Talk

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 1, Session 1 — 80 minutes

Summary: On the opening evening Russell marvels at the journeys that brought everyone together and sends care to a fellow traveler recovering from pneumonia. He invites unconditional welcoming, sets logistics and a rhythm of silence, and teaches the forms of walking and just sitting before a brief sit.

Welcome

[Russell:] I'm just thinking of all the journeys that went on, both today and over the days of preparation to come, and over the weeks and months, and for some, years of getting here.

And I just kind of marvel at that.

The unfolding of our lives is so mysterious and marvelous. How did we — who would have predicted we would all end up in this room tonight? You know? I mean, it's just so amazing.

I'm thinking it's getting warm in here.

[Silence 34 seconds]

So as I'm sitting here kind of marveling at all of us having arrived — all, actually, except there's one person who's not here — disappointed, and sending care toward one of our fellow journeyers who has pneumonia and is recovering.

This is Donna Markova. Andy over here is the husband of Donna, and we'll be going back and forth. She lives — I guess you're about a half hour from here, something like that.

[Student:] Yeah.

[Russell:] So just collectively, we can include her in our care. She is a marvelous being, and you will get to meet her, and in her own ways she will be adding to this week, and we will be adding to her week.

So then what comes from me as I sit here is a kind of bowing. You'll see me do this a lot, and it's not a particularly religious gesture. It's a human gesture of awe and respect, and really, all that you all went through to get here. I bow to all of you being in this room.

Everyone went through so many different, you know, attractions. Well, is it right? Is it right for me now? But it costs this much, and I have this much time, and what about this? And we all have so many what about thises and what about thaters. And somehow it felt right enough to be here.

And I bow to all of that that brings you here, which includes the beings in your life who have been part of you coming here, whether it's your spouses or your kids or your parents, or your bosses or your employees or your students, or — you know. And unknown beings who conspire and work together, and we somehow get here. And that's, again, absolutely amazing.

And I notice as I say that, it brings up a sense, this real gratitude, and it touches a place of — what is that? It's got some awe in it, and some sense of, huh, marveling, and just, wow, life unfolds. How does that happen?

So I'm sitting with all of that as I see you all here.

And I know many of you have been traveling quite far today. I don't want this evening to be too long, or too much verbal information. A twelve-hour drive from Salt Lake City, Carl and Aaron. You'll learn all these names. I know right now it's like, my God, it's a whole lot of people. How do I get to know all these people? I've got all these people.

You know, there's a part of us that feels that, probably, and that will likely fade quite quickly, especially as we learn each other's names, which is important. And some of us go, well, I can't remember names. That's okay. There will be ways that we will learn each other's names. I can almost guarantee that you will easily know each other's names.

You do, in your pamphlets and your little booklets, have pictures and names next to them. And it's nice, back in the room, when you go, who was that person that was telling me all about that? And you go, oh, oh, that's right. There were three Barbaras, so it was likely a Barbara.

So if you're ever confused, just say Barbara.

Yeah, so I also just want to acknowledge that place inside that might be there, that lives in most of us. Kind of a shy place. A shy place that's with a whole lot of new people, in a whole different environment. And there may be something inside that is excited to be here and feels it's just right, and there's also likely to be some other places. Something that says, oh my gosh, how am I with all of this. And that place inside that carries some kind of embarrassment about something about ourselves that's not good enough, or not aware enough, or doesn't meditate enough, or blah, blah, blah.

You know, there are a lot of Feldenkrais people. Maybe haven't done enough Feldenkrais. Whatever it is.

Just also, I encourage you to say hello to that place. That's welcome. I encourage you to have the atmosphere of welcoming whoever shows up in there.

Okay, that's part of the ground of our work here. Part of the very ground of our work.

What would it be like to live in unconditional welcoming of a moment? Which doesn't mean liking it. It means welcoming it. Big distinction, and we'll get into that in a lot of detail. But what would it be like to live in that kind of relationship to the living moment?

