Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 3, Session 5 — 36 minutes

Summary: Russell invites a light hold on concepts, then a movement lesson in the tanden and the exhale. Rather than controlling the breath, the lesson offers many ways of breathing — fullness downward, pauses, a cough, swallowing, and nostril and mouth variations — so the organism can choose what is functional.

Holding concepts lightly

Okay, yeah. So let's look. Looking at the tanden, and getting the feeling of the exhale filling low.

And so, from Feldenkrais's point of view, it's not helpful to take our concepts and turn them into truth.

Concepts, even really exquisite concepts — like we're talking about the brain, I'm giving a picture of it — hold them lightly. Who knows, there could be new discoveries about the brain twenty years from now that will turn everything upside down.

So what we want to work with is what is helpful for life to unfold. That's the criterion we're using. Is this a helpful way of looking at it?

From his point of view, to learn breathing, to go to breathing schools, to take exercises in breathing — he thought it was idiotic. He was kind of extreme in his opinions. He thought it would make matters worse. Why? Because you would cortically try to control something that has ancient wisdom, that functions better if you don't mess with it.

But he's saying, that doesn't mean you have to just have a habit and be stuck with the habit that you learned, that was connected to maybe some dysfunctional environments that you were in.

Because, well, what can we do if we don't try to control the breath and say, well, I should breathe with my belly and not with my chest, or I have to breathe full, or I have to breathe slow, or any of the concepts?

If we put that aside and we say, can I give my brain different kinds of stimulation so that it can create the sense of a different way of breathing?

And then there are alternative patterns, that one can begin to have a true inner choice — that one could go in this direction or this direction — that the organism now is free, we could say, to choose what feels most appropriate in a certain situation, what feels most functional.

So his point of view is, don't learn a way of breathing. Learn many ways of breathing. Shake up the system, and then let yourself be aware but not controlling. Let yourself notice. Let yourself bring questions into your body.

Which I really appreciate, that perspective, on all of my life, in all aspects.

Holding concept lightly, as a guide and as something to test with — test reality.

Fullness in the tanden

So it's true that most people, when they are at rest, the exhale will come in, and that feels quite natural. The descending of the diaphragm with the inhale — there's a natural filling, as this is open down here — and the coming up of the diaphragm can often just softly invite an inward movement here.

Now, when someone is engaged in demanding activity, it's really helpful when this gets full. One of the ways you can protect your back — this is the opposite of Pilates teaching. One of the ways you can protect your back is by not getting flaccid here, but by having a — to lift with a feeling of fullness here.

Not just forward. Remember, the golden ball goes back towards the sacrum. It's a way of giving support to this whole region. Inner.

What I can say is, yes. For me, at this point, probably eighty percent of the time, the exhale has an outward movement. It's just if I'm lying in bed and resting, but when I'm actively engaged in living, it's not that I'm doing anything intentional. It's that there is — it's part of my experience of a growing center — that this is just there.

Kind of like the ground becomes part of your environment, part of your bodily experience — something alive here.

I notice when there's a shrinking, a pulling away, that this tends to get tightened in here.

So what I want to do is — yeah, I want to get into the lesson. I'll give you some more theory about it, some more idea about it later, and again why I think it's so important. But for now, I want to see, can you get a feeling? Let's do it in sitting.

In sitting

You let an inhale come, and as you exhale, softly — not creating tension, but creating a feeling of fullness.

And you can feel that you're pushing out, but it's not only forward. And a lot of people find it helpful to think down towards the pelvic floor.

And if you really can't find it at all, one image that helps some people is as if you're constipated, but just gently push. And go, and then back off from that a little bit. And some people might find it helpful.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen talks about umbilical breathing, because the baby doesn't breathe with their lungs. The baby breathes through their umbilical cord. And if you think of that, it changes your sense of air, of oxygen, of breathing, coming into this region. Umbilical breathing.

Thank you.

