Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 3, Session 3 — 61 minutes

Summary: A movement lesson on the midline. Russell offers a plane of light through the body and links the sense of up and down with attention. On the back, the front, and hands and knees, head and pelvis move along that plane, then a gentle lengthening of the spine, standing, and a brief sharing.

Standing

[Russell:] Yeah, come to standing.

And this image of a living being. Knees soften, ankles soften. Relationship down. And once we feel that the energy, the sense of the organism, is in connection with our relationship downward, we then also think of the up—the image of the spine, the neck, the top of the head, toward our true height, toward our length.

And just as you shift weight, come onto one foot, and you feel that downward movement, particularly through the heel bone, the calcaneus. The rest of the foot is there also, sensing through the top of your head. Onto the other foot, through the top of your head. Feeling down. Up, down.

Just close your eyes for a moment, on both feet, and have an image. Your midline. The midline of yourself.

Feldenkrais would sometimes do these lessons—midline lessons, he called them—where he'd have an image as if there was a window, like a plate of glass through the center, like you're standing in a plane. But a lot of people, when I gave that lesson, didn't like having a plane of glass through their body. So I transformed it to a light. It's not just a line, but a whole plane of light that goes right through you like this, like it's in front of you, through you, and behind you.

Not injurious at all. It's just as if there was this sense of, oh, just over here is my right, just over here is my left. This is the kind of precise centering of that.

Just kind of have an image. Place your fingertips on the center of your sternum.

[Participant:] In the front to back as well, or only?

[Russell:] Yeah, all through you. The whole plane goes through you. Not this way, just this way for now.

And the middle of your sternum, the middle of your forehead, the very top of your head in the middle. Just let a finger come up there.

Finger on your sternum. Fingertips.

Just place your hands together in front of you, as if you're on this plane of light that's in front of your body. Your fingertips are upward. Your hands are just very gently touching.

You'll even feel that plane of light through your skull, through your neck, through your back, through your vertebrae, through your pelvis.

Your knees are soft, and you begin to raise your hands. Come up and a little bit backward, and you're letting your head lift, and you're looking. So you're coming up and out of your pelvis, along this plane. Your lumbar spine moves a bit. Your upper back lifts. And then you're coming down this plane of light, down this plane.

And you keep coming down, and as you come down, you begin to let your upper back warm. Your hands are along this plane of light. Your knees are soft.

Until the fingertips are pointing downward, and your back is really rounded, your knees are soft, there's some give in your knees, and your fingertips are pointing downward.

There's this image of a plane of light going through your body, front to back, back to front. And you come slowly up, feeling the up beginning in your legs and pelvis, and your back picks up on it. So lifted—your head, your chest—and then you're going behind you a little bit, and you're looking all the way up.

And we connect to the world above.

Extending your attention upward, upward, upward, and then coming through this plane. As you come down, down, you let your shoulders round, your chest and back round, your knees are bent, the softness, and then you bring your attention all the way down into the earth, pointing downward, right between your feet, following this plane.

And then again, coming up, up, follow that plane of light, until you extend your attention up.

And as you're extending upward, higher than the ceiling, extending all the way up, notice if you can also have a feeling for your feet on the floor. That your contact with the element, with this being, is here even as you're extending upward.

So mind is moving in both directions, in up-downness.

Come along this plane. You're coming down, sensing the midline, letting the back round, the shoulders round, the chest round, knees bent, and then you're looking into the earth. You're looking down. But you're also thinking up.

Can you have the downward attraction into the earth, and extend attention also up towards the ceiling, beyond the ceiling?

So this movement of attention is key for the growing of awareness. Attention is part of the infra-structure of awareness.

And then come up, knees bent, up one more time, up along the midline, a little bit faster, and you have the up, up, up, and the down, down, down. With this long vertical axis.

And then just come back to the horizon with your head. Let your arms come down, feeling your length, and the down.

Feeling what's lifted in your spine, trying to lift, just having the image of up.

Up is one of the great words. Up. Your nervous system knows what up feels like. Up. It senses the earth under you.

On the back

[Russell:] Please come onto your back. I'd like to continue this exploration in both directions, this whole vertical axis, the up-down.

