

Mindful Communication

As I was on the train to visit relatives in Freising, I noticed two young women a few seats away from me, as they were speaking so loudly. It wasn't both of them, only one was talking and the other was mostly only listening. Whenever the listener wanted to contribute something herself, the other one immediately took the floor again. It was a continuous monologue – for almost 35 minutes. At some point, I tried to cover my ears so that I didn't have to listen to the constant babbling.

Mindful communication is something completely different from the one-sided “speech” that I witnessed on the train. It's about creating space in the conversation so that people can really connect with each other.



Monologue on the train.

- ¹ What should I now say
- ² What else can I think of to say
- ³ endure silence
- ⁴ NOTHING is also okay

Here's the structure of an exercise for mindful communication that we practice in class:

Groups of two are formed.

One person talks, the other person just listens. It's possible to respond to what is being said with facial expressions, but there should be no verbal reactions.

As in normal conversation, eye contact should continue.

In addition to content, the listener can also pay attention to how something is said – particularly noting the voice, such as the emphasis, the melody of speech, the pitch and the timbre. While speaking, the speaker can also note the facial expressions and gestures of the other person.

After a while, about 5 minutes, the roles are reversed.

This is followed by a feedback round between the two people.

“What was observed, experienced?”

“Was it easy to listen to the other person?”

“What is it like for the speaker when the other person doesn't participate in the conversation?”

At the end, there is a group discussion about the experience.

The topic of conversation is variable. We usually use “What does happiness mean to me?” as the topic.

*It's helpful to remember at the beginning
of every communication with another person
that there is a Buddha inside each of us.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

Examples from the feedback round:

Response 1: "At some point I didn't know what to say. It was kind of embarrassing."

Moderator: "I didn't say you had to talk the entire time."

Response 1: "Yes, but it's difficult. You expect a response."

Moderator: "Why is it embarrassing to not say anything at times? Are we afraid of silence?"

Response 1: "It's nice to be able to just converse. You have the time to formulate your thoughts."

Response 2: "As there's no other input, the conversation can't unintentionally go in another direction."

Response 3: "It's exciting to listen really closely to what the other person has to say. You also learn something new."

Response 4: "And while just listening, you don't have to think about what to say in response."

Response 5: "It's much more relaxing!"

In another unit, we intensified the exercise a bit.

Again, one person speaks for a set time and the other listens.

Now, however, the person speaking should also pay attention to their own physical and emotional reactions. It's now about self-awareness. For example, about your own voice, the emphasis on what is said, the timbre, your own feelings when speaking etc. The listener now also pays attention to their own reactions. After the specified time has elapsed, the partners change roles. Then there is feedback again in groups of two, and later in the entire group.

In everyday life it's often the case that the same people always talk and others hardly ever get a chance to speak. Our fast-moving society doesn't make it easy for those who are more introverted or who require a longer time to establish a proper train of thought. Listening to the people who usually say very little can be insightful.

Mindful communication requires an attitude of interest and respect by all the participants. If the participants of the conversation also remain authentic and sincere, a deeper exchange can take place, which includes the heart level.

Primary literature used for the lessons

Thich Nhat Hanh (2013). *The Art of Communicating*. London: Rider.

Journal Notes

Mindful Communication

J. H.

6/15/17

Where: at home

What: mindful listening

I didn't meditate today, but a friend of mine told me something, and so I really listened consciously and didn't just wait for my turn to speak. He noticed that too, and he told me that he finds it pleasant to talk with me. And that's exactly the reason – because he has the feeling that I'm really interested in what he's saying. This kind of feedback naturally offers one positive validation.

N. S.

5/1/19

I've been trying to communicate mindfully since the last seminar. It's harder for me than I thought – not to react immediately to what is being said, with my own stories, thoughts and ideas. I think you have to pay attention again and again and then gradually add in the impressions of voice and body language.

01.05.19

Ich habe seit dem letzten Seminar versucht achtsam zu kommunizieren. Es fällt mir schwerer als gedacht nicht sofort mit eigenen Geschichten, Gedanken und Ideen auf das Gesagte zu reagieren. Ich denke dafür muss man immer wieder darauf achten und dann nach und nach die Eindrücke von Stimme und Körpersprache hinzunehmen.

03.05.19

Die heutige Meditation war wie ein ankommen, heimkommen, zuhieden werden. Ich habe ca. 20 min eine Sitmeditation gemacht bei der ich mich nur auf meine Atmung konzentriert habe.

04.05.19

5-minütige Geräuschmeditation
Ich habe probiert innerhalb und außerhalb des Hauses Geräusche zu hören, zu identifizieren und einzuteilen. Spannend war wie es

S. B.**12/5/18****Where: meditation room in Paoso****What: mindful communication**

My communication partner begins to tell what happiness is for her. I notice how she slows down during the conversation and is actually waiting for an answer from me. I find it difficult not to answer – it seems rude to me. But on the other hand, it's also nice not to have to give an opinion on a topic. Because of the uninterrupted communication, it's easy for me to follow her facial expressions when she says something that excites her, or rather less so.

S. Z.**Mindful listening****Time: approx. 15 min**

I'm aware that I'm someone who, when someone tells me something, has an inner urge to immediately make a contribution to it, without first letting the person really finish and process what they actually said.

Since I sometimes tend to talk a lot, I'm afraid that I might overwhelm people with it or not give them enough opportunity to speak, especially if someone is too shy to express themselves. Since I met with a friend today who had something to tell me, I wanted to try to listen attentively and focus on the content without responding right back.

I really have to admit that in the beginning I found it difficult not to say anything, because my girlfriend told me about the negative behavior of her friend – with whom I do not have a good relationship and therefore mostly keep my distance. So I found it hard not to comment on, which I managed, but on the other hand my facial features became more expressive than usual. I also noticed that my girlfriend's reaction to my silence led to her tell about it in much more detail. This made it easier for me to understand and interpret her point of view, because I also analyzed her facial expressions better than I usually do.

Since my girlfriend did not know about my "experiment", I only did the meditation for about the first 5 minutes. But I noticed that even after that I listened more intensively and talked less than usual.

Mindful listening**Time: approx. 8 min**

Today a friend of mine was very sad, so I visited her. I often noticed that many people in such a situation simply want to be understood or want to talk certain things from their soul, so I decided to just listen.

In the beginning it was difficult for me not to suggest improvements or solutions and to interrupt her, but when I noticed that she was slowly getting to the end of what she wanted to get off her chest, she asked me herself what I would suggest and what I thought about it. It made me realize how much understanding I would have lacked for the situation if I had not listened to the end and bombarded her directly with my suggestions. It also struck me that such behavior could give the impression that one wished to quickly dismiss the subject, or that I wasn't interested in her problem.