Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 6, Day 4, Session 3 — 61 minutes

Summary: Lying down, the lesson follows a midline and a plane through the body, then brings the hands, shoulder blades, and spine into a clearer relationship. Elbow lifts, sphinx, and a closing mudra show how the upper back can support the head.

Midline

[Russell:] So as you lie here, have a sense of that middle of yourself, that midline through yourself, even if it feels kind of obscure. You just keep orienting around your best sense for now of what is that central line.

And one way, if you feel really lost there — well, let's say you're in the middle of your back, and go, where am I sure that's right of midline? Or where am I sure that's left of midline?

Then you'll find an area. Maybe it's three inches wide, two inches wide, or you'll go, well, I know that. I know it's someplace in there.

So you can use this, kind of going to where you have confidence in your perception, and then kind of work your way back. And that can be an effective way.

It falls under the heading of intentional errors. In other words, not trying to just get to where you want to be, but let where you know you don't want to be help you define where you want to be.

Yeah, so just sense all the way through you.

A plane of light

[Russell:] And then let's bring the image of the midline going through the center of yourself, through the top of your head, through your neck, just in front of those cervical vertebrae, through your chest.

Just in front of those lumbar vertebrae, in front of your sacrum, and down.

And then let's imagine it as a plane. So what that means is we can drop this whole line down and towards the ground, and feel as if you're lying on what would be part of that plane. It goes into the ground.

And think of it as a plane of light, or something very insubstantial. Feldenkrais used to call it a plane of glass, but I had too many students say to me, I can't stand the idea of glass going through my body. So that image might work for you, but I've run into resistance from some people about it.

And now imagine, where is the center of your forehead? Where is the center of your nose?

So you're just kind of bringing attention down and through that space below your nose to before your lips, that middle area, and the middle of your chin, middle of your throat, middle of your

sternum, middle of your abdomen, middle of your pubic bone, right between your legs, through your genitals, down. Imagining that extending between your feet.

Are the two feet an equal distance from that plane, or do you have a sense that one is closer to the middle and one is further?

Yeah, so you're extending your attention all the way through yourself, even up towards the ceiling and into the earth, that whole mid-plane of yourself.

You might have it internally. The plane is there, and then it kind of goes through that line that's in the center of the center, that's in the midline of the midline, that goes up and down, equal distance from front to back.

Good.

Hands toward center

[Russell:] And put your arms out to your side at shoulder height, so be aware of your neighbors. You might need to shift a little bit. Palms towards the ceiling.

And if somebody needs to flip to the other side, or whatever you do.

Just sense the length of your vertical axis, and the width across your shoulders, across your arms. We're going to hopefully connect to how important those upper back vertebrae are, in the shoulder blades, for this sense of length, and other things as well.

So imagine that plane extends to the ceiling, and coming from the plane on the ceiling come these two lines that go to each palm, and they get pulled, and your arms are pulled by a force above the midline, and then the hands come together, elbows extended, and you just get to the point where the hands are just about to touch.

Keep your eyes closed. They may touch a bit, but see if you can keep them just really very close, and then if you're not sure how close they are, let them touch for a moment, but let that be a kind of surprise. Let that not just go and clap together, but let it kind of investigate those last moments, where you're navigating right and left.

From a Feldenkrais point of view, your brain has had great interest in this for a long time, and we're just kind of calling that forth — how the two hemispheres function together, how an integration is formed of left and right coming together, and where the middle is.

And let that open again. And if you touch each other, just do it gently. It's not a problem.

And feel that moment where you think that — kind of get curious, and not trying to be right, but more like a kid, kind of like, oh, I wonder when it's going to happen. I know it's close. Maybe even feel something between the hands before they touch.

And then let the hands touch each other and stay together, and then, keeping the fingers towards the ceiling and the palms touching and the fingers touching, let the elbows bend and the base of the palms come towards the chest.

