Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 2, Session 5 — 54 minutes

Summary: Lying on the back, the lesson explores how pressing into the earth creates lift, then invites a slow sensing of the whole back as if painting it with pressure. On the front, pelvis and knees rediscover an infant-like yielding that prepares the back for crawling and standing. Students rise and name the support, height, and mobility they feel.

Listening

So just resting on your back, fresh listening to the contact, this image of a living being behind you, growing the capacity for this quality called awareness. Which means that when possible, you're present and open, listening in a big way to what's happening in this moment.

And when you find you're lost in an old story or some old pictures, you say, "I see that." You acknowledge it. You feel it for a moment, and then you come back.

It's an old general practice of leaning into the present moment without pushing away in an aggressive way, or a judgmental way, if possible. To see, acknowledge, and return.

And please bend your legs.

Lifting the pelvis

Sense your feet in contact with the floor. Legs are bent.

Have your feet a little bit wider than your pelvis, at least as wide, and have the heels not too far from your bottom, meaning the lower legs are towards the vertical, as long as they're comfortable. Don't force it if they're not comfortable.

And just get the feeling for how your legs and your feet, particularly your heels, can support you in lifting your pelvis a little bit from the floor.

The feeling of how the earth force — the force into the earth — creates a lifting.

It's really important and fascinating to get how the down creates the up, and the skeletal movement through your legs, particularly through your heels, into the earth. And really allow the pelvis to lift off the ground, and gradually experiment with lifting a little bit higher, feeling as different parts of your back take the weight in different places, that you're coming up and going down a number of times.

It's a good opportunity to feel, does one leg get used more than the other? If you go really inside, can you feel that one leg is more present in your inner life, and the other one a little more distant? See if there's anything like that.

If it's uncomfortable, don't do so much. Do less.

And notice, as the pelvis lifts, if the jaw tends to tighten, or if you can allow space between your teeth as the pelvis lifts.

And so you feel, if you're lifting that high, how the upper back takes weight, and the space between the shoulders takes weight.

Good.

And then as you lower down this time, just lengthen your legs and pause for a moment.

[Silence 36 seconds]

An ink pad

Good, and bend your legs. Interlace your hands under your head.

And we're going to create an image. As if there is a very porous paper lining your back, and you're lying on some sort of natural color — almost like an ink pad — and you're wanting to bring an equal quality of pressure to every bit of your back into that ink pad.

So slowly begin to lift your head, and first you'll go kind of straight down your spine, straight down your vertebral column, like we did this morning. Lift the head slow enough that you don't miss the upper back, those upper back vertebrae.

And let the chest begin to fold in front so that you don't skip the vertebrae between the shoulder blades, the chest vertebrae.

And feel that movement all the way down through you. Feel what happens in your pelvis, in your lower back.

And we're going to stay in the central line for a little bit, and begin to also lift your pelvis to help the vertebrae. So we're just staying in the central line for now. By lifting the pelvis, even with your head in the air, you can bring more pressure to specific spots.

And then as you lower your head a little bit, let the pelvis lift a bit more.

So you're using the combination of the pelvis and the head to really bring a clarity of pressure into the ground.

You're pushing off your feet, lifting the pelvis, as you're lifting the head, and then one goes higher and the other goes a little lower. But you're maintaining both with some kind of — you're not letting them get floppy. There's a kind of spring-like inner tension between them. Not tension in the muscular sense, but it's a — it's good.

Make sure your feet are in a place where they can take weight skeletally, that the toes aren't lifting, but the weight can go through your heels.

Okay, leave that, please. Lower down and pause.

We're really taking our time to get acquainted with the earth, the support of the earth.

Feel that central axis through the top of your head, through your neck, some kind of image of your chest vertebrae, down through your pelvis.

The right side

Bend your legs, interlace your hands behind your head, and again, this image as if you're lying on this color, on this ink pad. Your legs are bent, and now you're going to begin to see, can you bring a kind of contact to the lower right side — the back of your pelvis, the lower right side of your lower back, that whole lower right quadrant.

So experiment with lifting your head. You'll push off of one foot more than the other. Feel how you can bring a clarity of contact of the whole lower right to the ground, all the way to the outsides of the ribs.

And can you get some kind of sense for where is the top of your pelvis on the right side? And can you get some kind of a sense of where the vertebrae come towards the pelvis when you're at the midline?

And you can shift your legs as you need to.

And then begin to move up the right side of your back, again using your pelvis and your head, to go all the way from the midline over to the right, bringing contact to every millimeter of the right side of your back.

So your interlaced hands are behind your head. You're combining the use of your head and the use of your pelvis.

