

Vol.  
5/2013  
Issue 1

Listening Education



Editor: Erica J. Lamm  
International Listening Association

## **Listening Education**

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## **Editorial Policy**

*Listening Education* aims to enhance the practice in listening education by providing a wide range of research and practical information through the publication of papers concerned with the description of methods for teaching listening in primary, secondary, and post secondary education and with the analysis of the pertaining research. This online journal will recognize that many disciplines – education, communication science, psychology, sociology, anthropology, - have important contributions to make to the achievement of its goals, and the Editors welcome contributions from them. The online-journal invites papers which offer descriptions of classroom practice, empirical research, and reviews of high quality.

The papers are searchable in three categories:

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- b. Reviews of material and textbooks suggested for teaching listening

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- Teaching listening: This is how to teach listening in the classroom
- Review of teaching material

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**Title:** The “Champagne Game”

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**Grade level:** Undergraduate; Graduate; Adult Education; General

**Keywords:** Nonverbal expression and impression, self-perception; nonverbal communication and the expression of emotion

#### Listening Practice:

**Course title:** Basic Listening Course, Interpersonal Communication

**Course level:** Beginning, Introductory

**Goals:** Understand the source of nonverbal expression, illustrate the feedback loop from nonverbal expression to self-perception and the loop from self-perception to the perception of others

**Type / Aspect of listening in focus:** nonverbal communication in listening, voice

#### Description:

1. Make or find a space which is large enough for the group to circle and walk about. Density is part of the challenge, so it is ok when space is limited and participants have to make sure that they both walk comfortably and do not bump into each other.
2. Ask the group to start moving and to avoid stepping on each other's feet.
  - a) WHILE they are walking, ask them to constantly murmur “champagne” (if alcohol is an issue replace by a different polysyllabic word which contains vowels, preferably some variety of “a”).
  - b) AT THE SAME TIME ask them to let their heads down. (Do not ask them to avoid eye contact or anything, it is sufficient to ask them to turn the head towards the own chest. This move changes the way the vocal cords work).
3. Let the group walk around for about 2 minutes. Then stop.
4. Ask the group to start moving again as in 2, but with a change in 2b: Ask the group to raise their heads straight up and to walk around with the same constant murmur of “champagne” or an anti-alcoholic equivalent. Do this again for 2 minutes.
5. Stop and debrief.

This activity is suitable for groups of any size.

#### Preparation and Procedures:

No special preparation; space for a group to walk around with the challenge to not step on each other's feet and to not bump into each other. Imagine the density of a crowd in the entrance area of a department store.

#### Tips and Debriefing:

The exercise is not really spectacular, but when people go through it, they often find

a) that when they perform the exercise heads down ...

... their own voice sounds dull, depressed, not communicative

... their murmur is monotonous, noncreative, feels odd

... their compressed voice from the first round causes / gradually activates a feeling of being depressed and “low”, and somehow down – no matter what their mood was just a moment ago (therefore, it is important that the exercise ends with the heads up version)

... they perceive the others as being intrusive in their personal space, as not interesting, maybe hostile, social density is kind of uncomfortable

b) that when they perform the exercise heads up ...

... their voices sound light and clear, interesting, outgoing, and friendly

... their vocal expression of ever the same word gains in variation, is changing to be fun, expressive, creative, ...

... as they hear their open and expressive voice they attach a different set of emotions, they and feel lighter, more outgoing and open for new experience and the others in the group

### **What we learn and can teach:**

Role of Nonverbal Communication in Communication / Listening

Nonverbal expression contains information encoded in voice characteristics; the reactions have an impact in how we perceive the other person AND ourselves

Theories of emotion (cf. Zimbardo & Gerrig, Psychology and Life, Pearson Textbook, any edition)

e.g., James-Lange Theory of Emotion: We are sad because we cry

e.g., Lazarus theory of cognitive emotion evaluation: We hear our voices which are low and dull and therefore we evaluate our inner situation / mood as being low and dull. In search of a cause or a reason for this low feeling, we often extrapolate that it is the others who make us feel awkward. Therefore: Perception of emotion in others might have a cause in the way in which we send nonverbal information as we speak.

