

Essential Arts Empowerment: Initial Alignment - Listening

The Essential Art of Listening
is both
active and passive
proactive and reactive,
diving deep into
dark waters of stillness,
reaching for treasures
in dense sediments,
opening petal by petal
to receive brilliant enlightenment,
sinking roots into
fertile ground of being,
growing ever upward
to the sun's beckoning,
releasing confusion and distraction
to become empty,
inviting insight and inspiration
to become full
flowing Essence.

To listen to the Divine we must begin to listen to ourselves. This is no dichotomy at all, only slightly ironic. The connection from human self to divine Self, if pictured as a line, must bend, soften, arc to form a circle, a loop conducting energy and consciousness around and around, radiating in all directions. Breathe for a moment and envision this, however it comes to you. Widen this picture to include the Divine as the flow itself, filling your being and spilling over to fill the universe. Let this picture in

your mind's eye evolve, stretch and contract, explore its multi-dimensionality, change over time, every day, each time you close your eyes. I encourage you to try the *Breath of Renewal* exercise to transform the automatic function of your breathing into a powerful tool for directing your mind's attention and for greater well-being.

Why listen to the self, and the Self? Our bodies are conductors of consciousness, instruments of understanding. Our human suits include ingredients and aspects with names that are such loaded words as ego, self, body, mind, intelligence, emotion, psyche, personality. Feel free to notice what associations you have with these words, and immediately allow yourself to expand beyond these familiar habits of thought to question their grasping hands automatically reaching for the rudder of your exploration. You are listening to your listening.

It is no coincidence that the Latin word for baggage is *impedimenta*, which easily brings to mind a sense of heaviness as we drag around more luggage than we really need. Picture your hands holding battered suitcases given into your keeping by ancestors, parents, teachers, peers, media, and then letting go of the handles of the bags as they sit on the dock and you float away in the splendid vessel of your true Self. Breathe with relief, knowing that if you ever need something in these trunks and duffel bags you can easily summon it, but you can let it go for now.

This is an endless process that you have started, letting go of any thoughts, beliefs, associations, memories or ideas you don't need right now. If they aren't serving your greatest well-being and conscious intentions right now, set them aside. Allow yourself to be clear. The voice of the Divine will not usually win an argument with your conditioning and

habits of thought.

Why not? Isn't the Divine all-powerful? Actually no, at least not until you realize that we are all part of the being of the Divine and as such we each have free will and choice, individually and collectively. We can argue with ourSelves, but that usually doesn't get us very far. Who wins, and what is the prize that is more valuable than our wholeness, peace and well-being? You can read more about these aspects of ourselves in *Human Self & Divine Self*.

Letting go of *impedimenta* helps us to open and listen. We are always being bombarded with the flow of divine guidance because we are part of the being of the Divine and the Divine is consciousness as well as manifestation. We can choose to tune into this flow of consciousness or not, to many greater or lesser degrees.

Balanced listening is an art to be developed intentionally. Begin by noticing your internal dialogue. Just notice and listen. Notice your energy level, your emotional state, your mental clarity, your spiritual connection. You will probably find it helpful to write down your observations, as this will validate the process and help it to feel more real, as well as reinforcing the habit. You don't need to analyze your notes or make sure they're grammatically correct. Just let them flow.

Accept whatever comes up for you with compassion and simple curiosity, not labeling things good or bad. Judgment is one chain that keeps you bound to the luggage you need to leave behind on the dock. While it has its place on rare occasions, judgment is a very powerful tool of ethical discernment, and can interfere greatly with listening in openness and

sensitivity if it becomes a mundane habit.

Consider the core of your being, your center. This is a feeling of being at peace, present in the moment, grounded in your physical being on the Earth and open to divine guidance and blessings. I encourage you to try the *Basic Energy Cycle* exercise to find this core, centered feeling. Think of times when this feeling just came to you spontaneously. Let these memories become vivid for you; let words come to you to describe them and write them down, at least a few, or draw your experiences.

Then notice what pulls you away from this core centered feeling. These triggers are there for a reason, and have probably served you well at some point in your life, but you don't need to let them control you. When you start to notice them going into operation, return to the *Basic Energy Cycle*, or even briefly to the *Breath of Renewal* to redirect your thoughts consciously before those triggers take you too far away from your centered core feeling.

Your natural state of being is one of peacefulness, well-being, contentment, not necessarily with the circumstances of life at that moment, but with your existence and the existence of the world. The more you practice these techniques and become filled with gratitude, the more easily you can leave conflict behind with judgment on the dock in the mist behind the wake of your onward journey.

What does this have to do with listening? You can set up a state of constant awareness of your own well-being by getting into the habit of checking in with your physical, emotional, spiritual and mental states and noticing when you start to feel like you're losing your calm, empowered

equilibrium. And you can do something about it, make small or large course corrections as needed.

What is your habitual reaction to a physical, mental, emotional or spiritual need as you see it arise? Do you tend to quickly tell yourself you can go a little longer without eating because you have more tasks to do? Do you overwork your mind when you need to take a break to process what you've been learning or thinking about? Do you suppress difficult feelings until you become depressed or angry? Do you put your spiritual practice at the bottom of your priority list because it doesn't pay the bills or take care of someone else?

Yes, there will be times when it is not practical to meet every one of your needs immediately, and you are resilient enough to accommodate this reality. However, listening and recognizing your needs is important if you want to fine tune yourself to become an antenna for essential truth, guidance and wisdom leading to empowered action for deeply fulfilling purposes. Begin to take inventory of your needs and usual responses. Make some adjustments and see how it feels and what results you observe. Be patient with yourself. See *Growing Your Comfort Zone* for support accepting healthy changes that may feel uncomfortable at times.

