

COMMUNICATING WITH  
COMPASSION:

THE ART OF LISTENING

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19<sup>th</sup> Annual

Bikur Cholim Conference

Turn to Me:

Faces and Phases of Bikur Cholim

Sunday November 12, 2006

Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council

A program of the Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services

212.399.2685 ext. 229 or 212

## A PRAYER ABOUT SPEECH

Help me God to wisely use my tongue

That my words not cause pain

Remind me God that my words can cause joy

My words can praise, enlighten, encourage, inspire

My words can comfort,

My words can heal

Place wisdom on my lips, God

Blessings on my tongue

Honor in my heart

- Rabbi Naomi Levy

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## THE ART OF LISTENING WITH COMPASSION

### Challenging situations

What are some concerns you have when visiting the sick?

What might happen that you would not know how to respond?

### Intention and Skills

People often think that communicating with compassion is the same thing as being "nice" or "caring." In fact, there is expertise required to effectively express compassion. *The ability to communicate with compassion is one of the most important skill-sets that we each must have.* Truly good listening is a great gift of love that we give people, a tangible expression of the call to "love each other."

- Rabbi Marcia Prager, MFT, author, [The Path of Blessing](#)  
Director, ALEPH Rabbinical Program, Philadelphia

### Four communication skills:

- A. The skill of Tracking
- B. The skill of Silence
- C. The skill of Sympathy
- D. The "way of being" of compassion

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The principle of empathy—

The key to listening with compassion

Usually, when emotional energy is present, the *first thing* people need is to be heard, understood and acknowledged.

“If I were to summarize in one sentence the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal relations, it would be this: ***Seek first to understand, then to be understood.***”

- Stephen Covey, Ph.D., The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, p. 237

The challenge of compassionate conversation:

Our desire to “fix it” right away or speak about ourselves:

“Instead of empathy, we tend to have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling.”

- Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, p. 92

*Empathy is a learned response!*

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What creates good listening?

A. Listen with the intent to understand

“Most people don’t listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

- Michael Nichols, Ph.D., The Lost Art of Listening, p. 242

B. Listening for content *and for the total message*

Listening without empathy: “He understands my words but not the way I feel.”

Listening with empathy: “He appreciates what my experience feels like *to me*.”

- Carl Rogers, Ph.D., A Way of Being, p. 143

**Empathy is about LISTENING TO UNDERSTANDING THE TOTAL MESSAGE**

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### The Skill of “Tracking”

Recalling the principle of empathy:

Usually, the *first thing* people need when emotional energy is present is to be heard, understood and acknowledged.

Tracking for content:

When necessary, we offer a succinct summary of the essential point or points.

Tracking for the total message:

We reflect back **what we sense the speaker is experiencing**:

The issue is...

You thought/think...

You wanted/want...

You felt/are feeling...

You needed/are needing...

Your experience was/is...

Notice that these are short, second-person statements (not questions).

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What usually happens next:

The speaker will agree and explain more and go deeper

Or the speaker will correct us and explain more and go deeper

Either way, our response is empathic because we are *seeking to understand*.

“If you want to make any relationship more rewarding, practice *responsive listening*. Responsive listening means hearing the other person out, then letting him know what you understood him to be saying. If you’re right, the speaker will feel a grateful sense of being understood. If you didn’t quite get what he intended to say, your feedback allows another chance to explain.”

- Michael Nichols, Ph.D., *The Lost Art of Listening*, page 126

If unsure, we can ask ourselves:

“Why did the speaker say that?”

“If I were saying that, or if I were in that situation, what would I feel?”

*This creates truly good listening!*

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Guidelines for Tracking

- A. Invisibility:** We don't announce ourselves. Tracking is a second-person statement.
  
- B. Short:** Good tracking is 1-2 sentences long; keeps focus on the speaker.
  
- C. Tentative, not definite:** Exploring, not determining, the speaker's experience. Seeking to understand, not to diagnose.
  
- D. Statements, not questions.** Maintaining a heart flow.
  
- E. Track last thing said or salient point or operative word.** Where the energy is.

"An empathic response is restrained, largely silent; following, not leading, it encourages the speaker to go deeper into his or her experience."