An easy exercise which can be used as a point of departure for more in-depth discussion of the effects of voice, nonverbals, communication and perception of emotion in listening situations

**Assessment:** None

**Title:** Metacognitive Instruction to Support Listening Comprehension in the FL Classroom

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**Grade level:** Secondary School, G 7-12, (ISCED Level 2, ISCED Level 3)

**Keywords:** Listening, Listening Comprehension, ESL, Metacognitive Instruction

### **Listening Practice:**

**Course title:** Listening Comprehension

**Course level:** advanced learners, possibly also intermediate learners

**Goals:** Students will use of metacognitive processes to develop their listening skills. They will reflect upon their own listening behavior, learn and use various listening strategies which are particularly helpful when studying a second language.

**Type / Aspect of listening in focus:** metacognition, interactive listening, active listening, listening strategies

#### **Description:**

“Metacognition results in critical but healthy reflection and evaluation of thinking that may result in making specific changes in how learning is managed, and in the strategies chosen for this purpose [...]” (Anderson, 2009, p. 99). Metacognitive instruction can, therefore, help the students to reflect upon their learning behavior. Metacognitive instruction enables students to consciously decide upon how they can improve their listening skills.

The following activity is designed for teaching listening comprehension in a Foreign Language classroom. It is a method based on the study of Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), which combines a pedagogical task sequence with “underlying metacognitive processes” (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). This method was tested in a small-scale study and was very successful for facilitating foreign language listening comprehension (Güler & Siddiqui, 2012). Both overall comprehension and deep processing will increase.

#### **Preparation:**

Select a suitable text or song for the listening comprehension activity. It is advisable to choose an authentic and clear spoken version of the text. Prepare a worksheet with a table, consisting of five rows. Title the first row with expectation, the second row with “1<sup>st</sup> Listen”, the third line with “2<sup>nd</sup> Listen”, the fourth line with “3<sup>rd</sup> Listen” and the last line with “Self-reflection”. Leave space at the top of the worksheet for the topic and date for the students to fill in (see Appendix). This activity is designed for a 45 minute lesson including an optional

assessment test at the end. The time can vary, depending on duration of the audio sequence.

### **Didactic Procedure:**

Step 1: Give the students the topic and title of the text. Ask them to write down their expectations in the first row, including any vocabulary and information associated with the topic. The students make predictions with the help of their prior knowledge about the topic and direct their attention to what they think they might hear. (3min)

Step 2: Let the students listen to the text for the first time. Tell the students to write down all the information they are able to understand while listening. Also, ask them to tick off their expectations at the same time. Let the students finish off their notes after the first listen. (5min)

Step 3: Ask your students to work in pairs and compare their information. Tell them to focus on parts which they understood differently and then try to locate these passages on the audio sequence. (5min)

Step 4: Play the text for the second time. Instruct the students to pay special attention to the parts of the text they have just identified as problematic. Additionally, they should add newly comprehended information in the “2<sup>nd</sup> listen” row on their worksheet. (5min)

Step 5: Engage the students in a class discussion and collect the main ideas of the text to ensure an overall understanding of the story. Also, discuss the listening strategies the students have used to understand the content. This can include the meaning of whole parts of the text as well as the meaning of specific words. (5min)

Step 6: Play the text for the third time. The students can use this phase as a verification of their comprehension and as a chance to catch up with the information discussed in the previous step that they might have missed out earlier. (5min)

Step 7: Tell the students to use the last section for their self- reflection. Students should reflect upon their listening behavior and note 1-2 listening strategies they would like to try out the next time. (3min)

**Tips and Debriefing:** It is recommended to have the seven-step- instruction visible for the students before and throughout the activity, either in form of a worksheet or on slides. Also make sure that the instruction presented is kept brief and simple.

It is not only important to implement the metacognitive strategies in an activity but also to point them out explicitly to the students and discuss further possibilities where these strategies can be applied.

**Assessment:** The students will complete an assessment in form of a multiple- choice in order to test their comprehension of the text. In addition, the classical multiple-choice questions, which test the factual knowledge, the students also had to answer assertion-reason questions. The latter format is more complex and is designed for assessing a higher level of learning.



