Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 4, Session 1 — 87 minutes

Summary: Questions about breathing into a full lower belly lead Russell to separate fullness from tension, and habit from control. A story of Zen masters sensing his hara opens talk of centering, ground, and why the heart waits. Then a demonstration of embodied listening, and teaching on presence language.

The breath and the lower belly

[Participant A:] You're saying that on the exhale, the lower belly comes out?

[Russell:] That's one possible way of breathing that we're exploring. Correct.

[Participant A:] Exploring it with us. Okay. So in that way, on the inhale — I'm used to the belly coming out on the inhale.

[Russell:] Right. No problem. It can come out in both, so it doesn't really matter what happens on the inhale. You'll have a pause in between.

[Participant A:] Okay. And the actual coming out is subtly different with an inhale and an exhale, although they're both coming out.

[Russell:] Okay.

[Participant A:] And during the pause, you're not keeping it out.

[Russell:] Or let's say there's space. Enough space there for the breath to come in. So you really don't have to worry about the inhale. Sometimes I teach this and people go, well, it just keeps getting bigger. It's getting bigger with the exhale, it's getting bigger with the inhale, it's getting bigger with the exhale.

[Participant A:] When the lower belly expands out, does that have any connection to the anus?

[Russell:] Yeah. We'll get there.

[Participant A:] Okay. What I'm wondering is, is it all created by the air, or is there some muscular —

[Russell:] Yeah, sure. It's energetic. There's muscular tonus that's shifting. And we want to differentiate between tension and fullness. That takes some time, because there is something there, and as you move from making it, you begin to differentiate. What is fullness?

[Participant A:] Yeah. This work, sure.

[Russell:] It's not — there's a tonicity. A tonicity that I experience as very vitalizing, but not tension-producing.

[Participant A:] Vitalizing.

[Russell:] So, just to be clear in another way: all the different ways of breathing are just ways of breathing, and in the present moment the body will find whatever seems best for it.

[Participant B:] But it sounds like — maybe I'm wrong — that you're actually suggesting that cultivating that fullness in breathing is more of an all-the-time thing.

[Russell:] Okay. This is the way I would say that.

Between habit and control

[Russell:] This is slightly different from Feldenkrais's understanding. I'd love to have this conversation with him, but fortunately he's not here.

Moshe said, give the system enough alternatives and it will choose what's needed and best. What I realize is that the power of habit is strong.

In an ideal world, someone's awareness would develop to the point that the capacity of a free choice would be there for the system, not for consciousness. What I notice is that that's an idealization. Awareness can help tilt things. We need the awareness to overcome the power of habit.

The danger is, if on one side is habit, the other side is control. I'm now trying to control each breath because I don't want to be in my habit. And of course these are analogies to everything. I become aware of something, and now I want to try to do this. And it doesn't feel natural, because it's imposing. It's like, sit up straight. Because we're slouching. Something comes over — oh, sit up straight.

Feldenkrais had a sixty-five-year-old man and his ninety-three-year-old mother. I got to see this. The man sits on the table, and the mother, ninety-three, sitting next to me, goes, sit up straight. And you have to wonder how many times he heard that.

It's such a beautiful externalization of what happens for us.

So now, in between control — cortical control, that man's presumptuous brain image — and just habit, the first thing is, like Moshe says, giving alternatives. Creating possibilities of other motor patterns. But what I realize is we need a little bit more than that. We need something like curiosity in our daily life.

Oh, am I in an old habit? Oh, let me interrupt that for a few moments. Let me — and you'll have a number of ways of doing this over the next days. Let me just play with that for twenty seconds, and then see what wants to happen.

It needs some conscious tweaking, to help what's newer come forward. Old habits literally are ingrained more deeply in your brain. Newer habits are literally more surface. That's why the phenomenon of retrograde amnesia — you lose the memory of the most recent learning. That's the way it works. And so under pressure, you'll lose that which is more recent.

So it needs some tweaking. It needs some invitation.

They were checking the hara

[Russell:] Have I told my Zen center story here?

It's a really good story, but I hate to bore people with repeated stories.

This was about ten years ago. I had met a Japanese master who was touring the United States. A little bit older than me. At that time I was president of the Zen Center at Sonoma Mountain, so I got to greet him and interact with him, and we had a nice connection. He didn't speak much English. In fact, his teaching was mostly through shakuhachi playing. It's a great way to teach. He was actually my inspiration, some years later, to take up shakuhachi. That's another story.

