Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 4, Session 5 — 48 minutes

Summary: Russell guides a movement lesson in differentiating the pelvic floor, belly, and chest. On the back and on the front, the group learns to inflate the torso in every direction, separate breathing from unnecessary contractions, and find a quiet fullness through the abdomen and pelvis.

Finding the pelvic floor

[Russell:] So, once again, pulling up in the pelvic floor, sitting, finding out, can you just breathe, and releasing.

Pull in your belly, and pull up your pelvic floor.

And see if you can keep that in and up, of both the belly and the pelvic floor, and breathe. As you release the breath, keep it up, and then let go.

Is anybody feeling like they can't really find their pelvic floor? They don't quite know what I'm talking about there.

One may form with your attention.

Okay, so, other images we can have, in addition to the sense of pulling up, pulling something into you, as if you wanted to stop yourself peeing.

Just see if there's some — you're getting something with that. Good, good, that's great.

[Student:] Well, what about — unless you're full of squeezing the sphincter, the anal sphincter?

[Russell:] Okay, yeah. I mean, that's part of it.

[Student:] Yeah. Part of it, trying to differentiate all.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. Just, that's part of your pelvic floor. And so we're just pulling in and letting go right now. That's a good enough distinction.

Now, just gently have the feeling of pushing out. And without pulling your belly in, see if you can pull up your pelvic floor. It's a little more complex.

Some people will find, well, no, my belly just comes in. See if you can differentiate the bottom from the belly. Up and down.

Not yet, we will. Right now, I just want you to find this piece. Breathe any way that makes it possible. But breathe.

It feels like the room is still. Okay, lie down. We've got to do some more steps here. The room got frozen on the last invitation. So we need a better step there.

So just enjoy the ground.

Filling the chest

And just sense your breathing. Feel what happens in your chest as you breathe.

And see, can you intentionally fill your chest without getting real tense inside? There'll be some feeling of pressure, probably. But fill your chest so that the breastbone goes away from the vertebral column.

See if you can feel — and you can use your hands on your chest — to see if there's a lifting without taking your back off the ground. Hands on the chest, near the sternum, above the breasts, is probably easier.

And feel that there's a forward movement, maybe a lifting up towards the shoulders, as you fill, but don't lift your back off the floor. So we want that whole cylinder, that whole roundness, to fill out.

If you find that you're lifting, let your back settle.

And then you're releasing the breath, and you can let the chest fall, and then you're inhaling, letting the chest grow. So let your pictures be that you're on the inside of your skeleton, inside the ribs, almost like you can welcome the lungs coming towards the ribs.

And you can feel upward, in the direction of your clavicles and shoulders, neck. The upper lobes of your lungs go quite high, surprisingly high in the torso. So let that growth in those upper lungs come upward.

Feel the back of the lungs. The lungs are actually closer to the ribs in back than in front. So see if you can sense the growing of the breath towards the floor as well.

And place the backs of your hands just near your armpits — backs of your fingers near your armpits — and see if you can sense a widening, that the sides of the lungs can grow. And you can have a feeling of inflating the chest in this direction also.

And now, let the air out, but create the same inflation in all directions. So how can you inflate the chest, but not have it be because the breath is filling you, but because it's an inner movement?

If you can feel how the chest can get big, you can hold your breath for a few moments and then let it go and breathe again, and let the air out, pause, let the chest grow.

Think forward, back, up, down, left, right.

So another way to do this is take a breath, inflate your chest, keep the chest inflated, and let the breath out.

And then let the chest fall, and do that again. So inflate the chest with the breath, and find out you don't need the air for that inflation. You can do that elsewise. You can let the air out and still have the fullness in all directions.

And once you have that, then you can exhale. And without any air, you can create an inflation in the chest. See if you can find that.

Good. Leave that alone. Pause. Just breathe naturally.

[Silence 36 seconds]

Chest and belly

Yeah, bend your legs.

And feel — put your hands on your lower belly, and feel how you can, as the breath comes in, inflate your lower belly. And have a sense of a gentle pressure downward, and outward, and backward.

And then just let it go with the exhale. You feel it goes in with the exhale.

And hold your breath. Take a breath and hold it, and pull your belly in without letting the breath out. And push the belly out without letting the breath out. Pull the belly in. And then just let it go and breathe.

