Practice

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 5, Session 2 — 25 minutes

Summary: Russell invites noticing where the mind goes between meditation and ordinary life, free of self-criticism. He distinguishes life-giving discrimination from habitual judgment, and speaks of waiting well. He then introduces a ground inquiry in threes — staying with one sensation, finding words, and listening without merging — and sends the groups to practice.

The in-between

[Russell:] So it's very helpful to notice some of the default positions of one's inner life, one's mind, of where one goes when we're not being directed to go any particular place.

It's like there's the moments when it seems like class has started and the moments when it seems like it's before class. You know, like the moments after the bell rings and the moments before the bell rings.

There's some part of us that goes, okay, ding, ding, ding, now I'm ready. Oh, ding. Now I'm back to me. Here I'm meditating, and here I'm me. Oh, now I'm in class. Okay, now I'm just me.

And that in-between place is maybe the most important. That place where we're not doing anything special.

Like I sometimes like to say, there are two states in life. There's meditation, and there's post-meditation. And the only difference is, in meditation, you're holding a posture. In post-meditation, when you're on a path, you're interested in what's occurring, and how it's occurring, and noticing the habits of distraction.

So helpful to notice how we wait for things to start, how we are after the bell rings, before the bell rings, and to notice what occurs as much as possible, completely free from self-criticism.

That habit of self-judgment — most of us have gone to the gym of self-judgment and worked out quite a bit. We got those muscles nicely toned, very responsive, and able to jump in real quick. It's just mental habits.

Well, I'm here to say that us ordinary people can actually neutralize the energy of that. And that's pretty amazing that that's true. It takes some practice, and then it seems to be the most natural thing in the world.

You can't believe any more than you stand over an innocent being that you love and stand there with the kind of little infant or something, you know. You should be bigger. You shouldn't be so fat. You should be this way. You should — you know, we just — it just doesn't arrive.

So we're sitting here, and I said there's meditation and there's post-meditation. The only real difference is holding a posture. In terms of the attitude of wanting to notice how living is occurring, noticing how living is occurring, our interest in somehow bowing to how living is occurring.

And when that living is not riddled with that immediate and constant judging process of this is good, this is bad, this is good, this is bad.

Life-giving distinctions

Now, a very important distinction I'm going to make right now. It just needs to be in the room — we can discuss it a lot. I want to make a clear distinction between the way I'm using the word judgment — I'm using it in a particular way — and the very important aspect of a human being, the ability to make distinctions, to choose, to make discriminations about certain things being more life-giving and less life-giving.

We don't want to get rid of that capacity, any developing ability. If someone wants to really appreciate music, they need to be able to make more distinctions about music. If you want to understand how plumbing works, you have to make more distinctions and discriminations about what's working and what's not working and what's effective.

But the habit is that that begins to become good and bad, right and wrong, as opposed to effective or ineffective, life-giving or not life-giving. They become judgmentalism as opposed to life-giving distinctions.

Now this is a critical difference, because we don't want to throw out — this is a real unfortunate place that a lot of people get to when they see the error of so much habitual judgment. They say, okay, well everything's equal. And that flat land is not where humanity develops and grows.

Not everything. There are qualities that are more beneficial to life, that encourage life growing. But we get so pulled into the good, bad, right, wrong thing. It's so old.

Waiting

So we're sitting here, and whether it's the post-meditation state or the meditation state — the only two states you ever have — the interest is, how is living occurring? How is living occurring? Beyond my judgments and criticisms and assessments, how is living occurring?

And we often sit here just kind of waiting for the next moment. So much of our life is waiting, that it's very important to learn how to wait well.

One of my favorite — well, I'd say teacher, although I never met him. I met him once, but never studied with him. Important back in the seventies was Trungpa Rinpoche, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. And he spoke very well to the American mind, to the Western mind, very graphically.

And so he would say — you know, he'd come in for a talk and be really quiet for a long time, he wouldn't say anything — you don't know how to wait.

