Talk

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 6, Session 4 — 97 minutes

Summary: Russell teaches presencing as a living relationship rather than a state to hold — grounded, unconditional, and without an agenda to fix. He shows how to be with inner pain instead of identified with it, so that wisdom can unfold, and how the same quality waters joy as well as difficulty.

Presencing as a living relationship

[Russell:] I'd like to spend some time bringing together some of our reflections from this morning and connect them to our presencing work from yesterday.

This learning how to be present with what is alive in us — how to be present for what is alive in us, how to hold presence — this quality of presencing. I don't want to think of presence as a state. States get — and then we try to hold on. It's a living relationship. Presencing is a living relationship.

Difficult to talk about. This one whole being has so many dimensions, and there's a quality of presencing that is very connected to what I like to call our true self, original nature, that space and light. There's a capacity for being with anything in the universe when one has contact with that spaciousness. But one also has to have another foot out. That spaciousness doesn't make distinctions in itself. It has to have a foot in the world, we could say, of everyday life, of the mind, of the body. So there's a kind of straddling of what is traditionally called witness.

Again, I like the -ing. A witness sounds like there's some character living in there who's looking at everything. It's more a function. Witnessing. And witnessing is both a function of our deep and true nature — it's an expression of it — and it has access to everything in the world of duality, in the world of form, in the world of what you're feeling, what you're thinking.

There's a kind of straddling. When I'm presencing with something that's alive — first I'm going to talk about presencing with something that's within myself. We've been working with this from day one. There's a quality, that groundedness in this physical body. Why? So that I have the capacity to hold space for anything that appears.

If I'm not grounded, I tend to get knocked over by difficult moments, difficult thoughts, difficult feelings. Sensations in the body hijack me, hijack my consciousness, and then I'm no longer capable of presence. Can you get that picture?

We all have many moments like that. In the meditation, we can say we're often being taken away by certain thought patterns. And then there's a moment in which the light goes on. In that moment, when the light goes on, there's a presencing for this spaciousness of being and the remnants of that thought state.

Do you get what I mean? You're straddling two worlds, the world of the formless and the world of form. And the witnessing function, the presencing function, has that capacity for linking you from, you could say, the absolute to the relative, from the unity to duality. That's its function in consciousness.

What helps it feel safe

[Russell:] So this presencing. As I settle and bring attention to something, there are certain qualities — this is where it's so intertwined with deep listening, or true listening. As I'm holding presence for something, certain attitudes help whatever I'm attending to to feel safe, to feel like it's okay for them to be there. They don't have to distort themselves.

What I mean by them is any phenomena in my inner life — feeling, thought, sensation. This works equally if you've cut your leg and you're working with the pain of a cut, or dealing with the pain of somebody really disappointing you. Exactly the same, strategically, we can say, of learning to be in presence for something that's alive, something that's happening inside.

I'm going to use some examples of challenging moments, but then I'll begin to talk about how the exact same attitude is very important towards our wonderful moments. To help our wonderful moments to grow. To water the seeds of our joy and our peace, and when we're having a connectedness, how our presencing helps support that. So although I'll use some examples of challenging states, that's not all we're talking about. I'll hopefully go a little bit back and forth.

As we were describing before lunch, there were certain universals about atmospheres that encourage vulnerable places to feel safe. Certain atmospheres. Interestingly, the same atmospheres that work interpersonally — most of them are the same ones that work intrapersonally, within oneself.

This is not to say that everybody has the same needs or wants in the listening environment. There are some differences. Somebody mentioned, "I like my hand being touched." Other people wouldn't want to be touched in a moment of love. Those are idiosyncratic. And most of us have certain things we like in certain moments and not in other moments. There are idiosyncratic moments.

But there are tendencies for most of us. It's very important that we feel safe, as I'm saying. Very important, the quality of warm-heartedness. That there's a sense of care. That it's not just perfunctory, but there's a real — we could even say curious attentiveness, where one is really with you, if it's another person. They're not just putting in their time, looking at their watch. There's even a kind of quality of timelessness, like there's no pressure.

Now, in some situations we are looking for solutions. We're working on things. I want to describe a more basic or generic situation in which we're placing a priority simply — it's a difficult word — simply on shining light on what is true, and helping it to feel safe enough to be alive.

And what are some of the conditions? Well, in presencing, we're holding a space. We're holding a space. There has to be room. When our bodies get really tight, often our inner life doesn't feel like it has any room. It feels all pressed and compressed.

This sense of, when possible, an unconditionality to the acceptance. That you don't have to be a particular way.

So when I'm with a challenging inner place — often when it's challenging, part of what makes it challenging is it's not a place that I historically have liked very much.

Using a moment here. If I find a place — right now I'm finding one that had some disappointment in an interaction with my daughter. There was a feeling of — the situation was, I was trying, not conscious of how I was trying to get her to do something. It was not so conscious to me. Then I saw it later.

And so, as I felt what was alive in me, I could feel this place, right in here, of concern. Concern that if she did that and didn't do that, something bad would happen.

My work at that moment, when I was working with myself, was to be with this. It's interesting right now, because it actually resolved itself, but I can feel the shadow of it. It's not — it's very tight, but it's in the right place, the same place it was. It's very curious. So this is both memory and it's a little teeny bit there.

There was this place of concern, and then another place in here that was upset with myself for pushing and not recognizing I was pushing. And I didn't like that at first. Something didn't like that.

