Meditation

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 2, Session 6 — 25 minutes

Summary: Russell introduces sitting as resting in the support and in the unfolding of life, like being carried in a small boat on a gentle river. Presence means noticing thoughts, feelings, and sensations as scenery, and returning when the mind wanders. The group then sits, with brief guidance to paddle back to the breath.

Introduction

I'd like to say a few words about our sitting.

First, I encourage you, if you haven't already, to read the two articles, very brief, on sitting practice in your folders. That'll be helpful. And be nice if you could read them before tomorrow morning.

And what I want to encourage right now is the atmosphere of resting in the moment, resting in the support that's underneath us. The literal support that you can feel through your bones, through your body.

Let's turn that clicker off, we have enough heat in here. Just turn it to the left, yeah, just turn it all the way. Is it all the way? Okay, that'll go off in a sec.

So this quality of resting in the support, but it's also resting in the moment. It's gathering confidence that, beyond your will, beyond your effort, beyond your control, life unfolds, and we can rest in that unfolding.

It actually has a momentum that will carry you from moment to moment. There's actually a force that moves from moment to moment, and you can rest and be carried.

Now, it's not resting so much that you're just sleeping or just letting habit mind run around.

It's an image that some of you have heard me use that I like quite a bit. It's like you're in a small boat in a river that has a gentle current. It's a wide river, and you're being carried by the current.

And occasionally, maybe the current gets a little smaller, you need to put a little stroke in, or you're veering a little bit, you need to paddle a little bit. But mostly, you're enjoying the scenery of your life.

The scenery are the thoughts that come, the feelings that come, the sounds that come, sensations that come. Whatever appears on your journey, as you're being carried on the river of your life, is the scenery of your life.

And as we're sitting here, our intention is not to just go into dream world, but to actually be in the boat with our eyes open and noticing scenery.

And sometimes you pass through countryside that's beautiful, and sometimes you might go by a garbage dump. But since you're a world traveler, you're interested in all of it.

Have you ever done that? You travel to another country and all of a sudden things that at home are not appealing at all. Or if you're a photographer, you might get out your camera and look at the way that particular emission is going out that pipe, right?

These things get interesting when you're just living and you're open to life. When we're on this cushion, that's our attitude.

Because we are on a journey, we are being carried by the momentum of our life, we are learning to trust that movement.

And our commitment is toward presence, which means I'm gonna forget, I'm gonna fall asleep in the boat, and then the moment I wake up, my gentle encouragement is toward noticing what's true.

The breath, the weight, emphasizing the physical sensations is very helpful, but also noticing the thoughts and feelings as they come and go. It's an orientation to presence.

Now, let's say you've gotten really caught up in a story, really caught up in a plan. You're enjoying the meditation so much that you're building a meditation center. You're picking out the color of your cushions when you happen to wake up to yourself.

And you're in the middle of deciding between purple and green when you realize, oh my god, I'm in the room and I just created this whole story. Right? We're human, this is what happens, right?

So that's a moment of awakening. You just saw yourself. You just woke up. Life became conscious of life. Bam, that's what we're looking for. Life just became conscious of itself in that moment.

So we want to be there for that light going on.

And if it's a strong story, you might need to steer the boat. And steering the boat means maybe concentrate on your breath. Maybe even counting your exhales for a little while. So you give yourself a little bit more something to do to bring yourself back to the middle of the river.

And then when you're back and you're relatively present, then you stop controlling so much. Just have a gentle orientation to the breath and the ground and the sounds.

And you expect that after two seconds or ten seconds or maybe a few minutes, you're going to be captured by something. And you won't know it until you know it.

And the moment you know it, you've come awake again. And it's time to celebrate, which means turn the light on that moment. Sense how it's alive in your body.

The courage is to choose presence, to choose to return toward presence.

Sitting

Let's sit together.

[Silence 9 minutes]

Just paddle the boat back to the middle of the river. You notice that you've been captured by a thought. That moment of noticing is an awakening.

Pause, sense your body, sense where you've been, just for a moment, and then go to the ground, the next breath, sounds, something that connects you to presence.

You can count your exhales from one to five. You can even repeat that a few times, give your mind more of an anchor, or a place to settle.

[Silence 5 minutes]

And sometimes the mind just wants to entertain itself, doesn't want to come to the breath or sense the moment.

And you can just stand next to that, even for one second, and just say, I know you're there, I know you don't want to be present. So you're not fighting it, but you're also not identified with the games the mind likes to play.

That's just the conditioned mind. You were standing just next to it.

[Silence 3 minutes]