- Michael Nichols, Ph.D., The Lost Art of Listening, p. 70

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### The Skill of Staying Connected

Maintaining the heart flow when we are not sure how to respond

A way of saying, "I'm with you, please continue"

1. Sentence Stems
2. Minimal Encourages
3. Open-Ended Questions
4. Asking for clarification or elaboration (when appropriate)
5. Last resort: paraphrase or simply repeat what was said  
(This is also a way to resume when the conversation is interrupted)

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### The Skill of Silence

When attentive listening is better than words

“There’s something about the respectful silence and attention of the listener that brings out feelings that need comfort or affirmation.”

- Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., *Guilt Is the Teacher, Love Is the Lesson*, p. 78

When responding with silence, use minimal encouragers as needed

### The Skill of Sympathy

When our feelings convey our compassion

The crucial skill in situations of grief and mourning over *any* loss

Empathy: seeking to understand another’s experience

Sympathy: feeling with another

*Both have a place; what is important is not to confuse the two*

### Examples of Effective Sympathy:

“I am sorry for your loss.”

“My heart goes out to you.”

“I can only imagine how difficult this must be.”

Ineffective sympathy: “I know just how you feel.”

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The foundation for all the skills

Communication skills have value when they are expressions of an underlying attitude of compassion. If not, our words are often perceived as “techniques,” and create distance rather than connection. The “way of being” of compassion is thus the foundation on which all the skills rest.

“The most fundamental and effective listening skill is not a technique or method or anything we do. Rather, it has to do with how we are inside ourselves as we listen to others. The heart of empathic listening is not about solving people’s ‘problems’ or about ‘fixing’ them. It is about how we *are* with them.”

- Drs. Ron and Mary Hulnick

University of Santa Monica, Spiritual Psychology Program

What does the above quote mean to you?

Summary of why we need both skills and the “way of being”:

Skills without the way of being: “technique”

Way of being without skills: well-intentioned but clueless

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### The Way of Being of Listening with Compassion

- Seeking first to understand
- With no external agenda
- Without blaming or shaming

### Compassionate Boundary Setting

Balancing caring for ourselves with caring for others

- Acknowledging the needs of the other (“I wish I could...”)
- Respecting our own needs (“...but I can’t.”)
- Respecting our abilities and limitations

The quality of “love” in the Jewish mystical tradition combines...

- Kindness, which includes empathy
- Strength, which includes boundary setting

The two, in combination, create “love”.

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## THE ART OF LISTENING WITH COMPASSION

### About the “Communicating with Compassion” course

Communicating with Compassion is a 10-session phone conference course that covers these 12 subjects. We studied A, B and L this morning.

- A. The key to effective listening (the principle of empathy)
- B. Four skills of listening and responding with compassion
- C. Four listening mistakes to avoid
- D. The dynamics behind the listening mistakes
- E. The skill of Checking for Completion
- F. Seven keys to effective advice and feedback
- G. Affirming the dignity of the other and avoiding shame-based responses
- H. The skill of Calibration
- I. The skill of Prizing and Perspective
- J. The skill of Boundary Setting
- K. Situations that call for a different communication skill-set
- L. The “way of being” of compassion: the underlying attitudes that support these skills

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## THE ART OF LISTENING WITH COMPASSION

Schedule of upcoming Communicating with Compassion courses:

10 one-hour phone conference classes and one individual coaching session with Uzi  
The first two sessions may be attended with no obligation

**If you prefer daytime:**

*10 Wednesdays, Nov 15—Jan 31 (skipping 11/22 and 12/27)*  
1-2 PM Eastern (10-11 AM Pacific)

**If you prefer evenings:**

*10 Mondays, Nov. 13—Jan. 29 (skipping 12/25 and 1/1)*  
8-9 PM Eastern (5-6 PM Pacific)

**For clergy:**

(For clergy, and those studying to become clergy, who prefer to be in an all-clergy class or if the timing is more convenient.)

*10 Thursdays, Nov. 16—Feb 1 (skipping 11/23, 12/28)*  
2-3 PM Eastern (11-noon Pacific)

**Year-end Tuition Special:** \$365 (plus \$30 materials fee for 80-page guidebook)  
Maximum 10 students. Contact Uzi (uziteaches@aol.com) to reserve your space.

*Instructor's Bio: Uzi Weingarten holds a Masters degree in the field of Education, and has studied communication skills and spiritual psychology with internationally acclaimed teachers. Uzi created the 10-session interactive "Communicating with Compassion" course, which is offered by phone conference. Uzi also provides individual coaching using his communication and spiritual skills.*

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Notes and Reflections

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