Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 4, Day 4, Session 7 — 74 minutes

Summary: A movement lesson for sitting posture. From the pelvis the group rounds and erects, then opens each hip on the back and in side-sitting. Reaching from the sit bones lengthens the spine. After a short sit, standing practice varies the field, focus, and fidelity of attention, with a few words on the body as idea.

A different kind of lesson

[Russell:] So this will be a different kind of lesson. Completely different.

What I'd like to do is work on developing, clarifying, growing our sitting posture for meditation, because some of us need some support in that — most of us.

It will be good if, in addition to having your mats, you also had your cushion or your chair, depending on your preferred style of sitting. And that was nearby you.

[Participant:] What should I choose, a cushion or my bench? I will try to sit on a cushion.

[Russell:] Okay, try a cushion. What we do will be relevant for both, so it will help both.

Oh, right. So why don't you change places? Linda and Lisa, change places.

That's a good idea. Great.

So let's start sitting on your cushion or your chair, whatever you sit on. Start with that.

[Participant:] Is there a benefit to choosing cross-legged, as opposed to —?

[Russell:] No, no. This is fine. Whatever is your most frequent way, or the one you want to develop, is fine.

Rounding and erecting

[Russell:] Sense yourself. You don't need to have the mudra. You can just have your hands on your legs, and just sense the ground support.

Begin to let your pelvis come back, as if you want to round your back. Your pelvis comes back, and let your head come down a little bit. Let your chest fall a little bit, so there's a little rounding in your back.

And then from your pelvis, begin to come a little bit forward, toward erecting yourself. Just feel that — a small, gradual movement of folding. Feeling a kind of C shape grow from the tailbone through the top of your head.

And then from the golden ball, from the middle of your pelvis, you begin a smooth and gradual forward movement, and you let your head come up, as if the head is directly connected all the way through your pelvis.

Come to the horizon.

And from what feels like neutral on the horizon, let your pelvis begin to extend your back. Move forward. Let your head lift up, but slow and really smooth, as if the top of your head is coming out like a continuous curve from the bottom of your tailbone. It's all moved from center.

Come back to neutral.

When you come up, let your eyes — even if your eyes are closed — let them lift in your head. That will help activate your extensors. That's part of the way kids get their extensors activated, is the eyes looking up.

Feel the chest lifting. Feel the throat opening.

Don't just shorten the neck. Come up and out of your chest. So it's not that your chest stays in place and your head drops back. Your chest is lifted from your pelvis, out of your torso orbit. The top of the sternum lifts up, and begins to go back a little bit.

Put your hands on — find the edge of the clavicle. Find the upper part of the sternum, in from the edge of the clavicle, the upper inner part of the sternum. And feel: when you go from looking forward, kind of up, and then the upper part of the sternum actually comes a little back in space.

Lift up and out of your pelvis. And then back toward neutral.

Your mouth soften.

And then pause for a moment and just feel yourself in neutral.

Lie on your back for a moment. We'll be working and sitting some more, but you need to come to your back.

The right leg

[Russell:] Sense your right leg. Your attention moves through your right leg.

And just slowly let the leg rotate a little bit outward. Let the knee come out, like we did the other day, and kind of slide the outside of the foot so that the knee comes out to the side, and then lengthens again.

Go slow and smooth. Feel how your pelvis changes shape. We're just bending the right leg, just the right leg, and how the weight shifts rightward in your pelvis, and the left side lifts. See if you can allow that.

So the knee is opening out to the right and sliding, and you're feeling that movement all through.

And find that movement — how you can have the head move opposite. Have the head move left as the knee goes, so your attention is mobile through your whole self. Your head's turning left as the knee goes right, and comes back to neutral as the knee comes back to neutral. So there's a sense of following through your whole self.

Okay, and then find a way for your right leg to stay open like that. Find a comfortable place for your foot, and let the left leg come to standing. So the right knee is open out to the right, and the right foot might be somewhere near your left foot.

And listening to your right knee and your right hip joint, roll your pelvis to the right. Keeping that left knee vertical, so it's as if you're rolling the whole pelvis over that right hip joint, which invites it to open. Keep that left knee really vertical. Find a good place for the foot so that you can really stand on that leg.

And you see, the whole right leg is invited to open in a safe way. The hip joint, the knee, even the ankle gets to turn in a safe way, from center.

And go slow. If anything's uncomfortable, do less.