And then I turned to, oh — you really felt the need to push. I needed to actually be with this place, not tell it, "Oh, you shouldn't push." I know how to do that. "Oh, you shouldn't be pushy. You've got to be — you teach communication. You've got to be conscious when you talk. Shouldn't be pushy." But it was unconscious at that moment. It didn't know what it was doing at that moment.

It took, actually quite soon, a few minutes later, got conscious, and could sense the push, and sense the judgment of not liking it. And immediately could see, oh, there's a place of judging it. Oh, hello there.

And as soon as I go hello to the judge, I'm back to the place that was pushing. And then I can say hello to that. And I'm with the place that was pushing, unconditionally.

When presencing with anything, it has this sense of, you don't have to be different to receive my want. That unconditionality is essential. You don't have to be different to receive my want.

And if something comes up inside that is unwilling to bring that want, then I need to see that and go to that first. And that usually has a judgmental voice. "You shouldn't —" And I get in touch with that and see what kind of presence I can bring to that.

And of course, if I judge the fact that I'm judging, then that gets the presence first, right? You can keep winding your way back to the original pain.

But often, the way we create suffering is by layering reactions to our initial pain upon the pain. Suffering is the pain of pain. Suffering is the pain of pain. It's the way we are carrying and reacting to and speaking to and living into the hurt spot.

The hurt spot just hurts. And that's okay. We can deal with hurt spots. But some part of us has gotten so afraid of the hurt spot that we layer very quickly on top of it all the reasons why we're bad for having it, and we'll never get rid of it. "I'm bad for having it. I'll never get rid of it. I'm a bad person. No one will ever like —" And now all of a sudden we're dealing with the pain down here, and now we've got this to try to deal with. It's kind of hard.

And then if you try to go to this spot with all this sitting on it, it goes, "I don't know. It's just so confusing. I don't know how to be with it."

[Participant:] Could you do that?

[Russell:] You got it. Just wanted to hear. Just for the fun of it.

[Participant:] Can I say?

[Russell:] What's that? Oh, yeah, yeah.

So we were talking yesterday. She's been with me a few times now. I realized that she's the same. I started telling this before, but it's still really coming in. It's so clear. What happens over time is it's really body-to-body transmission. I use a lot of words. I try to get metaphors. I try to get images. That's all trying to support what's trying to come through.

You got it. You just wanted to do that for the fun of it.

The fixer

[Russell:] Okay, so this warm and caring, this curious attentiveness. Now, this is a key one. I put it in red.

When I'm in presence with something that's living in me, it's very important that I notice any agendas that arise. I'll give you an example of this in a moment. One key agenda is the idea of fixing oneself.

Let me describe it. Let's stay with this example. I get in touch with something that's had a pushy tone. As I'm in touch with it, what comes up as a thought, and then I could feel it in my body, is, "I know what to do about that. Well, I need to talk to her, tell her that, and remember that she's old enough to make those choices, and if I'm going to ask her —" Then the voice that starts fixing the situation. That's not presence.

It's wonderful that we have sometimes helpful thoughts about what to do in situations, but that's not presence. And often this quality of presence gets hijacked by our fixer. We start calling the I the one who's going to make everything right and better. That's just another voice. Might be helpful later. We're not going to throw it out.

But for the process of our inner life feeling welcome, feeling seen, being in an environment that allows it to unfold, the quality of fixing isn't helpful. Hard for us to allow that.

So what happens is we need to bring attention to the fixer. When the fixer voice comes, and if that's strongest, we say to the hurt place, "I'll be back." Because the hurt place is so used to the fixer coming in and blasting him, or her, into shape. "I know what you need to do."

And we so much prefer identifying with the fixer rather than the hurt one. So it's very easy to call that I, and get a little bit of juice with it.

[Participant:] Russell, isn't the inclination to believe that the fixer stops the pain or hurt?

[Russell:] Okay. Nice. Great. Yep.

And the unfortunate thing is that it will, briefly. It's really unfortunate.

Feldenkrais — we watched him give somebody a lesson, and their knee got a lot better. Actually, that's not the example I want to use. That's better for something else. Let me use this example.

You walk outside and it's really cold. And you contract. For a little bit of time, you feel a little bit warmer, because your body has gotten mobilized, your musculature is working. But if you're out in the cold — those of you who can attest to this in Wisconsin, I'm sure — this is how you get frostbite. You can't move the blood through the system. You can't move the lymph through the system. You've frozen the system.

So the momentary success leads to an eventual destruction. And it's the same thing with the fixer. The momentary relief that we get from having a project to do with ourselves, from knowing what we need to do, freezes the place that's hurting in its place. And we leave that as it is.

So what we're looking at is something that's rather revolutionary. It's that your inner self, what I call your wisdom body, knows the solutions to its own difficulties. It knows what it needs. It knows what it would be if it could be, what it will be when it can be.

[Participant:] I love that. I just love that right there.

[Another participant:] Me too.

[Russell:] But it's literally, literally accurate. And this, again, I'm giving you a bunch that we will be unpacking in the next couple of sessions that we have together.

But there is a knowing of what's needed. We think the solutions are going to be found through our planning and our fixing of things. But what this work attests to and confirms is that awareness — a certain kind of awareness — activates a healing process. That's a radical thing. Activates a healing process, and that healing process is actually known inside, when it's given a certain environment.

