Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 4, Day 3, Session 3 — 51 minutes

Summary: Russell guides a lesson on rib and thoracic mobility. After mapping the ribs on a skeleton and a brief giraffe story, the class explores how foot placement changes pelvic turning, then combines side bending with rotation to free the chest vertebrae. A spiral reach from foot toward hand completes each side, and they come up to walk before lunch.

Ribs and the chest

[Russell:] We're going to do two lessons, which is a series I love. It's from the second year of the San Francisco training. They really help connect the organization of our center and ground, so that our chest can get more mobile — or, getting our chest mobile enough that our center and ground can. So it will make more sense as we do it.

So just begin by kind of very lightly feeling your breathing. A very light feel, where you can sense the ribs. And let me give you a visual. We've looked at this once before, but it's helpful to see.

We're actually getting a new skeleton, so you won't have to be concerned about his dislocated jaw. Not necessarily the model you want.

So, okay. Here is some kind of image of how, as you come under your armpit, they have the image of the ribs being under there, way up high. The image, all the way up.

If you come to your clavicle here, the ribs are right under your clavicle, and you come as high as you can under your armpit, and you're just starting to get —

If we just move the weight back — yes. You'll be in more trouble. Maybe potential abuse.

So, to think under these, under the scapula, think all the way up to these ribs and how they wind around. And how they attach back here, right?

You can find these. If you go just inside where that prominence is, your rib is coming around and coming up, and then coming down at quite an angle, these upper ribs, to meet with the sternum in front. Right? So it's quite an angle down.

And these upper ribs — so many of us have lost their mobility. And the lungs in here, pressing against something so hard, can't really fill all the sacs, and can't open the way they would if there was more yielding in the back and sides.

And oxygen is the lifeblood of every cell in your body, every tissue, everything. And everything gets better when there's more oxygen moving through you.

So just feel these ribs, and get a sense of how low you can follow them. These lower ribs, for many of us, are much closer to the pelvis. You can see there where you can follow your lower ribs, and they'll be a little bit back, the lower floating ones.

You feel? You feel those lower ribs, and you're not going to find them in here. They're around that.

And if you stay on one side, feel that arm hanging, feel the breath, and feel the real pliability of our sternum and ribs, since these all attach to these vertebrae — these thoracic vertebrae, the chest vertebrae, the vertebrae that all the ribs attach to. That's why they're called chest vertebrae. All these ribs attach, down through the whole thoracic vertebrae.

And you can see how most of these attach in two, and sometimes three, places on the body of the vertebra. So really, on the body here, there's an attachment. You can see it. Most of the ribs attach to the body and to the transverse process, the one on the side. There are a couple that attach in three places, but all the other ones attach in at least two.

And to really have these vertebrae mobile, these ribs need to be mobile, and the ribs need the vertebrae mobile, because they really function as a unit. They're bound to each other, literally.

So this, this I've improved. The series really does wonders for helping all of that, and then ultimately you'll see how it connects to the use of your lab.

A giraffe bows

[Russell:] When we were at Safari West, they had laid out on the ground the skeleton of a giraffe.

[Student:] Oh, yeah.

[Russell:] The vertebrae are about this big.

[Student:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. Also seven cervical vertebrae, just like us.

[Student:] Oh, yeah, I gotta go see that.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Student:] Yeah.

[Student:] Safari West, I hear.

[Russell:] Ten minutes from me.

[Student:] Wow.

[Russell:] It's amazing to see.

[Student:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah.

So I gotta tell you this. I gotta tell you a giraffe story.

So, we were in South Africa. And I was with the Sophia group, Linda's spiritual group that I'm also connected to. I'm on their board. I don't have the same practices, but they're wonderful people doing great work, and I love being with them.

And they sing a lot, and that's wonderful. They sing to the mother, to the father. Linda's is kind of esoteric, not based in Christianity, but very broad. They also talk about Buddha, and they get all the traditions. And it's beautiful.

So when they see these animals — we were on this jeep, on this road, next to a place where the zebras were running wild, and a zebra was near the fence, and we stopped the car, and they started singing in this open car.

And the zebra looked up, went back. A giraffe looked up and started to walk over.

And then it was a really big adult giraffe, looking at all of us singing. And then it finished one song, which was a song that they do to the divine mother. And at the end of the song, the giraffe bowed.

Literally. I mean, now, I'm kind of a scientist when it comes to that. It's not that I'll go for all the anthropomorphism that goes on. But this was — and I asked the guy, have you ever seen a giraffe do that?

I mean, it literally went down on its front knees, came down, put its head to the ground, came back up, and left. Have you ever seen a giraffe do that? No, I've never seen.

[Student:] Wow.

[Russell:] I got to speak to someone. I got to check these things out in multiple ways.

