Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 4, Day 3, Session 4 — 60 minutes

Summary: Russell invites a check-in on what is living from the morning's work with attention. The group explores being versus doing, turning the light around, and how attention differs from awareness. He teaches the triune brain, why worry lingers, and how body, feeling, and belief can return the nervous system toward a healing home base.

What's living

[Russell:] A few different journeys I'd like to go on together.

First, I'd like to just drop down and check in. Check in with yourself.

Since you're here, how are you? How is it in there? When you just kind of take the temperature, take the weather —

Reflect back for a few moments to what's alive, what's living. We spoke about attention from some big points of view. We practiced in meditation this morning, moving attention in particular ways, and at our threesomes, working with the in and out of attention.

And this will continue to be an important subject. But just see what's living from our looking this morning.

What's living can be — it's excited, it's confused, it's interested, bored.

How is it alive when you — the subject. And let your eyes open. And before we move on to some new territory, I'd like to just see where it's resonating, where it's not.

What's living in you from all this?

And if you'd like to not do it in words, but in gesture, that as well. Just be.

[Participant 1:] I started to feel, with our open focus and directed focus this morning — with the directed, I thought, oh, this is great. Not that I haven't counted in meditation before. But then I thought, oh, I'm focused. And then I realized, I'm multitasking.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 1:] Because my thoughts were going, and I was wrong, too.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 1:] And then I thought about it in comparison to my experience with our exercises today, afterwards, where we were grounded as well as being with what we were experiencing. And I thought, multitasking. And then I was —

[Russell:] Happens because being isn't a task.

[Participant 1:] And that's how I could let go of that concept.

And I'm not going to remember it now, but you said something was different than being. But it's translated for me as not just being.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. Being.

[Participant 1:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah.

So just feel into what Sarah's offering right now. This quality of being that's not a doing.

It's possible to have directed attention and have some sense of multitasking. It still can be sometimes helpful. Good to notice when it's also including other movements of mind.

I want to see all that. And something else.

Yes, please, Linda.

Turning the light around

[Participant 2:] Well, I understand the words when you talk about turning the light around, or this morning you talked about attending and then turning the attention.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 2:] And I understand that with my left brain, but I can't get the feel of what it is to turn the attention around.

[Russell:] Okay. So notice Linda sitting in the chair.

Notice the experience she's having, listening to Russell.

After asking this question — that you're not only receiving these words and processing them right now, but there's a sense that you can notice yourself doing that.

Is that true?

Yeah, take your time. And everybody can do the same thing.

Can we sense that we are here in our experience, and there's a knowing of that? There's a —

[Participant 2:] One is aware of themselves as they are sitting here.

[Russell:] Okay, good.

Okay, so let's practice. Right here. Starts out right here. Just right here. And notice that you notice you're right here.

There's a right here, and there's a noticing that you're right here.

And it doesn't have to make sense, and you don't have to struggle with it, but hold open the possibility that there is a — we can say it this way. Is it possible that the awareness doesn't just live inside this body?

Is it possible that, in the words of Rudolf Steiner, wisdom lives in me, and I live in wisdom?

Okay. So what happens to our experience when we have the sense that there's a here-ness, and there's a noticing of that here-ness?

I can be speaking to you, processing these words, and there's an effortless aspect of consciousness called awareness that observes my hand moving, and observes him smiling, and sees you smile, and is in the moment and with the moment.

And the in and the with — and now I'll really confuse you — the in and the with lives effortlessly together.

At first, it's an intentional use of attention. But as it blossoms, it becomes effortless. And that's what I call awareness, actually.

[Participant 2:] Okay. That was another. When you say awareness, is it the same — aware, in the same area?

[Russell:] Yeah. So in my use of language, unless I'm talking casually — I mean, casually I can say, attend to your foot, be aware of your foot. But when I'm being more strict in my language, attention is an action of intention that you can do. You can direct attention towards your foot.

By working with our attention, we can raise the level of consciousness to where there's a dawning called awareness.

And awareness, by the definition I'm using, is effortless when it has arisen.

Now, you can make a lot of efforts to bring it forth. You practice. But actually it's a rising up of a capacity of the organism.

And so the practice — part of the practice is getting right here, getting right here, then being able to notice that you're here.

