

Week 7 - Mindfulness and Communication
Mountain & Lake Meditations



To listen is to lean in softly with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.

- Mark Nepo

If you were to consider all the truly stressful situations in your life, you'd probably find that many, if not most, involve other people. This week, we focus on communication and what it means to be mindful in our interactions with others, whether it be family members, co-workers or neighbors. Our focus up until now has been on our internal world (thoughts, feelings and sensations); now we move from the intra-personal to the inter-personal, taking into account another's world, and the place where their world and ours meet. This means recognizing that "the other" (person or persons) have their own perceptions, feelings and needs, which are almost certainly different than ours.

Listening

Most of us don't really listen very deeply when we are in conversation. As Tara Brach says in **The Sacred Art of Listening**: "We spend most of our moments when someone is speaking, planning what we're going to say, evaluating it, trying to come up with our presentation of our self, or controlling the situation. Pure listening is a letting go of control. It's not easy and takes training... The bottom line is when we are listened to, we feel connected. When we're not listened to, we feel separate."

Dealing with Conflict

Effective communication with those who we disagree with is extraordinarily difficult. If you are like most people, you have a fall-back strategy to deal with conflict that was learned early in life, one that is habitual and embedded in interactions with others. The three most common strategies are: **accommodate** ("be nice"), **demand** ("me first"), or **withdraw** ("I don't care"). There is a fourth way, one that involves investigating both your world and the other's world, that can sometimes yield a surprising and creative solution that honors both worlds. In the martial art, Aikido, this would be called **blending**, a move that harms neither party and turns conflict into more of a dance than a fight. This is complex and an art form in itself, and forms the basis of Marshall Rosenberg's **Non-Violent Communication (NVC)**, something that is briefly introduced this week.

Videos

Susan Piver, in an entertaining and provocative presentation, **The Art of Being Heard**, describes four principles of mindful communication (timing, listening, agenda-less-ness, confidence). Her description of confidence may surprise you, especially given the fact that this particular presentation was given to a business audience. In the second video, Tara Brach talks about **The Sacred Art of Listening**, and in **Awakening Through Conflict**, she begins to answer the question of how one deals with conflict in communication.

Reading

Included in the reading is a written companion to the video above by Tara Brach, also called **The Sacred Art of Listening**. Anger is sometimes confused with hatred and identified as an emotion that a "spiritual" person would not have. Sylvia Boorstein clarifies this misunderstanding with **The Most Frequently Asked Question**. Our typical way of dealing with anger is to either externalize it or stuff it, and in **The Answer to Anger** Pema Chodron describes a powerful middle way, neither exploding nor imploding. **Conflict Management Styles** describes the four ways of dealing with conflict outlined above (accommodate, demand, withdraw, blend), and **The Heart of Non-Violent Communication (NVC)** by Marshall Rosenberg, is an introduction to NVC, a skillful way of communicating in difficult situations.

When is the last time that you had a great conversation, a conversation that wasn't just two intersecting monologues, which is what passes for conversation a lot in this culture? But ... a great conversation, in which you overheard yourself saying things that you never knew you knew? That you heard yourself receiving from somebody words that absolutely found places within you that you thought you had lost ... a conversation that brought the two of you on to a different plane? ... a conversation that continued to sing in your mind for weeks afterwards ... I've had some of them recently ... they are food and drink for the soul.

- John O'Donohue

Daily Practices

This week, we introduce the **Mountain Meditation** and the **Lake Meditation**, one of which we suggest you try at least once this week, in place of one of your normal 30 minute practices. These are both shorter practices (20 min), so on the day you do one of these meditations, you will have a shorter practice session (if you'd like a full 30 minutes, you can add 10 minutes of silent meditation on your own that day).

For the **formal practice** this week, we are now at a point where you can freely choose between any of the three main practices you've experienced so far: Body Scan, Sitting Meditation, Yoga (and the Mountain Meditation or Lake Meditation at least one day).

The **informal practices** up until now have been focusing on the intra-personal (what's happening inside you) and now we begin paying attention to the inter-personal, using the **Communication Calendar**, noticing what happens when we bring mindfulness into relationship.

Videos

The Art of Being Heard by Susan Piver [16 min]

The Sacred Art of Listening by Tara Brach [19 min]

Awakening Through Conflict by Tara Brach [9 min]

Reading

The Sacred Art of Listening article by Tara Brach

The Most Frequently Asked Question by Sylvia Boorstein

The Answer to Anger by Pema Chodron

Conflict Management Styles summary of communication styles

The Heart of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) by Marshall Rosenberg

Practice sheets

Formal Practice [PDF] [or WORD format] - Body Scan, Sitting, Yoga (+ Mountain or Lake Med.)

Informal Practice [PDF] [or WORD format] - Communication Calendar