What is the environment that's needed for what Gene Gendlin used to call the life-forward movement of the organism, for it to unfold forward? Well, an environment like this, where there's a sense of, you don't have to be different. I'm not going to change you. I'm going to be with you.

It kind of sounds like the elephant. I think it just wants us to really pay attention to this moment. A purring elephant, right?

Okay, so now we have shorthand: the purring elephant.

Presence has no needs

[Russell:] Now, part of this no agenda — and this is another really, really fascinating one — is when holding presence for something, presence doesn't have demands.

And one way to say that, that's really important, although a little bit maybe challenging at first, is presence doesn't have any needs of its own. It doesn't have needs for you to get better. It doesn't have needs for you to feel better. It's warm-hearted, and it's hoping.

I'll give you an image that for some of you will be terrible and for some of you will be just right. I think of this presence thing — this one foot in one world, one foot in the other — kind of like the way some people speak about guardian angels.

From people who talk about guardian angels, there's an angel who has signed up forever, for lifetimes upon lifetimes, to be with you. And they love you so much, they would never, ever, ever,

ever, ever desert you. And yet the deal is, they're not allowed to fix things for you. They're just there with you. And you can get support, but not fixing.

[Participant:] That's a great one. Where did that come from?

[Russell:] Right. Yeah.

Rudolf Steiner had this image. He was a mystic clairvoyant who was actually quite an incredible being. And they say that you can have relationship to your guardian angels and get guidance, but they can't interfere with your life.

And he said the saddest thing he ever saw, going into the angelic realms — there are different levels. I don't understand this. This is not personal experience. This is reading. So there are nine levels of angelic — he goes into these realms. He said the saddest thing he ever saw were thousands and thousands and thousands of guardian angels laying around, waiting to be called by their person that they were there to take care of.

They're just waiting to be asked. "Can you help me, please? Help me. Give me some guidance here. Give me some support."

Yeah, so put that story right here. I use that story as an image of what the feeling of presencing is like. The presencing is there, totally there in your corner — in the corner of the inner life, in the corner of a hurt, stuck place. But as soon as there's something like, "And I know what you should do," that's another inner voice. You've left presencing. And you've left the quality of listening that we're cultivating.

This listening, this presencing, has the feeling of being really fully connected, really with you, really with what's happening. If it's toward another person, it's really receiving. You're putting your agenda aside, your stuff, and you're really receiving them. But mainly right now, we're talking about how to relate to our own inner places.

So let's say you have a very difficult pain in your back. Presencing might look — and I'm making this up, because I don't have a pain in my back right now — presencing might look like bringing attention to this place in my back that feels so pressed. And then, as presence, I ask, "Show me what it's like." And, "Oh, it's just tight, and hot, and like a needle pressing in."

I'm with you. I'm with the inner place that's feeling that. I am presence. I am space and light. Holding space for something that's alive in this one.

And then maybe I hear an inner voice like, "I hate this. I hate — I'm tired of this back." Then I'm holding presence for that. "Oh, there's a place in here that hates it." So there's the back that's hurting, and there's this place that hates the back. "Oh, I feel kind of like a constriction up here, like it just wants to pounce on it or something."

Really, really know you're there. Tell me more. What's it like?

"Oh, I'm just so sick and tired of feeling pulled down."

I'm sick and tired of it. Tell me more.

"Oh, I just —" and now it might change, "and I'm really scared it's never gonna change."

Now I'm following it. It's leading me. And I am bringing presence to what's there now. And I may occasionally have to say, "Don't worry, back. I know you're there. I'll be back."

But our inner life has space for a few different things happening. Often there are two different things happening at the same time. Sometimes maybe even a third. Can't keep track of ten different things at the same time.

But I'm wanting to model and give examples of what it might be like to hold presence for something that's alive.

Now, almost everybody in this room is pretty skillful at trying to manipulate what's alive and control it from up here with some better ideas. You're probably going to do that a lot. Don't worry about it. As soon as you notice that, "Oh, I'm in that again."

So how can we get some support, some help, in not falling into our patterns so easily of losing presence? Don't you think that would be helpful?

[Participant:] Yes.

[Russell:] Those are my green thoughts.

Of course, I'm suggesting that cultivating this ground — which, of course, eventually will be a model for how we learn to listen to other people. The way we learn to listen to our inner life becomes a model for how we're listening to others.

Most of us can say, "Oh, I want to learn how to listen to other people." Right? "I want to learn how to —"

The first gap, for almost all of us, is how to be with the places that we judge, that get judged, and that are liked, or that are painful and uncomfortable within ourselves. How to be with.

[Participant:] I think I'm getting the sense a little bit, because I totally understand what you're saying about the story, the other things that pile on top of whatever it is that you're originally feeling. But for me, anyway, when I'm trying to be present with something, sometimes I do get answers. And it doesn't seem — I mean, there's different ways of getting answers. A fixer can give you an answer, but then other answers come out of the presence.

[Russell:] Absolutely. Yes. That's why we want to be in presence. This is the good news. Let me give you the good news. There is this wisdom. And the remarkable thing — you don't need to believe it, you just need to be willing to practice and participate — is that when certain qualities of presence are brought to places that are stuck, or places that are confused, or places that are struggling, places that are in pain, however you want to call it — it always has a sense of something kind of stuck or caught up. It doesn't feel flowing in those places.