And I want to say, and testify for that, that is not beyond us — very ordinary people, with our history and our conditioning and our challenges — to actually cultivate a radically different relationship to the ordinary confusions of life.

But that's for another time.

Taking care

[Russell:] For tonight, I want to go through some logistical things. I want to make sure that you can ask anything, if there's anything that we can do to help your sense of comfortability, and being able to take care of yourself.

One of the things that I like to do in my home, I also like to do wherever I'm teaching, which is encourage people to really be able to take care of themselves. Because as a host, if I don't feel someone feels that they have the right to go to my refrigerator, then I'm always wondering if they have enough to eat. Do you get what I mean?

So one of the ways I take care of myself is by really encouraging the people in my world to feel free to ask for what you need. Right? We want the support of your eating, and are you warm enough in your room, are you — you know, all that stuff.

Please don't feel like you have to put up with something and there's nothing that you can do about it. If there's nothing you can do about it, we'll find out that that's true, but likely we can handle the basic things that you're needing.

In that direction, actually — Valerie, you've got probably a few things to say to people logistically, do you? I seem to remember you telling me something like that.

[Student:] Make sure that everybody got that. And within the packet, I think everybody got the Angela Center information. So you have the Wi-Fi codes and everything there with that. So I think it's pretty self-explanatory. If it's not, just let me know if you have a question. My room number's even on here. I'm in room eleven.

So if you get locked out of your room at night, if something happens, don't suffer. Come see me. Okay?

[Russell:] Well, we could actually say something about the keys downstairs.

[Student:] The keys downstairs. It's on the first floor, in a mailbox. In the hallway, as you walk from the dining area down the hall, on your right there's a gold box, that if you lift it, there's an extra key in there for each room. So that's my understanding.

There's a key for each room down there, but you're not supposed to keep it. That's my understanding. Do I have that right?

[Russell:] Well, we'll find out more about keys tomorrow.

[Student:] If you lock yourself out — that's the basic. Yeah, we don't usually lock, but if you lock yourself out of your room, you can get a key down there to get back in your room.

And if you go outside at night, there's a code you need, or early in the morning. They don't open the door officially until like seven in the morning, and that's on here. It's 254. You need to put it in there. It's on your sheet, so you want to have that tattooed on your arm if you're a late-night or early-morning walker.

The only thing that isn't on here is that there is going to be a SWAT team on site on Saturday, down at Ursuline High School, running maneuvers. So just so you see some interesting-looking folk that aren't us. I just wanted you to know that.

[Russell:] Oh, literally. That's not a metaphor.

Well, we might have to do a kind of walking practice around Ursuline.

[Student:] That's very cool. Say it again.

[Student:] Oh, yeah. Yeah. No fireworks.

[Student:] I don't know if it's clear. I didn't see it, but I'm not familiar with this. Are there active nuns here, or are there areas we're not supposed to walk, or are there gardens we're not supposed to go into, or is everything fair game?

[Russell:] It is part of a religious order. It's part of the Ursuline School and Cardinal Newman High School. The woman who is the administrator is a sister. She doesn't wear a habit. She dresses like the rest of us. And so there are two sisters that I know of who help run the place, and then there are a number of lay people who are here.

Anything that's off limits will be locked. So you're free. There are some nice walks out. There have been some mountain lion sightings, but you don't have to be too scared of that. You just have to be conscious. It's unlikely you're gonna see one, but they show up around here. And they have some instructions downstairs on how to terrorize a —

But like the chapel that's down here, you're welcome to go in there. There's a labyrinth outside. You're welcome to walk that. Feel at home. Feel at home.

In the room next door, we've set up an urn, and put out a bunch of teas and cups. You can help yourself to teas. If you're up real early and the urn's not on, there's one of these water coolers that has a hot side — that's the red side — you can get hot water out of that. You won't get hot water out of this one. I unplug this one, cause I don't like the noise in the room. Okay, but you can get hot water out of the other one.

[Student:] The rattlesnakes are sleeping, I think, but there are still ticks out there, so you might want to check your legs and things when you're walking.

