Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 6, Session 6 — 50 minutes

Summary: On the last evening Russell invites those who are leaving to feel complete, then opens the floor. The talk turns to speaking and living the practice at home without sounding strange — pausing, listening, and meeting people freshly. He distinguishes ordinary sitting from a focusing-like way of hosting what is alive, and the evening closes with poems.

Last night

[Russell:] So, someone told me it was our last night. How did that happen? Long days, short weeks.

So, I do want to do some sitting together this evening, but I'd also like some time. If there's anything you're wanting to say right now — anything. I know a couple of things that I would like to invite. For Karen and Lisa, who are leaving, if there's anything so that you can feel complete. 'Cause I'm not gonna see you in the morning, am I?

So, I want you to feel complete, and I'm not sure if there's something I can do to help that, so I'm putting that out there. So that's — yeah.

[Participant:] Right.

[Russell:] Thank you, Lisa. I remember in one of our conversations you had — actually, this was a long time ago, when you almost came to the last program, and then it didn't work out 'cause the family thing happened. But at a couple of points you were thinking, well, maybe they can come out too. And that'd be great to meet Eli.

[Participant:] Oh, absolutely, yeah. Yeah, I'm sure. Yeah.

[Russell:] Yes, please. Yeah, well, I actually wanna speak to that tomorrow, but I will encourage interconnecting during the time in between. I wanna talk about that, and it is a whole subject. Right, yeah, thank you, thank you.

Well, one of the things is, hopefully, I think just about everybody's on the board now. Is that true? Is everyone on the board?

[Participant:] Everyone who has an email address.

[Russell:] Okay.

[Participant:] Or soon to be.

[Russell:] Okay, so that will help interconnecting. That's really gonna be a source of help for us, and yeah, I'll speak tomorrow about connecting, and I will include you all in email, or whatever I need to send, to let you know what's happening.

Let's say — yeah, it's a time for really anything. I feel like I've been putting out a lot today, and you've had some interaction together, but I haven't really given any time in the last couple of days, really, for you to ask for anything so much.

Am I fine?

[Participant:] Well, as I'm thinking of going home and interacting with people, and digesting everything that you've said, I have this vision of someone who's not aware of what I'm doing, asking me how I am.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And my question is, am I fine?

[Russell:] Depends. Depends who asked.

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] So, well, I'll speak a little bit to it now, and this will be part of our subject tomorrow.

Most — the temptation for our habitual thinking is to think in binary terms, is to think in essential duality, and say, well, do I answer with what's really happening in the moment and stay with it, or do I say I'm fine?

And we want to explore the whole range. In a certain moment, I'm just fine is perfect. In another moment, it's — well, let me take a moment and really sense it for a moment.

[Participant:] The question I guess I'm asking is, should I move towards — or, should is not exactly the word — but is moving towards changing my language, in ordinary conversation?

[Russell:] Yeah. Not so much. Not so — I don't — you'll have to see if it seems helpful or not. We definitely do not want to become some weird cultish-sounding something, that we don't talk like normal people. I mean, that's not helpful for us, for others, and I really don't encourage that.

Ordinary life

[Russell:] Much of the linguistic distinction that I was discussing today — and there, of course, further refinements that will continue going on — is for your inner work, how you hold the one here.

And when you're in a significant conversation, there will be moments where it is helpful to use the language to help you observe your identifications, when you're identifying in a way that's not helpful.

If you're identifying momentarily, temporarily, in something that you're conscious of, and it's just easier to say, no, no problem, it'll just be natural in that way, just ordinary in that way.

But when you start noticing that your way of speaking is bringing you into an old identity — this gets more than language, the way I was discussing it. This is what I was saying yesterday, and maybe more important than distinctions I was making today, if I had to choose, is to observe when you're telling your stories in the same old ways. When you keep reconfirming.

You know, it's almost like we all have certain stories that we can go, oh, that's A7. And we kind of press the button and say, okay, this is my trip to Nepal. And we go, this was my time when

I worked in the restaurant. This is my — and we can. And now sometimes, you know, that's no problem.

