

ASCA News • March 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

With winter nearing its weary end we begin to look forward to the welcoming reprieve of spring and its budding promise of renewed life and vitality. Spring, as a hope-filled time of year, reminds us that though we have suffered in the past, especially during the winter chill of our childhood, that as adults we are very much in charge of planting and pruning our personal life gardens. Recovery, like a garden, requires not only removing and pulling out by the roots the decaying junk from the past but perhaps more importantly planting and cultivating the hopes for our future. A well-tended life garden incorporates a balance of removing and resolving as well as planting and stimulating growth. What will you try to remove and resolve this spring? What will you plant and cultivate in your life this spring?

On March 11th, THE MORRIS CENTER's Board of Directors will be gathering to continue its work on planning for the future. Organizations like people and gardens need to discard what is not helpful, and plan and plant for future possibilities. We should all be proud and thankful for our volunteer Board. They expend much time and energy in tending to our organization. To be on the Board is a work of dedication and caring. Without the Board's guiding influence we would not have for example the recent co-secretary training, the revised web site, telephone calls and emails answered daily, dreams for the future, etc. I want to thank the Board for the many hours of meetings, discussions and work. We are indeed in good and capable hands.



The following brief article continues our monthly series focused on pondering some of life's basic questions as we slowly move into a new millennium.

A Reflective Moment for March

Listening: The Answers Surround Us

by George Bilotta

We like to have answers. Answers provide comfort, direction and reassurance. Since our lives constantly change in a wide variety of ways, we need continuously to seek answers to old and newly emerging aspects of our lives. We look for answers within ourselves. We consult with friends and with professionals. We research and read. We review the lives of others. How did they deal with similar situations? How did they uncover answers for themselves?

Perhaps the most significant tool for unfolding answers to life's many daily questions, dilemmas and difficulties, and for us as survivors of childhood abuse focusing on our ongoing recovery and moving toward a quality of life full of

meaning and fulfillment, is our capacity to listen. All the answers concerning our lives surround us. These answers may be within us. They may be outside of us. They may come from others. They may come from the whisperings of nature, etc. When we purposefully increase our capacity to listen, we listen in different ways and in turn, we may gather answers to our questions. We may hear things that we never heard before or we may hear them with their subtle overtones and undertones.

We have ears, but we know that we often do not listen and that at times we do not even hear. There may be background noise in our lives. We may be preoccupied. We may pretend to listen because we do not want to hear or we think that we already know the answer(s). Our pride sometimes gets in our way. At other times our arrogance hinders our ability to listen. In part, to listen involves a desire to hear, to purposefully cup one's ear to hear more clearly. To listen is to move closer to the source. In moving closer, in trying to increase our capacity to listen, there is a belief that one can learn; that there is something to gain from the source that is speaking directly or indirectly to us. We welcome, open ourselves and draw closely for maximum receptivity and listening. We quiet ourselves. We are all ears. We assume a stance of attentiveness, gentleness and humility. We have consciously decided to listen, instead of just pretending to hear.

How do we cultivate ears to hear and to listen? What blocks us from listening? What aids us in increasing our capacity to listen? One way to cultivate ears to hear for receptive listening is first to decide that I want to increase my capacity to listen, that I want to try to make listening a priority. Within this simple framework I can ask myself and in turn remind myself several times a day, how am I trying to listen? How am I going about cultivating my skill to listen today?

I might try developing simple and easy exercises like taking a moment to listen to my heart beating, to my lungs breathing. I might add trying to listen to the various parts of my body. What are they saying to me? I might try just sitting and listening patiently to every different sound that comes my way. I might try to differentiate the various sounds and nuances. I might select a few people everyday with the intention of trying to listen instead of just hearing these people. Listening to different people with their various personalities and ways of expressing themselves will increase my range of listening by raising my tolerance and appreciation for the different ways people try to express themselves. During an ASCA meeting, I might try listening to a person's share not as it effects me but rather how the share is effecting the sharer.

As I try to cultivate ears to hear for listening, it might be helpful to ask myself - what blocks me from listening? Obviously each of us uses selective hearing at times. What is my leaning and predisposition toward selective listening? What seems to be the major obstacles that I face in trying to listen? When I can acknowledge my blocks and obstacles to hearing, to listening, then I can creatively try to minimize and decrease their effects. However, if I never uncover my blocks and obstacles they will continue to plague and limit my ability to increase my capacity to hear, to listen. In many ways I will become deaf to the whispers that surround my life that often provide answers, directions and comfort.

Finally, it might also be helpful to understand what actually aids me in increasing my capacity to hear, to listen. What are the optimum conditions that permit me to

listen? By understanding what helps me to listen, which might be somewhat different than what helps another person to listen, I can plan and practice increasing these optimum conditions for listening. For example, I might discover that I listen best when I am unhurried, when I have given myself over to the task of listening rather than trying to do something else or be someplace else. I might surprise myself with learning that I can increase my listening just by clarifying to myself that I am now going to listen to ... This focusing is like purposefully cupping my ear to hear, to listen. Listening is an activity of intention. It is not a passive activity like hearing.

If we want to uncover the answers to our lives increasing our capacity to listen will greatly aid us in opening ourselves up to the answers that surround us.



Rotation C Topic:

Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for March

Trust: Only If They Cherish

Life is miserable without trust, without relying upon others. Many survivors of childhood abuse often comment that they are reluctant to trust others. For many survivors who have been hurt and harmed by people in positions of trust when they were children, trusting others as adults is often difficult, scary and anxiety provoking. From one perspective, the problem is not so much that we lack the ability to trust. Rather the problem seems to be that we want to trust certain people that are unworthy of our trust, that are untrustworthy, that are incapable of cherishing our trust.

