



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces

October 2020 - Deep Listening

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The Welcome Mat

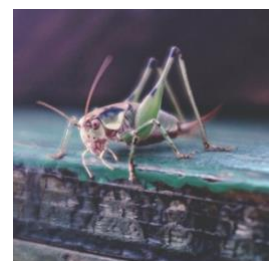
What Does it Mean to be a Family of Deep Listening?

There is a modern, listening-themed wisdom tale circulating that is problematic to me. It features two men walking down a busy city sidewalk; presumably, one man is white (though this is not stated directly) and the other man is usually described as being Native American (playing on a trope that Native Americans are inherently wise, and teach by sharing profound stories). The Native American man tells his friend he hears a cricket singing amidst all the bustle and noise, and he stops to admire it. The white man cannot hear the cricket and asks the Native American man how he can make out the sound. The Native American man replies that one can always hear what reflects one's values. (Can you feel the lesson coming?) He then demonstrates by dropping a handful of coins on the ground. At the sound of the money hitting the pavement, a dozen strangers turn to look.

One important thing we'll be doing together as families this month is learning how to listen to our worlds--including the stories we pass around--on many and deep levels. The story as it's described above can lead to some useful learnings, some expected, some less so. For example, if you heard this story told in a gathering, might you get a kind of uncomfortable flutter inside when you learned that one of the men was Native American, though the story was not written by a Native American, or shared in a Native American context? Maybe the gut-punch ending, which pits nature against wages (can we not sometimes have both, coin enough to raise a family and some leftover to create good in the world?) leaves you a little unsettled, maybe even hollow-feeling?

Those kinds of messages--sometimes wordless, often as much about feeling as knowing--are the messages we receive when we are listening deeply. Moved by that kind of deep listening to familiar stories, some people have revised the tale so the focus is on the opportunity to re-orient one's attention toward connection and the natural world rather than distraction and the empty pursuit of wealth. Deep listening can affect powerful changes in a person and a culture.

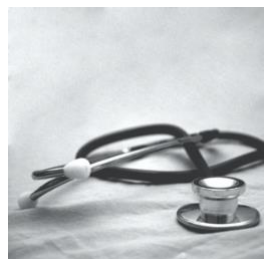
With deep listening's power in mind, this month we will hone our skills at using intuition, listening to hunches, feelings, and our guts. We will explore ways that people use their faces, bodies, and tones to say more (and sometimes different) than their words. We'll listen for assumptions about others that are vestiges of our cultural conditioning, no



longer serving us or the greater good. And we will practice listening for the numinous, the profoundly spiritual presence that some people say is the divine.

Gather up your metaphorical listening equipment: stethoscopes, ear horns, noise-canceling headphones, spare megaphones to lend out to amplify others' voices. As we solicit and craft stories this month, as we bathe in bowl ringing and record the clinks and shuffles of life at home, we will be listening--deeply--for the truths that rise from the sea of sound, calls toward that place yet to be built where love and justice prevail.

-- Teresa, on behalf of the whole Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Deep Listening Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, or a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the quietest thing you've ever heard?
2. Who has the best hearing in the family?
3. When do you try hard NOT to be heard?
4. What's one brand new sound you've heard recently? One you've previously never heard before?
5. What does it mean to "listen to your body"?
6. What do feelings tell you that words or thoughts sometimes don't?
7. Can you hear the differences among family members walking down the hall, or coming in the front door? What does each person sound like?
8. If you meet a new person, and you immediately hear yourself saying inside, "I don't like them!," where does that voice come from? Do you ever ask that voice, "Why?"
9. What sounds exist now that did not exist 100 years ago? 50 years ago? 10 years ago?
10. Can you have a conversation without words?
11. What sounds fill you with joy?
12. What sounds frighten or bother you?
13. If you ask someone, "What's wrong?," and they say--in a gruff and loud voice, "Nothing! I'm fine!," what might that mean? What might be going on for someone if their words and their body and voice are saying different things?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice that together, how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



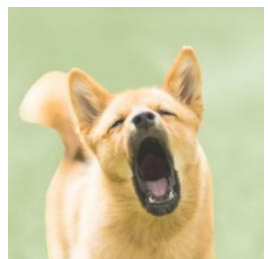
Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

A Treasure Hunt for Deep Listening

Let's collect some sounds this month! One really special thing about sounds is that there are easy to share--there's no scarcity, nothing to call dibs on. Everyone can receive the gift. Some of the sounds below are audible, and some are felt through the vibrations they make. Make a family goal of finding as many sounds as you can this month. It's always fun to keep a running list on the refrigerator or kitchen counter. Here's a list to look for, but we're sure you can find many more!

