Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 4, Session 5 — 16 minutes

Summary: The group asks about expanding without contracting. Russell clarifies fullness, breathing freedom through the torso, and the potency of a downward exhale. He then invites them to find, over lunch, a personal memory and an external image of grounded, centered presence in a challenging situation.

Questions from the lesson

[Russell:] Anything you want — either ask about or comment — before I just speak a little bit about, kind of introduce, the resource work we're going to do.

[Participant:] From the lesson, for the — yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, beautiful. I'm glad.

Any confusions about the ATM? Anything?

[Participant:] It's not easy.

[Russell:] Which part's not easy? The whole thing, or particular things?

[Participant:] Expanding, and trying to not contract around that.

[Russell:] Right, right. The difference between fullness and contraction.

[Participant:] Yeah, yes.

[Russell:] Right, and to err in the direction of smoothness and lightness. So even if it's very small, that's okay.

[Participant:] One clarification would be helpful. When we're — I believe, like, for example, if you're expanding, but you're expanding your chest, the air is going elsewhere? Or inhaling?

[Russell:] If you're expanding your chest and inhaling, the air is likely going into your upper lungs.

If you're expanding — you see, Feldenkrais's insight, which is very important. And he would — remember, he was a mechanical engineer, so he didn't think first as a biologist. Biologists wouldn't have this thought, likely.

His idea was that there's a certain volume in the whole torso, but what increases and decreases could be anything. And that people get into certain habits.

People who are very chesty and definitely contracted here, and do most of their breathing here — it creates a certain internal environment. People who tend to maintain a kind of contraction in their chest, they're pulled down, maybe a little bit depressive, and they do all their breathing maybe minimally down in here.

And what he was saying is, it doesn't matter. You want to be able to breathe in every location. Your chest could be small. You could be smaller, and you could be expanding. Your chest could be getting bigger. Your belly could be getting smaller. Your belly could be — and you can do that on the inhale or the exhale.

When you get that level of freedom in it, then your organism has choice, the possibility of all these things.

Downward fullness

[Russell:] I'm adding a further point, which he didn't speak about a lot. He did a little bit, but I speak about it more, is the internal potency that comes with that downward exhale.

I'm not saying to do that all the time. The more natural way is for the belly to come in as you exhale. Is it kind of releasing like that? But to have that downward fullness is very, very powerful.

In certain — again, old Zen traditions, they would teach that as a breathing method, and certainly in the Kung Fu traditions, they'll work with that. In fact, my friend Dennis — Dennis Leary — is in a lot of Kung Fu, and has recently been in the hospital. And says hello.

[Participant:] Dennis Lewis is in the hospital.

[Russell:] Well, he's out now. But he was in the hospital, and he does so much of this kind of what they call paradoxical breathing of the full, but they needed him to change it for what they were trying to do with him. So he's having trouble breathing kind of the way most people do. They have to shift it, but that's interesting.

But to get comfortable and smooth and easy with this fullness, for myself under high pressure situations, that is a tremendous ally. And I also find that for people who tend to get unstable in their sacrums, as they learn to get that fullness backward, it is stabilizing. Backward here.

In other words, I'm not just talking about the front. When I say abdomen, what I said a few times is not just the front, but the whole circle around here. It's easier to feel it in the front, but I don't know if you remember, like in the second week, and you have your hands here, and feel it in both directions. And we want that feeling of all around there.

[Participant:] That whole exercise we did in the second session, with the breathing into and expanding. Through the sphincters and down, yeah.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] That whole movement stopped the pain that was happening in the middle of my back.

[Russell:] Yeah. Isn't it amazing?

[Participant:] If it starts to hurt, all I have to do is just breathe, feel it, and let it.

[Russell:] Right. Yeah. I get that a lot from people, and yeah, I chose not to also include the sphincters today, because it just seemed like too much to try to do all of that at the same time.

[Participant:] Yeah.

Sitting and the dantian

[Participant:] So I have a question, and that with sitting, because I've found it's almost not an expansion on the exhale, but when attention's coming down to the dantian, and feeling the movement of breath, almost like a lack of returning back, like helps to anchor an aspect of presence down there.

But there's also a sense of not wanting to have a contrivance there that's ongoing with sitting.

[Russell:] Absolutely, yeah. I recommend it as a — you know, to do it for a few breaths and leave it. Just to remind your system to build, especially if you're top-heavy, if you're thinking a lot, to give a stronger magnet into the pelvis, into the dantian. So to use it like that and then let it go, but don't maintain control.

