Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 3, Session 2 — 76 minutes

Summary: Russell opens a morning check-in. Participants speak of the group's care, old injury, and the edge between blame, karma, and superstition. He teaches bowing to what is, working with regret, and meeting entrenched patterns until they lose their grip. Questions of form and personal freedom follow, then logistics for an evening labyrinth.

Check-in

[Russell:] Let's just take a moment. Check in.

There was a song, I think — I don't know if it was in the seventies — but, see what condition my condition was in. When I say let's check in, sometimes you can hear that lyric in the background.

I'm wanting to check in with those who had the meeting of steel yesterday. See how it is today. How you doing, Barbara?

[Participant 1:] Well, I wanted to say something last night, but I was still just kind of scattered.

I wanted to thank everybody in the group, on such short acquaintance, for really being such wonderful friends. I was back in the room reading the book from Eugene, which I just love. And I felt like I could just feel that. I mean, I was really kind of doing my own thing, but there was around me just this very soft and alert and listening. So I really appreciate that.

And even Carl said — I mean, it was astounding, it seems, how we hardly just got — I really appreciate that. Thank you.

[Russell:] Thank you. Oh, I'm glad to hear that. Oh, yeah.

And thank you for being willing to be with your process with us. Just something that will get clearer over time, but it's a wonderful moment to point it out. The quality that you are feeling around you is exactly the quality that we're growing — how to be with our inner life from that place.

So as you were listening to the places inside that were like this or like that, it's exactly that. Welcoming, gentle, caring, warm.

And let's see. Myra. How are you doing today?

[Participant 2:] I'll comment about what Barbara said. I really appreciated your response about it as well. And it was so spontaneous, the skills that you presented. And as she was going through that, it just brought up some of my own history as well.

Yes. Having a process. And where I'm at right now, I'm still having low muscle spasms, but other than that, I think just the silence. Holding the silence in the group, and just being open to that connection between the inner and outer silence.

And if someone feels willing and happy to offer some touch work at lunchtime, would that be a good thing?

[Russell:] Okay. So if you speak to Myra, that's something.

Again, I don't want anybody to feel a sense of — well, you know, those of us who are caregivers and are always ending up in that role, because it's hard for us not to when there's need — just notice if that comes. And someone else can step up if it feels like it's one of your compulsions.

But if it feels like a genuine, oh, I really feel good to do that at lunch, go ahead. Then you can speak to Myra.

And Barbara, how are you today?

[Participant 3:] I'm great.

[Russell:] You're great today.

[Participant 3:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Oh, good.

[Participant 3:] Yeah. Just really loving that I was allowing.

CC, thank you so much, all of you that offered your healing touch. My response in those type of situations is to take care, to just step into the — I don't know. Okay, what has to be done? And it was pretty cool to look back at, and how it all just was really okay.

And I too, when I originally came to your first retreat, had just been in a car accident, and I have some rods in me, and that all sort of came back. And I got scared, you know, like, oh my God, what if I go back to this place? Which — oh my God, I could, I might not.

[Russell:] So you can notice the place inside that also has that sense of concern, fear. And it's really helpful to acknowledge that that's there. Not to just kind of say, oh, well, everything's just fine. Right?

[Participant 3:] Yeah, I know.

[Russell:] And so that's why I'm inviting that there's room for that too. It's not an either-or in our life, is what I'm encouraging. But there's actually a lot of space in there for what comes.

And how profound to say, oh, I can sense that place that's carrying fear about the rods, and how it felt back then. That still lives in it.

Hello. I know you're there.

It feels so very different when it has that greeting.

I can just underline, if I heard it correctly. I just really want to honor that there was also a place of receptivity in you. That normally you're the taking care, taking care of the situation, and there was a willingness to somehow be cared for. And that felt a little different.

[Participant 3:] Yeah.

[Russell:] And that's — we don't want to jump over that, because that's an important something there.

[Participant 3:] Yeah. And I definitely feel the special bond.

There are various ways to get bonded to people. I've had a gift from the start. And then I've had a wondering and a question since.

The gift was just to look in the mirror and find the Andy that ignores the soft, tender fears or wounds, and keeps on trucking and helping other people and just pushing. So that's a gift, to say, yeah, that lives in me too.

And then to hear you say, Russell, that that's arrogant, to keep functioning that way — was what?

[Russell:] Right. That's why I used a strong word. A strong and very judgmental word that I kicked out quite intentionally.

[Participant 3:] Thank you for that.