[Silence 42 seconds]

Let there be this image of this plane of light that is through the middle of yourself, from way, way, way above you, as far as you can imagine, up into the sky, and as long in a headward direction and a footward direction.

You can imagine this plane of light that is infinitely high, and deep into the earth, and beyond the center of the earth, through the earth. It's this plane of light, and it extends way above your head, and from between your legs down, between your feet, and out, out, out into space in a footward direction.

And bend your legs.

Place your hands together with the fingertips towards the ceiling, palms together. Let the arms be a little bit long, and, following this plane of light, begin to move the hands, with your elbows long, in a headward direction, as if the arms would go overhead. So the elbows are long, first forward towards the ceiling. Just go a little bit toward the space over your head, just a little bit, and then back, over your chest.

Feel that movement in your chest. Feel that movement in your shoulders. The hands are touching, resting against each other, and the arms go above your chest and then above your head, but not further than just above your chest as they come down.

And then please place your hands beside you on the floor, and, listening to that plane of light, use both feet on the floor and lift your pelvis as if you're lifting along that plane.

So let the image work on you. It's a movement we did yesterday. Now we're adding the image to the movement, as if there's this plane that goes all the way through you, and you're coming up, and down along that plane.

And it's helpful to sense if one leg is more active, or one side of your pelvis lifts higher or faster. The awareness of that is really helpful information for your nervous system. If one side of your back begins to press more. So listen for differences. If one hand is pressing.

And really let that image of the plane keep returning.

Pause. Rest for a moment. If you want to lengthen your legs for a moment, you can.

[Silence 31 seconds]

And the pauses during these lessons are wonderful, just for resting, letting your nervous system integrate what's happened. Also helpful to notice any of the default movements of mind, if there are particular places you go in thought, or a particular way of thinking. Do you always generate images of the future? Are you always planning? Is it always memory? Is there a tendency, or do you kind of just go—you space out—or do you just kind of rest here on the floor?

Just to notice tendencies, with the same attitude of, oh, interesting. That's what happens.

Now, bend your legs. Extend your arms over your chest with the palms touching.

And thinking of the plane of light between your hands, and the plane of light bisecting your forehead, nose, chin, chest, belly, pelvis, down through your legs. As you bring the hands towards the floor overhead, lift your pelvis. So you're combining those movements. You're lifting the pelvis as the arms are lengthening towards the floor overhead. They may touch the floor, they may not. You're not going to force them.

But let the pelvis lift, in a sense that there's a connection as you lift. And the arms can keep going towards the floor as far as is comfortable, without forcing. And then as you bring the arms back up, you're lowering the pelvis, and the arms end up with the fingertips pointing towards the ceiling.

And so, notice if you can connect to that whole movement, and the sense of the energy upward, headward, above you. Imagine where your fingertips are pointing, that whole plane above you.

Good. And then lower your arms as you come up this time.

[Silence 53 seconds]

Center

[Russell:] Bend your legs. Imagine this plane of light, and notice it with your fingers. You can find what you feel as the center of your sternum. Use the fingertips of both hands, and touch what feels like the center of your sternum, and just notice.

How far to the right do you need to move your right hand to know, oh, I'm definitely right of center, and now it's pretty close, and then move your left hand a bit—I'm definitely left of center —and there. And then, once you feel that with both hands, lower one hand, and let the fingertips of one hand be right where you think of as neither left nor right.

A good way to check that is to move the slightest bit, to the place where you could say, I know I'm right of center, I know I'm left of center. And how big is that place where you say, that's what I'm calling middle?

Then take both hands and come to your pubic bone, and feel when you know your right hand is on the right side of the pubic bone and the left hand is on the left side, and gradually work towards the pubis. Work towards the center of your pubic bone, and then use whichever hand you didn't use before. Use one hand, maybe one finger or two fingers, to touch what feels like the center, and then you move just slightly right. I know I'm right of center. I know I'm left of center. And just linger in the territory where you have some inner confidence that that is center.

Good. Let the hand stay there. Bring your other hand back. Touch the center of your sternum. The left-right center. We're not talking about the up-down center. Could be.

