Talk

Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 1, Session 1 — 20 minutes

Summary: Russell opens the week with the scale of galaxies and universes, then turns to each person as a universe. He names the work ahead: contact with the unconditioned source that needs no perfecting, and soul work with the painful, conditioned life. A beggar sitting on a box of riches carries both. Spirit and soul, he says, are one and two.

Many universes

[Russell:] I just see so many, so many worlds, so many, so many universes. So many incredible universes, you know.

Pete and I were talking just recently. He was a fan of Stephen Hawking. I haven't seen these new shows, but I like stories about the universe.

I was reading recently about how, you know, there was a time, of course, when we thought, like, the Earth was the world, and then it was, well, the Earth has a bunch of planets around it. Oh, wait, now there's a sun and a bunch of planets, right? And then the sense that, oh my god, it's not just this little configuration of our solar system, but there's this whole Milky Way galaxy.

And you kind of get blown out when you go from the level of planet to solar system, and then you go galaxy, and then you go, wow, there are supposed to be — according to, I don't know if they know what they're talking about, but according to people who seem to think they know what they're talking about — there are as many galaxies as there are stars, or more, right?

And so this universe that we're in, we have this little Milky Way arm, that's what they call it, the arm that we're living in, this little galaxy we have. It's a pretty big galaxy from what I hear. It's not the biggest, but it's pretty big, as galaxies go, according to people who talk like they know about this stuff. So there are littler galaxies, and there are bigger galaxies. We're kind of a pretty good-sized galaxy amongst these billions of galaxies.

And I can't quite get there. Now, then you go to the next level, where they say, this universe full of all these galaxies is one of so many universes that are more than all these galaxies, that are more than all these stars.

You know, this is kind of like the kind of numbers Buddha would come up with, trying to say how blessed we are to have a human body. You know, it's like, they come up with stories like, there's a mountain of rock, a mile high, a mile wide, a mile deep, mountain of rock, solid rock, and every hundred years, a Garuda, a big bird, flies over with a piece of silk in its mouth and wisps across the top. As long as it takes that bird to wear down the mountain is as long as you've been waiting for this human birth.

You know, it's like these inconceivable time periods, you know?

So it makes me happy to be here. Makes me very, very happy to be here. Mysteriously happy.

And what happens when our universes come together? You know, it's like we really are each a universe. You know, I know an infinitesimal amount of each person's story in their universe, you know, a little bit of mine, and then there's all this that lives in each of us that nobody knows but us. Even our most intimates don't know what it feels like to be us. You know, they can approximate it, but — these universes that we are, and that we are growing. We are growing universes.

And then we get to meet other universes that grow together. They call it multiverse. No, no, it's multiverse. Universe is one song. It's verse of many songs and one song. Many songs and one song. Multiverse.

Coming in

Well, I would love it if we could all come in a little bit closer for a little bit. Just pull your chair, slide your seat, or you can sit on the ground over here, bring your pillow. Come into the neighborhood.

Nettie, no one's gonna take your cushion.

[Participant:] Oh, I didn't know it was yours. It looked just like mine.

[Russell:] That's great, that's beautiful. There we go. Thank you, Wendy.

So I don't want to talk very much tonight. I want to say a few words and then do a little bit of movement and then do some practices together. It's best to help us drop in, dig in the ground, as they say, get here.

So what's really with me so much is this great opportunity, I would say also intention, to share together what it means to — deepen the experience of what we could call the unconditioned. Deepen the experience of —

Shari quoted me before. You quoted me before when we were talking.

[Participant:] Well, I can probably find it. I think I agree with them.

[Russell:] Do you remember?

[Participant:] Well, okay, where'd it come from?

[Russell:] Go ahead.

[Participant:] The source that we come from doesn't need perfecting. It's already perfect. And the personality that we are cannot be perfected. And so there's no reason to try for that. That was from the — I listened to the first week.

[Russell:] That's good, I like that.

Already perfect

So, what does that mean? I mean, really, this is not theory that we're working with predominantly. What we're working with is how to be living from something authentic, that we get greater and greater confidence in a connection to — you know, it has whatever names, so many names. The unconditioned, the true self, authentic nature, who you are. The eye before eyes.

And at the same time, we are these marvelously conditioned and painfully conditioned and wonderfully conditioned beings who have unique expressions in this world of change, and how to be able to live into our particularity and our history, how to liberate our history so it goes from being this cage to being actually part of the way our gift comes.