Now, when I'm saying belly here, I want to encourage you to think all around. Think backward, downward, that whole region.

Yes. Yeah, right now, I'm not asking you to do anything particular. We're going to build towards that. It's going to increase in complexity as we go along. I want you to do it in steps.

So, just gently roll your head. Make sure you're not getting stuck in one place. Let your head turn a little bit.

Good, and take a medium-sized breath, and pause, hold it, and pull in your belly, inflate your chest, and then push out. Don't let the air out. Push out your belly, all the way down and out, and let your chest fall.

And pull in your belly and inflate the chest, and push out the lower belly, letting the chest fall, then let the air out, and take a breath.

So, we're taking a breath, a medium-sized breath, pausing, and doing a few alternate movements of the chest getting big, and letting it really feel the sternum come down and back as the chest deflates, then the belly fills out.

So think, when you're filling out your lower belly, you're not arching your back. You're also thinking back towards your lower back and sacrum.

You're pulling in the belly, the chest gets big. Pushing out the belly, the chest drops down. Feel the fullness in your lower belly.

Push out. The out also has a downward feeling. Good. Great.

Lifting the head

Leave that. Interlace your hands under your head for a moment, and just gently, with an exhale, lift your head as if you wanted to look between your legs. Let the elbows come kind of toward each other, not tight, but not all the way out. Some comfortable place where you can feel the palms on the sides of your head giving you some support, and you're looking between your legs.

Do that with an exhale.

And as you do that, feel that you can pull in your belly. That feels probably pretty natural. Pull in your belly as you do that. Let the lower back really flatten.

And then see if, with an exhale, you can do the opposite with your lower belly. See if you can push out and down as you lift your head. See if you can get anything moving downward.

Go slow, go smooth. Good.

And then pause, take a rest.

Feel the volume of your torso. Let your arms rest, let your legs rest, and feel the size of your torso, how the volume is in there.

[Silence 32 seconds]

Separating breath and movement

Now. Bend your legs gently, about 50 percent of what you could do. Inflate your chest so you don't feel tense, but you feel big, you feel large in your chest. And let yourself breathe without letting your chest fall. See if you can find out how to do that.

So even as the air goes out, you're not letting the chest fall.

Be inside yourself. Good.

Now keep your legs bent and push out your lower belly. Push out your belly, think down to your pelvis, to the pelvic floor. You're not active with your pelvic floor, but you're thinking downward towards it. You've got a fullness, the chest probably falls, and breathe here without letting the belly go in when you exhale.

So it will take just a subtle pushing down and out as you exhale, so that the belly doesn't come in.

And then take a breath. Hold your breath gently and push in and out — pulling in your belly, inflating your chest, out with your belly, letting your chest fall. When you go out with your belly, think down and back as well.

So filling downward, and let all the spaces of your torso grow. And see if you can do that movement faster, without getting chaotic about it. That there's a filling up in the chest, a pulling in of the belly, and then a filling of the belly and a dropping of the chest.

And you can think in all directions with that, and your teeth are not pressing, jaw is at ease, your tongue is at ease.

That's good. Okay. And then pause with that for a few.

And just feel how the breathing is. Feel how the ribs can make space for the lungs, and how the diaphragm moves.

Does anybody feel they don't know what I mean by the alternating movement of the chest and belly, pulling one in, one out?

Yeah. You're right on to the next process. You're perfect. Yes.

So, the next one is a long, slow inhale as this movement occurs.

So we're learning how to separate the breathing from the unnecessary contractions in the torso. This is a critical movement for a lot of people, so go slow. The movement will tend to get sharp for a lot of us here. Slow and smooth.

You can have a hand on a belly and a hand on your chest, if that helps you for feedback. Have your legs bent.

But, excuse me — same on the way out. So it's a long, slow inhale, and you might do three or four, two or five movements back and forth.

At first, it may seem like, I can't separate that. This will be a practice. And then if you can, with the exhale.

[Student:] Huh?

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, you can begin to do it inhaling — in and out, in and out, in and out — exhaling. Exhaling through your mouth might be a little easier to discover.

See if you can have the breathing independent of the chest-belly movement. So your chest and belly, just in this movement, back and forth.

Okay.

Parasitic contraction

So, sit up for me. Let me give you just — this is such a — in my opinion, one of Feldenkrais's very important discoveries. Freedom. Freedom in the torso.