When we learn to bring this quality of presence to those places, and we can be with it — this is a key move, okay? We've got something. You find that, "I'm really angry about this." Then all of a sudden you've learned to make the key move, and be with the place inside that's carrying the anger.

And when you can be in presence with it, it knows how to unwind itself. You can't make it unwind. But if you can hold the quality of being with it, in the forms that we're talking about, and in the language I'm going to tell you about in a little bit, it almost always will make at least

some movement out of its entanglement. Sometimes a big move, and really show you something. Sometimes it just unwinds a little bit. But almost invariably, it will make a move if it gets the quality of attending that we're talking about.

So yes, we are doing this because it is intelligent in here. And the stuck places — whether it's a relationship stuck place, whether it's in my bodily patterns, whether it's in a feeling state — all of that can be sensed in a bodily way, and there's intelligence in that sensing.

[Participant:] If I pursue that — I'm not sure if I asked this question right. I'm playing with words. For me, it would be easier to talk to the wisdom body, as opposed to the difficult place.

[Russell:] Yeah. You can go to the wisdom body and say, "I need some help with this."

[Participant:] Yeah. Pain over here. But what I'm hearing you say is that the pain — the wisdom body is apparently embedded in the difficult. You have to get through the difficult place to get to the wisdom body. So I'm playing with concepts here, I realize that. I don't really do that, but it just seems like it'd be easier just to go to the wisdom body and say, "Hey, how about help me with this problem here?"

[Russell:] That might work sometimes. That might work. You'll have to experiment. I'm not going to say that that can't work.

What I am going to say is — what I'm calling — remember, wisdom body is made up. There's not this thing sitting in there that we can point to and call, "That's my ulna, that's my breastbone, and there's my wisdom body." It's a capacity. That's why the -ing is so good. It's a functioning. It's a capacity, and it lives inside stuck places. It lives outside stuck places. It's not only in the stuck place, or the thing you're dealing with.

And I find it very helpful to work in both directions. For my inner work, it's something like, I might ask for guidance around something. Ask the wisdom in here to show me what might be helpful in this situation. I also find it really helpful to take care of the hurting places.

An image of care

[Russell:] And taking care means — let me give you an image. Close your eyes, so you can go inside.

Yeah, close your eyes. Enjoy your bottom. Enjoy the ground. Enjoy your feet. Enjoy your breathing.

And when I say enjoy, that's an invitation, not a demand. An invitation. Just be settled in yourself. Enjoy what you can.

And just imagine there's a situation where there's a baby who has some distress. They're upset. And somebody's with them saying, "You know, I have to leave, and the parents are coming over soon. Could you hold this baby? Could you take this baby and help this baby to feel safe and secure until their mom and dad arrive? They'll be here in a little while."

So you know it's not going to take forever. You've got this situation, and imagine that you decide, yeah, I'm going to take care of this one. No one else is around. I'm not going to leave the baby alone. I will take care. There's a part of you that maybe is scared, or doesn't want to. You acknowledge that, but notice how you would organize your inner body, your inner self, how you would be in

yourself, to communicate to this infant that they're okay, that it's safe. It's safe to be with you right now. They're going to be okay.

What are some of the ways you would be with them? Some of the ways you wouldn't be with them? And let your body show you the atmosphere it would want to convey to this little being, that it's safe to be with you.

And just feel. Let your body show you. Your inner self show you. How you generate the feeling of safety to something that can't understand your words. It understands your tones, maybe, but not your words. And that you wanted to give a body-to-body communication. A human-to-human communication.

And stay with that, and say out loud. Let's share together some of the things that seem important about how you would be, and how you would not be, with this one.

[Participant:] Gentle.

[Russell:] Let's go slow here. So, yeah, clearly a sense of gentle.

[Participant:] Soothing.

[Russell:] Soothing. Yeah. The tenderness — feel how your body could communicate tender. A soft touch, and also the kind of feeling you might have in your chest and your belly as you were conveying tender.

[Participant:] Quiet.

[Russell:] Quiet, yeah.

[Participant:] Observe.

[Russell:] Yes, you're really observing.

[Participant:] Protecting.

[Russell:] Protecting, yeah.

[Participant:] Holding.

[Russell:] Holding, yeah. Touching, sensing, being in contact. Physical contact.

[Participant:] Engaged.

[Russell:] Engaged, yeah. So that sense of you really would be bringing your attention and your care right there. You wouldn't be distracted by other things.

Yeah, and not too serious. Not making it a tragic situation. "This is really a big thing." No. You try to keep it somehow — everything's okay. I'm with you. If I'm with you, everything's okay. How do you convey that in your body? If I'm with you, everything's okay.

[Participant:] In rhythm.

[Russell:] A rhythm, yeah. In rhythm.

[Participant:] Rocking.

[Russell:] Rocking.

[Participant:] Caressing.

[Russell:] Caressing. Yeah. Kind of reassuring in tone.

And we can feel into this whole-body sense that you might have. Of course, your chest probably softens a little bit, to be able to have some of this. And you're able to take your own concerns and put them a little bit to the side, maybe acknowledging that they're there, but not letting them take you over, because you know that wouldn't be good for the baby.

And so you could acknowledge — "Oh, hope the parents get here" — that voice might come, or "hope everything's okay." And then you turn back towards the baby.

Okay, now just take, in your imagination, that you have a pain in your body. Can you imagine turning towards that with something like this caring?

