

## A New Way of Listening

Over the Summer I attended the annual two week Llysfasi Spirituality Workshop ([www.llysfasi-spirituality-workshop.org.uk](http://www.llysfasi-spirituality-workshop.org.uk)), learning how to accompany people on their spiritual journey. The workshop is so named because it was started, by Gerry Hughes SJ in 1985, at Llysfasi in Wales. I enjoyed learning practising Spiritual Direction and taking time to be on retreat myself.

One of the most moving parts, and very relevant to our Cursillo community, was my first experience of “Contemplative Listening Groups.”

We were told to do this, as a way of supporting one another, and wondered what we were letting ourselves in for! As a group of six we were told to be silent together for an hour, with each talking in turn when they felt ready. The listening was to be attentive (and thus active) but silent: without interruption or comment – even for clarification. After each talk we held silence, to honour what we had heard and to reflect on it. At the end, after this silence, we just left.

I found this transformative. To listen to someone without any thought of making a response takes listening to a deeper level. To be listened to with such attention is a precious experience, and I discovered a new freedom in speaking and in listening. Also it was extraordinary how I became more connected with my own thoughts and feelings as I listened to myself talk; and how a bigger picture grew through the telling of all the stories. This often answered some question that I had – whether or not I had formed or expressed it.

Once upon a time, I used to see my primary role in a conversation as problem solver or advice giver. So as I moved into spiritual direction I sought to listen more and to advise less. My experience at the workshop has been to rediscover the value of silence, and so to start from the other end of the spectrum: to be silent with someone unless there is a helpful need to say something!

During the phase when we were accompanying others who were on retreat we used again the model of the Contemplative Listening Group for supervision. That is, in a group of three, we listened to one another in turn as we described the feelings that had been evoked in us (and particularly any problematic ones) while we had been a companion earlier in the day. We used the final quarter of an hour to note insights and to share wisdom about any problems raised. This was fascinating, because we usually found common ground in our stories that made it clear what we needed to discuss or to develop.

I have never understood before, nor passed on, the way in which some Cursillo publications describe a way of doing Group Reunions silently as above. This was because it was too far from my own experience to be credible to me.

I challenge you to try experimenting in your own Group Reunion by listening silently to each talk about Piety, Study, and Action. Then at the very end see what needs to be done – perhaps some discussion of issues that were common to several stories, or prayer.

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Link to my earlier notes on Group Reunions:  
<http://dawntreader.blogharbor.com/files/groupreunionquiderh.pdf>

Link to my fuller write up of the Llysfasi Workshop 2007:  
<http://dawntreader.blogharbor.com/blog/archives/2007/9/21/3244076.html>