So what we're working with is, here's my lower belly, here's my chest. I'm seeing — take a breath in, long, slow, exaggerate the sound so you can hear it.

Exhale.

The movements of the torso, the musculature that is not essential for breathing, get separated from the breathing. Most of us have habits. This is a very common one. You've observed it either in yourself or another.

This is what in Moshe's language is a parasitic contraction to what's essential for breathing.

And we have many more subtle parasitic contractions, in our intercostals, in our abdomen. And so if you can keep this movement going — like right now I'm talking, so air is coming out — and have that independence of this movement, your breathing gets much more home to what's needed.

And in terms of our lungs, in terms of anything connected, the rhythm of the heart, this is all very helpful.

Does that picture make sense?

Okay. I know for some of you who are new to it, you go, I can't find it. That's okay. It's learnable.

Okay, take just little bits of practice till you begin disconnecting, kind of deconstructing something that's not essential for your breathing, and you just need to play with it.

Okay, let's do another step. Come on down.

Fullness and the pelvic floor

Okay, and bend your legs. Just lightly roll your head. Don't want to get too focused in here. Let your mouth be soft, let your tongue have space in your mouth.

Just without forcing, without controlling, just feel the flow of breath.

And just gently feel into your pelvic floor, and feel if you can just lightly pull up and release. Pull up. Pull up in your pelvic floor and release.

And if it's difficult to find, pull in your belly. So your belly muscles are generally auxiliaries for the pelvic floor. We're learning to differentiate, but if you have a hard time finding it, pulling in your belly makes it a little easier to pull up your pelvic floor.

And then we want to see, can you pull up the pelvic floor without pulling in your belly? Still breathing — or knowing that you're not — that's good enough.

One more step. Gently pushing out in your lower belly, keeping the lower belly out. And pull up your pelvic floor and release. Up and in, and release, without pulling in your belly.

Up, up, in, release. Up, up, in, release. Still you have this fullness downward.

It's very important that we learn to have that fullness without having to push out the pelvic floor, but there can be a tonicity in the pelvic floor and a fullness downward in the tanden — openness, potency.

Good.

Good, and then keep your legs bent, and just leave this alone. Just rock your pelvis forward and back. Oh, just light and easy, just casual, not so much focus, just easy.

Let that go all the way through your spine. You feel your head gets pushed and pulled a little bit, and it's just — let your mouth open, and as you exhale, just a sense of letting go on the exhale.

Just let that go through you. That's good.

Good, and then pause.

On the front

Come onto your front. Come onto your belly.

You have a choice of having your arms upward on the floor and your forehead on the floor, or your forehead on your hands.

Just sense the whole central line of yourself. The center of your forehead, the center of your nose, draw a line down your lip, down your chin, down your throat, down your breastbone, down the middle, down through your belly button, down through your pubic bone, the middle of your pubic bone, through your genitals, around. In between your buttocks, through your tailbone and your sacrum.

Keep going through your lumbar spine, through your mid spine, your upper back, your neck, through the back of the neck, through to the top of the head, and around through the forehead. So you have this central line.

And just notice any right-left differences in your pelvis right now, in the way your chest rests on the floor.

Feel how the breathing moves through you.

And gently inflate your chest and keep it inflated as you breathe. So you're not letting it go with the exhale.

Good. And then let the chest go.

Inflate your lower belly, down towards the pelvis. Keep yourself inflated there and breathe. Not tension, but fullness. Don't let the belly come in when you let the air out.

Gently go back and forth between the chest and the belly. You can breathe, you can hold your breath, whatever. The important thing now — do whatever works easiest for you in terms of breathing, but go back and forth between inflating the chest, letting the belly come in, inflating the belly, and letting the chest fall.

Just light and easy, back and forth. Be inside your torso, feeling that expansion.

Most powerful ways of working with the muscular habits is that internal pressure. Pushing out.

Well, it's good.

And then just pause comfortably on your front. Let your head be where it wants to be. Just pause here.

And just notice if you can have a simple, easy pulling up of the pelvic floor and letting go. And if that's not findable, pull your belly in and see if that helps you to pull up your pelvic floor.

If you feel like you've got access to your pelvic floor, then notice if you can create a fullness in your abdomen and pelvis, downward. Keep that fullness, and pull up and let go of your pelvic floor, keeping the fullness.

