Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 4, Day 2, Session 7 — 55 minutes

Summary: Russell invites people who have not yet spoken to practice moving from wordless sitting into language. Shares move through illness and death, a new groundedness in listening, emptiness, a quiet and painful season, and the fear and freedom of a changing life. He reflects what he hears, and closes on not-knowing.

From silence into speech

[Russell:] So it's really good practice, I find, to move from state to state. To move from meditating into interacting. To feel how one can be connected within and around, and the challenge of moving into language after not being in language, and all of that.

It's like, on a larger level, how can we live this work in our everyday life? This is an instance, in a very precise way, of going from the inner, wordless, quiet — or just with oneself — into interacting.

So I'd love to invite people who haven't spoken yet. We might not get to everybody tonight. We'll see how it unfolds, but I'd love to hear.

Close to death

[Participant 1:] Listening this afternoon, there was a passage from The Prophet that was ringing in my head.

You would know the secret of death. And how shall you find it — to seek.

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the secret of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

In the depth of your hopes and dreams lies your silent knowledge of the beyond. Like seeds sleeping beneath the snow, your heart dreams of spring. Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gateway to eternity.

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd as he stands before the king, whose hand is to be laid on him in honor. Is the shepherd not joyful, that he shall wear the mark of the king? But is he not more nervous? Is he not more aware of his trembling?

For what is it to die, but to stand naked in the wind, and to melt into the sun?

And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you truly sing.

And when you reach the mountaintop, then you shall be met. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then you shall truly dance.

I've been wrestling with this issue for some time. I buried more than my share of family members. A couple that are not too far away from my condition.

To personalize it — I've got a very good friend who was diagnosed with stage four cancer about a year ago. For a variety of reasons, it wasn't caught when it should have been. He was given three to six months. It hit me pretty hard.

It raises many of the issues this work has taught me over the years. I'm getting better at taking half-steps, but sometimes it gets pretty personal.

Seven months after he was given that, Western medicine offered him nothing. They just said there was no way — no chemo, no radiation, no surgery. This was throughout his torso. It was into his spine and head, up to his brain.

He was reluctant to take drugs, but he was on morphine at that point.

One last clinic, offering a therapy that had been around since the 1940s. It was pretty successful, from what I read, in the forties and the fifties, and then it was more or less abandoned, probably due to the advent of antibiotics. It's seeing a resurgence.

He went to this clinic. After three weeks, they could find no evidence of cancer in his body.

I want to share that, really, to invite anybody — almost anybody who's suffering from this. The protocol that they've adopted has now been accepted by Johns Hopkins. California will probably fall in line, and New York. So if anybody wants information on this — for me it was like going from

[Silence 40 seconds]

[Participant 1:] night to the day.

A filter

[Participant 2:] I think — sorry. You said, keep it simple but deep. Simple things. I can't remember the exact words, but it made a lot of sense, so I thought I would say it. I feel deeply better.

I figured I probably ought to add something to it. That's pretty good. But, you know, after the last session — which was an important one for me, because of the sense of space and energy — I had shared that I had trouble absorbing people's circumstances or emotions, and that it would really weigh me down, to the point that I didn't really like to engage with people who had issues or problems.

After that workshop, and in the last couple of months, I've had to do a lot of body-related work. Feldenkrais, PT, yoga, that kind of stuff. And the combination has really made a connection for me, to feel really grounded in what's going on.

And in becoming more grounded, it's allowed me to release a lot of stuff. It's allowed me to disconnect from a lot of the — sorry for my language — the traffic, the emotional traffic that I receive when working with other people, particularly family members, and not hold it. The flip side is, it has allowed me to connect more with what's more important. So there's like a filter going in.

Yeah. The groundedness is providing a filter, to let the stuff that is really heavy kind of go through, and create space for ultimately what's important.

I've had a very interesting couple of months, with a number of our children having pretty intense medical issues, stressful issues. The example I'll pick is this. My wife and I were going to a wedding, and she had made an arrangement to stay over, in Arizona, and be with her older daughter — my stepdaughter — and our granddaughter.

Due to other circumstances, she couldn't do it. And so I said, well, I'll go in your place.

This was pretty challenging for me, because the older daughter never accepted me as her father. There were a lot of years where she was angry about the fact that I was there — not because of me, because of the circumstances.