[Russell:] Yeah, that's true. Thank you.

Liaisons

[Russell:] And that leads to something that I'd like to kind of hold as a group.

I'm very indebted to Valerie for all the great work that she does as the administrator of the Embodied Life School, and she's chosen to do this program. She's a student in this program. That's a new movement in Valerie's life. Okay? So I want her to be able to be here as a student.

Now, there are some tasks that she'll need to do, but I'm gonna be doing my best to minimize those. In that direction, I would like — and I'll ask you for this tomorrow, so you can think about it overnight — I'd like to have, in the last program here, we had one person who was kind of our liaison to the administration of Angela Center.

There's a woman you'll meet tomorrow who's the secretary, who is the one who handles most of it if we need anything. And I don't want thirty people going to her. I want one or two people who will be the liaison to Tricia.

And so tomorrow I'm going to ask for two volunteers. I'd like one male and one female volunteer to kind of be the helper in the program. It's not a lot to do.

It's mostly two main functions. If somebody in the program is needing something, they would go to you. And if you couldn't solve it, you'd go to me. I don't want you going to Valerie unless it's absolutely needed. You'd come to me, and then I would help you to figure out whether you need to go speak to Tricia or something else.

So feel free to come to me, and then as you learn the position, you'll start going directly to Tricia, if you don't know where the extra towels are or whatever it is. So there are logistical things that those people would help with.

The other thing is if anyone in the program is having a difficulty with the material we're working with, and hasn't yet established a relationship to me that you feel you can come directly to me, your liaison can help. Okay, so you could let them know.

Oh, let me use my imagination. It hasn't happened actually in a program, but in my imagination, let's say — well, we actually had one incident, but we handled it differently.

In one program, there was a man who — very wonderful man, he's graduated, he's doing great work, wonderful man — but he had from his history a kind of skin condition that was very painful at night, like burning. And so in his sleep, he moaned really loudly. And the walls were very thin in the center that we were doing that retreat at. So you could hear him all the way, and all the people were hearing this.

And he would go to take a shower in the middle of the night, cause that would relieve the burning. And the sounds would be like somebody having a sexual — oh, oh, oh. And there was a lot of disturbance around it. But this was like the first week of a program, and it took about three days before some people felt like they could speak to me about this disturbance.

And I so much don't want that to happen. Right? So I'm using that. That happened in one of the other seven. You're the eighth program.

But if something is happening that is challenging your experience here, and you don't know what to do about it, come to me. If you don't feel like you can come to me, for whatever reason, come to the liaison, and they can bring the difficulty, and it can be handled, so that you're not feeling like you're stuck. You get what I mean?

So it's very, very important for the atmosphere that I would like us to be working together in.

So in that spirit, is there anything you're needing right now to know, to feel comfortable in this space for your first night and all that? Is there anything?

[Student:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Please, Natalie.

[Student:] Okay, let's see. Yeah. I've read in one of the pieces of paper that there's some sort of a hook somewhere, that you can grab the hook and close it with, out in the hallway somewhere.

[Student:] On one of the windowsills, an alarm pole, and you stick it in the pole.

[Russell:] Okay. So maybe you can get some help from some people in the rooms around you, if you can't figure that out. Okay?

[Student:] Great, thank you.

[Russell:] Let's help each other. Anything else needed?

Great.

A rare opportunity

[Russell:] So let me give you a few other logistical things, and then what I want to do this evening is go through the basic form of the sitting practice we do, and the walking practice, which most of you have experienced on a retreat, but a few of you haven't. And then I'd like to do a walking together and a brief sitting together, and then we'll go to sleep.

Okay, so that's what we're gonna do this evening.

So what I'd like to speak to is, we collectively, and each of you individually, have invited and created a tremendous opportunity for your inner life, for your unfolding.

And I feel so grateful, and so blessed, that this combination of teachings has been both given to me and is being given to me as I unfold, and as the work in each group unfolds the work further. It's a transformative work. And the people around the world who are engaging in it — very often people who've done a lot of work with themselves, and some people who were fairly new to some of these kind of practices — their lives are changing in remarkable ways.