So is this different from yesterday, when we played with exhaling and feeling the movement upward, or can we still feel it? You can do it now. Let's wait to get to linking then, okay? Because that adds a level of complexity. Yes, they're integratable. Right now, that adds a level of complexity that's not helpful — to know how you can go up and down at the same time.

Inhale — don't. Just let the — don't worry.

Most help with breathing comes from clarifying the exhale. Most help with breathing will come from working off of the exhale. Your body knows how to take in air, and we're going to do a little bit of pattern interruption, a little bit of lower brain perturbation, so that some of the lower brain structures get active in breathing, and that you're conscious of it.

That's better to do it than talk about. Go ahead.

Down, come on your back. Down, down, down, down.

Letting more air out

And bend your legs. Place your hands on your lower belly.

So gently with the exhale, notice if you can have a subtle outward and downward movement. When I say out, I also mean back towards the sacrum, so that you're not rolling your lumbar spine forward in the outness.

Thinking down can be very helpful. Think towards your sit bones, towards the space between your sit bones, and notice if a sound, like a cow — see if that helps you to push down.

Now, when we do this next piece, don't be surprised if you cough. It doesn't mean you have a cold. It's just gonna activate, for some of us, some coughing.

That's right. That's right. That's right. We're gonna go there in a sec. So for now, let the air out. Is that a question? Yeah, let the air out.

Pause. Let more air out. Push down.

Pause. And wait for the urge to breathe. Let the breath come, and then again, a normal exhale. Hold your breath. Pause in your breath. Don't let any in. Push out some more air, and as you push out, feel your belly coming out.

Pause. Push out a bit more. When the urge to breathe comes, just give in to it. Let the breath come.

So we're creating a little bit of oxygen debt, so that your hypothalamus, lower structures of your brain, get active, and you just let the breath in.

Again, it's a natural exhale, intentional pause. During the pause, don't tighten, if possible. Push out some more air. Pause for another couple of seconds. Wait for the urge to breathe, and just open to the breath. Just let the breath come.

The cough

Now, with your hands on your belly, intentionally create the cough. Feel into your hands. Feel into your hands. Let that come forward.

And leave that. Just feel the — actually, just leave it for a minute. Lower your legs. Well, just let yourself lie here and breathe.

Just sense the breath coming and going. Don't try to change it in any way. It likely comes in with the exhale — no problem. But it'll often be when you're resting.

Swallowing

Bend your legs. This time, you're gonna let the air out, and pause, maybe five or six seconds. Let some more air out, and as you're pushing the air out, feel your belly.

You pause again, a little more air out, and then swallow your saliva. So you create a little oxygen debt with that swallow, and then just let the breath come in.

Do that a number of times. Just feel what you can about being deep in yourself.

There's a reflex connected to swallowing that influences breathing. We're wanting to activate that. So just take your time. Do it twenty, thirty times.

[Silence 44 seconds]

After you swallow, you just let the breath come in.

Rolling the pelvis

Okay. At that pause, keep your legs bent, and just lightly roll your pelvis forward and back.

Just don't — where you don't control your breath, just lightly roll your pelvis forward and back, sensing the length of your spine, sensing from your pelvis through to your head.

So you want to open the field of attention from being focused so much down in your belly. Let it grow.

Roll your pelvis forward, the lower back coming away from the ground. Back is just flattening the lower back. So you're not lifting the pelvis up in the air. You're just rolling forward and back.

Pause with your legs bent. And breathe in through your mouth, and out through your nose.

And as you're breathing out through the nose, just notice if you can have just a subtle feeling of something fuller down. There's a slight pushing to get the air through your nose. Yes.

No, you're just resting with the pelvis. But the filling — if you feel a fullness down through your tanden, through the golden ball — we think of it back towards the sacrum as well as forward.

So you're breathing out through the nose, with a subtle feeling of pushing the air a little bit.

One nostril, then the other

Put your right thumb on your right nostril. Breathe in through your mouth. And gently push the air out through your left nostril.

Thinking down towards the pelvic floor with the exhale, just gently.

The breath just comes in, and out the left nostril.

