Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 1, Session 6 — 49 minutes

Summary: Russell locates a potent center in front of the sacrum, below the navel, sometimes pictured as a golden ball. Lying down, the group turns the pelvis from that middle, coordinates the movement with four-phase breathing, and lengthens through each side. Sitting and standing, they sense ground, breath, and what the lesson leaves in the body.

Finding the lower belly

[Russell:] Okay, so I'd like to use my teaching assistant to get a picture. So maybe stand up for a minute.

And we'll start with your hands on your body. Find your belly button. Find the top of your pubic bone. The pubic bone is quite thick. You actually feel the thickness if you think of it. Surprisingly wide. This whole space down through here. Surprisingly wide.

So, find the very top of your pubic bone. Okay, so you feel that space between the belly button and your pubic bone. It's probably five or six inches, something like that. And if you—

Right, everybody have glasses? Probably.

[Participant:] I lost my belly button. I had an inguinal hernia. Yeah, well— I have the remnants. I have a scar.

[Russell:] Maybe it slipped up.

[Participant:] It's a creative belly button.

[Russell:] It's a creative belly button.

[Participant:] It's never changed. It's not a normal one.

[Russell:] Yeah. I was born— I mean, I think it's part of why I bring so much attention here is I was actually born with three hernias. All over my middle. They actually circled around then. It's kind of curious.

So, if you take your belly button and your pubic bone, if you come down— if you think about two inches below your belly button, you're probably not quite halfway. You're probably above halfway, maybe a third of the way down, or for some people it'd be pretty close to that. Yeah? You feel something like that?

So, deep in there is this very potent area that I'll speak of a little bit now, and then we'll grow that perception over time.

Sorry, you can lower your hands for a moment.

So, if you notice, the top of your pubic bone lines up— this is approximate, everyone's skeleton is different— with the lower part of your sacrum. Your belly button is actually somewhere around, for most people, in front of like your fourth lumbar or so. And this place down below is like part of your upper sacrum. So the upper part of the sacrum, this opening into this big pelvic floor.

The picture that I sometimes like to bring is as if there is a golden ball, not on the surface where you feel the breath going out, but deep central in there. And it's this sense that— I mean, there are so many ways to think of it.

One is that, chakra-wise, it's the second chakra, connected to life, creativity, sexuality, procreation, to the womb in a woman. The sacrum is carrying all this electrical energy to your lower body, connection to the earth, connection to the bottom of your pelvis, to your survival. It's a very potent area, on many levels, or from many points of view, we could say.

So, part of what can come alive in here as we bring attention— and this is why we have the mudra around here. The mudra is your thumbs a little lower. It's a practice to be in front of your sacrum, in front of that top part of your sacrum, and to be kind of like a magnifying glass for the life energy that's moving through you.

It's the same life energy that feeds your sexuality, that feeds your connecting to the earth, that feeds creative force. This, what some people call eros, or creative energy, is going through here. So we want to develop some relationship.

Now, some people say, well, does it have to be golden? Well, that's the way it came to me. It doesn't. If you want your ball green— I'm not saying that there's a ball living in there. I'm saying it's a helpful image. If it works for you— if it doesn't work for you, when I say golden ball, don't try to create it. If it works for you, if it seems helpful to bring you here, use it. Okay? So it's not like you have to stay with that image.

I'd like you to have some feeling for this location in here. And it's not just sitting there. It's dynamic. Sometimes I'll say as if the golden ball is turning. Or let's say if I'm lifting the pelvis off the floor, or lifting my head, right? Or bending my spine. I get this image that this is a dynamic area that is radiant.

I don't think of it as just a spot. It's radiant. It radiates down to the pelvic floor— and we'll be doing some work with the pelvic floor during this time— and it radiates out, down to the side, towards the hip joints. So it's not really a structure as much as an energy. It's an energy. It's an area. That's right.

The structural locations are in front of the upper part of your sacrum. Right, behind your lower belly. Depending on the shape of people, it can be actually level with the inner aspect of your hip joint. It's usually just a little bit above the hip joint.

So we have some feeling for this area.

Two layers

[Russell:] And what I'd like to do is take a rather basic movement pattern, what I think of as basic. Certainly almost all of you have done this. We did a little bit last time. I use it a lot in workshops and retreats. Those of you who are going to be teaching the work, it's kind of a central motor

pattern that we want. I use it in diverse ways. In this case, we're going to use it to help sense this middle.

