

Hearing vs listening: The great chasm...

Chris Jordan
November 30, 2018



Hearing vs listening: for me, these are two qualitatively different states of attendance and activity. Hearing is first and foremost a physiological exercise that involves responding to what our bodies are experiencing. Hearing means our ears are engaged, noting its meaning, but not necessarily giving it much more consideration unless there is some emotionally significant meaning that requires further attention. Then, depending upon that meaning, as in being favorable or not, we may offer some quality of response.

Listening, on the other hand, signifies that there is actually a genuine investment of the self into the 'relationship', an unconditional offering. It first means that we have attached a personal significance to the 'other', that they 'matter', that they matter to me. Hence, I invest the personal time and energy, offering a morally significant commitment to the relationship and its participants, for the time I will be involved. Based upon that value being established, I open my mind and heart to the intent and meaning of the others' communication, as they understand it. Thus, I accept their meaning, their world view, not changing it to suit my own needs, biases or expectations. I affirm them in this insight, embracing them in their world, honoring them. Once this is established between us, then I offer my own response, not negating them or their inherent value. This allows for a proactive give and take, wherein we can then share emotionally significant information in such a way as to encourage a self-reflection to our response rather than a self-defense.

Such 'caring' can be as brief as asking, "and what will you be having for dinner, sir". Thus, listening is actually a form of 'love', not requiring that we like or not like what they have to offer, but rather offering to share in the humanness of the moment, by honoring and embracing the other as 'mattering' to us. When executed in this vein, even enemies can share in a communication moment, offering the contrasts and differences needed, but doing so as to keep the channels of relationship open to further give and take, if needed. Hence, to listen is to care, to honor oneself and the other as both being 'worthy' of our effort. That all matter. Naturally, as a matter of being alive.