Talk

Angela 2 — Week 4, Day 6, Session 2 — 88 minutes

Summary: Russell distinguishes helpful navigational voices from a solidified identity system, with its requirements, demands, and "channel me." Unnecessary suffering, he says, is tied to fixations of attention, and attention can be varied. A mind-mapping practice then brings critical and praising voices into listening with a partner.

Reflecting on the morning

[Russell:] So, just take a moment. Drop down, drop down.

And can I invite you, if it feels right, keep your eyes open. Learn the dropping, connecting to body sense, feeling sense, without having to go way in there. Maybe it's possible. And maybe it's not.

Maybe sometimes closing the eyes really is helpful, to drop you down and in.

Just take a few moments to reflect back to our meditation. We had meditation this morning, and maybe some somewhat obscure things were said about noticing. A suggestion was made to keep observing any solidification, and to keep stepping back. Might have been quite confusing. That might have opened something.

And there's also, again, the practice of sitting with two others, and shifting the attention intentionally, reflecting back how that seemed to influence you, what seemed helpful or not helpful.

I'd like to begin with some reflecting together, and then move into a specific subject I'd like to look at. So, anything from all that that wants to come right now. Yes.

[Participant:] Yeah, I'll do this with the intention of using few words.

I think the guidance this morning, where suddenly the turning the light around can get solid, and to release that solidity, just made me like, okay, I'm really confused.

So I was sitting with my confusion, and this is one image that came to me. I have this brand new two-week-old grandbaby, and I'm thinking, if I were a two-week-old, I wouldn't have a sense of self, and I would be immersed in the world of light and sound and —

So maybe that image, if you could respond to that, might give me —

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, great, great, great. Yes, yes. Good, good. Thank you.

So I support the image, as long as we also recognize that literally the two-week-old is going to be experiencing differently than your adult brain is going to experience.

Okay, so it's not that we want to become like a two-week-old, but we want some of what they have, in addition to what we have. So what that means is, it's exquisite in that there's no sense of

a solid self. There's perceiving occurring. At that level, it's a perfect image. Perfect image, and let that be there.

That there's — what I'm trying to point to, when I'm bringing up these confusing ways, because it's really impossible to talk about it, you can just point to it — that even the sense of "I am turning the light around," there's an extra I.

So we want even that to melt away in our experience, and what's left is space. And as soon as we talk about it, it solidifies again. So it's really hard for the part of our brain that talks about things and creates categories of things to keep melting it away. But we have to point to it and then let it melt.

[Participant:] Yeah. Why is that important?

[Russell:] Why is that important? Why is that not only important — why is that essential, from my point of view?

There's a really good chance that a significant part of the one who's asking, do I really need that, really doesn't want that. But there's another part of that that knows.

So let's say it this way. Actually, this is a nice lead into part of what I want to get toward.

The identity system

[Russell:] Okay, so let me take two steps back. So two steps is, I'm giving maps. Maps, as we know, are not the territory. Always, always. Whether it's a map of the brain or a map of psychology or a map of how we work, that's not literal. It's a way of looking that can be helpful or not.

So I'm trying to give ways that are helpful for approaching, and when they solidify, we need to pull them away again.

What forms in human beings, in adult human beings, seems to be consistent, is what we can call an identity system. An identity system.

And I want to differentiate between the formation of voices, of temporary identities or navigational systems that help us map the inner world and the outer world. We need that kind of navigation, some kind of representation of self and world that helps us move through it, like having a GPS.

One of the things that happens for most of us is this identity system solidifies and becomes a self-identity. It becomes who we think we are. And there's a gap between our intimate meeting of life and this layer that we're meeting life through. This layer of beliefs, this layer of ideas, this layer of historical reactivity, of conditioning. And we start having this barrier, we could say.

Now, from a traditional psychological point of view, the work is to develop a good identity. And a good identity is good. That's helpful.

What I want to suggest is that when the identity system solidifies, even if it has a lot of positivity in it, you're not going to find freedom there. You're not going to find your intimacy with the totality of life. You'll have more good moments. But there still is a gap.

And so I like to make a distinction between having a helpful navigational system for interacting with the world, and identifying myself with that navigational system.

When identified with my system, we start seeing a certain kind of contraction, a certain kind of solidification. That identity system.

You should probably write a little bit of this down.

So, right. This is a map, right? This is not reality. This is a map. It's either helpful or not helpful.

