love, awareness, and compassion.

Question, idea, concern? Contact Children's and Youth Practice Coordinator Katharine Krueger at 651-222-6968 x5 or cp@cloudsinwater.org