When I wait, I'm like a bird sitting on a wire, listening to the world around me, ready to jump, ready to sit. Or I'm like a frog sitting on a rock. When you wait — saying to his students — when you wait, you're like someone on the toilet who's constipated.

He felt very free about judging.

But, is it coming? Is it coming? Am I getting it? Am I getting it? Am I getting enough of what he's saying? I don't know. Missing it.

Ground inquiry

I'd like to do a practice together. It's one of the ground inquiry practices, different than what we've done before, but very, very helpful.

And I invite you to find two partners, so you're in a group of three people. And you're going to sit together, and we'll use the whole space of the room, and then I'll describe to you. Since I will make part of a threesome, I'd like two people to join me.

And if anybody would like to be in a chair, it's great to be in chairs. You're going to be sitting for a while, probably 20, 25 minutes of sitting, so have all three in chairs if anybody wants to be in a chair. Okay?

So please find a couple of partners.

I'm going to describe the process, and I'm going to model it briefly, and then you will be free. So, a good thing to do in your group is decide who is red, who is blue, who is purple.

[Participant:] Red.

[Russell:] You're red?

[Participant:] Yeah, red.

[Russell:] Did you just say?

[Participant:] I'll be purple.

[Russell:] Okay. Everybody got a red, blue, or purple?

It's always interesting to notice how people do that. You know, notice if you picked a color, or if you waited for everybody else to pick a color. Just notice, and each time we do that, notice your style.

And if you have a strong style of always waiting, jump in there. Whether I say one, two, three, or I say blue, or anything — if you're always kind of, well, I want other people to have a choice, and then I'll take what's left.

Well, it can be that's the way I feel good, right? Or if you're always the first one to pick something, see if you can lay back a little bit.

As we do it over time, it's interesting to experiment with. Even, you know, our whole life appears in each moment. We could take a moment and unwind it. You could take a moment and unwind it into the entirety of your life. It's really amazing. We may get a little experience of that. That's not happening this week.

Okay, so this process is working with a sensory stream of consciousness. It's about being with sensations in your body in more depth than you usually are. And it's about listening to someone else as they are going into their process, going into their sensing. And it's about listening to your own body.

So, for example, what I will be demonstrating in a few moments is, I'm going to get quiet and listen to some sensation that calls me, any sensation in my body that calls me, some place in my body.

And I'm going to go to that area and see what's the sensation that's there. And then I'm going to stay in that area and see what else comes.

But for this particular process, we're actually staying in that location. If I go to my knee, I'm not going to then go to my ear. It might travel a little bit down my leg or up my leg, but I'm staying a bit local, unless something like — oh, it's just so clear that that's calling me to my hip. If that happens, go ahead.

But mostly you're staying with the area that you're attracted to, and seeing what else comes to me in sensation, and how can I find language for that?

And sometimes words may not come, and you can just say, I'm feeling something there. I just don't know what to call it. It's kind of like — and then you do your best to be investigating, even as you feel inarticulate.

Learning that you don't have to be smart, you don't have to have clear words, all that stuff we used to have when we were in school. We don't need that. You can be in the unknown, but you're with something that's alive.

So let's say I'm with my knee. If I'm with my right knee, they're in their right. They're not trying to feel what I feel. They're listening to what they feel in their right.

Now the partners get to have a couple of very interesting things. One is they get to experience their own knee. They get to hear the words of the other person, which might help them to feel something that's present or absent in their knee.

They also get to see, do they start merging, creating the sensations that they're hearing? And that's very interesting to notice if one begins to feel that they're doing that. So, how to listen to another and be yourself, but still be permeable enough that you can get information.

Now, there are two ways the information works here. One is you're likely to sense things you've never sensed before, just because you're giving it so much attention, and the three of you together mobilize attention.

And second is you might hear words from somebody that are completely new for you, but something inside goes, yes, that's right, I know it. And so you develop a richer vocabulary for your own inner life, for your own sensations. Okay?

So we're staying here with our physical body, what it feels like. I'll stop talking and I will describe. And then after I do this, I'll give you a chance to ask any questions if there's any confusion, and then I will tell you the timing and how that works.

