

# The Fundamentals of Compassionate Listening



Healing Our World  
From the Inside Out

The Compassionate Listening Project

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## Table of Contents

The Five Practices of Compassionate Listening.....	3-4
From Protection to Connection.....	5
Reflective Listening/Mirroring Technique.....	6
Range of Responses .....	7
Feelings Inventory .....	8
Values.....	9
Inquiry and Deepening Questions .....	10-11
The Truth Box.....	12
From Rescue to Empowerment.....	13
Hierarchy of Needs .....	14
Ladder of Inference.....	15
Breaking the Cycles of Violence and Revenge.....	16
Basic Principles of Compassionate Listening .....	17
Guidelines for use of Compassionate Listening trademark .....	18
Healing Our World from the Inside Out, by Carol Hwoschinsky .....	19
Listening - the Common Ground Amid Conflict.....	22
Bibliography.....	24
About your facilitator.....	25

## The Five Practices of Compassionate Listening<sup>SM</sup>

1. **Cultivating Compassion** includes the ability to:
  - Find the feelings of the other within oneself and allow that to guide an atmosphere of connection/healing.
  - Anchor in your own heart and essence; connect to that of others.
  - Experience and express gratitude and appreciation for self and others.
  - Seek the gifts offered by conflict and hurt.
  - Practice forgiveness of self and others.
  - Engage in on-going personal work to heal one's own wounds/brokenness.
  
2. **Developing the Fair Witness** includes the ability to:
  - Be centered even in the fire.
  - Notice, unpack and contain triggers and mediate inner conflicts.
  - "Go to the balcony" to look at a situation objectively, considering each person's role and stepping into their shoes to see their perspective.
  - Suspend judgment of self and others.
  - Distinguish the impact of someone's words or actions from their intention.
  - Use language that reflects a non-judgmental capacity (the language of the Fair Witness) when asking questions or providing feedback to others.
  - Seek information, experience, and situations that expand one's open-mindedness and increase one's capacity to hold complexity and ambiguity.
  - Maintain a process of self-exploration to enhance awareness and discern the voice of deep wisdom from the field of inner chatter.
  
3. **Respecting Self and Others** includes the ability to:
  - Resist giving advice unless asked.
  - Trust each person's ability to solve his/her own problems (stay out of the rescue triangle).
  - Discern how one's emotional state impacts the group.
  - Practice self-care and responsibility for one's emotional wellbeing.
  - Build capacity to stay in the "fire" (i.e. intensity of interactions) by maintaining balance in the heat of conflict or strong emotion.
  - Be respectful of people's differing tolerance levels and capacity for managing conflict.
  - Hold the intention to "do no harm."

- Take responsibility: “I am part of what is unfolding, not separate from it.”
- Focus on one’s own emotional/mental states as a way of developing greater understanding of the whole.
- Welcome connection yet set respectful limits, akin to creating a healthy membrane between self and ‘other’.

4. **Listening with the Heart** includes the ability to:

- Anchor in the heart when listening for the deeper qualities beneath the stories we hear.
- Quiet one’s mind.
- Stay grounded in one’s body.
- Create spaciousness to manage the tension created by a multiplicity of views and feelings.
- Offer listening as a gift, choosing to keep one’s opinions, stories and interpretations out of the way (“less is more”).

5. **Speaking from the Heart** includes the ability to:

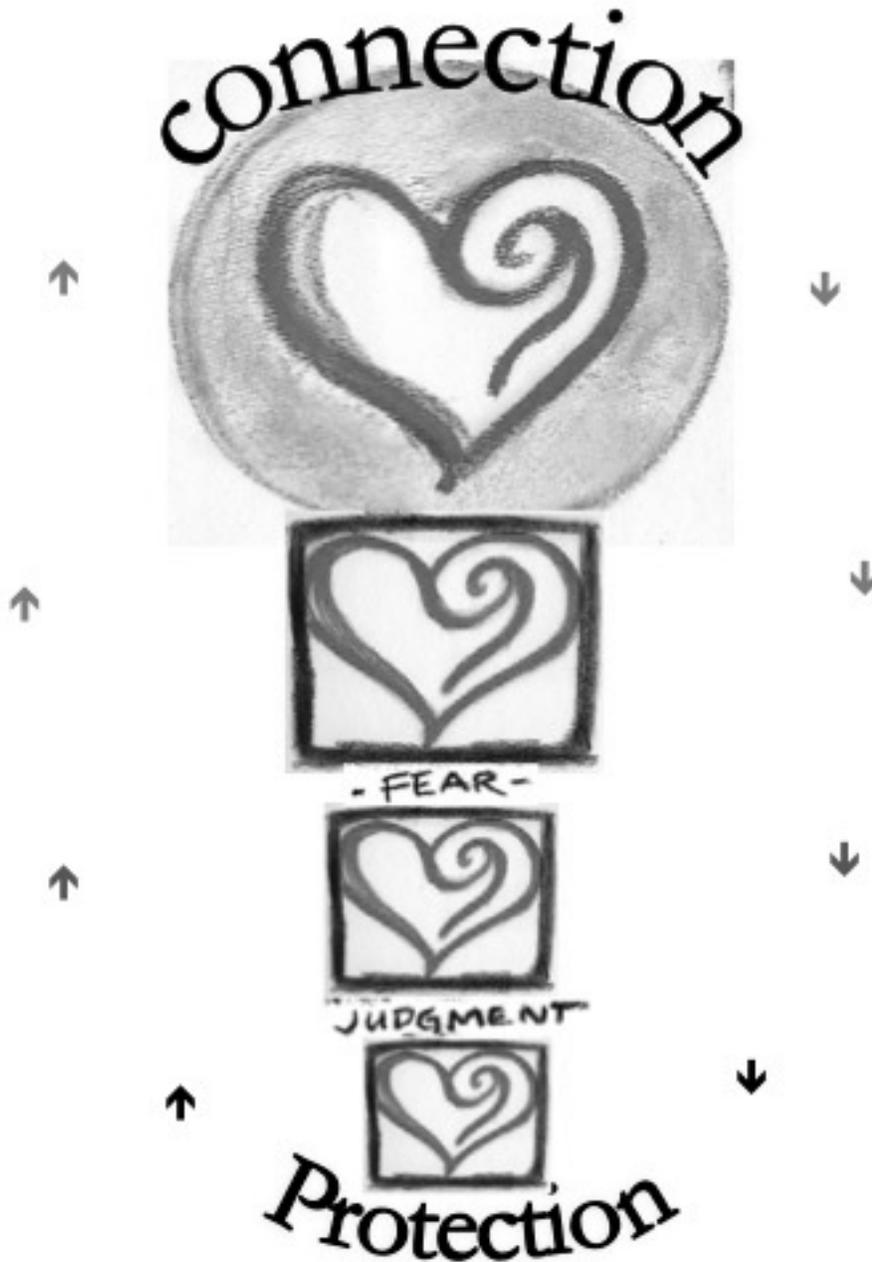
- Anchor one’s energy in the heart when seeking words of understanding and connection.
- Be courageous in giving voice to what has truth and meaning.
- Use language that reflects one’s ability to connect to the wholeness of the other.
- Use language that reflects a healing intention.
- Identify and capture in words underlying needs.
- Use “reflective listening” effectively.
- Name the essence of the issue, feeling or concerns expressed.
- Reframe issue, need, or situation to promote strength and healing.

