

Cuong Lu
Listening with Empathy
Part 1: "Listen with Your Body"
February 6, 2021



Dear friends, my name is Cuong Lu. I am the author of *The Buddha in Jail* and *Wait: A Love Letter to Those in Despair*. Welcome to my Dharma Talk series, "Listening with Empathy." First of all, I would like to invite you to listen to the sound of the bell with me. [Sound of a bell ringing three times.] I always follow my breathing when I listen to the sound of the bell. I learned that from my teacher Thich Nhat Hanh. When I'm breathing in, I know I'm breathing in. When I'm breathing out, I know I'm breathing out. So when I'm listening to the bell, I follow my breath and then come back to myself. I come back to my body because the breath is a part of my body. When I come back to my body, I feel at ease.

I have been practicing Buddhism for a very long time, and thanks to the practice of Buddhism, the practice of listening deeply, listening with empathy, I'm able to come back to my body. I'm able to discover my body is also the body of my teacher. My body is also the body of my father. This body is also the body of my mother. It's good! It's good to be your teacher, your father, your mother. You feel you are complete. You don't see yourself as an individual anymore. So when I practice breathing in and out and I come back to my body, I come back to myself. At the same time, I come back to my teacher and my ancestors.

The most wonderful thing is I discover when I come back to myself, I come back to your body also. My body is also your body. That's wonderful. That is such a wonderful discovery. I have discovered that I can be you. When I want, I can be you. I am you. So when I listen to you, I can listen as an outsider. I am not you. I may understand you but I don't understand you so deeply. I want to understand you deeply, I practice to be you. I am you like I am my teacher. When you look at me, you can see I am Thich Nhat Hanh. I am Cuong Lu, of course. But I'm also Thich Nhat Hanh.

When my mother was passing away, in 2004, I told her, "Mom, if you have to let go of this body, please let it go. It's okay. It's fine to let go of your body because your body is also my body. I will live for you." Thanks to that guidance she passed away so peacefully. Because I am my mother. I eat for you, I work for you, I smile for you, I breathe for you.

We are all interconnected; we inter-are. I am you. And when you suffer, I can feel your suffering, not only in you, I can feel the suffering in me too, when I applied the art of listening with empathy. It means you make use of insight. I have discovered that we all have that insight. This is so wonderful. It's not something you need to learn. I'm not here to teach you something. I'm here to remind you about your wisdom. You have the wisdom. You have the wisdom of nondiscrimination. You have that.



What is that, that wisdom of nondiscrimination? When we don't make use of our wisdom, we are caught by our illusion. All the time our thinking is producing illusions about yourself, about the other, about everything. About the past, about the future, and also about the now. The now can be an illusion.

When you're caught by an illusion, you listen and you may not understand the other. You might become angry because the person you're listening to is angry too, they are suffering. They are angry and saying something that hurts you. So you listen to her and you're angry, and you might do something that you will regret later on. After that you get angry and you hurt each other. So listening with empathy is not that kind of listening. Listening with empathy is listening with wisdom, with insight. And I repeat again, you have insight. When you are listening to me now, you may discover this; you say, "Wow, that's true, Cuong Lu, I have an insight, I have wisdom." And that's true, you have that.

I've been looking for the Buddha my whole life. I would like to share with you that I have found him. Finally, yes, I found the Buddha. It was not easy to find him, but I found him. My father passed away when I was 14 - 15 years old. I was so young when I lost my father. Somehow in my quest to find the Buddha I was looking for my father too. "Father, where are you? I need you. I need your guidance, I need your wisdom." And even now, sometimes I have a feeling, but now I know how to find my father. And now I know how to find the Buddha. Because I found the Buddha. I found the Buddha with wisdom. Do you know who the Buddha is? You are. The moment I discovered, "Wow, I have found you, Buddha!" was the moment I found *you*. I found you! You're the one who is listening to me. I found you and was so happy to be able to discover you. And you are there with very deep wisdom, the wisdom of nondiscrimination.

So every time I listen with empathy, I feel your pain, I feel suffering. Even when you are speaking from your suffering, from your pain, from your anger, I know that and I don't blame you. I don't blame you for saying unkind words to me because I know you're suffering. It's okay. I love you. For me, it's okay that you [act out when you] suffer. That is because I love you. When you love someone, you accept the other person, the other person's suffering; you don't say, "You have to be happy all the time." No, it's okay. Sometimes you suffer. I listen to you with empathy, recognize your suffering, and say, "Okay, my dear, my beloved one, you are suffering. That's okay. Sometimes I suffer too. Right now you're suffering." And I listen with empathy: I listen and I can feel your pain, your suffering, your frustration, your anger. And because I am you, I can feel all your frustration, all your anger. And I say to myself, "It's okay, my beloved one is suffering."



But my beloved one is a Buddha too. So my beloved one has the wisdom inside them too. And so, I listen to you with understanding, but also with deep confidence that you have the wisdom to overcome this suffering. That is a kind of support. Please try this practice with your beloved one. You sit there and you can feel her suffering, and at the same time, you have deep confidence in her. You will see how wonderful this support is for your beloved one.

But you might need some practical guidance to do the practice of listening with empathy. The first exercise I would like to offer to you is the exercise of going back to your breathing. Breathing in, you know you are breathing in; breathing out, you know you are breathing out. You keep coming back to your breathing. When you are back to your breathing, to your body, you will see your body is also the body of the other.

Thanks to the process of breathing, you can come back to your body through your real body. Not a body as a product of illusion, but your real body. And when you can come back to the real body, you get in touch with the real body, you get in touch with the body of the other person. And in that body, you feel her pain or suffering. And also in that body, you feel her wisdom. When you feel her suffering in your body you feel peaceful at the same time.

You know, suffering is only a problem when we don't see it. Because when we don't see suffering, it will destroy us. We will destroy ourselves. We will destroy the people around us. When you can come back to your body you feel the suffering of the other yourself.

The most wonderful thing you can do in this life is stop a fight. How do you stop a fight? By practicing listening deeply to the other. And how can you practice listening deeply to the other? You practice following your breath and breathing in and out to come back to yourself. Why? Because there is a wisdom in you, the wisdom of nondiscrimination. Because I know who you are. You know, I know who you are. You are the Buddha. I'm telling you a beautiful truth. You are the Buddha. You have the wisdom in you. Make use of your wisdom. Make use of wisdom to listen deeply to the other, listening with empathy, to help the other. And when you are helping the other, you are helping yourself. You think I'm helping you? No, no, no, no. When you're helping her, you're helping yourself. Your beloved one is yourself. I wish you good luck with your practice. Thank you very much for listening.