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- Vandergrift, L. & Tafaghodtari, M. H., (2010). Teaching students how to listen does make a difference: An empirical study. *Language Learning*, 60, 470-497.

**Teaching Listening in the Classroom:** The Listening Way: Building bridges through engaged listening

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**Course Title:** The Listening Way: building bridges through engaged listening

**Course Level:** General (teens through adults)

**Goals:** Students will (1) observe and learn the importance of intentional and purposeful acts of listening when engaged in communication with others, (2) develop their ability to understand and utilize cooperative methods of communication, (3) understand listening as an active and empathic practice, and (4) understand the power of listening in building communication bridges

**Type/Aspect of listening in focus:** This teaching exercise uses modeling and information sharing to engage students in using listening to build bridges with others.

**Description:**

"Many a man would rather you heard his story than granted his request." – Phillip Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield

Much of the conflict in the world today results from the inability of people with different opinions to listen thoughtfully to one another in an effort to find common ground. Each person has a different worldview and beliefs about events, politics, family and lifestyle both in their immediate environment and the world around him or her. Because of preconceived beliefs and growing tribal polarization, many individuals want to have their particular points of view verified and embraced by others. Often time, conversations become one-way dialogues wherein a person has already made up their mind about an issue and is merely defending a position with the end desire being to convert the other party. In this case, the tools of persuasion used to convince others may, in fact, fuel increased disagreement and lead to unintended consequences. This training conveys techniques of advocacy which use listening as a key component and demonstrates how listening can be a major component of advocacy among those who have differing opinions.

Proactive listening is the key to being in the moment, overcoming our preconceived ideas and opening avenues of higher communication. People constantly face the frustration of not getting along with family, friends and strangers (Conklin, 2005). Differing opinions lead to conflict and frustration, initiating cycles of difficulty in addressing conflict, which lead to greater failures to create constructive means of moving beyond disagreement, leading to greater conflict and frustration. Thus when we confront novel and complex problems in our

disagreements we continually persist in applying inappropriate methods and tools to resolve them (Conklin, 2005).

While it is extremely important to engage in the "big" issues that require our mutual attention, we experience difficulty addressing them rationally. Often the problems we want to talk about are ill-structured and involve evolving sets of interlocking issues and constraints. When we try to talk about issues we disagree about, we inevitably come up against different core values and beliefs. This training addresses non-coercive belief modification; specifically, it describes methods to use in talking to family, friends and strangers about those difficult topics and opinions that are in greatest need of discussion.

Resistance to belief modification in this model involves psychological issues and communication acts. Resistance incorporating communication acts can be affected by emotional attachment, attachment to positions and beliefs, a lack of time to change positions, lack of trust in the source, and strength of present beliefs and life experiences. George Boeree when explaining the difficulty of persuading people says, "We have all sorts of preconceptions and prejudices" (Boeree, 1999, p. 92). While suggesting that there are barriers to adopting new opinions, he still believes that persuasion and advocacy are possible. The trainee attempting a meaningful engagement with another person with differing beliefs is required to (1) relate the material to the participant's life, (2) encourage increased control of his or her own life, (3) show the participant that alternatives are possible, (4) increase the freedom and number of choices available to the participant, (5) have the interest of improving conditions for the believer, and (6) have the goals of each side being served.

Tactics for opinion modification using listening involve building a shared context where the two people understand each other and can communicate clearly. Researchers in language acquisition talk about interactional listening, which relates to the use of questions and negotiations to build meaning (Luk, 1992). Communication studies have begun giving attention to the importance of listening in dialogues. Listening is a complex tool that can be approached in exacting ways—some forms of listening can be as challenging and effective as traditional argumentation methods. In other words, listening can be the means of achieving change in behavior and or belief systems; this training explores the specific use of one type of interactional listening in opening listeners to change.

Andrew Wolvin gives an overview of active listening that emphasizes the processes involved in the listening act. Some of the important processes to remember when listening are to (1) create space, (2) identify emotion, (3) sidestep one's own fear and anger, (4) remember focus, (5) show respect, (6) honor the speaker's identity, and (7) ask questions to lower the tension and build rapport (Coakley & Wolvin, 1993).