### **Listening Generously**

*“Listening creates a holy silence. When you listen generously to people, they can hear truth in themselves, often for the first time. And in the silence of listening, you can know yourself in everyone. Eventually, you may be able to hear, in everyone and beyond everyone, the unseen singing softly to itself and to you.”*

Rachel Naomi Remen, MD

**Compassionate Listening**  
*From Protection to Connection*



The practice of Compassionate Listening teaches us how to reach through layers of defensiveness and reactivity to reconnect with our expansive, loving, essential self. From there, we can shift communication and relationships into heart-to-heart interaction.

## Reflective Listening/Mirroring Technique

Reflective listening/mirroring is the restatement of what you have heard a speaker say for purposes of clarification. A second stage can be used to state a feeling the listener has heard embedded in the message. We are checking out our interpretations by asking if the reflection is a correct interpretation. We are reflecting but always with a question mark. No one likes to be told how they are feeling if it does not match what they are feeling.

### Reflective Listening is used in the Compassionate Listening<sup>SM</sup> environment:

1. When we sense we do not fully understand and we would like to learn more about how he/she experiences their situation;
2. When we sense there is more to what the other person is saying than what is being expressed;
3. To summarize from time to time in order to pull together important ideas and establish a basis for further discussion;
4. To verify a feeling the listener has heard embedded in the message;
5. To validate a quality or value the listener might have heard embedded in the message.

### Benefits of Reflective Listening:

1. The communication level may be deepened.
2. The listener may become more empathic/compassionate towards the speaker.
3. The speaker may be able to gain greater self-understanding, clarity, and vulnerability through effective mirroring.
4. A shift in perspective may occur through mirroring statements.



"You say, 'off with her head,' but what I'm hearing is, 'I feel neglected.' "

### **First level:** facts

*The listener repeats what the person has said and checks for confirmation that the important parts of the communication were heard accurately.*

### **Second level:** feelings

*The listener expresses the essence or meaning behind the words, including the feeling tone and asks for accuracy.*

### **Third level:** values / essence

*The listener deepens the mirroring to the being or core level of the speaker's communication and reflects the values or essence of what was heard.*

## Range of Responses

<b>Reflective</b>	Silence	allows speaker to stay with thoughts	<b>Open/Accepting</b>
	Hmmm	affirms contact	
	Paraphrase/restate	affirms contact & checks for understanding	
	Clarification	encourages speaker to explore own feelings/ideas	
	Reflection of core feelings	acknowledges basic feelings	
<b>Middle Range</b>	Interpretation	brings to light what you think speaker might mean	
	Encouragement	pushes speaker to explore where reluctant	
<b>Directive, Non/reflective</b>	Confront, Challenge	questions speaker's assumptions, inconsistencies, contradictions	<b>Closed/Judging</b>
	Agree/Disagree	judges speaker's position or interpretation	
	Advice/Suggestion	tells speaker what to do	
	Convince	persistence related to taking action/changing opinion	
	Threaten	warns of punishment if speaker does not change	

## Feelings Inventory<sup>1</sup>

absorbed	amused	grateful	intrigued	proud	tender
adventurous	animated	inquisitive	keyed-up	quiet	touched
alert	astonished	inspired	moved	sensitive	wide-awake
alive	concerned	intense	optimistic	stimulated	zany
amazed	curious	interested	overwhelmed	surprised	

### ☺ Likely to be experienced when our needs ARE being fulfilled

affectionate	dazzled	excited	glowing	mellow	splendid
appreciative	delighted	exhilarated	good-humored	merry	thankful
aroused	eager	expansive	gratified	mirthful	thrilled
blissful	ecstatic	expectant	groovy	overjoyed	tranquil
carefree	effervescent	exultant	happy	peaceful	warm
cheerful	elated	fascinated	helpful	radiant	wonderful
comfortable	electrified	free	hopeful	rapturous	zestful
complacent	encouraged	friendly	invigorated	refreshed	
composed	energetic	fulfilled	involved	relieved	
confident	engrossed	glad	joyous	satisfied	
contented	enlivened	gleeful	jubilant	secure	
cool	enthusiastic	glorious	loving	spellbound	

### ☹ Likely to be experienced when our needs are NOT being fulfilled

afraid	cool	embarrassed	hurt	overwhelmed	suspicious
aggravated	cross	embittered	impatient	passive	tepid
agitated	dejected	exasperated	indifferent	perplexed	terrified
alarmed	depressed	exhausted	inert	pessimistic	tired
aloof	despairing	fatigued	intense	puzzled	troubled
angry	despondent	fearful	irate	rancorous	uncomfortable
anguished	detached	fidgety	irked	reluctant	unconcerned
animosity	disappointed	forlorn	irritated	repelled	uneasy
annoyed	discouraged	frightened	jealous	resentful	unglued
anxious	disgruntled	frustrated	jittery	restless	unhappy
apathetic	disgusted	furious	keyed-up	sad	unnerved
apprehensive	disheartened	gloomy	lassitude	scared	unsteady
averse	dislike	grief	lazy	sensitive	upset
beat	dismayed	guilty	lethargic	shaky	uptight
bitter	displeased	hate	listless	shocked	vexed
blah	disquieted	heavy	lonely	skeptical	weary
blue	distressed	helpless	mad	sleepy	withdrawn
bored	disturbed	hesitant	mean	sorrowful	woeful
brokenhearted	downcast	horrible	melancholy	sorry	worried
chagrined	downhearted	horrified	miserable	sour	wretched
cold	dread	hostile	mopey	spiritless	
concerned	dull	hot	nervous	startled	
confused	edgy	humdrum	nettled	surprised	

<sup>1</sup> Adapted in part from Marshall B Rosenberg, Center for Nonviolent Communication

## Values

In listening deeply to one another, our hearts assist us to hear the values underneath the words, rhetoric, or strongly held positions. When we listen deeply and can reflect the values that we hear, we connect to the wholeness in the other.