There'll be — not the only thing you're doing, but for now, at first, you're bringing your unconditional care.

Now, of course, if there was something that needed action, a wound that needed healing, something like that, you would take action, of course. Assuming all that has been taken care of — no. Now it's the time to kind of settle with this moment.

Can you imagine — and not only with a physical pain, but imagine that your heart is aching about something. Somebody really disappointed you, or you're upset about something that happened, or something you did, or something someone else did, and something inside feels upset.

Could you imagine turning towards that and saying, "Hello. I'm with you. I am with you. I being presence. I'm with you."

And notice, even in your imagination right now, how the body changes in that kind of situation. And just imagining that caring, how you feel that in your body.

As your eyes slowly begin to open, coming to sitting here, sensing yourself.

Being able to take care of a hurting place, even if we're also going to go directly to asking for wisdom. But this atmosphere of being with it, and trusting that there is wisdom within that moment, is a radical move. And once you get confidence, once you get some experience that it's worthy of having confidence in, it creates a very different inner relationship.

It really becomes the end of self-judgment there. The neutralizing of self-judgment. Neutralize doesn't mean that the remnants — the kind of balloon without any air in it — won't show up. But it doesn't have any energy, because you're so practiced. In what?

In moving from — this is the key move we're working on over the next three years — moving from identification with the historical self into identification with this being.

I'm using the word identification there, but it's still held lightly. It's moving from calling "I am — I am really angry." Fine thing to say. This is not a judgment. Sometimes I'll say that. But it's the moving from that as a familiar location to, "I'm sensing. I'm sensing some anger in here. I am noticing a place of a lot of anger."

Not that I am the anger. You don't say, "I am backache." Why would I say, "I am angry"? You say, "I have a backache. I'm the space in which backaches occur." Or whatever. "Well, I'm the space in which this anger is occurring. I am not that."

This may sound picky linguistically. It's a different identification. Where are we going to place it?

And this is tricky territory, because I don't want to imply that there's a right way of speaking. Sometimes to say, "I am angry," is the most authentic way to say it. Then you say it that way. Okay? We want to bow at the altar of authenticity. Right? That was the bottom line. Picking up the volume — it has to feel authentic.

But if it feels just as authentic, as it will most of the time, to say, "Wow, I am noticing a whole lot of anger in there. But let me be with that place that's really angry. It's feeling like this in there, and I am being with it."

This is radical. This is a radical move. This is how presencing works.

[Participant:] So Russell, to make it stick, you're saying that we're not the anger. We're able to witness the anger.

[Russell:] Right. We're not the anger. We're able to witness it. Right. That's right. That's right.

We are not those — those are false identities that we not only fall into linguistically, but we fall into in terms of how we're holding it in our inner life.

And for me to be with my wife and say — oh, you know, sometimes I might say, "I felt hurt when you forgot to do that." More often I will, even if I say it that way, it's like I'm being with the place that was hurt. I'm not avoiding it, but I'm not in it.

Presencing is learning how to be with, without distancing from.

Let me just give a little bit more here, then I'll come to questions.

Where we place the I

[Russell:] So the first move that's unbelievably powerful, in my experience, is when we get selective and conscious of how we're using I.

This I — this autonomous, authentic self called I — is now this connection to this place of spaciousness and light. So what does I do? I does things like, I sense. I notice. I am aware. I am acknowledging. As examples. There we can go on and on.

And again, this is not a rule. I'm trying to give you the flavor of something, and you will figure out your own inner working so that you can feel authentic.

But I'm trying to give you the picture that if there's a moment in which this vast being of Russell has been hijacked by a toothache, and now my whole moment is starting to go — this human being who's capable of all these possible thoughts, all these possibilities, has now been taken. The moment I can — and I've had practice with this in different situations — the moment I can say, "Oh boy, boy, boy. Sensing a whole lot. I'm sensing a whole lot. I'm with you. I am with you. I am with the place that's having this."

[Participant:] So mostly we never said feel?

[Russell:] Feel is a tricky one. I encourage — feeling tends to pull you in. Again, I'm not saying it's taboo at all. I use the word feel. But if it's really something I want to work with and liberate in myself, as soon as I say, "I feel," I identify with the feeling. And that is always a smaller identity than who I am.

Now, in a given situation, that again is not wrong. None of these things are wrong, right? I got to keep saying that. It might feel most accurate to speak that way. But if we're looking at what helps liberate our false identities — get that right, what helps liberate —

[Participant:] False means — it sounds like — are you judging that as false, not true? Why is all the judgment in that?

[Russell:] Well, what I'm saying is incomplete identity. It's when one has identified their self with a part of themselves. And whenever we do that, we suffer.

Whenever we identify the self with a part, we suffer. Whether that part be myself as a father — like those examples I was giving — or myself as a good person, or myself as an athletic person, or wherever. Or with a given feeling state, a given ability. Those are always too small for the human being.

Okay, so. We're learning what it would be to hold space for something that's living in us. How to be with it. And even if it doesn't feel right for you to do it with other people, for you to internally begin the process of really choosing where you're placing the I.

And when you find yourself bound to an old, conditioned way of talking about yourself, to yourself. "Oh, I'm just not okay." I'm just — this is one that so many of us carry. "I'm just fundamentally damaged. Something happened. I really got — people don't know what I know. A lot of people don't have that, but somehow I got this."