And the second thing we're layering into this lesson is this process that is also such an ally for our development, what I call four-phase breathing, or four-part breathing. Most of you have some experience with that. It's so very helpful to grow in the sensing of an inhale, a pause, an exhale, a pause, and feeling how you can get more and more comfortable with each aspect of those phases of breathing. And we'll look more at that.

So this lesson will focus on those things.

Sensing inward

[Russell:] So, just as you're lying here, place your hand, oh, maybe two inches or so below, on your lower belly. Place a hand there.

And think deep to your hand, back towards the front of your sacrum. See if you can bring your interest, your attention, into that inner region.

Can you have some kind of inner image of the sacrum, the front face of the sacrum?

There's a lot of pulsing of energy, whether you think of it as the electricity coming through the nerves, or as a more subtle form of energy, or both. There's a lot of activity deep in here.

What's called the enteric nervous system, the brain that lives in your guts— which we'll look at a little bit another time, but is so central to how inner listening works— there actually is a brain in there that processes information. There are actually more nerve cells in your gut that channel information up to your brain than receive information from it. Ninety percent upwards, so it's feeding information. There's intelligence in your guts.

And just lightly roll your head a bit.

Have a hand, or both hands, on your belly, and as you're turning your head, notice if you can have some feeling for your belly. I recommend taking off your glasses.

Sense in this region.

And please bend both legs.

And with both legs bent, just feel the natural rhythm of your breathing right now. How the breath comes and goes.

And intentionally create four phases. The pauses don't need to be long, but they need to be clear in your attention. So you're not trying to hold your breath a long time, but you're clearly having a pause, and how you enter the pause is significant. We're looking for a sense of smoothness. That's the main word: smoothness.

At the completion of the inhale, as the pause comes, a letting go, and a pause at the end.

You can imagine, if it helps you, as if there's an ocean and the water's coming in, pausing before it recedes and goes out, pauses before it comes again.

[Silence 33 seconds]

Turning from the middle

[Russell:] Lengthen your left leg. Keep your right knee vertical as you turn your pelvis to the left. But the key here is as if the golden ball is turning. So there's an image as if the middle is turning.

You can lower your hands if that's easier for you, either way. But turn your pelvis, knee vertical, and as if you're inside, in front of your sacrum. You're turning your pelvis from in there, just letting that go through you. Take your time.

Feel the pressure through your foot. Feel which parts of your foot are active. So as I say all these things, you're still having the intention to know your middle.

Feel if your head does anything.

And as you sense what your head does, what the foot does, your consciousness is permeating your body. The center is where you're perceiving from, as much as possible. As if you're not up there in your head looking down and noticing, but as if you're in your belly. The belly is alive. Awake in itself.

Notice if you can feel the difference. Let's go back and forth. A few more movements here.

So, notice how you can locate self in your head and look down. Feel how you can do that. Feel the shift you can make to be up there looking down, which at times could be a perfect and good way of locating consciousness.

Then keep the knee vertical as much as you can.

Now, notice, do you have a distinct difference when I invite you, and ask you to invite the sense that your belly is alive in itself? The golden ball, the pelvis, has the capacity for self-knowing, that you are in there, and it's awake in there— not as a reference to up there, but it's awake in itself. See if that has any inner meaning.

Just a couple of times, a little bit quicker, just more playful. Keep the knee from rolling leftward. It stays. It can move a half inch or so, but not more. It just stays very vertical.

Thanks. Good. Okay, leave it lower down and pause.

[Silence 38 seconds]

[Russell:] And bend your right leg once again.

And this time, as you turn your pelvis leftward, also turn your head leftward. Feel that whole movement through your spine. So feel it from foot through your head, with an emphasis on as if you're sensing from the golden ball that senses itself.

Let the head be synchronized. So the nose comes back to neutral at the same moment that the sacrum settles to the floor. The nose completes its turning left when your pelvis does.

And you're being precise about that.

And bring in the activity of the four-phase breathing. Inhaling as you go to the left, pausing, exhaling as you return, and pausing. If you want to have a whole breath in between so that you don't feel rushed, that's fine. Have a couple of breaths in between. But when you're doing the movement, it's inhaling as you turn, pausing, exhaling as you return.

And the right side of the pelvis is coming away from the floor as you turn your pelvis. There is a way of lifting the pelvis that is not letting the knee flop left. An activity in your— that allows that to occur.

Notice if your pelvis is in harmony with your head, if there's a rhythmic harmony.

And then again a few times a little quicker, but still harmonious. A few times a little quicker. You can let the breathing rhythm go if that's not comfortable at this rhythm. You don't have to pant. You can just breathe and do the movement more casually.

