



### ***How to Listen:***

## **Spiritual Listening for Individuals and Groups.**

A free download from the website [listeningcircles.org](http://listeningcircles.org) featuring excerpts from the book *The Sweet Conversation, a Guide to Spiritual Listening*, by Jane Smith Bernhardt.

### **Part I: The Sweet Conversation**

*"How do we know when the thought that comes into our mind is from a loving spiritual source, and how do we know when we are making it up? My advice is to abandon such questioning...If the voice is loving, if it feels as warm and familiar as a gentle embrace, then receive it with gratitude..."*

### **What is the Conversation and how does it begin?**

Most of human suffering may be traced to false identification: we think that who we truly are is this body which we carry for a relatively short time. Our brains, composed of mortal substance, can grasp neither death nor immortality. To reorient our consciousness with the Source of our eternal being is a delicate and sacred process. Without this reorientation we will continue to

be defined by the success or failure of this body, which in any case will disintegrate. What part of us is capable of making the leap into eternal consciousness?

There seems to be a place in each of us that yearns for the missing connection with one I think of as the Lover of our soul. Without this connection we are adrift in an incomprehensible universe. The good news is that the Lover is also seeking communion with us. Right here and now we may begin to open ourselves to the sweetest conversation there is.

My advice is to begin in any way that suits you. Remember: this is the delicious, divine encounter that we are seeking. It will help to release any sense of obligation. What do you enjoy? Some will wish to use traditional methods of meditation - to sit comfortably with a straight back and focus on mantra or the breath, allowing the thoughts that come into the mind to be noticed and dispersed, like cloud formations that pass across the sky. Some will find it helpful to read a passage of spiritual text and allow an inspiring message to gently carry them into a place of peace where divine presence is felt. Some may desire to write a question on a pad of paper or a journal and wait quietly in the expectation that an answer will come. Some may invoke the many names of God that allow their souls to soften and receive. These names are like bars of music through which the unnamable may come.

The place that is harder to describe is the other end of the conversation. How do we know when the thought that comes into our mind is from a loving spiritual source, and how do we know when we are making it up? My advice is to abandon such questioning. For the mind steeped in materialistic thinking, there will be no satisfactory answer. Here is a maze that will only waste our time. If the voice is loving, if it feels as warm and familiar as a gentle embrace, then

receive it with gratitude. Gradually you will learn to recognize when Love is speaking.

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**Exercise for the Reader:**

*Center yourself for a moment in comfortable stillness. Breathe, relax, and notice the sounds and sensations in your environment. Sink into this stillness as if it were a safe cocoon, and feel the gentle fullness of the air around you as you resolve to simply wait upon the Source of life.*

*Ask yourself: "What am I looking for?" Write down your questions and your thoughts. The Bible says, "Seek me and you shall find me, if you seek me with all your heart." What is it that you are seeking with all your heart? Write (or draw) until you feel that you have expressed what is in your heart, and hold this as your intention: "This is what I am seeking." This will help you to align with your soul's intention in this life. It will help you to awaken the voice of your heart.*

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**Additional Guided Meditations:** <https://listeningcirclesblog.wordpress.com/guided-meditations/>

*(How to Listen continued on next page)*

## Part 2: The Listening Circle

A Listening Circle brings people together in a community of practice for spiritual listening.

The structure offered here is a starting point. As your own circle evolves, you will find that it will naturally adjust according to the needs and inspiration of your specific circle.

### **Overview: Meditation - Listen - Share - Repeat**

In our gatherings there is usually time for two listening periods, each followed by some space for those who wish to share their experience. We begin by centering ourselves in awareness of our emotions and asking a question or seeking particular guidance, and then we listen for the voice of Love. Early in the process we would listen for eight or ten minutes, but lately the deliciousness of this space calls for more time, and we are allowing about 20-30 minutes. You will enjoy experimenting together to find what feels good within the circle.

Initially you may use guidance like the Listening Meditation below, to help your guests center themselves in relaxation. You may also use any of our entries in the Guided Meditations section of our website.