So the wrists are going to be close to a ninety degree angle, and then have the arms lengthen again towards the ceiling. So the base of your palms might actually touch your chest, but really listen to what happens in your shoulders for that to occur, your clavicles.

And don't force it if the hands say, no, I don't go that low. The fingers are pointing towards the ceiling as you do this. And you're coming down and you're listening.

I know for some people that's a very challenging movement, because of what has to happen across the back and chest. Let the palms and fingers be touching as you come down. So now the hands are touching, but do your best not to have the hands push on each other. That there's a lightness in the contact. So you have to do something else with your shoulders, not to press your hands.

In a way, there's something easier about pressing the hands.

That's good.

And then just rest for a moment. Rest anywhere.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Turning the hands

[Russell:] And take your bent arms and gently place the hands toward each other, with the fingers this time pointing headward.

So feel, you let your elbows only come off the floor, and again, feel that moment of the hands, fingers, and the palms touching, and then come away a little bit, and a real sensitivity, one to the other, not pressing.

That's it.

And then keep the hands touching, with the fingers headward, so the direction your head's pointing, and then turn these hands together towards the ceiling, and then turn them footward.

So the elbows stay. The hands are not traveling in space. They're staying pretty much where they are, over your chest. You're just turning the forearms and wrists.

So start with the hands over your chest, pointing headward. And so they're just above your chest, just forward of your chest, and they go towards the ceiling, and then they point downward.

There's an unusual kind of movement that needs to occur through your shoulder blades. See if you can find that.

May the hands stay together, the fingers stay on each other, the palms stay on each other. You're in that prayer kind of position, and you may even find that you could turn the forearm so the fingers point towards the chest, and then towards the head, towards the ceiling, towards the feet, and maybe a little bit towards the chest the other way.

Maybe not, but listen. Don't force, but let your whole upper torso be formed.

How you can let the sternum yield at certain points to allow this movement.

That's it.

Good, and pause. Let that stop and feel. Let your arms be at your side, and feel the influence.

And lightly just turn your head a little bit. This will certainly affect your neck.

Okay, please roll onto your front.

On the front

[Russell:] If possible, both arms are bent upward, near your head. Your forehead is on the floor.

And if that's uncomfortable, you can take pauses from that, but we'll have this for a bit.

Now, sense this central line right now in the middle of yourself. So it's that line that's centered left, right, and front, back, through that central axis, through the top of your skull, through the bottom of your pelvis, and just kind of sweeping through the midline in your attention.

And then imagining this plane that goes through you to the ceiling and through the floor. Through the ceiling, through the floor. That includes the midline, but it's more of a plane.

And feel where the center of your forehead is, and the center of your chin, and the center of your breastbone, your abdomen, center of your pubic bone, down through, between your legs, down. Down past your feet, and think of the distance of your feet from that central plane.

And just gently begin to let your eyes come into presence. Let your eyes go forward and back, and notice if your eyes feel oriented a little more right or left, so you can tune into each eye separately, and then both together.

You're not lifting your head. You're lifting your eyes up and down. You're breathing.

Okay.

And when you lift the eyes up, imagine that you're seeing up that midline, towards that plane. And when you're looking down, down that plane, towards your belly button, towards your pubic bone, towards between your legs.

So you're extending your eye movement into space.

Okay, leave that. Rest comfortably on your front.

So when I say the rests in this position, you're free to change your arms, your legs, your head. If being on your front is challenging, you could come onto your side. But if you can stay on your front, do so. It'll make it easier, because we'll be going in and out of that.

Eyes and head

[Russell:] And bring your forehead back to the center, and notice your two shoulder blades, and if you can have an image of the medial aspect, meaning the part closest to the spine on each side, and just imagine the space from your right shoulder blade to the vertebral column, and your left shoulder blade.

And get a sense of the right elbow and left elbow, which is further from the midline.