So, I'm just going to pause here.

Demonstration

And I'm drawn to my bottom, sensing weight.

Just staying right with it. Of course, I notice the sounds and notice other things, but that's in the background. With this sensation.

It's hard to describe. I sense the hardness of what I know are my sitting bones, more on the right than left. And as I'm with it, it's like they're dropping deeper.

Yeah. It's some kind of subtle pulsation. And again, I'm interested. It's more right. I feel my whole self is being pulled towards this right sit bone.

Even as I'm with it, I feel my body turning.

And the left side has a sense of more vague — something kind of vague, but also wider, flatter, less pointed.

And all of a sudden I notice I've been skipping over the place in between, the area of my anus and bottom there. I've just been kind of jumping to my sit bones, but as I open there, there's a lot of pulsation.

And there's a kind of settling there. I didn't realize there was a little holding up in my sphincter, and there's a kind of settling there.

Sometimes I move my attention away so that I can come back fresh.

And it's interesting, as I come back fresh, the left side begins to settle. Not as much as the right, that it's settling more and more and getting a little bit harder as it settles. It's curious.

And fascinating that as it settles, I feel the whole torque of my body going towards it. I'm not sure yet whether that's just energetic inside or whether it's actually my physical body turning. My head is turning, but I'm — yes.

And I'm aware that I'm taking a long time. I'm getting a little bit fascinated, so I'm going to pause.

Finding words

Okay, so, wonderful to have lots of pauses. You're listening freshly. You don't know what's going to be there. Yet hopefully, most of what you say, you don't know now. You might know the first couple of things — they come quick — but then you are listening. It's a process of listening.

How do I listen to my own bodily sensations? And how is it possible to actually be present enough that I can feel things I haven't felt before? And then how do I stay with it and find words?

That's a whole other learning, how to be with one's experience and finding words. Usually we leave our experience to find the words and then go back to it. But it's another kind of learning to stay in sensation and have the verbal function happening.

Okay, so we're stretching your nervous system here. We're stretching the capacities of your brain here to have these different centers lit up together simultaneously, nourishing each other.

And again, the listeners — it's a great opportunity to learn about yourself, and to grow your own inner language and your own experiencing, and your own capacity to have your autonomous self when someone else is very much in their experience.

The turns

So what I am going to do is set it up like this. The first person, as I just was, will begin with something like this. Whatever calls you.

You can't make any mistakes with this. The only thing I ask you to do is stay in the present moment. Don't tell stories. So if you go to your knee, it's not, oh, that's the knee that I hurt a few years ago. It's none of that. It's just living now with what's there, okay?

So it's all present, and you stay there, and then at some point I'll ring the bell. And then, okay, so the blue person starts, whoever is blue. Purple is going to go second, red is going to go third, okay?

And there's a great esoteric meaning to why that's happening.

Okay. So the blue person will say whatever attracts them. I'll ring a bell, it'll go to the next person, purple, and they begin in the same place.

Now, they may say a lot of the same things, they may say completely different things. We don't know. So they're going to stay in the same place, and then a bell is going to ring, and the same person, purple, is going to go to a new place. So the second person is going to do two — what the first person ended up with, and a new one.

Then red goes. Red begins where purple ended. We forget about blue now, right? Red begins where purple ended, just the last one, and then adds a new one. So after blue, everyone else does two.

And then we might go around a few times. When it comes back to blue, they do two the second time, right? So everyone after the first one does two. And you'll be guided by the ringing of the bell.

You're absolutely free not to say anything for a long time. Your only commitment is to tell the truth — that you're not going to make something up in order to say something that sounds groovy or something like that. That it's okay not to have much to say.

So, you know, I'm there and there's nothing I can say about it. It's fine to say something like, I'm feeling something, I don't know what to say about it. I'm still with it. And then you may be surprised — out of that fog, something emerges. Sometimes it happens that way.

If nothing comes, that's beautiful. You're being honest with your experience. Okay?

Any questions about the process?

Great. Well, have a wonderful journey and —