

# Introduction

Have you ever wondered--

How to talk so your kids will listen?

How to talk so your boss will listen?

Or your spouse will listen?

Or your parents will listen? Your family? Or your co-workers? Your clients?

Your teams?

How to talk so that your relationships work?

How to talk so you accomplish what you want?

How to talk so that people in your business are productive, nourished, thriving, and collaborating well with each other?

Well, I have news for you.

You are asking the wrong question.

Real communication does not start with the question, “How do I ‘talk’ to another in a way that works?”

The real question is: How can we *listen* to one another in a way that works? I mean, *really* listen, provide *deep* listening, *sacred* listening.

Real Listening is rare and not so easy to come by.

You and I are usually preoccupied with listening to ourselves, our triggered feelings, and our judgments while others speak. Or we are preparing what we will say when the other stops talking. Or we come from wanting to fix them rather than simply get their experience. Or we think we know what they will say before they are finished talking. So, we tune them out. Or, as Steve Martin says in one of his skits, “The Absent-Minded Waiter,” we “go to the Bahamas” for a moment.

Real Listening, what I am calling Sacred Listening, is a pure gift. It is a gift you give to yourself, a gift you give to others, a gift you give to the world, a gift you may be blessed enough to receive from another. And it can be learned.

It is a gift that allows you to know you belong and that you are loved.

Desiring to know what it takes to really listen arises when you have the sense, that there is another life that you could be living – one without the effort, the struggle, the sense of overwhelm, the suffering. A life of fulfillment, meaning, freedom, and joy on

an ongoing basis. A life in which your relationships, even those that currently don't work, work. A life in which you know you are making a difference.

Nearly everyone initially focuses on speaking – speaking well, speaking clearly, speaking confidently – as if speaking is the key to effective communication. However, the belief that communication primarily relies on speaking is a myth. Almost no one recognizes how crucial, essential, and vital listening is.

Have you noticed how in some conversations with people, you feel appreciated and understood, experiencing a profound connection with them? You can tell how genuinely interested they are in you; sometimes, you even find yourself sharing things about your life that you would never open up with anyone else.

And then, in other conversations and communication relationships, you feel shut down and judged, and you can hardly speak?

That's why I say listening is vital. The word "vital" comes from Latin, meaning "of life, life-giving." Listening is life-giving.

Listening is the key to truly serving, to making a difference in another person's life. It opens the door to self-awareness and compassion.

That's a big deal. Why? Because, without self-awareness and compassion, the world shows up as a threat to you, filled with competitors, enemies, and people who are up to no good, you act one way. If you are open-hearted, inclusive, and embracing, the world shows up as benign, generous and abundant, one full of kindness and generosity, and you act another way.

Awakening your Heart Listening is the key to many doors, including heart-centered leadership, as you shift from not hearing to authentically and profoundly connecting with another. It is the key to successful relationships. It is the foundation for accomplishment. It opens space for you to create and then dance in a new world, one you were perhaps not dancing in before. Real listening, profound listening, allows you to listen to others, yourself, life, and the Greater Mystery through new ears, and see through new eyes.

In this new world, your relationship with yourself and who you are – indeed, your own experience of yourself can be transformed. You can move from living from your head to living from your heart. You can move from living a life of struggle and resistance to living a life of joy and freedom. You can move from not wanting to be with certain people or merely tolerating them to creating empowering, loving, and life-changing relationships with them. You can move from thinking you are not worthy and don't matter very much to experiencing that you are making a meaningful and profound difference in the world.

You can open yourself up to a whole new perspective. Instead of feeling alone and possibly confused in a world where you try, drive, strive, and push your way through life to achieve a sense of success, you can embrace and develop a life in partnership, collaboration, and dialogue with others, where you generate ideas together that one person alone could never create.

Through listening with an awakened heart, life flows *through* you, not merely *by* you, and you're buoyed by the winds of spirit into a new future, a future of your own creation, rather than a future that is merely an extension of the past.

Through listening – real listening, which includes forgiving – , you can heal yourself and others.

Through listening, you can shift from half-hearted living, living with a (proverbial) “foot out the back door,” to embracing a life of passion, fully connected with your own Wisdom and Spirit.

Listening through your open and awakened heart, you can lead a meaningful, purposeful life in which your greatest gifts – the gifts you were born with – are expressed into and provided to a world that is hungry for them.

For forty years, I have worked with people to develop listening as a key to creating accomplishment. Contributing to organizations across various industries has shown me that fostering cooperation, communication, and collaboration frequently leads to unexpected breakthroughs. For example, in 2004, one of my clients, Parametrix, an R&D Engineering firm in the Western United States, successfully reduced its attrition rate from 36% to 8% and maintained that low rate for many years by restoring trust in their workplace and sustaining it through time. You, too, can listen with your heart at home, within your business and work, and in your communities. From my decades of experience, I have observed that you can:

- Create and sustain relationships -- with your children, your spouse, your greater family, your business colleagues, that work and that enrich everyone
- Let go of limiting beliefs that lead to feelings of unworthiness or low self-esteem, resulting in a feeling of self-empowerment which naturally attracts other empowered people to you
- Have breakthroughs from breakdowns, and design a relationship with obstacles that come your way as life-giving rather than life-stopping
- Lead a passionate, meaningful life, a life of joy that comes from being of service, and knowing that you make a difference, and being freed up to make the difference that you are here to make.