Historically, as she was dealing with her issues, I would absorb them all. It would end up being a problem. I would sometimes walk out of the room because I couldn't handle it anymore. And of course she would interpret that as, I didn't care. But it overwhelms me.

On this particular trip it was fascinating. I went, and I told her, it's really your trip, and I'll do whatever you want to do. We were going to Sedona and the Grand Canyon — a little drive, the wedding, some other things.

And it was incredible, because as she went through her litany of problems and issues as a single mom, years of legitimate problems, I basically let them slip by. For me, it was quite miraculous.

[Russell:] Let me get the picture. So you might be sitting in the car, or wherever, and she would be describing some of her situation, and you would be hearing it with this kind of filter. Stuff that in the past would get to you would kind of go through, but you could feel her.

[Participant 2:] Right.

[Russell:] Something like that.

[Participant 2:] Yeah. And I think that she could feel the difference.

[Russell:] Right, right, right.

[Participant 2:] It turned out to be a wonderful three days. Fascinating for me. She lives a very alternative life, so I was going to a lot of raw food restaurants, and instead of my normal meal, eating a lot of spinach and quinoa and other things.

[Russell:] You should ask him to fly you down there. You could take him to those places.

[Participant 2:] It really turned out to be a wonderful experience. There were some other issues bothering me. But it leads me to this. As we go through this experience with you, and we're learning more and more skills, and as I become more grounded, and can filter some of this and not get quite so depressed in a depressing situation — it leads to the next step. Which I'm sure, in your infinite wisdom, we'll probably get to at some point.

It was your comments on the phone call you just did, open to all the different programs. Some of Marshall Rosenberg's work, I believe. I find now that even though I can disconnect from the depression, or the sadness, or the stress, and I can be present for the person, I don't know what to say.

So I tend to fall back on a phrase. You're doing a great job. You know. And it's the wrong message.

[Russell:] Now, notice how I'm responding to you.

Each response I'm giving — many, many of the responses, to you and to others — I'm taking in what you say, and seeing if I'm really getting it.

So, am I right that it's really important to you, now that you're more grounded in feeling, to be able to have some way of speaking that feels connected to that?

This is my dominant form. If you resonate with it — we don't need a technique. What we need is to really want to take somebody in.

And one place that, for many people, not for all, is helpful, is to let them know how you're hearing them. That way, if you're not getting them right, they can help you get it clearer. But for many people, when they hear it back and it's right, they feel met. And you have a moment of intimacy.

I don't know how many times I've heard them say, oh, I blew that conversation. Well, I should have said this. I should have said that. That's not what I'm hearing. What I'm hearing you saying —

[Participant 2:] Yeah, it's a classic example. She was telling how she had failed as a mom. She wished it were different. And all I could say to her was, you didn't fail us, not once.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

[Participant 2:] Look. Look what's here.

[Russell:] Right, right.

[Participant 2:] That wasn't what I needed to say.

[Russell:] Something, maybe, like — oh, you're really feeling this pain in your heart, that you weren't the mom you wished you were. Am I getting that right?

If you just got it a little wrong — oh boy. Those words would be soaked up by her, and she would feel so met. You'd see the tears, too.

[Participant 2:] Great. Thank you. Thank you.

As they come

[Participant 3:] So, this morning after the meditation, it was quite unusual. It's not something I do normally.

And it was very interesting, in a way, because it didn't bother me. I was just accepting it, at the very precise moment, and had no judgment about it.

A difficult back-and-forth, between these people. I don't ask for more. Just at the moment. The rest comes at me later. And that's all.

And after the second sitting, again, the same thing. That was incredible. Lower legs. Normally I can't sit that long and then stand up — a little stiff. Even to sleep, normally. I don't feel my legs very much, but I stand up. But today, no.

I think the work, currently, is there. I take things as they come. And I can live with it.

I see that in my work, these past four months. There are challenges I work with. There are always challenging moments. And I can see the people being rude, and I smile, and my colleagues say, "Oh, that was rude. He's just a sucker."

I love it. That's where I am. It was so fascinating. This is kind of strange for some people.

[Russell:] Sure, sure.