That was one of the things I disagreed with in terms of some of the ancient teachings and some of the more vigorous Zen styles. They would have you keep doing that. And I think it just leads to — it's a doorway to great inner states, but it's a real sense of control that people are left with in these. And almost — I don't know, I don't think it's good.

A personal reference

[Russell:] Okay, so what I want to, just in a few minutes, introduce is — here we've done resources, resource processes, where we access a memory from our personal history, and we'll do that again with groundedness and centeredness. And you've all had the experience at times in your life, at different situations.

I'm going to ask you to, just over lunch, kind of think of — it doesn't have to be the biggest one in your life, anything — but some kind of situation in which you have felt that sometimes. It could be one time it happened greatly, but more like maybe at work with certain kids, or maybe playing music, or —

That you sense the grounded, centered presence, the quality of grounded, centered, where you feel this overall sense that we're working with today, that you're really here. And we could say it's presence, but it's got a particularly strong sense of groundedness, that you could be in a challenging situation. And that's the second part of that.

It's not only that you felt that, but that you were dealing with some kind of challenging situation, and it could be a little challenge. It doesn't have to be a big challenge. It's just it felt like you had to show up for something that was difficult, and you have the bodily experience of showing up and feeling like, oh, that's me when I am not withdrawing, not running away, not over — but that's me when I am grounded.

It could be a simple moment. There was a lot going on in your house, and somehow you felt different in how you dealt with it. It doesn't have to be like some life major. It's just that you had the experience of dealing with a challenging situation in a way that you would say, oh, that's me being connected to myself, to the ground, to my center. That's what I'm like when I have that.

Okay, so some reference for that.

Images that live in you

[Russell:] But the other thing that I've worked with — some of you have done workshops with me, have also experienced this. I don't think I've done it here in the program before, but everything in your past, everything that you've been exposed to, all the books you've read, all the movies you've seen, all the stories you've heard, all the myths, are taken in, and they live in you. And they can be resources, especially the ones that you really resonated with, or resonate with.

So this is very interesting if you think about it. It was one of the main functions of story in ancient culture. One of the main functions of movies, even a function of sports, even, is to cultivate heroes.

If you watch Mesa playing, he's, you know, with his sword — he's cultivating certain images. Heroic images are living in his body. And that's what so much play is about for kids, is growing moments where — you know, how many times I was on a basketball court, and five, four, three, winning shot, right?

Or if you think of Star Wars, Princess Leia, and how that lives in a lot of women's minds, especially young women's minds. These different images we've been exposed to, that we take in, and they can become alive in us.

We can say it's unfortunate. We're losing some of those great old stories or something. Some of the great myths were there to show us these journeys that we are on, and to give us models of people encountering their journeys with dignity and courage, and a sense of grounded, centered presence in challenging situations.

It's one of the things I love about the sports arena, because you really can see examples of that. When I see a politician — you know, in the dignity workshop — Martin Luther King or these people, I'll see them, and because I've become conscious of this, I not only am having these spontaneous — you know, mirror neurons relating to what I'm seeing — but I'm consciously working with allowing these images to feed that place in me that has them.

So the story, if I'm in a contracted state, it's, oh, they can do that and I can't. But if I'm in touch with essence, then they are modeling who I am in my grounded centeredness.

And that's such an important function of play, function of story, function of myth. Positive use of — when you feel a resonance. Certain segments of our population, for a little period, were walking taller when Obama was elected. That became an internalized image for a while for some people.

We can consciously cultivate and have resources that, because our awareness that's connected to it, just like in movement lessons, they take on another power.

And so I'm going to invite you to just reflect, over lunch, over your break, thinking of any of the images from your whole life, from books, from movies, from personal interaction. It could have been a teacher you had, a coach you had. And you don't have to look for what was the biggest, what was the most. Just that you can say yes.

There was an example there of what I would call grounded, centered presence, of somebody who was showing up, and they were able to do that under some duress. And if you have a resonance with that, that's all that's needed. It doesn't have to be in your top ten. It can be just that you felt a bodily resonance and a, oh, that's — that touches me.

So we want an external reference like that, and a personal situation, small, big, doesn't matter, where you feel, oh, that's me showing up.

Yeah. From any source, lives in you. It's amazing. The whole universe is in you — the whole universe that you have experienced is in you.

Okay, so we will come back and — is that a question?

We will come back and work with this in a resource-growing way that I think is better. Okay?

Have a nice lunch.

[Participant:] Thank you.