Listening always serves a role in communications because aspects like researching, emotional connection, self discovery, and behavior transmission are required as part of communication. Communicating for the purpose of engaging with other people requires questioning, empathizing, and non-verbal communications. Throughout this training, we position listening as a valuable tool for building bridges in communication.

### **Preparation and Procedures:**

The following modules are designed to follow alternate order based on the learning environment, group and goals of the instructor. Classes that are more advanced in listening techniques and theory may benefit from a modified Module 1 or may focus solely on Module 2. A training designed for troubled youth might place Module 2 at the end or focus on it entirely. The ordering and emphasis given to the modules is also changeable based on the age range of the intended students.

#### Module 1: Class Preparation

Lead a discussion of listening in realistic and theoretical contexts. Draw attention to the communicative functions of listening in terms of differing opinions. The instructor may provide handouts or readings based on listening way concepts. Discuss active methods of listening in communicative interaction and functions of listening in building understanding.

#### Module 2: Conflict discussion (5-10 minutes)

Lead discussion about conflict situations. Draw out particular examples of conflict situations. Ask questions about causes of failure in having difficult conversations; failure in communication results when individuals cannot agree on the framework and definitions they are discussing. Talk about why it is challenging to discuss difficult topics.

Put students in groups of 2 to 3. In each group have them come up with suggestions for ways to get around the problem of failure when talking about difficult topics.

#### Module 3: Exploring Listening (5-10 minutes)

Discuss three rules to remember to aid with difficult conversations:

- a) Don't proclaim your opinions when beginning conversations. Instead, start by asking a question and listening to the answer.
- b) Go into discussions with the intention of having a "learning conversation" through which both parties may be enlightened.
- c) Give your partner the opportunity to express his or her feelings and ideas, uninterrupted, and in full detail.

Prompt the students to think about the difficult topic and possible solutions; what would work to encourage disagreeing partners to be more open in discussions about the issue? How can we encourage others to be more open to new perspectives?

#### Module 4: Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Debrief the activity using the following discussion questions:

- a) What appears to be working/not working?
- b) What could be done better?

#### **Tips and Debriefing:**

The long-term goal of this training is to produce tools to increase individuals' communication skills and to build a healthier society through improved communications. In the model and the training described here, listening is an active tool that is as powerful traditional argumentation methods. The main goal of the interaction is to build a view of the commonly shared meaning both communication participants possess. Shared meaning can be identified and rapport can

be increased through improved listening (Lavery, 2007). The advocacy argument should not be the focus, but rather listening and finding shared meaning

**Assessment:**

This training operates through exploring the complexity and inter-penetration of listening during social interactions. For assessment, we need to determine how people embrace stereotypes or overcome stereotypes, and how people - and thereby cultures - can be divided and perhaps come together. Oral assessment takes place during debriefing at the end of training, during which the instructor can assess accuracy of student observations. A written survey is often used at the conclusion which captures students' self-assessments. Ideally an informal quiz may be given which will allow assessment and record keeping of training results. Assessments could be used with the same students for followup training sessions.

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Title           ***The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind***  
Author          Seth Horowitz

Publisher      Bloomsbury, NY, NY. 2012  
ISBN           978-1-60819-090-4

Dr. Seth Horowitz, a neuroscientist and research professor at Brown University, has written a comprehensive primer to expand our understanding of the role of sound. The breadth and depth of his experience in his chosen field of research will capture your attention. It is fascinating to read about someone who is so fully engaged in the work that they were put on earth to do. Clearly this is the case with Dr. Horowitz who has spent three decades of his life being fascinated by sounds.

This book is a bit challenging, dense and probably not for the casual reader. However, the author transmits a full force, over-the-top enthusiasm for everything audible. We learn a wide range of “fun facts” from why Muzak was created to manipulate our psyches; to the reason all of us hate the sound of a metal rake pulling across a slate surface. Or why all of us aging mortals might have an increase in paranoid thoughts when hearing inevitably declines in old age. But he does not rely on just a string of anecdotes to make his points; each chapter cites a panoply of additional credible research studies on the psychophysics of sound. If you want to ramp up your learning, pick up a copy of *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*.