And the question I've been living in came from some of the processing. And it's autobiographical. It's not just yours. To what extent do I make things like that happen, or does karma make it happen?

There's a New Age thing, kind of — you bring everything yourself. For someone who's really ill, that's a pretty rough concept. I think I'm responsible for my healing, but not necessarily for — so I've been walking that edge of, in my history, what was I responsible for, or what was I just needing a strong tap from the universe for? It's a hard time not personalizing challenges.

[Russell:] Yeah. It's very, very important. So we can all feel into that edge.

Bowing to what is

[Russell:] So I so often find myself, in living, when it feels really authentic in here and I go to articulate, it is so often paradox. That the words want their other side.

I find it so helpful. In my working with my inner life, and the events that occur in my life, I find it so very helpful not to argue with what is, with what's happening.

And in that not arguing with what's happening, it doesn't mean I like it. There's lots of room for not liking. But basically, this gesture for me is a constant practice. And I really want to hear myself say it, because it's been so important for me.

A — let's say an almost constant practice feels more true, because sometimes it's forgotten for a little bit. Not for long periods anymore. Of placing what is happening — whether it's an illness, or a wonderful something, or a challenge with someone in my life — that the situation that I'm in is exactly what's happening.

Now that seems so obvious. But I notice historically how often I spent a lot of energy into, it shouldn't be happening, how did it happen, who's at fault here. And all of that assigning of stuff. And then it transformed into something a little higher, called being responsible for myself. But that still was not enough. There was something incomplete about that.

How to say it. Events are. This accident happens. We work from there, inviting as much life-givingness out of it as can come.

I don't present this as a philosophy, but as a way of inner working. When something happens, it had to happen. There's no question, because it's what's happening. Before it happens, there's many possibilities. Once it happens, this is my life. How do I show up for what is, is my work then.

I don't spend a lot of energy with the assignment of this, this, this. That in its lowest form is blame. In its higher form is being responsible. At another level, it's beyond being responsible. It's just bowing to what is. And it's even beyond co-creation. Co-creation gets close to it, for those who know the language I'm speaking a little bit. It gets close, but that's even incomplete.

It's, okay, this is what's — what kind of learning, what kind of life-givingness can come from the situation that is occurring. And that includes learning about actions that I took, statements that I made, that I can now regret, or that I can feel like, oh, if I knew what I know now, I wish I'd done that, that, and that.

Okay. May it be so for next time.

So I know how to do blame, and I know how to do responsibility, and I know how to do co-creation. But what I'm finding is — not a kind of — this is challenging to say, because I haven't articulated this before. So let me go a little bit slower, to make sure that I'm not leaving something out that's important.

Let me take an example of a recent challenging moment. A little thing.

I've been with my wife for thirty-eight years, so we've had some time to learn from each other. And the other day there was just a stuck moment. Felt — didn't like it. Didn't like the feeling I had in my body. Didn't like how I was speaking, how I was being spoken to. It was just kind of —

And as I was investigating it, and I just went walking for a little bit before I said I'd be coming back to work with her, I could hear the voices of blame. It was, oh, if she wouldn't do this, and —

And then, of course, when you've been on a path and you've seen that for a while, you don't give a whole lot of energy to that, because you know it's not a reliable mind state.

So then I go to the place inside that's carrying that voice. And invariably, as was true in this case, that's a hurt place that's protecting something. Right? So I'm with that place. And as soon as I'm with that place, the energy of blame changes.

And then there's some other place there. I'm recollecting this little journey I did a few days ago. Some sort of, oh, how I was responding in that situation. And didn't actually go to blame there, but went immediately into regrets.

And regret — I find regret very helpful, actually. Regret for me is very helpful, because when I feel regret, I can work with it. I can take that moment and see what's the learning that wants to come, in this moment that I wished I had the capacity to function differently, if I knew what I know now, kind of thing. So I can take that moment of regret.

And let me do a footnote here. Some of you have heard me talk about this. I don't find, when one goes towards something like shame or self-blame — I find that when those are transformed into

this quality called regret, those same states become much more workable. Much more elucidating. Much more full of a forward movement.

Okay, that's a footnote.

So there's this regret of, oh, something — a tone of voice, a way of reactivity — and could be with all of that. And then there's a capacity to meet again. And there might still be some sense of wariness, as there was.

But what's gone is the assignment of fifty percent, or thirty-four percent your responsibility, sixty-seven percent my responsibility. It was a little bit mine, but it was mostly yours. It was mostly mine, but it was a little bit yours. Right? Those of you who are in couples know what I'm talking about.