It's kind of — but I really like the opportunity to be fresh. It feels just nicer for me. Unless I'm real tired, you know, I'm sitting on a plane next to somebody, I sometimes will have — I will enjoy listening freshly to how it wants to come now.

Sometimes I just want to say, you know, if I want them not to ask anymore, I'll tell them the Feldenkrais method is about neuromuscular reeducation or something, and then they keep quiet for the rest of the time. Or I teach Embodied Life. It's really — you know, I go, they'll keep quiet.

No, but seriously, what I find helpful is — yeah, this is maybe the important point that's coming. I'm appreciating the question, 'cause you see what just happened in this moment was — this moment was linking me to something that is quite important for my invitations to you.

Is we want to really do what we can to help our everyday life be an expression of our practice, but not in the way of, I talk in a funny way, but in the way that it's gonna feel appropriate and not transgressive to sometimes pause more than other people normally do.

And to say things like, even with people who aren't in this kind of work at all, to say something like, oh, you know, what you're saying right now is really, really touching me. I wanna go a little bit slower here.

I can say — I was telling somebody today on my walk, I was saying, I've got a brother who's not in this stuff at all, works for the tobacco industry, is not involved in this kind of stuff. And when he's speaking, and I notice something's coming alive, or he's saying — he might be talking about something in economics, and like this.

I'd really love to say something like, whoa, wait, slow down, slow down, that's really interesting, I haven't heard that before. Let me really take that in. And he loves it. People feel really listened to.

And in that moment, there's a pause. In our ordinary way of interacting, whatever subject we're dealing with, we both go deeper, even if we have no discussion about going deeper. A pause was brought into it, and we both are less habitual for a little while.

And that, as you live, happens more smoothly, and you don't have to do it because I want to talk about my feelings. It's not like that. It's more — much of the time, has more smoothness.

Also, you'll find that just by being more present in your grocery line, standing, meeting the eyes of people, interacting with less — people start responding to that.

And then you'll go back through your day if you decide to take up a gratitude practice, and the look in the eye of the person checking you out will come to you, and you'll have a relationship with them again. And then next time you see them, you already have something going. It's amazing.

And you have these living connections that are touching. But it's bringing life to life, but not doing it in a way that we kind of sound weird.

Except sometimes.

[Participant:] And I agree — whether it's three years — to keep deepening the relationship. And there's some people I feel like I —, and some people that I just met, and other people that I didn't really connect with, really at all. And so that'll be really nice next time.

And yeah, Thursday I have seven clients. I want that smooth enough. I kind of feel really hopeful that it's just going to keep — that this is going to keep deepening.

[Russell:] So beautiful, what you do. Your work is just so amazing. So — and it's here. It's a pleasure.

[Participant:] Thank you.

[Russell:] Thank you for receiving.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. And excited by the opportunities you have to be working in the world, with the kids you work with, with the situations you work with. That's bringing your presence into those situations. It's so amazing.

The work

[Russell:] Anything else would like to come? Yes, please.

[Participant:] Right. Well, what I was referring to became more like advanced physical therapy.

[Russell:] Yeah. Right.

[Participant:] That's — can't complain about that.

[Russell:] Yeah, it's true, it's great. That's a beautiful aspect of the work.

The analogy I sometimes use, for those of us who feel so grateful for all levels of the Feldenkrais work, or all levels of the different works we do — the analogy I like to use is, imagine that you loved music. Just imagine that music was really your connection to the deepest place you know.

And imagine that Mozart was your particular key, that just sent you as deep to your core as anything in the universe. That was your doorway to authenticity, to truth, to beauty, to goodness. That just opened you like that.

Then imagine that they discovered that listening to Mozart was good for depression. And then imagine somebody told you, the purpose of Mozart is to heal depression. And you'd say, well, it's great that it works with depression, but don't miss out on all this.