And when one — it's not helpful to push that away. It's not helpful to get into fixer mode. Say, "Every day, in every way, you're getting better and better. I love you. You are fine, really."

What is helpful is, in that moment of seeing, there can be, "I'm with this place that feels all this damage, and it feels huge." You don't have to minimize it. "I'm with this really, really big place. It almost fills up all of me. But you know what? It can't be all of me, because I'm here."

[Participant:] We just found a wizard.

[Russell:] It can't be all of me, because I'm seeing it.

And then, like a house of cards, this false structure can fall, at least for a moment. And as you practice, you don't fall for it. It feels and looks like somebody else's story that you took on.

So we need means for this. And this is not just language games, although language is essential for how we carry our life. But I don't want you to think of this as just linguistic. The language here allows you to make the inner move we're talking about, about how to be with something rather than inside of it.

And that's the ground where these states self-liberate. We don't actually liberate them. They self-liberate, because they have wisdom inside of them, and life doesn't want to stay constricted.

Moshe Feldenkrais: movement is life. He's got that. Buddha, same. Everything is changing. Life only feels stuck in that form when it's not getting the kind of environment it needs to unfold itself.

And so our pains, our pains in the body, don't feel like free-flowing areas. Why? Because they're stuck. They feel compressed. They don't feel light and easy.

The same way, when we're in a challenging moment with somebody we're close with, we don't feel free and easy. We don't feel light. We feel a compression, a tightening, a pressure, a something's not right. I mean, it's not like it feels wonderful when we're in that place, and then we resolve it and feel all terrible.

Is it okay? Or did you want to come in? You had a question a while ago, and I didn't give you a chance to ask.

[Participant:] Absolutely congruent. What Feldenkrais saw about working with hurting bodies and dysfunctional movement generalizes to working with our patterns of interacting with ourselves and with others.

[Russell:] Right. That's right. That's right.

Okay, so we get this. Got to give you a little bit — I know it's a little too much and everything, but we got to keep going, because we need this in the air, and we will get back to it.

[Participant:] Just one quick question. Why isn't seeing on there?

[Russell:] Yeah. I'm seeing — so it would be fine to say something like, "I'm seeing this place in there." Yeah, probably fine. It's all a question of, does it move you next to the something?

This is such a cool language. I got this from Ann Cornell. I'll tell you about some of the sources of this later.

These inner places — what we're doing with this presence thing is we're learning how to keep company. A beautiful way to think about it. It's like a best friend keeping company with something.

And when we get to a place where we spontaneously are capable of keeping company with our hurting places, the places that we used to judge all the time — and again, for the first year, a couple of years for some of us, it's going to be spending a lot of time keeping company with the judge. Because that judge is carrying, by the way, a lot of worry. Invariable. Almost invariable.

The one who appears as this malicious judge is actually very concerned and worried about what's going to happen to you if it's not telling you how bad you are. I mean, it's not smart. It's just not evil.

[Participant:] It was completely functional.

[Russell:] Yes. Exactly.

Okay, so we need to do another step here.

[Participant:] I just wanted to say, I think this is a step into the world that — as you said, it's kind of easier sometimes to see it outside us instead of within. But our daughter has had a stuck story. And once I actually had a great deal of compassion, after I realized how much her definition of who she is needs company, needs to be accompanied.

And I'm so tired of the definition that I'm like, "Oh, tell somebody else that." I mean, I've never welcomed it. It was just like this. And instead of being annoyed, all of a sudden I found this place of compassion for her, really trying to be heard.

So I hope it'll happen to me. But I got one level — someone else that's close to me. So anyway, thank you for giving me an appreciation of —

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:] Right, right. I can't get sloppy in my identities if I'm wanting something to unfold.

And so: I'm sensing, I'm noticing. We'll put these up so you can see them later. I'm sensing, I'm noticing, I'm aware of. Then this is another piece of beautiful language that will serve you for the rest of your life.

I'm giving you some examples, and then you will see what works for you. Again, authenticity is our altar, and bow to that. If something doesn't fit for you, you don't use it.

So another way to be with something, but not in it, is: there's something in me that's really angry. There's a place in me that's really sad. There's a part of me that's really confused.

The true self is never confused. True self is space and light. Just whatever comes, comes. Right? It's responsive to the moment. It can take different forms, but it doesn't live in confusion. So there's a part of me that's really confused in this moment. I'm making this up right now.

Personal bias: I don't use "part of me" a lot. Some people love that one, and it's a good one. I tend to feel more at home with these places in here. Don't know why. That's just been true for me.

And this something — this something word is brilliant. It liberates so much when one can say, "I'm sensing something that doesn't feel right. I don't know what it is." "I'm sensing a stuck place." "I'm sensing something that feels stuck."

Okay, listen to this. I'm sensing — so here I am in one of my stuck places, right? And then I take one step away. "I'm sensing stuckness." I take two steps away. "I'm sensing something in me that feels stuck."

Do you get how that's different? "I'm stuck." "I'm sensing stuckness." "I'm sensing something in me that feels stuck."

"I'm really angry. I'm so pissed off." Again, that might be totally great. If it tends to be a habitual state, you might want to investigate it. Just a suggestion.

So then it would be, "There's a whole lot of anger." "And I'm sensing a whole lot of anger in me." "I'm sensing a whole lot of anger." "I'm sensing something in me that is full of anger."

