Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 2, Session 4 — 49 minutes

Summary: Russell guides a first sensing of the sit bones and pelvic floor, and of a breath that can yield there instead of holding. Standing, the group inhales down toward the earth and exhales upward. He then models a short listening on how one is with meditation, and people prepare to practice in pairs.

Sit bones

[Russell:] Good morning.

[Participant:] Good morning.

[Russell:] Just take your right hand and find your right sit bone, on your ischium.

If you can let yourself rest on your ischium, so that you feel it clearly. And if you're unclear about whether you're on your sit bone or not, let me know. It should be pretty prominent. If it's, well, I'm not sure — it's probably not it.

And just move a little bit forward and back, and let your fingers feel for the inner aspect. Just over the tip, towards the inside. See if you can feel in there a little bit.

Just introducing something now that we'll be coming back to. I want you to get a sense of the sit bone and the pelvic floor. The left-right boundaries of the pelvic floor are your ischiums.

And so I want you to take your hand — but come out for a second. Just feel how that settles a bit. Maybe even disappears a little bit. Do you feel that there's a different weightedness on each side afterward?

That's a yes, that's a no, that's —

[Participant:] I don't really know what he's talking about.

[Russell:] Left hand under the left ischium.

We'll be continuing working with center and breathing, and part of working with the breathing over the next days is going to be getting more clarity about our pelvic floor, and how that is intimately connected to breathing, and intimately connected to many of the very deep, very old patterns of self-constriction.

And so to begin bringing some awareness into this region will help our furthering.

Now, just see if you can have a sense of the space between the sit bones. Of course, our anus and the genitals, and the space in between, is all through this region.

I wonder if you can sense any breathing. Actually, without forcing, without pressing, are there any signs of breath?

See, as this diaphragm descends — the lung diaphragm — as this diaphragm descends, there can be, when there isn't the excess tightening in the pelvic floor, a kind of opening.

This first got clear to me. She's embarrassed that I say this, but I told her I do, diapering my daughter. When I realized, oh my god, what we called in those days her hiney hole breathes. And so that brought up the question, does mine?

And as awareness grows, I realize there's a — when in a very comfortable, settled inner place, feeling safe and supported by the earth, part of feeling the support through the sit bones is a kind of subtle yielding.

So we're just bringing it up as something in the background, to kind of entertain yourself with over the —

[Participant:] Huh?

[Russell:] A settled — what did I say?

[Participant:] Yeah, the background.

[Russell:] Thank you.

[Participant:] So I have a question. The sit bones are hard bones, and then you moved to the anus, right?

[Russell:] Well, no. We're feeling the sit bones, and just the inner — not going in, but just feeling the bone on the inside.

So what I would like to encourage, and find helpful, is if we can feel the supportive, solid — you know, these sit bones are very much analogous to these heel bones, both in terms of the embryology and their function.

Coming to the ground

[Russell:] So the support functions of this strong calcaneus bone, which I also want to get into, not right now, maybe later, about how important it is to actually soften our coming to the ground.

I still hear a lot of people strike it, you know. And unfortunately in the textbooks they call it a heel strike, and I would like to call it a heel caress. We don't have to stomp the ground in order to walk. There's a lot about that that's connected to the strains in our knees and hips and lower back. We're hitting the point. And I want to guess that's probably for our evening, sometime.

So this bone system. We want to feel, okay, I'm here, connected to the earth, and then between here, in this space, there can be a yielding.

And what I was suggesting is to feel a little bit over the lip of the tuberosity, of the ischial tuberosity, over the lip of it. It's usually a very sensitive area. A gentle palpating in that area can feel quite relieving for a lot of people.

So I just wanted to invite you to begin exploring your own ischia, and the space in between the ischia. Particularly right along the borders.

We will get into something Kegel-like, but this palpating is not specifically a Kegel move, as far as I know.

[Participant:] I don't understand, or I guess I need a definition of the word you used, embryology.

[Russell:] Oh, so the development in the fetus.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Well, it's just, if you look at the bony structure developing, there are different kinds of analogies in different parts of the body. The jaw and the pelvis, in general, go together. And as the legs are forming, there's a prominence in this bone, as the bottom of the pelvis is formed. It's like your feet are connected to the bottom of your pelvis, as is your jaw.

