Movement lesson

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

Summary: A lateral-bending lesson begins in sitting with paused breath, then moves to the floor: sliding the head and arms, using rotation to open the ribs, and rolling the foot toward the hand. Sitting and standing afterward invite a quieter sense of volume, connection, and ease, and a reminder to do less rather than push into pain.

Sitting

Just sort of start sitting, any sitting that you like, and get a feeling for the movement of breath through your whole torso, where you sense it.

And pause at the top of your inhale, and then just feel, how do you begin the exhale?

And then pause at the bottom of your exhale. And feel that whole moment between the pause and the beginning of the new breath.

So, introduce this, and we'll actually be coming back to doing a whole lesson around this kind of a theme. But for now, just begin to get curious about how do I pause my breath? What's — how do I actually do that?

And then how can I enter the next phase, and how can that entry get more and more subtle, so that there isn't a jump at the beginning of the movement from the pause to the next phase, but it gets more and more like a breeze?

And is it easier to move from the exhale to the inhale, or the inhale to the exhale?

And is the pausing easier in one direction or the other?

And then just begin to get a little bit of a feeling of bending, laterally bending, bringing your head and shoulder down to one side. Pausing there, and letting there be a breath in which you pause on each side of the inhale and exhale. Feeling where the breath goes.

And come back to neutral for a few moments, and then do the same to the other side.

And one last thing in sitting, which is let the breath be in the background, and in the foreground notice what's different, skeletally, about bending to each side.

So take your time in your own rhythm. Feel what is about bending on the right side, and the left side getting long. What's different about that than bending on the left side and the right side getting long?

Yes. Your left lung is smaller than your right, to make room for your heart.

Now, if you have a difference that you can verbalize, say it out loud.

[Student:] Just the bending right or bending left?

[Russell:] Say it again.

[Student:] So the right is more mobile in both directions.

[Russell:] So check yourself out and see, does that experience help you to sense anything?

The right side bending wants to go into rotation, did you say? So there's a kind of forward movement when you go to the right that's not there when you go to the left?

[Student:] When I bend to the right, my left ribs open out to the left side, allowing me to bend, and I move bending to the left.

[Russell:] Oh, interesting. Yeah, so you sense the limitation on the left feels like actually the right ribs are not going over. Yeah, so that's an interesting thing to pay attention to.

Usually we might feel a limitation on one side and just keep our mind there, but what about projecting to the other side?

[Student:] That's home.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, yeah, nice. Great.

Okay, lie on your back.

To the right

Interlace your hands under your head, the elbows out to the side, and just slowly slide your head and arms down to the right, so the nose stays towards the ceiling. It's a lateral bending movement.

And do that a number of times, listening to the change of shape. How the left side gets longer, the right side bends, and what that invites in your legs, in your pelvis.

So, as always, we're practicing the movement of attention in these lessons, right?

And sometimes we bring the attention to a place, like feeling the right ribs, maybe even a location like the upper right ribs, and then sometimes we'll sense, let me sense my whole self on the floor, or my whole back.

Or let me then go down and notice a specific place. What happens in my right leg? And more general, what happens to my whole lower body?

So we can change the size of the field we're attending to.

Some of us tend to be more detailed people. We go, oh, there's my right heel. Okay, there's the bottom of my cervical spine. Some of us are more generalists, like, there's my back. There's my torso.

Just to notice, can you vary the size of the field that you attend to?

You can stay down to the right, bend your right leg to standing, roll your pelvis to the left, and let yourself bend a little bit more if that space opens down to the right. And then as you lower the pelvis, notice, do you need to go back to where you were, or can you be in this new space comfortably, not forcefully?

And then you do it again, and we keep seeing, does the space open up in the lateral bending?

So you don't need to lengthen your leg, just raise and lower the right side of your pelvis, feeling, can you inhabit some of that new territory that you enter?

The rotation opens up the lateral bending, and then we see, can I have some of that? So you stay to the right, then you rotate, and then you go, is there a little more space? And then you lower the pelvis and see, can I stay in that space?

That's it. Good.

And then just a few more moments. Stay there where you can comfortably lengthen your right arm downward, your left arm upward.

And find a way for your right hand and your right foot to get near each other. The right hand is downward towards the right foot, the left arm is upward, and if the right hand can touch the heel, or touch the pant leg, or, if it's comfortable, come around the ankle.

Let the thumb be with the other fingers. It's a more primitive grip. And only hold the ankle if the foot can be on the floor. If the foot can't be on the floor, then hold the pant leg or something.

And then holding like this, rotate your pelvis to the left. Let your eyes look beyond your left hand. The head rotates on the floor, spirals, and look up.

Come back to neutral with the head a little bit, and then see, could you look rightward and downward the next time? So you're varying the direction of your head.

One time, you're spiraling up toward the left hand, and one time, as the pelvis rotates to the left, you're looking down to the right.