Keep the right knee open. The right knee stays open out to the side. You're not lifting the leg. It just stays out to the side like that. You're just turning the pelvis.

And you can't bring the pelvis back without lifting the right knee. The right knee can lift a little bit when the pelvis comes back, as much as it needs to, but not more.

And then let the head go left as you turn your pelvis right. Find that in this position. Feel that rotation through your spine, that twisting through your spine. You're going in two directions, and that's very helpful. The vertebrae of your back — that's good.

Okay, and pause, and lengthen your legs.

Please roll to your right side. Come up to sitting.

Sitting over the right hip

[Russell:] Let your right leg be bent — not on your cushion, if possible. If this is too uncomfortable not on your cushion, then use your cushion. Have your right leg open and your left leg standing, leaning on your right hand. You can also make a fist with your right hand if that's better.

This is actually a beautiful pose. You'll see some beautiful Kuan Yins in this kind of a pose. Avalokitesvara. It's a sublime pose of serenity.

And just gently feel how you could lift the left side of your pelvis, keeping this knee vertical, and then let the left side of your pelvis come back.

And then, as you lift, you're rolling over your right sit bone, and you're coming to a real full height. So you're coming up and over. It's almost like your head is coming out of that sit bone.

You turn a little bit to the right, and then you come back down. Let the left side of the pelvis come back towards the ground. And you come up and out.

There's a little bit of turning in the head, but it's like you're a phoenix rising out of the ground here, out of your hip joint.

Yeah. The right knee is up. There we go. That's it. Is that okay?

Okay, so your right leg is bent like that, your left is standing. There you go. And lean on whatever is comfortable for that right hand, a fist or a hand, and then rotate the left side of your pelvis towards the right. That's it. And let that right knee go more towards the floor if it can, as you rotate towards it.

That's it. Good. And then let the left leg come back.

See if we can find the sitting. If you need some props, something to sit on, you can use it. See if this is acceptable.

Okay, Robert? Anything uncomfortable right now in this? What's uncomfortable?

Okay. So your back feels a strain also. Okay, so let's just see something here.

Take breaks as often as you need to. Often, lifting the left side of the pelvis will help. If you think something else might be helpful, you can use cushions. You want to give as much support as needed.

So now, in this position, just turn to look to your right, as if your left sit bone is coming away from the floor, and you lift the left side of your pelvis. Turn.

In fact, take your left hand. You're doing it the other way — okay. Left hand on your left sit bone. Find your left sit bone. Everyone have a left sit bone?

And as you turn to look to the right, it's as if you're lifting that sit bone and helping it turn. Lifting and turning. Let your eyes look around you to the right, and let this sit bone come really away from the floor as you turn.

Good.

Okay, and now free your left hand, and reach up and to the right as you turn your pelvis again towards the right, the left side coming away from the floor. You're reaching up and to the right, as if your hand is attached to that left sit bone — your left hand — and it's almost like it's pulling it away from the floor as you turn towards your right.

That's it. Light and easy, many times. Turning right, reaching, looking up. That's it. Good.

Okay, leave it. Lie on your back.

[Silence 56 seconds]

Bless you.

The left leg

[Russell:] Sense both your legs. Let your legs be long to start, and just begin to tune into your left leg. Any differences, right and left legs, as you're lying here?

And then slowly feel how you can let that left leg begin to open. Ride the foot on its outer edge, and lengthen. Feel that whole movement. Go slow, inviting your pelvis to have that kind of opening in the left side, and feeling how the knee can feel safe enough in this position.

And begin to let the head rotate to the right, in harmony with the knee.

And let the knee stay open. Bend your right leg to standing. So the left knee is pointing leftward, and you're on the outside of that left foot.

And then slowly begin to rotate your pelvis leftward, taking the right side away from the floor, and letting that left hip joint open. The left knee is likely to come more down towards the floor as you rotate in that way. That left hip joint opens in the front. Just keep inviting that, smoothly.

And then let the head rotate in the opposite direction, towards the right. A number of times, let that happen.

As you rotate the pelvis, really let that left leg open. As long as it feels safe, it can really come down towards the floor. That hip joint can open.

And then a few times, a little quicker and lighter.

Okay, then pause. Lengthen your legs.

[Silence 47 seconds]

Roll to your left. Come up to sitting.

The left leg bent open, out to the side, so the outside of the left ankle is on the floor, and the right leg finds a place to stand, and you lean on your left hand behind you.

And if the right foot can be to the right of the left foot, it's better. If not, then work with it.

