Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 4, Session 4 — 42 minutes

Summary: Russell invites questions from the morning practice and speaks about embodied listening, the wisdom body, and pauses that let something fresh be known. Participants share being heard in the body and confusion in a partner exchange. He stays with one person's sadness, then clarifies how speaker and listener can work, and how embodied images influence behavior.

Embodied listening

[Russell:] So, are there questions, or something that could be sharing? Could be questions that want to come from the practice before lunch, before we switch over. Any confusions, any particular discoveries that might like to be voiced right now?

Yeah, please.

[Participant 1:] Yes.

[Russell:] Oh, thank you for saying that. I want to really underline that.

One of the qualities that we're working with right now, in this movement of embodied listening, is learning how to listen to our inner life. As I'll talk about more another time, it's quite clear to me that there is access to incredible wisdom in what some of you have heard me call the wisdom body, or our inner life, when it's related to in a certain way.

And how do we kind of decode its language? It's not that it's — well, you can't think it. It's not thinking. Well, it includes thinking. It includes feeling. It includes sensing. It includes a unique integration of all that, received in a certain environment, a certain welcoming ambiance.

So the work we're doing in our sitting — of welcoming whatever comes and sitting with it, not trying to fix it, make it better, but just acknowledging what's there, with a gentle inclination towards the present moment. We are practicing this kind of welcoming, or open-hearted relationship to what's occurring. And so this is a ground — oh, what do I want to call it — an attitude of all the practices we do.

When we go deeper into this kind of what I call embodied listening, it needs pauses. Because at a certain point in our speaking, we're telling our story that we already know.

For a while, something can be fresh and can be congruent at all levels, and the voice that is speaking is in touch with what's living in the feeling centers — mainly the chest, the brain that lives in here, and the brain that lives in here is in harmony with the brain that lives in here. That's called integration.

When one is speaking from the — and that's not just metaphor. There is a dense enough collection of neurons in our belly and in our chest that these can be spoken of as brains. They have the

capacity for learning. It's not just this that tells this what to do, but there are actually networks of neuronal tissue that change behavior and feed back to what's going on in here. But it's not just one way. And this is quite an exciting discovery.

So this is not new age blah blah. This is people talking about how this center learns new behaviors. How the belly — these centers are very connected to our feeling life.

But by feeling life, we don't only mean what has come to be, in this culture, quite a bit of getting carried away in your emotions or in your feelings, but the intelligence that's communicating from the organism. The intelligence often about survival issues that are coming from here, and about connection issues, heart issues, relationship issues that are often vibrating through here. It's not exclusive, but often a dominance.

And as we learn the language of not only these places, but what the integrated language feels like, it often needs — okay, wait a second, I need to get it fresh.

And it's amazing when that is allowed. And then when that becomes part of conversations with intimate others. Because most of our conversations, in my experience with others, we tell them what we already know about what we're experiencing. But what's happening in the interaction can't come forward, because we're still a few minutes or seconds or hours behind what's actually happening.

But we need the pause. Wait a second, something doesn't feel right.

The greatest contribution I made — I do a little bit of consulting work with companies, and it usually comes from somebody who's working individually with me, who's a CEO or a vice president in a company, and they invite me in to work with their staff. And it's been very interesting, the times that I've done that.

And the greatest contribution I think I made to this one company was the permission to say, something doesn't feel right, and I don't know what it is. That — that was legal around the table.

You can't believe how much creativity was liberated when that became legitimate. We actually practiced everybody saying that, and they felt silly, and they felt stupid. The other really challenging thing I did was I had them turn off their BlackBerrys and their computers and actually look at each other. I was on the edge there.

But this — when, in our coupling, in our groups, when it can — huh. You know, something new is coming. I'm not — I need a minute here. What I'm saying doesn't feel just right.

I love when my inner life doesn't like what my mouth is saying. It's an update. It's like, hot off the press. Cancel that. Cancel. Where's the eraser? That used to be true. It was true when I started the conversation.

So I so appreciate it, because again, we are right now in our process learning certain basic skills that we'll then be bringing into ways of being with difficult states, ways of being with other people, ways of being with bodily states.

It's a whole atmosphere around listening that begins with an unconditional welcoming, and cultivating. How do we learn unconditional welcoming when everyone in this room has tremendous habits of judging everything? Right? So that's an edge for all of us.

And the pausing. Okay, what feels true right now?

Yeah, that's a great gift. Thank you.