And that's called self-reflective attention.

[Participant 2:] Self-reflective.

[Russell:] I'm here, and I'm noticing that I'm here.

[Participant 2:] Not here.

[Russell:] I'm here, and I'm noticing that I'm here.

[Participant 2:] Here, not here.

[Russell:] And that capacity for self-reflection is what's meant by turning the light around.

Attention normally moves out. Or even for many people, even when they're attending in their body, they have the sense they're here, and it's moving down there.

So it still has the sense of moving out from a location here.

And what I'm proposing is another possibility. That this whole, and even beyond this whole, has a capacity for awareness.

And the practice of self-reflection, the practice of witnessing, the practice of noticing the one who's there, are all practices to help that. Help raise the octave.

[Participant 2:] Yeah. It's interesting, because as you're talking, I'm just sort of going to feel that feel. And I get little glimmers of it.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 2:] And what I notice is, when I'm in those little glimmers —

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 2:] Much more expansive.

[Russell:] Always. A hundred percent.

[Participant 2:] Even a difficult moment, there's space.

[Russell:] It's implicit.

In the level of consciousness in which awareness occurs, which can be called beingness in its aware state, it's always spacious. And the return to the historic identities always feels contracted, narrowed. Not enough space here.

And I don't want to make this sound all mystical. We experience this whenever we bring our attention to what is, in the ways that we're working with.

You have it probably numerous brief times during every movement lesson. Numerous brief times during every listening process.

During a meditation, there'll be moments of it. And we want to start stringing more of those moments together, and they start getting a kind of momentum to them. And that, combined with some kind of grace — because we can't do it all. We can just create conditions.

Are you getting it?

So that feeling that you have during those glimmers is what we're talking about.

Yeah.

Yes. And then our journey becomes one of how to have the historic self without becoming the historic self.

Because it has gifts. Even our wounds are full of gifts, and we want all that. But as an identity, it's a tight shoe.

So we have to get enough connection with this higher state of consciousness to know that we don't have to be in that shoe.

You get what I mean? We need these practices so that it becomes familiar.

And then you start going, oh my God. It's not a question of getting rid of my past. It's having a whole different relationship to it.

[Participant 2:] Yeah. Yes. Right.

[Russell:] And that glimmer, we could say in modern language, is a brain state.

And we want to keep affirming that state so that it starts hardwiring. So that we actually grow myelin around those synapses, and around those axons, so it gets to be faster and stronger. So that it's more familiar.

And it becomes just more attractive, unless you're super tired, or something's really upsetting. Then you can get pulled back, and then you see it really soon.

But that glimmer is exactly it. You got it.

And what's such good news is, it's not far from us. It's not like we're these impure beings that need to be in the monastery for forty years. We all have it, but we have it in brief flashes.

And then those increase, and then they get more sustained, or more reliable.

Well, sort of. We could say it's, in one aspect, a default.

Yeah. Well, I put up another term there that actually one of my students gave me. I can't claim it, but I like it so much I want to use it. So, Gary, this is for you.

Conceptual gravity is like a default. It's where you fall back to, and it has a certain gravity.

So this is a gravity of your being calling you back. It's a different kind of gravity that becomes more familiar.

The marathon of life

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 3:] So this, what Linda referred to as glimmers, are only an experience in less stressful situations. That's more available for me.

I've had two in the last couple of years. Two sort of more prolonged experiences where it felt dangerous. Not for me, but for one of my kids. And it was over a sustained time. I'm like, okay, I really need a different way of being conscious for this.

I really found it very hard. I mean, I could at times. But the danger part — and I'm thinking of the reference you made when the ambulance went off, and you were like, you're hardwired to get on guard. To protect. Which is, I lose my own sense of the bigger envelope. The bigger spacious.

So, do you speak to that? And in a sustained way. I'm not talking about somebody had a car accident and you're responding. I'm talking about a prolonged period of months. And that unguardedness does make it —

[Russell:] Yes, yes, it does. It does.

[Participant 3:] And yet that's when I most probably need that self-compassion, to be able to sustain a situation. I don't know. And if you want to do that another time — but I'm very interested in the marathon. I call it the marathon of life.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So let me.

