

Humi 9 – Comparative Religion -- Compassionate Listening Project guidelines

Reports due on Monday of weeks 5, 8, and 11 (along with Reflection Question packets)

This project is your chance to LISTEN to people from other spiritual traditions so that you can gain some “insider”, personal knowledge of another religion.

What you have to do (3 times during the quarter):

1. Identify someone from a religion different from your own (atheism ok)
2. Set up a time to sit together without distractions
3. Conduct a “Compassionate Listening” session (using questions or freeform)
4. Take notes on your experience (reflect on your results)
5. Turn in a report (2 pages; 12 font; double-spaced)

Compassionate Listening Background

Compassionate Listening was originated by Gene Knudsen Hoffman, Quaker and international peacemaker. Her concepts were further developed by Leah Green, Carol Hwoschinsky, and others who are now facilitators of the work. Gene wrote, “Some time ago I recognized that terrorists were people who had grievances, who thought their grievances would never be heard, and certainly never addressed. Later I saw that all parties to every conflict were wounded, and at the heart of every act of violence is an unhealed wound.” In her role as a counselor, Gene recognized that non-judgmental listening was a great healing process in itself.

As Gene originally conceived it, Compassionate Listening requires listening that is non-judgmental and questions that are non-adversarial. Listeners seek the truth of the person questioned. Listeners accept what others say as their perceptions, and validate the right to their own perceptions. Compassionate Listening can cut through barriers of defense and mistrust.

Compassion is a feeling of deep empathy or sympathy for another. The practice of compassion is central to every faith as well as universal standards of morality. It is the seed from which the abilities to practice all other virtues are grown. Those who practice compassion are those who are also capable of bringing to life a morality that safeguards the dignity of all. Suffering is universal. One way to step outside of our own pain is to become aware of the suffering or indignities experienced by various other groups or individuals.

— *“An enemy is one whose story we have not heard.”* —Gene Knudsen Hoffman

— *“Perhaps every terrible thing is in its deepest being somehow something that needs our love.”* -Leah Green, founder/director, The Compassionate Listening Project

Tips for Creating Questions

Your goal is to create open-ended questions, inviting the participant to share their life experience as a member of a particular religion. Yet you also want to have thoughtfully studied each religion deeply enough to ask intelligent, well-informed questions. You are striving for a balance of mind and heart – thoughts and feelings – in your questioning.

Examples:

- Ø What was it like for you, as a child, to be a member of this religion?
- Ø How do you feel about...(other peoples' reactions to you as a member of your religion)?
- Ø What are some of your earliest memories participating in your religion?
- Ø Are there any friends or family members who especially affected you in your religion?
- Ø What is a strength of yours that has helped you get through your life?

Tips for Creating a Compassionate Listening environment

Let the participant choose a safe space for your hour together. Be attentive to the environment, doing everything you can to help your participant feel comfortable. Remember the importance of silence, and do not rush from question to question. The practice of staying silent but deeply attentive allows the listener's mind and heart to be open and be deeply affected by the pain or courage of other lives. It can be a radical change from not listening—interrupting, tuning out, or thinking about what one wants to say when the other has finished speaking. Within the silence provided by Compassionate Listening, there is an amazing opportunity for both the teller and listener.

REFLECTIVE LISTENING:

Reflective Listening is the restatement by an individual group member of what he/she believes he/she heard a speaker say for the purpose of clarification and encouragement. This may help to thrash out feelings that were only semi-apparent when they were first said. Reflective Listening also helps us to verify feelings or facts that have been indirectly implied by the speaker.

ASKING QUESTIONS:

Knowing how to ask questions is vital to maintaining the trust and participation of the guest. Questions must be asked from the heart in a fashion that helps further the understanding of the group and maintains a spirit of empathy. The speaker must not ever be made to feel that they are being judged. Remember: we ask so that we may get to know this person better. We ask so that we may change the way we feel about people. We ask so that we may remove our prejudice and be of help.

"It is better to be kind than to be right." —unknown

"Love is the silent conversation between two hearts." — Paramahansa Yogananda

"I do not want the peace which passes understanding; I want the understanding which brings peace." -- Helen Keller