And each time you sense a part of you, you're kind of saying hello to it. You're welcoming it. You're saying, "I sense you in there." Notice if the breath wants to be invited towards some of these places.

It's an invitation to get intimate with these places that are touching the back, and a sense of the ground helping you to feel yourself, helping you to know, "I'm here. I can sense myself."

That's it.

And then gradually begin including the upper part of the right side of your back. So we're still only on the right side, but now you're including every bit. Take your time, so you know where the midline is, and you can find the space between the midline and the right shoulder blade. And you can find the back of the shoulder blade on the right side, maybe?

And you can really take your time to sometimes use the head less and the pelvis more. You're probably pushing more off of your left foot to bring the weight over to the right.

Softly breathing.

That's good.

Okay, let's leave that. Lower down. Pause for a moment and just sense how that's living in you.

As you're lying here and breathing, you have a sense of that right side opening to breath, inviting the back of that right lung as it opens towards the floor, and upward, and downward, sideways, and can fill out the space.

And it's remarkable, when we can be conscious of the ribs and the vertebrae, that the breath can actually invite a kind of opening through the ribs.

The left side

And please bend your legs.

Just experimenting with lifting your pelvis, how you could bring pressure to the left side of your back. Feel what you need to do, and how you need to shift your weight.

Wonderful, because you learn to clarify the movements of your pelvis, but you're not even trying to. You're just bringing weight to the ground in different ways.

So feel, how could you shift your weight so that different parts of the left side of your back can come to the ground, as you lift your pelvis?

So for now, let's not lift the head yet. Let's see what we can do with just the pelvis first, how you can shift.

And if you get very articulate with the way you push off your legs and the way your pelvis moves, you can actually get quite a bit of refinement about where the pressure is in your back, and between the ribs.

Lower your pelvis, but keep your legs bent. And interlace your hands non-habitually behind your head, and begin to experiment how you could gently, and in presence, lift your head and sense the pressure into the left side of the back, where you can reach with just moving your upper body.

So feel how you can use your breath. Usually exhaling will help the bending of the chest be easier.

And feel how you can shift a little bit more leftward, or a little bit less rotation or more rotation, and how that invites subtle shifts on the ground.

[Silence 51 seconds]

As you lower down, pause once again. Lower your legs if you like.

[Silence 45 seconds]

And then bend your legs, interlace your hands non-habitually, and begin to sense how you can lift your head and your pelvis to go through your whole left side. Feel what using both — how that can help you.

And so there are certain places that are easy for you, and you can go to them readily, and then notice if there are certain places that you tend to skip over. That's where the action is — to find those places where consciousness doesn't live, so it's easy to jump. But if you slow down and really bring yourself into each millimeter, you'll find something can come awake, something can let go in it.

Through the whole back

And as you continue, feel free to work through your whole back. You can go left, right. You can do figure eights down your back. You can just get very free with using your pelvis and your head to, you know, draw through your back.

Lighter, where you're less studied, we could say, and more playful even, where you let the combination of movements surprise you. Not that you throw yourself unconsciously, but that you're allowing the shaping to occur in ways that maybe are a little surprising.

Just notice if your back feels evenly painted.

That's good.

Okay, let's lower down from that. That's a good preparation for where we're going.

And just sense the breath, and the width and length of yourself, the contact of your back with the ground.

And just lightly roll your head a bit. Make sure your neck is free.

Nice.

On the front

Then please come onto your front. And rest your forehead on your hands.

It does take a moment to let the front of yourself get intimate with the element and open. It takes a few moments to feel how to let the chest and the pelvis settle to the ground.

Then notice, with all this work you just did, sensing your back into the earth, how can you sense your back without the pressure of the ground? Is there any sense of the back of yourself?

And it's more subtle, especially when there's not discomfort, when there isn't a kind of pressure of the ground. What can we sense? How do we know our back is alive?

You might sense some breath in your back. But maybe there are some other sensations as well.

Interesting to just feel how you know you're alive in the back of yourself.

And just gently begin to experiment with lifting your head off the floor, and just sensing the change of contact on the element as you lift your head.

Just raise the head. We'll begin just in the central axis, like we did on the back, and sensing, as the pressure moves down your torso, down your sternum, how the head begins to lift.

And you can even notice that if you bring more pressure, or more consciousness, into the ground, the head can get lighter, lifting. So if you like, you can press a bit with your arms. You can also feel a kind of moving pressure of the front of your body, and letting the pressure into the floor help the lifting.

The eyes lift. Let that go through you.

And put the hands out a little bit to the side of the head, and begin to feel freer to begin looking around as you lift, and letting the turning of your head travel through you.