Standing

[Russell:] Okay, so what I'd like to do right now is, I want you to feel it first. I want you to stand up.

Have I mentioned how important it is just to feel yourself standing? Ten thousand times a week. You can, just because.

Did I talk here last time about Moshe's fascination with a psychiatrist named Paul Schilder? I did, didn't I?

[Participant:] I think so.

[Russell:] So, right. And — correct.

And so this sense of just basic hereness, before anything, before feeling content, thought content. Here. And to feel that in our proprioception, or pressure and weight and contact.

So we're here, and I want to bring an image that we worked with before. It's counterintuitive for many, but it's very helpful. If the air comes from above. If your skull opens and the air comes down, down, down, down, down through your bottom. And exhaling from, could say from in the earth, up through your bottom, through the space between the sit bones.

So the exhale has this upward movement. You know, most of us are used to lifting with an inhale. Often at first it feels, well, why are we doing it this way?

Well, if we are — there are a few different reasons for wanting to open to the world above and inviting it down through us. I want to put that to the side, and for now just speak about the direction of these diaphragms. This opening downward with the inhale, and this coming up with the exhale. I want to get a feeling for that.

So what I'd like to do is, as we inhale, let the hands be quite soft, and a feeling of, as we inhale, we come —

And feeling all the way through you, and exhaling. The hands shift.

Let your fingertips come up as if there's a radiant sculpture on your arms. As if your arms and elbows, forearms, all the way through these crowns of your fingers, which are shaped like the crown of your head, and they are wise, anyway.

So we want to go, inhaling. Feel all the way into the earth, all the way through your bottom, exhaling.

Rest for a moment. Good to keep shifting. Take a foot up so that you're staying awake to the ground, right?

When you're standing for a while, it's very valuable, on many levels. Mostly I'm thinking in terms of awareness, but also in terms of the demands on your hips and back and knees, to shift, to stay awake to the ground. So it's just a little bit of movement that can keep you alive, keep you sensing.

Now, can you have a picture, in standing, of your sit bones? Can you have some kind of inner sense of the location?

And without forcing, in the sense that, can the breath, as this diaphragm drops, and there's an opening downward. And a subtle feeling — and no is a good answer, because this grows over time. So there might be, I don't feel anything below my belly. That's absolutely fine. But it might be that something comes there.

So just a few moments of focusing through the bottom of your pelvis. Inhaling down. Exhaling.

So as the belly recedes, it's as if there's an in and up. As the belly comes out, it's as if there's an out and down.

Awake in your feet. Just put one hand, the fingertips, on the bottom of the pubic bone. Again, it's quite a thick bone, so find the bottom. Bigger than you might think, so really find what feels like the bottom lip of it.

No, I'm saying that with the inhale, there's an opening downward, and with the exhale, there's a very subtle inward, upward movement. It mirrors this diaphragm.

Well, as you inhale and this diaphragm comes down, this descends. Right. There's an upward movement with the exhale. Follow? Are we okay? Are you with me?

The borders

[Russell:] Okay, so, bottom of the pubic bone, bottom of the coccyx. Very, very bottom.

I know I'm moving quickly through this, because I just want to introduce it, and then we'll be working with it over some different practices, over days. I find this very important and powerful work.

So make sure you're at the bottom. It might be a little turned under at the bottom. Feel. This is generally thought of as the front and back of the pelvic floor. Think of where your sit bones are.

If you want to begin cultivating inner images, find one sit bone. Feel the bottom, the kind of pointy place. See if you can come a little bit around the inner lip, and breathe.

Stay awake in your feet. If this is bringing up any inner discomforts, do less. Breathe with yourself.

We want to be awake all through the bottom here. Your hands come off. Shift your weight a little bit.

Come to the other sit bone. One hand to the bottom of the pubic bone.

Think through, and actually see if you can feel any breath, any signs of breath. Inhaling down. Exhaling up.

Let that go. Feel down, whatever is alive for you down.