But that was an amazing gesture. It was like a prostration. It was a prostration. I didn't see the hands come up.

So it was amazing. It was amazing. And the giraffe was alone. There was no other giraffe.

[Student:] Correct.

[Russell:] It was a giraffe.

Was it this group where I told the zebra story also? Or is that another group? I'll tell — no, let's do some movement.

Remind me. Yeah, when I say remind me, somebody has to remember, because I forget. These three that I pushed together remind me. Sorry. And then the other one about the laundromat, how I got discovered.

[Student:] Oh, laundromat.

[Russell:] Yeah, they're separate stories. The zebra didn't get discovered at the laundromat. So yeah, we've got to remember those.

Turning

[Russell:] So just stay another couple of moments. Just stand. Let your knees soften a little bit. Let your knees soften.

Get a feeling for your center, kind of moving from your center. A little bit of turning. Feeling how your chest and your shoulders — you turn. You can turn from way down in here.

And get a feeling for how, when your shoulders turn, the thoracic vertebrae, these chest vertebrae, are designed for turning. I mean, they're designed for it, whereas the lumbar vertebrae are

designed for going forward and back. Look at this later. The thoracic vertebrae are designed for turning. That's their best thing.

And when you turn, these vertebrae turn. Of course, your ribs turn. And one of the best ways of freeing the thoracic spine and these ribs is by cultivating the lateral bending, in addition to this rotation.

So we're going to do some movement. For those of you who are interested in the kind of kinesiology of it, when you put together the lateral bending with rotation, you really maximize the movements of these vertebrae and ribs.

Come on, take off your glasses, and enjoy the ground support, connecting with your breath.

And bend your left leg to standing.

Just remind yourself, like we did the first few days, sensing that connection of the foot and ankle to the knee.

And it's not that you're trying to figure anything out. It's that you're bathing with your attention these whole regions, which of course changes blood flow. That's measurable, as you're attending in there.

It's not just like your body's down there and your mind's up here. It's that you are in there. That's shifting what's happening in there.

Just gently turn your pelvis, so that you push off the foot and turn the pelvis towards the right. And notice, can you make a distinction between locating yourself in your head, looking at your pelvis and leg down there, or being in your pelvis and leg, sensing the movement from there?

Is that a distinction that you can sense — that consciousness can be in the leg, not only referred from above? Is that a distinction that makes a difference in your experience?

Can you be inside there, sensing that rolling?

And so the reporting about the movement in thought is a secondary process. Is that possible? It's not that that doesn't happen. It's that before the thought, I'm turning my pelvis, in your leg there's a knowing. In your pelvis, there's a different kind of knowing.

Feel into that, if that has an experiential reality.

And then just experiment, moving your left foot closer to your right leg. You can be in there.

Feel how the angle changes the movement, how where your foot is changes the movement. And move the left foot quite wide, quite wide of your pelvis, and feel how the angle of pressure through the leg, through the foot, influences what happens.

And if you were going to compare the foot being quite wide to being near the other leg, what are some of the differences you would report? Hear some out loud. Some of the ways you organize the movement differently when the foot is in a different location.

[Russell:] What is unstable?

[Student:] When the foot is in close, it feels less stable, feels unstable. It doesn't want to stay there. When the foot goes out to the left more, the weight goes more clearly right and less upward.

[Russell:] When the foot's wider, it goes across and less up.

[Student:] And more movement in my knee, away from me, when my left foot is closer to my right.

[Russell:] Knee goes away.

[Student:] From me.

[Russell:] From your pelvis. Yeah, from your pelvis. Goes out from your pelvis, yeah.

[Student:] My head wants to go — when my foot is close to my leg, my left close to my leg, my head wants to go there.

[Russell:] When your foot is closer to the leg, then your head wants to go left.

[Student:] When your foot is close to the leg, the pelvis lifts higher.

[Russell:] Pelvis lifts higher when it's close.

Okay, now place the foot on your right leg somewhere, anywhere you can. See? And could you turn? Could you find a way to move the pelvis, move the left side of the pelvis away from the floor, with the foot on the leg somehow?

Bent. The foot is bent, the leg is bent, and the foot is as flat as can be on there. Good.

And then find a way to stand the foot on the right of your right leg. And then go back to the left. And go back and forth like that, where you just kind of stay over — you step on, then over, and on, then over, and feel.

But find the floor on each side, the foot standing on the floor. On the right side, on the leg, and then on the left side of the right leg. Good.

Okay, leave it lower down.

[Silence 31 seconds]

Bending to the left

[Russell:] Just lightly roll your head a bit. Feel any right and left differences.

Then interlace your hands, put them under your head. Elbows out to the side.