So I feel — I'm not saying that as, oh, I'm great, doing something — but that we together have this great opportunity. It's a rare opportunity in this life. It's a rare opportunity.

And I am here because my life path has brought me to both the unfolding that I am working with in my own life — cause my process is certainly not complete, it continues to grow and grow and grow — and the gift that I have been invited to share in the world, which happened most readily in this kind of environment. That's why I've created these kinds of programs. It's because this is the edge. The edge of unfolding for myself, and for many of the people who are attracted to this work.

So I'm so very grateful for that. I'm so very grateful that the work has a tremendous depth and a tremendous lightness at the same time. There's a great valuing of laughter and humor, and seeing through the absurdities, as well as dropping as deep as it's possible.

To support that work, I encourage certain atmospheres, certain attitudes. For example, I will encourage you very much to maintain silence from 9:30 in the evening until 9:30 in the morning.

What that means for most of us is that when you wake up in the morning, you're not speaking. We have three couples who are part of this program. And even if you're in your room with your partner, I very much encourage you not to be there as a couple. I encourage you, mostly even in this week, to approach it — you know, don't avoid each other, enjoy each other, interact with each other — but you're here for your unfolding, and your unfolding will bring something really new to the relationship.

But those of you who are not a couple, but are in a double room also, there can be a draw to saying, oh, you know, it's uncomfortable not to speak. I'm really asking you to commit yourself to that. It makes a difference.

Now, if there's something functionally needed, you don't need to go get a pad and paper. It's not like some sort of artificial practice, like if I say a word, I've messed it up or something. It's more an attitude. Right?

So our breakfast, our time in here meditating in the morning, we start at seven. I really love it when people have the intention to be at the practices a little bit early. So when you read seven, I encourage you to think of five or ten of — and you can be here, you can lie on the floor, you can stretch, you can just sit. It's really wonderful if you're not just coming in the room right at seven.

And if you're late, you're always welcome. Okay? And please just come in the room. If it's possible to leave any judgment, embarrassment, or shame at the door, please do it. So, in other words, when people come in late —

If you wanna walk like that, okay, but it doesn't serve me. It doesn't serve the room. So I encourage you to just walk in the room. You know, it's like, okay, so you're late, sit down. It's okay. You're in the right time for yourself in that moment, and you didn't get here at the time that we were hoping to, but who knows what forces are at work, right?

So we do our best, but have the intention. It works. We become a certain kind of body together when we hold these intentions. We support each other.

There are two commuters. Pete and Andy will be commuting. And if you guys have the intention to be here more like a quarter of than five of, so that when you walk up, you're not kind of huffing and puffing, but you've gotten time to take off your jacket and stretch out a little bit.

Yeah, so I recommend starting that at night. And our evening practice finishes at — what's it, about 8:15, I think. Sometimes it might be slightly later. And then, if you want to talk at that point, fine. If you want to start your silence earlier, that's fine too. If you want more silence, if you want to be silent at lunch and dinner, let us know just by gesturing, or letting us know in some way.

The silence at breakfast — silence doesn't mean you have to be serious, right? You can still look at each other and smile, and you can even say pass the salt. So it's just an attitude. You know, attitude.

Yeah, so in general, to look toward — I love to start all together. Again, I'm taking care of myself here. I've got a certain kind of attachment to the learning that goes on here. And so when people miss the first ten or fifteen minutes of, say, a movement lesson, or of one of our practices, something in me is going — and often there's something that I know about what they're working with in their life. Oh, God, I wish they were here. So you never know.

Yeah, so it's just a good idea to have the intention.

Also, I know you all have your own connections in the world, but if you can limit your cell phone use and your computer use, that's a good idea. Okay? So that more of your energies are here.

Okay, there will be a part of your mind that will want ways to run around. And we want to learn how to be with that place, or those places, in warm-hearted ways, where they don't take over the organism, and yet they're not just pushed away. You get what I mean?