Just breathe, sensing.

Good. And then put your hands together. Lengthen them above your chest. And as you lower your long arms along this plane, between your legs, so the hands are going to go towards the pubic bone, feel when you can begin to lift your head, and let your chest roll, and let the middle of your

sternum come down, and the hands come all the way down. The small finger side of your hands may end up touching you, they may not, but there's a folding of your shoulders and of your chest.

And then you come back up towards the ceiling. Let the pressure into the floor, and the folding of your chest, do the lifting of your head, so it doesn't become a strain in your neck. You think of the ground forces, and you let the chest and shoulders roll forward. It'll get lighter in your neck. That's it. That's it.

Feel, are both feet pretty equal when you come up? That's it.

Okay, leave that. Pause. Sense yourself lying here. Feel the quality of yourself lying here on the floor.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Both directions

[Russell:] Extend attention along that plane that connects you all the way up to the sky and down into the earth, that goes right through your body.

And then the same plane can be thought of going infinitely in a headward direction, so you can follow it above your head and below your feet. So you can feel the length, as if you're suspended along this plane of light, continuous way above your head and below your pelvis.

Please bend your legs. Extend your arms forward. And we're going to connect these movements, where as you lift your pelvis, the arms are going overhead towards the floor. And then, as you lower your pelvis, the arms go over the chest, and then they continue going downward towards your pelvis, and you lift the head.

So your pelvis and head are giving direction, and your consciousness is going basically where your fingers are pointing. As the arms go overhead, you're thinking of your length way above you. Your fingers come down, you're extending attention in a footward direction.

And it might help to exhale when the head is lifting. It might feel right to inhale as the pelvis is lifting. You see if that's true.

If your feet lose their ground, feel where your feet need to be to give you good support.

Good. Okay. And leave that. Rest for a moment. Lengthen your legs.

Let this image work on you, of this plane of light.

[Silence 51 seconds]

On the front

[Russell:] Please come onto your front, with your forehead resting on your hands, if that's comfortable.

And as you're resting there, bring in this image of this plane, so that you sense through the center of yourself, through the midline. You feel the center of your pubic bone, the middle of your pubic bone. Middle of your sternum. Middle of your forehead. The middle of your sacrum and back, the middle of your pelvis.

Imagine the vertebral column, and if you have a scoliosis, just imagine the middle line. Imagine the middle of your neck, the middle of your skull, so that you have the back present. This plane goes right through you.

And then you can think all the way up in a headward direction, as far as you can imagine. All the way down in a footward direction, through your pelvis, between your legs, and out into space.

If it's comfortable for you, extend your arms in a headward direction with the hands touching each other, just so that the hands are along the midline. If that's not comfortable, you can stay with your head on your hands. So now your chin or forehead would be on the floor. Your arms would be long above your head, if that's comfortable. And your palms are touching, like before.

And just begin to raise your eyes without lifting your head. Feel the eyes go up and down, just as if they're hanging, and then you lift them up a little bit, and then downward.

And then as you lift the eyes up, let the head begin to follow. So now the head begins to lift, and you're thinking along that midline, and you let your eyes open. Look out along your hands and where they're pointing. And then keep letting your eyes look up that plane of light, out into space and upward, and then you look down along that plane.

Feel how, as the head lifts, the chest can begin to support the lifting, so it's not just in your neck. There's a feeling that both sides of you can support you, so that you lift really along that plane.

Feel the pressure in your pelvis. Does it feel like you're in both sides of your pelvis? And are both feet equally present?

So we're using this plane of light to give us a sense of both sides.

Feel, can you perhaps even sense into the middle of your pubic bone?

And feel what it might be like to let both feet lift just a bit from the floor, again thinking along that midline. Feel that pattern.

Then as you lower the head, the feet are lowering, so it's a whole body movement. It's not this, this, this, and this. The eyes lift, the head lifts, the feet lift. You're referencing this plane. Pubic bone is to the floor.

Any of these movements, if it's uncomfortable, you do less, or you could just do it in your imagination. That's fine. Never need to force yourself.