[Participant:] It might not be anger.

[Russell:] Yeah. I'm sensing something in me that feels something like — because it might not be anger.

[Participant:] Something like.

[Russell:] Yeah. Something like is a beautiful one. That, up here too.

Not too close, not too far

[Russell:] So there's one more key point I want to see if I can get across. We're talking about skillful ways of being with what's alive. Skillful in this sense means how to allow it to unfold in its own right direction. Skillful means how to be with this so that it can unfold in its own right direction.

Another way of saying right here is its own life-giving direction, its own life-honoring direction. It's what we want for our kids, right? Not to be what we want them to be, but for them to be able to unfold in the right direction for them. And by right, we mean something like life-giving. And they connect. They fulfill in that direction, right?

So we are assuming the same direction with our inner life. How to be with it.

Now, if one has a tendency to be very distant from their inner life — and this is often true in archetypically male-dominant beings, not necessarily men, but archetypically male, where there's a lot of thought and understanding and reflection, and the feeling life is distant — we don't want to be too far away from the inner experience, just like we don't want to be in it.

We don't want to be — you know, some people, this is the problem with the way witnessing is often taught in spiritual circles. It's like, "I'm noticing — yeah, some kind of something looks a little bit messy over there." It has an atmosphere of pulling away from, of not embracing, of not being there for. That is not presencing. That's why I don't use the term witnessing.

[Participant:] When you say in spiritual circles, are you referring to the way —

[Russell:] Well, meditation. Meditators are often taught to witness thoughts, or witness experience. That's one of the — yeah, see the clouds, like it's just something over there. If that is not balanced by other support, I've seen too many really, really accomplished meditators not be able to have a relationship.

The warmth is such an indicator that what we're looking at here is an experience is happening. We want — now this is going to really confuse you, so get ready.

Remember I talked about the self-illuminated jewel? Self-illuminated jewels, lit up from the inside.

When I sense harmonious relationship in my living, what I notice is I am simultaneously in my experience and with my experience. And it's not a back and forth. It's a simultaneous in-touchness with what's alive in this body, in this moment of relating. And there's a witnessing, or a presencing, of it at the same time.

That presencing doesn't remove me from it completely, but doesn't leave me hijacked by it, as it takes over the organism. Do you get this picture? This is a key one.

That we can be living where we are moved by life. And there's this effortless quality of noticing the moving, being moved by life. And there's no sense of — I want to convey something about its intrinsic. No sense of separation. And not identified with.

Okay, let's use that. Maybe for somebody that speaks — not identified, and then you tend to negate things a lot. Not identified, and not separate.

[Participant:] Is it called not being able to write a book about it, or something?

[Russell:] Sort of. It's not one, not two. Not one, not two.

[Participant:] I've once had that experience. It was made very clearly, and I had just come back from a meditation retreat, years and years ago, and it was just stunning in the clarity with which I experienced that. And I've always been able to use that experience as a touchstone, to knowing its truth. But I've never had it again. Can you actually live with it?

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. So I'd love to speak to that. Thank you. It's so great.

My experience is that it lives at different levels of intensity, but it never loses its nature. So it can come as a really startling kind of moment of absolute clarity, that is excellent as a resource state. But you don't live in that. You live in something that has that experience occurring at less intensity, but at no less authenticity.

So there's no doubt about it, but it's not overwhelm. It's not like, "Oh my God, the world is —" And it's not just that you get used to it. It's that it has varying degrees of intensity.

I can attest that we can live it most of the time. I don't know, maybe one can live it all the time. I don't have it all the time, but I do have it most of the time. And I do have the never-far-away. So the recovery, the recuperability, is close.

[Participant:] I feel it more than anything.

[Russell:] I know. Stay with the feelings. Stay with the feelings.

[Participant:] I feel that at certain times, so it's just a feeling. That's all I know.

[Russell:] You know what? We've got some time to practice.

[Participant:] I had what I call my transformational state. Maybe it was this, but it was the sense of unitive envelopment, and the sense of love everywhere. I won't go into detail, but it lasted for like three weeks. And I had a hard time functioning.

It was so potent that what normally would have happened, in terms of arguments between my kids, they just felt something different. And people called me with these incredible messages out of the blue. And I just felt like I was radiating. And I was crying all the time, out of just, "What is happening? Where am I?"

Every place was a place of incredible encounter. The grocery store. And people were like, "Oh my God." I don't know how I could drive. So I'm saying I had that personal experience, and I don't know if I just didn't have the courage to stay in it or not. But it was another state of being. It was.

[Russell:] So my picture of our opportunity and our task — let me step back for a minute.

If you're in another culture, in another time, there might be support and function for living in that state. We have a different situation we're living into, and it evokes something in addition in consciousness. It evokes, how can I have this true sense of love as my nature?

Which we can go — at some point we might see that beingness can be used equally to love. They actually, at that level, begin to become the same thing. But love as my nature be where I'm living, and yet there is a this and a that, and a functioning. It's not as overwhelming, but it's also not ordinary consciousness.

So it's not a choice between the ordinary or the extraordinary. It's different, and it's not just a blend of the two either. It's a different kind of living. I don't want to be so abstract.

So from this quality of grounded presencing, one begins to feel a harmony that is not some sort of esoteric state, but one begins to feel a harmony in ordinary living. And when one starts feeling a little bit disconnected, the body registers that, and there's a calling to listen to what is needing attention.

