

## ***Mindful Listening Practice***

We are using a method of mindful listening known as *Lectio divina* ("holy reading"), an ancient way of reading scripture, passed on in the Benedictine tradition. It calls us to ponder and sit with a short text until we "take it in." We learned this method from Mary Rose O'Reilley, a Quaker educator and professor at St. Thomas University in Minnesota (*Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*). She describes the process as surrendering to whatever word or phrase catches the attention and respecting the power of these words to resonate with the full range of human experience and one's spiritual life. The words deserve a kind of attentive reading we might offer a friend who has pondered long over what he or she has to tell us.

### **Method:**

1. Center yourself in your body, mind and purpose.
2. Read the passage reflectively several times.
3. Hold this passage in the light. You could consider questions such as these:

*What speaks to me most profoundly here?*

*What do I feel called to "take in" for my own experience?*

4. Sit with a partner

The "*sharing partner*" continues sharing what you are noticing this text holds for you, is saying to you.

The "*listening partner*" listens with full attention, noticing when your mind wanders into your own thoughts, judgments, feelings, and gently bringing your mind back to fully listen to your partner.

5. Change listening and sharing roles.

The degree to which participants find the readings evocative is key factor in the activity. In presenting the *lectio divina* activity, I like to offer participants a choice of readings, selecting them for variety and with the particular group in mind. On more than one occasion, I've seen participants wipe away tears as they contemplated a reading. Of course, it helps to include light readings as well. Here are three of the readings I often present (Richard Brady in *Tuning In: Mindfulness in Teaching and Learning*).

Mulla Nasrudin (a classic Persian jokester/folk character)[**should there be some orientation to Nasrudin?**] decided to start a flower garden. He prepared the soil and planted the seeds of many beautiful flowers. But when it bloomed, his garden was filled not just with his chosen flowers but it was also overrun by dandelions. He sought out advice from gardeners all over and tried every method known to get rid of them, but to no avail. Finally, he walked all the way to the capital to speak to the royal gardener at the sheik's palace. The wise old man had counseled many gardeners before and suggested a variety of remedies to expel the dandelions, but Mulla had tried them all. They sat together in silence for some time and finally the gardener looked at Nasrudin and said, "Well, then I suggest you learn to love them."



Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for answers now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. (Rainer Maria Rilke)



Terry Gross: Can you share some of your favorite comments from readers that you've gotten over the years?

Maurice Sendak: Oh, there's so many. Can I give you just one that I really like? It was from a little boy. He sent me a charming card with a little drawing. I loved it. I answer all my children's letters—sometimes very hastily—but this one I lingered over. I sent him a postcard and I drew a picture of a Wild Thing on it. I wrote, "Dear Jim, I loved your card." Then I got a letter back from his mother and she said, "Jim loved your card so much he ate it." That to me was one of the highest compliments I've ever received. He didn't care that it was an original drawing or anything. He saw it, he loved it, he ate it.