So we want to see, can the cervical vertebrae find freedom even turning rightward?

So each time you turn your pelvis, one time you'll turn the head left, come back to neutral, then the next time from neutral, you'll turn your head right as you turn your pelvis left. That's so.

There we go. Great.

Feel. Slowly come back to neutral, and then sense how your ribs are breathing right now, what's shifted in your torso.

Just as we solidify identities through our self-talk, we solidify identities through certain contractions in the body.

And these lessons are so helpful at creating Swiss cheese out of the identity, creating gaps by getting contractions, say, in the ribs to free up, and what those contractions might be connected to in our story.

Yes, we just enjoy the breath, enjoy lying here.

To the left

Interlace your hands non-habitually under your head, and just experiment.

Well, first actually imagine sliding down to the left, and imagining what that's going to feel like. Where do you think you'll sense a comfortable folding, and where is it unclear?

What do you picture happening on your right side?

Do you have some imagination of your legs being influenced by the sliding of the head and arms down to the left?

And once you've had some imagination about it, go ahead and experiment, and compare your experience to your picture. Beautiful way to grow awareness through the whole body.

So the legs are long right now.

And then stay to the left, bend your left leg, and rotate your pelvis to the right, and notice if you can slide a little bit more.

So you start out down to the left with your head, and then you see, with the rotation, there's some space open that you could slide maybe a half an inch or something into, and then you lower the pelvis slowly.

And you see, can you stay there, or maybe go back a little bit, or maybe go back all the way, however much you need to. And then you do it again, and you're inside your skeleton, just kind of with X-ray vision, or a sense of where are these forces meeting, what's happening in there?

[Silence 36 seconds]

And then pause. Stay where you can on the left. Bring your left arm downward and your right arm upward, and find a way for the left foot and left hand to get close, or get the pant leg, or get around the ankle, or something.

And begin rolling your pelvis, letting your head at first look up towards the right hand.

Chin comes away from the chest, and the back of the head — it's a little bit of a spiraling as the eyes look up, and there's this beautiful arc from your foot through your pelvis, through the top of your head.

So many examples of sculpture throughout the world. It's an inspirational posture, reaching up, looking up, spiraling out, ground up.

Then also, find a way that you could harmoniously, every other movement, when you turn your pelvis to the right, turn your head to the left. Find a way that that could feel—

There's a naturalness or an ease to it also. Sort of different aspect. I could turn that way, maybe.

With your right arm, find a comfortable place. If it needs to be out to the side, because being up is not comfortable for the shoulder, that's fine. Just as high as is comfortable.

Feel the shape of your whole torso.

The expression hard-chested comes from somewhere. A real hard-chested person. Something about those ribs, those attachments softening, yielding. Chest opening.

Good. And then slowly come back to neutral, lower down. Pause here.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Crossing the legs

Bend your left leg to standing. Just sense how you could bring your left foot to the right of your right leg. What would you need to do that?

Stand on the right side, and then come back. Do that a number of times. Feel what has to shift in your pelvis, in your back.

Do it, just kind of go back and forth. And you can move your right leg a little bit leftward, so it's not as far if that's needed, so it can get simpler if possible.

Touch the floor, and come back. As much as you can, bring the flat of the foot to the floor, so the heel is quite close to the right leg. The knee is vertical.

And then with the foot on the floor, rotate your pelvis to the right and back. Feel how you could push out your hip towards the knee to bring that foot more to standing. When it's on the right side, it's on the right side.

Feel, could you find a way to lengthen the hip towards the knee? Let your body rotate. Let your chest rotate as much as it needs to, to allow this movement. Breathing.

And with your foot like this, bend your right leg to standing. So your legs will be crossed. You're standing on your right foot.

Bend your right leg to standing, so your legs are crossed. Yeah, your left foot doesn't need to be on the ground, just your right foot.

Hard to find which is the right foot. What's it doing over there?

Okay, now, interlace your hands under your head. Slowly, gently slide your head and your arms down to the right. Slow, feel that movement, and back a number of times.

Keeping the pelvis on the ground — I mean, not sliding the pelvis. You let the pelvis do what it needs to do. I'll tell you if you're doing something that's helpful for the legs.

Now, pause when you're over to the right. Lengthen your right arm downward, left arm upward, and slowly lower your knees to the right so that your left foot goes towards the floor, even towards your right hand.

Doesn't have to touch the hand, but eventually that might be the direction, that the right arm is long enough, and that the foot is bent enough. But you don't have to try to force that.

You're bringing the foot towards standing on the floor. So, there you go. The left foot is coming to the right side towards the right hand, and that knee is tending towards the vertical. The left knee is tending towards the vertical.

Yeah. Okay. And see, that's not so simple.

