Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 1, Day 6, Session 5 — 40 minutes

Summary: Standing, Russell offers an image of breath drawn from above, down the skull and spine into the earth, then exhaled upward with a gentle lengthening. On the floor that image fills and lengthens each limb and lifts arm and leg, same side and diagonal, from breath rather than effort. It closes standing, sensing the back.

Breath from above

[Russell:] Let's stand, please.

What could be more fun than that?

Now, I want to bring us an image that, for some, will feel kind of counterintuitive, odd, but I would like to cultivate it and work with it, and some other time tell you why I think it's valuable.

So it's an image that, as you inhale, it's as if the air comes from way above you, through your skull, through your spine, filling your pelvis, through your pelvis into the earth.

And you're exhaling, and it comes up and out. All that way, up and out.

So the inhaling is down from above you, through your spine, through your pelvis, into the earth. And the exhaling is coming up through your spine, up and out.

And there's even a very subtle sense. This is the counterintuitive part, probably. A subtle sense that there's a gentle lengthening upward with the exhale.

Now, you're not stretching. You're not going, oh, I got to exhale and make my spine longer or something. It's a picture.

Inhaling. As if the inhale comes down, fills your pelvis, goes through you, from way above you. So we're also including space in our image of breathing.

It comes from way above you, through your skull, through your spine, into the earth. It doesn't have to be a detailed image. You can just sweep the breath down through you, and up, and out.

Giving direction

[Russell:] And please take your hands and observe me for a moment.

I'm placing my hands. The occiput is the lower bone on your skull here. The fingers are on the occiput, the thumbs are around someplace in front.

And it's a sense of inhaling down, and as you exhale, a subtle suggestion up, and you can even let your hands kind of go up and all come off your head.

So it's like they just — they're not actually pulling, they're just giving direction to the skull with the exhale.

So we're working with the celestial gravity as well as the earthly gravity. The sense of an attraction upward.

So with each, you can then let the arms come down, and then you have a breath.

But this room goes from cold to hot so fast.

Menopause. We will call this the menopause room. You know the word menopause?

[Participant:] Oh, yeah.

[Russell:] Okay, so once again, put your hands.

So, the picture here. Let me get my —

So if you look for a moment — definitely all can see.

So if we look, here's the occiput. Your fingers are coming around, and actually the weight — this part of your hand, this carpal joint here, is giving direction upward.

You're basically near your ear. You are just behind your ear, which is, in most of us, where the atlas and axis are.

We're just taking the space where the atlas and axis are articulating with the cranium, and we're suggesting an upward lengthening.

So it's as if the breath comes through here, and then with the exhale, we're inviting a little bit of space between the vertebrae.

Yeah, and it's really a suggestion. It's not, okay, I gotta poke. It's more like just slightly more than the word up.

It's a direction that you're heading.

[Participant:] Question — your atlas and axis is where it punches through the foramen magnum?

[Russell:] It's the first two cervical vertebrae.

It fits so well here, but anyway. It actually goes through the mouth into the back of the head.

But what we're looking at is something that's coming up. It's not pulling the head back, it's not pulling the head forward. It has this upward direction.

The skeletal line

[Russell:] And interestingly, that line of the skeleton goes all the way through those ankle joints and the calcaneum — calcaneus bone, the heel bone.

Right?

And now Aaron asked before, well, what does this kind of softening in the knees have to do with a kind of skeletal organization? Because wouldn't the skeleton be more with the knee tending more to a straight place?

Well, you wouldn't want the knee locked, which is what a lot of people do, because that actually thrusts the knees behind a more skeletal line.

So a slight give in the knees is really very, very helpful.

Exaggerating that slightly for most people is a good thing to give them, even though anatomically the knees might be slightly in front of this gravitational line, because it counteracts that tendency to pull away from your ground.

Think of a four-legged — people.

[Participant:] Four-legged people? The knee joint is always bent. I mean, I know they're vertical — they're horizontal, but.

[Russell:] Right, right. But it's always a give. It's always a give. And yes, we want that.

Okay, so what we're looking at is this, and what we're going to do in this lesson is connect the breathing to this sense of lengthening.

And actually, we're going to take that through the body in a few different ways and connect it to a kind of vitalizing of our backs and limbs.

So I think this should be a pretty good lesson.

You better get going now.

Lie down on your back.

On the floor

[Russell:] Okay, so. Yeah, so lie down and take off your glasses if you're wearing such.

And enjoy the floor. It loves you so much.

And as you're breathing, just a few sweeps of breath, inhaling down through, and really let your imagination travel through your spine — through your skull, through your spine. You can sweep down through your pelvis, and up, and out.