So the calculations begin to become irrelevant. And what's left is, here's a situation. That's my life. This is my living moment. And how can I enter this living moment?

Not as if I'm a victim, that it's happening to me, or as if I created it. All of that stuff looks like a side issue to, how do I live with it effectively?

So I changed the whole topic of conversation, from laws of attraction and creation and all that stuff that I'm kind of suspicious about, into — life occurs, and I'm going to bow deeply to the occurring that's occurring, and work with that, from that, for that.

So I don't know if that speaks to it for you.

[Participant 3:] Yeah.

Superstition and old patterns

[Participant 3:] I think that's a slightly different angle, in a way that I've had some confusion around. I mean, there's this concept of karma.

And I think we're all familiar with the concept of karma, and find something helpful in there. You know, what goes around comes around. But I've noticed in myself, or in other people, that it kind of borders on superstition. And getting stuck there.

I understand what you're saying. Just basically keep it simple. This is it. But my observation of what I'm realizing is more superstition in myself than a true understanding of karma, or than a real being with what is. It's just something I've been noticing. It's been interesting.

[Russell:] Let me see if I'm getting it right. So when I'm talking about just being with what is, if I don't assign causality, then that's not falling into the superstition of karma. Is that true?

[Participant 3:] I'm not saying the superstition of karma. I'm saying superstition and karma are two different things. That karma isn't superstition.

[Russell:] Right. I gotcha. But that we can treat it that way.

[Participant 3:] Yes.

[Russell:] Yes. It becomes a kind of belief, and a kind of — yeah. And I get uncomfortable around that.

[Participant 3:] Right. And I think you're saying a similar thing. But it's this fuzzy thing that I can't always — I don't always land on, oh, that's superstition. It's not, because I carry, from my past and

my family and their family — I'm realizing there's so much deep-rooted superstition in people's beliefs and behaviors.

[Russell:] Yeah. And you're really questioning those. Really wanting to question. I support you in that.

For me at this point — and this is not true for everybody, but for some people it's really important to know where things come from. And I used to have that. But I feel I don't have the time for that anymore. There's too much pain. There's too much suffering.

You know, it's kind of that beautiful Buddha quote. When you get shot with an arrow, you're not sitting there going, I wonder who made this arrow. I wonder what kind of wood it's made out of. I wonder what kind of bow they shot it with. And I wonder why they shot it. You want to do everything you can to get that arrow out.

And I would say that that's closer for me.

[Participant 3:] This is, I think, very similar. But it's my own process that I'm struggling with.

[Russell:] Yes. Right.

[Participant 3:] And it's — I have this default thinking. And as I'm learning this process, and I become awake, I go, oh, I'm thinking that. So, oh, this is a memory. Or oh, this is planning. Or this is whatever.

[Russell:] Oh, I'm so happy to hear that. I'm so happy to hear that. Oh, it comes.

[Participant 3:] But this default state that I find myself in is this state of fear, and this catastrophizing.

For instance, I walked up the hill, and several times I found myself having been bitten by a snake, and going to the hospital, and maybe having some sort of karmic, you know, shamanic vision from it, or whatever. Or attacked by a cougar. And I go, okay, this is really irritating. I don't want to spend my time in this state of fear.

But I guess I don't know where. And if I fight against it, it becomes stronger. If I accept it, it doesn't seem to go away. It's that I continue to default back.

[Russell:] Right. Yeah.

So first, I'm just so happy that you're seeing all that. And please don't minimize that.

Would you like some ideas for that?

First I want to say that most of us have certain default patterns that are likely to be around a very long time.

I can also say that these default patterns are not just one thing, in the sense that the default pattern of catastrophizing could be around for the rest of your life at very different levels of intensity.

So very often, with our deep old conditioning, what I've noticed is these patterns will be around in the background. But as we work with ourselves, as the awareness grows, they get less and less energy. It's kind of like a deflated balloon.

So you had this big monster balloon, and the air began to come out of it. So now it's trying to be real secure. It's trying to be like it was when it was full of air. But now — and so you're looking

at this thing, and it's still annoying that it's there. Something gets annoyed about it. But it's like, hello. Oh, you're here. Oh, hello, hello, hello.

And really, we need even more. Well, hello, you're here. Oh, what do you — and you engage it, actually. What would you like me to hear now?