Okay, it's a big subject, and I do want to speak to it, but I don't want to go too wide with it. Let me — okay. Yes.

[Participant 4:] One thing I've noticed in myself is that Wes was talking earlier about habits of mind.

So you've got a habit of mind about being concerned, say, or being the mother in a particular way.

And I've noticed that I can be really attached. Like there's almost a belief that this is the way one is supposed to be in that circumstance.

So it isn't just about changing the way I'm responding. It's also about changing the way I believe I should be responding.

So if I can let go of the way I believe I should be, and be okay with something different, then I can open up a space for a different kind of response.

Does that make any sense? It's like, if I'm worried about something, it's because I think that I'm supposed to be worried, because that worry is the way you're supposed to respond.

And then to find another way, it's almost like wrong to be a different way. I don't know if that's something.

[Participant 3:] Yeah. No, I hear what you're saying.

No, I appreciate what you're saying, but I'm not sure at this point that worry as a way of being is something that I need to continue. I mean, I think I've been working a lot with energy. It's more like what to do with the energy of caring, in a way that doesn't deplete me, and creates a way of being present for somebody else — it being more life-giving instead of life-draining.

And so, yeah, I get very happy. You know, I'm working hard with not worrying, because worrying is useless. It does happen. I don't define it this way, as being a quality of being.

[Participant 4:] Sometimes I find, though, that if I really go deep, deep inside, I'm not really aware that, oh, somebody is strong in me at some point. It's a part of me that believes that I'm supposed to feel something sweaty. Even though all of my teaching says it's not.

It's like the room. It's like there's a hum in the room of where that is going on.

[Participant 3:] Well, I think for me — and I think it's easier for me to explain like an enneagram — it's sort of that sense of being so helpless, that there is an action that helps me not feel helpless. I don't like to be in not-knowing.

[Participant 4:] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Participant 3:] It's like trying to do something with that anxiety of helplessness.

That's difficult, that vulnerability, that place. So that action, which is doing something, is sort of a defense against vulnerability and helplessness.

But I'd like to have it more life-giving.

[Participant 4:] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Yes. Yeah, yeah. So far.

So let me give you a picture. I think it blends with what Barbara's saying. It starts in another place.

Three brains

[Russell:] Let me speak about picturing brain levels, okay? Let me couch this response in terms of neurology.

So, if we think of the classic development of this brain — not talking about this one and this one, although they're connected. This brain. We think of the lower brain, midbrain, upper brain, right? That's kind of the classic triune brain.

It's a model. It's a helpful model.

So the lower brain, often called the reptilian brain, grew from our fear-based responses of self-protection.

It's what gets activated in danger. This brain.

It's not very differentiated. It's like, it's on. And learning to navigate that part of our brain, integrate that part of our brain with the rest of our brain, is a critical part of our health and our well-being.

It's that part of the brain that — I can tell you a zebra story.

I didn't tell this here, right? I must have told it on the weekend.

Why zebras don't get ulcers

[Russell:] So it was interesting, in South Africa, being with these white lions. And there would be these herds of zebra.

And the zebras have an interesting setup. They're kind of hanging out, grazing. Not real nervous or anything. They take turns. There's a guard zebra at each end, and everybody else is kind of hanging out. And these guys are also eating, but they're kind of perking up a little bit more. Everybody's eating.

And when there's danger, they would run.

As soon as the ones who were kind of keeping track of things gave a message that there was no more danger, it was over. Maybe go to the waterhole and push around a warthog. And there's a hierarchy, so the warthogs are kind of low — both to the ground and on the hierarchy of esteem at the waterhole.

So what's the point of that?

The point is, maybe once a week, a zebra gets killed by a lion.

Most of the zebras in the herd will never be killed. The great majority never will.

I mean, it may even be once every three weeks, because the kills are successful about once every three or four nights, and they have other herds. So your chances of being killed are pretty minimal.

There's an interesting professor at Stanford who wrote a good book, Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers.

Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers has to do with the fact that when danger happens, they get fully on. Their autonomic nervous system sends out the adrenaline, gets those muscles moving, gets them running fast. And when the danger's over, shuts down. And the parasympathetic, the healing parts of the nervous system, flood with those kinds of life-giving chemistry.

