Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 5, Session 4 — 41 minutes

Summary: Russell asks the group to hold confidentiality so inner life can stay safe and authentic, not only outside the room but among themselves. Together they sort nervous sharing from pushing, appreciation from intrusion, and how recordings, mistakes, and the stories of a life can be handled in a way that frees rather than re-traumatizes.

Confidentiality

[Russell:] So we are all here. We're all working together, learning together, and it was helpful for me at the break to be reminded that I had forgotten something that I usually do the first day we're together, which is to communicate the tremendous importance it is for our collective safety, which is very, very important for the work we're doing.

That we have an understanding of confidentiality to everything that happens here. Everything that happens. And this is actually a little bit even more than you might think, so I want to speak to it. And then if you have anything to say, you'd be welcome.

Without doubt, one would not discuss beyond the group anything that happens in the group. Also, one would not discuss within the group something that happens within the group.

Now, this is very important. If something is happening for you that you want to talk about, it's your experience that you want to talk about, you can choose to talk about it. But you wouldn't talk about something that went on for somebody else, some process, even if it was a totally positive experience. It's not about whether it's positive or negative.

Now this gets a little bit tricky. Let me describe some of the tricky places.

What we're doing here, what my interest is, is not only that we feel safe with each other, but that your inner life feels safe with you. Do you hear what I'm saying? Not only that we're safe with each other, but often—I would see this often back in the encounter days and in the sensitivity training days and the gestalt days and all that I've been through in the seventies and eighties, where there was such a value placed on it's good to be open. And open meant saying everything that was happening in your inner life.

And then when one got to some more subtlety, one began to realize that the inner life begins to close down or—and this is the most important—get inauthentic, because it can't stand the publicity.

It's not ready to be out there, even though your controlling mind is saying, oh, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm finished with this. I feel fine talking about my mother publicly, about this, or about my relationship. Now, sometimes it really is accurate. I'm not saying you never share your inner life with your intimate others or with people in the group, but you would do so—and we'll get clearer on how to do this—from the ground of checking in with your inner life.

Is this okay in this setting? Meaning maybe you're on a walk with somebody, with this person, in this setting, at this time. So it's not just, oh, I trust the person, I can say anything. No, it's more demanding than that. It's, I trust this person, but this isn't the right moment.

Yeah, I trust this person, and I'm feeling like I'm ready to speak, but there's something—somehow it doesn't feel like they can really hear me right now. So you're gonna be really deferring to your inner life. Yeah?

Now, where it gets tricky is, let's say we're doing a sharing process. Like, we did a resource growing process. Now let's say somebody was working, that you listen to them, and they're working on something like open-heartedness, that they're wanting to feel less reactive in certain things.

You wouldn't go up to them later and say something like, "Well, how's it going? How's it going with that?" Even from the kindest, sweetest intentions, and we all may make mistakes about this. So this is not like you're bad if—but from the kindest, sweetest intentions, you may enter a territory where it's actually unintentionally stopping a kind of ripening.

So we want to defer. And if someone wants to speak of their inner experience and it's the right moment, and you feel comfortable listening, that's fine. They can bring it up. And we're hoping that they've checked in with themselves, but you wouldn't bring it up to them.

And I know this gets challenging, or will at times get challenging, because you'll have a very touching interaction, and you'll want to find out are they okay. Yeah, and kind of check in with them. We need to be really listening. Does that seem like it's intrusive?

You might even end up saying something like, I notice that I'm really uncomfortable, cause I'm kind of wanting to ask you about what you said, but I'm also not wanting to intrude, and I don't really know what to do. You might share your process with it.

But let's really bow to a respectfulness, that it has its own—I want to say rules doesn't sound right, laws doesn't sound right. The environments in which it flourishes and the environments in which it doesn't flourish. It has its own soil and its own care that it functions well in, and we want to defer to that.

So, definitely no speaking about it with other people from here, and within our sangha that we're growing this sense of—what I share with you, you not only certainly wouldn't share with somebody else, but you would even be very cautious about saying something to me about it, even though it was just you and me.