So, we have what I'm calling an identity system. I'll give you — I didn't invent this language, and I'll give you the sources in a little bit. There was a very lovely female Zen meditation teacher who died years ago, Joko Beck. Some of you have probably read her work, and she came up with this term, and a student of hers, a psychiatrist, kind of elaborated it, and that's where I was first exposed to the language.

I wouldn't say that they would agree with everything, or — I don't know if they would agree or disagree with everything that I've gone to from there, but the basic concept came from them, so I want to credit them with it.

So, the identity system. Again, I'm distinguishing between helpful navigational voices. We need those. We're not trying to get rid of them.

When that solidifies into a system, we know it because you start sensing contractions. Just like we've said many times, when you go from a moment of — what do I want to say? Where you feel stuck, you feel identified with a particular anything — thought, feeling, sensation — and then you spend time with it in the way that we've been learning, in that open listening, there's always the sense that it opens. That it never gets tighter. Even if it's not resolved, or even if you're seeing that it's really difficult, somehow the seeing of it lets an opening occur. There's space. We've all had that experience many times.

So the identity system creates these contractions. The identity system always has — I like this word that they came up with, I didn't — requirements. Ways you have to be. What I call demands.

So when the identity system is active, it's not only, oh, it would be helpful to spend more time meditating. You're a bad person if you don't meditate. The identity system speaks often like that. It tells you what's wrong with you, and then tells you what you need to do to fix it. It has requirements for your existence.

The navigational voices that are connected to your self, to your source, have your best interests. They're more like the voices we hear when we enter in our focusing. They have this unconditional — they can be objective. They can see that, oh, you're suffering with this, this would be helpful. But they don't come like this. They come pointing a direction.

So you can tell when the identity system has taken over the navigational voices, that there's always a constriction. There are always certain requirements, the sense of you have to — demands, for you to be an acceptable being. Do this, you can't do that.

So we're going to have voices. We're gonna have lots of voices. You probably have noticed some voices. We're gonna have — meditation's not about getting rid of voices. It's about cultivating friendliness with what's living in there, and having the different voices functioning in harmony for the unfolding of our life.

It's cultivating friendliness, so that there is this internal integrity or order. It's called integration, when the different voices are functioning in harmony with the unfolding of our living.

There's the conductor of a symphony, carrying a lighter around, like a Western. So that means, right there — asking, who's asking? Right? 'Cause it's right at that edge. Something — who's speaking? Who's listening?

So we're at the edge of, if I form a solid identity, I'm gonna become a teacher, and I'm going to feel like who I am is the one trying to give this. And you can start feeling like a student and feel kind of solid in —

Alternatively, I can enact — I can become temporarily in this role of teaching and studenting, and being with each other in this agreement together, but who's doing that is held lightly.

This — what's functioning through the historical being of Russell and this body — I'm wanting to be a vehicle for something that's life-giving. Where is it sourced from?

If this is in connection with living, it is sourced from a much larger place than just his ideas and his history, and it's heard from that larger place. How do we know that? How do we know when that happened? We get a certain resonance, and it starts opening. And you have these moments where it feels connected to something larger. That's not my fantasy or my hopeful imagination. That is an opening.

And we have this interconnection with living that transcends the individual. And it's not a belief. It comes from these moments of the solidity falling away. And you become permeable.

Now, you've had many moments like that, but as with all of us, they are left behind, and then we form our solid identity again, until we have the next time. But we start — we think who I am is the one who gets solid, then I have these nice moments of opening. And I am the one who gets solid and I have these nice moments of opening. And I am the one who gets solid and I have these nice moments of opening. And we live like that until there's a reversal. And the world gets right side up. And you realize you are the vehicle for this immensity. And you have moments of solidifying when you forget you're connected.

How to live as nobody particular is very challenging, and wonderful, and that's what I'm learning.

Channel me

[Russell:] So, the identity system. Nice other term I got. I gotta look up this guy's name. I got a thing, it'll go, but I gotta look up the guy, 'cause he came up with this other nice term.

The identity system creates channel me. Channel me. Channel me is the station you tune into when you're caught in the identity system. You create channel me, and channel me is who you see the world through.

[Participant:] Did Ram Dass say channel me?

[Russell:] I didn't know that.

[Participant:] Oh, yeah, yeah, changing channel.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah. So this channel me is a really nice picture to have when the identity system solidifies.

And if you start noticing your inner dialogue, how much of it is about me. I mean, each of the me's. And then it starts getting kind of funny, that he's talking about me all the time. Why are you talking about me? I'm not that interesting.