Just let that kind of sweeping occur.

Even if you think you can't imagine things, do your best to travel through your body, just sweeping your mind in that way.

Good, and please turn onto your front and rest with your forehead on your hands and your legs long.

And again, just take a few moments to think. As if the air comes from above your head, headward direction, it drops down through your spine, and really track with attention through yourself, and then exhaling up and out.

Follow that a few times.

From the toes

[Russell:] Just gently put your toes on the floor as if to push off for running.

And just see if you can gently create a little push off the floor that pushes your pelvis and pushes your head, lengthens your spine.

Just a little pushing through.

And it kind of rocks through gently. Feel it through.

And you can do that in an oscillation, kind of going bop, bop, bop, bop, bop, a kind of oscillatory movement, letting your chest soften on the floor.

Good, and then rest the toes for a moment.

[Silence 31 seconds]

And once again, organize your toes, and this time a long, slow push, and push with an exhale.

Inhale coming down through your spine, exhaling, and you push, and you feel that lengthening through the top of your head, as if the breath is traveling up your spine as you push.

And connect that lengthening to the exhale.

Good.

Okay, leave that.

The right side

[Russell:] Please look leftward.

Lengthen your right arm upward, if that's possible. If that's not comfortable, don't do it, or do it less. Find a comfortable place.

Gently feel the movement of turning your pelvis, a little left, a little right.

Let the toes rest. The toes are not pushing off, and you're just turning your pelvis and feeling that go through yourself. Left, right.

Feel how that travels through the vertebrae, through your chest.

That's it. Now you can feel it all the way through to your head, maybe.

And then, as the left side lifts, let the knee bend out to the side.

So the left leg is bent, and the left arm out to the side. The knee goes as if you're creeping upward, so the knee goes out to the left.

Yeah.

And your left arm is bent, your left leg is bent, and your right arm is long, and your right leg is long.

That's it.

And let yourself have an image as if you're inhaling, and the inhale travels down to your pelvis and to the right side, down the right leg, and actually feel if you can pull your mind, your consciousness, through the right leg, through the right ankle, through the right foot, and then exhaling.

The breath sweeps upward through the leg and then eventually to the spine and out the head.

So the movement through the back and head can be very brief, so that you can have more attention on your right leg, as if you could feel the hip joint and the breath, the knee and the breath, the ankle and the breath.

And as that leg fills with air, also let the leg lengthen just a little bit, as if someone just begins to pull a little bit on your right leg, as if the filling with air lengthens it.

Nice.

Good, good, and then pause here for a moment.

Think of your right arm, and just imagine inhaling through your right arm.

And as you picture the breath traveling through the arm, let the arm get a little longer, as if someone is just gently pulling on it — the right arm, the long right arm, not the bent left.

Let it get a little longer, as if it's filling with air.

The right arm lengthens just a little bit. It's not like a vigorous stretch. It's as if the air and your consciousness create space in that arm.

Let the shoulder come into consciousness.

So the breath going through these joints can invite some opening, some mobility, some space.

So we're using a gentle movement, the breath, and an image.

And then one more thing here. As you inhale, lengthen the right leg and the right arm. Gently, as if they're filling with air, pausing, and then just releasing on the exhale.

That's good.

Okay, and then slowly bend both arms, put your forehead on your hands, lengthen both legs.

Sense your contact with the ground.

Then, with your legs long, as you inhale, the air goes through your right leg.

The right leg lengthens slightly and begins to lift a little bit off the ground.

So you're inhaling. Connect the movement to the inhale, and to the image.

So the air is coming down, filling your right side of your pelvis. As it fills the leg, the leg gets a little longer and lifts.

It's not pulling it in. It's letting it get longer and lift.

And then as you exhale, you lower it back down.

And just feel that through your whole back.

It just lifts a little bit. Find a way for the knee and foot to come away, if possible. If that's uncomfortable, don't do it. Do less.

Good.

And then just pause in this position for a moment. Let your leg rest.

Pause here and just feel how life moves through your body, where you sense what's alive.

Good. Forehead on your left hand, if that's comfortable. If you'd rather turn your head, you can do that.

But if it's comfortable, put your forehead on your left hand, and lengthen your right arm upward.

And as you imagine this air coming through your skull, over to your right shoulder, through your right arm, let it come all the way through the hand and fingers.

Your fingers kind of pop out like a balloon toy in the shape of a human being.

And let the fingers come out. The arm gets longer and begins to lift.

It's connected to breath.

So you're inhaling, letting it grow out, out, out from your torso, and it comes off the floor just a little bit.

