Meditation

Angela 2 — Week 4, Day 3, Session 6 — 30 minutes

Summary: In pods of three, facing one another, Russell leads a non-speaking experiment in meditation. He contrasts open attention with directed focus, then guides shifts between soft and sharp attention on breath, sound, and the ground, ending with a silent reflection and a bow.

Introduction

Create a pod with two other people. The three of you are facing each other and sitting.

So, this will be a non-speaking practice.

What I'd like to experience together is an experiment in meditation, in which I'm going to invite you to a particular kind of focus together, and I'll be inviting different changes of attention occasionally.

You're going to see if there's any way that feels different, sitting with two others in this close way. If you actually feel some shift, perhaps, in the space within you and around you.

For those who are less clear about what I mean about the open meditation, it means that there's less directing.

There's still a basic orientation to the present moment. So there might be moments of feeling the bottom, moments of feeling the breath, but it's more like these things call you and you go there than that you're picking the breath and staying with it.

So again, it's a continuum, but what I'm calling directing, there'll be a specific place you're bringing your attention.

What I'm calling open is, you still have an intention toward being in the present moment, but now you're letting what comes call you to the moment.

And even within that, or if you're feeling very spacey, you can — okay, let me feel my bottom for a few moments, let me listen to sounds.

So there can be a little bit of directing, but then you let it go, and it's open again.

Is that clear?

Okay.

Sitting

So, let's bow together.

[Silence 35 seconds]

As you're sitting here, let your eyes be open, at least a little bit, and begin sensing the ground under you. Your hands.

The breath towards the lower belly.

Length of your spine and upward, the top of your head towards the sky.

Movement of air and sounds.

Breath down where your hands are by your lower belly.

And let the attention be open. Orienting to presence.

[Silence 2 minutes]

And continue letting the attention be open, but in a way that's a little bit sharper. Clearer, like you're turning up the resolution.

Still it has the openness of being called.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Open yet bright. Clear.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Stay open, let the focus soften. More diffuse.

[Silence 2 minutes]

And now begin to focus on the breath in your lower belly, counting the exhales. Let that be the center of the whole world, and have that in a sharp, clear, bright way.

[Silence 56 seconds]

Of course, when you lose it, just return to the breath, counting the exhales, the sense of sharpness. Clarity.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Even if you only get to one or two or three, it doesn't matter. Just keep returning, as much brightness as you can.

And if you find it relatively easy, notice if it becomes a little bit habitual and loses its sharpness, brightness.

And then feel how you could stay with the counting of the breath in a more diffuse way. You're still with each breath, but the edges are less sharp.

It's softer.

And continue directing your attention, but now towards sound. Let sound be the center of the universe. In a soft way.

[Silence 41 seconds]

Of course, even when you're directing — can you welcome the other background phenomena? You don't try to keep them away.

[Silence 36 seconds]

And let the sounds become sharper and clearer.

[Silence 45 seconds]

Sense a shift as you bring directed attention to your contact with the ground.

Clear, bright boundary.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Since the shift, did you go back to sound?

And now let your attention just be open. In a soft way.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Let the attention continue open, but sharper. Clearer, brighter.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Resting in the open presence, soft, welcoming.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Stay silent, close your eyes for a moment.

We're not going to be speaking right now, but imagine what you might say. Actually formulate any sentences if you were going to describe what was interesting to you, surprising to you, what got your attention, what was different.

So many different variables, from sitting in this formation to all those distinctions.

And bow once again, and let's organize for walking meditation.