Is that what I mean? And that's a very, very healthy ground for a community. Very, very healthy ground for a community.

Please.

Nervous sharing

[Participant 1:] In my experience, there's been times when I wanted to share something, but I was very nervous about it.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 1:] So I guess I'm wondering, when is it something that you're listening to yourself, and when are you pushing into something that's good?

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 1:] Because you're, I don't know, facing your fear or something.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, I get it, I get it. Thank you. It's a really important distinction.

Cause sometimes to share something is difficult. Something inside is saying, oh, I'm not sure about this, and I feel nervous about this. And yet there are times when those sharings are the most liberating and helpful for our inner life. So we don't want to assume everything's got to feel all fine, right? But then how to make the distinctions about what kind of not okay?

And here we get back to how to listen to the inner body. How does it communicate? This is challenging and okay, or this is challenging and not okay. And this is a finer differentiation that no one in the universe can tell you how to do, except you begin to tune into it, asking the question of it.

What I'm suspecting you'll find is that if you don't railroad it, force yourself, and you acknowledge the nervousness—there is nervousness here, I can sense that. I'm going to be with that for a moment. Now, I'm going to continue. It feels right. I'm going to continue.

And you begin to speak. It's very likely, if you're really transgressing yourself, you'll have more signs. It will shut down more, it will press more. So as long as you're not pushing through, that you're honoring what comes, it can have some nervousness and feel okay.

[Participant 1:] Thank you for that.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. Good.

Okay. So that's back to the example. If I've communicated something with you that was really challenging for me, you would be very sensitive about bringing it up. Certainly not around other people, and even privately with me. If you were going to bring it up, it might be more like, you know, I noticed that I'm wanting to ask you about that and feeling very protective, and so I'm not sure. So you would bring it as your questioning. Yeah?

Appreciation

[Participant 2:] Yeah, great. I would like to get clearer on it, because some of the radical—

[Russell:] Yeah, just speak a little louder.

[Participant 2:] For instance, if at lunch I say to someone—I express my appreciation for why it was moving, a dramatic group of men, that they exposed themselves.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 2:] And I want to clarify that. I mean, I don't feel that's tempting. I can't believe that's invasive, and yet maybe I'm on the border of what you're defining.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, this is good. This is a good example.

So, let me clearly say these are not clear lines. Okay? That's why I say sometimes it can be just right—just right meaning life-giving—to share your appreciation about something that occurred, right?

How can we be respectful, be really listening to a moment in which that is transgressing and a moment in which it's life-giving? Yeah? So that's what we're listening for here.

Now, one of the things that I notice is a strong cue for me is the energy with which it came when the person was communicating. Were they communicating from a very vulnerable place? And then it opened—then I would be more still, respecting that there might be some vulnerable pieces in there.

If it was coming from a place where their voice was pretty strong, and it was a realization that came, and it might have been very revelatory, but it had a sense of wholeness, groundedness, then still you would be cautious. You might even say something like, you know, is it okay with you if I share something that came up for me? Or you might ask permission.

And we're all going to work with this together. Again, I don't have the—you know, they didn't give me the book. We're writing the book. And it isn't a set thing, and it's different according to the moment, according to the circumstances.

What you're helping me see, and I appreciate it—what was coming through now is the other side. I don't want to create a sense of—can't speak about—oh, that happened in the group. I don't want us to feel tight with each other. I want us to feel like an open vehicle for each other to share. So I don't want to generate that, which is what you're helping us to bring.

And I don't know how to linguistically define the categories. More I can speak about the energies and the feeling of it.

And just to say, as we are getting to know each other, it's helpful if we err a little bit on the side of not sure. And maybe even a couple of times you would then check with the person later. Say, you know, I almost said something at dinner. Can I check out something with you about something that happened this morning? I almost said something at the table about how much I appreciate—would that have been okay? Would that be okay?

So we might learn from each other. We might, right? It's not a set thing. It's evolving.

Please.

Absolutely. It's a complete place to practice exactly what we're doing. That kind of listening. Whole body. And thank you. Exactly. Yes.