Almost like it's this being that was very, very powerful, and it's now kind of in a wheelchair or something. It's trying to do its power thing, but —

Okay. So you have a different relationship with it. The way it could provoke so much fear begins to shift. And that's, rather than getting rid of — if it happens to be one that leaves, great. But what we want to do is get into such relationship with it that it just loses its intensity. And the energy that's in it gets liberated for a life-giving function. Because we want every bit of your life energy functioning for your life.

Okay? So the neutralizing liberates some, but you still need to be able to relate to this quality.

Let me give you another way that's really helpful, and it's going to sound really strange, and maybe unimaginable at times. Is to actually find a way of playing with it.

What that means is — oh my God, a cougar? Oh, really? Oh, maybe there's one over there, and maybe there's one over there. And exaggerate the hell out of it, until it's really hard for you even to take yourself seriously.

So most of you know I was a rigorous Zen student for some years. And in the beginning, in the first, oh, ten years or so, I was very macho Zen. And I would say every time I sat, or almost every time I sat, I would spend at least half the time in sexual fantasy. On and on and on. And years.

And then could get into it, and see it, and want — and struggling with it. Not an easy state. And working, you know, from my teacher's point of view, it's just, be with what comes, be with what comes, be with what comes.

And so what I began to find — so that's maybe the first ten years. So the next ten years, I start noticing that the pattern wants to be there, but it doesn't have the energy in it. But before I knew it didn't have the energy in it, I treated it as if it was the same.

I want you to get this. The pattern would arise. The reaction to it would be as if it was this overwhelming pattern. And by reacting to it that way, it became stronger. Its actual energy in itself was not that great. It was my hatred of it, my reaction to it, my, okay, now I've really got to work with — even my working with it energized it.

So I needed to go to another level of being with the pattern, and see that, oh, it's coming forth in the same shape, but like a shadow of its former self. And the moment I treated it like an enemy, like I did, it went from shadow to fully formed. The moment I was seeing it, how it was, it went from shadow to disintegration.

And so fascinating to see that the pattern was there, but it was not one thing. It was overwhelming at times. It was turned to ash at other times.

Okay. So these patterns are workable. And I want to encourage, first, just the awareness, like you're doing. This maybe being with it a little bit more. Sensing into it. Relating with it. And maybe even playing with it, exaggerating some of the ways of being with it.

There's something else that wants to come about that.

Of course, this is good ground for feeling. The reactions to it. The different ways — the reaction, the tired of it, the angry at it. So we want awareness somewhat differentiated into the ways our organism responds to these patterns.

This is the last thing I want to say. Most of our patterns, as deeply personal as they feel, are universal. So it doesn't mean that everybody has them. But my pattern was — you know, probably fifty million beings are working with a similar energy. Maybe dominantly male energy, maybe, but with a similar manifestation of pattern. And the sense of, I'm working with it for them also, and with them also.

This is very important for working with personal pain. Personal pain is not just personal.

That when we can be with that — oh, like I used to tell some people. That moment of, let's say someone's dealing with insomnia, difficulty to sleep, is really having trouble with it, really not liking it. And one could be awake and not struggling with it, but one could be awake and really hating it.

So I don't want to go into the whole approach to that. But the point that I'm making about it right now is, what if in being there you also know that there are millions and millions of people in Africa, in Asia, and in North Carolina, in Canada, who right now are trying to sleep and struggling. There was some sense of, I'm with you, sister, with you, in this particular suffering.

So it's a very helpful step for a lot of us. It's not going to be helpful for everybody. But for a lot of us, to recognize that what we experience is both personal and completely not personal. We are an instancing of a kind of pattern that lives in humanity, and we are bringing it toward consciousness.

Now here's a little bit of superstition. For me, that feels — this is one that's feeling accurate in my world — that my working with my individual patterns has benefit for other people.

Some of that benefit is direct, where I'm interacting differently with people, so they can feel that. But some of it has this indirect effect, that I actually believe that as we work with our patterns, we make it easier for others to work with the same kind of pattern. It's like we share mind.

Now this is not superstition. This I know, that we share mind, is — the belief system. I'm using belief system. Superstition, sign off.

I'm saying that I do believe it's true. And I'm differentiating the part that I know about. The part I know about is that we share mind. The part that I'm hypothesizing about is that when we work with these entrenched mind states, other people benefit who have a similar mind state. That we're actually working for future generations with those same patterns.

I can't prove that right now, so I call that a belief. And for me, belief merges — one could call it superstition. I don't call it superstition, but one could.

