

Meditations – invitation to sadness

by Cora Crisman & Tony Domenick

Listening Guide

Meditation no. 1 – invitation

What invitations are you receiving?
What invitations are you giving?

Meditation no. 2 – repetition

In the music, what do you hear repeating?
Within those repetitions, what differences do you hear?
As your breath repeats itself, what differences in each breath do you feel?
What repetitions do you notice in your thoughts?

Meditation no. 3 – immolation

You have permission to move around while you listen.
Try squeezing your palms together until you start to shake slightly, then release.
If you hesitate to move, is it because of people around you? Your own judgment?
Take a chance, and move in a way that feels right.

Meditation no. 4 – sadness

Try repeating these words in your mind while listening:

Breathing in, i know this grief is deep
Breathing out, i know this grief is sad
Breathing in, i know that grief is love
Breathing out, i know that grief will pass

Try a shorter version, timed to your breath:

Grief is deep
Grief is sad
Grief is love
Grief will pass

Liner Notes

Meditation no. 1 – invitation

We've played music together since 2013, and are so grateful to release our first album. Having both benefitted from meditation practice, we decided to improvise after meditating together, intending to converse calmly with each other's musical ideas. For each improvisation, we found a comfortable placement in the room for our cushions, bodies, and microphones, discussed a loose plan, pressed record, meditated silently, and then began to play.

Early on we wondered if this music would find a place with any listeners—it doesn't feel as calm as some other meditative/ambient music, but also doesn't feel as engaging as some other instrumental music. Committing to our own meditation throughout the process brought the confidence needed to share this peacefully & joyfully created blend of calming & engaging frequencies.

Meditating while mixing also brought the insight to offer two versions for your listening pleasure: In the Head & In the Room. In the Head mixes use plenty of delay & reverb; likely an easier entry point for listeners familiar with ambient music. In the Room mixes are much more plain, close to what you'd hear if you sat in the studio while we recorded. You may prefer one or the other at different times, depending on your mood.

Thank you for accepting our invitation to listen.

Meditation no. 2 – repetition

We brought in a more specific theme for this improvisation: repetition. Meditation itself is a repetitive process, returning your focus again and again to your breath or other focal point. Skill and intimacy come through repetition, whether playing music, doing dishes, dancing together, or counting breaths. Changes that feel huge are often the result of countless small repetitions.

There are many repetitive patterns in the world, especially in music. Repeating a melody over and over can build satisfying intensity, but overdo it, and some may lose interest. Of course, this depends on an individual's tolerance for repetition—a tolerance we have built up considerably as teachers. Learning *requires* repetition, and so patience truly becomes a virtue when teaching, parenting, or persuading.

Having a daily routine provides positive structure, but inflexibility can become monotonous to our minds, encouraging subtle changes. The place to focus during repetitive processes is on the subtle changes; the realization that each repetition isn't exact, that there are variations, will lead to peaceful growth. Which repetitions are serving you well, and which need adjustment?

Meditation no. 3 – immolation

Nonviolent resistance to oppression often depends on the violence of oppressors—Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. gained support and swayed others by virtue of their peaceful attitude as they were brutally attacked. The Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức chose self-inflicted violence, burning himself alive to wake up the world to the oppression in South Vietnam.

What's the difference between a person who cares so much about justice that they take extreme actions and a person who is 'mentally ill?' Is not the person ordering bombs to drop sick? Disconnected from other life in the world? Even those who try to maintain their connection to all life can become paralyzed by suffering, rather than able to help alleviate it. The definitions of what classifies as a mental illness have changed dramatically throughout human history, and will likely continue to do so—perhaps the baseline level of violence we all perpetrate, tolerate, or ignore will one day be looked at soberly by the majority of future humans as insanity.

As we sat to record meditation no. 3, we reflected on all this violence and wondered about the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance—a terrible quality to try and measure. Is the violent act that calls attention to greater violent oppression 'worth it' if a few people notice? Thousands? Millions? Is it admirable if it leads to policy change but crazy if it leads nowhere?

We musicians don't have the answers to these questions; we don't pass some sort of ultimate judgment on what is good or bad for people to do. Nor do we think that music can somehow *solve* the problem of violent governments killing indiscriminately—this meditation is merely a cathartic expression of frustration, of powerlessness to resist violence in the past, present, or future.

Despite all that weight, there was a powerful satisfaction in allowing these sounds to emanate from our instruments—a controlled, calm explosiveness. We do believe musical metabolization of violence is another small piece of the puzzle to unravel violent oppression and encourage a peaceful coexistence with all life.

This meditation is dedicated in part to Aaron Bushnell.

Meditation no. 4 – sadness

Buddhism can sometimes seem (especially to Americans like us) impossibly stoic, almost denying powerful emotions like grief, anger, sadness, frustration. There is an idea that one must sever attachment in order to reduce suffering and experience bliss.

But as Cora said just before we played this meditation, we must detach ourselves from our identities as individuals so that we may attach ourselves to the entire world! The aim isn't to feel less grief or other so-called unpleasant emotions, but to know what to do with those feelings, to hold our grief close and say, "hello grief, there you are again."

Like no. 3, this meditation expresses a powerful feeling that needs a container, and reconnects that which has been disconnected through grief.

This session was the longest, we recorded 30 minutes of improvisation, and decided the last 20 was more for us than for the people—not everything we feel needs to be shared publicly. As the music fades, remember to make space for your own grief, but especially for the grief of your loved ones. Accept sadness as worthy of expression, and give the calm three-breath-hug that they need.

This meditation is dedicated in part to Steve Crisman.

Thanks

Thank you to my music teachers: Missy, Chad, Donna, Cathy, Cindy, Bev, Teri, & Mark; to my sound engineering professors: Charles & Tom; to Rae for inviting me to the long tone choir, awakening in me a deep love for the drone, and giving me the precious shruti box that is featured on this album. Thank you to Thich Nhat Hanh for his influence on my mind, which familiar readers will notice in these liner notes. Thank you to my friends and family for repetitive encouragement and being there when i burn with anger or melt in sadness; especially to Cora, Kelsie, Gus, Mick, & Lyn. –Tony

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