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## Listening Pt. II

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## Listening

When we listen to someone speak, we take into ourselves much more than the meaning of the words that are spoken. We listen with various levels of interest, attentiveness or concern depending upon our present relationship with the speaker. We attend with more openness to someone we trust than to another person who wishes to convince us that he or she is "right." And we open our hearts to receive what a dear friend relates, while we listen more cautiously to anyone whose values are clearly opposed to ours.

In all the different modes of listening that we exercise, we are anything but mere recipients of word-meaning. Our listening is not passive, even when we are in company with someone we have known for a long time, and converse about matters of little importance. Listening is as lively a human endeavor as is speaking or writing.

Listening is also a spiritual activity as much as is speaking, and in many situations listening is more beneficial for our minds and hearts than anything we could put into words. When we listen, we can more readily monitor both our thoughts and our feelings, allowing for a healthy synthesis in making judgments about what to keep and what to dismiss of the content coming to us. Even when we are speaking, we are capable of a special kind of listening: to ourselves. We are able to perceive whether or not our words are close to our truth, and we know when we are following our inspirations or giving in to negative pressures of fear or expectations.

When we pray, and we listen, we do not usually hear words. Rather, we might become conscious of word-thoughts within us that are meaningful. At other times very little comes to mind, but we find that we are peaceful and contented. Even if we pray with memorized or written words, whether of a particular prayer or some lines from Scripture, we can still listen. Sometimes we will be able to savor the meaning of what we are saying or of what we intend by our use of words in communicating with God. At other times we might notice inner contentment while we say the words, and come to acknowledge more fully our present state of mind and spirit.

When we listen in prayer, not concentrating all our attention and efforts on what we are saying to God, we are more likely to become aware of how we feel about what we are thinking, and also recognize that some of the longings and desires of our hearts are as important in relating with God as are any of the words we might use. With an attitude of listening, we are liable to notice how some thoughts that come to mind resonate deeply within us, and that we can pause and savor the experience. We notice too, that some thoughts pass quietly though our minds, and do not attract us.

Other thoughts cause disturbance and move us away from our communication with God, and those we need to recognize as not helpful, and either leave them aside if we are able, or bring them consciously to prayer by telling God that these negative thoughts are getting in our way.

Listening is a powerful channel for giving and receiving love.