Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 4, Session 6 — 23 minutes

Summary: Participants share what a listening journey stirred — coming alive with a partner, finding a missing detail through repeating keywords, and setting education aside to stay with another's language. Russell explores limbic resonance, learning from mistakes, and how fresh, precise language lets the inner life feel met and begin to shift.

From the journey

[Russell:] And we can take a few minutes if there's anything that's wanting to come from that journey. Please.

[Participant:] And the experience that I had was that I was almost right there with him. It felt so real to me, and I was so thankful to be the listener, because I came alive. I was watching his face light up and his eyes light up, and I felt like I was lighting up, and it was amazing. It was just amazing.

[Russell:] Yes.

There's a quality — there's a name that recently has been used by a certain group of neurologists, which I kind of like. It's called limbic resonance.

It's the resonance of us with others. And there's a tremendous kind of availability for learning when we are in a safe state like that, and listening to another — that your inner life can actually learn states from somebody else.

We're doing that all the time, actually, unconsciously. Watching television sometimes. We gotta be careful, huh?

Limbic, like your limbic nervous — it's basically referring to your middle brain.

Resonance. It's a quality of where they start responding to each other on this feeling level, like mothers and babies. Very good example. And you'll start seeing breathing patterns changing, other physiological indicators that begin to line up together, brain states begin to line up together, and the organisms, the cells, begin resonating toward each other.

And what I'm very interested in about that is that often that happens when we're not so conscious, and we're actually taking in things that are not so helpful for us. And it's really good to learn how not to do that.

And it's really good, in situations where it can be life-giving — our inner life can model on another person's inner life. We don't have to do all the learning separately. Isn't that amazing?

That's part of sangha. Part of what used to be the modeling on the guru.

But as Thich Nhat Hanh says so beautifully, you know, they talk about the coming Buddha. He says, sangha is the next Buddha.

Isn't that nice? Sangha is the next Buddha. Or it's learning to be learned from each other.

[Participant:] Is the Buddha real?

[Russell:] Huh?

[Participant:] Not in the congressional session.

[Russell:] So I'm just moved with that experience, and just underlining that, in addition to it being a nice and pleasant experience, it actually can become a modeling for our nervous system.

And when we have interactions like this, sometimes just repeating it to yourself, remembering it once or twice later — oh, I had this wonderful moment with him. What was that? He was — oh, right. How did that feel in my body? Oh, right.

I know you won't. How cool is that? Wow.

What repeating found

[Russell:] Anything else want to comment?

[Participant:] Yes, I wanted to say that the repeating was quite useful for me, to make the picture complete. I had my chest, my vertebrae here in the picture, but until we were at the stage of repeating the keywords, I felt that there was something missing.

[Russell:] Yes, yes.

[Participant:] The eyes were missing, and that was really —

[Russell:] Absolutely.

[Participant:] I will be, yeah, by a listener to get the whole thing.

[Russell:] Yeah, thank you. That's really helpful.

[Participant:] Thank you.

[Russell:] Oh, that's so good.

And I so appreciate that we can make mistakes, and that there's open territory to learn from each other.

To assume that we should know what we don't know is how I tortured myself for a long time. Anybody else do that? Assuming you should know what you don't know. Well, that's called learning. It means there's something you don't know, and you're getting clearer about it.

Oh, you mean I'm not supposed to know everything that goes on?

Gosh. And then when we can actually share that with each other and not be ashamed and hide that — oh, I said that and it wasn't so helpful. Now everyone in the room is learning from you, and you're giving a gift. I think so. It's good. Really, it is. It's true.

And it's a challenging gift for all of us to embody the error, we could say, or the miscue, or the thousand mistakes a day.

[Participant:] Well, yeah, Feldenkrais did a similar thing. Intentional errors.

[Russell:] Intentional errors.

Then we can let ourselves off the hook. Most of us are carrying something like the image of perfection, in some language, right? Something like, we should be this, and we're really this, and we try to hide it from ourselves and certainly from each other. And then when we can laugh a little bit at that part of ourselves, gently, because it has feelings too.

[Participant:] It's all conditions.

[Russell:] Yeah. It's a long, long, long conditioning of judgment, and I shouldn't make mistakes, and how to look this way. And I am so grateful that we can learn to soften those hard edges.

Stay with his language

[Participant:] Well, another thing I'm learning as a listener is, sometimes my training gets in the way — my own education. And there were times where I had a different idea of another word I could use to name what he was naming, and then I thought, no, just use his language. Come on.

And I used his language. I'm kind of fighting myself. And he was like, that's it. That's not like, oh, you're so stupid. Don't remember anything you learned at school. Just be with him.

I mean, really, I was having this little inner fight.

[Russell:] Awesome.

[Participant:] And then he gave me the book back, like, okay, that's my job. Be with him.

So I was like, don't let your education get in the way. Have too many degrees. Do one.

[Russell:] You're resonant with us, yes. We know this. Yes, this is so important.

We'll look at that in layers and layers and layers — how attracted we are to that which we wish was not.

Right, right, right. It keeps wanting. Yeah, that's beautiful. Thank you. And thank you for staying with it, and something comes.