### **Preparation: A Safe and Welcoming Space**

It is important to keep in mind that hosting a listening circle is a source of joy. Let this thought guide you as offer space and opportunity for others to come together and share in this journey. It is as if we have all been invited to a party to celebrate the great spiritual awakening, and the host's job is simply to

prepare a safe and welcoming space. There is no need to be special or worthy or good. Every listening circle will be different and unique. The only real formula is the careful offering of space, time and intention. At the beginning it is helpful to have clear structure, but as the group evolves new patterns will emerge. Remember that we are on a frontier of consciousness where anything may happen.

### **Opening: Working with Silence**

After warm greetings, we open the circle with a few moments of silence where we begin to imagine the presence of unseen helpers. As always, language is a question. What are we speaking of when we use words like Source, the Lover, God, Allah, Yahweh? Can we be sure of the nature of Angels, Guides, or even Ancestors? I have tried to be inclusive and humble: who are we, after all, to name the creative pulse of the universe? We are inviting this unnameable presence in an atmosphere of openness and safety, holding one another with care. We are riding a new wave here. This process is outside of the realm of ordinary social discourse, and will have a different rhythm and frequency. Spaces of silence are often the most powerful element in the gathering.

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### **Listening Meditation**

*Sit or lie down comfortably. In this time of stillness, be in this present moment. Notice the sounds... Breathe gently into your chest and then into your belly. Take a series of deep, relaxed breaths. Now begin to notice your own feelings: are you comfortable? Your thoughts: are you here? Your heart: what is the state of your heart? If it is useful, place your hand over your heart. Allow your breath to come and go. We will take some time here in relaxation and gentle*

*nurture. Remember, when you feel your internal mental chatter is in the way, that this, too, can be observed and loved. As soon as you observe, the chatter becomes somewhat akin to the traffic noise or birdsong—part of your environment. Practice adopting the stance of observer and returning to your breath.*

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**Additional Guided Meditations:** <https://listeningcirclesblog.wordpress.com/guided-meditations/>

## **Listening**

Ask your group to take a few moments to feel the presence of this love, for it is real. Your body will one day disintegrate, but this relationship between you and the source of love will continue forever. Allow this love: breathe it in and rest in it. You are not asking with your mind. Wait until it is your heart that begins to receive the voice of Love. It may take the form of a feeling, an image, or a message. If there are any words for you, you may record them, or just remain in the place of this experience. Receive it all in gratitude.

## **Sharing**

At the end of our appointed time of silence, I ring a little bell and—after allowing a bit more appreciative silence—begin by asking: "Is there anyone who would like to share what they have written or received?" When someone seems to have experienced a sensation or a message from the voice of Love, I might ask them, "How does this feel?" Remind them that this sharing is a helpful encouragement to the circle, but not necessary. If someone wishes to pass, it is perfectly all right.

**For the second meditation** you may use another exercise in the Guided Meditations section of the website, or choose a direction that feels right to you. "What are your worries? What are you seeking? Where do you need guidance? What are your concerns for the world?" All these are questions that may be posed in the simple format of seeking the voice and viewpoint of eternal Love. As you listen, gradually patterns will emerge that will be new to your internal cosmology. "I am enough. I am loved. I am eternally safe." You may hear hope and light expressed for the future of this world. The voice of Love has many healing words to offer, as well as deep wisdom and endless compassion.

### **Closing: Gratitude**

We close the circle with a moment of gratitude, sending thanks to each other and to the presence of Love that surrounds us. In our circles, this may be expressed silently, or as a song or words or another expression of thanks as offered by circle participants.

*As you progress in your path of circles, you will be shown the way. You will be able to feel into the timing. Checking in with your spiritual source as the meeting times approach, you will learn to hold and guide the circle with increasing ease. I wish you joy on your sacred journey- with blessings, grace and gratitude,  
Jane Bernhardt.*

(Return to the [listeningcircles.org](http://listeningcircles.org) website)