And then pause. Rest comfortably on your front if you can. If you need to come off your front, do so. You can rearrange your hands and legs, and pause here for a few moments.

[Silence 51 seconds]

And come back, with your head in the middle. If your arms can be extended above your head with the palms touching, do that. If that's not comfortable for your arms or your head, you can keep them bent.

And notice what it might be like to begin to lift your pelvis a little bit in this position. Feel how you can organize the pelvis coming a bit away from the ground. And listen to that plane of light as you lift your pelvis in the air.

Listening, can you actually think, as the pelvis lifts, all the way up in the direction your fingers are pointing?

Just lift. Listen well that you're not straining. It's not a simple movement. It's a very empowering movement for the back. We need to do it really consciously.

That's it. As you lower your pelvis, think beyond your pelvis, down, down, down that plane of light between your legs, all the way down.

Are both sides lifting? If one side is lifting significantly more than the other, lift the side that lifts easily, less. Let that side mirror the side that lifts less easily. So then both sides are lifting along that plane.

And as you lift your pelvis, also lift your head. And then lower both together. If you can get the feeling of where you touch along that plane of light—where you touch the ground—most clearly.

[Silence 31 seconds]

Head and pelvis

[Russell:] Okay. Pause. Just come onto your back for a moment, just to get a little relief from that. We'll be coming back here. Come onto your back. And as soon as you're settled on your back, again, have that plane.

Just let yourself rest here.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Bend your legs. Interlace your hands behind your head.

Listening to that plane along the midline, slowly lift your pelvis and your head together, listening to that plane, and lower together.

Notice if you're clenching your teeth or fixating your eyes. Let the elbows come toward each other as you lift your head. It'll be easier.

And when both are in the air, begin to experiment, lowering the head, lifting the pelvis a bit more, and then lowering the pelvis and lifting the head a bit more, but they both stay in the air. As if they're a unit, moving up and down a bit, along that plane.

Then let the head come all the way down, pelvis in the air, and then let the pelvis come.

Are your hands coming out? Please come onto your front.

Listen for the middle of your pubic bone. Move the pelvis a little bit left and right, just to give yourself a feeling. Often, to find something, it's good to intentionally go to something you know is not it, which Alden Christ called intentional errors. A very important concept in learning.

Then think of the middle of your sternum. Middle of your chin, middle of your forehead, middle of your neck and back, middle of your skull. Midline down your back to the middle of your sacrum, between your legs, all the way down, as far as you can imagine in a footward direction, and all the way up, as far as you can imagine in a headward direction.

Just get the feeling of alternately lifting your pelvis. As you lower your pelvis, lifting your head. Get that feeling that the arms be long in a headward direction, so the sense of length upwards. As

the head lifts, you're kind of looking along that plane, out into space, and then up that plane. Let the eyes really lift.

The nervous system is organized so that the raising of the eyes can help that tone in the back. You don't have to exercise so much. Neurologically, connect to what happened when you were an infant, looking up, and getting toned, and getting ready to lift you.

And then as you lower the head, let the pelvis lift. Again, this movement that you did as an infant quite a bit, and probably not a lot since then.

And then find the pattern where you're lifting both together. The pelvis and the head come in the air, and then, like we did on the other side, as you lower the head, lift the pelvis a bit higher. Just lower the head a little, lift the pelvis, and then like a seesaw, lower the pelvis, lift the head a bit higher. So they both stay off the ground, but you're moving as a unit, up and down, so that the pressure point on the floor is a different place on that plane.

That's it. Getting all of those vertebrae to participate.

That's good. Notice if both eyes are functioning.

That's good. Then pause. Lower down. Let your forehead rest on your hands. The eyes just drop towards the earth.

Hands and knees

[Russell:] And one last investigation here. Please come onto hands and knees. If it's difficult for your wrists, or your wrists don't like this motion, you can make fists.

Have your knees more or less under your hip joints. Your hands more or less under your shoulders.

And think of that plane of light. As you look down, and begin to look through that plane, and eventually even towards your chest, let your pelvis round as well, that whole rounding of your back along that plane.