You know, and then, how to be with our challenging and painful moments in more life-giving ways. You know, not just getting rid of them, but kind of liberating, living through, not even trying to change them, but how to live through them in ways that allow life to move forward.

The beggar on the box

You know, so many ancient traditions have a story, something like this. There's this picture of human beings as the beggar in the village sitting on a box, and sitting and always asking, having nothing, having so little food, and a place to stay, just sits the whole life.

And the beggar, the only thing he ever got from his parents was this box to sit on. The only thing they ever got was this box to sit on, that they had a place to sit. But always wanting, always wanting, always wanting.

And miraculously, and very simply, one day, someone asked, what's in the box?

And of course, he opened the box, and there are all these riches. Not poor at all, but has everything that he could possibly — she could possibly —

So usually that story is given as an invitation to return to your true self. That everything that's needed is in there. You just have not recognized it enough. And that's great. That's beautiful. But for me, that's only part of the story.

There's also a way in which, as beggars, we can learn through our wanting, through our struggle, through our uncertainty. It's not just having our clarity of wholeness. That's great. We want that for sure. But that's actually incomplete. It can actually become a hiding place.

Now, when we're suffering and struggling, of course, we're all willing to hide in something that feels so wonderful. You know, give me infinite bliss. We will all sign up for that. But there's something else in our task, I feel.

Spirit and soul

Something else, which has to do with, yes, deepening into the spaciousness of being that cannot be improved, cannot be perfected, cannot get better. And to know that, and actually to have an authentic — and it can be very subtle. It's not like you go around, you know, just in some ecstatic state, but there's a —

We find that when in contact with authentic self, qualities like joy are a neutral state, actually. They're not a —

It's not that you go from feeling gray to feeling that joyfulness. It's like, think of healthy infants, you know, that joyfulness, that basic sense of connection to the moment, connection to the world around. Moments of upset that pass through the body, but the body doesn't cling to those aspects. Not that we're here to become children again. It's another something for adults, but qualities like that are what we find as we connect more and more to who is here before the stories, who is here when the stories are held lightly, who is here that's not absorbed into the personal stories.

And that is so exquisite, and we want to grow that, and I am here to say that that, for me, is not complete, actually. That it's also working through and with those gnarly places in life-giving ways, in ways that help the energy that's stuck to, let's say, self-liberate.

Why do I say self-liberate? It's because what you do is create conditions for it to move. We don't move it, actually, but the light of our presence, a certain way of being with what is stuck, can help it to move, can be a space in which it can move.

So I want to grow both sides of that, we could say. It sounds like two different things. They actually kind of merge together, but this direct contact with that which cannot ever be made more — you know, you can't take the wetness out of water. You can't take the isness out of you. Right?

Can't take the wetness out of water. It's implicit. It's called implicit. It's what you are. You know, that beingness is what you are already.

Okay, so how can we know that well enough that it's not a fantasy, it's not a hopeful — okay, so that even in our struggling moments, there's some link back to us, so that we can actually tolerate more and more discomfort, because it's kind of like a connection to the mothership, so you can do your walk in space further out, so to speak.

But when you're walking out there in space, you feel like you're out there in space. You don't feel like, oh, no worries here, I'm with the mothership, you know? You feel more like one of those guys, you know. You see the latest Wallenda who's gonna walk across Niagara Falls, right? Do you ever see those guys walking across these? I can just look at them and get inside, you know?

But so, the feeling is, well, you all know this, the feeling is that, wow, this is really challenging. But boy, you can really, really work with that challenging when you have some confidence that back there, there's a net, so to speak. Between you and the water down there, there's a net down.

He didn't want to do it with a net, but they weren't going to let him, right.

So this other guy, what he does is he's got a rope tied onto the rope, so he falls, but he's hanging from the rope, and he's developed this technique for getting himself back up. And way above, like the Grand Canyon kind of places, he's swinging and getting himself up and throwing himself and landing on the rope.

It's almost as scary as being on a cushion. When you're not wanted.

So we'll be working in both these directions always, always. We can classically — the work with that beingness is called working with your spirit. Working with all those inner states that are part of your personal history, part of your personality, is called soul work. And we want to have our soul and our spirit in delicious harmony together.

Not turn them into one thing, 'cause they got — they're one, but they're two.

Okay. Enough of that. You've all traveled too far to listen to stuff like this for too long.

Let's set up mats. I'd like to do a little bit of movement, and then I'd like to do a walking meditation and a sitting meditation. I want to do all that tonight, so that we can be grounded in our practice for the morning.