Good, okay. Leave that. Lower your legs, lower your arm. Just feel how that influences your breathing right now, having just exhaled those times through the left nostril.

[Silence 41 seconds]

Bend your legs. Close your left nostril. You can use your left thumb — and inhaling through your mouth, just letting the air come in, pausing briefly, and then exhaling out the right nostril.

With a little bit of — you'll need to get the air out, so there's a little bit of pushing, but it's not a pulling in the belly. It's a little bit out.

[Silence 47 seconds]

Pause. Place your hands on your belly. Just feel your breathing.

And just notice if you can intentionally create a subtle fullness. We want to differentiate that from a sense of tension. A subtle fullness as you exhale, downward.

It's likely not to feel so natural. But if you feel it, see if that can get more subtle, yet clear.

And now, legs bent, you can either use each thumb, or you can use the thumb of one hand and the two fingers of that same hand, but you can alternate.

In one breath, you're gonna inhale through your mouth. You're gonna go back and forth from nostril to nostril, exhaling. So it's one breath. You might do three or four or five turns back and forth. You keep the stream of air going.

Pause at the end, swallow, and let the next breath come in through your mouth.

[Silence 36 seconds]

Okay, let that go. Let your hand come down. Lengthen your legs.

Not trying to breathe any particular way. Just let your attention move through your body, including the golden balls.

The lower belly

And just as you're resting there, notice — can you pull in your belly and keep it in and breathe?

Think of your lower belly. See if you can find some movement. It might include your upper belly, but see that there's something below your belly button that you can use your hands to help you sense. That something can come in. And you could push something out.

Don't worry about the breath right now. This, actually, we'll get to in more detail tomorrow. But just with your hands on your lower belly, see if you can have the feeling of pulling in the belly, and being able to push out the lower belly. Down below your belly button.

Sink towards your pelvic floor.

And bend your legs. And let a breath come in through your mouth. And out — a little bit out both nostrils, and then a little out your mouth, then both nostrils, then your mouth. Go back and forth, closing one passage, then closing the other.

Not with your hand now. You're just letting both nostrils exhale, then you open your mouth, then both nostrils.

Feel how you can switch back and forth between exhaling from your nose and exhaling from your mouth.

And think down towards your bottom. And just let the air come in. Let the air come in through the mouth.

And see if you can get smoother in the transition from nose exhaling to mouth exhaling — nose, mouth — and feel what you do to shift. And listen down in your belly.

That's it. Good.

On your front

And just for a little bit, come over onto your front. And feel your breath against the floor.

Notice where you can sense the breath.

And rest your forehead on your hands, and do that same movement of exhaling, alternating your nose and mouth, thinking downward on your exhale. And notice — can you feel against the floor some fullness of your lower belly?

If you do feel that, is it more on one side, or is it on both sides?

Going back and forth between nose and belly.

Create a little bit of oxygen debt by waiting at the end of an exhale, and then just let the air come in.

Go back and forth real quick between the nose and the mouth. Feel into your lower belly.

Leave that. Come onto your back.

Just pause for just a moment on your back, sensing the breath as it comes and goes.

Sitting

And find your way up to a sitting position. You could sit in for just a couple of minutes.

And as you're sitting, you can think. Follow the breath. Breath can come down with the inhale, but notice if there can be a subtle, intentional filling downward with the exhale.

And if you feel it, see if it can get more subtle, easier, lighter.

Pull your belly in a little bit. Take a breath and pull it in, and as you exhale, go, and push down and out.

The inhale comes, and move down and out.

And now without the move, see if there can be — and it's still intentional — a filling.

And then letting it get more and more subtle.

And then let go of the intentionality, and just feel yourself breathing. Feel how the inhale comes — its rhythm, location.

Let your eyes open, and still follow your breath.

Okay.

Closing

So this is a process that will grow over the next couple of days. It will — just a step in that direction. Did a step yesterday, doing a step now, and we'll continue that.

We're a little bit late for lunch, so let's head on down.