It's a different relationship from how we usually deal with our distractions. We're usually either fighting them, or we're pulled into them. But we're cultivating a different way.

So do everything you can to bring your energies here.

I think that's about all I wanna say. Let me see if there was anything else. I think that's good. Any questions that you have right now?

There are tissues in the room. Where have they gone? They're usually — yeah, I'll make sure that they're — do you need them right now? You need to blow your nose.

[Student:] Yeah, check the room next door.

[Russell:] I'll make sure that we get a bunch of boxes up here. We normally have a bunch.

Walking

[Russell:] What I'd like to bring now is the form of the walking practice. And so let's stand.

This will happen in the morning meditation, in between the two sittings, and in the evening when we do two sittings.

So the form — and later, in a couple of days, I can answer questions about, well, why do we do that, or what's the importance of that. But for now, what I'd like to encourage you to do is just do it, and feel how it lives in you.

And so, Eric — you, Carl, I'm sorry — move the blanket back and stand in front of it. And Barbara, if you could fold your blanket a little bit back. So we want to be able to — we're going to end up walking in this big oval, so the mats need to be a little bit back.

And put your left thumb in your palm.

These recordings — I try to get most of what we do here recorded, and then it gets sent to you. And so you can work with the material in between segments. So the whole program will be recorded. You can put down your thumb for a minute while we talk.

The whole program will be recorded. And the agreement, which I don't ask you to sign, except in your heart and in your mind and in your integrity, is that you will not make copies of it. You will not be sharing it in a way that does not feel like it has integrity.

What that means is, there's a wonderful talk, and in your home your best friend, or your husband, or your wife is there, and you say, gee, I'd really love you to hear this talk. Of course we want people to receive the goodness that you might be experiencing, right? So that's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about that you would ask me if you were gonna conduct a class using that. Right? That we would have an interaction about that. Do you get what I mean?

So it's yours, and it's held — I don't even know how to describe that, but I want you to feel like it is your material, and that there's a kind of respectful use of it. Something like that. And if you're unclear, you would ask. Okay?

Okay, so left thumb in the palm, put the fingers around the thumb. You put this hand just a little bit below your solar plexus. The right hand is over the top, and the right thumb is kind of like a little cap on top of your left fist.

And this — for those of you who've either practiced in traditional Zen centers, or have observed, this is not that kind of — it's more comfortable. It's not lax, but it's not stiff.

And we want the feeling. The embodiment of the standing, the embodiment of the walking, is the infrastructure for the state of mind that we're growing. So it's not tangential. It's not something that's just put on for somebody's opinion or aesthetic. It actually creates a kind of inner integrity.

So we're looking for a sense of length in the spine, a feeling of the top of the head towards the sky, so when we're walking, you're conscious if you start looking at the ground. It's very influential on the quality of your inner life. Doesn't have to be stiff — the sense of length upward, and a sense of connection into the earth.

This whole week we'll be exploring intimately the sense of our connection to the earth and our connection to the sky. So we begin right here in our standing. And when we stand, our practice is to stand, to enjoy standing, and notice what we add to the simple intention to stand here.

Now, at a certain point, when we're just standing here, your eyes would be open. You'd be not getting lost in yourself. You'd be here in your experience of standing. And I would make a gesture like this, and you would see it, and we would go together.

Now, just observe me for a moment. What will happen is I'll turn to the left, and we'll all turn at that point to the left, and then it's a very slow walking.

If it fits for you — it's a very natural feeling, if it fits for you — to inhale as the heel lifts. And pause in your breath as you either carry the foot or slide it. If your balance feels precarious, you can slide the foot. And exhale as you put weight on it.

And then you'll just stand here, maybe for a whole breath, and just enjoy your life. Or if you're adding something to your life that's making it less than enjoyable, then notice what that is. Don't demand that you enjoy your life. It's just an invitation.

Then maybe after one breath of just standing, do it again. And it's kind of a half step. It's not a full step. So this foot is kind of halfway above the other foot. It's not a long step.