So you can let the pelvis respond, let the chest respond, and just like you were an infant learning about the world, being on your front and being curious. What can I see? What's in front of me? What's to my right and left? And let those movements go through you.

Breathing.

And so each moment of the head lifting, you might notice that there's a different kind of pressure into the earth. That every lifting has an earthbound movement, and every time the pressure into the earth shifts, what lifts away from it can shift.

That's it.

Okay, and then lower your head. Pause for a moment there.

[Silence 37 seconds]

The right knee

And sense the contact of your pelvis in the ground, your thighs in the ground.

Just lightly let the right side of your pelvis lift a little bit. You kind of roll your pelvis. The right side lifts a little bit.

And for this movement, either have your forehead towards the earth, or look towards your right.

Have the right side lift a little bit, and just feel how that goes through you. Where do you press the ground?

Feel how the right knee bends a little bit when you lift the right side of the pelvis. Feel that turning of the right heel.

Just lifting the right side. And as you lift the right side, let the right knee intentionally bend a little bit out to the side, just gently. And see if you can find that connection.

And we were talking about that soft-kneed feeling. Well, for a lot of us, the legs get very stiff, and this, we could say, natural bending of the leg gets compromised. So we're just uncovering or recovering the bending — that the right side of the pelvis lifts.

And for some of you, there's a spontaneous bending in the knee, and for others, the leg is more like one piece. Well, either way, bring a gentle bending of the right knee out to the side. If possible, the foot stays in contact with the floor, if that's possible.

The knee just bends and begins to slide a little bit upward, a little bit in the direction of your right elbow. Just a little bit. Let it be subtle.

These movements are so important for the health of our backs, as well as our torso in general, our hip joints.

So let that get finer. The pelvis lifts, the leg gets free. Let the knee bend out to the side. The knee goes to the right. The foot will go a little bit, the heel will turn leftward, and the knee will come out to the side. The knee will kind of pop out and begin to slide up, as if you were creeping on the floor.

Feel that connection all the way from your pelvis to your foot.

That's good.

And then pause with the knee bent out to the side.

With the right knee out to the side, pause, and in this position begin to experiment with lifting the pelvis a little bit off the floor.

What would it be like for the pelvis to come a bit more into the air, gently?

Feel what you need to do. The knee stays bent. The knee is out to the side. Turn your head towards the right or towards the floor, either way, but not towards the left right now.

And you're finding a way for the whole pelvis to come a bit into the air. You need to do something with your lumbar spine.

Very empowering movement for the back.

Feel what happens, how you can let the left leg soften as well. You might find that that knee can help a little bit. But just feeling how you can free the pelvis, and notice how the pressure moves up your torso.

And I wonder if that left knee can move even a little bit leftward as the pelvis comes in the air. The left knee a little bit leftward. Would that make any sense?

Okay. The right knee is bent. The right knee stays bent.

This is a movement that infants do quite a bit, and adults don't do very much. Very empowering movement.

The right knee stays bent as you lift the pelvis a little bit in the air, and you begin to notice, can the left knee bend a little bit? For some people it goes, "What? How could that be?" And don't force it. We're experimenting.

Right now, it's very good if we can get the pelvis a little off the ground.

Okay, leave that for now. Rest comfortably on your front. If you can't be comfortable on your front, then come onto your side, or some other position.

[Silence 43 seconds]

The left knee

Just turn your head to the left. If that's not comfortable, then look forward into the floor.

And your legs are long. Just let your legs be long, and just gently begin to turn your pelvis, lifting the left side a little away, and bring it back to the floor. But feel that whole movement.

Really let the whole front of you have an intimacy with the ground, a kind of closeness to the ground, connectedness to the ground.

And as the left side of the pelvis lifts, begin to let that left knee bend, just a little bit. Bend just a little, and then lengthen again.

We want to give a chance for that bending to be spontaneous before we do it intentionally. That you can feel that the lifting of the pelvis invites a bending in the hip joint, which invites a yielding in the knee, which invites a turning in the foot. And when that kind of interrelationship is spontaneous, we are much less injury prone.

Yeah, that's one of Feldenkrais's great discoveries, that it's interrelationship throughout the human body, throughout the human being, that evokes excellent functioning and less injury.

So we're wanting to invite that connectedness all the way from the pelvis to the foot, and then gradually begin to bend the knee out to the side and then lengthen the leg, and let it begin with the pelvic movement.

And then stay with the knee out to the side. Just pause there.

Notice, with the leg bent like this, how you could get the support of your arms and your torso to lift your head. Lift your head to look around a little bit, like you were an infant interested — oh, what's over there? You look over your left shoulder. Maybe you look out in front of you. But let the pressure into the earth assist the lift.