And they'd say, no, no, no, it's really — and then, but then sometimes people, they get better from their depression, they want to learn more about this. But it feels like, you know, wow, this is all living in there. Let's not miss it.

[Participant:] Yes.

Dear one

[Participant:] It's something that stuck with me from the last time that I saw you in Salt City.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] It was a phrase that you used with someone in a process. We were in an introduction. And it's something of that — the flavor of the warmth and the love.

[Russell:] I so appreciate you bringing it.

[Participant:] It feels like it's giving something back to me about Buddhist practice. You know, can be a very —

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And I feel like this little phrase, it's like its batteries have been recharged. And it's — hello, sweetheart. And it touches me so deeply that all those tender parts would be whenever —

And then that brings something else that wants to come. And then a question, which is, one of the little handmade greeting cards that's in the next room — this beautiful phrase that is coming to me in practice, that is, behold the one beholding me as I am.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And I like that. It's connecting the witnesses — smiling, warm, that light in the space.

[Russell:] Beautiful, yeah.

[Participant:] And then, as that came to me, there's a little bit of a question about — I don't remember if you finished something about, don't do this in the sitting practice, and if you could say a little more before we sit.

[Russell:] Okay, okay. Yeah, that's beautiful. And I want to give context to the sweetheart. Oh, dear one is another way I do it.

So, you'll all find your own many ways of being with your inner life, and your own vocabularies. For me, one that came quite spontaneously out of working with resource processes, and a number of times of finding my caring self through how I would hold my daughter when she was little.

And there became this gesture for me that was like, when I would have something painful inside that at first might have been difficult, or some — oh, dear one. Oh, sweetheart, I'm with you.

And it feels like I'm talking to this inner place that doesn't know what to do, is scared, is hurt, is angry. Oh, dear one. Oh, sweetheart. I'm with you.

And that probably sounds really loud to many people, but oh, it's just such a — for me, in my inner life, just a natural way of being with anything that doesn't feel whole, complete, and fine in itself. Anything living in me.

And there's ever a moment — which I must say there isn't anymore — but if there ever, on the path to that, there ever was a moment where there was something inside that didn't want to be kind to this place, then I was kind to that place.

You know, and it maybe didn't want to be called sweetheart. It might have been just, I'm with you. It couldn't handle too much intimacy. I'm with you, big guy.

Skillful means. It's called skillful means. Whatever it needs, you give it. Okay, okay, big guy. Tell me all about it.

The guest house

[Russell:] So, this is a distinction that will be helpful for some right now, and will make more sense as we go along, and especially after next time, and our learning not only how to be with ourselves, but how to bear witness for another in skillful ways.

When — in the guest house. Remember the guest house?

So we're inviting these places in, and sitting down with them.

Tell you a beautiful story that Jean is loving to tell these days. There's some people who have been working with focusing in different countries — in Pakistan, Afghanistan, different countries — teaching villagers not the steps, not the thing, but the basic focusing attitude. And of course, it's all the women who take it up first. The men won't go near it. But the women then teach it to their husbands, a way of listening to their inner life.

And they're finding the great gift of Rumi, who wrote The Guest House — because these are Islamic countries and they all know Rumi — and the function of guest and host is so built into the culture, and sitting down and having tea is so built into the culture, that they use this to teach how to be with something, how to serve tea, and how to be with it. As if you've offered a tea, and sit down with it.

And then he tells the story that this woman had told him, who was working there. Do you know them? Do you know them? At a presentation?

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah, it's touching. But both — Barbara and Karen work with focusing, or have been trained in focusing work. I don't think — has anyone else been trained specifically? Yeah, so they're good allies in this.

So, Jean was telling the story that he heard from them, that there was this woman who had taught her husband this thing, and this way of working. And apparently one day he was home, and his neighbor had stolen some water rights — had rerouted a creek that he relied on — and he was fuming.