But let me put a footnote here. Remind me to bring up the idea of taking up something new. Remind me by the end, if I forget. I'll bring a shakuhachi, give you a few notes.

So, Fu Man Roshi is his name, and he was growing the center in Bavaria, and had been there for some years. I told him, I travel and teach, and I'm teaching at this other Zen center, would you be interested? He was trying to grow. He was more open-minded than most Japanese Zen teachers, and he was looking to have something that was also helping people get healthier in the modern world. His wife was a Swiss woman who was studying energetic healing, so he was more open.

He invited me. I went over there, which was risky for him, because he was still part of the Soto Zen lineage. That's a major school of Zen. And he was getting a lot of money from Japan to build this beautiful center in Bavaria. Follow the money.

As happens in all these structures, as near as I can tell, the pope of Soto Zen, or the bishop of Soto Zen, was visiting him to see his center. And there's this California guy teaching stuff, right? And traveling with the Soto bishop was a very famous kendo master, a Zen master famous for sword. They were traveling together, visiting centers in Europe. They're very strict, and they send reports back. It's kind of Vatican-like.

So I get a message that Fu Man Roshi would like you to come over at lunch to meet these two people. I didn't know anything about the system. So I walk in. They're sitting at the table. I had a fairly formal Zen training, because my teacher was quite along in it. So I walk in, and I bow. And then — oh, they're really short. Japanese.

Oh, Felden. Oh, Felden. Like moaning. It's like, stand up for a second. So you're me, standing there. Oh, Felden. Oh, very interesting.

So I'm in California, and these two guys are like another species. And then we bow, and they sit down, and that was it. That was the meeting.

So I went back to my room.

But interestingly, a few weeks later I was in the Black Forest, at Baker Roshi's center, where I run one of the mentorships. He had lived in Japan, trained in Japan. I said, I had this strange experience, and I described it to him.

Oh, they were checking you out.

No — what do you mean?

When they do that, they're trying to see if you have anything here. That's the way they are. When they come, they're actually feeling for your center. And when they do that, it's like that lion.

So I go, what happened? Did I pass?

And he goes, did they invite you back?

I said, yeah, I'm going next year.

He said, you passed.

So that kind of accelerated my interest in that region. And the other thing Baker Roshi said is, it's really funny. In the last twenty or thirty years — he trained there in the sixties — the culture there has really lost that sense of hara, in his view. He was saying, now the businessmen, when they meet, they groan and growl, but there's nothing there. Like they're trying to be something that their parents were, or their fathers.

Fullness and support

[Russell:] So I got interested in this phenomenon, of course. And back to what you were saying.

What I began to notice was — I'm not sure it's a linear progression, but something like this. I began to find that when I was starting to disconnect, particularly if there was a tentativeness internally, a kind of unease, I would lose something here. I would get tighter in here. And I found that having the exhale here gave me the capacity to stay in presence in challenging moments. And that got my interest very much.

And then I began to notice, doing physical labor — there's a whole system actually, in Australia. Do you know the woman, a Feldenkrais practitioner from Sydney? Beryl, Beryl something. She developed this whole system, years ago, twenty years ago, helping people with back problems to lift things by creating this support through what she called a contraction. I call it this fullness in here.

But it's the opposite of pulling in. Not that pulling in can't be supportive too. I'm not against that. One could tighten in that way. But what I notice is this fullness here. And in this case, if I'm lifting something, there is a tension here. I've let the fullness grow into a —

Yeah. Very much so.

So the other way that I know of engaging the abdominal muscles is a contraction in here that decreases the space here. It actually brings this closer towards your back. And it's also a potential support system.

The martial artists do it in the opposite way. They do it more like what I'm talking about. The outward. Creating support through this. One can also create support more like putting a brace around it, coming in.

In my experience, it supports the back. I'm not sure that exact support is the same. It's the way you can support something by pushing in on it, or by creating a boundary on it — a pressure outward that can create a fixity inside. So there are different ways of creating support. I'm not sure, if you went in there, how different that would look. Not sure.

What I know is that for me — and I haven't practiced the other nearly as much — I feel a kind of closing inside. A decrease of inner space, almost like a shrinking. And in this way, I feel truly empowered in my whole self, and a much stronger overall life energy.

That's the best I can do with that right now.

[Participant A:] Did you register their hara?