As Horowitz illustrates the principles behind the process of hearing, I recalled that I once lived right next to a commuter train. I was amazed by my own ability to stop hearing the cars rumbling by at all hours of the day and night. How did I become habituated to such a loud and frequent noise? My guess is that many of us working in listening research actually know very little about our perceptions of sounds. Most of the coursework available through departments of speech and communication studies does not emphasize the science that explains how we hear. We may remember generally that the hertz (Hz) unit is used for measuring sound. And we might even recall that the term was coined after the German physicist who is credited with being the first to prove that sound travels in electromagnetic waves. Beyond this basic level, however, many of us probably know very little about how our aural apparatus functions.

Because many of the professionals who belong to the International Listening Association focus on voluntary efforts to perceive messages effectively, I suspect we might sometimes skip over learning more about the constant involuntary processing of sounds. Any basic

textbook in listening theory usually devotes only a few pages to the parts of the ear and the automatic nervous system.

Most of the best-selling books currently available on the topic of listening move past the anatomical aspects of hearing rather quickly and shift toward the meanings that are created in our minds. It struck me that so many of these fine texts feature a graphic or picture of an ear somewhere on the book jacket. Dr. Horowitz reminds us that an ear is “an organ that senses the changes in the pressure of molecules” (page 13). It seems like a technician’s description, but actually he waxes on poetically about the three small bones which vibrate in the opening to the cochlea (where the tiny hairs in our inner ears convert sound vibrations into nerve impulses). The experience of different sounds can have an enormous effect on us. Still, I’ll bet that many of us have only a passing acquaintance with issues related to auditory perception. Only in recent years have sessions at the annual ILA conference begun to address listening dysfunctions and disorders.

Reading *The Universal Sense* heightened my awareness of the physical characteristics of sound, in the variety of places that I inhabit. Reverberations across hard surfaces like walls and floors that carry music well can interfere with enjoying a good conversation. Sound can bounce around and create echoing noises that impair comprehension. Only a small change in the speech-to-noise ratio can shift us from understanding almost everything, to understanding almost nothing. These concepts and the language of “aural architecture” which refers to the experience of sound-in-space is a topic of interest to several ILA members that I have corresponded with recently. Reading Horowitz’s book would provide a good introduction on how the audible attributes of physical space contribute to our perceptions of the world around us.

I’m sure all of us who have taught an introductory class in human communication have tried to get across the idea of the role of prosody in speaking and listening. Just asking students to take two simple words and communicate vastly different messages is a great activity to share the lesson (e.g. “you won” said in shock as if you never thought in million years that your friend had any such abilities, or said to communicate that you join them in the spirit of joyful triumph).

Thus, Horowitz fills in a theoretical backdrop for this type of experiential education by explaining why we share this ability to interpret another person’s feelings by listening to their tone of voice as well as the variation in pitch, pacing and volume. He provides a full description of why it is not the content of what is said, but rather the production of the acoustics of how we speak that has both a conscious and subconscious effect. Although visual cues are vitally important to most of us, he concentrates his efforts on what he calls “the sonic world” and the processing of emotional speech prosody which is organized around chromatic intervals similar to the 12 part musical scale. He finds unique ways to show that the bulk of the meaning that anybody takes from our utterances is derived from our inflections and intonations. Now we can better appreciate why we will never mistake SIRI’s voice on our iPhone for a real live gal pal.

To illustrate his strong beliefs about the emotional impact of sound, he shared a story about consulting for a nationally prominent school for the blind. The administrators there hired him to help create a fire alarm system to evacuate the pupils. However, because they rely so



much on their sense of hearing, it could not cause them a huge amount of emotional upset. Until his interventions, the students had not been taking the expected steps during the loud drills. They had complained that the noise impaired their ability to think clearly. In this story, and so many others, he reminds us of that crucial link between what comes into our ears and how it triggers our feelings.

The book regales us with tales from his field and lab studies with bullfrogs (they make low pitches) and bats (they make high pitches). Horowitz even seems a bit wistful in mentioning the passing of one of his bat subjects, Melanie at age 16. The rest of us take cameras on our vacations but he carries little digital taping devices to solidify his memories. He and his wife once tried to capture some of the noises produced in and around the Eiffel Tower in Paris by whipping out several of their many hand-held recorders. In a post 9/11 world, the security staff wasn't buying their explanations that they were hard-core sound collectors. The nerdy couple almost went to a French jail for that adventure.