That is how we're designed to function.

Now, one of the unintended consequences, perhaps, of having a brain that can imagine danger, can hold images of danger — and especially if there are real-life situations that can help sustain those images — is we get to stay in that alerted state far longer than any other mammals.

It wasn't intended. That was created as an alarm state for a temporary reaction that is meant to pass, so that you can live in a parasympathetic-dominant state. Parasympathetic means your system is healing.

Your system is resting. Your system feels nourished. And this is not theoretical. Your blood vessels open more to the organs. The muscles don't need to be fed as much as when you're in danger.

So your organs get healthier. Your heart pumps easier, smoother. Less blood pressure as it moves through you.

So there's lots of consequences of the parasympathetic state.

And we're not designed to be there all the time. But the design is for that to be our home base, and to come out of that in danger.

Most of us are flipped, or many of us are flipped, to where we're sympathetic dominant.

That's why acupuncturists are always talking about our adrenals being shot. Because we're sympathetic dominant, and we occasionally find a way — maybe with a glass of wine, or a meditation, or whatever — to cool out.

And that urge that so many people have, being on all day, on all day, and needing to find a way to —

That's a healthy longing for the parasympathetic nervous system to do its function of healing us, resting us.

And so many of us develop unhealthy habits to do that healthy function.

But one of my points about this is, how do we change that, what's upside down in us?

So how do we get the lower levels of our nervous system — this part, this brainstem — to respond in different ways?

You can think of the brainstem. The brainstem's connected to the spinal cord. This is very primitive functioning, right? This is your breathing. This is your blood pressure. This is that level of chemistry. It's really what we could say is the base of your body.

So let's hold that thought for a moment. Let me just give you these other two.

The midbrain is more connected to your mammal brain, your feeling responses.

The reptilian brain is designed to avoid danger. The mammalian brain is designed to seek positive things.

And then on top of that is our cortex, which is the neocortex of the advanced primates, that can now create pictures of the world. Create events that are not here right now. Can create positive futures, negative futures. And the rest of the brain can respond to those pictures that the upper brain is creating.

That's why we can repeat thoughts and images to ourselves, and our midbrain and lower brain will respond as if it's happening now.

Those levels of your brain don't differentiate between something that's internally generated and externally generated. This is very interesting.

So how do we move?

Stroke the lizard

[Russell:] Well, to work with the reptilian brain — this is millions of years old patterns.

Well, it takes — and this is what very few people get — there's a different relationship to the body.

We need to use the body sense over and over, when you're not on alert, to grow a bank account. To grow an immune system. To what Rick Hanson likes to call stroke the lizard. Stroke the lizard.

You've got to. And stroking the lizard has to do with many, many, many moments. Brief moments of, I'm here. I'm settled down.

The stuff that we do — I didn't devise it for that purpose, but it comes full circle. That's what it does.

That's how you get that level of your brain not to be so activated.

And you can't initiate that in times of high activation. You've got to develop the bank account. So that when it's a strongly demanding kind of thing, you've got that in there.

So you can go on alert, but then you leave. Leave my daughter in the hospital, or wherever she would be, and go home. And of course there's concern, but there's a way of returning. Getting the system back to baseline, so that healing can occur for the next interaction.

Okay. So one level is stroke the lizard. Getting that level of our brain — which means coming into our body in a neutral or positive way, over and over and over.

Coming into our body in a neutral or positive way, over and over and over.

Most people don't do that. They ignore their body unless it's painful, or unless there's a moment of ecstasy or something. But otherwise the body isn't there.

What you attend to is what is.

So to bring the quality of attention that we're talking about to this very body, with the kind of care, the kind of listening, the kind of breathing — is all bringing down the set point of the reptilian brain, and giving it some restorative capacity when it's gotten activated.

So it takes less to activate it, and it takes less to bring it down.

What you see in classic cases of post-traumatic stress is, this part of the brain is on fire always. It is lit up red always. It is on. And therefore any sound can be a gun going off.

And literally the nervous system feels it that way. And they can get under the table when you're sitting with them, and they don't know how they got there. The lizard brain took over.

So one level is cultivating that resource. That caring.

Now, another level. How do we nourish the mammalian brain?

