Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 1, Session 5 — 42 minutes

Summary: Russell invites everyone to offer a name and a brief kernel of what arose, calling the listening itself the real work of a group mind. Images surface — stone becoming seed, a dark that is not fear, a well, a silk coat — and he speaks of integration, tending inner gifts, and living with a life that will not come to order.

The real work

[Russell:] I'd like to introduce ourselves again. What I'd like is that you give your name, and anything, briefly, anything that came in that process. If something came that you would want to speak out — something, again, not a whole story, but just kind of a kernel. And if not, that's okay. If you want to say anything about where you are in your processes.

This is both a way of cultivating listening in our group, so when you're not speaking, hopefully you're listening with your whole body. And it helps actually to guide our process, because this is how a group mind forms, is by being in connection.

Speaking — and that's the way. This is partially a statement for those of you who are teaching. In my experience, the way work gets relevant to either everybody or almost everybody in a room is that it's coming out of the room. The interacting of the beings in the room comes forth, finds some language, and in both conscious ways and ways that we're not even conscious of, shapes what the teacher says, shapes how we interact with each other.

So it's not, you know, for some people, well, this feels like a delay till we get to the real work or something. This is the real work. This is a listening.

And I say this is going to be brief, because I'm asking you to be brief, because sometimes I will interact or comment. That's also part of our unfolding together. Sometimes it won't. But we're going to spend some time with this. When I feel like — oh, after probably about twenty or twenty-five minutes, we will take a break. Going to do some movement, so I don't want to sit too long without moving, and then we'll come back to it.

So what I'd love is, when you feel ready, to just say your name, and anything you'd like to offer. It could have come from this process, or something that's just important for you to offer right now to the group.

Yeah, please. Yes, yes, yes. Your body was listening and ready.

At the end, let us know you're done by just bowing, and we will then bow and say thank you — the name — so we all have the name on our tongues.

Yes.

[Participant 1:] Well, you're probably glad to know, or maybe not, that I didn't drive here. And that my father and mother did in fact make it from Florida to Michigan.

I wasn't really expecting anything, but a very profound image came to me of a place here, kind of in the heart, that felt very encapsulated and old. Probably encapsulated from just not wanting to — not being ready to address it, or it's just not ready. And then as I was feeling into it, it sort of looked kind of stone-like. And as I was looking at it, it turned into a seed. And then I felt like, oh, okay, maybe something's about to grow. And then as I was kind of like, grow, grow, it kind of went, not yet.

I just wanted to acknowledge one other thing. When I'm partnering with someone, I'm trying really hard to be present, but my kids are at camp. And I'm from Colorado, and the camp is fairly close to the big wildfire, so they're not in danger or anything, but there's a piece of me that seems to be just turned that way. So I just want to acknowledge that. As I partner with someone, I'll try to be really present.

[Russell:] Well, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love that image of the seed, that movement from stone to seed, and the fact that a seed is hard. It's encapsulated for good reason, for its right timing. That's very — yeah.

[Participant 2:] What I noticed was that what I saw was really kind of murky and dark. There was a part of me that was thinking it should be scary, and there should be fear around it, but when I felt into it, it didn't feel scary at all. Like I was saying, it's not fear. There's nothing scary there.

So when I was done, and I was processing, there was this — I didn't feel it in my body. And I went, I guess I did, because I knew that it wasn't scary when I went in there.

[Russell:] Yeah. Thank you. And actually, it's a great example. I could tell from the way you were speaking that the dark, murky place came from in here. Your hand gestured it.

So speaking from our body doesn't mean we're always talking, and it's here, and it's here. Some of us never have it like that. Some of us, it's just dark, it's murky. But the difference between it being kind of dark and murky — and that's not an aesthetic preference that I'm giving you. I'm saying that neurologically, it's lining up differently.

What makes this work potent, in my opinion, is the lining up of the physical body, the feeling body, the thinking body, and the space around you — other beings, space — all together at the same time. The physical body, the feeling body, the thinking body, and the environment that you're in, lining up together. That's called integration. That's the neurology of a complete moment.