Mistakes

[Participant 3:] I really appreciate everything that's being said here, but one thing I just wanted to comment on is that I think invariably there are times that you're gonna say it in the way you think is really gentle and ask permission, and still you're gonna step into a landmine. Because you don't know what it is in their life. And nobody—right.

So what I would just like to put forth, at least for me, is that if I'm the stepper on the landmines —sorry.

[Russell:] Wait, wait, wait, wait. I want everybody to hear this. This is general. This covers all landmines for the next three years. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry.

[Participant 3:] And sometimes, don't shoot me if I stand up. But I mean, I think that there's a part of it too, about we're all here to grow and to learn, and we are going to make mistakes, and we are going to step into it.

And then if the person—and I'm thinking to myself, if somebody got me at the wrong moment, and they asked me something, I might go back to some horrible reactionary moment and then just not act in the way that I wish that I could.

So I think that we all should have permission, and just realize that if you're the person who stepped in, or the person who's upset about it, that we really all are—I feel the intentions here are so high, and everybody's here for the right reasons. And so if we do have a stumble, let's find that inner way and make peace with it. Move on.

[Russell:] Thank you. Yes. Let's—we're in school. We're in school. Right. We're in school. And this is so good. Yes. Thank you.

Yeah, I just want to linger here for one sec. Let's put it this way. If you haven't made your quota of mistakes, I would like, before you leave, to make at least one. I'm bringing a little joke to the fact that we're going to make mistakes. And the opportunity there is precious.

Cause we don't want this to become, oh, that's my week away from life. And then I go back to my world, and you're learning all sorts of behaviors that are specific to this room, but that don't carry over. We want these—we don't want—but we, in that funny sense of the word, welcome these moments in which there's a rub, because that is exquisite learning.

How we resolve our rub. How the place that gets hurt, which has gotten hurt in that same way many times, how it maybe responds different, or works with the hurt differently, on both ends. Yeah?

And boy, if we can have that, our learning will accelerate, and we will become sources of healing and peace in the world, really.

You were next.

Pausing

[Participant 4:] Yeah. Actually, I just had this picture of next time we'll all have a little badge that'll say pause. I mean, seriously, I think pausing before I ask and before I respond is one way to just say check in. And I know that I don't habitually do that. I respond pretty quickly. So that might be one way to at least practice a check-in, even if you don't really spend the time getting the answer. But at least there's an effort.

So I'll invite you all to have an imaginary—and I'll try to remember that I'm seeing that on you.

What my wife taught me, that helped me do that—it was a hard lesson for me, because I was kind of a caretaker, trying to give everybody nice things. And she said that you often give to people what you most would want to give to yourself, and if it missed the mark, I was crushed. I couldn't believe that my special thing I was giving this person wasn't what they wanted, and they might have been offended by it.

So it helped me delay that space between giving something I thought might be a response, so that I could be curious. What would this person really want? Not what would I want—what would they

want in this situation? And do some inquiry around that, rather than just launching with what I thought they—a hard lesson.

[Participant 5:] I just want to piggyback on both of those, because certainly nonviolent communication, and also group process, and asking permission, also allows the other person who might be in reaction to have a chance to pause as well. And so it's actually a gift and an opportunity. So always asking permission, I find, works every time.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, it's beautiful. Yeah, thank you.

Recordings

[Participant 6:] I also wanted to just ask, and put this on the table. I really appreciate that you're recording everything so that we can kind of go back home and listen to some things that maybe we missed or bring back in. But just out of curiosity, if one of us opens up with a very vulnerable moment, is that also on recording?

[Russell:] Yeah. So when we're doing processes like the partner processes, I shut it off. If I'm guiding them through a process and it's been in the whole group, it's usually on, and anybody can ask for a section of tape to be either deleted, or they can tell me, I would really like to have that for myself, but I want to delete it from the group, and we can arrange that. So we can make a copy of that section, we can take it off the recording and post it.

[Participant 6:] Yeah, I think that's great, cause there might be something that, when I'm home, I want my wife to hear, out of excitement and joy of things that I'm doing, and suddenly she's listening to somebody open up about something she shouldn't know about, cause of honoring our confidentiality. So I think that's important.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. So you can ask me, and we'll take care of that.