1. A dog barking in somebody else's house (maybe a neighbor's yard, or a classmate's pet heard through video call)
2. A plane zooming overhead
3. Two (or more) birds communicating using their songs
4. A family member coming home (this might be a familiar car pulling into driveway, familiar footsteps coming up stairs, or familiar keys jangling in front of a lock)
5. The sound of love (What could this be?)
6. The word "vote" said on the radio or TV
7. Rushing water (maybe somebody turned on the bath in the other room, maybe you live near a creek, maybe a good rain sent water gushing down the street)
8. Someone saying "thank you"
9. The rustling of dry leaves kicked up by the wind
10. Your own heartbeat in your body (For a trick on how to hear this really well, check out Soul Matters team member [Leah Morris' video](#) this month!)
11. A mysterious sound whose source you can't identify
12. Music from a car passing by
13. Church bells that ring throughout the neighborhood
14. The sound of a family member breathing quietly or loudly (snoring) while they sleep



From the Mailbox

Our mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside our Soulful Homes. Sometimes, these connections ask things of us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes these connections offer things to us (a letter from a friend or a special delivery), and often, they do both. This new section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. There are so many brave, inspiring and wise leaders "sending" us messages of hope and "delivering" us ideas about what we can do to fight racism. So each month, this section will contain two "notes" from these leaders in the field of anti-racism. Every family will relate to them differently. Engage them in whatever way connects with your family best.

Deep Listening Through Meditation

In order to listen deeply, we have to let go, and we have to listen past words. Sometimes we hear discernible sounds, but sometimes what we can tune into is pure frequency, vibrations.

Invitation: Listen to this singing bowl meditation from sound healer Heather Archer. Her Instagram channel, where she offers several such singing bowl "sound baths," is called [thriving_with_heather](https://www.instagram.com/p/CA1XK4QDzoT). This particular 5 ½-minute meditation is dedicated to abolition: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CA1XK4QDzoT>

What was that experience like for you? Had you heard singing bowls before? How did listening deeply to Archer's playing help you to think in a new or different way about abolition? Or maybe it brought up thoughts or feelings about abolition that you've had before? After experiencing this, what other "sound baths" can you think of that might be fun to try?

Telling the Story of the Call to Action

What was it like when you first heard the call toward social justice? Where did it come from? When? From whom? Was it one moment/event or a longer, slower ask, over several weeks, months, or years? Or maybe you were raised in a family where social justice was the culture that surrounded you? How was that like or different from your friends growing up? There is a story there, and it's one worth sharing. In fact, deeply listening to one another's stories may be the only way we can come to truly understand the kind of society we need to build in order to thrive together.

Social justice organizations use storytelling as a primary means to motivate others to hear and feel the urgency of the need for change, and then to take action in their own lives. We're going to do the same thing, on a smaller scale.



Invitation: Write, or make an audio or video recording, of the story of how you came to care about and act for social change. If there was one moment that catalyzed you, tell about it. If it was a slow growing over time, share the series of realizations that brought you up to this point. Share your story with friends and family one-on-one or through your social media channels and challenge them to do the same. Use the questions at the start of this section to help you get started.

[Here is one example](#), an essay by a young Tibetan woman named Purandhya. Her reflection is called, “How I Became an Activist: My Story of Political Awakening.”

And a couple more, two videos, one from Swedish teenager and [climate justice activist Greta Thunberg](#), and [another from young adult Nupol Ziazolu](#), president of Black Lives Matter of Greater New York.

Note: This invitation does not require that we are currently taking a grand and concrete action. Some of us may be in the learning stage of our commitment to social justice rather than the acting stage. Learning, reading, listening, soaking up--that’s essential personal work, and the story of how we got there is important. A story that ends with, “And I’m not sure what to do next, but I’m ready,” is a powerful place to be in one’s life!



At Play

Playing Games with Deep Listening

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: Learn “Pig Latin”

Speaking in a code or specific style forces us to think a little bit deeper about the way we use language to communicate. Learn the tricks of Pig Latin together as a family, then choose one night to try and speak *only* in that style. It might be fun, but it also might be frustrating. If it’s frustrating for family members, pause and talk about why this might be so. Maybe speech is taking longer than usual, maybe we keep forgetting the rules. Keep it light, and approach any challenges with curiosity. Play with the Pig Latin as long as it’s fun, and let it go when it’s time!