And this time, begin to lift your eyes and let your head follow, but as your head is lifting, you're following down the midline that touches the floor. You're feeling that connection of lifting your eyes. Your eyes are looking along that plane, that midline plane, and you're tracking into the floor.

This is all attention practice.

So your forehead is on the floor, you're lifting your eyes and head, looking along that plane — huh? Yes, your eyes, say it again.

[Student:] No.

[Russell:] What?

[Student:] Your forehead is no longer on the floor.

[Russell:] Did I say keep your forehead on the floor and lift your head? That's not the best instruction.

So, lift your eyes, let your head follow, pay attention to the contact with the floor, with the parts that are on the floor.

And you're looking along that midline, and also listen to what happens through your shoulders, how your arms are on the floor.

So your arms are bent upward near the head, unless that's really uncomfortable. That's it.

Feel, see if you can sense the middle of your pubic bone as you lift your head. Your eyes lift.

Good.

And then pause, rest comfortably.

[Silence 52 seconds]

Head and pelvis

[Russell:] Bring your forehead back to the ground.

This time, listening to the center of your pubic bone, listening to that plane along the floor, feel how you could lift the pelvis a bit from the floor, and what presses into the floor.

Loosen.

Lift your pelvis a bit from the floor. Feel how you do that.

That's the feel along that midline. Bring your pelvis a bit. That's it. Feel into your back.

As you lower your pelvis, lift your head and press the pubic bone into the floor. Lift your eyes. Think of that line. Think of that central line.

As you lower your eyes and your head, feel how you could lift your pelvis. Just let that go back and forth like that.

That's the feel. You're looking out on that midline. The plane.

If you had eyes on your sit bones, they'd be looking down the plane also. Eyes looking downward from your sit bones.

It's an old evolutionary experiment that didn't work. That's where the original head up your butt came from.

Okay, pause. Rest comfortably.

[Silence 43 seconds]

Sphinx

[Russell:] Organize your forearms so you're in a sphinx-like position, your elbows under your shoulders, your head hanging in front.

Barbara, have your elbows more under your shoulders. Okay, that's better like that.

Excuse me? Right now it's down. It will be up.

And just feel your shoulder blades. Feel. Can you have the upper arms vertical? Elbows under your shoulders. That's okay.

And the head is hanging for now, and you're slowly letting your eyes lift and your head follow. Listen to the change in your back and shoulders, and then let your eyes lower and your head follow.

And let the head continue as if you wanted to see your chest, and let your shoulder blades, let your chest respond. What if you wanted to see if you spilled anything on your shirt?

Okay, so your back has to shift a little bit. How are you going to let the head keep coming down so the chin really goes towards the chest, and you keep looking down towards your breastbone?

Think of the space between the shoulder blades going backwards. Is that possible? So that the back begins to round back as you look down, and then the back goes forward as you look up.

Great.

Okay, and then pause for a moment, rest here.

[Silence 37 seconds]

Between the shoulder blades

[Russell:] Come to the sphinx position. Head lifted, eyes towards the horizon, and feel, how could you sink the spine between the shoulder blades and have the shoulder blades come toward each other, and then find a way for the shoulder blades to come apart?

Let your eyes orient to the horizon. Go forward and back like that. Think of that central line, that central plane.

So it's not raising and lowering the head. The eyes stay towards the horizon, and you're seeing, could you sink the spine between the shoulder blades? What does that even mean? See if you can find that.

This is a very important movement for the carriage of your head, for the sense of the — well, let's talk about it later. Let's find what you can right now. I'll give you some ways of making it clearer.

Think of your shoulder blades coming together and the spine going forward, and then the shoulder blades coming apart. That's right, you're getting it. That's right.

Make it smoother, lighter. Breathing is still excellent. Keep doing it here.

Your eyes stay towards the horizon, even though the head wants to lower at some points. That's good.

The right elbow

[Russell:] And then rest with your forehead on your left hand and your right arm long. Upward. Long, upward.

