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LISTENING...

A great teacher once told me just to be silent and I would learn all that I needed to learn. It's been a life-long exercise that I've tried to practice off and on, but lately has me wishing I could take a year off and go somewhere just to be quiet. I suppose in some indirect way my career has been chosen with this in mind. To sit and truly listen to another with no mind chatter and no agenda makes me a better listener.

In working with couples I teach a new way of how they can hear what the other is trying to say as well as be heard themselves. I encourage them to practice this exercise at home.

The exercise is simplistic in its structure; facing each other on the couch, one speaks the other listens. No one is allowed to interrupt. I give a pencil as a "totem" and whoever has the pencil holds the attention and does the talking. Both are given a set time of five minutes to start and the pencil (totem) is exchanged several times between them.

After they've had a few go rounds with each talking about their positions on a topic, I then ask them to speak only to the subtext of the other. In other words, stop listening to the words and identify the feelings that are under the dialogue. This takes communication to a deeper level as they recognize in each other, over the course of an hour, similar feelings.

If a couple can be more honest and clear in their dialogue with one another, there will be less misunderstanding and more intimacy.

Doing the above will enrich the communication between you and your partner even if you have only a limited amount of time. It will be time well spent in lives that always seem to be set at "fast forward". It's not so much about the words that one needs to hear from one's partner but the feeling of connecting with them.

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