As you begin to become more sensitive to your own needs you will notice that they are not yours alone. You are also becoming a channel for your intuition, which connects you to consciousness beyond yourself. You can enhance this process by learning and practicing meditation, dream journaling and interpretation, dowsing and other forms of divination, deep prayer, contemplative art forms, and especially spending time in Nature, listening to the non-human voices of the Earth. I encourage you to

expand this sensitivity with the *Tree of Life* visualization.

Returning to the image we used to begin, picture that flow of energy radiating flowing through your human and divine selves, feeling yourself now as a more open channel, a more finely tuned antenna of divine consciousness. The more you practice this, the more you will become accustomed to the “language” of energy. You will notice it flowing within and around you, hear messages on the wind, ask and receive answers to questions in your life, receive divine guidance and develop a deeper relationship with Spirit. You can certainly experience all these things within a religion that you already practice or a new spiritual path, whether traditionally religious or not.

I use this skill of “tuning in” to stay healthy. When I feel something even just barely starting to come on, like a sore throat or sniffles, I no longer decide to ignore it and push on through. As soon as reasonably possible I slow down and listen to my body and what it needs, which also leads me to listen to my emotions and consider whether I'm feeling run down in not-just-physical ways as well.

I find that a little gentle stretching and yoga free up my circulation and loosen tension that is probably some stuck emotional energy draining my physical vitality anyway. I massage my head, neck and shoulders, give myself Reiki, drink lots of water and tea, try to get some quiet rest, keep warm and indulge in things that feel comforting like reading under a blanket, sipping hot soup or going to bed early.

Sometimes it's not possible to take the time to do these things, but I have found that tuning in, even just mentally, instead of pushing through the

early warning signs makes a huge difference in how sick I get and how long it lasts. I choose to do the best I can in the situation without judging or cultivating resentment. Though it's much less frequently and less severely now, sometimes I get sick, and I can accept that too, with more compassion and less judgment. Catching my run-down state physically helps me stay tuned-in on all levels.

Tuning in emotionally helps me to spot dynamics and patterns in relationships before they become entrenched and more difficult to adjust. Listening to a hunch, a trigger, an inner prompting can help our physical senses and mental acuity become more refined, more accurate and perceptive. We can stay out of some big trouble this way, or make subtle, conscious responses that continue to build healthy relationships and deeper emotional health for ourselves.

This also helps us learn to identify what our own emotional issues are and to be able to separate them from the voice of the divine Self. Taking an honest look at our ego identity, emotional wounds and strengths, patterns from the past and coping tendencies can help us accept ourselves without judgment and with greater awareness, holding our imperfect selves in compassion with plenty of room to grow. This can quiet habitual anxiety that creates static and confusion that block intuition. Embracing our woundedness and our resilience alike helps to open the channel for divine wisdom to flow.

Mental habits and intellectualization can also block the flow of intuition. We live in a culture that values our brains as super-computers, yet we are so much more than that. It was a great step forward away from the superstition and Inquisition of the medieval church-ruled society to the

Age of Enlightenment and Reason. But things have swung from denial of free thought and inquiry to obsession with the mental realm to the exclusion of the others.

Now we must continue to move forward, past the tendency to glorify our human intellect, and return to a foundation of ethics with a growing wealth of expansive awareness, beyond hyper-individuality to a healthy balance of self, community, planet and Spirit. Intelligence is a wonderful tool, as is Science, but these are not meant to guide our direction in life as our values and deep purpose are. Any idea or position can be argued persuasively by a competent orator or intellectual, but that doesn't make it right. We know in our hearts, our bodies and our souls that our intellectual ability is but one partner needing to work in concert with all our senses and deeper understanding.

One way we can open our minds to both enhance their power and keep them in balance is by reclaiming our usage of language. Think back to the baggage or *impedimenta* attached to certain words. We can unpack those bags at any time and find out what's in there that we want to bring with us on our journey and what specifically we need to leave behind.

It's helpful to find out the history of a word, or etymology, since we inherit cultural as well as personal baggage. Knowing what a word originally meant or how it was used in the past can be quite revealing, whether reading historic documents or using words in modern contexts. For instance, “lady” and “lord” originally meant “loaf shaper” and “loaf watcher” respectively. Creating and guarding bread were sacred rituals to our ancestors and we can invite this sense of reverence to our food preparation and nourishment today.

Choosing our words carefully is always a very powerful exercise. Notice the particular baggage you have with certain words, and notice the impact they have on others. If there are some that seem to be triggers for difficult emotions or reactions, consider using a different word that conveys your meaning just as precisely. It may also be helpful to clarify just what you mean by a particular word that can be taken different ways, or to ask others to clarify their meanings of a word that you might understand differently. We can *describe* meanings of words that we use rather than *define* them. The dictionary is only a set of observations about what words can mean, and can give us useful information, but it can also become a mental prison if we surrender our creative authority in shaping our communication or listening to the true intentions of others.

Together, the realms of mental, emotional, physical and spiritual listening and sensitivity can bring us into greater alignment of human self and divine Self, greater alignment with the world around us and the people in it, and greater alignment with the Divine. As you engage in your personal practice and as you journey through each day, you can cultivate the habits and natural rhythms of the Essential Art of listening and aligning for greater and deeper power and well-being, wholeness and harmony. And all is well.