So now we're under. We're south of the golden ball, right? And we want to be able to sense the breath through the golden ball. It doesn't necessarily stop there, but there's an opening actually towards the earth.

Now, that's a strict boundary of the earth. So it's good to get a little picture. Maybe come in here for a minute.

This is not exactly the same. A lot of people are different, but it can come into it. First of all, how close the bottom of most people's coccyx is to the sacrum. It's not a big distance. Come towards the fingertips.

For so many people, this region is a chronic contraction.

Tone

[Russell:] Many of us, as we're getting older, particularly women, are more concerned about the loosening, for incontinence. But even as the sphincters can get more labile, the contractions higher up can still be there.

And we want a fluidity. We want a tonus. We don't want a flaccid pelvic floor at all. But we want that it's not chronically contracted.

Everybody knows what that feels like. And can you feel how there's a tightening that goes on deep down? Some of it we can feel in terms of our voluntary musculature, which we call voluntary skeletal musculature, but autonomically, under that, is where the action really is for our inner state.

[Participant:] And isn't it the chronic tone, the chronic effort, that is what gave the flaccid? You can't hold it forever.

[Russell:] No.

[Participant:] Something gives. But it does, doesn't it? It damages the nerves.

[Russell:] Well, yeah, let's say that. I don't know about that. What I do know is that the rhythmical alternation between the sympathetic and parasympathetic gets completely out of whack.

[Participant:] Absolutely, and that's what creates the incontinence.

[Russell:] Yeah. And so what's amazing is that awareness work and movement work can actually influence this.

And for most of us, this is not a real familiar territory. So we want to feel assured as we bring it into awareness, and we don't want it to become a big thing. We want it to become just part of our body image, part of our breath, so that that can become a natural way.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] And for some — yeah. Okay, so a little bit more standing. A little bit more standing.

From above, through

[Russell:] As you're breathing, think from above, through your skull. Just let your mind sweep down. Sweep. Not a lot of detail. It's a sweeping through the spine, into the pelvis, through the pelvis, into the earth.

I wonder if there's even a sense that your inhale goes back towards the front of your sacrum. It's another key possibility. That was part of getting that the golden ball is not in the front. It's also that there's breath available backward.

And let's add this. Let's start with the arms up, and let's inhale and bring the breath down to the earth. And pause for a moment, then exhale. Look up.

Inhaling. This is kind of the opposite of the way most people like to do it. Exhaling.

One more time. As if you're really taking something from above, through you. Pausing here, pausing in your breath. Knees are bent. You're not stretching yourself too much. And exhaling.

Stay up here for a few moments, a few breaths. Notice if your consciousness can include the up, as well as your feet into the earth. A good support. Your legs alive to the ground. The down and the up. The bottom of your pelvis.

Oh — you aren't. Feel the length of yourself.

So, over the next day, just kind of experiment a little bit with that, and then we're going to come in and do some more work again. I want to do it in pieces. I find that it works best that way.

Listening and speaking

[Russell:] Let's come in for a moment, in this area. Yeah, let's come. Here.

I want to do another listening and speaking, a brief listening-speaking practice. I want to get our skills developed with that shortened version. Letting the inner life speak as we listen. Finding how we can position ourselves so that the inner life is not feeling directed from this brain, but this brain is receiving.

It's actually so interesting to see the rather recent discoveries, in the last ten years, twelve years as far as I know. The majority of neural impulses from the neurons in here are going upward. So the information is actually going from here. We usually think of controlling things from up here. But what a different picture, that this is feeding — contributing very much more than we ever thought.

Yeah, so the whole picture of the focusing model, which I try to think of as a listening, as an embodied listening, is that there's all this living in us, and we don't want this undervalued. We just don't want this seen as the be-all and end-all. We want all of this functioning.

So this practice of, oh, I can find it. If I give a certain kind of invitation, it actually is not hiding. And I think it's really important that we learn to do that not only when there's something difficult. Because then there's a lot of pressure. Then there are things that don't want to be seen immediately.

That's why we do the resource processes. So that with our inner life, we develop this friendly relationship, this safe relationship, and then when we look at some of the more challenging things, it's already used to being listened to.