Feldenkrais talks about it in his language, Jung in his language, Buddha in his language, but that's what we're working with. And neurologically, it makes so much sense. We'll go a little further with that later. So that it comes from the body doesn't always mean there are specific things, but it has a certain quality. And sometimes you notice it through gestures. So pay attention to hands. Sometimes your hands will go — I don't really know what that's, you know? And you listen to what your hands are doing, and they will speak.

I think I told you the story, or I can never remember who I tell stories to. My first discovery of that was my first ever gestalt process, when I was nineteen years old, at Esalen, and radically unaware of myself. I'd been meditating for a while, but still so much unconscious. And I was there, and I'm

going, I really like my brother. Yeah, my brother and I are really close. And all the guy had to do was say, watch what your head is doing.

And it was so embarrassing and blatant. I was actually in conflict with my brother at the time, and we were having — but the memory was that we were closest. And he just said, just keep moving your head.

So, kind of early on, I got a clue.

Somebody else. Yeah. Got it, got it.

Speaking from the body

[Participant 3:] So, coming back. I had the experience of remembering, while we were standing, the enlivened comfort of verticality. And I had been forgetting that. I was — I don't want to be remembering in — you know, that possibility of being.

[Russell:] Beautiful. Thank you. Beautiful sentence. Just letting that resonate for a few moments.

My body knows the enlivened comfort of verticality.

Now, when people are speaking and we're listening, this is a practice of letting your body listen.

Oh — you were first, then you. Yeah.

[Participant 4:] The first thing I became aware of, that's been very present, and it is very present, is a pulling discomfort from a nerve that's been bruised for about six months. It's very present with me, and most comfortable when I bring my ear this way. So that was the first thing that called to me.

And also for me, it's come to be about letting go of worrying, a lot of responsibility, listening.

And the next thing I became aware of is this — like this. What came to me was Wanda Landowska. She came yesterday too. She was the world's greatest harpsichordist, or most well-known harpsichordist. And that's what it felt like. After fifty years of playing the harpsichord, she went back and took lessons as a beginner again.

And I feel like that's what's very foreground for me now, is being in this circle. I feel like a beginner again after fifty years of facilitating circles. And July is what I've been naming as my threshold. So in my body, I feel both this letting go of this long silk coat that's an identity, and also this turning inward and arising. Embracing not knowing what I'm going to be fired with.

And when we sat down, I began this in the circle when everybody was here and I wasn't here, and I was running from pneumonia. And this, when I looked at it — this part of it feels like, and it's almost complete. This half feels like what has been, and this half feels like what is not yet, but almost. And I feel a yearning to listen and feel this.

So the silence here is like food for me. It's nourishment. That's the word. It's nourishment.

[Russell:] Thank you. Such a vivid image. Say the silk coat again. What were the other words with the silk? You remember?

[Participant 4:] Yeah. That was weird.

[Participant 5:] Well, I'm a good student, so I heard the question, which is, how has the program impacted you? And I thought, well, that's my mind. But that was sort of there as an opportunity. And then, anyway, in the check-in, basically what arose is that I kind of checked about a relationship with an older daughter, and I just was told I'm just different. I don't know how. I don't know why.

And then once I named that word, different, there was an amazing bodily experience. Sort of completeness, and then there was this flush of heat all through my body, and then tears. And it totally surprised me. I was like, oh my god, what's going on?

But I think I'll have to check in with my body again to reveal more. It was more about, initially, sadness of leaving sort of what I thought I should be in the world. And then trusting that whatever the difference is, is going to be just fine. But it's very uncertain. It's not real stable. And then I'm thinking, well, maybe it's not supposed to be stable. Some questions around what this all means, and how I'm going to live into it.

So it was very big, five minutes. I'm like, I don't know if I could do ten.

[Russell:] Thank you.