And slowly slide your head and arms down to the left, and back to neutral. Go slow, go slow, so you can enjoy the ride. So you're sliding. You're not lifting the head. The back of the hands slides on the floor, so you're not lifting the head. You're sliding the hands and arms on the floor. The head is bending leftward. So the left ribs are bending like an accordion folding, and then opening.

Do that a number of times, scanning with your attention. Are you clenching your teeth? Are you breathing? Can you sense the change of shape through your ribs? Can you get an image of what the vertebrae might be doing?

Go slow. Good.

Okay, and then come back to neutral. Pause.

[Silence 34 seconds]

And bend your left leg to standing. Interlace your hands under your head. Slide your head and arms down to the left. And pause there. Pause there. Feel yourself there. Feel the shape of your chest.

And keeping the nose towards the ceiling, so you're not rotating the head, roll your pelvis to the right and back to neutral. Let the knee stay vertical as much as you can. It might come down a little bit, but turn your pelvis to the right, as if that knee is going to stay over that heel, and come back.

And feel, when your pelvis turns — notice, could you slide a little more down to your left comfortably?

And then notice, could you stay in that area comfortably when you lower your pelvis? If not, then don't force it. And then find out, each time you roll the pelvis, is there a little more territory, maybe, that you can comfortably slide into? So think of your ribs.

Good. And pause in this position. Bring your left arm downward on the floor, and with your right hand, see if you can reach over to your left ribs. See if you can touch the ribs on your left side.

With your right hand, you're touching the ribs. And roll your pelvis, and see if you can feel the ribs rotating, and also invite the ribs to bend just a little bit more with that hand. So, as if they go a little bit towards your pelvis. And then see if you can touch another place on your ribs, and feel how they turn, they come away from the floor, and you might be able to suggest a little bit of bending.

Bending means that those ribs would go towards the pelvis a little bit. That's it. You're breathing.

And then come back down. Let yourself slowly come back to neutral. Lower the leg, lower the arm, and just feel. Notice how the quality of turning the head to the left may have shifted a little bit. Feel the way the head turns, and then pause, just for a moment.

[Silence 45 seconds]

Rotating into the bend

[Russell:] Interlace your hands under your head. Slide your head and arms down to the left. Feel the bending. Feel the bending in your chest.

And stay there, down to the left, with your nose towards the ceiling, and bend your right leg.

So you're going to turn your pelvis towards the left, and listen for when you can feel the kind of challenge to the thoracic vertebrae that occurs, because your head is bent this way, and the thoracic vertebrae want to roll into where you're bent.

So just go slow. And this is a very good way of cultivating movement in those mid-back ribs, and mid to upper back vertebrae.

So go slow. You're bent to the left, and your pelvis is turning to the left.

If you want to get an interesting sense, kind of go inside your skeleton. Inside your skeleton, keep your head and chest where they are, lengthen your right leg, bend your left leg. Roll your pelvis to the right, and feel how there's a sense of that being congruent, and how you could even maybe bend the head a little bit more. Space opens when the pelvis turns in that direction.

See if you can get any inner sense, any inner image. Why would that get easier?

And then stay there if you can. When you lower your pelvis, lengthen your left leg, bend your right leg, and go slow here. Roll your pelvis to the left, and see if that new territory that you're in — if that's okay — you're going to kind of rotate into the bend. Which, done gently and slowly, will help the mobility of those vertebrae.

Go slow. Feel. Go inside the shape of your skeleton.

Good. And then slowly come back to neutral. Take your hands out and lower your leg. Just feel how the turning of your head. Go slow enough to feel what happens.

So, it's movement strategies like this that come from Feldenkrais as an engineer. A biologist wouldn't think of doing those counter-rotational kind of things. But as a guy who builds things, a mechanical engineer, who understands joints and creates such —

And just rest here and feel.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Bending to the right

[Russell:] And interlace your hands non-habitually — the other one — and put them under your head. Sense the shape of your torso.

Slowly slide down to the right. A slow feel. Where do you sense the bending? Where?

If you go inside your vertebral column, inside your skeleton, how can you follow that movement, kind of with inner X-ray vision?

Letting the bending go through you. This pliability in the chest is so helpful for our knees — our knees, hips, and ankles — but Feldenkrais would emphasize the knees. Partially, I think, because of his own condition. How important the pliability of the chest is for healing our knees, really.

Go slow, and pause when you're down to the right, and bend your right leg to standing, and turn your pelvis to the left. And when you turn the pelvis to the left, you're not rotating the head. The nose is towards the ceiling, but you might be able to bend comfortably a little bit more. In other words, the right elbow might arc downward a little bit more.

Listen. And the right side of the pelvis comes away from the floor when you do that, so that the rotation happening in your thoracic vertebrae interacts with this bending. You might feel something like that.

