



The Practice of Deep Listening

Dear CUF folks,

Have you ever been listened to so deeply by another person that you feel it in your body? That you feel your muscles relax, your breath and heartbeat slow? I try to remember those experiences when I'm in conversation with someone else, even or especially when the conversation might be a difficult one. I try to remember to let go of tension in my body and pause for deep breaths, to open myself to listening without judgement, without interruption, without trying to help or fix the problem. That does not come naturally to me, I need frequent practice – what about you?

As the election nears, the divisions within our society, our communities, and even families seem to be widening. The voices of candidates, voters, journalists, influencers on all forms of mass media are ever louder and more discordant. The voices I hear from CUF folks, friends and family are ever more anxious and despairing – my inner voice has the same tendencies. What can we do, as Unitarian Universalists striving to live into our values of pluralism, justice, and equity? I've forgotten who gave me this advice, but it has helped guide me many times: when deciding between different actions, choose the most loving one. This makes sense in terms of our UU values, too: "Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values."

The first duty of love is to listen.

~Paul Tillich

Listening deeply to those in despair for our society, then, is a gift we can give not only to those who share with us, it is a gift we can give ourselves. Letting go of the reflexive need to express our own opinions, experiences, and advice to listen deeply to the other creates a quiet space in our minds. It can help us to make the loving choice for ourselves about how much we will listen to the shrill voices of crazy-making social and mass media. It can help us to make the loving choice to seek out others who will listen deeply to us, too. As your pastor, I make that an open offer to you; our Pastoral Friends are also ready to listen deeply. This month, we all have the chance to prepare ourselves for the election and beyond by practicing deep listening with each other. Let's do our loving duty together. Peace,