Okay, and then pause once again. Lower your leg.

And both sides are resting on the floor.

Notice the flatness of the left side. You might be having a kind of flattening, maybe even a widening out behind the sacrum. Maybe not, but these are things people often experience. Sometimes a lengthening in the left leg. You might feel the opposite. That's okay.

Feel behind your left shoulder. Compare your two shoulders. How you're settled to the ground on each side.

The other direction

[Russell:] Bend your left leg.

That okay?

And bring attention into your middle, and an image of that ball.

Notice, without any particular breathing pattern. Place your hands on your lower belly once again. Remember, it's below the belly button, above the pubis.

And notice if there are signs of breath in this area, just without forcing anything or breathing any special way. And no is a good answer. There might not be any signs of breath here.

So place your hands somehow on your lower belly. Your left leg is bent.

And, thinking of that golden ball, now turn your pelvis. Let your head go to the right, and sink with the pelvis, and let's have the four-phase breathing come in. So it's inhaling going, pausing, exhaling coming back.

Now, if it can feel comfortable, notice if it's possible to inhale to a count of four, pause for a count of four, exhale to a count of four, and pause. And you can adjust that rhythm as you need. If you need shorter pauses, a longer inhale, a longer exhale, you can adjust it, but begin with four, four, four, four. So it's four-phase breathing, or a counted four-phase movement. Knee vertical, head turning.

Don't let the knee drop over. Let the knee stay over the foot.

A few times, leave the breathing alone and just do the movement, a little quicker, lighter, more playful, less control, you can say. Yes, there's still the pelvis and head going. You're still awake in your middle. It's just the movement is freer.

That's great. Okay, lower your leg down and pause.

[Silence 49 seconds]

Length through the side

[Russell:] Bend your right leg. Right leg.

Bring your left arm upward on the floor. The left arm is long upward.

Find a comfortable place. So if your shoulder doesn't like it really upward, move it more to the side, so you find a way. You find a way to get the arm turned, palm forward and upward orientated.

So, sense your length through your whole left side, and the standing of that right foot.

Let attention be in your middle.

As if the golden ball is turning. Turn from your middle. Sense from your middle. Turn.

And as you're turning, sense the lengthening through your whole left arm, and let that arm come out a little bit. As you feel it, there's a kind of rolling in the right leg and the left leg. The right knee is staying vertical still, and there's a gentle invitation to length through that left side. Let that length be there, but the focus is really your middle.

It's almost like, as the weight comes onto your left side, the arm is invited out from the spine a little bit. Even the leg comes out. It's like the weight coming onto the side is like ironing, or like squeezing a tube of toothpaste. There's a way it can get longer.

Let your head go leftward, and let all the going leftward happen with an inhale. Let there be a pause. Let the golden ball turn to bring you back. Let there be a pause. So everything is coming from that center.

Martial artists— this is the center of chi, or ki. A key point in all the Eastern arts. That goes through you.

And as your head turns leftward, let the back of the head slide just a bit on the floor, as if you wanted to look up towards your left hand, so your chin will come a bit away from your chest. It's like your whole front, including your throat, is lengthening gently. The feeling of length going through you, and your focus is from the middle.

The right side of the pelvis is really coming away from the floor, as long as that knee is vertical.

And just for the next few movements, place your right hand on your lower belly, and as you turn, feel deep, as if you're thinking back to your sacrum.

Eyes are looking up, so a whole lengthening in the left side.

And then a few times, leave the breath out of it, but just quicker, lighter. Feel into the ground with that right foot. Support it into the ground.

Intimate connection between centering and grounding. The earth force, and your center.

Good. Leave it. Lower down.

Just lightly turn your head a little bit. Feel the quality of that.

[Silence 35 seconds]

I am here

[Russell:] Just rest here. Let your breathing just be as it is, with a gentle leaning toward your presence on the floor. Not trying to hold on. It's okay if your mind wanders, but you're leaning toward.

How's the breath? How's the ground? How am I?

The basic bodily sense, prior to feeling, actually. The basic bodily sense, I would suggest, is very much connected to I am. The I am experience. I am, and I am here, on this spot. I am. I am here.

Our weightedness, our relationship to gravity and the earth. As infants, that really brought us into a location of consciousness, into a place, a spot.

We want to feel that quite directly.

Then please bend your left leg. Bring your right arm upward on the floor, and just take a moment to sense the length of your right side.

Find a comfortable place for that arm, so your right arm is upward, the left leg is bent.