[Russell:] Something inside did.

[Participant A:] And was that a conscious event?

[Russell:] Well, you know, I didn't — it's a great question. I've never thought about it. What I can say is this. I clearly felt their presence down here. I clearly felt that these are beings of substance. So that's a yes. I didn't frame it in that language.

There was clearly the sense — I don't know if you've ever noticed, they kind of have this wide walk. Moshe used to walk like that. This kind of —

[Participant A:] Yeah. The big valley.

[Russell:] Yeah. The valley here, and the valley here.

Okay. I've got a Moshe story I want to tell you, but go ahead.

[Participant C:] I was going to make a comment, just on language. Because you talk about pushing out, and you're really very precise about exactly what you mean. And it's easy to hear that and forget — just the words.

And I think, in response to the question about support of the back, what you're teaching us is that there's an engagement of front and back. A surrounding. There's a pushing out that can — and it's a kind of pushing in both directions.

[Russell:] That's right. That's a really important point. Really important. Thank you for bringing that. Is that clear?

So when I'm talking about this, even though most of us don't sense it at first as clearly — you will sense it — there's something that goes back. When this is coming forward, there's something that gets fuller back here. It also, in its completion, goes clearly downward. And there's this feeling of being held in this powerful place. Yes. Energetically and metaphorically.

[Participant D:] Really admiring your cylinder. The increase in the cylinder, to improve the root chakra. Whereas just pulling in kind of decreases the cylinder.

[Russell:] Right. That's an interesting point. I'll get there in one second.

It's an interesting point when you look at the old image. And actually the military has changed in this way. The old image of the kind of strong Western man is the pulled-in belly and the inflated chest. And from a martial arts point of view, you're a pushover. You might look tough. You might have a lot of muscle up here. But your center of gravity is way too high.

So this fullness in here, that the traditional martial arts emphasize, is really quite functional. And as you're saying, it's more — root chakra means safety. It means survival. It means I'm here on this earth, capable of taking care. While this pulling in can work for stabilization, I think that there are other things lost.

Center, ground, and the heart

[Participant E:] Learning, and curiosity, can trust into the I and the it. And the hara.

While trying to experience that, trying to cultivate that — first to discern my I and my it, and the elements — trying to cultivate the simultaneous experience while feeling the ruach, the hara, the

expansion. I'm not there in any way, but I can move towards it, where I can feel that that contains both. It's an experience because of the multi-directional.

So I'm just trying to put the head in the gut, so to speak. And the beautiful luxury this morning really got a lot of things going, I felt. And usually when a lot of things get going inside of me, I need to find my body. I need to find my base, and start playing with that more.

So if I'm doing a Focusing with somebody, and I find myself switching from an it to an I, or whatever, finding that space — is that like a home that's in there? Am I making any sense?

[Russell:] What I'm hearing is that you're excited about all this. And that there's this interest in connecting this I and this it in this sense of hara, and wondering if having this allows space for both of those to be there.

[Participant E:] Something, yeah. Somewhere in my body exists the either and the or.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant E:] And much of this work is when there's a beautiful marriage, or partnership. Like Joseph Campbell talks about serving the partnership, not the individuals. And so I'm serving this exploration of interrelation. Then these physical practices that we do here help to embody the experience of that.

[Russell:] Yeah. So I would say, for me, I think it's really important and helpful to have the center as one of the places. I wouldn't rate it over the ground. I would say, along with our groundedness, and actually very much connected to it.

It's why we moved, in our first week, starting with ground, and then we move a little bit upward into this region. And we're not wanting to leave that groundedness behind.

[Participant E:] Right. Oh, yeah. Absolutely. They're supporting each other, each step.

[Russell:] That's right. You got that. Good.

Brief is not my strong suit. Go ahead.

[Participant F:] How this connects to the verticality and the horizontality. If that's where it gets complicated — it really feels like it's overpowering. I don't know where it is. Help me. That means I'm confused about it.

[Russell:] Yeah. Well, I would say that the capacity to be full here, to be present here, relates to both dimensions.

It relates to our capacity to withstand, in a certain way, the timelessness of the vertical. That we have a power in here, or a presence in here, or something in the direction of an I-ness. Where is this I, if everything is here, there, here? Something that gives one a sense of self. One of the senses of self that become important.