And listen well. This is quite a precise and interesting movement.

Feel how you could lift your right elbow off the floor. Go slow. Just listen to the right elbow lifting, and what happens in your shoulder for that right elbow to come free, where the shoulder blade needs to move.

The hand stays on the floor. It's not lifting the hand. We want to differentiate the hand and the shoulder blade. And so somehow the shoulder blade comes back.

See if you can find how to lift that right elbow off the floor. That's it.

And then let the elbow keep lifting, and let the hand, but not the fingertips, come off the floor. As if the hand was heavy. Feldenkrais would say it's sitting in honey, and it's heavy, and the hand lifts but the fingertips stay on the floor, if possible.

Let that action across that whole torso occur. Right arm is upward, yeah. Right. Yeah.

First just the elbow, and then the elbow and hand, but not the fingers. Still breathe. Listen well.

And then if you can have all that, then get to the place where the honey drips off the fingers. So the fingertips come off the floor, but it's led by the elbow somehow. The hand hangs. In other words, you don't lift the hand. That sense of a passive hand, where something's dominant more proximally, more towards your center.

That's right. Elbow lifts, hand lifts, fingers hang. And something has to really move in that upper back and shoulder area. Let the hand hang. That's good.

Excuse me? The elbow can bend when it lifts, yeah. It doesn't bend a whole lot, but it bends a little bit. No, you're not bending it quite that much. It's still leading with the elbow towards the ceiling.

Yeah. That's good. Okay, great.

Leave it. Rest on your back for a moment.

[Silence 59 seconds]

Turning the head

[Russell:] But that image of that central plane be there, going through your forehead, nose, chin, chest, pubic bone, beyond your body.

Just very lightly turn your head a bit right and left around that central plane.

Only go as far in one direction as you can in the other, so whichever is less mobile, let yourself be confined to the comfortable limit in that direction, and go to the other side the same amount.

So you're tracking midline. You're tracking how far you are from midline.

And it's not a goal to make it bigger. It's a goal to be in touch with the quality in each direction, and modeling only as far as is really smooth and light in each direction.

Good.

Please come over onto your front once again.

The left elbow

[Russell:] Put your forehead on your right hand, left arm upward.

Huh? It doesn't matter, just be comfortable, yeah.

Left arm upward, and just take a moment just to track that midline, just kind of sweep through. Even if it's vague, keep doing it. And the central plane. Sense the middle of your pubic bone.

And then just let that left elbow begin to find a way off the floor. And listen to what happens through your shoulder and through the upper spine for that left elbow to come off the floor.

Go light and easy. It's not such an easy movement. And listen for the smoothness. There's often a real jump at the beginning. We want to get that smooth.

Okay, so really the takeoff is very important. Keep seeing if that takeoff can get slower and slower, so that you're really there for the moment of thought becoming active, the moment that the intention to lift begins, even before it comes off the floor, that you feel the innervation, you feel the about to, and then you let the about to become manifest.

But if you keep going more and more precisely, you can go, okay, what would half of that be? Is there any jump at all? Could it be absolutely fluid? Moving through water, breathing.

That's it.

And then that elbow continues, and then the hand begins to lift, but not the fingers. The fingertips have contact, but you're still listening for this quality. This quality of fluidity, of lightness, in a rather obscure and challenging movement, but it does wonders for many things, particularly your upper back and neck.

That's it. Then there's a feeling of the hand hanging, and the fingertips just maintaining some contact with the floor, and then the lifting occurs further, but there's a feeling of the hand hanging, the fingertips dripping with honey.

And you're coming up with the elbow off the floor. And of course, you're activating parts of your back that you rarely use.

That's it. That's good. That's nice. Yeah, I see much more fluidity.

Good. Okay.

And then just rest comfortably on your front, whatever that is for you right now.