Now, if the person in front of you is much slower than you, you can do this kind of walking even standing in place. You're just shifting weight, really. It's both an opportunity to free your legs from the sitting, and it's a beautiful — once you get the feeling of the walking, it can bring you something very helpful for your sitting practice also.

Okay, so we're not gonna shut off the lights yet. I think we'll keep the lights on.

[Silence 6 minutes]

[Russell:] You're relaxing. Just keeping your hands as they are, you just do a little bow forward, small bow, and then, staying in the circle, you walk as quickly as you can back to your seat.

So we walk. We're like a centipede with all these legs, staying in the circle. And you just take up all the space between you and the person in front of you. Just don't run into them. Bring your best to fill the space.

You want to be conscious as the speed changes. You pick up speed. So you're bringing energy into your walk. Literally taking up all the space between yourself and the person in front of you.

We'll come to sitting. And come to sit.

Sitting

[Russell:] So, the sitting posture. There are a number of different postures, and I'll describe some over the days, for those who are not familiar with a particular style.

One, like Sarah sitting with her legs back, that's called seiza style. That's a possible way of sitting.

Bob, is that your seiza bench from home?

[Student:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. A seiza bench is an example. I don't think there are any here at the center, but I could try to bring some next time. Note of that.

And sitting in chairs is wonderful. It's not a second-class sitting. It's just as good.

And if you're sitting in a chair, if it's okay for your back, don't lean back in the seat, but be self-supporting. So you see how Ruth is away from the back of the seat, and the feet are on the floor. Right? Or you can have the feet on a mat, but have the mat a little bit more even, and in front of you, so that the feet can really rest on the floor, and not feel like they're tenuous.

Yeah. And maybe a little bit more space, if that feels comfortable, Mara. Right.

And it's important that we find — and this is a work that takes place over time, as the posture begins to work on you — how you can have your comfortable, really grounded, yet really light and long sit. Yeah, and it's something that unfolds, and you will have it sometimes and not at other times.

Having your bottom elevated is usually a good idea. Do you have a cushion over there? You might even need to acquire one, cause if you have your bottom elevated, if you're sitting cross-legged, your legs will come down more easily, and you can get a more stable triangle of support.

And on these cushions, it's best, if you're sitting cross-legged, to be on the front third of the cushion. So again, the pelvis is tilted a bit forward, so the legs come down.

As a hand position, these are called mudras. This is a mudra. This mudra, the left hand rests in the right hand. The left index finger is at the end of the right index finger, so that you can just see the fingers end up on top of their corresponding finger. The small-finger side of your hand can rest against your pant leg. And your thumbs gently touch, about that, just under the height of your belly button.

So I'll talk more about this place, but it's not a haphazard place at all. It's a central place in the inner workings of the human being. Literally a central place.

It's okay for your hands to rest a little bit on your legs. Or if they don't reach, if your belly button's higher, if it feels uncomfortable in your shoulders, you could put a little pillow or something. So it's not that the hands are hanging, but they're not held up. The shoulders are dropped. It's a sense as if there's a little weight in your elbows.

And at first, this probably feels a little awkward. But in a little bit of time, it's likely that this circle here will become a support for your head that is very empowering.

This is called the universal mudra, or cosmic mudra. I encourage you to use it. If you don't want to, you are a free being, and I encourage you to at least experiment with it.

There's a length to the spine. There's this gentle touching of the thumbs in the middle. A feeling of good contact with the ground underneath you — your bottom, your feet and legs. A sense of the top of your head towards the sky.

And the practice that we most often work with is a practice whose Japanese name is shikan taza. Shikan taza. The best translation of it is just sitting.

So that means we're here without trying to control the mind, and yet not just letting it run around. What does it mean not to control, and yet not to just let the mind pull you? There's a sense of just being present with what comes.

The breath has a kind of priority of place. It's kind of central. It's not because we think it should be, but because when one is quiet inside, the movement of breath has a big vibration within the organism.