[Participant 3:] And at the same time, I have a kind of feeling. There's some cleanup, and I feel a little empty from the cleanup. So I expect — I don't know what I expect. I would like to be filled up with chocolate, perhaps. Perhaps not. I don't know.

[Russell:] Yeah. So maybe it feels kind of empty in there, and maybe there's a wanting of something, but maybe not. You don't know.

Can I give you a comment for that?

The emptiness is a door. And not to be too bothered is good, as an entry. And now you get to learn about the empty place, because each empty is different. Let this empty reveal itself for you.

So we don't just stand at the door and say, oh, it's empty, I can put up with it. Actually go into the empty. The meditation is a good place for that, and whenever you can sense it.

[Participant 3:] Yeah. Thank you.

[Russell:] My experience is that once one begins to have more sittings in which there's not much going on — at first, oh, it's so wonderful, there's not much going on. How nice.

And then something inside, for me, would start getting like — not much going on. And so it started creating something going on, about not much going on.

But then, finding out how to be with this nothing-space. And to be with, to acknowledge, the places that would get uncomfortable, that wanted to create a story, or wanted to create something, even something uncomfortable.

How to linger with whichever particular empty. And then there's a turn, in my experience, in which the emptiness is experienced as the infinite potential of a horizon.

I can't even say that something comes into the empty. But it no longer has the feeling of vacant. Each one is different — it's weird to say. It's not that something comes, but each one is different, yet it still fits as empty. It doesn't make any sense, I know.

But learning to navigate those shores is a step.

As you're less involved with your own thinking processes, and your own history, a whole new arena opens up for navigation. And that's part of it. How to navigate those vast open spaces, which can be experienced as ecstasy, but not always. They can be just empty.

Sometimes it is sensed as spaciousness, and has this very open quality. Nothing to do, nothing to be, nothing to have. Kind of floating, but very conscious.

And sometimes it rises an octave, and becomes something closer to ecstatic. And sometimes it lowers an octave, maybe, and has a tone of sorrow that's completely impersonal.

That's my experience.

A quiet phase

[Participant 4:] Well, on that note, I'm in a very quiet phase of my life. I'm grateful for that. What people might consider stress — for me, my life is very quiet, and stress-free.

I have a cousin who's ill, and I don't experience that as stressful. And a good friend of mine also has advanced cancer. I'm glad that I'm there, because I will feel sad, and I do, but I don't feel stress over it.

On the other side, I do feel a sense of depletion in my body, physiologically. I'm very tired. For the past month or two I've had a lot of pain in my foot and in my knee.

But I'm also very grateful that I don't have to struggle to do things I wouldn't be able to do, or that would be really difficult or painful for me to do.

Sometimes I think I'm not really ready, at this point in my life, for this. I'd like to be more active. But on the other hand, most of the time I'm okay with it. I have an amazing life. A lot of people don't, these days, and I'm really grateful for it. I know what it means.

[Russell:] Thank you. Is your foot and your knee — is walking difficult?

[Participant 4:] Yeah.

[Russell:] And stairs? Stairs particularly?

[Participant 4:] Yeah.

[Russell:] And have you tried significant icing of your foot?

[Participant 4:] Yeah.

[Russell:] And now you're kind of living with it, in as good a way as you can.

[Participant 4:] And the knee is something else, because the knee is from knee surgery, which I'm sure is aggravated because of the foot.

[Russell:] Sure.

[Participant 4:] And I love to walk, so it doesn't make me very happy, not to be able to walk as much as I would like.

[Russell:] If you're open to it, you might want to let the various Feldenkrais teachers know that you might be open to getting some touch, if that would feel like something you would like.

Don't expect results. I hate it when people say, how do you feel? Like, well, not any better. If you're willing to touch her and not have her feel better.

Also, right around the corner from you, if they're still doing it, is a low-fee Feldenkrais clinic. I'll give you the address. You can call.

[Participant 4:] No — give me that. In New York?

[Russell:] Right around the corner from you. You already know it.

Anyway, while we're here, if anybody has the urge to place their hands on her, there is a very generously padded table in the gallery. It's a nice way to connect, even without expectation.

[Participant:] So where do you put in the requests?

[Participant 5:] I'll share.

[Russell:] Great.