And you begin to have a source of reference for the disconnecting place, for the false identities taking over. And one begins to notice that sooner and sooner. And there becomes a self-correcting, where one gets back into harmony.

But harmony is not only harmony with oneself. It's harmony with one's world. One begins to feel that. One begins to get lots of phone calls out of the blue. Or one begins to see the way it happens in the office so often, when we're working with something and something is weaving, and this comes in, and then that. How did that happen? This becomes part of the fabric of one's living.

Yeah, sounding more esoteric than I wanted. This is grounded in bodily sensing. You have to be present in order to — so we begin with the presencing, not because the body's so special, but because it's so special. Meaning, it's such a reliable entry point to presence.

And it's from here, the physical body, then we get to the feeling body. And the feeling body gives us access to, "Am I in harmony? Am I missing something? Oh, what a gift. Something is constricted. What's it need? Oh, I didn't pay enough attention to that."

And if you give it the attention it needs, it unwinds, and it tells you. It speaks to you. So we really have a reliable reference, as we learn its language.

Part of this learning is how to be with our experience and in our experience, but not in a way that we get hijacked by a particular mind state, body state, feeling state. You understand how I'm using the word hijacked?

We don't get hijacked by that state, where it takes over the organism. But we also don't go so much into that being-with that we are objectifying our experience.

[Participant:] So what I'm hearing is not an either-or. My training, my life training, is you're either here or there, like Dr. Seuss or Sesame Street. I'm here, I'm there. So the duality — it's not either-or. It's a kind of adjacency. A kind of alongside.

[Russell:] It's not either-or. That's part of it. It's an adjacency, but there's also an in-ness. And one is sometimes walking right next to, and sometimes it has the experience of one being right with. Right with, right in it, but not lost in it.

[Participant:] It feels like circles to me. Like — never mind.

[Russell:] Okay, so thank you. Thank you.

So if one begins to feel too much separation from experiencing, that one is keeping it over there, kind of at arm's length, it's really helpful in those moments to come back to the bodily sense. Not to try to find it first in the abstract. Not even, "Well, what's the word for that? What am I feeling?"

How can I sense what's happening? "Oh, there's a little bit of tightness there. Okay, stay with that tightness." So sense, what kind of tightness? Is it a pressure tight? Is it a jumpy tight? And so we unpack it, so that it can reveal itself.

And as you spend more precious time letting it reveal itself, it often starts showing you a kind of feeling quality. "Well, it's —" or a picture will come, or a metaphor might. But to begin by sensing it physically is really helpful.

[Participant:] Standing in the experience at the same time as being able to look around. It's a universal awareness. In and with.

[Russell:] Exactly. That's what we're looking for.

[Participant:] But don't do this during sitting.

[Russell:] Okay, yes. Don't do this during sitting. But this opens up another territory. That's another territory. No, it's important. This is very important, because there is a difference.

This whole thing we're talking about, which is some of the ground of this work called focusing — this whole thing we're talking about is related to the way we sit, but it's not the same as. And it's too much to do right now, but I will want to help us make the distinctions. Where they overlap exquisitely and importantly, and where there are some key distinctions that we want, in order to let everything grow that's growing.

[Participant:] As well as the movement.

[Russell:] Yeah. There's movement, there's sitting, focusing. Yeah, but at some point I will describe for you how the movement ties all that together, and unties that. But again.

[Participant:] I just wanted to celebrate the difficulty, because without them we wouldn't have anything to deal with.

[Russell:] I want to ding that.

And I also want to say — let's start a new paragraph — and also, learning to be with our wonderful states. How to nurture the subtle feeling of gratitude, and water the seeds, so that we start feeling, "Oh, I can bring this same way into growing."

Okay, what happens here. I'm walking in the sun, walking with someone. And the green grass over here, the way the light is hitting that, and the moments of seeing something together, brings this ripple inside. And I can take a few seconds to get that again, and my body can come alive with it. I want that too.

More than fixing

[Russell:] It's a very interesting analogy. One of the sadnesses, maybe, that lives in me a little bit, as I think of — I love Moshe Feldenkrais, and we were quite close. And one of the sadnesses that lives in me about the direction of his work is that, to some degree, it's being taken by the medical world, or by the people who are using it to fix problems.

It's getting known more as, this is what you do when something's wrong. Whereas he saw the incredible potential. Although, for what we're doing — which is we are also using his lessons to unwind our historical self — he knew that was a potential, but it's not often being used that way.

And that the movement work has the potential for liberating so much joy, and so much presence, and so much possibility. It's not just about fixing problems.

And the same thing comes for me around Gene Gendlin. Gene Gendlin's work. He also has become really one of my best friends in the world. I love him. I have such respect for him, and I learn so much from him.

And part of what's happening in my interactions with him is, he also has this regret that the focusing world is, in many, many places, getting used only in therapy. So he loves the places where it's moving out into other environments. That is what's thrilling to him.

But these kinds of attitudes — this attitude of how to help this blossom, and how does one be with an inner state so that it helps to water its seed. It's great that it helps solve difficulties. I want that. But I don't want to think of it as that's its function.

Keep me honest. Thank you.

Okay, I think that's enough. That's probably more than enough. I appreciate your attention very much.

And let's take a little break and do some movement together. Let's meet back in ten minutes.