BEAUTY  
COMPASSION  
COMMUNITY  
CONNECTION  
COOPERATION  
COURAGE  
CREATIVITY  
EQUALITY  
FAITH  
FAMILY  
FRIENDSHIP  
FREEDOM  
GENEROSITY  
Justice  
GOODWILL  
GRATITUDE  
HARMONY  
HUMOR  
INCLUSIVENESS  
LOVE  
ORDER  
PATIENCE  
PEACE  
RESPECT  
SERVICE  
SIMPLICITY  
TRUST  
UNDERSTANDING  
WHOLENESS  
WISDOM

## Inquiry and Deepening Questions

*Imagine setting the one you question (even yourself) off on a treasure hunt to encounter the heart of their soul and situation.*

**What is it?** Inquiry is the use of is open-ended question that have no answer but invite an exploration that sets a path of discovery. As a practice of Compassionate Listening, we offer a question to serve the ones we are listening to -- to deepen their connection to their own essence, as well as the connection between us. This is a matter of the heart, not the head where we do problem solving and typically assume we know what the problem is. Our use of such inquiry arises from the belief that the person (and only the person) knows the wisest course.

There is no formula. Seek to offer questions that:

- Increase understanding and empathy
- Help the speaker to deepen in his/her experience
- Help the speaker, not the listener
- Help evoke ultimate concerns and reveal values

Avoid the use of questions for:

- Satisfying your own curiosity
- Showing off your knowledge
- Couching criticism or questioning choices
- Demonstrating your skill as a listener
- Analyzing or explaining the situation
- Offering opinions

**Why offer questions?** There are times when the speaker may seem stalled or stuck in the same place in a story. Or they may ask for help...In these cases, we may offer an open-ended, deepening question to serve them. A question is better than a suggestion as it helps the person draw upon their own wisdom and experience to find their own path.

Powerful questions can move people out of a stuck place by offering a broader perspective, giving a sense of hope and purpose, and calling upon the best in people. Such questions can imply the possibility for positive outcomes by guiding people to recall past success, explore possibility, strengthen motivation, and clear distorted perceptions. Inquiry can be used to catch a seminal moment and can deepen the speaker's understanding. It can bring to the surface unmet needs and illuminate values. Listeners use inquiry to facilitate the process --**not** for curiosity.

**How to proceed?** It is important to consider the impact a question will have on the speaker: Will it open, not close their heart? Will it interrupt the flow? Will it cause any defensiveness or send them out of their heart up into their head? Inquiry puts the questioner's hands 'on the steering wheel' in a directive way no matter how wisely crafted to be open ended. Be impeccably clear on the intention of the question before asking it. Anchor in your heart. Offer it as a gift.

### Some Examples:

- *Can you say more?*
- *How has this situation affected your life?*
- *What was that like for you?*
- *What is the source of your courage?*
- *What life experiences have helped you in this situation?*
- *Could you say more about that?*
- *If this situation were fully resolved, how would things be better for you?*
- *How has your life been shaped by these events?*
- *Can you tell us about the situation that concerns you?*
- *Disputes often reach the levels they do because of deep, unmet needs. What deep, unmet needs do you see at work in this situation?*
- *What is in your heart right now? If you were a wise fly on the wall, what do you think might work?*
- *What is the source of your courage?*
- *Can you tell us what life experiences led you to feel this way?*
- *What are you yearning for?*
- *What do you most cherish about this relationship?*

### Characteristics of Deepening Questions:<sup>2</sup>

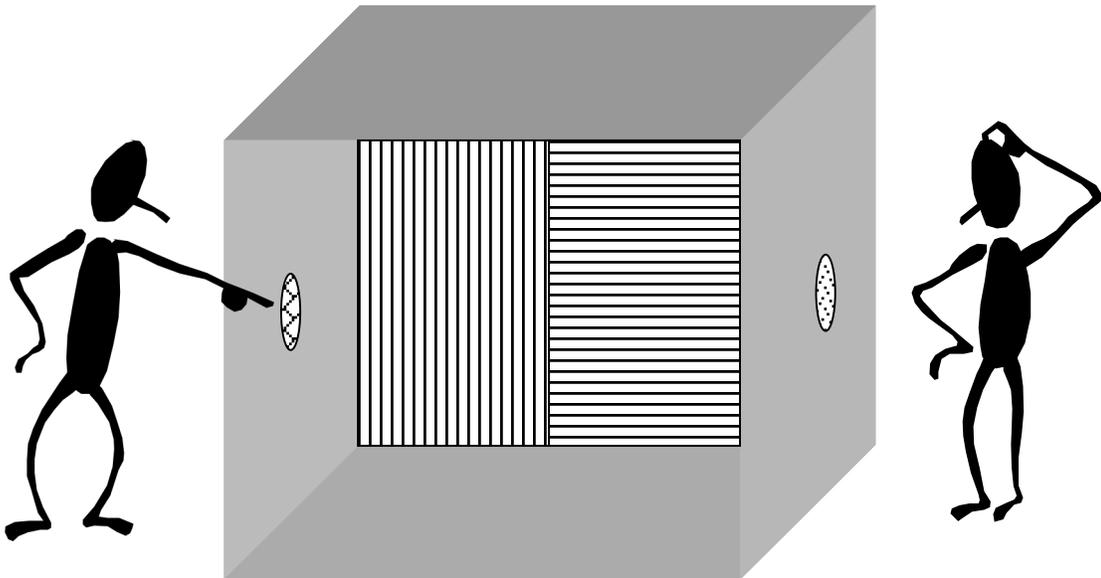
- **Create motion** – instead of “Why don’t you move to Seattle?” DQ: “What type of place would you like to move to” or “What is the meaning of this move in your life?”
- **Open up options** – instead of “Why don’t you move to Seattle”, DQ: “What are some places that you feel a connection to”
- **Evoke ultimate concerns, high points and deepest values** -
- **Avoid “why”** - why questions create defense and resistance. “How”, “What” and “Is” are good places to start instead. Why don’t you find a way to help the community on this issue?” vs. “What action might you take to help the community on this issue?”
- **Are empowering** - “What would you like to do to help your community?” (for example to high school kids) Assume that they want to help. Assume the goodness in people
- **Ask the unaskable** - “Are there any ways that you might be contributing to this conflict?” “What are you both prepared to do for the sake of your grandchildren?”
- **Are simple.** Asking more than one question at a time is confusing...keep your questions simple and one at a time.
- **Are respectful.** When we use inquiry we convey trust in the person that they are smart enough, courageous enough, to find their own solutions. This is change from the inside out.