So then you start taking channel me more lightly. And boy, is that wonderful. When the whole world doesn't depend on channel me. When your whole raison d'être doesn't depend on channel me. Oh, it's like taking off a heavy weight.

And in our sitting, hoping to have at least some moments where you go, oh, I don't need that. I can actually just be standing here, walking, and I don't have the problems at home, or even the opinions about him or the opinions about them, but I'm just — a lot.

So, let me see what else I want to say about this. So I want to keep affirming we're not trying to get rid of the voices. There are healthy ways of having an identity, but being that identity is always going to be too restrictive, even when it's, quote, a positive, healthy, well-integrated — you know, Freud's picture, that the best we could do was a well-adjusted neurosis.

So, how do we know the identity system is not solid? Well, we generally have more sense of lightness. A sense of openness. One m, right? One m. Rightness, openness. There's a sense of free thinking.

Now, this free thinking is very important. It means, like I was pointing to earlier, yesterday and the day before, that we're able to hold our own thoughts and our own opinions, our own preferences, with a sense of lightness. That it's not the truth.

One can be a little cold, a little hot, and one can notice it, and it's not like the whole world has to change because I'm feeling this or I'm feeling that. We can hold our opinions, our thinking, our assessment even of ourself and of others, as a proposition. The criteria that I like to use in the end is, is this life-giving?

Is this thought, is this way of organizing my inner life, my attention, my connection to others — is it supportive of life unfolding, or is it somehow constricting?

And that, for me, as a criteria, is much more helpful than true and false. True and false, in the end, are opinions. Temporary opinions, in my opinion.

A clear lens

[Russell:] Let's see if there was — okay, so then there's some other terms I like to use for this identity system.

When the "I am" is in charge, we see it — a constructed self. Right? This is the constructed self, and we want to be able to see the self that we're seeing through. That's a constructed self. Another word is conditioned self.

What is it that we are, when what we're seeing through has a clear lens? Then there's a sense that the free being and life can be in harmony. We still need some kind of lens for seeing through, for navigating. This inner life, in that sense, is like a two-week-old baby. It needs some navigational help. But if that navigational help is transparent, then we're not dominated by our historical conditioning.

Most of the time when we are in that identity system, the conditioned self is what we're in touch with, and it's what is controlling our view of life. And we will keep recreating our past. That's what it knows how to do.

Now, the fact — and I would say the fact, again, this is my way of looking, but it's not the truth, it's my way of looking at things — is, freedom is our potential. But it means being willing to question the constructions that we see through, the beliefs, the ideas that we see through. And it means taking responsibility for our own attention.

It means grounding, as I said the other day — responsibility for attention, grounding in the reality of the body as a doorway to the present moment, because it's only in presence that we have a possibility of being free from our constructed self.

The language that Joko uses for that is substitute self.

[Participant:] I'm sorry, I got lost in the last part. We got constructed, conditioned — the substitute self —

[Russell:] The substitute self is the carrying forward. It's the same. It's the same thing. These are all names for the same thing.

The substitute, meaning that which is in front of our direct experiencing, our intimacy, our meeting in aliveness directly. So we come through the lens of all of that.

And some people would say, hey, it's impossible for a human being to be free of that. And maybe sometimes that's true. I don't know what the limits are. But I do know that we can be freer.

And the key to that is taking responsibility for our attention, grounding through the body into the present moment, and being able to hold our thoughts, feelings, perceptions lightly — especially our conclusions — to hold them lightly as hypotheses about ourself and the world.

So, let me just get one more thing here. I like the way Antonio Damasio, the neurologist, speaks about this mapping process, and he has this picture that an important function of our brain is mapping the inner world, mapping the outer world, and bringing those maps together in some sort of congruence.

And we will be mapping. We need some way of navigating. I think of that mapping as part of our navigating system. Can we be responsible for our own mapping? And that's where the kind of infrastructure of the mapping is our attention. What we're attending to, and how we're attending to it.

What we're attending to. I gotta go a little bit further. Okay.

Fixations of attention

[Russell:] Okay, let's just look a little bit more at this whole domain of attention.

Some of you, I think, have seen the DVD that I have on the movement of attention. That's a good one. If you haven't seen it, it's a good one to see. Or we can get — I can bring. Do you have any copies here? I can bring some copies in.

I teach that at a Feldenkrais training, but I teach it in a way that's of interest to the general public. It's called the movement of attention.