I am committed that *The Heart of Sacred Listening: The Key to Transforming Your Relationships, Your Work, and Your Life* makes a deep and lasting difference in your life. What will forward that? What will pave the way for that to happen

Well, the clearer, the more committed, and more specific you are in what you are “up to” while you read this book, the more power and impact the book will have in your life.

I once had a coach who worked with me to make a difference in people’s lives through coaching. He said, “If you can bring people to be at stake for something in their lives, something that really matters to them, you can read the phone book to them, and they will have a breakthrough!”

That’s what I am committed to, for you: a breakthrough.

So. Let us pause here, before we get into our first story on behalf of you, maximizing the opportunity for transformation in your life through your reading this book.

I invite you to find a pen you love writing with. Choose any questions or questions that are relevant for you, or make up your own. Take a pause and address any of these questions, deliberately and intently:

What do you intend to gain by reading this book?

What is a shift, a new opening, a possibility you would love to make for yourself? What is your heart’s desire? What do you long for?

What would you like to move, alter, create, or let go of in your life, on behalf of leading a joyous life worth living?

Where am I stuck, stopped, or constrained in life?

What new possibilities in creating relationships – with myself, with others, and with Life – would I love to open up from here?

If I were to shift from “x” to “y,” what would “x” be? What would “y” be?

What specific, personal areas, issues, or concerns would I like to impact in some life-giving way? This could be in any domain – professional, personal, work-related, home-related, community-related.

What am I passionate about that I feel some blockage around? If I had a breakthrough in this, what difference would it make in my life?

I have structured this book in a particular way to maximize opportunities for the stories, teachings, and reflections to make a difference in your life.

The book is divided into Four Parts.

Part I highlights distinctions, tools, and principles that allow you to create a breakthrough or transformation in your relationships with others by awakening the heart of listening.

Part II gives rise to a breakthrough in your relationship with yourself and in your own self-worth through that awakening.

Part III opens a new relationship with listening for Life and Life's many gifts, including the obstacles, challenges, and breakdowns in it.

Part IV creates an opening for you to live a life of true joy, a life of meaning and purpose, a life where your spirit can soar, fulfilled, like the eagle.

Each part begins with a poem or prose that points to the essence residing at the heart of that transformation.

Throughout the book, my own and others' stories are included as inspirational examples—teachings for developing a compassionate, courageous, and generous heart, one that listens sacredly to life. Listening sacredly creates breakthroughs in life that would not otherwise occur.

Life-changing principles and distinctions are embedded within the stories and elaborated on later. You may have "aha!" moments as you read these stories.

First, you may feel you *understand* them. But understanding *alone* is a "booby prize," and doesn't spur you into making a difference in your own life. In school, it was important to understand. In the work of transformation, a different kind of learning takes place.

Picture a circle, like a pie. Let the pie represent the domain of knowledge. A slice of that pie, you could say, is what you know you know. When I was two years old, this slice covered the entire circle. Another slice is what you don't know you know. This slice of pie got larger as I got older. Then, there's another slice, one most people are unaware of. It's the slice of the pie called "What you don't know you don't know."

The territory in that slice is dark. So, first you grapple. Once you start to work with the principles and live from them, new possibilities begin to open for you in your life. As you continue to practice, you naturally begin to embody them, creating breakthroughs in your own life, your relationships, your work, and in life.

You'll notice, as you go, that I have included "stopping off" places called "Now It's Your Turn" —intentional pauses in the flow of the book where you can take a moment to stop, think, reflect, write, or journal, about your own life, making the ideas of that chapter relevant to your own experience. If you choose to engage in this work, those pauses can last for any duration – a few minutes, an hour, a day, or even a week

– whatever timing suits you best to begin embodying the tools and principles that can make a profound difference in your life.

The following classic story will get us started.

It was late at night. A man had dropped his car keys in the gutter. He frantically searched for them under the streetlamp. Another man came by. Seeing the man on his knees, looking for something, he asked, “What are you looking for? I’ll help you find what you are looking for.”

“I’m looking for my car keys,” the first man said.

“Where did you lose them?”

The first man looked up at the man who was there to help and pointed to the gutter. “Over there, in the gutter,” he said.

“Then why are you looking here?” the second man said.

“Because there’s more light over here,” the first man said.

We are always searching for the keys in the light. However, the vital keys to fulfilling a life are often lost in the darkness, where we can’t easily see them. Finding those keys requires us to explore new, unfamiliar, and possibly uncomfortable territory. However, it is where the keys are, and this book will give you light enough.

The journey is well worth it.

