Practice

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 5, Session 7 — 27 minutes

Summary: Russell speaks of the edge between preference and what is, then tells of Linda snoring during early sitting at a Zen center. He leads a resource practice of presence: a somatic memory grown in sensory detail, then a silent partner exchange in which the listener embodies presence.

The edge

We are always in this edge as human beings, where there will always be arising a preference, and reality will appear as it is, and that's the edge.

It's not to deny our preferences. It's not to say they're bad. It's not the old story of let's just try to get rid of desire. No. It's acknowledging that and bowing to what's true, and working with any rubs that live between them.

But our siding is with what is.

And that's called sanity.

Linda

Now, it reminded me of my dear Linda. She still appreciates this story, so I'm happy to tell it.

My dear Linda — this is back in 1975, when we started at this Zen center that I then stayed at. We were doing an intensive practice, and we're sitting, and it's about five in the morning.

The room — well, it's cold in there. Very cold and austere, and sometimes the teacher would walk around with a stick. And we were sitting, and we want to be good students.

And then all of a sudden, over to my left — do you ever have the experience of waking yourself up snoring?

So Linda, she's two seats down, so I'm not going to say anything. Of course, it was keeping me right on the edge of my seat. So then finally she was mortified. It was just this moment — it's such a great opportunity to deal with pride when moments like this occur.

And so she had a meeting with the teacher later that morning. It's very formal, and it's not like meeting with me. You bow, and you do all those prostrations, and you go, and you sit down. And so she sat there and was just kind of like, so full of shame, really.

And he just said, "Thank you so much."

And she says, "Well, what do you mean, thank you?"

He goes, "Your snoring woke everyone up. I didn't need to use my stick at all. The snoring was so much better."

Getting ready

Anyone needing anything? Ask, say anything, before I move into — we're gonna do a practice, actually a resource growing practice that I'd like to do shortly. Is there anything needed before I do that?

I'm a little concerned that those four lights won't be enough. We'll look at it. Let me get a look at it.

Yeah, maybe. Let's experiment. Pete, above your head, does that thing say lights on it? The fan — the fan thing. Go down. The fan, thermostatic looking thing. Does it also say lights?

But they don't work, right? Okay. Yeah, okay. Let's try it, let's see. I don't want it too dark, so I don't want to be sleepy for this practice.

Well, we can leave — actually, put them all on. We'll leave them on for a little while, then I'm going to turn them off, and it's going to feel much better.

Yeah, I do, right. It's a great story.

Okay. So I'm taking it there's no other needs or wants right now.

As I understand, there will be an evening meditation, 8:30 tonight. There will be a party at 6:30 in the morning.

This practice — the first part of it will be by yourself, the second part with a partner, but I'd like you to be with a partner now, so we don't have to do the finding a partner in the middle.

So use the whole room, so you're not staying in the sphere. Use the whole room. If one person is in a chair, both are in a chair.

Presence

As with many of these processes, we'll be working with a quality, and this quality is very, very, very central to our work. You all will know what it is when I say it, but it's very central to our work, and we're gonna start tonight calling up some somatic memories for this quality, for the experience of this quality.

And then tomorrow we will get to work with strategies of how for it to come alive in our everyday life, in addition to this resource process. So this is going to move on into actually the beginning of learning to focus together.

And so, to give it a name, this quality is a quality of presence.

When one feels really present with a moment, a situation — could be a person, could be that one feels really — whatever your interpretation, whatever your version is, this is me when I am in presence, when I am present with —

Again, it could be that you're alone and really present with a mountain, a trail, yourself on a cushion. It could be that you're really with another, you're really in a certain activity.

But I encourage you not to decide right now what you're going to use as your reference, but let it come out.

Now with these references, what's really cool is they're sometimes not your strongest inner example, but it's what's coming now. Use that. You could do it again another time.

I have six inner references that have been actively cultivated for this quality. And they emerge at different times. They seem to have stopped at six, somehow. But so take what comes. Let it, because that'll be most alive for you in your life.

And let it emerge after I give you this first part, this induction, where you go to a different state of consciousness. We're gonna let it come.

The memory

Okay, so sit with yourself and close your eyes.

If you're sitting in a chair, find a comfortable way for your feet to be on the floor. If you need some support, get some sort of support under you.

And just begin to sense that you're settling into the chair. But really, really notice any of the thoughts that come as the mind starts getting active, and don't fight it, just notice it and drop down. Let your body ground you.

Feet.

You can sense your bottom, weight, contact.

Sense your hands.

Begin to bring attention into your inner body, the places you tend to feel things, inside your throat and chest, inside your belly and lower belly.

And as you're sensing in here, invite your inner life to bring you a memory of you in a state of presence, a quality you would call, oh, this is me really being present, whole, let's say connected in this moment.

Real full feeling of, this is what I call really being present with myself, with my environment.

Could be with another person or animal or specific place or activity.