[Silence 45 seconds]

Alternating elbows

[Russell:] Put your forehead on the floor, both arms upward, a little long, so the elbows can have a little bend in them, but it's not like they're bent in front of your face. They're long, upward, and alternate, one elbow lifting and the other, if you can find.

Go slow enough that you can feel any differences between the elbows.

Begin where the palm stays on the floor, and you're really listening. What happens in each shoulder with this elbow, and across that upper back. There's a lot to be learned here. Listen to the movement on the ground.

This is high quality information for your motor organization.

With the hand on the ground still, and try to really get that answer. And then slowly you can do the movement a little bit more, where the fingertips are on the ground but the hand lifts, on each side, and you're letting one side learn from the other. Just paying attention. Breathing.

And then if it feels right, go all the way to where the fingertips come off the floor, but the hand hangs. It's not a lifting of the hand. We don't want to activate the hand that way, because we want to keep what's getting active around your shoulder blades, and in your back, active. We don't want the hand to take over there.

When you feel satisfied, just rest comfortably on your front.

[Silence 40 seconds]

Shoulders forward and back

[Russell:] Great.

Come to the sphinx position, please.

And feel how you could bring that right shoulder forward, eyes on the horizon, so the elbows are under the shoulders. And the upper arms are more or less vertical. They're going to be slightly out from the vertical, but almost vertical. And yeah, that's it.

Just bring it forward and then back. Just feel that movement, and your eyes stay on the horizon. That's it, perfect. Feel that.

And as the shoulder blade goes back, think of your chest coming a bit forward. Just the right shoulder. Breathing.

So you're not sliding the arm. It's not sliding the arm, it's moving the shoulder. That's it.

And do the same with the left shoulder. Forward and back. Listen. Make sure you have the backward movement. And you're not sliding the elbow on the floor. It's really getting the movement in the shoulder.

Your eyes need to stay on the horizon. It's easier to do it other ways, I know.

Right. And then what about both shoulder blades towards each other, and sinking the vertebrae between the shoulders? See if that's got any more reality to it.

Let the vertebrae sink between the shoulders, if you can find something like that. That's it. Good.

Right, okay. Lower down, pause for a moment. You look so serious.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Hands and feet

[Russell:] Okay, one last time. Forehead on the floor.

This time, put the hands together on that plane above your head, with the base of the palms near your head somewhere, so the elbows are bent. You can feel that mid-plane. The base of the hands may touch your head, or be very near your head, so the elbows are bent.

And then let your knees come out to the side. Let your feet touch each other on the plane, on the central plane. Your feet are touching each other.

See if the knees can be bent into the air. I'm sorry, the feet can be in the air. The knees come out to the side a bit. They don't have to be very far to the side, just enough that the feet can touch. So the feet are in the air, if possible. The knees are wide so the feet can touch.

So the knees are kind of like your elbows. The feet are kind of like your hands. The knees will need to be wide enough that the soles can touch each other, if possible.

Okay? And just kind of rub them again, kind of get familiar. Say hello. Play footsie. You kind of feel that.

And rub your hands as you rub your feet. Your hands up and down each other as the feet go up and down. Now see if you can track all that.

And again, if possible, the soles are touching, as much of the soles as possible are touching. So the knees would need to be wide for that to occur. The knees can't be right under the ankles vertically. That's it.

So feel, track your hands and feet, and then gently lengthen your hands along that central axis, and let your feet come down along that central axis, and then let them come up along that.

But thinking that whole midline, as if you're touching something in the middle of you, a plane, somehow, and the pubic bone is on the floor, and the breastbone, and the middle of the forehead. That's it.

Just what you're doing. But up and down. That's it. There we go. Great.

And then feel if it might be possible to lift your head, and when that might be possible for you. Think along that midline. Is it easier when the hands are coming towards you, or away?

Think of where you're pressing the floor. That's it. Let that whole movement come.