Yeah, it's alive. It's just like your hands are saying — it pulses, it has life.

Yeah, great. That's part of why I love the biological connection to our spiritual life, or to our emotional life, that it's pulsing, it's living — to our thinking life. That's where creative thought really comes forth.

Hearing with the whole body

[Russell:] You had something.

[Participant 2:] Yeah, I just wanted to share that hearing the words coming back to me was really powerful for me. And maybe that had something to do with her Aussie accent. It made it seem like a GPS kind of sizzle.

[Russell:] Okay, good. Well, I recognize — that's great.

[Participant 2:] But it was really — it didn't feel — I was, you know, initially there were thoughts of, when my partner says things, am I going to feel a little rushed? Am I going to feel a little pushed into something?

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 2:] And I really felt heard, because I didn't feel rushed at all. It actually made me sink deeper down into it.

And then the final one, which I think was, I have all I need right now, or something along those lines. It was like just a bucket of water had been poured over my head, and goosebumps just went through my body. And I sat with that for a few minutes, and then I said, say it again.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 2:] She said it again, and it was like, yeah. Right.

[Russell:] Oh, I love that. I love it. That's such an exquisite example of hearing with your whole body.

[Participant 2:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Oh, sweet. Thank you.

Something else want to come?

Staying with what is here

[Russell:] Well, actually, let me ask this question before we go on. Is anybody feeling a little bit lost? Like, people seem like they're doing it, and I can't find what he's talking about, really. I'm not sure, because it can be hard to say.

[Participant 3:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Which part?

[Participant 3:] This is a difficult moment where it didn't seem to work for me at the time. There's a lasting feeling of, well, feeling guided and —

[Russell:] Say it again.

[Participant 3:] Needing, and —

[Russell:] Do you have a sense of what that more is?

So, were you speaking? You were speaking, and something inside was wanting something more. Is that it? Do you have a sense of what that more is?

[Participant 3:] And then when it came back in reflection, that's when I felt I got lost in how I was heard. And I think I wasn't sure if it was something with the process, or something with my misinterpretation of the process.

[Russell:] Okay, so what was your interpretation?

[Participant 3:] So — you got more words than were helpful.

[Russell:] Yeah. Something. Right.

[Participant 3:] You know, I'm in the caregiving, and I'm defaulted into many different places that I really don't want to be anymore.

[Russell:] Great. Good, good, good. Thank you for bringing it.

And let's go slow and look at all that comes. Yeah. So, how is that living right now? We'll just kind of check in and see how that's alive right now.

What are you sensing in your body?

[Participant 3:] Sadness.

[Russell:] Sadness.

Is there a location to that? Does that feel all over, or a particular place?

[Participant 3:] It's in here.

[Russell:] Some kind — yeah, let your hand be there if that feels right. There's some kind of sadness in here, and let that place know you're with it.

And just kind of very gently feel how it might like you to be with it, so that it can feel welcomed and met.

[Participant 3:] Always.

[Russell:] Oh, okay. So stay with it. Stay with it. Just let it bring this soft, open feeling towards it. Let it know you're here.

See if there's more it would like you to know about. What kind of sadness it is.

[Silence 31 seconds]

[Russell:] Yeah, so let it know. Check in with it, and right with it, and just check with it. Almost like you're repeating it back to it.

Am I right that you're something about truth — being with truth, and feeling safe to be with the truth? Something about that. See if it resonates with that, or if it wants to be known in some other way.

[Participant 3:] It wants something else to be known.

[Russell:] So really receive that.

[Participant 3:] But it also wants to know. It really wants to be listened to.

[Russell:] Really let it know you hear it.

Really take your time. Let this place know: I really hear how important being listened to is, with you.

And — is that place saying that, and I accept it?

[Participant 3:] I see.

[Russell:] Right.

So stay in there. Would it be accurate to say that the "and" lives in a little bit of a different place than the solar plexus? That there's room in there for other things. There's the "and" — I accept it exactly as it is — but yeah, there's an and. That includes what's up here, and there's still room for the place down there that really wants to be listened to.

And so let both of those places know they're welcome here.

And just, if it feels right, notice that place that was carrying the sadness. What it is right now. What it's like in there.

[Silence 32 seconds]

[Russell:] The sensation in the solar plexus — what's that like there?

[Participant 3:] It's open there.

[Russell:] Great. And just take a moment to feel how you can appreciate that your body is so alive, and so willing to communicate, and when listened to, it actually shifts and moves.