Well, that is our positive forward movement toward. It's not getting away from something. This is where so many of our resource processes work. That we are moving toward open-heartedness. We are moving toward unconditional warmth. We are moving toward consciously connecting to the good, positive things that we have experienced, and growing those, growing those brain patterns.

Can you take a little bit more, or is this too much?

Well, the mammalian brain is designed to move toward nourishment. The reptilian brain is designed to move away from danger.

So the toward. A lot of us just spend all our time avoiding danger, but don't cultivate the toward — something that is positive, life-giving. Just getting away from that which is bad.

To get away from is older, and it precedes.

Okay. I'm kind of doing some editing here.

Velcro and Teflon

[Russell:] It's important that we see that our unconsciousness — when we are not in our awareness, when we're not in our awake state — the organism selects toward what is dangerous, or potentially dangerous, and ignores almost immediately that which is life-giving and positive.

The way I've heard it quoted is, the brain is Velcro for the negative and Teflon for the positive.

And why is that?

Well, it has evolutionary value to be really concerned about danger.

Our ancestors — you know, Igor in the cave, and the weather's getting cold, and some of the folks in the cave say, hey, we're going to go look for a warmer place. But Igor says, don't worry about it. And his family freezes to death, and he doesn't get to pass on his genes.

So if you weren't worried enough, if you weren't scared enough, you didn't make it. If you were too scared, going around like this all the time, you didn't make it either.

But there is a selection toward being vigilant.

So that worrying is in our DNA, unless we take charge of our attention.

And of course, we have different set points for different nervous systems. Some of us are more wired towards that, some less. So it's not like one point. There's a range.

But for most of us, there's something about learning to use our attention to grow a different body state, so we're less activated.

And I don't — in my opinion, it's not enough to do a yoga class once a week, or a Feldenkrais. If this is a daily practice, a daily relationship, then to cultivate these life-giving states — like the shower of blessings, and cultivating a field of gratitude — is such an example of growing the mammalian brain. Of using our cortex to help that part of our nervous system create health in us.

We can move towards the positive, but we have to choose it.

Isn't that an amazing setup? That we have that ability. But that's called being responsible for our own brains, by being responsible for our attention.

Where you place your attention is what's going to form.

And if our attention is unconscious, it'll go towards, oh my God, what's going to happen if I can't do that? Oh my God.

Now, that's not all bad. We need some of that, but it gets overactive.

And we live in a culture where the system plays on that.

The news wants to keep you scared.

Much of the capitalist structure is based on danger, and taking care of that danger, and getting more protection. And for the mammalian brain, getting more stuff to make you feel better. To get that little hit that comes when you go shopping, or when you get that new thing. That's an attempt at pleasing that part of the brain.

But it's very short-lived, so it's like a drug. It needs more, needs more. So the system is based on more.

But the deep nourishment of each level of the brain requires a different understanding, and a different relationship to our thinking, to our attention, to our body. How we're attending to our feelings.

So these are a lot of words. I can just keep going on, but I want to pause here, and I want you to let in what's coming. Because this is not helpful if it's just cerebral. It has to go through the layers, and feel.

How are you resonating with what you're hearing? What's applicable for you?

And it's astounding, and daunting, and exhilarating, to realize we can be responsible for our own experience of living.

A new wardrobe

[Participant 5:] Can I just say, because it's really super alive in me right now.

Through this whole process of my job going away, and recreating myself, I started doing all the old stuff. And this is between January and June. And I just had these moments where I said, I have to do this different. I don't know what to do.

And I just kept calling on all of our work. I said, what if I just try that on for size? And then what if I try the shower of blessings? And then what if I try just the pausing?

And the more I kept doing that, you guys, things started to shift within me.

And that's why I feel I was doing something right — like, not right, but I was really practicing, just the whole time.

And I feel really proud of myself, because it's been so challenging. I mean, it's been so — really challenging.

[Russell:] Just be with that place. You've got some tissues coming, on your right.

Really, really sense that place that's been carrying this big, big challenge.

Can you sense that in your body at all, Christina, the way that place has been?

[Participant 5:] Yes. I'm here, and some in here as well.

[Russell:] Yes. So maybe, if it would feel right, put your hands there. If not, it's okay.