And by the way, when we're doing processes and words are not coming, sometimes there are no words yet. Let your gestures work. This is speaking. Sound. It's like, it's this, it's this.

Beautiful communication.

Don't demand that historical language will serve your current needs. The language may be too old for what's blossoming in you.

You might actually have to make up some words. You might actually need to add an unusual adjective to a known word. It's like that. Crazy sanity.

That came from me one time. Said exactly what I wanted to say. No one else could understand it. Well, actually some people did, but it felt just right for looking at something that was wild, but it wasn't just all chaotic. It was a crazy sanity.

And everything inside went, yes, that's right. Right?

So sometimes it's a new expression that you invent that your inner life goes — and sometimes it's just all like, that's as close to the words I can get. But the inner life goes, you got it. That's what it feels like. And then you are in connection with what's alive in you.

Not a victim of language

[Russell:] Great to seek language, great to invent language. But like one of my important mentors and best friends, this man Eugene Gendlin, who developed this Focusing work that we're gradually working into through kind of some back doors here.

He's a brilliant philosopher, really a brilliant philosopher, and psychotherapist. I remember him saying something to me, oh, six or seven years ago, sitting there. And he's written about this also. He said, you know, you don't have to be a victim of language. You can use language to say anything. There are no rules.

And what I took from that was, be more of a poet when you're talking about your inner experience, trying to speak in prose. Because often prose is too narrow for what it feels like.

And we need a kind of permission to call it something that's never been said before, for the inner life to go, yeah, that's what it's like.

[Participant:] There was an image that came up, and as soon as I tried to put any language on it, it missed. It was there, and it was resonant as an image, and if I tried to describe it, if I tried to name it at all, everything was just — it was all slightly off.

[Russell:] Yeah, good, good. So then that can become that image there.

Let it be, and ask it if it's okay to be called that image there, or just that thing, or that, so you have an identifier. But it's saying that's okay. It will let you know.

That's what's amazing — it responds in there. And it lets you know when it's off, or on, or close.

[Participant:] So how does that work when you're the listener? Is that because we're not used to making sounds to reflect back what the other person may be sounding?

I know it works when you work with people in coma. It's excellent if people make a noise. But we're pretty inhibited around making — we do it with babies. That works really well.

But does it work when people are — I mean, if somebody made a noise, and I don't know. In your experience, if you just, like, oh, that's how it feels, and you might say, oh, it feels like that. I mean, could you?

[Russell:] It depends on the quality of resonance that we're having.

[Participant:] Okay.

[Russell:] Sometimes it's just right. They go, oh, and it just feels totally natural to go, oh — or sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes they do that, and it feels more right to maybe even say nothing. Or sometimes to say, all that.

All that's a pretty nice one. Somebody has that kind of big —

But it really is. That's why we want this quality of connectedness, and then it can just come out of you, what fits.

[Participant:] Oh, yeah, it is.

The box of sad

[Russell:] Yeah, so just to drop this seed that we'll get to again many times.

I've observed it in myself for many years, and for most people I know, their inner life gets trapped in ordinary language. And when ordinary language doesn't work for their inner life, they ignore those parts of their inner life.

So the language begins to lead the experience, or box the experience.

And yet, what allows life to unfold is when it's fresh. Yeah, I'll give you a really clear example.

Get in touch with, say, something like — this is an example from my past. So I was in touch. There's something really sad. I noticed the sad, but then to really be alive with that sad, I needed to feel what this sad felt like, because every sad is its own sad.

If I keep it in the box called sad, it actually can't do much, because it's locked up in a box, the box of sad. And it feels good that I identified it. And then we can talk about the sad, but it's kind of like moving the box around. Well, there's my sad there.

But when I open the box and I go, well, what is the flavor of this?

Oh, it's actually a lonely sad. Lonely's closer.

So now it's a little smaller box, or a little less tight box, and it's lonely. Oh, and then it — oh.

It's like a little boy lost in the desert, on an island, and he's not sure if he's alone or not.

That got it. The inner life said, that's just what it's feeling. And in that moment, it's like, thank you.

Even though you go, well, great, you're on an island all alone. Great.

But when the inner life feels really seen and met and welcomed exactly as it is, it opens.

In my experience, with myself and with others, it doesn't feel wonderful, but there's a relief, a release, and it actually begins to shift. Sometimes a very little bit, sometimes a lot.

But my experience is, when I stay at the level of the big box — the big box is a good place to start. It's kind of like you found the right house, but you haven't gone in the house yet. You found the right address. It's called the sad place, but you're still standing outside the house.

Now you go in the house, and you're in this room of the sad place called lonely. And now you go to the back of the room, you open the closet, and you find — now you're in touch with what's really happening, what called you to that house in the first place.

You get what I mean?

So that's a kind of listening that takes pausing, and how is it? And you try a word out. You go, well, that's close, but we'll get to — I think tomorrow we'll look specifically at how the body speaks. Yes, no, maybe, almost.

We want to learn its language.

[Participant:] Beautiful.

[Russell:] Thank you so very much. This is very, very good. Let's take a little pause. Come back, we're going to do some movement together.

Let's turn on some heat during the pause so that the movement feels good.