Come back to neutral, slowly uncross your leg, lower down. We'll get that to be a little easier.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Rolling to the side

Bend both legs. Interlace your hands under your head. Put your left ankle on your right thigh near the knee.

Slowly raise your right foot and your head off the floor. A slow, light lift, and lower down. Keep the right leg bent.

So you just lift the foot off the floor, and you lower it, and you lift your head, and you listen to a sense of simultaneity of the foot and the head lifting.

Slow. Let your jaw be at ease. Exhaling as you lift is probably a good idea.

So slow. Let the left knee be out to the left, and the outside of the ankle is touching the thigh.

Good. You are folding.

And now, keep your left hand behind your head, free your right hand, and as you lift the right foot, bring your right hand under the sole of the right foot, if possible, in that direction anyway.

So you — I'm sorry, under the sole of your left foot, excuse me.

And you touch the outside edge if you can, and then you let that go. You touch the outside edge if you can. If you can't, you just go in that direction. You don't force.

Lifting the head, yeah. That's it. Good.

So the right ankle is on the left thigh. I'm sorry, the left ankle is on the right thigh. I was looking at the wrong person. The left ankle is on the right thigh. That's it.

You're reaching with your right hand.

And then hold the foot if you can, and let the right foot come back to the floor. So you're holding the left foot in the air if you can, or touching around the pant leg, and the right foot is touching the floor, so the right leg is standing.

The head — if you can let it come back to the floor, let it come back. If it needs to be in the air, you're still holding it. Your left hand is still behind your head.

Now, in this position, roll to your right, bringing the back of the right hand towards the floor with the foot upon it. And then you turn to your back. Do that a number of times.

If you don't need your hand behind your head, you can free your hand. You're just rolling to your side. The knee tends towards standing. The foot is going towards the floor.

So it's as if you're standing on your right hand. The sole of the left foot is in the palm of the right hand, if that's convenient. Your fingers are around the outer edge of your left foot.

And you're not forcing if that's not convenient. You make it a little bit easier.

Take that left hand and put it below the front of your left kneecap. Your fingers pointing away from you, and hold your leg like that. Roll with that.

So your hand is on your foot, your fingers pointing away if possible. That's it. And your foot comes towards the floor.

And do that a little faster. Kind of like just roll. But the back of the hand comes towards the floor. You're like — you know the way chimpanzees roll.

And take care of yourself. Nice. Leave it.

Come onto your back and enjoy.

[Silence 40 seconds]

Stepping over

Interlace your hands under your head. Slide your head down to the right. Reach down with your right hand. Up with your left hand.

Turn your palm towards the ceiling — your right palm towards the ceiling, actually both palms. And bend your left leg to standing. Your right arm is downward.

And now step over your right leg with your left, and come towards your hand. You may not get to your hand. Your right arm is downward, your left leg is stepping over your long right leg.

Yeah, and you go back. Do that a number of times. Just kind of get simple with it. Just step over and back, over and back. Let it get simpler.

You're just kind of stepping over in the direction of your hand. Your hand reaches in the direction of the foot. Your right arm is downward. That's it.

We're going back to a movement that hopefully is simpler after the last movement. It's a progression of teaching your body that it can do this, and everybody is much closer to that foot than they were a few minutes ago, because your brain got to experience that it's possible.

That's it. Good. Okay. Leave it. Lengthen your leg. Pause for a moment. Enjoy your breathing.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Interlace your hands non-habitually under your head, and slide down to the left. Do that a number of times, down and back, feeling the bending on the left side, the lengthening on the right.

And pause over on your left side. Lengthen your left arm downward and your right arm upward. Bend your right leg to standing.

Your right leg is standing, your left leg is long, and you step over your left leg in the direction of that hand and back. You don't try to force anything. Just come over and back a number of times, over and back.

Just kind of letting your pelvis, letting your back get used to that, letting your brain get used to that, the sole of the foot towards the floor.

And keep your leg over on the left side, and bend your left leg to standing, so it kind of goes in the crotch of the right knee. That's it. Good.

And then slowly lower your knees towards the left, the foot going in the direction of that left hand, the right foot going in the direction of the left hand.

That's it. Good.

And then we can make it easier by taking the right hand, putting it below the front of the kneecap, the right kneecap, and holding with both hands. Lengthen your left leg, and just roll to the left and back a number of times.

So the back of your left hand is going towards the floor, with your right foot standing in it, is the direction. You may not get that far, but that's moving in that direction. That's it.

And then just get the turning simple. Let the left leg be long now. The left leg can be long. And you're just rolling to your left side and back, getting that simpler.

And when you roll to the side, let the knee be vertical. So we're just rolling left and back, left and back. That's it. Breathing is good.

That's good. Okay, leave it, rest on your back. Just feel what's happened, the shape of your chest.

Breathing.