**Remember...Inquiry is often not needed:** Take your cue from the speaker and stay out of the way as much as you can. Most often, Less is More. For the most part Compassionate Listening is practiced by offering loving presence, heartfelt connection and spaciousness. Questions are needed much less often than we tend to imagine. We are often silent, fully present while holding space for the speaker, perhaps offering a touch. We may offer a reflective response (facts-feelings-values/qualities). Most essentially, we anchor in the heart.

<sup>2</sup> In part synthesized from Fran Peavey, **Strategic Questioning: An Experiment in Communication of the Second Kind.** Available from [crabgrass@igc.org](mailto:crabgrass@igc.org)

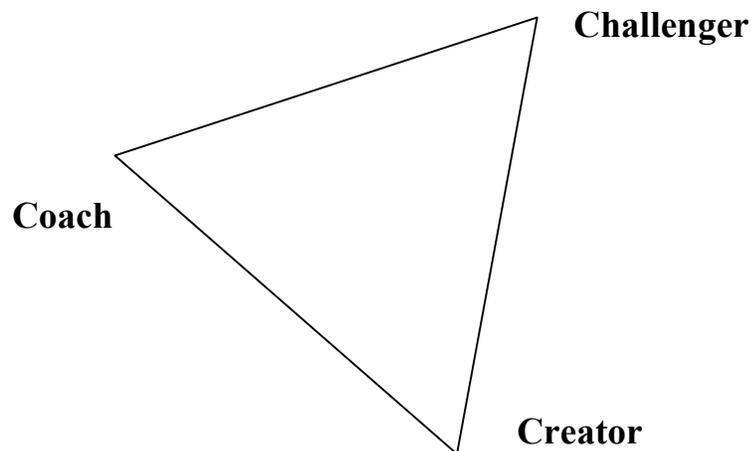
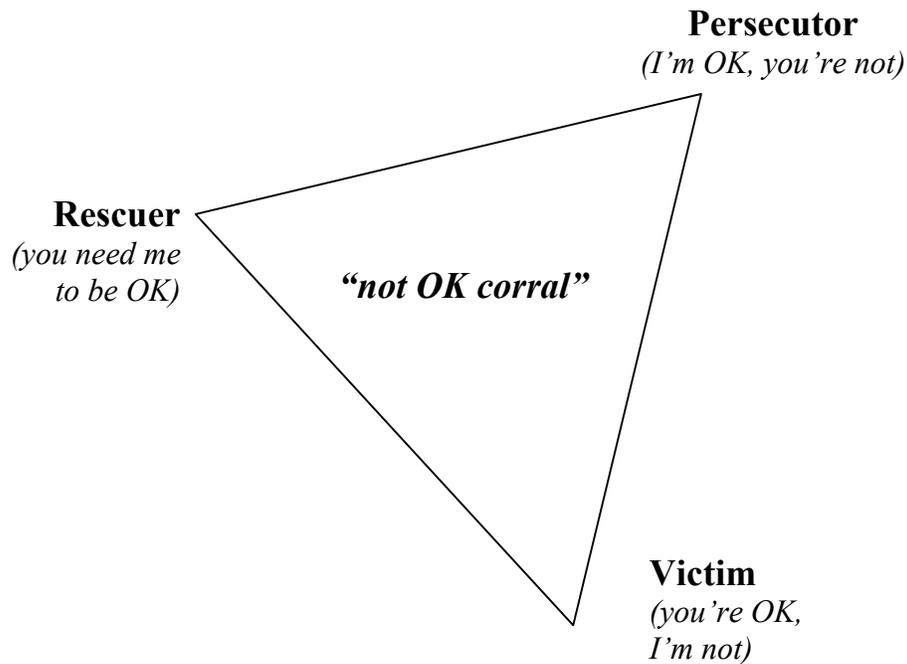
## The 'Truth' Box<sup>3</sup>

- Separate IMPACT (your personal response) from INTENTION (the other person's motivation).
- Step to their side and look through their peephole to understand *their* meaning to them: Listen to *get it*, not to *get them*.
- Follow the PLATINUM rule: do unto others as *they* would have you do unto them.
- Engage courage (heart) and skills: inner calm, outer curiosity.
- Follow the 3 R's:
  - Responsibility,
  - Relationship
  - Real Issue
- Focus on
  - Problem, not personality
  - Forward, not backwards
  - Solutions, not blame