So, as we've been working with attention, one of the things that I have not said is my supposition, which is connected to everything we're talking about this morning. My supposition is that most of our unnecessary suffering — we're going to have some pain if you're alive, but some of the unnecessary suffering is connected to fixations of attention.

Our attention gets stuck. We keep repeating certain thoughts to ourselves. We keep repeating certain ways of attending to our partners, to our situation, to ourself, to what the world is, and we keep reaffirming that perceptual position, and we assume that it's true.

But it's actually our conditioning that's been taught to think like that, based on lots of sources that were not necessarily wise. You know, we're carrying a lot of the thoughts of our parents, and before that, the genetic lineages. And —

Is it possible for human beings to question that? That we actually have — is awareness potent enough that we can turn the light towards all that living in us?

That's a huge question that is kind of a basis of my life, I would say, working with that potentiality. And as I work with it myself and I watch people working with it, I go, man, I don't know the limits on this. It keeps growing. It keeps getting — you know, wow.

So the unnecessary suffering, connected to fixations of attention. I've focused on certain ways of moving our attention. There's the what you're attending, and there's the how.

The how that we've focused on so far, many times, but I haven't delineated it quite like this, is the distinction of internal and external, which we talked about a little bit.

I can't tell you how helpful it is, when you're locked into a mind state, to open your eyes and find some colors in the room. When you're locked into something with your partner, to just open to random sounds. When you're lost in space, lost in functioning where there's a lot of demand in the world, to drop back into your feet. To widen the moment of attention. To be fluid between the internal and the external.

And I would even suggest that in our moments of real flow, spontaneously the internal and the external are moving together, and there's no effort to it.

Varying attention

[Russell:] So, internal, external. Then we worked with what I call focused and diffuse.

It's the level of fidelity in hearing, of brightness in seeing, and it applies to any moment of attention, that we can take the dimmer switch and lift it and just bring a little bit more, to have sharper, clearer, defined moments.

Similarly, we worked with this quite a bit last time in terms of seeing, when we were working with the blindfolds and we were working with diffuse, and it applies to every moment of attending. You'll have your default level of focus, where that switch is left, and to play with that, even a little bit, widens your range of experience.

Now, it's especially true in a moment that feels fixated, a moment of suffering, to notice how the attention is getting frozen. And just as we can vary the internal and external, we can also vary — you know, I really want to know what this is. You're locked into a difficult moment with your loved one, and you're both kind of really fixated in that attention.

What happens if somebody opens the field and actually begins to even look at the other with some background, and feel oneself with some sense of space? Just a small thought.

[Participant:] On occasion, I've tried that.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] And I can just about see my wife going catatonic, reaching over there and going, "Wow, pay attention, stupid."

[Russell:] Yeah, okay, so if you're doing it in a way that leaves her feeling like you've left, that's not helpful. So how to do it in a way that you still have enough connection.

Do you get what I'm saying? It's like — I just right now, in this moment, went from focused towards you to widening my field. I still have you. I haven't left you. I just have more. My body softens. I have some more peripheral vision. I'm right with you. But I'm right with you in a different way than I am now.

And to be able to vary that is really helpful. Sometimes if I'm in a very widened state, if that fixates, I get spacey. Then more focus is helpful. Sometimes I get fixated in a real intentional, focused way. Widening gets helpful. Does that make sense?

[Participant:] But it's true, if you change your habit of response, it can freak other people out.

[Russell:] Yeah, that's right. Yeah, yeah. But if you're lucky enough to have a sense of humor, and have a partner who has a sense of humor.

[Participant:] Sometimes I find that having a sense of humor in those situations — that sense of humor gets you in trouble. I mean, I can think of moments. I was just doing something totally bizarre and absurd, and I saw it, and I just cracked up. And we just looked at each other and started to laugh.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, beautiful. Yeah, she just gave us a moment like that. We all just laughed. There was a softening.

The distinction that she just made there, that's quite helpful, is she was laughing at herself.

[Participant:] Yes.

[Russell:] Right. Important distinction.

[Participant:] Important distinction. Right, exactly right.

Just like Russell was talking about the qualities of navigation systems. They lead more toward openness, spaciousness, as compared to contraction and solidity. It's the same way humor can be something that opens and pops, or it can be something that solidifies and hardens.

[Russell:] When humor is directed at another, even if the other laughs, there's often a contraction. When humor is at the expense of anybody, even somebody who's not in the room, my experience is part of the field contracts.