And in the horizontal, this becomes a center for our movement. Becomes a center for navigating through life in ways that are more empowered. The sense of learning to move from center, and not withdrawing here, from the old fear habits that tend to shrink us. From our bottom, through our genitals, through this whole region, tends to pull in here. This is like an antidote toward those patterns.

So in the horizontal world of everyday life, this is an empowerment to deal with what's coming. I need my ground, which connects me to — I'm here, I'm on this spot. I need a center to be able to deal with difficult interactions. Now, of course, I need my ground for that also, but it's almost one step up from the ground.

The ground is my first. I'm here, I'm safe, I'm in this world. Now, next step, I'm interacting with someone, and they're asking me for all that, and I feel overwhelmed by it, and I start shrinking in here.

So grounding and centering are intimately related, but they're not exactly the same thing. One leads into the other.

I really want to get to a subject. Go ahead. We'll do the Moshe story tomorrow. We're going to be with center tomorrow.

I thought — that's a really good question. Sorry.

[Participant F:] Yeah. I think it's sort of an integration question. As you were explaining that, I was wondering. You talked about the three brains, and whether what we're cultivating — the hara — connects with that brain. Because a lot of teaching now, in spiritual circles, is about the heart.

[Russell:] Right. I'll tell you why we wait. Well, the heart is centered in week five, but week four to begin emphasizing this. Although it's always here, and the sense of warm-heartedness permeates everything. But why this isn't the focus before that is, in my understanding, there is a potential danger in opening from here without a real something under it that's reliable.

Opening the heart energy, the love energy. I go to places where everybody — there's one place I teach in Sweden where it's beautiful. It's all about, how are you, can I take care of you. And it's genuine. There are a lot of love practices. But the practicality of dealing with everyday life is really missing. In the community of people, in the interacting with each other, dealing with very important things like time and money.

No, I missed that. But anyway, all of that. And the capacity not to just override our fears with another something. The movement from fear to love is not through a bypassing, but through something else that grows in us.

And in my opinion, from a chakra point of view, if you go here first and haven't developed the infrastructure, it's going to get you in the end. It will get you later.

Yeah. Sorry. Okay. Well, so many things. I love your enthusiasm, and I want to be moving along in some practices. You'll be next.

Embodied listening

[Russell:] Okay. So this is our next practice.

As you know, I like us to get the sense of embodied listening that Focusing is so brilliant for. But I like to keep the sense that we're not learning a technique. We will add the technical aspects, but there's something in the way of listening. Once we learn it, and get a little bit of the language for it, it becomes something available to us, something that feels natural for us, and then we can get some more detail about the skills.

So at this level, all Focusing is self-focusing. Or all listening is learning to listen to yourself. I'm not talking about outside in the world, when you're listening to someone. In this kind of embodied listening, even when you're with a partner, like we've seen the last couple of days, the partner is backup presence for your presence. It's backup presence for your presence.

So your intention is to be this warm-hearted light that's with whatever is here. We've had some hints along the way of certain language, certain attitudes, certain ways of turning towards this, when we want to grow that further.

There are different levels of companioning, and I will talk about that tomorrow. Right now, we are working with what I consider the most important and fundamental aspect of being with a person when they're listening to themselves, when they're in an embodied listening process or Focusing process. You are cultivating your presence. Your warm-hearted, light-filled presence.

And since none of us are perfect, what that means is, when you space out, you have the intention to come back. You have the intention to be there as a field of listening. The field of listening.

And I would suggest that if you haven't found it already, you're likely to find that just the presence of the other makes a big difference. And that's not just psychological. It's neurological. It is connected to mirror neurons. It is connected to limbic resonance, connecting with another. So this goes on between bodies.

And each time we get to another level of listening as a companion, what came before is always included. So presence is there always. That's the ground.

And so what I'd like is to have us in partners. And I'd like to have a listener just listening. Not saying back words. Just holding presence. And the speaker will be spending time — it'll be fifteen minutes this time — with anything you'd like more information about. It's an open subject. You're not looking to solve problems.

It could be something that's challenging in your life. It could be something that's not challenging. It's something you'd like to learn about that's alive in your life, and you want to hear what the wisdom body has to say about it. What's your inner life — which is ultimately connected to everything — what it has to say about it.

Again, from my point of view, we have access to a wisdom that this, by itself, can't even imagine. And we want practice at listening as a whole being. And the remarkable thing is that even if you're fairly new to it, it can come and surprise you.

