

## LISTENING

Good morning, afternoon and evening one and all and thank you for being here with us today. Before I begin I want to ask a favor. If you are normally inclined to do so, today, please don't make notes during this little presentation. The text of this presentation will be available, along with the chilla, on the Living Sufism website within a day or two at the latest. So for today, let everything else go and just listen.

Having said that, however, I'm going to right away break the rule. There is one little phrase I would like you all to write down now and hopefully retain as a constant presence for you; and that is:

### *SOUNDS DO NOT INTERRUPT THE SILENCE*

Keep this thought with you, as you listen today and, if you choose, during the chilla I am offering. Thanks. So let us begin.

*I'm surrounded by sound but I'm not really listening  
Where I've been, where I'm going next occupies me  
I don't hear a thing  
There is an art to listening  
In this month's chilla, we will practice that art.*

It's possible this brief chilla text which I've just read and which is included on the website may have generated an assumption that we would be circling around something to do with how we communicate with one another; talking and listening.

But today and for this month with the Listening Chilla, I want to explore a more fundamental, essential quality of the listening experience...that is, very simply we are hearing and then listening to sound.

...hearing and listening to sound...

I suggest a simple definition for our purposes: hearing is the event of vibrations being perceived through our ears; listening takes us beyond the one dimensional and into the complexity of what we may do with those perceptions. Hearing is the surface, listening is the depth.

Hazrat Inayat Khan says, in *The Mysticism of Sound*,

*“The Life Absolute from which has sprung all that is felt, seen and perceived, and into which all again merges in time, is a silent, motionless and eternal life... Every motion that springs forth from this silent life is a vibration and a creator of vibrations. Within one vibration are created many vibrations; as motion causes motion,,. So the silent life becomes active ...and creates every moment more and more activity, losing thereby the peace of the original silent life.”*

And, he goes on to say,

*“Creation begins with the activity of consciousness, which may be called vibration, and every vibration starting from its original source is the same, differing only in its tone and rhythm caused by a greater or lesser degree of force behind it.*

*Sound gives to the consciousness an evidence of its existence, although it is in fact the active part of consciousness itself which turns into sound. The knower so to speak becomes known to himself; in other words, the consciousness bears witness to its own voice.”*

Let me read that last bit again...

The challenge when presenting a chilla is always how much information to present; how much context, content. Too much or too little information may over-or under-emphasize a sense of direction...”He said this, so I should do that...He didn’t say that so I shouldn’t do this...If I don’t have this experience, then I’m doing it wrong...and on and on and on.

So I’m taking some care here but there are a few seeds I would like to plant.

Where does sound come from? Where does sound go?

Inayat Khan suggests that sound comes from and goes to *“The Life Absolute from which has sprung all that is felt, seen and perceived, and into which all again merges in time, a silent, motionless and eternal life...”*

Then within the Listening Chilla let us have this intention: that as sound passes beyond hearing, from simply vibration into the complexity of listening, let us remain in an attentive state, allowing, as Inayat Khan suggests, *Sound giving to consciousness an evidence of its existence.”*

There is so much sound; indeed, so much noise; everywhere, all the time. On the surface, it seems a distraction, a diversion. We seem to hear so much and all at once. How can we know what to listen to?

Most of the time when we are hearing, the first thing we do is identify or label the sound: a voice, a particular voice, a truck driving by, music coming from somewhere out the window, a child’s cry, happy or sad, the neighbors, the traffic...so much sound, so much processing we undertake; some consciously, some semi-consciously and some unconsciously. Some labeling is out of habit; we hear the neighbor’s car start up at pretty much the same time every day---there she goes, off to work; and some require us to think about what we’ve heard...what is that sound, where is it coming from...?

And then there is how we react to the identification. The neighbor’s car starts up...why the heck doesn’t he fix that muffler or the garbage truck comes by early in the morning...too early, or turn down the volume on the television, please, or lord that is so beautiful, it reminds me of that time when...so you get it I think.

Most of us on this call have ideas and experience in dealing with the noise: we sit, we pray, we chant, we sing, we dance, we meditate...all right there and available in a myriad of practices.

During this chilla, we only listen.

Identify yes but let that go.

Feelings yes, but let them go.

Make straight those hooks, as Nisargadatta reminds us.

The Listening Chilla will ask you to, quoting Pir Elias in his book, The Open Path,

*“..listen dispassionately, unattached to what comes up. [As] at a certain point the shifting objects---the thoughts, feelings and sensations---appearing in your awareness lose their interest for you, and you relax into the listening itself...”*

Finally I want to close with something from Jean Klein, as quoted in The Open path:

*What is important is to discover listening itself, which sooner or later will be revealed to you. At first the accent is on what is listened to, the sensation, feeling or thought. But the more the listening is sustained the more emphasis is shifted to this listening to this listening itself without a listened to. Then you are at the threshold of the source from which the listening derives. That very instant listening will become a living reality.”*

And remember: Sounds Do Not Interrupt The Silence!

Thank you.