Here’s a video showing how it’s done: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoX6Nasi7cM>

And if Pig Latin is too familiar for your family, or you’re up for something different, try learning to speak gibberish!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5-K7f-ddAc>



Option B: Bee Breath

Silent meditation allows us to listen deeply for the small, still voice within, but there are other kinds of meditation that make that kind of listening space within, too.

This month, we'll be learning a yogic breathing technique called Bhramari (BRA-mer-ee) Breath, also known as *Bee Breath*, in order to bring about a state of calm, relaxed presence. With Bee Breath, we close our ears, eyes, and mouth, and make a buzzing sound at the back of the throat in order to experience only the vibrations of our own breath in our heads. What an interesting sound!

[This tutorial](#) shows how it's done. (Note: The speaker calls the technique "Bhramari *Pranayama*," which means bee *breath exercise* in Sanskrit.)

Rachel Kinbeck of the Unitarian Universalist summer camp, The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center, describes some of the benefits of Bhramari Breath [here](#), in a longer tutorial, filmed in the apiary, or bee yard, at The Mountain!

- Were you familiar with this technique before, or one like it?
- How was it to experience Bee Breath together?
- Do you have other times in your life when you can shut out all or most sensory input, and simply "be" inside yourself?
- What is that feeling like for you?



On the Message Board

A Monthly Mantra

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities.

September’s “Wake Up” Mantra:

“I am listening.”

When we introduce our mantras, we often suggest that family members identify “teachable moments,” or poignant conversations in which inserting our mantra would be of most help. (A great gift of mantras is that the more often they are repeated and applied, the more they will become part of our inner dialogues that carry us through difficult situations when we can’t immediately get the help and support of our circle.)

This month, we have a different idea. When you first wake up in the morning, maybe even before you fully open your eyes, say to yourself, “I am listening.” Imagine that--you, laying in your bed, gently moving from your subconscious to your conscious mind, from dream to thought, from rest to activity--speaking silently to the great beyond, “I am listening.” How does it shift your approach to the coming day when you begin with, “I am listening”?

Trying this, you might hear...

- A little wisdom carried over from your dream-time
- The sounds of your home, and your community, waking up around you
- A voice inside guiding you toward a helpful state of being
- An ancestor saying hello
- The voice of the divine, offering the love and encouragement you need
- Your to-do list already starting to write itself
- A carry-over worry or concern from the day before (It’s ok if this happens. You might even “greet” the worry and say to it, specifically, “Worry, I am listening...”)

Many of us are dependent on alarms to wake up--often abruptly, and other of our first waking moments involve caring for others. If it’s not practical to do this exercise before even opening one’s eyes, make a quiet moment another time in the day to take a few breaths and say the mantra.



At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

Elijah and the Small, Still Voice

Have you ever been through something very, very difficult and scary? Maybe a car accident, or a kitchen fire, or a dog attack, or a mugging?¹ Things like that can be terrifying. Afterward, and for a long time, we might have many very big, deep, hurt feelings, like fear, anger, loneliness, and mistrust. When those feelings well up inside us, it's good to have someone to talk to, someone who is listening, whom we can trust.

This story is about a man, Elijah, who went through a very scary experience, and what helped him find comfort and relief was listening hard for the voice of his god--the small, still voice--in the quiet that followed the catastrophes. Through deep listening, he felt at peace.

Here is a story about Elijah, from the Toolbox of Faith curriculum, written by Soul Matters DRE Katie Covey:

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/toolbox/session5/elijah>

When you are scared and worried, whose voice do you most want to hear?

When you want to tell about being afraid and upset, who do you most want to listen to you?

If you don't hear a small, still voice within, or you don't have someone you can talk to, can you listen to yourself, and hold your own story, when you have troubles?

Before you turn out the lights, [listen to this beautiful song](#) by Soul Matters team member Lea Morris, called "I am Listening," and watch Lea and her children wonder together about what deep listening is, and can be.

¹ Some children who experience events such as these will not be traumatized by them, and others will be. There are more resources than ever before on how trauma affects children and youth. Check out the website, [Trauma Informed Parent](#), for ideas on how to bring this awareness into your parenting.