I think I said this here, but I don't remember. The agreement around the recordings is that they are just for you, right? Did I speak to that?

Okay, okay. That's important. Your significant others can hear a talk, but you're not using them in classes, and you're not—yeah, you know. Just use your sense. If you start feeling like, gee, I'm not sure if I'm doing this too much, if you're going through the whole week, then call me or email me. Say, you know, this is my impulse, where I've got a great—

Cause some people—I love when people from different groups interact. I love when people from different countries interact. That thrills me.

And so if people are getting together, as they sometimes do in some of the study groups, some of the graduates of study groups, and they'll get together—some of them in Europe especially, they're very active with this—they'll get together for a weekend, and they'll take recordings, and some of them are from different groups, and they'll say, oh, I want to play this talk that Russell gave back in the second year of this, and let's work off of that and see what we—and I love that that kind of sharing is going on.

Yeah, so I'm all for that.

[Participant 7:] What about someone that is seeing the effects it's having on our life, and they're really interested in the program?

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 7:] Are you okay if we sit down and, if they're like, I'm interested in potentially going through this program?

[Russell:] Yeah. What I wouldn't feel great about is, let's say you're the type that really likes to review material, that you review the whole program with them would not feel great. That you share some of it with them would feel great.

[Participant 8:] As I listen to you talk, what I would not be comfortable with is to have a piece of my personal work out there for other people without permission.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, that's really true. Right. Yeah.

Does more want to come about this?

Carrying our stories

[Participant 9:] Yeah. Well, I'm thinking that you're gonna have another time.

[Russell:] This is mainly the time for—

[Participant 9:] I just was thinking about your comments, and more about—and Russell was talking about someone doing stories, giving people's stories, and sharing.

I understand that. We talked about sharing stories a couple of months ago, but—what—you just spoke about checking in with what feels right.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 9:] And maybe right now isn't—I'm noticing.

[Russell:] Right.

Okay. So the question, if I'm understanding—well, I don't know that. Let me tell you what I'm understanding, and we'll see if I got it or not.

So what I'm hearing is first that it's a little nervous bringing it up, and that it's about sharing stories with each other about your life, and with these kinds of connections, how all of what we're talking about now fits with sharing your stories. Is that?

[Participant 9:] What?

[Russell:] I feel you. I feel like you wanna drop it. Is that it, or is it difficult to stay with this right now? Would you like to have a few more minutes with this to get clear?

[Participant 9:] Sure.

[Russell:] Go ahead. I'm with you.

[Participant 9:] I want to understand what it is, and I'm using the word appropriate. Stories. Stories are appropriate, and what stories are inappropriate. The intention that it's something that you'll notice, notice within ourselves.

[Russell:] But what I'm hearing again so far is—I'm gonna change the word, it might fit, and if it doesn't, just toss it aside. But you really wonder. I'm changing the word appropriate, that's a great

word, into skillful or helpful. What's helpful to share in a story with each other, and what might not be? Is that?

[Participant 9:] As bad as many stories, right?

[Russell:] Yeah. Right.

So let me say something general, and this may be speaking to what you're bringing in, it may not, so you can let me know that. I'm going to speak to it, hopefully, but actually more than it as well.

Our biographies, the events of our past, what we've all been through, has been very critical in our shaping.

How we speak about the events that have occurred is a whole other level of how it's living in us. So people think that we're formed by events, and that's partially true. It's actually much more true—no, that's not quite right. It's very important that we recognize how we tell our stories and hold our stories about what we think happened. How we carry our memories, and how those memories are shifted, changed, deepened, made more traumatic, less traumatic, by how we carry it in ourselves and how we offer it to others, is very important.

So there are events that occur in all of our lives. There's how the events are living now, how we're carrying them, how we're framing them to ourselves and to other people. Okay?

Then there's a next level. You with me here? This is a next level, which is how I can be with what's alive in me, as I am with a certain event, or a certain something that happened. How I can be in my process around something, around how I'm carrying it.

