



MIND, BODY AND SOUL

Listening a “rare art form”

by: Alisa D. Nelson

Shish, Shish, don't you hear it the wind whispering through the trees? Just recently, I came back from California Sequoia Forest, home of the “Big Trees”, located one hour and a half east of the California State Capital. The forest is lined with a path of enormous redwood trees that will send your head spinning by just merely attempting to look up at the top of the trees, this is one “head and neck bending” experience, the only way I can describe this experience to City folk, is to compare it to looking up at the Empire State building from the same street, the vertical shifting is so amazing.

The Sequoia Forest is a place where size matters, a place where one feels small, measured to the size of nature that surrounds you. It's a place that you

say to yourself, “God visits often”, when walking the forest trails, you can hear the beautiful sounds of the wind whistling a tone that stops you in your tracks, the true sound of music. The rhythmic sounds of trumpets and flutes to the sound of the ancestors whispering through the trees “keep listening”. Listen for a moment, you can hear music in the air, and if you choose to sing along, your voice will echo the pure harmonic melody with nature. The acoustics here are heavenly and not man made.

Music is everywhere, but how many times do we get too busy to listen. Or do we choose to ignore or rarely pay attention to the sounds of the birds singing early in the morning, crickets chirping and the sounds of the leaves rattling before night falls,

Most of us have heard of the famous artists Van Gough, Picasso, and Monet, well “listening” has now become a rare art form. Westerners live in a world filled with “hurry”. Hurry up and turn that alarm clock off, so that you can “hurry” to bathe, brush your teeth, slip on your clothes and shoes to “hurry” to go to work, school, or get to the gym. Let’s not forget to “hurry” and heat up a “pop tart”, a “power bar” or 1 minute “microwave breakfast sandwich” and a grab quick “cup of joe” on the go. Now that we’ve got our morning “fix”, we are ready to get started.

Wow, this is our life? The hustle and bustle of life leaves most Westerners with little time to really listen. Oh right, we do listen to the television to hear the news, current events, and weather (so that we can match our mood and outfit to the climate). Oh, and let’s not forget, we listen to the traffic report just before leaving the house to avoid accidents as we “hurry” off to work. While we are in the car, we call ourselves listening to the radio in order to relax, but in between the DJ’s jokes, your cell phone rings, you tap your blue tooth and start chatting’ while at the same time putting in a CD to listen to your favorite song play and watch out for other bad drivers while sipping on that last drop of “Joe” rushing to get to work. No problem, all is well, because we have a name for what we are doing (multi-tasking) and everyone does it, but I call it (not listening). Sure you can hear your favorite song playing in the background of your conversation, while changing

lanes on the Highway. But are you truly listening?

Listening is an art. We all need to work on refining the skill by learning to actively listen. It’s okay if you are beginner at this and you happen to be in your 40’s, 50’s, 60’s or 80’s. You can start by training yourself. First, start by listening to nature, relax and yes, open up your windows at home and listen to the sounds outside & try to name the various, animals or types of vehicles’ that pass by your home. Or go to the park and do the same if there are too many distractions at home. Second, start by listening to music such as Jazz and Classical for the various sounds of instruments, of course this task is much easier if you are a musician, but even if you are not, you can train yourself to identify the string instruments from the brass instruments. These are just a few things you can do to start listening. Third, set a side your own thoughts while someone is talking to you, and when they are finished speaking, paraphrase what they said to you back to them to let them know that you are really listening. I know this is hard if you haven’t been trained in this way of communicating.

Nature is continuously, communicating with us in song and warnings. This might come to you as a surprise, but the key to the art of listening requires a change in thought patterns and routine. Slow down and take the “hurry” out of your life by practicing to listen to what is being sung in nature.