That's not what you were referring to. Yeah, so I'll just call it a belief.

[Participant 3:] I think that in the New Age, we don't talk about — the word superstition's really fallen away, and it's sort of become belief.

[Russell:] Yeah. That's good. And important, I think.

[Participant 3:] But people then, once it becomes belief, they've forgotten the distinction.

[Russell:] Good.

[Participant 3:] I mean, and this kind of holds for that stuff that's on the edge of our experience, that we're maybe a little scared of. Or like, if I do this, that will happen. You know, like I have to cross myself before doing it. And how much — like that's where I get scared.

[Russell:] Yeah. It's a really good place to question. It's a really good place. What's helpful in that, and what just creates more fear.

[Participant 3:] Yeah. Thank you.

[Russell:] Yeah. And I think it's a really important — I mean, it's part of what I rail against in a lot of New Age circles, and when I'm in certain kinds of environments. That certain things are just accepted without the rigors of investigation, we could say.

But at the same time, and you're helping make these distinctions, there is something. The point I'm wanting to make right now, that is very authentic from my experience, is that we influence each other in our inner work. And to call that forth, for many of us, eases the burden of our own patterns.

First, that it eases some of the shame we carry about our patterns, because we're not — there are millions of people working with the same thing. So that's helpful.

That my capacity to be with this painful moment might be of benefit to another. What happens in my body is a widening and a connecting, an opening. Whereas when I'm stuck in my painful states, I most of the time feel separate and isolated.

That's part of the great challenge of chronic pain. And it's also the challenge of whether it's mental pain or physical pain. Is that sense of isolation, that no one really knows what it's like to be me. And that feeling of separateness from the rest of the world — this can be so devastating. And so for me, and again, it's not simply a kind of opium that I'm giving myself to make myself feel better. There is a way that this works, in my experience.

There's something coming from — for me, that feels really important. Go ahead, Lori.

[Participant 4:] I understand what you're saying, and I can just embrace it so easily.

The part — and there's a part of me, and this is the really important piece, that wonders. I'm going to bring back what Alex said. How do I embrace it without being arrogant, about that I in some way may be powerful, or — I have this block there that keeps me from reaching out and embracing sometimes, because I don't want to come off as powerful.

[Russell:] That's the superstition. That's the superstition. This kind of first belief that we can't even articulate, that if I do this, something will happen. You know, something bad.

[Participant 4:] You know, if I feel, bad will happen. I accept that. I have this feeling towards other people that are in New Age stuff, that a lot of times I go, that's hokey. I don't want to be there. That's sort of like, if I'm powerful, am I going to be hokey?

[Russell:] Right. So you feel that concern about that.

Okay, so I'd like to make a deal with you. I have the sense that over our years together, you've gotten to trust me.

[Participant 4:] I do.

[Russell:] I'll tell you if you're getting hokey. I'll tell you if you're getting arrogant. I promise.

[Participant 4:] Okay.

[Russell:] Okay. So let it go. Let it fly.

[Participant 4:] Okay. Yeah, that works.

The edge of preference

[Participant 5:] So when you were talking about assigning blame versus assigning responsibility, and in the end, just the working toward not doing that. And I thought, oh, that's wonderful. You know, my first reaction was how wonderful not to have to be involved in all of that.

And then what I noticed is, right in here, in the solid places where I feel my fear, is scary. It's really scary.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yes. Yes. Oh, yeah. Oh, thank you.

And I really encourage you to be with that place, because it has the feeling of stepping off. Into an unknown place.

I mean, what I've discovered after lots of stepping off — and it's still scary — but what I've discovered after lots of stepping off. Trungpa — Trungpa Rinpoche put it this way. We feel like we're stepping off a cliff, and then once we step off, we find out it was a curb.

You know, when you step off a curb and don't know it's there, there's a moment where you feel like you're falling, and then the ground is right there, and you go, oh, it's okay. Right? But there's that moment where it feels like you don't know how high you are. Right?

So yeah. This is a good edge. I don't want to — I want to encourage you to keep coming back to that feeling, and to the sentence, or the way to bring it about. Blame and response. If I'm not blaming, and — okay. What does it mean to really —

Let's not make assumptions that it means I'm completely this way or completely that way. But let's just say, what would it look like to be truly bowing to the truth of my life from moment to moment? That that has priority over my preferences. That's the big moment.

That's — the third patriarch in Zen, this was his whole story. He put it more extremely. The way he put it was, the great way is not difficult, just cease having preferences.