So we really want to be conscious of even how the humor is. Is it opening the space, or is there a kind of —

[Participant:] One way I was imagining myself trying that out is, in a moment of frozenness, to say, okay, if I were seven, how would this moment look for me? I mean, I think to be a different age would free me up. I might still be upset, but I don't think I'd stay upset too long, or whatever. And so anyway, this thinking of what ways I can not think out of it, but be out of it.

[Russell:] Yeah, that's really nice. It's just like the two-week-old. That's a good hint. Changing age is something I really like for changing fixation of attention. Changing our age.

And that's, again, what I'm hoping in the meditation. We begin to sense, by sensing around our body, sensing that, and then letting go of thinking that you are meditating, and yet not just spacing out, you begin to sense something larger. And it stops feeling accurate to just talk about the one in here and that out there. You start feeling part of a larger field. That is interconnectedness.

And then we start going, okay, how do I navigate as an autonomous self which shifts? Because we're not throwing out the historical self. We're not throwing it out, because each one of us has something from our history that's unique to bring. We want that. But how not to be solidified. You get it?

So we're working with this pretty big picture of how most of spirituality, Eastern spirituality, was about getting rid of that historical self. And then Western psychology was about getting that historical self really healthy, or functioning. What we're talking about is being able to have this historical self as a place of expression for something much larger. And yet it comes through each of us differently.

[Participant:] That's so beautiful. And imagine if, 300 years, maybe twenty generations down the road or something, if a lot of people are doing that, what kind of creativity and good-heartedness will be the norm?

[Russell:] Yeah.

And to let that field get bigger and bigger and bigger. It's safest and most helpful when there's good ground. Although that doesn't stay solid, it stays reliable. It's like a navigational place out of which to come. And then it's not like it stays at one level of openness, or one level. It's variable. It has movement to it.

The size of the field

[Russell:] Okay, so one more distinction that is important, although this one sometimes confuses people, is the size of the field we're attending to.

Some of us are more generalist in our attention, and some of us are more specific or detailed. Now, this is different than focused and diffuse. Let me try to describe that, because people confuse that.

So, do you remember last night, we were paying attention to the breath in the belly for a little while? You may remember that, you may not. So we had attention in the belly, the breathing in the belly. And sometimes I would say, have that in a very clear, bright way, a focused way, and sometimes let that get more diffuse. And then I would say, feel your breathing in your whole torso. So now we're in a larger field. And you could have that larger field more focused or more diffuse.

People tend — generalists tend to be more diffuse people. The detailed, specific people tend to be more focused people. But by crossing those, we get to experience more reality.

So, the first walk I ever took with my wife, thirty-nine years ago, was a model for everything else. I'm pointing out the mountains and all that, and she's seeing the rock with all the moss growing out, and that little flower coming out the side. She is oriented toward much more specificity in the world. In her interest, she gets a lot of detail. I get big pictures. I've learned through her to grow my detail.

Now, it used to be that I would have big picture and more diffuse. Then I grew my focus quite a bit, so I can have big picture quite focused, or big picture diffuse. She used to have — actually, her detail was interesting. Her detail was also diffuse, which is not so common. Usually detailed people tend to favor focus. But she had this, one of the intriguing things, looking back, about her. One of the many.

But we both developed more focus capacity, more precision. So you understand how I'm using these words differently. This has to do with the size of the field. This has to do with the way you're attending to things.

And to vary that will open your moments. And these are wonderful to play with in ordinary moments, and they're life-saving in stuck moments, especially when you've had some experience with them. So you can call on this.

Okay, so, well, let me give you one last, and then we'll do a practice together. So these are ways of attending. And remember, the map is not the territory. These are ways of looking at our experience. Our experience is whole. And these are differentiations that either are helpful or not. So don't confuse the map with the territory, right? The experience is always a whole event.

Sensations, feeling tones, symbolizing

[Russell:] So, one other differentiation I'd like to make is what we attend to. In any given moment, out of this wholeness of experience, there are sensations. There are always sensations.

If you're interested in what I'm saying, thoughts are pretty dominant at the moment. But you could also have your bottom in the seat, and that's probably more in the background, but it can be there, or it can be completely absent.

There's always some kind of feelings, or feeling — I like to say feeling tones, or feeling state. In any moment, we could tune to that level of ourself and have a sense of, oh, I'm interested, or I'm bored. By feelings, I don't just mean emotion, classical emotions. I'm energized, or I'm tired. Sometimes they're opposite. Sometimes I'm excited and tired. Or I'm interested and I've had enough. Right? All of that. So those are kind of feeling tones that are permeating us all the time. That's another level of ourselves.