Just pause there for a moment, thinking through your whole spine, and then slowly feeling the lifting of your eyes all the way through to your pelvis, your head, your whole spine, letting the plane help you.

So you feel the lifting of your chest as the head lifts. You let the chest go forward and up. The back arches. Really let the chest. Some of you are straining in the neck because you're not letting the chest come forward and up.

And then round along that plane once again. Eyes come down.

Let your pelvis be quite active. Some of you are leaving the pelvis out, doing extra with your head. Let the consciousness be all the way through there.

That's nice.

Okay, leave that, please. Come onto your back. And just rest in this feel. Feel what's the quality of the inner life, after working with this image for the last period of time. Just feel that.

Let your head roll a bit right and left.

[Silence 32 seconds]

Lengthening

[Russell:] Bend your legs. Just roll your pelvis forward, meaning away from your head, increasing the lumbar curve. So the pelvis is on the floor. You're just rolling it forward. It means the lower back comes away from the floor. Do it slow. And feel your head gets pulled downward.

Feel that pull through your whole spine. Imagine that midline. Imagine that plane of light. And you're being pulled down, and then let the pelvis go, pushing towards the head, the head coming out.

And find a way to surround your skull with your fingers, and your thumbs will be around the front, near your jaw. So if you can't figure that out, you can look at me for a moment. The hands are around the back of the occiput, and the thumbs are in the front near the jaw, and you're just giving the most subtle suggestion of length. It's not really a pulling. It's just more of a gentle suggestion.

And then slowly roll the pelvis forward, away from your head, and as the head gets pulled, a little bit of, you could say, traction, creating a slight space between the vertebrae. So the pelvis goes away, and you're just gently not letting the head get pulled down so much, so that there's a little space in the cervical vertebrae.

And then as the pelvis goes towards the head, and it's a pushing, pull a little bit with your hand so that you accept the push from your pelvis, and that becomes a gentle lengthening. So the head stays on the floor. You're not lifting it. You're just very gently inviting it to lengthen in response to the push from the pelvis.

And then you're creating a kind of holding as the pelvis goes away from the head, inviting some space between the vertebrae.

Very gentle.

Long, and midline.

Lower your hands.

Please take your time coming up to standing, feeling yourself in standing. Take your time.

Yeah. The lesson can sometimes work in unusual ways, so take your time to kind of reorient to the vertical.

[Silence 31 seconds]

Afterward

[Russell:] That's good, huh? That's really you in. Got your line.

So, in whatever ways are helpful, you move a little bit, sense yourself. You can, if images or senses come to you that are interesting, put them out.

[Participant:] Expanded.

[Russell:] Expanded, expanded. And is that a particular direction?

[Participant:] The up-down, mostly.

[Russell:] Say it again.

[Participant:] Septimize.

[Russell:] How?

[Participant:] Yeah, septimize.

[Participant:] Really weird frustration.

[Russell:] There you go.

[Participant:] A newness.

[Russell:] A newness. Can you say more about that, or not yet?

[Participant:] Yeah, just the newness.

[Russell:] Yeah, good. Good to know that.

[Participant:] My horizon is about that.

[Russell:] The horizon really came up. Yeah, yeah.

[Participant:] Eyes are softer.

[Russell:] Eyes are softer, yeah. You feel that also, yeah.

You're standing up. You look so in yourself, really. And this quality I see, the length in the spine, up-down.

[Participant:] It's just full, laser-like. And walking, shifting left and right, it goes left and right. It wants to stay upright. It's not like rigid.

[Russell:] Right, right. It yields, but it tends toward, or something.

[Participant:] Yeah, it tends to stay like that.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. Good.

Okay, so, as many of you know, but I'll say it anyway, the lesson doesn't end now, right? So without trying to predict anything, just stay awake to what it's like over the hours, even sometimes days. But this kind of deep movement—the image brings a certain quality of depth. Keep referring back to that. It works on both hemispheres in a really interesting way. And then these somewhat challenging movements, connecting the pelvis and the head in this way, really can be quite reorganizing for the back.

You see what comes for you.

Have a nice lunch. Who am I meeting with at lunch? Are you first, or—

[Participant:] I think I'm you.