Now, what I would like to do also, once you find partners, is to see if there is somebody who would be willing, and interested, and it feels good inside, to be a, quote, demonstration couple. Where we would be with you while you were speaking, and your partner would be just listening.

And what I want to do is be able to learn from each other. Our styles of speaking, listening. And that the person speaking, afterwards, if it was okay with them, we could offer observations. And it's not at all that we're making suggestions to them, or certainly nothing like criticism. It's a curious looking at the movement that occurred as they were reflecting, as they were listening.

And I'll suggest that we actually have a scribe who's writing down much of what is said, so that we have a reference to go back to. And then we can look at it together, and it'll certainly be helpful

for the person speaking. I can guarantee that will deepen your inquiry process, and it'll be helpful for all of us. And if we have a few instances of that over the days, I think we'll get a lot of learning.

So find a partner, and then I'll ask if there's somebody willing to be listened to.

Yes. Yeah. Could be any of that.

A demonstration

[Participant G:] Inside me there's a fluttering belly that's energetic. And I'm aware that what I'm approaching, I approached yesterday with two others, and I'm approaching it with a much bigger field of energy. So I'm feeling that energy and asking, is there anything I need as I do that?

Breath. I need breath.

And there are two aspects of what I'm wanting to learn. One is a sense of up and out, and the other is very — and I want there to be grace between them.

The words that go with up and out are music, love, mystic, mystery. My hands are doing this. It's almost what we were talking about today, like that. And down, it's got to do with reliability, responsibility, serving. And in between them, there's this small —

Void.

In that naming and feeling the void, there's a concern. Like, I could get lost.

My words are falling.

And today I heard that, conceptually, I understand both are important. So my head knows that. Like my breath, and like the cylinder that I've been so interested in. And I want to travel with grace. I want connection, and I don't know how to do that.

And what I know about this is that I have a voice that goes, do this, do that, do that, then this will happen, and this will happen, and blah, blah, blah. And that's frightening. It's old and frightening.

And in this moment, even as I define things that I've known in the past, there's this feeling in here.

[Silence 39 seconds]

[Participant G:] Now a part of me is slipping out to watch myself.

And I'm wanting to regard that observer with kindness, rather than adversarial, critical. That's a new way of thinking about the bank camera who watches me.

Wondering what it's saying. It's trying to keep me from getting in trouble. Or making a fool of myself.

[Silence 32 seconds]

[Participant G:] This emptiness is getting a little warmer now.

There's a part of me wondering what I would do, or how I would live, if there wasn't a voice telling me what to do. If there wasn't the one who says, do this, do that, or else don't go away, you've got to stay here. What would I do if those voices weren't there? How would I live? How would I inhabit my life?

And I'm thinking about the voices that say, let's get out of here, or else do this, do that. If they weren't enemies — if they were trying to help me — I would say to them, I hope there's a kinder way.

I want a kinder feeling. I want it to be a better feeling than this.

Breath. Breath helps.

In addition to the bank camera, I want my own eyes to see you all. Notice that I have eyes, as well as a bank camera.

Even as my eyes are opening, I understand how much I have looked with the bank camera, instead of seeing what is.

And what has been empty here feels quivering and alive. I can't say it feels good, but I do feel alive, and I feel something besides void. I feel permeable, instead of missing.

Very interested in that silver. What it can have.

[Russell:] It's about ten minutes. And if it would feel okay — only if it feels okay — I invite you just to stay. To stay where this is right now. I'll tell you when there's a couple of minutes to go.

[Participant G:] That feels okay.

[Russell:] To see if there's something else that wants to come up, if it feels right.

[Participant G:] Right. I understand what you're saying.

So as I stay, what I'm feeling is a preponderance of this one. Okay, let's go. Let's get out of here.

What that one tells me is, at least that's known. I don't know what will happen if we stay. At least this is known. I won't let myself — again. It's dependable, or predictable. Staying here is — you know.

[Silence 34 seconds]

[Participant G:] And the norm in the circle is, I can say that's enough now. I don't need to, as much as I did. That helps.

I would like grace and facility, rather than just surviving this. I'd like to learn some grace at going between being reliable and dependable, and mysterious. And I'd like some grace, and some skill.

[Russell:] Two more minutes.

[Participant G:] That's what I want to learn, and I don't know how. I don't know how I'm going to learn it yet.