So there's always sensations, always feeling tones, and then there's what's traditionally called thinking. The word I like to use better these days is symbolizing. Symbolizing includes thinking. It's how we represent the world. Symbols are representations. Our inner thinking, these words, the sense you're making out of them, are representations. They're mappings of territory. When we get images, those are symbols. Right?

So these are always occurring in the totality of a moment. And often one is quite dominant. And in many people, especially when our attention is fixated, we are so locked into, oh, that sensation, that our whole universe has become that, and our attention has gotten fixated on a spot.

And from there, we might want to open our attention to what it feels like. Not just, oh, it hurts, but how this one is responding to that hurt. What kind of thoughts they're getting? "Oh God, it's that place again. This is going to last me two months. I'll never be able to go to my daughter's graduation." Well, all the stuff that goes on with it.

One can begin to notice how the attention is moving. One can begin to vary how they're attending.

So I've got this spot, but I also have the sound out. Changes the experience of the spot. I've got this spot, but I also have my whole sense of my back and my legs. Changes the experience of the spot. I've got this spot, but let me have it in a more diffuse way. Oh, let me feel, soften the boundaries of it. Or let me go really right into it and feel it in its kernel. Changing how I'm attending to it changes the experience of the spot.

Right? So this is magic. This is how we create our experience of our living, by how we're using our attention.

You get fixated. A certain thought keeps going around and around and around. Chances are you've gotten fixated internally. You have that thought — now open to external sensations. Or can you also have some other thoughts? Or what are you feeling with that thought? And how is your body, how are you sitting while you're having that thought? Maybe you're kind of like this, and you feel that for a moment, and something comes up, and the thought begins to loosen a little bit. Because our experience is whole, and these are all interconnected in our creation of our moment.

So these are, you know, godlike capacities for creating our experience of living. But we never get taught this. And given that, we can be responsible for how we're attending, and how we're attending will create our experience.

And I'm suggesting, be responsible for your attention. Ground yourself in the reality of your body in the moment. Because it's in that doorway that change can take place. When we're just in thought and we're disconnected from the moment, you're going to repeat the past. That's what it does. It can't do otherwise. We're not here. It's only here that new possibilities unfold.

So we come into presence, and then we begin to notice, holding lightly the experience I'm creating. Where am I fixated?

You had a — was there a question coming? Oh, you're just scratching.

[Participant:] I don't know. I just feel I need to share this. I follow everything you said, and I really feel attuned to it.

I find that the struggle point for me is getting off the requirements or demands. Because when I shift who I am, you know, there's an interesting play between personal guilt — I really should be doing this, which is what I've always done, but I want to do this — and the cultural guilt.

And then when I explain to somebody what I'm doing now, they look at me like I'm crazy, because they knew me here. And it's just incredible how much power there is at that step. And once I get off that step of the demands, or the cultural guilt, or the looks — it's, what's wrong, you're crazy — and I feel like, really okay, this is really what I gotta go do. It is different from what I used to do. But it's so hard to. That's a real struggle for me. So I just feel I need to say.

[Russell:] Thank you. Yeah, I'm with you. I'm with you. There are these incredible magnets to our old identity.

[Participant:] You know, on the other page, the motto — unnecessary suffering. Yeah, and there's a kind of emphasis that that does exist, necessary suffering.

Pain and suffering

[Russell:] Okay. So — is every suffering unnecessary?

So, we can make a distinction that I like. I don't know where I first heard it. I didn't create it. Many, many years ago, I think I heard this from somebody.

We can make a helpful distinction and say, pain is essential. Suffering is optional.

Suffering is how we're carrying our pain. You're gonna have pain if you have a body, and if you're in a relationship, there's gonna be loss. That goes with the territory. There's gonna be pain. The suffering that we add to that is what we're working with.

So technically, in my inner life, in my inner language, all suffering is optional. But that's a little big to bite, so I say unnecessary suffering, so that I don't have to go through all that.

But I like that distinction. I know pain. I know how challenging that can be. And I know how much I can add to it, pouring the fuel on the fire of it, through mostly my fearful thoughts, and my angry thoughts, and my unforgiving thoughts.

And when all those thoughts are not added to it, and I come back to the facts, it's that I can deal with. It may bring tears to my eyes. I'm not saying it feels good in any way. It just feels workable. The unworkability comes through how I'm adding to that painful moment.