There might be a tendency to pull the belly in. Be aware of that.

Good. Okay, let that go. And just enjoy your resting here. Just let yourself go. Let the floor have your weight.

[Silence 54 seconds]

Quadrants

Good, and place your forehead on your hands, or your arms upward, whichever works better for you. And let the feet rest on the floor.

Just think of the upper right quadrant of your chest. Chest includes upper back, the side of the armpit. And notice, could you inflate that area? Could you bring the feeling of the upper right growing?

And include breath if that helps you. Grow your upper right. Feel the pressure out towards the floor, out towards the side, backward, upward, and let it go.

So see if you can get the feeling of growing the upper right quadrant with an inner fullness.

And then notice, can you create a fullness in your lower left quadrant?

Lower left, meaning towards your pelvis, lower back, lower belly, that whole quadrant, front, back, and side, lower down. If you can have the feeling of pushing down on the lower left, inflating, and then inflate the upper right.

You might be pulling in your belly when you do that, but you're getting the feeling of differentiating. Go upper right and then lower left. Maybe you can find it.

[Student:] And in, and in — say it again.

[Russell:] Lower left, not just lung, but lower left pelvis.

[Student:] Yes, that's right.

[Russell:] The pressure is going down, lower left, through the lower back, the lower belly, pelvis.

[Student:] Are you alternating or doing?

[Russell:] Alternating. Going back and forth as if there's an internal wave going through you.

But right now, do it either way, whichever is easier for you. You can hold your breath a little bit. If you find you can do the movement relatively easily, then see if you can have a long, slow breath and do the movement.

Now switch to the upper left. See if you can get a feeling of inflating in that area. You can actually differentiate. It's like you're growing the upper left side of your torso. You can help with breath. You can do it just as an inner movement.

And the lower right. Lower right. Left, lower right.

The whole upper body, inflating your chest, and it gets really big in all directions, pulling your belly in, and then pushing down and out in your belly and letting the chest fall.

Pulling in your belly, letting your chest grow. If you can find that basic movement, then see if you can breathe a long, slow inhale and a long, slow exhale as you do the movement.

Leave that for now. Come onto your back, please.

A subtle fullness

And no matter how far you feel you got with that, feel the influence on your breathing.

It's an inner complexity, so know that. And take time. Get clear about these things.

Feel what happens.

And last thing for now, bend your legs.

Create a gentle fullness towards your lower belly and lower back, the bottom of your pelvis, as you exhale. Keep that fullness. Breathe.

It'll change a little bit with the inhale. You don't have to hold it rigid. Let it fill with the inhale. Let there be a pause, and then a gentle filling with the exhale, and then a pause.

So during the pauses, you can release any extra pushing, anything, and then you open your belly for the next breath with the inhale, pause, and then a gentle push with the exhale. And then release during the pause.

Just every once in a while, with that exhale, notice if you could pull up the pelvic floor for a moment and then release it. Lower back stays on the floor.

Okay, let's let that go for now. Let that go for now.

Just very lightly, casually, chest and belly alternating. You can hold the breath, you can breathe, whatever is easy. Chest, belly, back and forth. Belly comes out, the chest falls. Just light and easy.

Okay, and faster. You might even be able to sense your diaphragm. If you have a little gurgling in the middle under your ribs, that's your diaphragm. You do it fast, sometimes the diaphragm will gurgle.

It's unusual to actually have a sensation of the diaphragm.

Okay, leave it, come up to sitting. Just feel how that lives in you.

Well, let's say, include the fullness back towards the lower back, so that we get this intra-abdominal pressure moving in all directions. It's wonderful for your lower back to get that.

So, yeah. So it's best if it's not rocking the pelvis forward. You have that fullness.

And just feel yourself sitting. Feel how the breath is, and the shape of your torso.

Feel how the breath comes down with your inhale.

Feel, can you have just the slightest, slightest fullness with your exhale? Not that you should, not that you have to do that all the time, but just see if that would be simple.

It's almost like something pulling down the exhale as well.

Very, very subtle. In rest, that can get to be where it's not quite a down, an outward, but it's not quite an inward. It's just a kind of very subtle fullness.

Great. Next step. Thank you so much.

[Student:] Keeps growing.