That's a little difficult. But what we can go for, us ordinary people, can really go for — we can't cease being attached to our preferences. I'm all for preferences. I'm all for desire. I'm all for wanting. And I'm looking at what happens when I insist on that. When I hold fast to that. When I say, unless life shows up this way, I'm not playing. Right? We all know that.

That's what I'm talking about. Is how can I bow. And the bowing includes the place that wants it different. The place that hates it. We don't have to get pretty inside about all this. You get what I

mean? There's room for it. And the gesture is, okay, this is what I'm working with. I'm not going to spend my energy fighting that this is what's true.

I know. And you get enough experience that very quickly it becomes the next step of your journey. And you look back and go, oh, that led me to that. Somehow there's an unwinding that we can actually look upon.

Forms and freedom

[Participant 6:] So, before I ask this question, my heart is going. So it's really recognizing that the question I ask of you is in that place where I am yet. And so I'm very aware of that.

So yesterday you spoke of methods, and you've shared with us the universal mudra, and sitting in certain ways, and — my full opportunity in what I went to bed with last night. You know what I went to bed with last night. So that's a story that I manage as I speak.

It kind of feels like an elusive paradox. The — I didn't forget it — the pronouns and the cross. I can't say it. The frustration. Do they become meaningful before I get it? What — am I going?

So in a very simple way. If I sit like this, and you're sitting like this, the master sits like this, and I'm sitting like this, so they show up, and I can't seem to get my left thigh down. So I'm not looking the part. You know, I'm kind of looking my part as I bring — but if I don't want the part, am I missing that? If this really doesn't give me the meaning that you teach me, shall I continue to do it?

These are just random kind of questions. Are they another form of the orange robe?

And then the pattern that I bring to many of these wonderful experiences is, I'm pretty — I don't do patterns really well, I guess. I do horrible drumming. Very random jazz playing, because I don't hold patterns super well. I don't seem to grasp.

And so I take myself to the most loving, soft place, because I'd rather sit with softness than something that — which is just, love it. Love it, be with it, it's okay.

The temperament that I came in with. And at some point I don't want to meet my hardness with you, or with anybody here that finds the great calm moment in the pranam, or in the bow.

Creativity and habit, you know. I guess if we don't have habit, creativity can't take form. You know, if creativity's form can't evolve, or something. So there's a real vulnerable place inside, and you can't figure out this whole — and I love what Barbara said about superstition.

And when I was feeling your suffering yesterday, of that watery belt of flux and water, you know, because my whole story is, I'm hoping we are moving to the essence of all of this rather than the form. And yet the form does keep me tethered, like a balloon to the earth.

But I know this is something big, because my heart's going. And whenever I bring this, like, here's the oppositional defiant one. Not pretty good. My way. I'm trying to be really mindfully, lovingly intelligent about it.

[Russell:] Right. Yeah. Great.

Yeah. It's a really important edge of investigation. And I hear how alive that gets for you. And it's one that I've been dancing with also, for many, many years. And I guess we each will work our way through it.

I know, or I sense from your questioning, that you've experienced, or sense, that there can be value in forms. And we don't want to lose that. And we don't want to be stuck in an old something imposed upon. Right?

And I share the question. I think you articulated it very well.

[Participant 7:] For some of my being, my journey is to discover kind of my original nature. Very simple.

You know, my experience — yes, it was kind of funny, because I think the question was, share a pleasurable moment of the day. A moment that you felt touched. A moment that touched you.

It was really interesting, because I couldn't share that. Because why — conditioned self always takes me back to my mind. Automatic. Because I don't know my original name. Right. That's a whole other story altogether, to be bothered.

But the experience was that my experience was color. And when the five o'clock sun hit these two trees, it was a real experience. Yeah. But that's not what I said. What I said was, I reverted to my self.

So the point I'm trying to make is that when I bring my conditioned self to this group, I'm kind of caught. Because my conditioned self didn't embrace as much the New Age philosophy, or the vocabulary, or the experience, or the ahas that some people have. And I'm not discounting. I'm just saying.

So, somewhat similar to what you're saying now. On the other hand, I think I need to know that I have to move away from my convictions, though, to find my true nature, or whatever.

[Russell:] Yes. Yeah.

[Participant 7:] So it's this fine line of faith. I'm kind of hanging in there. Didn't work the old way.

[Russell:] Yeah. Thank you.

[Participant 7:] Not sure where it fits, and where it's going to go, and am I going to get one of those ahas this week, or maybe next time. Right. That's my point.

