

Power of Listening

The goal of this post is to explore some elements of listening as they relate to relationships, BDSM or otherwise – regardless of gender, role, sexuality, etc. Understanding different ways of listening can improve your skills, which can enrich & enhance your interactions. As par for the course, this post is not meant to be definitive or absolute, but rather address the overall theme and perhaps propose some viewpoints one may not have already considered.

Over the years I have interacted with a wide range of individuals in a variety of relationship models. While I may favor a protocol and service oriented power exchange dynamic in my own personal life, it is not my only expertise. Through a variety of relationships, I've learned various ways one can listen to someone or an experience, be it lifestyle oriented or not..

Listening, to what??

Well, that depends on how we define listening, doesn't it? First let's clarify but what I mean by "listening" (and you'll see why I put that in quotes). Listening means, essentially, to open one's sensory awareness to input, which may be experienced from a variety of sources. This awareness is linked to our modes of sensory processing which includes:

- Audible (sound)
- Visual (sight)
- Olfactory (smell)
- Gustation (taste)
- Tactile (touch), and
- Kinesthetic (including Proprioception & Vestibular – body movement, position, balance & feel)

Listening is Choosing to be aware (or building awareness of)

these modes of input processing, as well as actively maintaining awareness & focus of these inputs. We then try to make sense of what we are experiencing as part of our cognitive integration, which includes filtering the information through the layers of consciousness.

Learning to listen with your whole self and mind is a key part to increasing your overall sense of mindfulness and your active Being.

Active Listening

Active Listening is a communication skill often taught to help with conflict resolution, whereby parties are encouraged to stop thinking of what will be



Listening requires concentration

said next, and instead focus on the speaking party for improved understanding. Techniques such as verifying what has been heard through paraphrasing or restatement, and asking for clarification to ensure full comprehension are often used for this technique. It breaks down the art of listening into (A) comprehension, (B) retaining/memory, (C) response, and (D) tactic/method.

The attention one pays during discussion with another, when using active listening, is about receiving the full spectrum of input from the other. The focus shifts away from what one will say next, and more about fully experiencing the communication of and knowing the other, both verbally and non-verbally. Attention becomes attuned to word choices, tone, rhythm, breath, micro expressions, eye & mouth movement, body posture.

Beyond this is trying to fully understand and appreciate what

the other is trying to communicate and show some sympathetic response (e.g. mirroring). This is valuable, and just one powerful application of Listening.

Mindfulness

A key precept of Mindfulness training is increasing your presence in the moment, largely through the broader practice of listening. Noticing your breath or heartbeat, the feel of fabric against skin, the tension of muscle beneath skin, etc are all ways of becoming more fully aware of the moment

The practice of being mindful is a bit of an anathema to modern western society, which often defines itself by inventing and indulging in various modes of distraction. More often than not, the culture seeks to avoid mindfulness of self and other and instead focus on stimulation, gratification, and other forms of “noise”. However you can find the practice around us when you learn where to look:

- In **meditation** (zazen, qigong, kundalini, transcendental, etc) the ability to listen allows you to hone the mind and choose what to focus on, or let go of, in order to develop a balanced sense of awareness, peace, or attain a clearer wisdom.
- In the **martial arts**, one trains to listen to become more aware of position, balance, and that of our opponent. This awareness develops a sense of connectedness in the moment, person to person, and teaches us to abandon anticipation.
- In **spiritual practice**, a similar practice of attenuation is used to open mind and soul to unseen energy, connectedness to others, to the world and to a sense of divinity (whatever that may be for your respective spiritual/religious path).

Long-Term Memory Recall

Another use of listening skills is evoking old or “lost” memories by guiding someone through a focus on a particular sense, one at a time, until they are able to recall those individual sensory experiences. I’ve practiced an exercise with a few individuals whereby allegedly lost memories were recovered by slowly focused on by individual senses, slowly building a jigsaw puzzle to be reconstructed into a clear memory. A first memory may be a faint smell or color, and drilling into the characteristics of sense until it was present in their mind. Then proceeding to other senses, whichever seemed to come next, until the link from sense to sense was being recalled more easily. In the end, these “lost memorie links” built a practice or exercise which made remembering things easier. For these individuals, what once seemed like a huge gap was filled in, and much uncertainty of their life made solid.

Whole Listening

The challenge in dungeons, play spaces, etc., is that our consciousness is often dealing with a LOT of inputs. Such distractions come in the form the shared environment. These distractions may be music or ambient sounds, other people playing, passers by that are a bit too close, etc. Lighting may be too bright, or too dark and smells may draw you away, etc. It takes practice to filter all these things out and remain connected to your partner, which can be challenging at times. Developing focused listening to attune ourselves to that connection, keeping what matters at the forefront of our attention, and the distractions at bay is an important skill to have for successful public play.

A way we can do this is by forging that connection BEFORE you play at all. Before you step into a play space, consider how connected you and your partner are at that moment. If meeting

in a dungeon, perhaps step outside it or find a quiet place to take a moment to tune in to one another. Consider running through this quick list to create and strengthen the connection, enhance your awareness of one another, and use that to push aside things that might become problematic during your scene.

Listening with a partner:

- Look at them intently, openly, honestly, and fully; notice their eyes, lips, hands, shape and form, etc.
- Listen to their breath; hear it from the lungs, pass their lips or nose, time your breath to theirs and synchronize.
- Smell their breath then their skin, their hair – experience them fully through inhaling their essence.
- Taste their skin (if permissible); a little taste of skin on tongue, with tip, with edge, with flat of tongue.
- Let the fingers touch; using light pressure, like cats whiskers, to feel the muscle and blood beneath the skin.
- Hold one another; feel the body movement in breath, in height, body and limbs sway in tiny movements.
- Try to amplify each of these experiences, so the whole you is listening to the whole them.

Closing

What we often experience in BDSM related activities is an enhanced sense of awareness of our partners. By actively engaging in a type of play that requires more focus for those involved, we momentarily choose to unplug from the outside world and (ideally) step into the world of shared experience with the other. This awareness, primarily achieved through modes of listening, allows us to be acutely tuned to the nature of cause & effect in Play.

Whole Listening allows you to know the other person in a much more comprehensive way and share a deeper experience with them. This strengthens the experience, the bond, as well as your memory and emotions regarding the moment. It can also create a very powerful experience unlike what may have been experienced before. Be mindful that this way of experience intensifies emotions, memory, and the impact on you, so one word of caution it will most undoubtedly therefore make any "drop" much more intense as well. I think the benefits are worth it though...

Benefits:

- **Focus** – listening to speech as well as eye motion, breath pattern, micro expressions, body posture & movement.
- **Understanding** – achieve a fuller picture of the other, how they may be communicating in other ways, and intent.
- **Awareness** – of your own subliminal messages to yourself via muscle tension, breath, posture, choice of words, etc.
- **Recollection** – improves with clarity of the moment, added to by all the inputs experienced at that time.
- **Choices** – as you practice this you become more mindful of the whole picture, how pieces fit, and how to respond.
- **Confidence** – practicing and developing the skill, leading to better awareness, choices, and outcomes.

If you wish to know more, or receive personal training in these techniques, please do not hesitate to contact me.

-Sir Vice

Copyright 2014 Limits Unleashed