They've been having this water quarrel for a while, and the guy actually rerouted it, and he went back to his little home, and he got his rifle, and he was just about out the door when he said to himself, "Maybe I have a guest."

And he sat down at the table, and he talked to the place that was angry, as if he was serving it tea. And gave it a time to — well, but he did this. He did — oh, so, and, oh, so you're really upset, and you really want to get back. Tell me more. What's — and it's all tight inside.

They don't do a lot with all the body stuff. They connect it to the body, but then let them just tell out this, and what else does it want you to know? Well, he shouldn't do that, and there's another part. Then they recognize another part of me that really wants to be able to be friendly with him, but it's just so angry, this part is so angry.

And, well, what about the — well, the friendly part, just, I just want to live in harmony with people, and I just — we've been neighbors for so long. Yeah, but I've got to speak to him. Well, and then after a period of time of just going, listening to the voices in himself and letting them speak, he

was able to put away his rifle, go speak to him, and tell him that, I'm really — you know, I was really upset, and I don't want to do anything. I almost felt like really hurting you, but I really want to — and they just worked it out.

And coming to him from that place of truth, but not with all the blame, transformed the interaction. It's unbelievable.

But this — so, in the guest house, we are sitting down with things, and we are in the focusing attitude, and I really want to make sure we're getting this. I'm not yet teaching steps. You will get a variety of ways that you can pick what works for you, but what's so potent that I want in the air is this way of turning towards your inner life, this way of treating yourself, the way of being with it, and how it's alive, and letting it speak, and feeling it bodily, and receiving, and finding out how to be with that particular place in a way that it feels safe and able to speak to you, able to tell you things that you don't know yet.

That's when you know you're really in the focusing process, when you're hearing things from your body that you haven't thought before, and it's surprising you. I didn't know that was going on.

And so I like to make a distinction, and I very much encourage you to work with this distinction, between when we are practicing just sitting, welcoming what comes.

It's like the front door is open, but the back door is open, and you don't serve it tea. It comes through your house. And you welcome it, and you watch it go by.

So, when we are in a more focusing relationship to what's alive in us, that's what I call more reflective meditation, where at another time in the day you might stop, and in the reflective times I recommend closing your eyes. I think it's easier to get in touch with things with your eyes closed. Close your eyes.

And you can begin like a regular meditation, just sensing yourself, grounding, breathing. And then you can invite whatever wants to come, or you can go back to something that was there earlier that you want more information about.

And you — okay, I'm just gonna be with this place that feels upset about the way somebody said something, or is really uncertain about what to do with — you know, Mason needing this, and someone else saying, okay, what — just feeling confused about it. I wanna sit with that confused place.

And then, sit with it and say, okay, show me what would like some company from my presence. Oh, it just feels like so. Confused, so — okay, I'm with the confused place, and sense it in your — so then you kinda hang out with it.

Another image that I once heard, that I think is pretty helpful for distinction. It's like you're the host of a gathering. And in meditation, you meet people at the door, you point out where the drinks and food are, and you let them go, 'cause you're gonna meet the next person and have them feel comfortable. You don't just stay with that one.

But then, when you're doing a more reflective meditation or a focusing-like process, you invite somebody to go into the back room, 'cause you haven't seen them in a while, and you wanna sit down for 20 minutes and really find out how things have been going.

But you wouldn't do that during your usual meditation, unless it was just — something was so strong that it was a battle not to. And then you say, okay, this really needs my attention. That make sense?

What's important to recognize is that they are really cousins of each other. They're very close. But that basic quality that we're reinforcing — the sense of I am the space, and I am the light.

I am the — as the light, I'm the capacity for noticing, which includes being with and letting go. But I am that, and at moments it becomes more of a being with and staying with for a while, and at other times it's more of a letting it go through the space.

But they're both the same ground of being, applied differently. Same ground of being, different function. Both are liberating in different ways.

They're each a gift. For me, each without the other has a certain incompleteness.

I spent a lot of time letting everything go through, and I got very unattached to lots of things, and very capable of letting things go. But there was a certain depth missing in certain areas.