There's a little emphasis on the exhale. Not that you're forcing it, but that you're interested in the letting go that's connected to the exhale.

Sounds are welcome. They're all part of your living moment.

When you notice thinking, you just turn attention towards the thinking for a moment, and just acknowledge, oh, that's happening. And then you come to the next breath, and you drop down into your bottom.

Just sit for a few minutes this evening. I just want you to know the basic form, so just stay with your sitting.

[Silence 5 minutes]

[Russell:] Can you notice that you're lost in a story or a thought? Just gently turn the light towards that moment. Come to the next breath.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:] You feel discomfort in your body. If it's mild to moderate, you just turn the light towards it. You acknowledge that it's there. You can even let it be the center of your attention. You're curious about its temperature and its quality, and it's likely to change with your presence.

If you choose to change position, or if it feels like it's taking over and you're fighting yourself, make the change a conscious choice. Say to yourself, I'm going to change position. And just for a brief moment, you would put your hands together in the prayer position, just to acknowledge that it's a conscious choice. Then, in a slow way that's congruent with your meditation, you can change your position.

Do whatever you need, but stay within the rhythm and the intention of the meditation, so you don't throw your body around.

[Silence 40 seconds]

[Russell:] And you hear the bell, we just put our hands together. And you're free to move however you're drawn to move.

Questions

[Russell:] Are there any questions about the basic forms of walking or sitting practice? Cause my intention is to start in the morning without any instruction in the sitting. I'll probably give a few words, often at the beginning of the morning practice. I'll bring an image, or some words, and then we'll just begin.

Is there anything that you'd like to ask about tonight?

[Student:] Yeah. The breath with the walking.

[Russell:] So again, if it feels natural — if it doesn't, if you're struggling, let it go. Just walk.

But you might experiment with lifting having an up feeling, an inhale. And there's a pause in the breath as you come forward. And then the exhaling has the sense of coming into the earth. And then it's just standing, for a whole breath.

Unless your breath is really slow, and then you might lift with the next inhale. But most of us will just stand for a whole breath, and then again with the second inhale — after you've stood for an inhale, and for the next one, inhaling, pausing.

Again, if that feels, oh, that's not my rhythm, I can't remember — just leave it alone. Just walk. The most important thing is that we're not distracting ourselves from living in the moment.

Something else?

[Student:] Will you start some mornings — will you do some more meditation in the morning, before the seven o'clock?

[Russell:] Yeah. So after a few days of getting into this rhythm, what will likely happen is — was I doing that in some of the retreats you've been in?

[Student:] Yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] So what I usually do is, I begin to offer an optional 6:30 meditation for those who would like some more practice. And whenever I do that, my statement is, it's not better to sit at 6:30. If you derive more nourishment from the sleep, stay in bed. If you're drawn to more practice, I'll describe how I approach that. There's a slight alteration.

But the first couple of days, I don't even want anybody doing that. I want us just resting. There's been a lot of traveling, a lot of buildup, and so I don't want people to feel drawn to that.

[Student:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Okay, that's great. Thank you for saying that.

I meant to ask, is anybody concerned about not being able to get up, or what time they're getting up? So you don't have an alarm clock?

[Student:] Right.

[Russell:] Right. That's right, you do have a time change. So what I would recommend is — what room are you in?

[Student:] Four.

[Russell:] Is there anybody who knows they're near four? Okay. Would you like a knock on your door? So figure out what time you'd like.

Great, thank you. That was easy. And if I can remember, I'll bring you an alarm clock tomorrow.

[Student:] Mats.

[Russell:] There's some in the back there.

[Student:] Yes.

[Russell:] Oh, yeah, you mean these kind of blankets? Sleeping blankets. Okay, so extra sleeping blankets. What room are you in?

[Student:] Middle of the night, you're cold. You won't mind?

[Russell:] Please.

Yeah, that's okay.

I'm going to encourage Karen to have the right hand on the bottom. Okay, yeah.