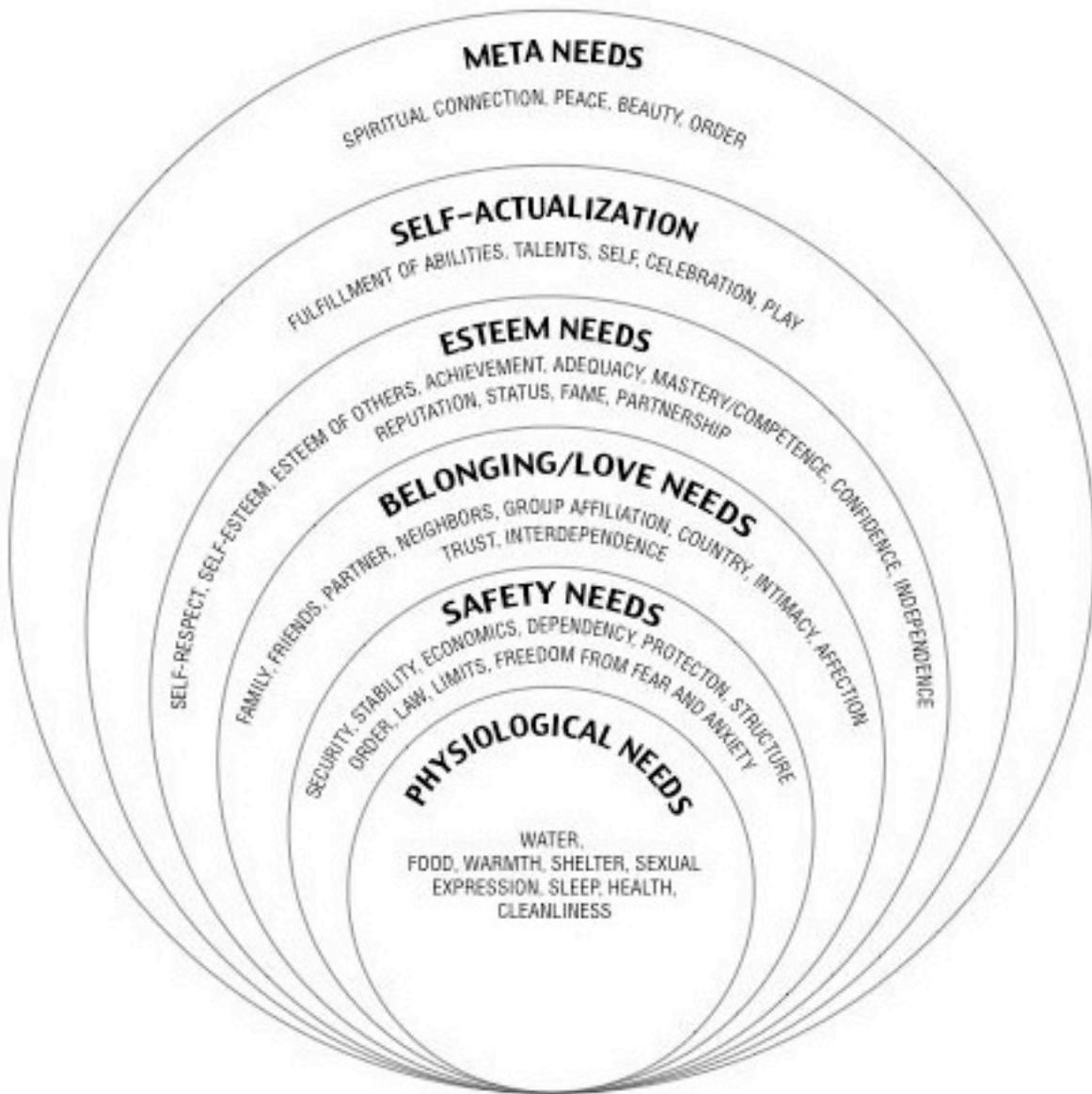


<sup>3</sup> © 2013 SUSAN PARTNOW, [SUSAN@PARTNOWCOM.COM](mailto:SUSAN@PARTNOWCOM.COM), [WWW.PARTNOWCOM.COM](http://WWW.PARTNOWCOM.COM), 206 789- 8697

## From Rescue to Empowerment



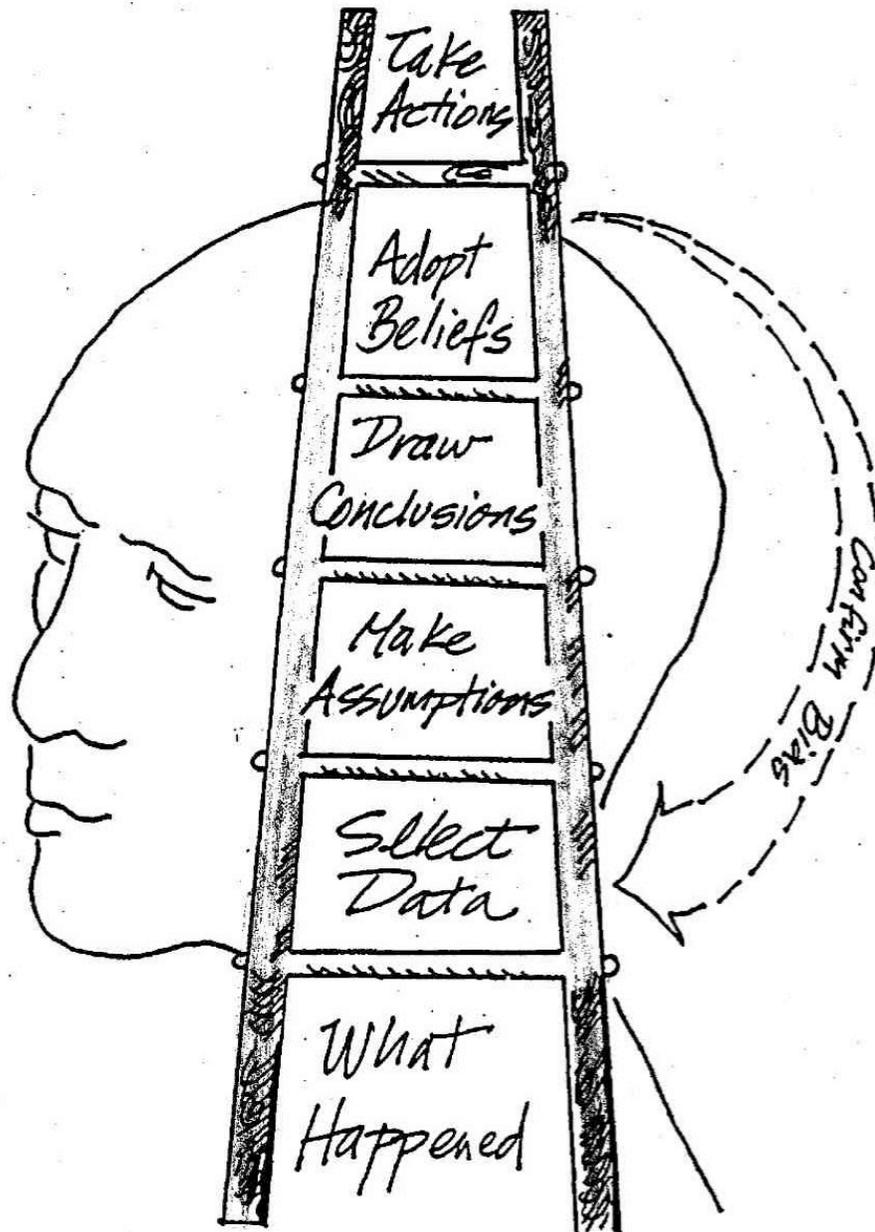
*Adapted from Karpman's classic drama triangle and "Power of TED" (The Empowerment Dynamic) developed by David Womeldorff, Evolutionary Management*



## HOLARCHY OF NEEDS

Adapted from the work of Abraham Maslow

# LADDER OF INFERENCE



Developed By Chris Argyris

An act of aggression can lead the victim to eventually perform “justified” acts of aggression in the name of “self-defense”, and then the cycle starts again. In this model there is a turning point where it is possible to break out of the cycle. If mourning and expression of grief takes place on the side of the victim, and acknowledgment of wrongdoing is made on the side of the perpetrator, then there is a chance of breaking this cycle of violence and revenge and establishing justice and reconciliation (modeled by the inner spiral).