So this time, what I'd like to do is just take a general subject. The general subject is going to be how I am with my meditation. How I am with my meditation.

And as always, there are two things we'll find when you want to go in. I encourage you not to rehearse what you're going to say. Let that, as much as you can. And you notice it: well, let me see, I can say this, I can say that, I can say this. So that's kind of cute that we do that. We acknowledge it, and then, hopefully, we let it be in the background.

One thing that I notice, going into a process like this, is sometimes there's something really active in the foreground. Before I get to the subject, in this case meditation. Sometimes, you know, maybe

I'm really sad about something other. Maybe there's something really strong that I'm carrying from a different interaction. So first I need to acknowledge that.

I can't just, okay, I'm going to go and look at meditation. The inner life doesn't segment.

What I find is, almost all the time — not all the time, but almost all the time — with an acknowledgement that I know that's there, and for me a commitment that I'll be visiting it later, it won't be disappointed. That there's a willingness to allow consciousness to move to other subjects. So it begins with an acknowledging. And if it doesn't want to move, then you don't do that process.

So that's the first thing. Sometimes there's something strong in the foreground. It just needs — it could be a physical something. It's really hard to settle with your inner life because your neck is lit up in some way. And it doesn't mean that the neck stops being lit up, but in acknowledging it, often it will recede enough into the background that you have consciousness available for another subject. It could be the same with a feeling state, or something else.

Yes?

You're not trying to force it away. What you might need to do is spend the time with that thing. You don't go on with the planned process.

Okay, so that's the first thing. Second thing is, with almost everything that we're interested in, we have a lot of ideas already. And sometimes it's really helpful, at the beginning of opening to your inner life, when a subject is there, that you acknowledge kind of what you already have about it. What's already alive in your understanding of it. Again, I'm not saying you have to do this. I'm saying that often it helps the process to have that kind of on the table.

And then we can do what's really exciting about this kind of listening. It's the opportunity for something you don't know yet to appear. Right? That's what I'm most interested in, is that hot-off-the-press picture.

And what I notice is, as I said yesterday, a tendency to be either years, days, weeks, minutes, or seconds behind what's hot off the press. So sometimes it helps what's hot off the press if I acknowledge, already, some of the things that feel better being said. Well, you know, this already exists.

So I'm going to model it for you, in my way. I have no idea what I'm going to say. It's going to be fresh.

This process is going to be seven minutes. So it's a really long time for some of you. I know. This process is going to be seven minutes, and I'd like somebody to tell me when it's five minutes. Somebody do.

[Participant:] Yep.

[Russell:] Thank you.

Dropping into my physical body again, similar to what I felt yesterday. I feel my social body takes a little bit of time to kind of come here. Sit bones, and the bottom, really help here. And the breath.

Bringing a soft inner question about what wants to be known about meditation at this moment.

What comes first is just great gratitude. I already knew it, but it's coming fresh. It's like a welling.

There's some kind of split. It's like, here is my practice, and here is my practice of guiding others in their practice. Somehow both come up. We're in a meditation, and they're both there. They're separate somehow. Just feeling that.

They don't feel like they're pulling at each other. They just feel like they're living next to each other.

Drawn toward my own. A sense of lightness and space.

But interesting — it runs into this. So they're not really so separate. It runs into this, which feels like some sort of boundary around being conscious of where other people are. Tracking, tuned to the space around. Some kind of boundary on lightness and space.

No sense is there. I'm recognizing an absence of really feeling it. I just notice that it's there.

What is — I hear a line. Well, light and spacious, up to a point.

Laughter didn't feel right. Light and spacious.

And with that comes, too.

Already? Who made it seven minutes?

I'm in touch with a longing for the freedom from that. And also, there's a — that feels just right. No. It feels, actually, it somehow adds to something, even though it doesn't add to this. Oh yeah. There's a this that's bigger. And it's good to have that time limit, because this is coming quickly.

So there is the longing for this being all that I need to pay attention to, but there's a larger space that is enjoying as much of this as there is. And just passionate, actually. That's the feeling on this. Passionate. About wanting to convey the possibilities, on this cushion, to people.