[Participant 6:] Often, thinking of it again, it came from talking of this as a body living mentorship project for me, which is the latest, best version of something I've been doing for a long time. And really grateful that it's meeting my current needs. And it's like a spiral, which fortunately goes up, and gets wider. Not that things are perfect, but I feel the resources. More access.

So this was — it's a good trip. Thank you.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 7:] Well, I experienced this pain, and deep sadness, and sort of this dullness, and with tears, and then all of a sudden it became like a well. A well that sort of resourced something very deep, but also brought life — this life flow of water coming up and out. And then it actually came to my heart, then very deep, sad darkness. And once again, the well. And then there was this image of all the trees out here, and the movement of the leaves, and the life, the life-giving aspect.

And I had the sense of wanting to draw, which — I brought a sketch. This one wants to draw.

Images with legs

[Russell:] Thank you. It was a powerful image that you're bringing — other people are bringing, really — and then the urge to draw.

I just want to speak to these. These are gifts. These are true gifts, from our inner world, and actually more than our inner world, our world in connection. And I don't even want to define how, where those connections are. It's bigger than I think we can understand.

But when something comes that has that flavor of, this is really coming for me, this resonates, that has legs for your inner life. It's not complete in one moment, usually. It's an invitation for something that has more in it, that can unfold over time.

So I encourage you, when one comes, to either, if you're a journal writer, write it. If you're an artist, paint it. If you like to move it, find movement with it. Find a key word or sensation, like we do in

our resource processes, and we'll do more of over the next days. So that it's like a personal resource process that came from your inner life.

That image can become one that lives for you and through you, as this deep well that touches some sadness and wants to — you know, how it lives. And without kind of defining it, well, it's always like this. No. It's a source. It's a source of life, as you say.

So these spontaneous comings. That's a really nice connecting of this inner work to Jung. We know there's a long interest here in Carl Jung, a long, long time of study, so I know that I'll sometimes make connections. But the way a collective unconscious, or an archetype, can live and come forth — and then it's like the dream world, speaking.

And when we give it the kind of care, and we don't just go, oh, that was nice, what's next? But we give it the kind of care, it has lots in it. That's why we're shocked. Five minutes? How can all this come? But it's living here, hungry for receptive listening.

And when it comes, it's a gift. And then we want to live with that gift, and feel how it wants us to live with it. And it's so —

Diminishing, in a way, to try to seek its completion too quickly, or what does it mean? We want meaning to keep unfolding out of it, but not let our desire kind of encapsulate it.

Great. Thank you.

Already enough

[Participant 8:] I think what came most strongly was from the listening, when you were speaking, and also simply the listening to myself. That there's this child living inside of me that longs for that authentic communication. I don't exactly know what it is, and can't quite say it, but there's a longing for the quality of that sharing.

[Russell:] Thank you. And you had your hand up.

[Participant 9:] First, it felt good to be heard, and also felt good listening to you. Good to be back in that process.

And I have been noticing some things different about myself from January. One of them — and I didn't get to express it fully in the five minutes, but I did get some of that out. Over the last six months, I put on the board that I went to Central Africa, and I feel that I'm still, in a way, growing as a result of the experience.

And one of the things that I noticed differently is, in January I was very much wanting, wanting, wanting, you know, growth and practice and self-development. And I'm in this space now. It's very different. Since being back, just being incredibly grateful for the basics, like a bed and food.

And so I find myself here in this experience in a very radically different place, kind of unexpectedly, where I don't feel privileged to be here. It doesn't come from that place. I'm very excited about this, you know, the work, being back here. But I'm very much in a place of letting it come to me, just being grateful for what it is that I have. Already enough.

And the other thing, too, that I'm also very present to is, coming here, I felt very much in the I rather than the we, because so much has happened and I haven't been in connection, in communication,

with many people here — most people. And so that has felt a little — there's a part of me that wishes that I were here feeling the we. And just after this exercise, and a hug from someone in the group, already starting to feel that we that we experienced in January. And so I'm patiently excited to really get back into that space.