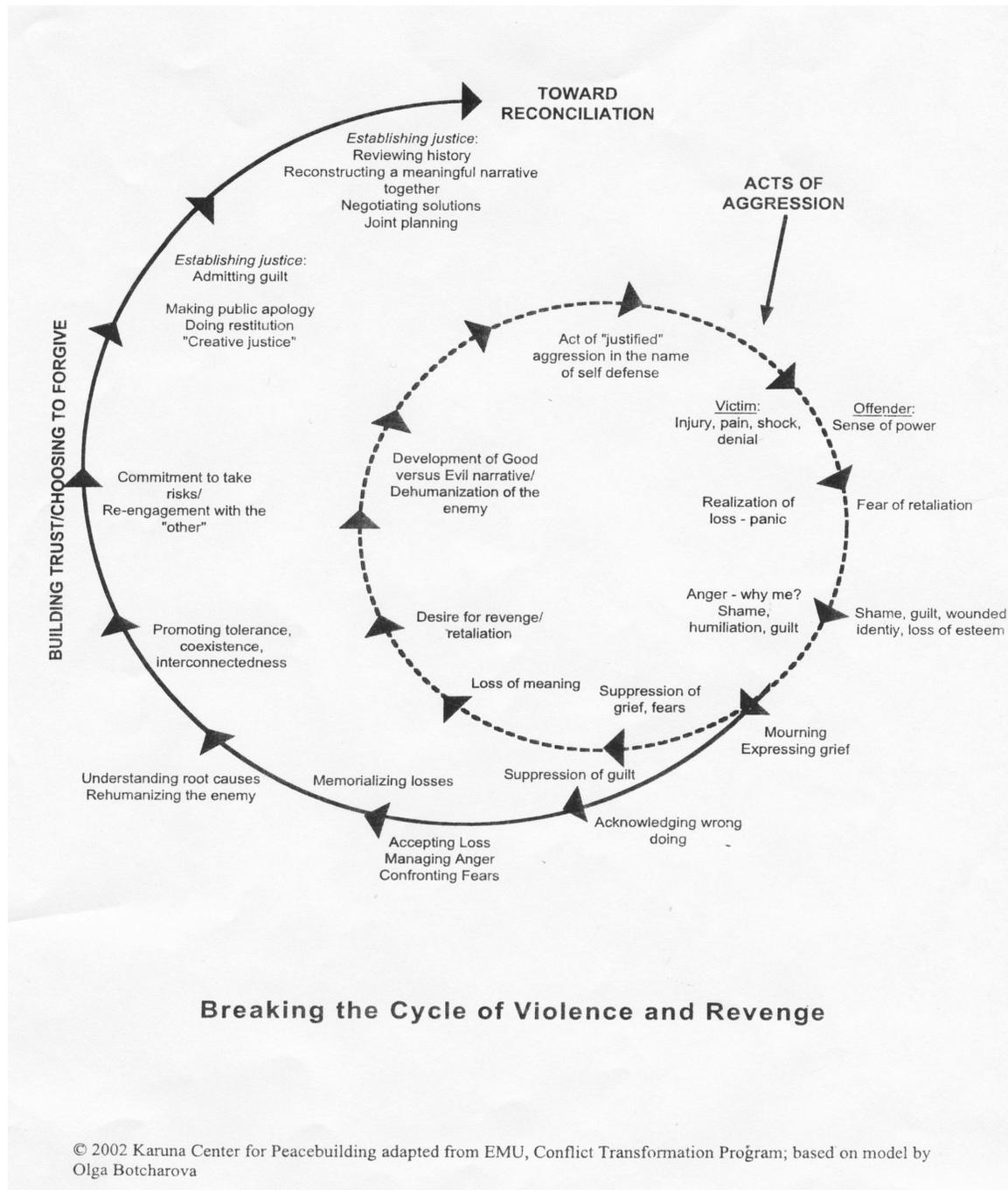
We can use this model to discover what stage we are at in our own cycles of conflict.

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### Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Revenge

An act of aggression can lead the victim to eventually perform “justified” acts of aggression in the name of self-defense or retribution, and then the cycle starts again. In this model there is a turning point where it is possible to break out of the cycle. If the victim can mourn and express grief, and if an acknowledgment of wrongdoing is made on the side of the perpetrator, then there is a chance of breaking this cycle of violence and revenge and establishing justice and reconciliation (modeled by the inner spiral).

We can use this model to discover what stage we are at in our own cycles of conflict.

## The Compassionate Listening Project: Basic Principles

Compassionate Listening<sup>SM</sup> finds its roots in many spiritual practices and cultural traditions, as well as conflict resolution techniques. It is interesting to note that many scientific principles support the theory behind Compassionate Listening. Relatively new is the research connecting the heart and brain, which has been “known” for centuries in many spiritual practices. Here is a list of just some of the principles on which Compassionate Listening practice is based.

- Energy cannot be destroyed - only changed from one form to another (transduced).
- We can't save the world - the world is saving itself. We can align with those forces.
- For every action, there is an opposite and equal reaction. It can mean a destructive cycle in people.
- “A problem cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created it. A larger perspective or deeper understanding is needed.” *Albert Einstein*
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- As above, so below. Fractals are simple, repetitive patterns throughout the natural world.
- Conflicts recycle, often in another form, if the basic, underlying needs are not addressed.
- “There is a drive in living matter to perfect itself.” *Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, Nobel Prize winning biologist.*
- “Perhaps every act of violence comes from an unhealed wound.” *Gene Knudsen Hoffman*
- Within each problem is the key to its resolution. Within each wound is a pure essence seeking expression.
- Follow each conflict to its source. The sources of interpersonal conflicts are often unmet inner needs, competition for limited resources, and/or conflicts of values.
- Everyone who is part of the problem needs to be part of the solution. Each person involved is part of the whole.
- Listening is accepting but not necessarily agreeing.
- The opposing view is always valuable. Look for underlying commonalities to build solutions of mutual benefit.
- Compassionate Listening is not about satisfying curiosity or problem solving. It is about being present to another.
- In resolving conflict, focus on the problem – not the person. Reach toward unconditional love for the person.
- Humans are more alike than not. All humans share the same needs for security, safety, belonging, love, approval and self-fulfillment. These human needs cut through cultural differences and become the basis for common ground.
- What we have not resolved within is projected on others.

## **Guidelines for use of “Compassionate Listening<sup>SM</sup>”**

We encourage you to integrate Compassionate Listening into your lives and actively share it with your friends, family and community. The best way to continue to deepen in your practice is to create a Compassionate Listening practice group. You will find our “Practice Group Start-up Manual” on our website. You are welcome to download it and convene a group. You do not need a large group to begin a practice group.

Compassionate Listening<sup>SM</sup> is a legally protected service mark of The Compassionate Listening Project. If you would like to integrate Compassionate Listening into your work, please review the following guidelines. Our community of trainers and certified facilitators have worked hard over many years to develop –and continually update– our curriculum and bring our work into the world with integrity and love. Your efforts to respect TCLP’s intellectual property rights and honor these guidelines are greatly appreciated.