When we're conscious of the earth force, then the head gets lighter. If we just focus on lifting, the head is quite heavy.

That's it. Let a moving connection to the earth support you. You look over your right shoulder also, in this unusual position.

That's it.

This is how you learn to strengthen your back, and prepare your back for standing, originally. This was all practice for standing. Getting the proper tone, proper freedom in your back and torso. We can recover that.

Okay, lower your head, looking leftward, and begin to experiment with how you might lift the pelvis in the air, in this position. How can your pelvis get a little bit freer from the ground?

Come in the air a little bit, and if you can get the pelvis in the air, can you move the pelvis a little leftward when it's in the air?

And if you can move it leftward, feel how the right leg can rotate and begin to bend a little bit.

That's it.

And you might even have both legs bent, and the pelvis in the air, if that feels possible.

And that's, again — you can even see little kids sometimes sleeping like this, messing around in the crib, as they're driven toward this experimenting with freeing themselves from the earth. And it's pleasurable, and it's interesting.

They giggle a lot. Or coo. It's a cooey kind of — oh. That's it.

See, is it possible that both knees can be bent, at least a little bit, at the same time? And maybe you can turn your head to the other side, and maybe even lift it a little bit, even with the pelvis in the air.

And don't force anything. These are powerful movements. You don't need to be aggressive about them.

That's it. That's nice.

Great. Great. Okay.

And pause. Rest on your front.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Crawling

Just your legs long. Slightly roll your pelvis. Lifting the right side, notice if that goes through your leg more easily. Let the leg bend just a little. And left side, let the leg bend a little, so that there's a sense that the legs are not these stiff sticks, but can actually yield, soften.

Right.

And as you move your pelvis, also lift your head, and look around. Let your pelvis and head kind of know each other. You're looking a bit left and right, and your pelvis is free to move.

That's good.

And then bring some weight onto both forearms. So let your legs be long, your weight on both forearms, your head is in the air, and in this position begin to bend your right leg out to the side, lift your pelvis a bit in the air, let your left leg bend a bit.

So you're taking weight on both knees, with your forearms on the ground. See if you can find that movement.

This is when kids begin to start their crawling kind of motions.

Just see if we can slowly allow your back, allow your brain, to remember these connections from your head to your pelvis, through your back.

So you're experimenting. You're looking around. You're getting support from your forearms. The pelvis goes up in the air. If possible, at some moments, both knees are bent and the pelvis is in the air, and you're in a kind of crawling position. Only if that's comfortable.

That's nice.

Letting your head look around, feeling how the element is willing to support you no matter what you do.

That's called unconditional support.

Okay, leave that. Come on your back and sense yourself.

[Silence 39 seconds]

Standing

Notice what it feels like throughout yourself right now. What you feel like.

And bend your legs. Lift your feet off the floor. Get hold of your knees for a moment. Just make sure there isn't too much residual, or uncomfortable pressure, in the back.

Just roll a bit left and right. That'll soften.

Now, please roll to your side. Come on up to standing.

Feel what this kind of lesson gives you in your verticality.

[Silence 34 seconds]

Of the quality of your back, the shape, the carriage, your height.

Your relationship is like earth and sky.

Move in any ways you like, and again, if any language comes for what you're experiencing, put it out.

[Participant:] Grounded feeling, yeah.

[Participant:] Responsive.

[Russell:] Like, responsive to the earth particularly, or —?

[Participant:] Both ways.

[Russell:] Both ways. An up-down responsive.

[Participant:] Balance.

[Russell:] Balance. Say it again.

[Participant:] Rippley.

[Russell:] It's interesting to observe the upwardness of the chest, and the fullness of the chest, the height of the head, as I look around.

Huh?

[Participant:] Mobile.

[Russell:] Mobile. Yeah, mobile.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Very empowering for your backs in general, the support of your head.

And it literally is a movement that infants work with, something very similar, for quite some time, as they're growing the strength in the back for standing.

[Participant:] Soft legs.

[Russell:] Soft legs.

Closing

Okay, so I would like to think what I'm motivated to do right now is explore this a little further, in the form of a — I want to set up for meditation, and I want to do a walking meditation from this space, and then a little bit of sitting also, before our dinner.

So set up for meditation. If you need the bathroom — if you think you're going to need it within the next half hour — use it now. If you don't need it significantly, please stay. And so we don't have to delay.

Is anyone missing a silver-colored ring?

Looks like — oh, is this yours?

[Participant:] Oh, I thought you were saying it.

[Russell:] You gave it to me.

[Participant:] Oh, oh, I got you.

[Russell:] Thanks.