Head and ribs

And your right leg to standing. You can just roll your pelvis to the left and your head to the right. Just light and easy. Just let that go through you. Pelvis left, head right.

The knee stays. Just let the head roll to the right as you turn your pelvis to the left. It's just simple, simple.

The knee is vertical. The whole vertebral column at this point is probably—

So you're not sliding. Listen to the direction. The pelvis is rolling left and the head is rolling right. It's a simpler movement. The head is rolling right. That's just simple rotational movement, making use of all that movement that's occurring through those chest vertebrae.

That's it. Good.

And then interlace your hands under your head. Slide down to your right, reach down with your right hand, let the foot and hands come near each other. If you can surround the ankle, do so. That's it.

And holding like this, just one last time, rotate the pelvis left. One time, look up towards the left hand, one time down towards the right hand. Just vary that, and feel how the ribs are bending now.

And then rotate your pelvis, keep it rotated, and turn your head right and left. Keep your pelvis — the right side of the pelvis off the ground. See if the head can be free to rotate right and left easily.

Slow and smooth, not aggressive. Nice. Good. Slowly come back to neutral.

[Silence 54 seconds]

Interlace your hands non-habitually behind your head. Slide your head down to the left. Bend your left leg to standing. Reach down with your left hand and up with your right.

See if you can get the hand close to the foot, around the ankle, or to the pant leg. So it's the left leg that's bent. Left arm downward, right arm upward.

And just feel the rotating of your pelvis to the right. One time the head can look up to the right. Let that spiral really form.

And then the next time, you're looking down as the pelvis turns to the right. You're looking down to the left. And so we get the counter-rotation, which gives another kind of movement through the upper spine.

Eyes look up, and then your eyes look down. And if you do this the next few times from inside your vertebral column and your ribs, can you sense all the mobility that's occurring in there?

That's great. Okay, leave it, lower down, slowly come back to neutral.

Again, it's really wonderful to watch as we do this series of lessons. There's a couple more that we'll be doing in this series, but the difference from where you were the last time and now is really interesting to see, how the mobility grows.

Feel the breath. The shape of your chest.

Sitting and standing

And come, roll to your side, come to sitting.

First, just get your sense, your impressions in sitting.

And so the breath moves, and then just experiment with that lateral movement we began with, and feel there's some difference that makes a difference to you.

Slow enough that you can sense, and feel, pause, and feel the breath.

Just pause, sitting, breathing for a moment.

Then come to standing. Explore in whatever ways you like. Feel what's got your attention.

And of course, there's listening to the physical phenomena that stand out to you, and there's listening to what feels different, which is often very hard to describe. The way it feels different to be you.

Subtle shifting of the infrastructure, self-organization, how we carry ourselves.

Yeah, so move in whatever ways you like. If there are some observations that you find interesting, either from during the movement or in sitting or now, if you have words for them, put them forward. If you have a gesture for them, you can say it that way.

[Student:] Possibility.

[Russell:] Beautiful word, yeah.

[Student:] Volume.

[Russell:] Volume, yeah. Feel that in all directions?

[Student:] Connected.

[Russell:] That is, all over connected, or particular ways you're sensing?

[Student:] Skeletally.

[Russell:] Skeletally.

[Student:] It's got an up, down feel.

[Russell:] Yeah, it all relates. Yeah.

What was it over here? There was something coming. Go ahead.

[Student:] A strong lightness.

[Russell:] A strong lightness, yeah. And the gesture is just a strong lightness, right?

If anybody'd like to join, someone's going out to lunch.

[Student:] A canoe. The shape of a death float in a canoe.

[Russell:] So you did it in a way that was painful. Really, really important.

You only do as much, and if that means doing it in your imagination, you keep backing away. Yeah, because it's not helpful if you're feeling like you're hurting yourself.

Well, I wonder, as your awareness grows, you can do more and more with less and less physical effort. So you want to keep updating. How much do I need to do? Is this my habit self, that relies on a certain—

See, some of us only know where we're at our edge when there's something uncomfortable. And we want to learn what's there before that.

And how can I know I'm full before I've overeaten? How can I know — and the only thing that can be alive earlier than your discomfort is if your awareness is there and can be interested in more subtle things.

Yeah, that's right. So, less, less. These lessons are just — next time we do it, exquisite for you. You just, with less.

Okay. Yes, please.

[Student:] Walking around that image of Corcovado over on the South Bank. A sense of just the — yes, expansiveness in the chest.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. Beautiful. Yeah. This one up there. Yeah.

[Student:] It is better.

[Russell:] So you're not going to call your lawyer. He said during the lesson, I'm going to call my orthopedist and my lawyer. In the sense he might be struggling.

So, take a very brief pause, like two minutes if you need the bathroom. I want to introduce a process before our lunch break that will continue after this.

Excuse me. We can — that's a good question. We can gather, sit comfortably near me when we come back here.