Just a moment of thanking your body for its capacity and its wisdom.

And the message that you really intend to listen well to your direction — that you'll be back to listen more.

Feel like a place we can stop right now?

And just really let yourself have that. Let your attention open out a bit more, where you hear the sounds, and when you're ready, open your eyes and come back in.

[Participant 3:] Thank you.

[Russell:] Yeah. A lot living there.

Thank you.

I just want to say, for all of us — hopefully when we do these kind of spontaneous processes, you know that what we're working with is examples of the ways of listening we want to learn to do with ourselves and with another.

It's this amazing thing, that the knowing is already in the body when it gets a certain kind of environment. And I try to help you give yourself that environment.

And when you meet it with this kind of discernment and caring, and really — oh, that's the way it is. How can I be with you? What do you need? Oh, to really listen.

And when it really feels hurt, it goes — always. Life, when it's feeling confused, hurt, upset, estranged, always begins to contract.

When life is feeling really welcomed, heard, understood, cared for, it begins to — you can see this in amoebas. We put one in an environment where there's some nourishment around it, and its boundaries grow like this. As soon as you give an astringent near it, it pulls. And this is cellular. It's not our imagination.

But we are now bringing that into how I actually interact with what's alive in me, in a way that respects its life forward movement, that it wants to open. It needs a supportive environment for that. And that's not just theoretical. It's quite specific.

And there's room for different things to be alive at the same time. And that's beautiful.

Thank you. Thank you.

Are you needing anything right now?

[Participant 4:] I feel kind of put on the spot too.

I recall we did this in December, and that sent us a message. And you were around our group, and you kept saying, stop telling this story, you know, get out of the story. I think I was doing it with a partner on that occasion.

And I certainly didn't mean to offend you, or try to impose something analytical. I thought what I was doing was repeating what I was asked to say. And my hearing from you was, it started becoming a story. And I just invited her — where is that in your body?

And you could have taken it like, what are you doing telling me, you know? So that's where I was coming from, the direction I had experienced in December. And it's so easy to get into the head story. And I had just kind of reflected back, where is that happening in your body? And that could have just put you off, derailed you from what you were trying to experience. So I apologize.

[Russell:] Right, right.

[Participant 4:] So I just want to comment that it was nothing but goodwill.

Agreements for listening

[Russell:] So I'm going to say more. I'm starting with just — I want to acknowledge that your giving was coming from goodwill, from what you had learned in December, and wanting to bring that forth. And so I bow to that.

And some of these times, some of these instructions can be, will be confusing, because what I'm looking for at a given moment can be different than what I was looking for at another time.

Right now — and this is for our next round, so that you hear it — I'm really emphasizing the listener not saying anything, except at the end, just the very words that are references for the person who's speaking. When they pick out their one, two, three, or four key sensations, words, or images that connect them, they can hear that back.

And so it's a specific practice. The other would be good at another time. It's not a bad thing that you did at all. And for what we're doing right now, we're focused on a different aspect of listening.

That — got that? Feel that?

What I also want to say, and this is very difficult socially, but we're beginning to form a community that will have agreements together, is: when somebody is in a process, sharing their process, the one who is speaking — it is your universe.

The one who is listening, as much as possible, you are offering selfless service. You are there for the other, for exactly what they're wanting. That doesn't mean later you might not have to process something that felt funny for you, but at the moment you're doing your best to be of service for what they're needing.

And what that invites is, I encourage the speaker to be able to say, you know, I'd really like to hear some words back. And the person gives you something. I don't want to hear anything. I don't want to hear anything. They can even change their mind like that.

And you've got to deal with the kind of, did I say it wrong? And as soon as you can, you put aside your own stuff. You'll get to that later. But right now you're in service to this one.

It's like if you were nursing somebody who had an accident, and you've got a lot of feelings about the accident, but you've got to take care of them first. And then later you can get to anything that came up for you.

So I want to empower the speaker to ask for what you want and need. I encourage you to do it without being violent about it, but for most people in this room, most of us tend toward caregiving. And our tendency would be to place the other's experience ahead of our own.

Now, our inner life doesn't get that. For so long, it has been pushed down by our thinking and been told it should be this way or should be that way, or I've got to take care of them. I'm a caring person.

Part of what frees the wisdom body is when we, at least in certain situations, learn how to place a priority on what it is saying, and place a stronger value on taking care of this rather than taking care of the other.