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Deep Listening Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) over the soulful parts of parenthood. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you and your discussion partner to take in a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

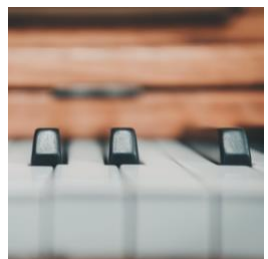
Soul Matters team member [Elizabeth McCoy](#) creates Soundscape Journeys for the Soul Matters sharing circle, featured in the small group packets each month. This month, we’re going to invite Elizabeth onto the porch with us for our Sip of Something New:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-JGuj-gd8H_4sqjYQOLhllmJyVcenk

Throughout the sound experience, Elizabeth poses questions for each listener to consider, many of which are listed below. Read these aloud together before you listen to the clip so you have them in mind. Afterward, you may want to read them again and share your answers with your conversation partner.

- What images come to mind as you listen?
- If you could give a title to each series of sounds, what would those titles be?
- What part of your body responds to the sound?
- What colors do you picture as you listen?
- Does what you hear remind you of a personal experience?
- What memories come up?
- What would you say the themes of the sound clips are?

How did it feel for the simple act of listening with an open mind to be the focus of your time?



Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

- What are the sounds of your parenting?
- Who could you count on to listen to you when you were a child?
- What have you learned about listening in the last six months? The last year? The last five years?
- Are you an external processor--someone who makes sense of their experiences by talking out loud, as thoughts come--or do you process silently, to yourself until you have come to a conclusion that you want to share? How about your loved one?
- What kind of listening do your communities need right now?
- Is being *listened to* a right? Do we have to listen to anything anyone would say to us? When was a time that you chose not to listen to another?
- How do you know if you're asking the right questions of your life?
- What part of deep listening is hardest for you? (Examples might be not giving advice, keeping my facial expression neutral when I hear something that upsets me, watching a loved one suffer as they share their fears and worries, hearing hard truths about myself, etc.)
- Sometimes it's hard to tell when what we hear is a message from our intuition and when it is from our conditioning. This can be especially difficult when we have different identities from the person we are listening to. When you encounter a challenge such as this, whom do you turn to as a sounding board to be vulnerable and curious as you learn? Or, what resources help you to make sense of this?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

A Family Sound Portrait

In our On the Porch section, we linked to a Soundscape Journey created by Soul Matters team member Elizabeth McCoy. Some of the sounds she offered were unusual or musical, while others seemed like every day sounds.

What are the sounds around your own home? Which ones create feelings of comfort, security, and familiarity? Using a smartphone, a laptop computer, or other recording equipment, and working as a family, create a recording of different sound clips that together make up the soundscape of your soulful home. Here are some ideas:

- The percolation of the coffee pot, or whistle of the tea kettle
- Laughing together
- A pet barking happily/purring
- A clock ticking
- A squeaky door opening
- Somebody running up or down stairs
- The sound of keys as a parent gets home
- Splashing in a bathtub
- What else?

Save the sound file someplace secure. What you’ve made is a kind of sound portrait of your life together in this moment in time, a family treasure to be enjoyed in the decades to come!



Interview An Activist

In our From the Mailbox section this month, we were invited to tell our own stories of becoming inspired to commit to social justice. But we know that there are other people--many of them elders--who have done this work before, and who have their own stories of rebirth as advocates and activists.

For this Extra Mile, video-interview an activist from your congregation, neighborhood, or other community. You might ask them some of the same questions you explored in the From the Mailbox section, or different questions, specific to what you know their work or passion is.

Often we know people who are doing amazing things to make the world a better place, but we don't have the opportunity to hear their stories and learn from their journey. Interviewing them is not just beneficial to us but is also a gift to them. It honors their work and journey by making special space for their journey to be heard.



Blessing of Deep Listening

When gusts of new knowings slap through the canyons of your own being, wearing down familiar rock faces and eroding cliff holds, may you find the strength to sit still there, in the deepest seat of self, listening beyond the howl and avalanche to the tender truths carried by the wind. Let these truths change the inner landscape you live in, for that is how we evolve. And when it's your turn to bellow and blow, may you, too, encounter a brave sound-gatherer, one who sits quietly with fear and wondering, one unafraid of the stories of becoming.



Connect with more Inspiration
for your family, and for you!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our music playlists on the monthly themes.
One playlist is one [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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