And you can feel how you could turn your pelvis towards the left, as if you're pushing your right knee out a little bit. See if you can find something like that. Turn and look to the left, and come back, and turn and look to the left. You're coming out of your pelvis.

And then let the right leg come down so that it's bent backwards, if possible, if that's convenient. Use supports if you need them.

And just begin to turn and look. Actually, let's take hold of the right sit bone and lift it and turn. Come back, and lift and turn, so you really feel not only the sit bone, but of course that rotates the hip joint, and you really come over that left sit bone — even beyond it, to where you're sitting probably towards the outside of that left hip.

So this pelvic movement is really key. It's really important, and it's one that's easy to lose, actually, and to regain.

So let your right hand come around and reach up to the left as you come around. That right sit bone and that right hand — they're connected. And you're reaching up and around to the left, as if your hand is also pulling up. It's attached by a string to that right sit bone, and the right side of your pelvis rotates and lifts as you reach.

That's it. That's nice. Great.

On the cushion

[Russell:] Okay, and let's just take a moment sitting on your cushions. Feel how this is coming — or sitting in your preferred way of sitting.

Feel where you come onto your sit bones. Know your back is organized.

Sense where you feel the weight, what your height is like, what your legs are like, the shape of your spine.

Slowly, from your pelvis, let your back round down. Let your head come down. Feel the rounding.

And then from your pelvis, coming to neutral, and then through neutral, letting the pelvis go forward, and looking up, out of your chest. Coming up at the chest. Let the breastbone lift. As

you come forward and up, the breastbone lifts. Letting your chest help the head to lift. Your eyes participate.

And then go back down. Feel the moving down, and from around the lungs, up and down, letting your chest support the lifting of your head.

Like you're coming up and out of your pelvis, up and out of your chest as you lift. Your eyes lead the way. Feel it all the way through to your pelvis.

And then coming down is a softening in the chest. Letting that chest feel, as the head comes down. You want that mobility around the breastbone, that can both come forward and up, and back and down. Harmony — the connection between the head and the pelvis.

Just lightly tap here. Just tap. Kind of wake up here. The breastbone a little bit, the ribs around it. A tap, tap, tap, both hands, all around the breastbone, the ribs, breathing.

Then pause. Please bring your right leg back, left leg in front. Use whatever supports you need so it's not a strain.

Anybody needing help with supports?

Put one hand on the floor to the right of your left knee, and one hand to the left of your left knee. See if you can have two hands on the floor, and the knee somehow in between. They could be further out than the knee, or closer in, but the knee is between.

And then, leaning on both hands, lift the right side of your pelvis away from the floor. Let your head come up. You're looking up. And then lower down, but let the lowering go all the way through the top of your head and your eyes. The pelvis might come back all the way to the floor, or near the floor, and then you're coming up and away from the floor at this angle.

So your hands are around the right knee — I'm sorry, the left knee. But your right leg is back. You got it. Yeah. There you go. That's the way. There was something that was confused there.

So come up and out, and back and down. At this angle, up and out. As if you're really lifting — such a beautiful movement for the whole back. Come up and out, connected to your eyes. It's like your eyes and your sit bones get connected.

Now keep your right hand where it is, and slide your left hand forward. And come back with your left hand. And slide it forward. Let your head come down. And come back.

And then slide about halfway forward of how far you could go. Keep your back as it is, but lift your hand from the floor, and lift your eyes and your head, but let your lower back stay as it is, and come back down.

Lift your arm so your lower back is staying extended, and lower down. Lift your hand and your eyes. Lower down, and slide.

Feel the influence on your back.

Yes, you can stay on the floor. That's fine.

Bring your left leg back, right leg in front.

Just feel that you could rotate the left side of your pelvis away from the floor, and back. Just kind of get light — if such a word could be used — light with it, easy. And let both your hands be down, if you like.

Just kind of turn your pelvis. Look around yourself. Turn and look around, and then feel how you could look up, and let the left side come away from the floor, and look back down. And how you could look up, and back down.

And let the connections — your eyes, your neck, your chest — go all the way through to your pelvis. So you feel your belly come forward as you look up, and come back down. That's it.

Good. And lean. This time, let's lean on the left hand. Let your right hand go forward.

Reach out, come back, and then reverse it. Lean on your right hand. Let your left hand go forward. When the left hand goes forward, turn to look to the right. Feel how you can come out of your lower back.