A new resource

[Participant 5:] I'm getting so much out of the sharing. It's just so precious to me, because I feel like I take pieces from each of you. It's like, oh, I could talk about that. And then that goes away. And I think, well, I could really share that.

So this is truly hot off the press, because I thought I had certain things I wanted to share.

What I want to begin with is that I am crazy about Feldenkrais work. I am falling in love with it more and more and more, and I didn't know that this was going to happen to me.

I have a regular date on Tuesday, and I do it at home on Thursday, and I can't wait to do it. I'm seeing fantastic results in my back, in how I move, and in how I see the world. I'm thrilled. Really, really thrilled. And I really like the people I practice with.

With that, there's more freedom of movement, not just in my physical world, but in my mental and emotional world. It's changing a lot for me.

And since we met in January, I've still been trying on the self-employment thing for size. It's been both challenging and edgy, financially.

And then there's this blessing. My operating system is changing tremendously. I didn't realize until today that even though this has been the most challenging place I've experienced with finances, I feel a sense of freedom within myself that I've never experienced before — of how I'm dealing with it, and how I'm looking at it. And there's a lot of joy. I'm a pretty joyful person, but this is coming from a well of some new resource within me.

I'm trying new things. I feel very creative. I've been writing poetry, and I've been on my bike a lot, and I feel like a little kid.

I don't know if there's really a point to all of it, or if I can pinpoint it. I have all of these aha moments. It feels like there are many pieces that are starting to fill me up in a really new way. And they're all so subtle. But it's the pausing, and the resource growing, and being dedicated to my cushion, and really listening to myself as far as my work.

I feel strongly about what I do in the world, and I know that piece will come in with the finance piece. I just know it. Or maybe I didn't know it before.

And I almost didn't come here this session. With the help of Russell and others, they helped pave a new way for me. And I think, how can I not be here with you?

My sense is that this week will propel me — even into more of a shower of blessings, as I walk on this new path of discovery of my work, and of being in the world with all of that. And I feel really hopeful.

It's been really scary. Can I pay that bill? Oh, maybe I can borrow money from this to go pay that. I've never done this before. But I've never wanted to be so authentic in my life.

I just feel like my posture's different. My voice feels different. I'm just going to keep listening.

Thank you.

[Russell:] Thank you.

This community

[Participant 6:] Well, those of you who are nearby, I can attest to the wonderful massage, because I got one. I was up there. Hot stones and hot towels. A tremendously nourishing and beautiful presence, so I can highly recommend the place.

I just wanted to add how grateful I feel for being here, in this community of people. It's really so special to have this group, each one of you. It creates a very, very rich community, and I really appreciate it deeply.

Not getting hooked

[Russell:] I'd like to hear from those who haven't spoken.

[Participant 7:] It's hard for me to distinguish this work from other work that I'm doing, and it doesn't feel that it matters. I think it's all fusing nicely. So, generally, where I'm at.

I got interrogated again, coming in. Bullied for two and a half hours, and told that I may not get in next time. So that's clearly an ongoing routine, a cycle of it.

But it was good in one sense, because this time I was on it. Okay. I didn't get upset or fazed. I was just slightly irritated, because I had to miss a flight. But I got on top of that, so it wasn't a problem.

And at least I got a little more clarity. It's because I've been coming regularly — which, on the visa they gave me, I might add — and they want me to have longer periods away. So that was the revealing bit, this particular trip.

But as the guy said, look, it's up to the discretion of the next person I deal with. And they like to let you find out.

We know that this is part of the craziness in our world. So it's good not to get hooked into it, but still to know you can have it again.

They canceled my six-month visa, so I no longer have that visa, even though it was due to terminate next year. So I'm now on the 90-day thing. And they could have deported me, but they didn't. So that's good.

I'm mentioning it really more because I found myself taking it pretty much in my stride. Seeing the paradigm that it belonged to, I just went with it, and was very grateful for that. Because I was pretty grumpy the first time, and a bit scared.

And it really is part of this way of life that I seem to be choosing, which is to be on the road. Clearly America's not going to be a place I can end up in unless, through foul means, I find a way. But it will have to be through foul means.

So it's just another part of this, whatever this is. Not wanting to be anywhere. At this point, wanting to just be available to the breadth of cultural possibilities that come with moving around, on the sunny equator.

