

# Post-Crescent Interview

With Peter Hwosch

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Unedited version

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*In your words, what is compassionate listening, and why is it something that needs to be taught or re-taught, as it were?*

Simply put, everyone really needs to be heard.

Most of the time we do not truly listen, not deeply, not without judgment, with an open mind, with an open heart, with a genuine desire to not only hear, but feel what is being said. This is even more likely when we are confronted by anger, pain, the heat of passion, points of view we do not hold, or even find abhorrent...

Gene Knudsen Hoffman, a Quaker activist and Compassionate Listening pioneer, says,  
“An enemy is one whose story we have not heard”.  
another from her is “At the heart of every act of violence, is an unhealed wound”.

What do these statements mean to you?

When might you have felt really deeply heard, particularly when you have been in emotional stress or pain?  
What shifted in you as a result?

Did being heard, felt and understood, with empathy, compassion and even love or understanding bring a sense of relief, relax you a bit, perhaps calm you to where you could regain some center of balance?

Did releasing the stress through letting it flow from your body, mind and heart to someone you felt would hold your pain in the trust it was given help to bring perspective, or perhaps help you to approach the situation from a calmer place of deeper awareness or wisdom?

Most conflict in the world, whether within ones self, with close family or friends, in work environments, or communities, within national debates or between nations states is based on not truly listening to the underlying needs and concerns of those with whom the conflicts are with. The root of all actions we find difficult to deal with boil down to pain and fear.

Pain and Fear.

These are very challenging emotions to open to, particularly if we are in some way entangled or involved.

Why is it so difficult to listen to people we disagree with?

Why is this?

Conflict is an opportunity.

It is an opportunity to bring intimacy into relationships, and to deepen ones own understanding of self and others, of preconceptions and stereo types. It brings opportunities to find the creative third way, for solutions to rise from understanding the needs of everyone involved. Without all concerned parties at the table, allowed to have their needs truly heard, the creativity needed for solutions will miss critical components leaving voices unheard and unaddressed. What comes are unsustainable solutions because some interests are not given consideration and will, (if not immediately, over time), resurface and continue the cycles of violence or conflict.

On the global scene for instance, the most effective formula for producing terrorists is to isolate a group of people and give them no hope, and no voice.

No hope and no voice.

What alternatives are left them to be heard, to be seen, to have attention brought to their unaddressed needs?

There are some avenues of course, but how many of us have the depth and wisdom to be Gandhi's, Martin Luther Kings, or Nelson Mandela's?

Compassionate Listening starts foundationally. Initially we are not solving conflicts. We are simply listening to one another to understand and feel, not fix.

How can I sit with you, learn to put my opinions and beliefs to the side, (not to give them up), long enough to open my heart and mind, to hear what you feel and think, without challenging, judging or fixing? What does this require of me? This is where Compassionate Listening begins, within each of us, our own ability to sit in the fire of our own judgment, past pain, guilt, and wounding, AND, recognize these same histories in others, embedded in the struggles they may be lashing out with.

How can I notice where and how I get triggered by what you may say, and still stay present, still be open, still genuinely want to understand and get what your experience is.

Can I let silence happen?

Can I allow you to really go deep into your point of view and experience without interruption, discussion or debate? Can I ask opening questions that invite you to go deeper? Can I reflect what I heard in the form of strategic inquiry, so you feel and trust I heard and understood you, so you have an opportunity to revise or add to your story, and even perhaps hear your own point of view come back to you, without aggression, in a way that could ultimately deepen your own understanding of your positions, preconceptions and other influences we are often not aware of within or own conditioning?

this is a lifetime of awareness and can only deepen. We never "arrive", but the journey gets calmer, clearer and more empowering to know we can navigate conflict in all it's pain and emotional charge. This is what the world cries for, has always cried for, and now simply must come to if we are to survive into the new century of challenges facing an ever shrinking and interconnected planet.