You might have the sense of, I can't bring my mind to the place in front of the sacrum, because there aren't— you know, it's much easier to feel your body against the floor, because you have a clear boundary. To feel into the space in front of your sacrum, behind your lower belly, is a bit more amorphous. So don't worry if that feels like, I don't get it. It's something that develops, something you can grow through practice, through attention.

Lengthening the right side

[Russell:] So again, bring your attention to the area of the golden ball. Let the right arm find a comfortable upward location, and then begin to slowly roll your pelvis from your middle.

Let your head roll right. Connect that rolling to inhaling, pausing, exhaling as you come back, and pause.

Turn your pelvis rightward. Feel the left side is clearly coming away from the floor.

You might even be able to feel, if you really pay attention, particularly as you lower your pelvis, the sacroiliacs, the place where the large pelvic bone and your sacrum come together. It might even be a little bump there that you go over. If you pay attention, you can actually feel the boundaries of your sacrum on the floor. Maybe.

Go ahead and let attention move really through your middle and out. Let your right arm get longer. Let your right leg roll and get a bit longer. Let your head begin to slide slightly so the chin comes away a bit, a whole feeling of lengthening through the front of your body.

Go all the way from that left foot through your middle, all the way up through the top of your head into that right arm. Follow that through yourself.

As you come down this time, pause once again. Lower your arm. Rest your legs.

[Silence 45 seconds]

[Russell:] Lightly roll your head a bit.

As you're lying here, notice the rhythm of your breathing if you don't try to make it any particular way.

[Silence 37 seconds]

[Russell:] That's the length of yourself.

Sitting

[Russell:] Please roll to your side and come to sitting.

I'm going to sit here. It'll be three or four minutes. If being on the floor without something for three or four minutes is challenging, you can get a chair or get a cushion. If three or four minutes works, just sit where you are.

Sit in any form that works for you, cross-legged, or legs back, or side sitting.

And first just sense what comes to you as you're sitting here, what emerges.

Feel the rhythm of your breathing.

The rhythm of breath and the rhythm of your heart, and the synchronistic functioning of your autonomic nervous system, are intimately connected.

This four-phase breathing, I notice, can be a balancer, a way of righting, of synchronizing rhythm.

Just as you're sitting here, let that— and pause for as long or as little as you like, but have it be a clear sense. You're not trying to make it longer. Longer is not better. It's just— and notice, as you're breathing, that there can be a sense of opening down towards the golden ball.

Standing

[Russell:] Please come to standing.

You can take a few moments just to sense yourself standing. You're on this spot, listening to the influence of the series of movements and this way of paying attention.

So, what happened to your length, your sense of the ground, and of course this feeling of the middle.

And begin to move in any ways that you're curious to move. Walk, or stand and change, turn, or anything you want, but listen to how what's occurring in you wants to be sensed. What is of interest?

And when you feel ready, you can just begin to walk a little bit, and if you have something that stands out, that you have language or images for, then bring that forward.

[Participant:] Space. That.

[Russell:] Can you say more about that? Space— in, out, all?

[Participant:] Pole.

[Russell:] Pole. Well, do you have more about the—

[Participant:] Pole. Like this diagonal pole, it looks like. Yeah.

[Russell:] You're pointing to your middle. Is that where you're feeling it? Around the golden ball.

[Participant:] Stability.

[Russell:] Stability.

So when you hear these words, check them out in your body. When you have resonance, when you don't, when it sparks something else.

[Participant:] Powerful.

[Russell:] Powerful.

[Participant:] Powerful. Especially in the— yeah.

[Russell:] Huh?

[Participant:] Yeah. Just connected to the floor. Connected. And then I realized that connection to the floor makes my upper body feel more a part of everything.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah, just stand for another few moments. Just notice this.

[Participant:] Permeable.

[Russell:] Permeable. Right. Yes, yes.

[Participant:] Joint here.

[Russell:] Joint here. Interesting. In your hip joints, and here.

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. There's more movement below and above here, because you're right in here. Like a gyroscope.

Okay, we're going to pause here, and we will have our lunch, have our break.

If you're wanting to have a meeting with me during the week, it would be great to sign up, because if the slots aren't taken in these first couple of days, then there may not be enough slots as we get into the week. So choose a slot. If anybody would like to have a meeting today, I think there are two slots open for today.

And you had something.

[Participant:] Yeah, the sign-up sheet is— I'm sorry— it's in the tea room. When you walk right in the door, it's on your right. I just wanted to say also that I put on the board, we—