[Participant:] Contraction.

Yesterday I had a really — a huge — that hurt. I tend to do this, go inside and hear those voices, and it's a village in there, and I make it into little people. Right now, that's what I'm doing.

And yesterday I got in touch with the critic that I have constantly carried with me throughout my life. But it's enlarged, you know, right now, and at different times, but right now for sure.

And it was the first time that I've ever been able to see that critic, who was really tall and thin, with their finger out at me. And I put that person outside of me and saw them taking care of me, you know, in a way that I'd never experienced before. That that critic is my friend, and I didn't know it. I've been so — you know.

Now there's this softening, and this part of me I'm grateful for. Feels like a blessing.

[Russell:] Yeah. Thank you. I think that's a perfect segue to a practice I want to do tonight. Everything works.

So, take a pen, take a piece of paper, please. You need a pen for this practice. A pen or a pencil, a writing instrument, please.

Mind mapping

[Russell:] So, this is a process that goes by the name of mind mapping, and it's different. There are a few systems of mind mapping out there. This is probably different than what you've been exposed to, if you've heard that term before.

And I like it as a way of gathering some information, and then we're going to do some listening, some focusing around it. So it's a quick process. It only takes five, seven minutes or so.

I'm going to give you a few cue-stimulating sentences that you'll write in the middle of your page, and you'll put a circle around those. And then I'm going to suggest that you write randomly and quickly around your page. You just let thoughts come. No one else is going to look at your sheet. So you don't have to do any editing. You just write quickly. Maybe you're not even sure if it's right. Just as much as you can, you just let it go. Okay?

Just a little, one more prelude. As she was helping us to see there, one of the main ways the identity system fixates and maintains control is through critical voices. It can also be praising voices. It's part of why that whole dynamic of judgment, blame, and criticism, and praise is so important. Because even if it's a positive requirement that you meet quite a bit, if it's a requirement, it constricts.

There's an absolute difference between the same behavior, or the same attitude, freely chosen, or required. So we want to give a chance for some of this to come through. So in the center of your page —

[Participant:] Which part?

[Russell:] You don't understand what I mean by requirements?

Okay. Requirements are demands on yourself to be a certain way. That you are an unacceptable being if you're not that way. And it's a requirement when the identity system is strong, as opposed to when you are free and having different values or different directions. When the identity system is strong, those requirements become demands, restrictions, and a way of compressing yourself into a solidity.

Praise can do the same thing. You become identified. "I am wonderful" can be just as compressing, because now I have to keep being wonderful. What if I'm not?

Okay, so our free self can use the same things, the values. We have values. We want values. When they're taken in freedom, they become orientations for the being, and we can work hard towards them. It's different than when they're coming right next to them as a demand. Where they're living in our inner life is different.

Right? So we're not getting rid of preferences, values, and stuff. We're just seeing where are they coming from in you.

So, let's just do this. Okay, so in the middle of your page, please write, what's wrong with me? Have fun with that. What's wrong with me?

Please write, how I should be.

[Participant:] Both?

[Russell:] I'm giving you about four or five different sentences. You're just writing this in the middle of your page. These are cues. These are stimulations for your inner process. You may use them all. You may find that one is so absorbing that you just use that one. This is to try to stimulate the process in the direction that I'm hoping it will go.

How I should be. Next sentence, how I must be. Some people react differently to different ways of putting it. What's right with me? Could say, what I like about myself. One more. And the last one, my basic fault. My basic fault. Singular.

Well, you know, you can put an s in parentheses. I'm looking for flaw.

[Participant:] Flaw?

[Russell:] Yeah, flaw. To really go towards — most of us carry some picture of this.

What I've noticed over years of working with people, working with myself, is at times many of us get back to, there's just some basic damage, that if other people could see that basic damaged place, they would know there was no getting out of that. And most of us carry that. We're surprised to find that other people carry that, carry some basic damage, you know?

Kind of the metaphorical dropped on your head when you were little, and you're never going to get over that. Most of us are carrying a story like that. We're surprised to hear that other people do, and we have very good validation for our story of it.

But let's be with it and see if we can maybe learn from how the identity system structures itself. So this is not so much to come from your conscious mind. Just keep writing until you're surprised at what's coming out.

Okay, use any of these, all of these, one of these, anything.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:] Don't argue with yourself. There's a part that may disagree with whatever you write. That's okay.