***Give me your background with the program.***

I had a recording studio in San Francisco when I was first aware of the project through being approached to accompany a CL delegation to Israel, the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West bank to produce a film, which we made called "Children of Abraham" (screening at the Appleton library on Sunday Jan 25th). This experience changed my relationship and conceptions of right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust etc. I was shattered and awakened to the deeper understanding that everyone is in pain, everyone is suffering, everyone has a story that led them to their points of view, and everyone has gifts.

Everyone.

I recognized that if I had lived any of these lives, I might share their points of view.

This was a very deeply humbling experience that has challenged me every day since, and has left me with a new relationship to conflict. My activism up to this point was based on rage, "fighting injustice" as I framed it. I fought against issues. Fighting for peace is as oxymoron as it gets... Now I work to support positive change, for things not against things, for reconciliation, for ways that makes old behavior obsolete...

Einstein said one must rise above the level of the problem to see a solution.

I can now recognize, with out exception, that everyone is in pain and everyone is afraid, and some do not know what to do with this suffering but to lash out in anger and frustration. A first step is to give the gift of listening.

Without being at all a religiously oriented project or practice, it has become, for me, as much a spiritual practice

as anything I could have been challenged by. Every spiritual tradition speaks to the core practices of this work. All can lay claim to this practice. None of this is going to be particularly new to anyone who has tried to live a thoughtful life. Implementing and integrating this practice into everyday life, or in to the global events around us, is easier said or understood intellectually than truly practiced. It is at times the most difficult thing I have ever tried to do...

***Can you offer examples of Compassionate Listening at work and of the lack of Compassionate Listening.***

Please visit [www.compassionatelistening.org](http://www.compassionatelistening.org) for many projects where this work is employed. This Project has had it's roots in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, German Jewish reconciliation and others.

I am bringing this work to the Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp in the Balkans, a project near and dear to my heart. We offer one and two day workshops, and then intensive trainings for folks who really want to go deeper or be certified to facilitate these workshops. This question is addressed through out my rambling responses.

As far as evidence of where it is lacking, watch the news, any news cast, and look through the lens I am speaking about. This is simply put a world that does not listen to one another...

How can learning compassionate listening at create social change globally?

How could it not? My motto is think globally, act locally, (or where ever you are).

We can not offer anyone anything we do not hold for ourselves. This goes for love, or peace, or anything of this nature... If I am not willing to listen to those I am in disagreement with, I am not going to understand the system at play, I will miss huge parts of any issue, there will be far less creativity, I am likely to be wrong as often as I am write about what course of action to take or at least benefit by the tempering of diverse opinions, extremism is rarely a good idea etc etc etc... If leaders in positions of power had this orientation, things would be a lot different in the world. And as far as I am concerned, where the people lead, the leaders will follow...

I was floored by a statement that Robert McNamara made in the film, "The Fog Of War", where he spoke about when he went to Vietnam 10 years after the fall of Saigon and met with the North Vietnamese leadership. After 2 days of listening to each other he declared that if he had had those discussions in the 60's there would never have been a US intervention or war in Vietnam.

Listening is fundamental to understanding. Understanding is the basis for relationship.

Relationship is how we come to know each other beyond our stereotypical or prejudiced views. As simple or basic as this sounds, this IS the real foundational key to world peace, not to mention peace around the dinner table... This is one of many kinds of awareness that IS changing the world.

***How does the Toolbox Project fit into all this?***

The Toolbox Project is a distinct and separate project, 501-c3, as are many other projects I am deeply involved in such as Reuniting America, and my work in the Balkans to name a few. They are all incredible projects serving deep needs with heart and vision. See the attachments for more info, and please visit my website, ([www.hwosch.com](http://www.hwosch.com)), for info on the Balkans Project. For that matter, films about all of them are available from if you have interest, as well as the CL films in the Middle East.

I can say my experience is tested and honed with CL in all of these programs, and to me they are all rooted deeply in the same soil. Deep listening and getting more comfortable with navigating conflict in general serves me in my engagement with each, and helps me with guiding my part of their development. For all, they started with me making either short or longer format films to promote and articulate their work to a broader audience.