

DEEP LISTENING IN POSTPARTUM

I. Have You Ever Lost an Organ?

The body creates both a baby and an entirely new organ, the placenta, during pregnancy. In my postpartum experience, I felt a lot of body confusion and body grief around the "loss" of the baby and the new organ. This exercise is a practice I repeated to help my body through this confusing time.

Lie down on the floor and feel the body release. Scan the body and try to let go of any unnecessary worry. Lay still and silent. Listen to what your body has to say.

Ask if the body understands what has happened. Explain what has happened to the baby through words, images, songs, and feelings. Speak to the body in body time, very slowly, with a lot of silence. Send the body a visualization of the baby. Ask if the body understands that the baby is now living outside the body. Ask the body to remember birth and the transition from womb to world. Ask the body if it understands that it has lost an organ and assure it that this is ok. Listen to your body's grief. Give your body time to grieve for the loss of both the placenta and the baby. Invite your body to have a new relationship with the baby. When Kangarooing or holding the baby, give your body time to ask questions, speak, and listen.

Listen to your body's lament.

Sing your body's lament.

Dance your body's grief as you are able.

Deep Listening® Through Parenthood:

Sonic Meditations for Birth, the NICU, and Beyond



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DEEP LISTENING IN THE NICU CONT.

V. Breast Pump Jam

If your baby is born early, you can still breastfeed, but it is best to begin breast pumping every 3 hours, as soon as possible. A hospital-grade pump is often supplied by the hospital and covered by many insurance policies. If you would like a pump and have not received one, please ask for it.

Find your favorite tempo for the breast pump. Relax. Feel a release through your body and listen to the milk coming. With each pump, feel the body respond and improvise a musical duet with the rhythm of the pump. If inspired, imagine the baby fat and healthy, dancing a baby dance. Remain listening to the sound and follow the dynamics of the pump and the milk.

VI. Love Songs

Make up love songs for the baby any time you are away (especially if you begin to worry). These could be lullabies, songs of hope or dreams for the future, ballads about the family, or anything you would like to share. Try to explore a range of emotions in these songs ~ humor, love, care, history, even worry. Let these songs be a way to express honest feelings to your baby. Imagine this as the grounding of your relationship and the seeds of strong communication. Sing them to your baby when you are back together. Remember to listen to the baby's response. These are both songs and conversations. Return to this practice through childhood.

DEEP LISTENING IN THE NICU CONT.

IV. Good Things

I think Good Things is particularly powerful for a baby that has never known life beyond the hospital. This exercise is best done with physical contact with the baby, while Kangarooing or holding hands.

Remember a beautiful moment in your life. Remember how it looked, how it sounded, how it felt, how it tasted, and how it smelled. Remember all the emotions you felt at this moment. Remember it so well that you are back in that moment. Send the memory through your skin into the baby. If it helps you, you can tell your baby about it or sing about it, but this can also be done silently. Try to do this with all of one's energy. Remember another beautiful moment and repeat the process for as long as you would like.



Photo taken at the DL retreat in Sortland, Norway

INTRODUCTION

The meditations in this book share my explorations of listening in parenthood. I originally wrote these meditations for myself between 2011-2015, inspired by my Deep Listening® study and practice, as a way to support listening to my body, my environment, my baby, and to tune in to the particular time that is the transition to parenthood. I am inspired to share these meditations because, while on bed rest and later during my daughter's seven weeks in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), I found limited resources regarding how to relieve the stress of early delivery or the strain of the unfamiliar NICU environment. I want to put this out in the world to support others with this experience. I also want to share what has been such a supportive practice to me. After 14 years studying Deep Listening (including two courses at Mills College, three Deep Listening retreats, and one conference), I present this pamphlet for my certification in Deep Listening at the Arctic Circle Midnight Sun Deep Listening Retreat in Sortland, Norway. I am so grateful to Pauline Oliveros, Ione, and Heloise Gold for their teachings in this practice. I wish to thank the participants of the retreat for their supportive and useful feedback on these meditations and their suggestions to publish them. Big thanks to my parents, who inspired a curious engagement with everything that is at the root of this practice and for my husband Grant Tompkins, who has been listening with me for a long time. Lastly, I must thank my daughter Dorothea for sharing this adventure with me and for being my favorite listening partner.

- Anne Hege, Sortland, Norway, June 25, 2015

DEEP LISTENING IN LABOR

I. Waves to another Shore Inspired by a conversation with Sarah V. Paden (to be performed once contractions begin)

Think of your dream world ~ the environment that often arises in your dreams ~ imagine a vast shoreline in this space. Look up and down the coast and then out to sea.

In your dream landscape, let the feeling of the contractions expand into sound and sight. Visualize the waves. Sonify the waves. Explore the form of the waves within the body from your dream space.

Let the waves continue to come to you. Listen and watch them from your dream shore until the sound transforms into a baby's cry.

II. Form

Listen to your experience as a kind of form.

Mentally imagine the shape or arc of each momentary event
each contraction
each moment of ease

each breath

each push

then the form of the moments together

each contraction cycle

the time before the water breaks, the time after

each phase of labor

and finally, the totality of the experience.

Sketch these forms and use them later as the form for a musical composition, sculpture, or story.

DEEP LISTENING IN THE NICU

I. Vital Duets

To be performed in the NICU with its many audible alarms.

Listen to the surrounding beeps and alarms until it becomes music. Sing (out loud if permitted, in one's mind if not allowed) a duet with the musical machines. Do this whenever possible.

II. Singing through the Skin

To be performed while kangarooing with an infant. (Kangarooing is when an infant is kept warm by being on the naked chest of a woman or man. Skin to skin contact provides the baby with a way to keep its body temperature at the correct level. Kangarooing is an effective way to help premature infants maintain their temperature without an incubator. It also supports the attachment process with an infant).

Feel the baby on your skin. Consider how the skin is a permeable membrane. Sing your heart song through your skin, through the baby's skin, directly to the baby's heart. Sing your heart song to resonate all of the baby's body with love.

III. Blessings

Sing a song of blessings. This may be a traditional song or one that you make up of all that you wish for your little one. Repeat the song until you have fully understood each blessing and feel confident that it will come true.