Poems

[Russell:] Anybody have a poem they'd like to bring?

[Participant:] Yes.

[Russell:] Okay.

[Participant:] The title of the poem is High Flight, and it deals with a world that I — which was written by a young airman during the Second World War, before the US joined the fight. He went over under the Canadian flag, and was killed just before the Battle of Britain. He was 24 years old. And he wrote this on the back of an envelope, which was subsequently sent. And the title is High Flight.

The poem is recited — a young airman's flight, and a sense of the sacred.

[Russell:] Thank you, Pete. Yeah. You don't know what Pete flies.

I would love one.

[Participant:] Yes.

[Russell:] Would you speak louder, though? I think we're losing some of the words because of the distance. Are you — or you could come in the middle.

[Participant:] No?

[Russell:] Oh, okay, okay.

[Participant:] This is a poem by Stephen Levine, and it's —

[Russell:] Louder, louder. Yeah. Yes. That's what those feet are for.

[Participant:] So, this is a poem by Stephen Levine, and it's one that I need to hear a lot, so it's in my heart. It's called Mother of Us All. I'm gonna close my eyes.

The poem is recited — a prayer to be held as we are, rather than perfected.

[Russell:] Nice, yeah. We'll hear that one next. Yeah, and you can stand up, though. It's a big room.

[Participant:] It is a big room.

A prose piece is read, about making something the tide will take, and about finding that well-being is not in what can be lost.

[Russell:] That was after Eugene's first dream course. Yeah. Yes. Oh, beautiful. Yes.

[Participant:] From a beautiful woman that I've not yet met, and can't wait to. Many, many years ago, I carried a poem in my pocket. That was a reminder of the morning I woke up and met my false self, that needed to make some changes in my life. And this poem came upon me — unanimously beautiful? What's the word?

[Participant:] Anonymously?

[Participant:] Thank you. Anonymously. So I had no idea the author until about six years ago. I literally, physically tripped at Barnes & Noble and landed in a bookshelf. And —

[Russell:] What did you say?

[Participant:] I physically tripped, landed in a bookshelf.

[Russell:] Oh, you told that story earlier.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And a book fell out, and I'm on the floor, and the book is right here, and I'm collecting my parts, and I look down, and it's the poem.

[Russell:] Wow.

[Participant:] And I pick up the book, and I turn it over, and I'm just like, wait, that's my poem. And I pull out my spare poem. And it was this poem, and it's a wonderful book that became my companion during a really rough, rough time that lasted many years. But it was my companion, and it was written by Donna Mariposa, which is — incredible.

So, I will not die an unlived life.

She recites part of the poem — a choice to live fully — and the line trails off.

I'm listening to this. I moved to bring a poem, and I'm not sure I have all of it, but I will see in the telling. It's called Mysteries.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] Can you hear?

The poem is recited — ordinary life as mystery, and a wish to keep company with wonder rather than with certainty.

That's Mary Oliver.

[Participant:] I would like to recite a poem, and also request that the people who have recited the poems type them onto the board. Because I like to read some again and hear some, and some I just like to read.

[Russell:] That's a really nice gift. I think you have that in your newsletter — that poem that you've read, once you've posted it. The Mysteries?

[Participant:] Yes.

[Russell:] Could be.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. So, and that's great. It's a beautiful — there's a space. What's it say? Inspirations, on the board. That's great.

[Participant:] This poem's written about a hundred years ago by Tagore, the Bengali Indian, and it's a very slight adaptation from his original English.

Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high, and knowledge is free, where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls, where words come out of the depth of truth, where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection, where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sands of dead habit. Where the mind is led forward into ever-widening circles of action thought, into this heaven of freedom, let us awake.

[Russell:] Thank you.

[Participant:] It's adapted for us simply because he — let my country awake — and it became a national —

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:] Thank you. Good. So, we've been sitting a little while. Let's do a walking followed by a sitting.