And in the situations that we're setting up here, that's the agreement. And then we can look at how that applies to talking to friends, and how that applies to other situations. We can do that later.

But for now, when we're in this situation, I want to empower the people who are speaking to really say, you know, I really just need silence now. Oh, I need more speaking. I need speaking, but I need it a little bit slower. Any of that.

And we'll do our best as listeners to make it a practice of — do I personalize that? Can I be free in that? Can I let that go? Is that different? That's your inner work, and we will have time to deal with that if it needs some attention. If your inner place needs some attention, let's do it.

You get what I'm saying? Very, very important.

We've lived in a culture that has given much more value to our control functions, to being able to control our inner life, to being able to tell it what it should be. And we got a lot of positive reinforcement for being in control of our inner life.

So of course our inner life, which is carrying some of the keys to the wisdom body, is reluctant to come forward. And we need to get into a different relationship with it, so that our accessibility to that is not so difficult.

Please.

[Participant 5:] I would appreciate some time to debrief, you know, after an exchange with someone.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 5:] And having had the opportunity to share on this before, I just think it would be a valuable thing to have some time to debrief.

[Russell:] Yeah. Right. Thank you.

Embodiment and change

[Russell:] And something I want to make sure that we understand.

When you're recalling an image — say I'm with this image of walking down the beach with Linda, and remembering this sense of deep connectedness, wordless connectedness, and I can feel the sand, and at that moment my presence is on the beach.

And that sounds funny. Well, but you're in this room. Well, no. Actually, we want to let our body have the feeling of sand between the toes. Because when you can get that, your body can create — oh, what do I want to say — in a much deeper way, when the kinesthetic, proprioceptive, physical feelings of the body are combined with feelings, what it feels like with each other, combined with images, symbols. We're walking down the beach, I see your face.

When all of that is living together, it goes much deeper in its influence on our behavior, its influence on our biology. This is how we can change the blood pressure, and the hormones that are dominant at a given time, because we get the limbic brain, the middle brain, active in these neural networks.

It's different than simply having a positive thought, or an imagination that doesn't include the embodiment. The embodiment brings it down in the brain, which gets the influence of it to be much stronger and more spontaneous, so that it arises in your life, and you think, I used to get all intimidated by that person. I don't know how it happened, but I'm not feeling that anymore. And something really shifts because of this kind of processing.

These are the kind of — I just got an email about that, too. That one's hot. Someone who worked with stuff around having their grounded presence with their boss, because they always felt so nervous and fluttery, and actually was dealing with hypertension that was situational, and thought

they needed to — well, they did some really beautiful work, like resource-growing work, this kind of stuff.

And just repeated it a few times. She said, it's amazing. I am different in the office. It doesn't happen. Most of the time I don't have to think about it. The only time she has to do it — she said in her email, the only time I have to do it intentionally is when he gets a certain volume in his voice. He's a real yeller.

And when I hear a certain yelling — it's happened a couple of times I've needed to. Her office, I guess, is outside his. I've needed to take a couple of minutes. And I always say, use the restroom as your office, as your private space. Go there, and bring herself back to her ground, cool down, and be able to be with him.

So yeah. We're looking for very observable changes in our behavior here.

So what I can say absolutely clearly is, I don't know. And please tell me what your research brings. Oh, really? Really, we are doing research here that hasn't been done.

So if you are going to have certain experiences, I'll be very curious, as you work with these and get some time with each. Does it start being a melding? Do they live separately? How those protectivenesses work.

Yeah. I see what feels right. Check it out.

These practices that we do, hopefully you'll find them interesting enough that sometimes you'll do them on your own, and you'll go back and say, well, what happens if I just do the one with my son? Oh, can I bring them together? And it doesn't always take fifteen minutes. You can learn to do this in two minutes.

Once you learn to drop into the bodily state, your nervous system needs to be in a certain kind of — your cortex needs to be at a certain level for this to penetrate. And you will learn to make that shift quicker and quicker, so that you can be in this, what hypnotists call the hypnagogic interval, but is actually a state of learning that is different than our normal beta-dominated brainwave. But we can access it very quickly when we include embodiment. Without the body, it's very hard to make the shift.

But that's — you know, yeah.

Okay, enough. I'm talking too much. Let's move on.

Let's reverse roles, and I'll lead you in. And I'm going to remind you at some point about remembering the opposite state.

Okay. So.