[Russell:] That's a beautiful letting it come to you. Thank you.

Every absence is a presence

[Participant 10:] Two reflections. One is that, in terms of the program, I do feel that I'm changing, and I can see myself differently in situations. The problem is it's usually too late — after the habit. So it's like —

[Russell:] Only two weeks?

[Participant 10:] Speed that process up, and back it up, so I can see myself in a situation while it's happening, as opposed to after the fact.

The second is, in terms of this morning's exercise, interesting to me to look in and see the confusion, all the stuff that's going on in my life, and it's not clear. And so it's not something I can do in private. And they're not bad activities. In fact, they're good activities. It's just I'm not creating enough space to do some of the work.

And then I was also very conscious of a sense of inadequacy, because I couldn't find the words. You know, I'm not finding it. I'm finding that. It's like I just felt very inadequate, because I couldn't do it. I was kind of not having all these great awarenesses, great things happening. So it's just an inadequacy issue for me.

[Russell:] Yeah. So, can I ask a question?

[Participant 10:] Okay.

[Russell:] When it feels like it's not coming in a way that you can sense it, what is there? What's there?

Okay, so you're aware of an absence, like you're not experiencing this. And so I'm wondering — every absence is a presence in another form. So I'm curious about the presence that this absence is.

[Participant 10:] Yeah. A dissonance.

[Russell:] Feel your body. That's right. Can you feel your hands now? Your hands are — that's right.

[Participant 10:] Yeah.

[Russell:] To really be in touch with what is there. Right, right. Let's go slow. Gotta go slow, because there's a lot. You're right there. There's this dissonance in here, and there's a pushing away. That's your body speaking right now.

You might think it's all thought, but it's actually — you're clearing space with your hands, trying to clear this space, because something in you knows there's dissonance in here, and it feels cluttered, and it's a wanting of space. That's not just mental stuff. You're actually feeling that. That's what it feels like.

[Participant 10:] That's true. I mean, that's how I felt.

[Russell:] Okay, right. There's dissonance here.

[Participant 10:] Yes.

[Russell:] And there's too much clutter.

[Participant 10:] Right.

[Russell:] Around it. Not getting it. Beautiful.

[Participant 10:] I think. Yeah.

[Russell:] Well, that's — thank you. But do you get what I'm saying? Beautiful. Thank you.

[Participant 10:] Yeah.

A lot living in us

[Participant 11:] So glad to be in this kind of place. It's very busy kind of stuff. Being loud.

[Russell:] Being loud. Okay.

[Participant 11:] Happy to be here. And the image that came up after — so there's a lot going on at home, and there's a lot of busyness inside of me, and it made me remember when I would go up to one of my children's bedrooms, and I'd open the door. Wow, what am I doing wrong as a parent, that this is something disturbing? You know, just all the judgment, and all the discernment of how do I go about this. This room is incredibly — things could be living here.

And literally, as a metaphor, things could be living here. I don't know. And so, realizing, when I close that door, can I be with the clutter? And the incidents, the demanding clutter, and discipline — it's demanding.

And at the same time, feeling just the exquisite ability to be present to that, not have to fix it. That's what this week is about. And I'm tenderly with it, you know, really tenderly with it, because it's giving you permission to close my bedroom door at home and be with all of you, and knowing that there's no cleaning lady coming in. Or man cleaning lady.

So that was really being with the dichotomies, I guess.

[Russell:] Yeah. Beautiful. Thank you.

So this feeling that there's so much, right, this sense of — your eyes get big. The sense of, you know, it's this cluttered world.

Well, how's this for a really, maybe helpful discovery, by fifty scientists working over the last five years in different parts of the world, discovering the microbial environment living on and in our body. The microbes, basically — microbial, mostly bacteria. That there are actually trillions. Many more than the cells making up your body are the critters.

Many more — many times. You've got, you know, many times the amount of human cells that make up your body are these beings living in you and on you. Very many in your gut, but elsewhere. And most of them are beneficent. But even — there are many that are not. There are some that can turn toxic.