And as your right hand goes forward, turn your head to the left. And again, it's as if your fingertips are coming out all the way from your back and pelvis. That's it.

Okay. The key here is to let it go all the way through to your sit bones. Otherwise your back is working too hard. Let it go all the way to your pelvis. It goes through your back.

Good. Okay. Nice. Go lie on your back.

[Silence 59 seconds]

Head, arms, and the hip

[Russell:] And let your right knee open out to the side. Let your left leg come to standing.

Interlace your hands under your head. Slide your head and arms down to the left. Do that a number of times, back and forth, letting that go through you. Feel the influence into your pelvis, into your lower back. Let your chest soften.

You're sliding the head. You let the pelvis do whatever it does, but you're not intentionally doing anything with it.

And then pause when you're over to the left, where you could stay, and let your left arm come down, and the right arm go up. And find if there's a way of bringing that left hand and that left foot close to each other. Or if you can hold that ankle, do so, if you can get near it. As long as the foot is on the floor.

And rotate the pelvis to the right. You're rotating over that hip joint. That's it. And let the head look up towards the right hand one time, and then down to the left the next time, but in conjunction with rotating your pelvis.

Feel that bending in your chest, and its relationship to the pelvis rotating.

Only go within your comfort, so that the foot has to be in contact with the floor. Do less if the foot's lifting, or if it's straining. That's good.

Great. Then come down. Pause. Leave that.

[Silence 59 seconds]

Let the left knee come out to the side. Let the right come to standing.

Interlace your hands non-habitually under your head. Just a number of times, slide down towards the right and back. Do that a number of times, smoothly.

And then stay to the right. Bring your right arm downward, left arm upward. Bring the foot and the hand toward each other. And rotate the pelvis leftward, alternating the direction of your head.

That's it.

Okay, and lengthen your legs. Leave that for a moment.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Reaching from the sit bones

[Russell:] Roll up to sitting. Your right leg back and your left leg in front. And lean on your left hand.

And with the right hand, reach up, feeling the connection to your right sit bone, letting the right sit bone come away from the floor, as if it's being lifted because it's connected to that hand. Come back down.

So it's as if, from this reaching, the pelvis is immediately activated. And then reach a little more to the left as you reach up, a little more to the right. Different angles, but the connection is from your fingertips to that right sit bone.

Light. Let the hand get light. Let the mouth get light.

Now put your right hand back on the floor. You can be a little bit at an angle now, and just flip your legs to the other side. You won't be facing forward. You'll be at an angle.

You lean on your right hand. You reach with your left, as if your left sit bone is being lifted out of the ground from your hand, your reach. You can let the arm turn a little as you reach. Go a little towards the ceiling, a little more to the right, or a little more to the left, and feel how you can let that left side of the pelvis come away, and you rotate over that right hip.

That's good. Okay.

Come back to your cushions, or to your chair.

It's coming, I see.

Listen to the length of your spine. See what's happening in your pelvis, what you're sitting on.

Reach up with both hands. Let your eyes lift. Let your pelvis come forward, so your lower back comes a bit forward, your belly comes a bit forward. You reach up, and follow your hands back to neutral. Find neutral in your pelvis, and then just lower your hands. Keep your spine long.

Feel — can you settle on your bottom and have this long spine?

Once again, reach up. Let the hands be soft. Your eyes are helping you reach. And then you follow. Let your pelvis have this bit of forwardness, and you come back to the horizon. You have this uplift in your back, and then you lower your hands. Let your eyes be on the horizon. A long spine. And feel your carriage.

Feel your breath in your belly, your settledness in your bottom, and your length in your spine.

Take your mudra.

What you sense

[Russell:] If you've got something that feels different in a significant way, that feels helpful in some way, see if you can find words. Put it out.

What's there? What do you sense?

[Participant:] Front of the sit bones.

[Russell:] So if someone says something, you listen. What do you have in your sit bones? Anything about the front, or something else?

[Participant:] Free jaw.

[Russell:] Yeah, I really see that.

[Participant:] Open across the back, and the sides of the shoulder blades, down.

[Russell:] Really widens your chest.

[Participant:] Rib cage down at the back.

[Russell:] Rib cage down at the back.

[Participant:] Side ribs like gills, breathing.

[Participant:] Looking out from a high place, like down into a canyon.

[Russell:] Just, if you can — if you're comfortable enough to stay there a little bit — just stay there. Beautiful.

Fifteen.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Participant:] Need a longer shirt.