[Russell:] I think you articulated well what you were trying to say. Thank you, Bob.

And I'm so happy that you also noticed the moment of the light and the color, and that that's in your experience. Yeah. So I'm really appreciating all of this. This is an edge, you know?

Yeah, go ahead, Robert. Yeah, go ahead with one more, and then I'll say something.

[Participant 9:] Well, I wanted to say something about that.

[Russell:] Okay, so let me just bring something there.

I am here really committed to your freedom. Your freedom.

That can end up looking different than the ways that I — I certainly don't want you to try to be like I am. In terms of those of you who end up teaching this kind of work, or, you know, I'm not wanting to model a personality, or model a type or something. Do you know what I mean? That's not it.

And for me, there's this edge of looking towards skillful means. Looking for expedient means, to bring people as deeply and as authentically as possible to themselves, in the ways that I know how.

So I'm on this edge of absolutely bowing to your own freedom. And you can choose not to have the mudra. I'm not going to come around and say you gotta have the mudra. I'm going to encourage you to feel it, at least for a few months, and then make a decision.

Same with a prostration practice. I don't think it's good to decide after a few days, unless you have something inside that says, this really doesn't feel okay for me. Honor that. That's more important than what I say. Don't override that. And then, if it's okay, just do a standing bow. Not just stand. Find a way to be a part of the group, in a way that feels like you're in touch with your own integrity.

Yeah? And if it feels like, well, I don't know if this is any good, but I don't hate it — it seems I'm not transgressing myself to do it — then part of our deal is, you're signing up to learn something. There's something that's attracted to what I'm bringing. And it won't be everything that I'm bringing, but it's something that I'm bringing. And so I suggest trying on the practices, and seeing what works in your inner experience, and communicate with me about it.

And I will not — it's hard for me to picture demanding that you do something, or trying to demand, you know? I have too much respect that each person in this room is a free being, and I am here in service to that.

[Participant 6:] Yeah. I miss that. I miss the connection.

[Russell:] Right. Yeah.

And that's really a lot of where I'm coming from, in repeating certain what feel to me like human gestures. My understanding of the human nervous system, and how that connects to human experience and motor patterns, and what happens. And just watching, being around some great beings, and watching how practice has shaped their body, and shaped the field around their body.

And I am one who — this will perhaps surprise you — I am one who is very reluctant to take on forms. So, for example, at the Zen center I was at, most people start wearing their black robes after about six months of being a student. And I waited fifteen years. And that was with requests every year from my teacher to start wearing my robes. But I didn't want to join the club.

So I've got a very strong aspect of that. And then found that wearing the robes made a difference.

I was with my wife — we lived together, had our money together, were monogamously sexual for ten years before I could get to the point of a legal marriage.

What I'm saying is, for me, the cultural forms, there's something inside that goes, no, no, no, no, no, we can get there without this. And I worked with it. And I have found that there are forms that accelerate the path. Unless they transgress a given individual.

And most of the time, the people they transgress won't work with me in that. You know? So what I'm putting out there is — I relate to the concerns.

[Participant 8:] Just one quick thing, real quick, and then Rob will. Ease up, because it's on this. Okay.

And Shannon, thank you for bringing this up, because it gives me great excitement and joy to know that you presenced that, which was a huge thing for me, and I think for a lot of us here. That there's really conscious thought in the smaller things. You know, that we're not just — I mean, to me, it's something very, very profound and important.

You know, I'm considering this to be a very important part of my life, spending three years with everyone here. And to not just do it because we're told to do it, but to really — thank you for bringing that here, and making my experience with all of you more real.

[Russell:] Thank you, Tom.

[Participant 9:] Okay. I found recently that which constellates all my responses to life, perhaps. So even when I think I'm working with something, it's still coming from that fear.

And so, somewhat recently, I have found myself having that fear up. And because I've let it go on for so long, I was able to get rid of it. And just hit the block.

[Russell:] Oh, yeah.

[Participant 9:] But I've also noticed, even to this day, I've held on to the idea of how hard it is.

[Russell:] Let go. That's it. Just to the point. Right. And I'm glad — I'm going to agree with you.

[Participant 9:] Yeah. If I do these practices, probably it'll nibble away. And that's a way of working with them here, rather than holding onto this identity. I've done that for so long.

[Russell:] Yes. Oh, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. Yes.