- If, after completing a workshop, you wish to include Compassionate Listening in your own work, or make presentations, you can state that “you have received training from TCLP” rather than presenting yourself as a Compassionate Listening “Facilitator” or “Trainer.”
- Our certified facilitators are authorized to create trainings or curricula with the term “Compassionate Listening” in the title or heading.
- You may use the term “Compassionate Listening” in the body of written materials you generate. If you do so, please cite TCLP as the source for this term and provide contact information for TCLP.
- TCLP materials and handouts are copyrighted. Please do reuse our materials – keeping our contact information at the bottom of each page so the source is clear.

Thank you for being a part of our unfolding!

## Healing Our World from the Inside Out

by Carol Hwoschinsky

Listening is simple, but did anyone ever promise it would be easy? “God gave us two ears and only one mouth,” says an old Jewish proverb, “that we should listen twice as much as we speak.” The Compassionate Listening Project has used that wisdom since 1990 to help bridge the bitter divides in the Mid-East. And now, since the applications of compassion and listening are universal, it is being taught and practiced in many places in the world.

Compassionate Listening has its roots in Quaker and Buddhist practice. It provides a quality of listening that creates a safe container for people to be free to express themselves and to go to the level of their deep concerns. It provides the basis of all meaningful relationships. It is the first step to reconciliation. It enables sustained dialogue. Dialogue then becomes the basis for problem solving and ultimately, for advocacy.

Compassionate Listening is a dynamic process for it involves noticing one’s own judgments and putting them aside for the time being in order to be truly present. Not only does Compassionate Listening deepen our understanding of ourselves and others, it can diffuse conflict and heal deep emotional wounds. It changes the lives of those listened to and the lives of the listeners, as well. It can serve in all aspects of one’s life – from personal to professional, individual to community, and internationally.

In searching for clarity at deeper levels, we listen to the grievances of each side and communicate them to the other, including the feelings of suffering. Suffering is a common denominator. When all parties recognize the suffering they have inflicted, the process of true reconciliation proceeds. This is not an easy process and takes a significant amount of inner strength to acknowledge the suffering one might have inflicted on another.

I have had the good fortune to go to Israel and Palestine over the past eight years to listen to people and to help people listen to each other. It has been an amazing experience to be in a place of such obvious strife and conflict. I have learned many things about people, about countries and policies and about myself. These experiences have shown me that I don’t have to “go” anywhere to find these conflicts. They reside within my own mind, my own family and my own community and country.

I only have to look back a little over a year ago during the lead up to the Iraq war to see how the divisive thinking process was seriously threatening the fabric of our own society. Those who were against the war were labeled unpatriotic and un-American. Those in favor were accused of being warmongers. Accusations were hurled back and forth and few were able to listen to the deeper concerns of the “other”. Did any one ask what is the best way to bring peace to the Middle East? Americans want peace. How do we go about it?

I see the same dynamic played out in the present political arena. Republicans and Democrats dig their lines deep in the sand. Is anyone really asking what is best for the country and the world? What is best for people? For the greater whole?

Since we each see only a part of reality, learning to see more requires that we take in other points of view and learn to work with them. Listening to divergent points of view helps to broaden perspectives and understand a greater picture.

Everyone who is a part of the problem needs to be part of the solution. Our world is a complex and seemingly chaotic system. The issues humanity faces are large and difficult to solve because we all hold pieces of the solutions and we don't understand the whole picture. By connecting the pieces we uncover meaning. Linking ideas and networking with people is pivotal at this juncture in time.

In the case of conflict, all parties to the conflict hold elements of the solution and need to be heard. Astute listening can detect elements of agreement in divergent positions. The connection allows a glimpse of the greater whole, wherein lie the solutions. Einstein stated that a problem cannot be solved at the level at which it was created. In searching for clarity at deeper levels we listen to the grievances and for the suffering. We listen without judgments for the underlying interests and needs that connect us.

Conflicts recycle in many families mainly because the core issues are not addressed. We are in such a hurry to find a solution that we don't look deeper to the core of the problem. This is where the connection lies. We find the real underlying issues, which are what need to be addressed. When a teenager wants the car, it's not usually for transportation. The issues are most likely a desire for prestige, socialization, control or many others. Trying to find other ways to get from here to there does not address the real problem.

It seems logical to listen for divergent points of view in order to find solutions that will be acceptable to all concerned. But why is it so hard? Because we confuse listening with agreeing. Listening requires impartiality, at least for the moment. Advocacy is another process. Listening does not imply accepting blame. It does mean listening deeply to the needs of others and respecting their rights to their opinions.

Often, when listening to Jews and Palestinians, I cannot distinguish the concerns and needs of one from another. I hear the need for security, safety, homeland, prosperity and the right to raise one's family with dignity. Isn't this what we all want? But few are listening. This failure to hear and to recognize our interconnection and the common basic needs is what leads to conflict: the projection of our fears on to the "other" – enemy making.

In the Middle East it is difficult and often dangerous for Israelis and Palestinians to listen to each other. But many do and under very difficult circumstances. Listeners know that under every act of violence is an unhealed wound. Compassionate Listening reveals these wounds to both the listener and the speaker. It is a deeply healing process.

I was sitting in a hotel in east Jerusalem listening to a small, quiet man tell our American delegation how his son was abducted and executed by a group of Palestinians. He recounts how he, an Israeli Jew, reached out to the parents of the young man who had killed his own son, and together formed a support group for bereaved Jewish and Arab parents.

I was in a Palestinian refugee camp listening to a man tell us of his family's decision to donate the body parts of his dead son. The Jewish doctor reminded him that because his son had died in an Israeli hospital, his son's parts would most likely be used for Israeli Jews. Our host exclaimed over

and over that humans are humans and that whether one is a Jew or a Palestinian doesn't matter at times like these.

The Jewish and the Palestinian fathers that I just mentioned had experienced such pain that their hearts were broken open and from that open heartedness, they could see themselves in another. My observation was that they could see their own pain in their "enemy". They were One. Extreme pain does break our hearts open. But do we have to go through intense broken heartedness in order to recognize each other? Disconnection is the most painful of experiences: disconnection from Self, from people, from nature. You name it—it's lonely, and terrifying to be cut off from what holds real meaning. I see division all around me. I see people separated and alienated. What I see in my world, however, is actually a reflection of my disconnected mind. My mind—our minds—create the world we see out there. This state is a symptom of a paradigm shift that has been taking place since the gradual birth of the scientific revolution where the separate elements have become analyzed to the detriment of the greater whole. One might say that the whole world in conflict is experiencing a collective "dark night of the soul"—a disconnection from our essential nature as loving beings.

But with every dark night there is promise of a new dawn. There are signs of change—of hope. There are people who are making choices to love rather than hate, to forgive rather than hold the pain of judgment. The promise of healing lies in connecting consciously and deliberately to our hearts. When I look at the world and I am connected to my heart, I see a totally different picture. This is not uncharted terrain. Fortunately, there are many practices, some ancient, others based on new scientific research on the heart/brain connection, which lead us to this place of peace and interconnection that we can draw upon when life gets difficult and when we have problems to solve. By connecting with our own essential heart space, we recognize it in others. This serves as a validation to them of their own essential being.