That's actually a very big insight into why we get sick sometimes, how the immune system gets compromised. What that means is that we think, well, I got attacked by this organism outside. Well, there's some of that, but what gets activated are organisms in you right now that are not lethal when you're healthy.

And in fact, the current hypothesis about it is that part of the functioning of your healthy microbial environment — healthy microbes, healthy bacteria — is to keep those in check, and that kind of helps them be strong, because they're kind of checking up. But you get into enough stressful moments, or challenging mental states, and particularly emotional states, carrying those for a while, and there is a literal depressing of the capacity of your healthy microbes to deal with these that are already living in there, and they start multiplying. And when they multiply, there tends to be inflammation in the body.

And it's a fascinating picture of that we're dealing with clutter. There's going to be a lot going on. And how do I uncover, recover, more and more often have the inner balance of those organisms working in a life-giving direction? They're working together, not against each other.

And it's such, for me, an exquisite metaphor of, there's a lot living in us, literally and figuratively. There's a lot living in us. We're carrying a lot of relationships. I mean, just with your microbes, you've got trillions of relationships. You're many more than planets in the sky. Many more than stars in the sky. You've got — yeah, we're back to the galaxy. It's unbelievable. You know, 300 trillion is the current estimate of what's living on and in.

It's a vast universe, and — well, sometimes you can feel buried.

Thank you. And who am I in all that?

Yeah — we already said thanks. Thank you again.

Let's have one more person, because we want to take a short break, and then I want to make sure we have a movement lesson before lunch, and then we'll continue with people after lunch. Yeah.

[Participant 12:] My eyes got big with the so much, because I'm feeling. There's so much. You know, when you could barely — you know, couldn't do ten minutes — I could go hours.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 12:] And guess what came to me when I was listening to myself with my partner, who is here right now. This just feels like a sparkling gratitude to be here.

And similar to what was said — a current best version. What did you say? Something we've been doing for a long time. I really feel these currents of so many things I've been following, coming together in what we're doing here. So there's a gratitude about that.

There's a sense of this sort of crumbling of these walls, where I've compartmentalized these different things for a long time, that feels liberating and disconcerting at the same time. And I also feel this coming through. Something's coming through. And I also have that uncertainty. It feels big.

And I guess what else is here is, I just am so grateful for the connection, and the emphasis you've already put on — and we're going to continue this week — about just refuge, and the unchanging freshness of being. That feels — I just get chills in my neck.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah.

[Participant 12:] It's okay, all of this too muchness. It's really okay.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. Beautiful. Thank you.

You cannot empty the mind

[Russell:] Did anybody ever get to the bottom of their to-do list?

And the microbes have their to-do list. So what I mean is, kind of what we were saying yesterday is, in the Zen world, there's a beautiful phrase: no matter how long you sweep, you cannot empty the mind. Meaning you're not going to get your life in order at that level. So I encourage you to stop the fantasy.

That doesn't mean, well, okay, then there's nothing to do, let us just let it all — you know, I can't get — no. We've got to do what we can, but we don't have to carry the illusion that has been really disproved for at least thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years, that it's ever going to get really ordered. You know, or if it ever has moments like that, it starts feeling like it, it's going to disintegrate quite quickly, or shift quite quickly, or feel actually maybe even too held, quite quick.

So how to live well with the unchangingness — the ever-changingness and the unchangingness? The ever-changingness, and what is it? Where can we hang our hat?

Well, it's something to do with, I'm not in control of this. I do my best to show up. And how can I have the sustenance, the nourishment, of the unconditioned?

Yeah.

And to end, there's a wonderful line in a movie I recently saw that was just delightful. The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. Yeah. And this young man is kind of trying to fix the clutter of everybody's personal lives. And he looks at this woman and he says, don't worry, it will all be all right in the end, and if it's not, it's not the end.

Ten minute pause. Set up your mats for movement when you come back. Let's move the chairs out of the way.