But see if that place that's been feeling so challenged, and working so hard, wants anything right now. Wants any kind of company from you.

[Participant 5:] The first, what comes to me is something about being seen. But I would not — I'm just —

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah.

Oh, great. You can check it out. It doesn't have to be right.

You can go in there and go, are you really wanting me to just see that you're here?

And see how — just to really take some time to acknowledge that you've been working really hard in there, and it's been really scary, or whatever the right words are.

[Participant 5:] Yeah. Yeah. Like, quite wonderful?

[Russell:] Sure, sure, sure. Yeah, that's there too.

We're not saying this is the whole thing. We're just saying that there's this place that's been really challenged, and this place that feels really wonderful and hopeful, wants to be acknowledged. Wants to make sure that that's not forgotten. So we've got — yeah.

And just notice if this challenged place is needing something else from you right now.

[Participant 5:] I'm not sure.

[Russell:] Yeah. So just pause here, and just kind of be with it.

No demands on it. No demands on your presence. You're just kind of keeping company, letting it know you see it.

Let the wonderful place know you know it's there too.

And you're just going to take your time, and see if anything else might like to be acknowledged.

[Participant 5:] It does. It's more of like an act of feeling courageous. With myself.

[Russell:] Like an act of feeling courageous with yourself.

Let's take those in. Like an act of feeling courageous with myself.

And there's something in your throat that wants some — you feel that?

[Participant 5:] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Just kind of be with that. We don't know.

You can acknowledge the courage, and you can kind of stroke that, or feel that.

You don't have to know what it is. You're just going to hang out with it. It will hum in some way, or not. There's no pressure on it.

[Participant 5:] It's just a really new way of being.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 5:] And I like it. Like, it's new, like new clothes. You know, the whole new — like I'm getting a new wardrobe.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

[Participant 5:] It's permeating through me too. Like the colors of my purple shirt are actually inside my organs and my body, and come alive.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. Great.

Yeah, you're getting a new wardrobe. Looks good.

[Participant 5:] Yeah. I guess it's really hard to get out.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. It's wonderful.

[Participant 5:] Because that feeling, of the choice of not being here, is similar to how I was doing it before, too.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 5:] And by coming here, it's like, shit, I could go. I can do — you know, it's the same as when I look at a bill and I say, I don't know where that's going to come from.

And then I go through the shower of blessings, and I look outside, and I have a statue of Kuan Yin, and I'm cultivating. Like I'm growing so much. The flowers are growing around me and in me.

I don't know. It just feels pretty wonderful.

That's part of the tears. Like, thanks for your good work you're giving us.

[Silence 32 seconds]

Letting it through

[Participant 6:] So, the analogy you're talking about — like, even there's shaking off.

[Russell:] Yeah. And we need that too, right?

Because if we're going to be stuck on high alert, part of that self-regulation, part of coming back to a baseline, is how do we release it?

Because a lot of the people I see, because of being victimized, or because of being unable to complete the body function that they wanted to do at the time, then are stuck in this place of powerlessness, or malaise, or stoppage in the body.

So even if it's imagined, even if it's done through art, even if it's done through movement — that defense orientation, or that need to complete that body movement, which is, you know, no, get off me. Don't stop me. I'm running out of here.

Helps regulate the system again. Because it was commanded. You didn't do what the body, the reptilian brain, told you to.

So even if it's that you're in this long period where you feel hopeless, or you can't stop something that's going on and your heart wants you to — how do you release, release, release, so the body gets to self-regulate?

[Participant 7:] Yeah.

And that's one of the things that I really love about the art and the expression. Because, you know, from that place of not knowing, you often make it, or create it, or paint it.

[Russell:] Yeah. Because the body knows where it was going. Right.

I've had the experience just like that, of people needing to shake it, move it, yell it.

I've also had the experience, with certain people, of being in connection. Deep connection with another. They can gesture it. They can imagine it. It can move through in many different ways. But it needs to move through somehow.

Sometimes just a spontaneous gesture, and in the presence of a concerned being with them, making that, or meeting them, allows —

Like I used to think, back in the day when I did a lot of cathartic work, that it had to come out of the body that way. That's one way. That's a beautiful, helpful way sometimes.

But like you're saying, the art.