See what happens if you have the feet coming toward the pelvis as the hands come towards the chest, and lift the head at the same time. See what that feels like.

Then the feet and hands go away from the head. That's it. All come together and go. See what that feels like. That's it. Beautiful.

Leave it. Come on your back, please.

On the back again

[Russell:] Let me find out if all that hard work with the shoulders was valuable.

Just feel. Put your arms out to the side at shoulder height, palms towards the ceiling, and feel that space between your shoulders. Hands at shoulder height, palms towards the ceiling.

And like we had at the beginning, just feel the contact perhaps you can have with your shoulder blades, with the space between your shoulder blades.

Can you find that plane that goes through the upper back, in the center? Often very obscure for people.

And then imagine your hands being lifted by a string on the center line at the ceiling, and see if you can track the space between the shoulder blades and the hands, coming together and apart, that whole plane that goes all the way through you.

So your vertebral column is there, and through to the earth. And the shoulder blades are moving away and towards it, in a funny way.

Good, and then let your hands stay together for a little bit, lightly together, and let the elbows bend out to the side, and then turn the hands around themselves, and feel, can the fingers go a little more towards the chest?

So the elbows are bent to the sides, and the hands are above your chest, and you're just rotating down and up, and feeling that movement across your upper body.

That's it. Let the palms be together as well as the fingers, if possible.

That's good. Okay, leave it.

Bend your legs. Come on up and let's see. Now that is for you.

Standing

[Russell:] Stay in your body. Sense what occurs as you just listen.

Your brain has been through some modifications and challenges and opportunities, and things it's probably never organized before.

But feel what — situations. That's right.

And feel your height. Feel what supports your head. Your image of your vertebral column. What is that midline like?

You move whatever ways you like, and see what, if you have words for what stands out, you can bring them out.

Clarity. Clarity of anything particular. Right, oh good.

[Student:] Wingspan.

[Russell:] Yeah, you feel that height right now. That's right. Yeah.

And feel how your head is really — you feel your chest. Is it comfortable to have your chest lifted like that? That's beautiful, yeah.

You also. I don't know if you sense it, but your head is coming out of your torso. Your neck is a half inch longer, it looks like, from over here. Can't be that, right? You see?

Feel what supports the head. What pushes it up like that?

Saying yes to what?

[Student:] More open.

[Russell:] Yeah.

Mudra

[Russell:] Just take a moment. Just sit for a moment. I'll let you go in — but just sit for a moment.

And feel your mudra. Feel the shoulder blades, the space between the shoulder blades.

We're just sensing the mudra, and very lightly, just as light as you can imagine, think of the shoulder blades coming back a bit, and the vertebral column going forward. It's the slightest bit you can imagine.

As soon as you feel something, do it half that, then half that, and then half that, till it's the slightest bit. The shoulder blades are coming back, and as if the chest, the vertebral column, is coming forward, but the smallest you can. So feel what you can, and then go smaller, smaller, smaller.

Think up through the top of your head.

And let the tips of your fingers touch, just the tips. And feel what happens if you imagine, or just very lightly, as if you're pulling your hands apart, but don't let them go apart. Feel what happens between your shoulder blades. As if you're pulling your hands apart, but very, just lightly.

Stop doing that. Feel what's alive in your chest, in the area of your heart, and between your shoulder blades.

Feel what lifts your head.

And then feel this gesture here. And then feel through, light touching of your hands. Feel the space between the shoulder blades. Feel that midline.

Just a bow along that midline.

We have one more approximation of this experiment. We'll do tomorrow, but pretty interesting, don't you think?

Good.

Very brief pause just to move around.

Pete, you available? What do you think?

I looked over at my friend Pete and I realized he could use a little companionship, I think, and he's feeling somewhat estranged, and so I thought we could finish the morning where I can just guide him, and he's happy to have you witness that.

But I'd like to take just five minutes to complete this, kind of be free from this, and then we'll take some time together.

Okay?