

Transcript: Listening Deeply in a Climate-Changed World with Peterson Toscano

Jessica David: I'm Jessica David, a Harvard Divinity School student and an intern at The BTS Center. And this is the Climate Changed podcast Behind the Scenes Edition. Hello, friends. I need to know, how do you stay grounded when it comes to our climate catastrophe, especially when you're feeling overwhelmed, bewildered, and dispirited by it? In the next few episodes of our Behind the Scenes Edition, we'll be guided through a contemplative or embodied practice developed and delivered to you with love by a member of our team. In this episode, our producer, Peterson Toscano is going to guide us through a practice. So welcome Peterson, on the other side of the microphone today. So before we get into the specifics, tell me, what were your intentions for this practice?

Peterson Toscano: When I thought about this question, I thought about like, someone getting married and asking for someone's hand in marriage and the parents saying, and what are your intentions? But actually it's not very far off. It does, right? But it's not far off. My intention with this practice is to help listeners deepen their relationship with the world of sound. And all the sounds around them. And not just hear, but to really listen. I feel that so much of what we call background noise is actually alive with meaning, motion, and presence, but we tune it out and we have to actually, our brains have to do that so we can function. I live in Sunbury, Pennsylvania, and when I talk about the trains that interrupt my recording sessions, people often say, wow, I don't even notice the train anymore. They've blocked it out. So my goal is to invite us back into that awareness, to step outside of ourselves for a moment and immerse in a sonic world we're part of but rarely attend to.

Jessica David: As someone who also lives near the train tracks, I have to say I have really loved that because the train doesn't come by here that often. And so it's enough that when it happens, I notice it and it's just this little moment of, oh, something is happening. These people are going by my house on their way to and from somewhere.

Peterson Toscano: And depending on the time of year and the weather, sometimes the train sounds closer than it is. And I actually live in an old railroad station where a train doesn't come by, but I think of it as like a ghost train coming by because it sounds so close sometimes.

Jessica David: Oh, no way. We're going to have to talk about that. I have many questions. So what guidance would you offer me and the listeners before we get started with your practice?

Peterson Toscano: Okay. I would say, let go of any expectations of understanding what you hear. You don't have to say like, that's a That. You may identify it, it just may be a weird noise. Just listen. And then as you're listening, I'm gonna encourage you to notice where the sounds are showing up. Are they on your left, on your right, behind you? As you listen, your ear can actually pick out the location. If it's close, if it's far, you'll listen for rhythm, texture, any patterns. And you're not trying to actually solve anything. This isn't about mindfulness in the sense of clearing your mind. It's about filling your mind with sound. So let it wash over you. Let it surprise you. Listen with curiosity, okay?

Jessica David: All right, listeners, here we go.

Peterson Toscano: Here we go. Okay, listener, if you really want to discover the world of sound around you, start recording a podcast. Because suddenly you hear everything. You realize how loud your world is. Every random sound, small, loud, that's in your house, in your neighborhood, even in your own body. Suddenly you're so aware of that. When I travel, I take photos. Of course, I love taking photos. But I also take audio recordings and I call them sound slices. And I use these at the end of my show called Bubble and Squeak. And through this practice, I've discovered something really important. The world is definitely full of sounds, more than I expected. And some of these delight me. Others annoy the heck out of me, or they used to. At first I just wanted to record pristine nature sounds. You know, birds, winds in the trees, maybe some water flowing gently in the distance. But then I'm like, that's not what I was going for. And I thought, they're ruining it. They're ruining this moment. Let me start over. I'll cut that out. But I've learned to let that go and to listen with different ears. These sounds are part of the tapestry. Every time and place has its own specific soundscape. And most sounds I hear represent life, represent a living being, even the man made ones. There's a driver in that truck, the person who installed that humming air conditioner. We're all nature. We fill the world with sound. I'm going to share one of my sound slices with you. While you listen. I invite you to notice what you hear in your right ear, your left ear, which sounds are nearer, which are farther away. Can you pick out individual sounds then let them just weave together? Notice how they create a kind of sonic quilt, a collective experience. Right now. Just put all your attention into listening.

Jessica David: Peterson said this was fascinating. I know that this is just a taste. What else could we do to ground ourselves in this work?

Peterson Toscano: Yeah. Well, this is an easy one because you can take it with you and do it on your own. You definitely don't need a fancy setup. You can record on your phone. You don't have to record, but I actually encourage you to consider recording because as soon as you start recording, I don't know what it is, you just started noticing more. So just turn it on, sit still for a few minutes, or walk gently or wherever you are. And it could be during a walk, a commute, even while you're cooking. Just a moment, but you're paying attention to the sound. If you're driving, please also pay attention to driving. And what's nice is you can then listen back and you'll almost always hear something you missed the first time. Or you'll notice patterns in a way you didn't notice the first time. It's a way of returning, of noticing what we usually overlook. And the more you practice, the more you'll start to hear the world differently. You'll be able to differentiate where the sounds are coming from and how far away, and you'll open up your heart. Is the goal to listen more fully and more compassionately? So the call to action, I guess, or inaction, is to take a moment to listen to the world around you, to the voices, human and non human speaking. Rustling, humming. Life abounds in every creak, clank, chirp and sigh.

Jessica David: Beautiful. Lovely. This is a hard practice for me, I think, because I am, as I admitted in the first episode, I'm someone who lives in my head and lives in words. And so listening requires letting go of words and letting go of the sense that I can control the sounds

I'm hearing or I can label them neatly. But you also, you miss so many things when you're caught up in the words and what you're really inviting us into. I think Peterson is taking that all in, whatever it is.

Peterson Toscano: Yeah. And as we've talked about already in the first episode, and I imagine Madeline will talk about in the next one, it is an embodied practice because our ears are part of our bodies and physical things happen when we hear. And we can even feel it in our bodies if sounds are loud enough. For sure.

Jessica David: Yeah. And I think we feel ourselves differently too. We experience ourselves and our place in this. You use the word soundscape, which I love now we're part of this bigger, bigger, bigger, expanding place.

Peterson Toscano: Yeah.

Jessica David: Thank you.

Peterson Toscano: Yeah, you're very welcome. Thank you for the chance to share this. I love sound and so I love sharing sounds that I have found through the years.

Jessica David: Well, thank you, Peterson, and thanks for all your work on the podcast. Of course. Listeners, it's your turn now. What did you think? Tell us about your experience with this listening soundscape practice or any other practice that brings you strength and peace. Email us at podcast@thebtscenter.org that address again is podcast@thebtscenter.org or you can leave a voicemail at 207-200-6986. Again, that's 207-200-6986. You can also text that number 207-200-6986. However you do it, we would love to hear from you. For more on this and any other episodes, please visit climatechangedpodcast.org that website again is climatechangedpodcast.org Thank you for listening to the Climate Changed Podcast Behind the Scenes edition with me, Jessica David. Coming up in our next episode, Madeline Bugeau-Heartt is going to join us with another practice. Special thanks to Peterson for guiding us through today's practice and producing this episode and all of the work on Climate Changed. Thanks to Nicole Diroff for your assistance and support. Climate Changed Podcast is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine. Learn about the many resources we offer along with our in person and online programs. Visit our website, thebtscenter.org that's thebtscenter.org Take Good Care, my friends.