So what this means to say is, most of the time when we're working in here, I would say most of the time we're not in a lot of historical events. But we're very much learning how to be in the bodily process. And sometimes a historical event will be here to practice being with our bodily process with it, so we can practice how to be with it in a life-giving way, so we're not carrying it in the old way in which it kept re-traumatizing us because of the way we spoke to ourselves about it.

So historical events might arise for us to be in process in a new way with.

Now, as you're cultivating friendships and true heart connections, for some of you, as I've noticed in the past, real soul connections will develop out of being here together. For some of you, you're going to have certain friendships that will seem to last, maybe a lifetime, or last a very long time. For some of you, it's not going to be that you're going to have an active friendship, but when you're together, you're going to feel closer than you do with most anybody in your life. Sometimes it happens like that.

In those situations, there might be times when learning about someone's history adds to your relationship. But I encourage you to really listen to whether you're telling the old story in the old way.

Most of us keep telling our old stories as if they're true, rather than remembering that I'm telling this story in my current memory of that, and how I'm carrying that story. And how I begin to articulate it can give life-freeing energy to that, and it can also simply put another shovel on—or throw some more gas on the fire of this anger, or this sense of never being cared for.

How we speak about it neurologically deepens it, grows it. So we want to use our skills to free our history. Okay?

So when one is choosing to speak about their past, it has to feel authentic. So it's not a question of, actually it was wonderful when they were hitting me, or something. You know, it has to feel authentic.

Things are not just what they were. It's how it's living. And you all are experienced enough to know this, but I have been dumbfounded to be in the presence of people, seeing what is so clearly a horrific event transform into something that was truly liberating. And it's like the kind of things you'd never wish on anybody becoming the gift of their life. I've seen it too many times.

So that's about as much as I can do with it. Did I get close to it?

Please. Okay, okay, let's take a moment there, but I think you might have had something you wanted to say about the other. Take your time. You don't have to rush it along.

Healing stories

[Participant 4:] I was thinking about when this topic came up for me, the protective safety aspects of it. And as we were talking, I began to think about the amazing healing stories that will be emerging as well. And wondering what it would be like if I spoke of somebody as this person in the group, or a person I know, because some stories are healing as they develop. So I have some confusion.

[Russell:] Great, thank you.

I would suggest that's wonderful. To take healing stories, to take transformative moments—we want that in the culture. We want that in our personal relationships. We just want to be conscious of, you know, am I saying this in a way where it's obvious who I'm talking about? You know, that kind of thing. But as long as one has a positive intention and is holding that, they're precious.

I mean, you hear me talking sometimes about this person, I just got an email from this person, or this person in Germany had this experience or something, because these things are so living in me. They just come out. I would not want to hold that away from our learning process.

Yeah. Thank you for that.

Yes.

[Participant 10:] Is there a process?

[Russell:] There isn't a formal process. What I would encourage is that the people who are connected to that have an intention to work with it in an embodied way, which means how we can be authentic and respectful and caring, and find, in my language, the love that's lingering in that, but how to work with it.

If the people find it's either too scary to be alone with it, or if it's, say, two people or three people, something like that, it would be totally fine to come to me and say, you know, this is up, I don't know how to deal with it, the person won't speak to me, or we both would like some guidance. Or as we go, you might find that there's someone else in the group that you would rather have. But it's sometimes great to have a third party or a fourth party who is not part of the interaction to bear witness, and to help encourage some pausing and some listening, and to notice the reactivity.

We're all here to liberate our reactivity, right? I mean, that's not—but when we are connected to our wholeness, our reactivity is down on the floor. And so that's our direction, and we'll all stumble. You know, that. And it's precious to know that that can happen, and then we can get up and, rather quickly, we are learning some basic skills.

I mean, we are, even though I don't write it out as this is this, this is this. These last days, we've started a curriculum of learning, of embodied learning, that you will see later as a real order to it, if you don't see it.

Good. Well, thank you so much for this quality of connecting around this. Does anybody feel incomplete in the conversation around confidentiality?

Great. I would love to do some movement together, and I would love to start standing, and I'm gonna go to—