[Russell:] Thank you.

[Silence 59 seconds]

Sitting

[Russell:] Sit for five more minutes. If you need to change the position of your legs, because it's too much, or something, do so.

Listen.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Notice how you could have the attention to the outside world — including the sounds, the sights, the sense of space — or shift more internally. Breath and weight, other sensations. You can have them somewhat equal, a kind of openness to both.

Then notice you could have the resolution at a higher intensity, higher fidelity, or softer, a little fuzzier, a little more diffuse.

Then also notice that you can vary the size of the field you're attending to. You could feel the breath just in your belly, or you could feel the breath throughout your torso.

You could sense the lower back. You can open out to sensing the whole back.

Sense your left foot. At the same level of focus, you could sense the whole left leg.

And let's slowly bow, and bring ourselves to standing.

Shifting attention

[Russell:] Got multiple levels happening — the influence of the lesson. Also inviting you to vary your attention.

So we are, at this time, more directive in our attention. And the three matrices we're using, the three ways we're shifting attention.

One is noticing the difference between an internally oriented attention — so right now, feel the body here, the breathing inside, how it feels in there — and immediately you could choose to open to the sounds. You could open to the space around your body, the other beings around you.

Then you could shift your level of focus. You could have the external, the sounds, be at high fidelity. In other words, wanting to hear them bright and clear. Or the colors that you see, giving them that little bit of extra attention that helps them pop a bit.

Or you could soften your seeing, soften your hearing, so that it's a wider, more diffuse perception. See if you have that.

So we could go internal, to your left foot, and we could have it sharp, bright, clear. Or we could let it be a little bit softer, in our way of taking it into the field of perception. Wider, diffuse.

And you could take in the whole left leg, and you could take it in in a sharp, clear, bright way, or you could take it in in a more diffuse, wider-angle, softer way.

You could have your right leg. You could open the field to both legs. You could open the field to your whole body.

You could get your whole body bright and clear. Let it sharpen, as if you're looking through a brighter lens to the whole body. You could soften the whole body in your perception.

And choose your hands as a location, so we can get a smaller field, and it could be bright or diffuse. You could have both your arms. You could have your arms and legs. You could have your body and the space around your body.

Feel if there's some kind of subtle vibration that begins in your body.

Close your eyes and sense your arms, your legs, the space around you.

As attention lingers, the physical body becomes an energy body. It often has a kind of vibration to it, less boundaried.

Does the attention move out into the space around you?

Have your body in the background, and there's a larger space. Would you perceive this body as if from outside the body? To be in that larger space, and have this body within that larger space.

Just your weight. Have your ground return, but still the sense of space around you.

Can we cross these, so that we have I'm here and I'm here? Can we experience something like I'm here and I'm here? I'm in a larger space, and I have some location here.

Move a little bit through space. Feel what happens as you're moving, as you're shifting your attention, and as you're getting malleable in the perception of self and world.

[Silence 52 seconds]

How to think the body

[Russell:] Robert, what was your Heidegger quote yesterday about the body? Do you remember that one? If you don't have it, that's okay.

[Participant:] Yeah. The thinging of the thing. The isness, he said. And he was talking about when he came to the lecture, and at the end of his lecture.

[Russell:] Oh, that one. Yes, yes.

A very esoteric lecture on Heraclitus. Heidegger and Fink were giving this lecture together. Toward the end of it, Heidegger said, in that very esoteric place, he said, I do not know how to think the body.

And then Spinoza said, the mind is the idea of the body.

You'll get into that one.

Well, feel how it's quite malleable, our perception, and the world we create through how we perceive self and environment. How we shift attention, or stay locked in to certain habits of perceiving, and we keep recreating the same situations.

And there is an incredible — we all are an incredible potentiality toward creating, experiencing of living. That's different. That's growing. That's life-giving.

And these bodies are — when you start getting this, the perceptual field is like a playing field for growing a life. And our body is part of that playing field, in which we generate and create new realities.

And that's not just kind of woo-woo talk. That's literal.

Start feeling it in our body. We're not nearly as solid as we think. Unless we think so — then we are. Because then your body becomes the idea of your mind. You've reversed things.

Dinner time.

And the mind is the idea of the body.

It would be good if you can remember to bring that article on mindfulness to our meditation tonight, and maybe look at it. And if you have a chance, if there's any particular sentence, or a couple of sentences, that grab you, mark them for yourself. That might be relevant for tonight, or intrigue you.