See, traditionally — but I don't want to demonstrate. When everyone was sitting in full lotus, the hands could rest kind of on top of the heels, but they would still have a kind of uplift. It's fine to rest here. What we don't want is a kind of droopiness.

So as long as there's a feeling of not tension, a kind of vitality, we could say, then it's fine to be resting. Which is one way to think of the sitting in general: a resting vitality. Resting.

If it's too much vitality and not enough resting, it begins to feel like tension and hard work. If there's too much resting and not enough vitality, it gets droopy and flabby. We want resting vitality. A nice image for living.

Something else?

Great. Okay, well, thank you so much.

[Student:] Yes.

[Russell:] You just thought of it. Okay.

[Student:] Yes.

[Russell:] The meetings are optional. There are enough times for everyone, but it's completely if you want to. One sec.

The afternoon meetings, you have a second option. You have the option of asking for a walking meeting. If the weather is nice, I'll go for a walk with you, and we'll talk and walk. The evening meetings are all sitting meetings.

There's a room called the white room, which is on the first floor. The first floor is the floor that we eat on. That's the dining room floor. If you walk down the hall, past the foyer — so it's more than

halfway to the end of the hall, just beyond the foyer where the main entryway is — on the right, the first room is called the white room. It's labeled, and that's where the meetings are.

And you would just tell me, before we break for lunch, if you would prefer a sitting meeting or a walk.

[Student:] Where's the sign-up?

[Russell:] It's up here.

[Student:] Great.

[Russell:] Someone had asked about the purpose of meeting here. Yeah. Thank you.

The meeting is an opportunity for you to ask anything, in terms of the practice, that you would like some guidance in. That's one of the functions, if you have something that you're wanting.

A second function that some people find valuable is, they're just wanting more connection. That they're choosing me as a guide for these next years. For some people, that might turn into a very long-term relationship. For some people, it'll be for these years, these three years together, and you'd like more personal connection. For some people, that's not very important. There's not a strong wanting or need. It's not better to want it, or have it, or not. For some people, there's something in that that's helpful. For some people, it doesn't mean much.

So if you have a question that you're working with, you can ask about your sitting posture. You could ask about something that's coming up in your sitting, or something coming up in the work, or if you're wanting me to know something that's in your life that's going on.

It's not usually just kind of chit-chatting about the 49ers or something, you know — although I'm very interested in the 49ers — but that's not usually the subject that we take. We'll do that more at lunch or dinner. Not so much in a meeting together.

My attitude towards the meeting is, I'm here to serve you. And so I make myself available for that period of time. I've had people just want to sit together. I've had people want to just tell me something that's been really difficult in their home life, and they just wanted me to know about it. Or I've had people ask a question of form. Could be anything like that.

Yes, Wendy.

You're right. Yeah, we could have a silent table. That's a good idea. That's nice. Yeah, I like that.

So let's — if I don't remember to put something on the table — let's say the furthest table away, away from where the food is, and away from the window, so that back corner there. And if we need two tables, the two in the back, the one near the windows and the one. Okay, let's take that.

[Student:] I'm noticing that you have office hours listed here. I just wanted to clarify that that would be tomorrow.

[Russell:] Yeah, sorry. Friday and Saturday, I believe.

[Student:] Wow.

[Russell:] Yes. Friday, 8:30 to 9:30. And Saturday, 12:30 to 1:30.

[Student:] I was wondering. My understanding is that the Wi-Fi works best in this room, as well as the room next door. I was thinking of meeting in the studio next door, for anybody that wanted to come out, go over the board, sign up for the board if you haven't already.

[Russell:] Would it work for you, Valerie? I'm thinking the 8:30 to 9:30, I would rather that that was still in silence. Would that be all right not to do it then, but maybe do that at 12:30? Would that work?

Okay, so it'll be 12:30 to 1:30 on both days. And if you haven't joined the board, and you're wanting to, and wanting some help, Valerie can help you, being our techno expert.

Okay, I think that's good. Thank you so much. Sleep well. See you a little before seven tomorrow.