And then you see, is this new territory that you're in, is that acceptable?

So, right leg is bent, hands interlaced non-habitually under your head. Slide down to the right, and rotate. That's it. Feel that movement.

And then you can come back to neutral and pause with that. Lower your leg slowly. Rotate your head a little bit.

[Silence 48 seconds]

And interlace your hands non-habitually. Slide down to the right. Bend your left leg to standing, and slowly rotate your pelvis towards the right. Sensing — so the left leg is standing, and you sense how those forces interact. So slow.

Many times, rotate the pelvis. Feel into your chest vertebrae, into those ribs.

And then stay down here to your right. Lengthen your left leg, bend your right, and as you roll the pelvis left, slide — as long as it's comfortable — slide down. Lengthen the left leg. Lengthen the right leg, and bend the left, and just notice if it's comfortable enough to stay, to rotate, even when you've slid down this far.

That's good. Go slow and smooth. Don't force. These movements are strong. You don't need to push it.

Rotate the pelvis. Really feel that left side come away from the floor, and back to the floor. That's it. And then slowly come back to neutral. Unwind from these slowly, and lengthen the leg.

You'll find that you can have surprising improvements in different joints when this kind of whole body movement gets organized.

Just lightly roll your head. Get a sense of the shape of yourself. Feel what's happening in there.

[Silence 55 seconds]

A spiral

[Russell:] Bend your left leg. Interlace your fingers under your head. Slide down to the left. Lengthen your left arm downward and your right arm upward, and just gently roll your pelvis towards the right.

Feel if there's a little suggestion of lengthening through that right arm, and begin to pay attention to your left arm. Can your left arm get slightly longer? Can the ribs bend a bit? The left arm is downward. It's not under the head any longer. The left fingers are towards the left foot.

And actually move the hand and move the foot, to see, could they comfortably get close to each other, or touch each other? Or if it's really easy, you can surround the ankle with your fingers. You can move the foot a bit and the hand a bit.

And the right arm is upward on the floor, not under the head. So, right arm is up, left arm is down, your hand is near the foot, and you're rotating the pelvis towards the right.

And as you rotate the pelvis, now you can let the back of the head slide a bit on the floor, and look up towards that right hand. Look upward. The right arm gets longer upward, and you're looking towards the right hand.

So your head will turn, and — sorry, not towards the left shoulder — you're looking towards the right hand. Your chin comes away from your chest, and you're looking. That's it.

So it's like a spiral out from your left foot, all the way through the top of your head. And you feel that bending in those ribs. Let that go through you. Let it really go through the joints, through the elbows, through the knees. Reaching, bending.

The head will slide a bit on the floor, so the chin comes away from the chest. Yeah, eyes look up. Good.

And slowly unwind from that. Lower down.

[Silence 49 seconds]

[Silence 38 seconds]

Interlace your hands non-habitually under your head. Bend your right leg. Slide down to the right.

And rotate your pelvis to the left, and see if there's a little more space that opens without strain.

Keep your head where you can, over to the right, and let your right arm reach downward and your left arm reach upward. Feel the length of yourself. And in this position, turn your pelvis left and back, and left and back. Just feel that.

And as you turn left, feel the lengthening of the arms, and the right hand and the right foot can get attracted to each other. And if you can hold that ankle, do so. If you have the ankle, keep the thumb with the other fingers, so it's like a primitive grip, not an opposable thumb.

And if you can just get near the foot, or touch it, that's great.

And let the back of the head slide on the floor, the chin come away from the chest, and the eyes orient where the left hand is pointing.

So, as the pelvis turns to the left, it's like a spiral coming out of your foot, and you're reaching, and the ribs on the right are bending, and the arm lengthens, the whole torso finds its yielding.

Okay, and then slowly come back. Come back to neutral. Lengthen your leg.

Sense yourself here. Sense what's interesting to you.

Roll your head a bit, right and left. Notice the quality of the rolling, and feel how far down your back you can sense, and your thoracic spine.

And feel the quality of your pelvis and legs as you're lying here.

Coming up

[Russell:] Roll to your side and come on up, and see how that feels. Come up slow, because things shift, and you don't want to come up with the assumption that you know the body you're coming up into.

And we already have implicit assumptions how it's going to feel, and your body will recreate that. So if we want to allow the possibility of something shifting, we want to come up with a little more innocence, a little more freshness, and then sense what comes. It gets our attention.

[Silence 35 seconds]

Feel in whatever ways you want to. Bend yourself, walk, do whatever feels — how you'd like to sense yourself.

[Silence 33 seconds]

And as you're walking, sense any connections of the mobility of your pelvis and chest. Anything about that?

[Silence 44 seconds]

Okay, it's time for our lunch. A good lunch. Enjoy the influence of the lesson.

Thank you.