The hand and elbow come up just a bit, only if that's comfortable.

The right arm. And it's important that it's connected to the inner sense, the breath, the feeling of the energy of your body moving through that arm.

And these next few movements connect to your right arm and your right leg.

And feel they can lift a very little bit. They don't have to lift very much, but connect it to the breath.

Don't make it a mechanical back exercise or something.

It's filling with breath, and as if the breath itself begins to lift the arm and the leg.

Just a little bit, if that's comfortable.

And then please pause.

You can rest. If you can rest comfortably on your front, do so. If you need to come off your front, do so.

You can change the direction of your head, you can bend your legs, you can do any —

[Silence 46 seconds]

The left side

[Russell:] Good.

Okay, and please begin to tune into your left leg.

Your legs be long. Let both arms be bent comfortably.

Just begin to tune into your left leg.

Have your head however it wants to be for now.

And begin to connect the inhaling through your spine to your left leg, down through the leg, all the way through the foot, out the foot, and then exhaling up and out.

Really let the breath, the image, and the sense of that leg come together, and you gradually begin to lengthen the left leg.

It's a small movement, but it's clear.

You feel this pelvic movement connected to the breath.

The left leg gets long, and we can immediately go to the whole movement. So it begins getting long and lifting, but let the lifting grow from the breath.

Listen to the change of pressure on the floor.

Right. That looks nice. And pause.

Lengthen your left arm upward.

Just feel this for a moment. How it's comfortable or not, and if you need to adjust yourself.

Begin to connect consciousness, how you can move with the breath through the skull, neck, over to the left shoulder, and you can travel through the arm.

Sweeping the mind all the way through the hand and fingers.

Then connecting the breath to fill those fingers, and begin to lengthen the arm.

Then the lengthening, it begins to lift off.

And there's a sense of that connection all the way through you.

As you continue, sense all the way through your left leg and your left arm, and notice if you can find a way to let them fill with breath.

So consciousness moves both down and up.

You've got the leg and the arm, so it's a lengthening of your attention to include a bigger picture.

That's it.

Good, good.

And then, just before we take a pause, have both arms up, both legs down, and just a few times, but connected to the breath, go through the right side lifting, coming down, pausing for a moment, then with an inhale, the left side lifts.

Feel how the rest of you relates to the ground.

See if one side is significantly different than the other for you, and listen to how you can learn from that.

Letting it get lighter, less and less effort.

And then just rest comfortably on your front. Unless you need to come off your —

[Silence 48 seconds]

Diagonals

[Russell:] Both arms upward, your head as is comfortable. Both legs long.

And the key to these movements is that consciousness is moving through, much more than just doing the movement.

So if it's a challenging movement, just let your attention move in the ways I'm inviting.

So think of the lengthening of your right arm, the filling of your right arm, and the filling of your left leg, and the lengthening and lifting of the diagonal.

But again, don't make it a mechanical movement. Let it be an outgrowth of consciousness in that diagonal, and the breath filling.

Feel how your weight shifts on the ground.

Right arm and the left leg, getting longer, filling with breath, and lifting.

That's good.

And then shift to the other diagonal, left arm and right leg, filling with breath, lengthening and lifting.

It might be that your head likes to lift a little bit. That's fine.

And go back and forth between those diagonals, but only as fast as you can connect it to the breath. So not just doing a mechanical movement.

Good.

Okay. Leave that. Please roll onto your back.

Coming to stand

[Russell:] And come onto your back. Let your legs bend.

Interlace your hands under your head.

Legs are bent, and just gently, this time with an exhale, have the feeling of lifting your head, letting your spine lengthen a little bit.

Lifting your head, looking between your legs. If that was demanding on your back, you want to just ease it a little bit while we come up.

Exhaling, thinking of pressure into the floor.

Okay, leave that, and please come to standing.

Listen to how the shape in your back makes sense, a bit different from some of the other lessons.

Gently let your right arm lift. Onto your right leg. Right leg.

Let the left leg come back just a little bit. Left toes on the floor, and just bring the left arm long, back a little bit.

Right arm, I think.

Feel that through your whole back.

Onto both legs. Pause for a moment in standing.

Shift onto your left leg. Let the left arm come up.

And the right leg back a little bit, toes to the floor, back.

Looking up, let the left arm come back. Letting the whole back have a feeling of up and out of the spine, forward and up.

Come back, just standing.

Feel. What happens to your shape, what the up and down is like.

Oh, move a little bit. We're a little late for dinner, so you might want to be moving in that direction.

Thank you.

We'll start again at seven.

Inspired.