[Participant 7:] But the system doesn't regulate to us. The system doesn't recognize it when it comes out like that. It's not a natural, soft way for the system to know, on every level.

[Russell:] Oh, exactly. Yeah.

You know, it happens in different — what I notice is, different nervous systems seem to need different means.

And yeah, that's helpful. Yes.

Deep imagination can work.

There's also, when somebody is deepening, it's not like it stops, and then they need to — how do I want to say it?

Let's say someone is connecting to a deep level, and then they go for a run. Then they do something else. But it can still come through, even if they're not working on it at that time.

It's not separate from the consciousness that they've touched, when they've been working with you, or something like that.

So the good news is, the organism wants to regulate. It needs opportunity.

[Participant 8:] And that's the body wisdom.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

[Participant 8:] Yeah. You didn't mention the whole cathartic tears of grief process too, which is — you're almost doing it yourself. You're just releasing all that.

[Russell:] Yeah, right. Yeah. Yes, it can be. It can be.

Again, all of these things can be absolutely helpful. Movements through. They can. But they're not always necessary, and they don't always necessarily —

Like those of us who were in the cathartic tradition, would have people crying a lot, doing a lot, but it didn't necessarily process. Because it wasn't —

We had the steam engine model back in the seventies. That there was a certain kind of buildup, and if you exploded it out, you got healthy.

And then we realized that's a little crude. There's something more natural. Something more self-regulating.

It's not just, I feel better. The problem is, you feel better for a little bit, but you haven't really processed it.

And yet sometimes you do.

Okay. Let's — I want to make sure that we're staying connected with what we're working with.

How to have these different levels of ourselves, and how to function.

And the key word — and I don't want to talk on it now, but we're moving toward what is true integration.

How is an organism integrated? How are these different levels of the brain integrated?

And that's something I want to get to when we're fresh.

What really does that mean? And it really has to do with these levels we're talking about, plus a little bit.

So that's — it's too much right now. But I want to affirm what Barbara was speaking to.

That is looking at your belief systems. Looking at the underlying belief systems, and how those belief systems can activate, and keep activated, midbrain and lower brain phenomena. Because the information's moving up and down.

And so just as our life-giving images can help resuscitate the system, and just as our beliefs about the potential for healing —

You know, this is the best part of positive thinking. There's a lot I don't like about positive thinking, actually. But the best part is that when your organism is in a state of — well, like Pete's story the other day. To know, well, maybe it's possible. The stories of healing.

The stories are very life-giving to the organism. Just that you hold a possibility.

Those beliefs in a possibility of healing, of goodness, of care — all of that is physiological. It's not just in my thinking.

Similarly, when I have a belief that if I was a good father, my daughter wouldn't have trouble. And I could torture myself and generate that thought. Or she wouldn't have that problem. And I could keep that thought going to where it really could take over my nervous system.

How can it work? It works on these same muscles, and on these same blood vessels, and on the same neurotransmitters. And it becomes an embodied state that we can create from top down, or from bottom up.

The system is wired like that.

So our belief systems, a repetitive thought, an expectation, can activate all the way down.

And of course, these aren't separate things. They're going up, down, up, down. They're reinforcing each other. It's not like just top down or just bottom up.

That's why we need these skills, so that we can be responsible for our brain states.

[Participant 9:] Should add a little bit. And by the same token, I think the top down can also be helpful. That we need the cognitive piece.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 9:] When you tell yourself, you know, I can do this, and it's okay to feel this way — when there's a cognitive piece in there giving you support.

At least in my experience, that can be really important.

[Russell:] Absolutely.

You can repeat and repeat. I'm okay. I can do this. I'm smart enough to handle this. I've done this before. I've got the skills. I know I can deal with this.

Just repeat that. Repeating that can be really helpful. Absolutely. Absolutely.

And that, again, is not simply living in the cortex. It goes all the way down. It influences all levels.

Okay. I think that might be enough.

[Participant 9:] You need some more.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, we got to bring those in. We're incomplete without those. Yeah.

Okay, so this is good. This is good. What I — oh, boy.

Let's have a little pause. Ten minute pause, and then we're going to continue.

And I'm not sure what continuing yet, because I've got three things I want to do.