Anyone who purposefully (or consistently but unintentionally) hurts, wounds, harms, abuses, wrongs, assaults, betrays, neglects, injures, etc., us, is unworthy of our trust. It would be a mistake to place our trust in them. They simply are incapable of handling our trust. It is a simple fact. Though we might want to trust them, though we might want to give them another chance, their behavior clearly demonstrates that they are incapable of cherishing our trust.

Trust is a type of investment in others. Being wise, prudent and using some common sense is helpful. Assessing in a practical way whether a person is capable, worthy and can cherish our trust is a prudent thing to do. If they cannot honor our trust and even though we may want to trust them, we should not trust them. When a big Mack truck is barreling down the street and even though there is a red light for the truck to stop, it might be prudent to wait and see if the truck stops before walking across the street. Likewise with trust, we do not need to invest substantial trust in someone until we know and are assured that they will respect and hold dearly our trust.

Trust is not an all or nothing entity. We can test the waters by giving a person a little trust. If they handle and cherish our trust then we can invest a little more trust in them. If they do not respect our little bit of trust, then we can withdraw the trust with minimal effect on us. We often come across the saying that people should earn our trust. That is we should be able to ascertain that they can handle some measure of our trust before increasing our level of trust with them. Incremental trust can be a helpful way of taking reasonable and prudent risks. Trust is important in our lives. We need not fear trust, we need just to be wise and prudent with whom

we invest our trust. Not everyone is capable of cherishing our trust.

Questions:

What has your experience of trusting others been like?

How do you place trust in others who are unworthy of your trust?

How can you increase your wisdom and prudence about assessing the trustworthiness of others? What are some typical signs that point to the untrustworthiness of others?

What are some typical signs that suggest that a person is capable of receiving more of your trust?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Relevancy of Ongoing Education During Regular ASCA Meetings

Within the Co-Secretaries ASCA Meeting Format manual which contains the script, directions, suggestions and materials to operate ASCA meetings, there is the suggestion that following the announcements that the meeting spend a few moments on what we call Ongoing Education. Some meetings conduct Ongoing Education at almost every meeting. Other meetings tend not to include this aspect in their meetings.

We encourage spending a few moments at every meeting on Ongoing Education for a variety of reasons. First, a well-educated ASCA meeting membership ensures healthy meetings, increases safety and adds to an atmosphere of support and respect. Second, new participants join a group periodically and they need to be educated about the various dynamics of an ASCA meeting along with the rationale behind why ASCA meetings are organized and run in specific ways. Participants tend to violate our guidelines and the spirit of the ASCA philosophy less when they have a thorough understanding of ASCA ways and procedures.

Third, during Ongoing Education moments Co-Secretaries have the opportunity to clarify and to be pre-emptive about an unhealthy or troubling dynamic that they may see emerging within a meeting. For example, a newcomer may be bordering on violating the cross-talk guideline. The Co-Secretaries might use the Ongoing Education moment to discuss what cross-talk is all about. Fourth, established meetings might tend to become a little sloppy in observing certain guidelines. This may result in inviting confusion and trouble.

Finally, continually reviewing various aspects of the ASCA meeting can be reassuring to the participants. When Co-Secretaries are perceived as being helpful, on top of things and thoughtful about what is going on in a meeting, members, especially the new members of a group, tend to feel reassured, secure and safe.

The bottom-line is that it can be most helpful to an ASCA meeting to use a few minutes at every meeting to discuss various aspects of the ASCA meeting.



Poetry

BEATING MY BONES OUT IN THE OPEN

When I was born, I inhaled the beat
The sound of bongos on the ethers
I was teething on "On The Road"
I grew up with rhythm embodied in me
Wanting to bust out but thwarted severely
I had to hold back, pretend not to see
Pretend not to be me, holding the sacred within me dearly
I pretended forever, forgot who I was.

Stopped listening, stopped feeling, took orders really well
But the beat kept beating, building up pressure
Against expectations, projections of others
Until the day I couldn't hold back
The rope got too taut, there was no more slack
Chaos erupted and spat in my eye
Rocket explosions littered the sky
I lost all sense of sanity, spoke nothing but profanity.

I wrote and wrote and tore up pages
The beat was spurting, I was hurting
Until I resolved to live the pain
Beating my bones out in the open
No more running for cover of shade
No more honoring of outdated contracts
That shouldn't ever've been made
It's a bucking bronco now I'm riding.

I'm out of the gate, there'll be no more hiding
Past the point of diminishing returns
Are tenfold gains where no pain remains
Learning to love life is nothing more
Then forgetting to hate life so much
So lick your wounds and come out fighting
Listen up, the beat's all around you
Stand fast and breathe, the beat has found you.

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Co-Secretary Update

Any updates for current Co-Secretaries of ASCA meetings are included in

this section of the ASCA News. Currently, we forward a hardcopy of the ASCA News to all the meetings. A Co-Secretary or some designated person from the meeting should be duplicating and distributing the ASCA News to the meeting membership.

1. If there are changes in co-secretary assignments, please let me know. Also if co-secretaries have a change in address or telephone number, please send me these changes. Finally, if as a co-secretary you have e-mail, would you please e-mail me at georgebilotta@cs.com so I can verify and have your e-mail. You can also contact me at 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020, 508.835.6054.



Observations, Questions, Comments!

If you have any observations, questions and/or comments that you want to share concerning ASCA and THE MORRIS CENTER, George Bilotta, welcomes your inquiries, phone: 508.835.6054, e-mail: georgebilotta@cs.com. If you would like to contribute a poem, story, article, etc. to our **ASCA News** please contact us.