Listening with the heart is a way of action that does not cause a sense of separation and an adverse reaction. Recent research on the function of the heart is showing it is possible to free ourselves from our automatic, protective reactions—our separation. What we feel in our heart influences our perceptions and physiology, and has a profound effect on all living things in our environment. The heart is more than a pump.

When asked about Compassionate Listening and what good it can possibly do when the problems in the world are so pervasive, I return in my mind to the many people whose stories I have heard. I am certain, though we may not be able to visibly change the events of the world, that changing one life—even my own—makes the effort worthwhile. I know that lives are altered by these experiences. I am confident that compassion and understanding ultimately enhance the lives of all.

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## Listening — the Common Ground Amid Conflict

**By Janet I. Tu**

*Seattle Times staff reporter*

The Israelis and Palestinians sat in a circle in a rundown room outside Bethlehem.

They had already heard from a Palestinian man who was fighting to preserve his house from being demolished by the Israeli army. They listened as a Palestinian mother described how she cried as she sewed her daughter's wedding dress, knowing she would not be allowed to leave the country to attend the wedding.

But the Palestinians were having a hard time seeing how Israelis suffered in the conflict.

Then a former Israeli soldier spoke. More Israeli soldiers die from suicide than in combat, he said. Please see our suffering in that statistic, he requested.

"You could hear a pin drop," said Leah Green, facilitator for the group, which met in June. Suddenly, people realized that though the Israelis' suffering "doesn't look like the suffering of the Palestinians — it doesn't look like occupation — it was still suffering."

Such breakthrough moments are part of what Green, a resident of Indianola, Kitsap County, strives for in her work as founder and director of The Compassionate Listening Project. It brings together people on opposite sides of conflicts past and present — Israelis and Palestinians, Germans and Jews — to listen to each other's stories.

At a time when headlines from the Middle East are almost unceasingly about strife, Green, 48, presents a different vision. She believes peace can be built. And she believes the compassionate-listening process, which she helped develop, can be a valuable tool in creating that peace.

The basic premise of Compassionate Listening is that people need to listen, without judgment, to the stories of those on the "other side." They need to resist knee-jerk reactions while asking non-adversarial questions that allow them to see the other person's humanity.

It can sound touchy-feely, Green acknowledges. But she points to concrete results: For instance, an Israeli woman who went through the program plans to bring the Palestinian participants to meet with Israelis who have never met any Palestinians before.

And Green has won over some skeptics.

Rabbi Anson Laytner, executive director of the Greater Seattle chapter of the American Jewish Committee, initially thought her approach was "too touchy-feely and ignored the hard political reality of things."

Now he believes it's the only way to build bridges of understanding. "When you have those bridges, you have those chances to make the kind of peace that is not just paper peace, but living peace."

Green knows any big breakthrough has to come at the higher political level. But she says people on the ground need to first know there are those on the other side who acknowledge their suffering and see their needs. They need to have developed a level of trust with each other.

"If you prepare the ground, when there's a crack of an opportunity, they'll jump — make the leap of faith," Green says. "Without that, they won't make that leap."

### Shared Stories

One evening in early May, some 20 people met in Berlin. Some were Holocaust survivors or the children or grandchildren of survivors. Others were descendants of German soldiers or citizens. They were there as part of The Compassionate Listening Project's Jewish-German reconciliation program.



Former Israeli soldier and former Palestinian prisoner embrace in June, 2007 West Bank Compassionate Listening Training.

They put photos of their relatives on a candlelit table, then told their stories.

"It was the first time I had heard a German talking about a grandparent in the same way I had talked about my grandfather. It totally brought tears to my eyes," said Phyllis Selinker, an attorney from Poulsbo, who says her time in the program helped her with longstanding fears about the Holocaust and Germany.

Green grew up with stories from her grandparents, who were refugees from the persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe.

It made her wonder: If everyone says they want peace, why aren't peace-making skills taught in schools? Why don't governments spend more money on peace efforts and less on war?

Those questions stayed with her as she spent two years in Israel studying at a university and living in a kibbutz, and as she earned her master's degree in public administration from the University of Washington.

She got involved in Middle East peace groups. While she felt they did important work, she also found some of them too focused on what they were against.

Then Green came across the writings of Gene Knudsen Hoffman, a Quaker peace activist who believes that at the heart of every violent act is an unhealed wound that can be healed, in part, through nonjudgmental listening. In Hoffman's writings, Green saw the underpinnings of peace-building skills that could be taught.

Over the years, Green has developed an array of programs. There are daylong workshops, advanced-training sessions, local compassionate-listening groups and people who use the techniques to resolve workplace or interpersonal conflicts. Revenue from these programs, along with grants and private donations, funds the project.

The organization is best known for its work around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition to getting individual Palestinians and Israelis together to hear each other's stories, Compassionate Listening also organizes delegations of Americans who travel to the Middle East.

Larry Snider, a consultant for nonprofits who lives in suburban Philadelphia, was part of such a delegation six years ago. He was profoundly touched by a Palestinian whose son had been killed during the 2000 intifada. Yet the father urged them to keep working for peace.

The next day Snider met a Jewish couple who had built an institute to take care of developmentally disabled Israeli and Arab children. They had built it in honor of their son, who had been killed by Palestinians.

"If they could make a commitment after they lost their children, then I could make a commitment," said Snider, who is organizing Philadelphia-area imams, rabbis and Christian clergy for a Compassionate Listening trip next year.

### **Is It Enough?**

Still, there are those who wonder if listening is enough.

Ziyad Zaitoun, a Seattle engineer who is active with Voices of Palestine, says organizations like Compassionate Listening reach only a tiny percentage of the population. Most Palestinians, he said, are still suffering under occupation.

At the same time, he thinks what Green is doing is needed. "They have to bring more people together, especially high-ranking people within the leadership."

Recently, the husband of a young woman who had been seriously injured by a 2002 bomb attack at Jerusalem's Hebrew University asked Green to help him meet the family of the bomber.

In June, Green met with the bomber's family in East Jerusalem. She listened as they expressed deep sorrow that their son and brother, who as a teenager had been arrested and tortured by Israeli military, would turn to such violence.

Green says she doesn't condone the act, but believes it's important to try to understand its roots.

Both the bomber's family and the husband of the bombing victim, Green said, had expressed to her that "if perhaps both sides can get together and hear each other's realities, maybe we wouldn't get to this point where we're wounding each other."

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About your facilitator: