



Resilience and Sacred Listening

By Kathy Marshall Emerson, Executive Director
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This morning as I was waking I heard the first loon calls of spring at the lake. Listening for the lovely feeling took no effort. Clearly the feeling was not the sound of the wail; the feeling is what was happening inside of me as my thinking, without any direction from me, made meaning of this early morning loon call. In this state I was profoundly grateful for this place, all of life, my wonderful husband and anyone I might meet today. We can indeed easily and naturally listen for a feeling.

Sometimes we may have been puzzled by the familiar words of Syd Banks, “Listen for a positive *feeling*.” (*The Missing Link*, p. 73) However, we can with great certainty recall when we have listened from our hearts in this deep and natural way. We can even tell stories about those precious moments.

Some years ago during a conference break, I was privileged to walk and talk with a co-presenter, resilience author and professor of clinical psychiatry Dr. Steven Wolin of George Washington University Medical School. (*The Resilient Self*, 1993) He was renowned for successfully treating clients with very difficult pasts. He quietly explained if he listened deeply to his patients, together, he and each client would create *sacred* space. In that shared space he knew healing unfolded.

I like the words *sacred listening*. In this state of mind we honor the other person, see his or her innate health and also have every confidence we are capable of navigating even unknown territory. For me this is the power of the kind of listening Syd Banks was referring to. Without a doubt this is listening beyond words, listening for a feeling, listening to the spirit of both the person and our own true self. How shall we understand this magical guide called feeling built into all of us? It helps to understand our spiritual nature.

Parker Palmer describes spirituality as the diverse ways we answer the “heart’s longing to be connected to the largeness of life.” (*The Courage to Teach*, 1998, p. 5) Everyone longs to be heard. When we are being listened to we feel connected, appreciated, understood, valued, respected and loved. It works both ways. When we listen from the heart to others we feel present, calm, connected and compassionate.

When we also listen beyond the words to ourselves, we can hear the voice of our common sense and connect to our natural health. Listening this way becomes a *way of life* and allows us to develop deep connections with others. When we listen clearly and deeply we see possibilities and opportunities for change and growth. We find solutions to problems, discover new ideas, and navigate life’s rough spots with more grace. Listening is a result of our state of mind; our state of mind is dependent on the degree to which we understand how we operate from the inside out. That is why learning the principles is so important. With this understanding we can indeed live trusting the unknown and daring to engage in *sacred listening*.

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