There's an urgency, almost. Something gets a little concerned about the urgency. I want to live my life. I need to — I really want to come back to that. There's something about the urgency that feels — I'm concerned about something.

I realize it's really weird. This gesture is very, very wonderful. And it's also a finishing. Dropping down.

As is so often the case, amazed at what's there. And really, what's there is not known by me till I give it all my attention, even for a short period. It gets all my attention.

Thank you.

After the listening

[Russell:] Anything you want to ask about? Again, your process will be, of course, your own process. It will have some similarities. If there's any mystery to it, or anything confusing in the way I — what I'm asking you to do will be my way of listening. Anything that would be helpful for you?

[Participant:] Yes.

[Russell:] Yeah. Great. Thank you for bringing that in. That's so important for us to get, that unfolding is in steps. Sometimes there's a big something, but often — I don't know whether to call this a big or a little. It feels important for me in a way that surprises me.

But even if I had thirty minutes, it probably could move a little bit further. But it has a kind of gestalt to it, that life is ready for at this moment.

And so I think it's really important, what you're saying. If we bring to our inner process an expectation of completing it — now, we can have a sense of completion without it being complete. That's an important distinction. If we lay the concept of complete on us, then we're just frustrated, even though a completion occurred.

Yeah? So really good to realize we're in a process of unfolding, and it has its own kind of rhythms, its own timing. But what we can do so wonderfully — wonderfully is not even the word I'm looking for — so helpfully, is bring this kind of invitation, where the body is here. The physical body is here. The feeling body is here. The imagery and symbology is here. And they're working together.

And there's a real commitment to a kind of listening that allows pauses. Allows a lot of not knowing what that is.

[Participant:] Yeah, that's good. So you basically described what I think, you know, as I was going to think. So in meditation, I can go off on journeys, lists.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] I can be real mental. And so what I'm feeling, from what you were doing, was describing a feeling state of where that thought takes me. So it's not so much a diatribe of my monkey mind, as much as a sensational experience.

What leads what? Like, is my feeling of anxiety looking for a thought that can couple with it — oh, you must have left the door open, or you didn't talk to this student — if that makes sense?

So you're not describing a dialogue, or a diatribe, an editorial of your monkey mind, as much as it's a journey of the sensation.

[Russell:] I would say yes. The content of where your mind goes is not significant for this.

[Participant:] Okay.

[Russell:] But more than the sensation is also what comes in your relationship to all that monkey mind. How that's living in you could be part — it doesn't have to be, but could very well be part of someone's experience.

You may notice — I'll just pick examples out of the blue — maybe there's some sort of inner expectation you're in touch with. Wow, I really feel an expectation. I'm in touch with something inside that's really expecting something, expecting more. Or there's a judgmentalness about the monkey-ness. Or it's not judgmental, it's just disappointed that there's so much activity in the inner life.

We want to say hello to how it's coming to you, how your inner life is bringing you reflection on it. So it's not just sensing, it's not just feeling, it's not just symbol. It's the whole thing together. What can be sometimes called a felt sense of it all.

[Participant:] Particularly, that kept coming to mind with that experience. It was my thought, logical thought, creating the expectation — or is it my expectation, with my body?

[Russell:] Right, right. So what I will encourage is to notice, if you're in your process and you notice that kind of, well, where is this? Just know, oh, I notice something really wants to understand what precedes what.

So don't identify with the one who's trying to figure anything out. You're the space in which that's occurring too. There's always a backward step, and what's potentially alive has space to come alive.

It's a radically different way of listening.

So let's get some practice. Find a partner, maybe a different partner from yesterday.

[Participant:] Yeah, please. It's a little stuffy for me. I don't know for other people. If we just, before doing air conditioning, can we open the doors and just hit that cross breeze?

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. As an intermediate, before we do air conditioning.

[Participant:] Yeah, that's a good idea.

[Russell:] Let's try it.

[Participant:] Let's try it. Let's see. Let's not open it a hundred percent, but put something in the door. Because I think for me it'll feel a little too open. Like a chair or something.

[Russell:] Yeah, we can open. Let's open this one as well.

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah, that's right. This one feels more exposed.

[Russell:] Yeah.