Just seeing what comes. If a few things come, kind of sort through and just kind of choose whatever has more calling at the moment. Best to choose one. I'll give you a little bit more time.

Keeping your eyes closed, just raise a hand if you need more guidance or more time to find something to be with.

So, just say a few more words. If you have one, you can just begin kind of nibbling, smelling, remembering, and I will come back to a general guidance.

Those who are still looking — it's a moment, doesn't have to be a big moment at all, where you felt, I'll use some other words, connected to yourself and to your environment. Environment could mean another person, a place, a task.

You felt, oh, this is me when I'm in my non-distracted, really interested, connected to something, and I feel wholly involved in it.

Again, it doesn't need to be a big thing. It can be very ordinary.

So as we're gonna cultivate this memory, this moment, let it be in a specific place. So invite your inner life to make it a specific place.

And enjoy the sounds as they come, even supporting your presence.

And you're in this specific place. Notice, are you outside or inside?

What's the environment like that you're in? If you're outside, what's the landscape? What can you see? What does the air feel like? Any smells, sound?

Sensory rich is really helpful for this.

Inside, where the doors and windows are. Grow it like you're in a movie. You're seeing it, you're with it.

And begin to sense your physical body, how you stand or move, or you're lying down. If you're with another, are you touching, being together?

You're doing an activity. Have a sense of your body moving in this moment. It helps your brain to get it.

Keep growing this moment.

If any voices are saying something like, oh, I can't do this, or I can't — just acknowledge those voices and keep experimenting.

And begin to sense. You keep recreating the scene, the sights, the sounds, the smells, the feeling in the body, as you feel what's it like in your chest, in your belly.

In the overall sense of yourself, in this moment of presencing, this moment of being present for something, this presencing moment, keep inviting your body — be alive to this moment and show you some of what occurs.

What happens to your inner rhythm, sense of time.

Sense of the space around your body.

The quality of your thoughts, if there are thoughts. What stands out about the thinking life in this kind of moment?

How it feels to be you.

And as you come up with feeling words, look for the sensations in your body that tell you, oh, that word is right, because it feels like this.

See if you can have any kind of somatic reference for the feeling states. May not be ordinary language. It's okay.

If you spend another minute with this, notice in the background if there's some subtle qualities, sensations or feelings, that seem important, but they're more subtle, they're in the background, and invite them to — be conscious for you.

Sometimes important aspects of the experience are subtle.

[Silence 32 seconds]

Your mind wanders, just come back.

And in a minute we'll be bringing this to a close for now, but we'll be coming back to it, so just take the minute to see if there's anything more that'd like to be acknowledged.

[Silence 30 seconds]

And just take a moment to thank your body for whatever it has brought you, and if there's a voice that has a judgment — oh, it wasn't a lot, or it wasn't as much as I want, anything like that — just acknowledge that voice. I know you're there. And this is a learning.

If you felt it very strongly, just allow that feeling, that that's there.

And then let your body know that you really want to cultivate a listening to how it forms its life-giving moments. To help support it in these capacities, and that you'll be back. In fact, you'll be back shortly to learn more, to be with it more.

Then slowly let your attention come back to just sitting there, feeling yourself, hearing the sounds around you.

Letting your eyes open.

With a partner

Now, gonna stay in silence, and I invite you to face your partner, and without speaking, decide who will listen first, and who will speak first.

So, just without speaking, decide who will speak, who will listen.

The listener — your main job is to embody presence. You are actually embodying, as the listener, the quality we're working with. That's what you're doing. You're not saying anything.

At the very end, when the person finds the two, three, or four key words, sensations, or images, you can give those words back to them slowly for them to take it in their body, maybe change the word if they want another one.

And if the person doesn't want to hear the words back, you can just tell them, no, it's fine. So take care of yourself as the speaker. And the listener is in service to you.

I'm going to lead you in. And in this practice, we don't look for the opposite. We just stay with this practice of presencing, and I will give you like a two-minute notice when it's a good time to start looking for the key words, expressions.

You can also listen for a key gesture, a movement that would help you to recall this state of presence. Invite your body to show you.

So I'll begin by leading you in. Both people can do this beginning, because this helps you both be in presence. I recommend closing your eyes if that's comfortable.

And settling into your seat, feeling yourself breathing, coming into your inner life, inside your throat and chest, inside your belly and lower belly, in there where you tend to feel things.

And invite this same image of presencing, of you in a moment of presence.

And when you feel ready, you begin describing the physical scene in present tense language, where you are, if anyone else is there. You're speaking to your own self. It's like you are hearing your

inner life and giving words and resonating the words. Your partner is kind of eavesdropping on your self-listening.

You're not speaking to your partner as much as you are listening and speaking to yourself.

So you're growing the image more and more, so it's sensory rich. Give as much detail as you can, not a lot of stories about it, but as much as evokes it.

And then stay with the bodily movement, physical body, and the feeling body, what it feels like to be you. That's where most of your time will be.

When you're ready, please begin.