[Silence 3 minutes]

[Russell:] If you've been writing in the same direction the whole time, I recommend flipping it. It might open something just to be in a nonlinear direction.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:] This'll be about two more minutes.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:] Next thirty seconds or so, let that —

Okay, let's put those down for a moment. Just close your eyes. Drop down into the bottom. You're here on this spot. You can feel your feet. Feel the tension from all this thinking and feeling and sensing, and just be right here, where your hands are. Sense the air, your body, the sounds. Including the ground and the sound together. And follow the next three breaths.

Just, as you're sitting here, hold a light image of yourself as a free being who's learning to live in this world. You have certain conditioning, certain patterns, some that serve life, some that don't.

And as a free being, you're wanting to liberate any of the patterns that feel self-limiting, that are not helpful. That are no longer life-giving, even if they were at one time.

Just gonna take your time looking over this sheet of words, phrases that you have, and you're listening for the two, three, four, maybe five at the most, that have the most energy right now for you. Maybe conceptually another one is bigger, but right now you feel, oh, that's got energy for me.

And then make a box surrounding anywhere between two and five that have more strength for you as you read them now. They don't have to be difficult things. They could be wonderful things. Anything that has more energy right now. Is it something you'd like to learn about in that?

[Silence 43 seconds]

[Russell:] Yeah, if you could wait just a few, I'll give you a break in just a couple of minutes.

Yeah, anywhere between two and five. Probably two or three is best, but if you need more in order to feel satisfied, that's okay. Okay, does everybody have that? Need a little — okay, take another few seconds.

Just pick out what has a draw for you. I'd love to learn more about that, how that lives in me, how that functions inside.

Here, and let's put down the pen once again. Just close your eyes. Settle down. Connected to both your bottom and the space around you. Let the sound and the ground help you. Sense the space of the room around you.

There's a feeling that you're not collapsing in, but you're opening out, as well as having yourself here, on this spot.

Again, this is an affirmation from your free self, wanting to navigate through this life with more grace, and recognizing that all the inner qualities have a function, and when they're liberated, energy gets liberated. We're not getting rid of. We're freeing, from the identity system, qualities — through awareness, through presencing.

That which has the most energy for you right now can give you the most, as you let it unfold in surprising ways.

So, look at the ones that you have a square around, and from those — it really doesn't matter which one you choose, actually. It will lead you. But just pick one. Put a star, a few stars around it, that that's the one you're gonna learn about. You're gonna learn through that one. It may bring all the others with it, but you're gonna use that for your inner stimulant. And at this point, it really doesn't matter which one. It will access the right territory.

With a partner

[Russell:] Now, so what we're gonna do after we take a break is, you can have a partner, and you can tell the partner how you want them to listen to you. It's a different way of focusing with something, or being with something.

You're gonna use this as a stimulant. The other person doesn't need to know what you're focusing on. The content is not essential. The process of how you engage it is.

So if you've written something that you feel, I'm not so comfortable having those words out there, no problem. You can completely do your process and have the felt responses to those words be what you're communicating.

So if I'm dealing with some very personal, maybe sexual issue that comes up, and I don't want to talk about it, well, I can talk about, I'm with that place that gets really tight inside, and I'm hearing this voice about, don't do this, don't do this, and it feels like a pressure. I can be completely with something, and nobody knows my content, because I'm in the process.

If you feel comfortable having the words out there, a lot of people find that that's helpful. But really, on the side of taking care of your inner life. If it feels ashamed, embarrassed to have that out there, no. If it feels okay to have it out there, I recommend that's fine to put it out there.

So, what we're gonna do is take a little break. By, at the latest, twenty-five after, I'd like you with your partner. So, about a twelve-minute break or something. Twenty-five after, you're starting. Twenty-five after, you're letting your partner know — one of you is going to work before lunch. Just one of you.

So choose who's gonna work, find a partner, find a place you're gonna be, and let your partner know what kind of listening you'd like.

And if you'd like them to lead you in. And the partner will keep time for a twenty-five-minute session, and then if it feels right, you can talk a little bit about it, but I'd like to be on the floor in this room at noon.

Got the timing? Is that clear?

Who needs a partner, please connect with somebody. Raise your hand. Stand. Okay, is a partner needed over there? Who needs a partner? Raise your hand.

You two, partner. Okay, they need some new partners, 'cause they were partnered yesterday. Do we have two other people who can shift? Who are two partners that can shift?

[Participant:] You guys can shift? Yeah, okay.

[Russell:] Yeah, okay. Okay, so — is that okay with you? Is that okay with you?

Is everybody with a partner?