Listening (pub. 1/15/13)

There are many notes played in a piece of music. You may have hummed the melody to a song for years but never known the words.

 Don’t let that be true about your coupling. Listening is truly an overlooked art in our society but it must be attended to in your relationship. It’s really the only way you will survive.

 An old guy once told me, “you gotta have understanding.” And you only gain understanding through listening.

 A suggestion is to take the long view of your relationship. A committed relationship between a man and a woman is as old as Adam and Eve. Some say its tougher these days, I don’t know. I know we’ve got more opportunity and maybe more selfishness to go with it.

 But I do know that a man committed to a woman and a woman committed to a man forms the strength and security of a family that is necessary for the survival of the species. And we can establish this going back thousands of years. So I’m talking about the long view. Not just the aggravation of last weekend.

 And men and women are different. I state the obvious but sometimes we forget. Listening is a way to cross that divide, to reconcile the differences.

 Going back to the issue of time, listening to the other can be frustrating. But it is a basic component of maturity to be able to delay gratification and work for the greater good.

 The latest in brain science says that our listening affects the “shape” of our brain. The more listeners understand what a speaker is saying, the more closely their brain responses mirror the speaker’s brain responses. We begin to anticipate where the conversation is going.

Then we have two tightly coupled brains communicating well. It’s that feeling you get that you just click with someone. It’s almost visceral. You can finish their sentences. You just know you’re on the same wave.

Too often we’re selfish or worse, listening to somebody else. If he’s listening to a bunch of selfish fellows and she’s listening to a hurt or bitter girlfriend then what is their brain resembling? You can’t replace or imitate the value of time spent together in conversation. And again, it can be work.

Step back and see the beauty of the relationship. Remember with gratitude those positive things that have brought you to this moment. Look past those hurts that in the moment seemed big but over the stretch of time are inconsequential. Relative to the importance of your relationship the miscues are small.

Can you reconcile yourself to the truth of where your relationship is today? Listening can be the tool to better understand, to reach out, and to grow closer. Listening can literally move us toward being of the same mind, a great strength of a couple.

Beautiful music, that’s where we’re headed; giving each note its due, each instrument in the band a voice. Create harmony in your coupling by listening.