This move. This radical move that we'll be working with every day. Of being able to turn the light around. Being able to stand next to any of the patterns, and meet them with warmheartedness. And dance with, and hold hands with, and jump up and down, and whatever is needed to not be in the pocket, controlled by. And not needing even to get rid of it, but being able to give it a cup of tea.

That is a radical move of human freedom. And I will stand with everyone in this room to say we are each capable of it.

Even those of us who feel like, well, but it goes back so very far, how could I possibly not be kind of run by that pattern. Well, this radical move of being able to be a presence for it. Witness it. Stand next to it. Get pulled in, but not for very long, before you have enough signs in your body that you've disconnected from who you are. And the sign gets present enough, and it's like a bell goes off. And you learn how to be with that particular conditioning, that particular suffering, that particular fear.

[Participant 9:] Yeah. Right. Thank you.

[Russell:] Yeah.

Evening plans

[Russell:] Well, see, we're not going to get to my talk this morning. Or my other talk.

Damn it. The whole day's messed up now.

This came as actually a talking mercy. And it was transformative. And you ended up next to your fear. And questioning all forms, but feeling comfortable with it. You never know.

Okay, so we're going to go into some movement, because I often feel a shift when we've been sitting for a while, and there are other processes that I hope to get to today.

Let me, before we do that, make just an announcement, so you know this is happening. A couple of logistical things.

One is, we have a special event this evening that I'm excited to have.

[Participant:] Huh?

[Russell:] Oh, thank you — oh my, there is the SWAT team today. Thank you. That's right. So if you hear any funny things, or see anybody running around in the grass, it's okay.

So this evening, after dinner, we're going to caravan over to what's called Sophia's Sanctuary, which is the teaching facility on my property.

And my wife Linda, who's a teacher of meditation and of other forms of movement, has created, over the holidays, a really incredible labyrinth.

And it's quite — the building itself is quite potent, in that it was built — we have imagined this building for thirty-five years. Thirty-five years ago, we lived one mile away from this building, from this property. Thirty-five years ago — thirty-eight, no, thirty-six years ago — we lived right near this building, in a barn near this property. Blue Trail Valley Road, we lived on.

And then we moved to San Francisco, then moved to Philadelphia, and then traveled around the world for two years, and lived in Massachusetts, and then lived in Marin County, and lived in Sonoma. And then three years ago, bought this property that was a mile away from the place we were thirty-five years ago, where we first had the imagination of building a teaching facility like this.

So it's a real, for our biography, quite an important moment. And so it was really created from love and from care. And Linda has an understanding of what's called sacred geometry, which are the relationship of widths and heights and lengths. So it's built according to certain principles.

And in the ground there are — this is real superstition — in the ground there are crystals, and Buddhas, and the Heart Sutra. But it's a potent place. And we've done practices from the ground up, and it is a wonderful space to be in. Andy's actually played piano — and he plays beautiful piano — but won't be playing today. But it's a beautiful space to be in.

So I wanted you to experience this space. But most incredibly is this labyrinth has a real something to it. I don't know how many of you have walked labyrinths. Linda will introduce you to it.

You can walk it with a question in your heart. You can walk it with nothing. There's no rules about it. Linda will describe the kind of walking in and walking out. It could be that something comes to you. It could be that it's just a nice, quiet meditation. But it's because it's there. I asked her to keep it. She has classes starting, and she was going to take it down. I said, you know, keep it up. I'd really like my group to be able to, at the beginning of our journey, have this experience.

[Participant:] Excuse me — it's an inside labyrinth?

[Participant:] Over the next three years, Russell, will you be leading us in the labyrinth?

[Russell:] I'll be following you, Pete.

So I have — Pete will be a driver. Andy will be a driver. There's Andy. Valerie will be a driver, and I need probably three or four other cars.

We have one, two, three, four. No — okay, four. So I'd like to have at least four in each car. Five total. Okay, so we have — and then we need one more. Oh, wait, we have Valerie. I'm sorry. We might. So that might — but okay, so one.

So when we get together at lunchtime — I don't want to do it right now, because it's going to take a little time. When we come back after lunch, we're going to each get together with a car and make sure we have enough people in the cars.

I have directions I'll be handing out for the drive, and you'll be leaving here promptly at six-thirty. So you'll probably meet downstairs about six-twenty. Dinner's at five-thirty. You'll meet downstairs around six-twenty, be in the cars by six-thirty. It's a little under a half hour. Let's call it a half hour to my house, so we want to start at seven, at the house.

Okay. Let's take our pause.