How does all of this information help people who teach classes or workshops on listening skills? My reading of several university level course syllabi on listening lead me to conclude that the process of hearing is not mentioned frequently nor even at all in the aggregated list of course objectives. Any mention of the physiological process of hearing was usually limited to learning to distinguish between the process of listening and hearing. That does not mean that I think that professors should list this text on the required reading list for an undergraduate class. It would work well as an optional recommended book for students with a strong background in the life sciences. Dr. Horowitz certainly demonstrates a passionate sense of inquiry as a researcher that might be inspiring for graduate students. Most likely, though, this book should find a place on the shelves of those of us that teach related coursework.

The detailed background the book provides can enrich instructors' descriptions of how our brains process sounds. After all, just sharing a few of his examples will enliven a classroom discussion. Mention that the reassuring sound of a cat purring sounds like being swarmed by angry bees when it is recorded and played back at an increased speed. Ask the students why it is that we can recognize the familiar footsteps of a friend or family member? Tell them about the U.S. government's track record in using loudspeakers to broadcast annoying music as a type of "psychological weapon" to end sit-ins, occupations, demonstrations and, even, drive gang members from street corners. Horowitz seems downright mystified about why the military does not make even more use of acoustic weaponry.

Seth Horowitz brings many years of professional experience to his argument that hearing should be privileged as the most important of our five senses. Although he never speaks of her directly, he seems to agree with Helen Keller's often reprinted quotation: "Blindness separates people from things; deafness separates people from people." Although many people who live in the deaf community might disagree, he further asserts that hearing is more important than sight in developing cognitive processes. His thesis made me recall childhood debates, with friends and siblings, about whether we would prefer to lose our hearing or sight. Dr. Horowitz makes the case that those of us who lose our vision make a better adjustment than those of us who have to learn to live with profound silence. Through constant references to nature (mammals all have eyelids but no "earlids"), he pushes his beliefs about the exalted value found in the ability to hear.



When I started reading the book, I wondered if Dr. Horowitz's work was somewhat solitary. But I learned that he has many collaborators across the globe, who describe themselves as "science nerds and audio geeks." In fact, he is a leader of an organized movement to investigate and inspire curiosity about how we hear the world around us. He and his collaborators are acoustic researchers, independent scholars and musicians affiliated with educational institutions and performing arts organizations (to learn more go to [www.justlistenproject.com](http://www.justlistenproject.com)). They hope that their discoveries will make learning about sound science fun for people of all ages. Horowitz also makes frequent references to his consulting work to show that he's not an out of touch elite academic, but rather someone with an enduring interest in the application of his knowledge to improve the quality of peoples' lives. He lets the reader know that he knows what sells consumer goods these days, mentioning that he coined the term "sonic branding" to provide the auditory version of a company's visual logo.

I think it is important to reemphasize my earlier caution that Horowitz occasionally delves a bit too far into scientific research for the typical reader. I suspect that each separate chapter might have evolved from his lecture notes from a full semester's coursework at his Ivy League institution. At times he sounds as if he is lapsing into a recitation of his more memorable field trips. Still, if you're willing to persevere, Horowitz provides a wonderful grounding in theories of aural processing and it is always accompanied by his authentic excitement. He has an unusual ability to explain complex information through analogies and has an ever-present sense of humor even noticeable in the footnotes.

I once met a young man who held a Ph.D. in acoustical science from one of the world's most prestigious universities. A prodigy, he had finished his doctorate at a young age and along the way began to study and consult to churches, particularly around the issues of sound carriage in chapels and cathedrals. He must have been listening to an inner voice as well, because after all that education, he packed up and went to seminary. He said he became a priest in part because he would be able to have the gift of spending so much time in those resonant caverns of worship. I always thought he was bit a bit of an odd duck and I don't think I really understood him until I encountered Seth Horowitz through the pages of his book. It seems incongruous to say that this book has been eye opening. Maybe I should say that this "good read" has encouraged me to tune in to subtle intonations that I might not have perceived before being alerted by this dedicated scholar.