It was reinforced for me, being back in Australia, that that really isn't where I want to be. Certainly, as far as I can see into the future.

Whether I can pull something off, to be able to stay in Auckland, is just going to unfold. And the thing I'm aware of is that this feels very clear. I don't feel worried about it. It just will be what it will be. Just part of it.

Not increasingly, but in an ongoing way, people want to know what I'm going to do when I grow up. And I find it makes sense. But that's okay too.

I just need to trust myself in all of this, and trust that whatever this is, is what it is. And if I can't clearly identify it, it's a slightly odd way to live, but that's part of what's upsetting the authorities.

But it's incredibly interesting. And having a practice is great. This is so important — that I can just be available to what is here. And sometimes I pull that off with grace, and other times with less grace. It's a work in progress.

So that's kind of where I'm at.

Being more

[Participant 8:] Okay, this is my turn. Is that why you were prompting me?

I mentioned this evening to Russell that I am much more of a doer than a be-er. And I'm trying to get to the point where I can be more, rather than do more, and be more present for my husband and for myself.

He had booked our vacation to the Netherlands, and two weeks before that I managed to break a tiny bone in my left wrist. So that forced me to slow down, and it really helped me to need help from other people.

I'm usually the one who's always there, giving assistance to whoever needs it, and especially with my husband, because he's had some health challenges.

And it made me aware that getting help is not all that bad.

So now I'm trying to slow down, and be more, without breaking my wrist.

[Russell:] I hear that's possible.

[Silence 42 seconds]

How barely it happens

[Participant 9:] Now, to live, it seems — all the listening, that foot-on-the-ground interaction with other persons, this group — is both the celebration that it can happen so easily, and the grief at how barely it happens.

Just reflecting. Like seeing old friends come to visit, or family, and how it doesn't have that. Lost time. It's the ability to really — though there's a desire for it — that sense of really listening to one another. Letting something surprise you.

[Participant 10:] What came up as kind of an edge earlier is something I love to learn more about, in the realm of focusing and listening. The wisdom body. The inner body in general.

We were describing the levels of thought activity, and I just want to get to know more. What is the wisdom body? Where does it fall in all this? Between the unconditioned, the beingness, the historical self.

I feel a little soreness in my solar plexus around having written off a lot of inner life processes as story — or, it just must be, so I'm going to get to the unconditioned. And wanting to just be more alive.

Only don't know

[Participant 11:] Really, I mean, I must start talking.

And I felt myself in a state of sort of benign not-knowing. Any imagination of my future, or of how I'm going to make my life go. It was a very pleasant state.

So I probably should just shut up, right?

[Russell:] Not knowing is good. Not knowing is good. That kind of not knowing.

I've mentioned this important Korean Zen master, Soen Sa Nim. I believe I've mentioned him before. He spoke very little English, and he had two sentences he said over and over again.

One became the title of his first book, which is Only Don't Know.

He'd ask his students a question, the students would answer, and he'd go, Only don't know. Only don't know.

The other sentence was, Go straight. Stop all that. Go straight. Only don't know. Go straight.

I was at one of the Dalai Lama's five-day teachings, a number of years back. At one point he takes questions from the audience. People are asking, and he's answering, and somebody asks him a personal question. Like, I don't know, should I get divorced?

And he looked. And he said, I don't know.

Just like that, in front of five thousand people, the Dalai Lama says, I don't know. And then he takes the next question.

[Participant:] That's good. So good.

[Russell:] Don't know is such a good truth.

Oh, yeah. I think he was bowing. Did you feel finished?

[Participant 11:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Go straight.

[Participant:] Was there any more in his book, or was that it?

[Russell:] There were dialogues. But actually, did I tell you how he got discovered in a laundromat? Remind me tomorrow. I'll tell you the story. I'll tell you a Soen Sa Nim story.

Almost.

Did you feel you got a chance when you spoke earlier? Did you feel complete?

[Participant:] Yes. Good.

[Russell:] I thought so. Has everybody spoken?

Well, thank you so much, everyone. I feel like the fabric of our container — the container that we're in — feels very, very strong, and good, and warm, and ready.

I'd like to just do some prostrations together, and say goodnight.