So much of my life I've identified problems, and stopped, instead of saying, well, so you've had those difficulties and vulnerabilities. What else could be possible?

I would like to identify myself with learning, as opposed to identifying vulnerabilities and problems. There'd be a sense of continuity, and more motion.

My ears and my eyes go, well, there's a lot of people who probably know some things about that. So I'm drawn out to you all. I pretended a lot in my life that I knew how to do things. It was just how I was raised. If you don't know, you kind of bullshit. And that's a very uncomfortable place.

And somehow it helps to say, I don't know how to go gracefully between being responsible and left brain, and a lover and a musician. I don't know how to shuttle that very well. I'd like to learn. I'd like to dance that.

[Russell:] Yeah. Maybe just, as we're finishing, feel how all that's living for you right now.

[Participant G:] Thank you.

[Silence 33 seconds]

[Participant G:] I don't want to have to escape to be a dancer, a musician, and a romantic, and mystical. And I don't want to be imprisoned in reliability. There's something between leaving orbit and being in jail.

[A participant:] Amen.

[Participant G:] Thank you.

Presence language

[Russell:] Is it okay with you if we reflect together? And just let us know anytime if anything is not feeling right. If there are observations — something in his way of moving that taught you something? You got something? That's a helpful thing. If there's a place where you were wondering, if you were in such a place, what might be some options for yourself? That would be great.

[Participant H:] An observation. At the beginning — I've never seen that, or thought of that. He asked if there was anything he needed, and he saw that he needed breath. Asking, is there anything I need? I thought that was beautiful.

[Russell:] Yeah. Just starting right off with what he can do himself. And for all of us, yes.

[Participant J:] And now I'm looking at the hara. Just right there, it really came along, and felt full. Alive today.

[Participant K:] For myself, it was when you spoke of approaching them with grace and skill that I came back there. That just so opened my question.

[Participant L:] I was trying to take what Russell's been focusing on into this. I think he stood with them in a couple of ways. One thing resonated with me. Something like, I've never considered the possibility that they weren't enemies. And I sat for a moment with that possibility, until I was able to accept that as a possibility.

[Russell:] Let me make a comment about that, from my perspective.

The quality that I call presence, and witnessing — the witnessing aspect of presence — actually doesn't have the capacity to be judgmental. When a judgmental voice comes, as often the sense of something looking at us comes, that's a something that needs my attention.

So from my point of view, I'd say, oh, I'm noticing a part of me, that judgmental eye, looking at me from out here, like a bank camera. And I'm just acknowledging that it's there. I'm sensing my relationship to that. I am the presence that sees them.

And it's easy to confuse these, because we're talking this image of shining a light from the outside, and often we think of that critical eye that we've looked at ourselves with. That self-consciousness that we've looked at ourselves with. So, very important to make a distinction.

By definition, in my suggestions for your cultivation of your inner life, when witnessing, when presencing is occurring, judgmentalness is out of the equation. Discernment is in the equation, in the sense of clear seeing. But the sense of something telling me I'm good or bad, or right or wrong — that's not there. That's part of the environment that allows the inner life to feel safe.

Now, most of us need some time for that to grow in an authentic way. The language really helps. Hopefully everybody's hearing this. When you're noticing a voice that has that kind of thing, it's not a bad voice. It's part of your history, part of your inner life. We're just not going to let that hijack the presence.

So we're placing the I, at this moment, in the capacity that sees all that.

And that gets tricky sometimes, when we're in it. That's actually one of the main functions of a partner, when a companion is more active, as we will get to. The companion is backup presence, meaning you've gotten caught in an old way of thinking about yourself. You're in your process, and it's this thing that's looking. And here's where presence language is so helpful.

I'm noticing — not I. I notice, like a bank camera looking at me. And maybe there's a reaction to it inside also.

Yeah. Let me answer that in a second. Is it okay here, talking about this?

[Participant G:] Let me check in. I'm not sure. There's a way this is going to get conceptual. I think it's okay, but I just don't follow where this is going.

[Russell:] Okay. Let me rephrase that very briefly.

[Participant M:] I'm just wondering, Russell, if we should all break away now.

[Russell:] Yeah. So, in that moment — as you know, my setup with people is, I don't tell them what to do. I give invitations. Hopefully people always know that I really am totally welcoming of their ignoring my invitation.

And if, in this case, it would feel authentic, I might say something like, oh, you're noticing something like an eye looking at you. Maybe say hello to it. So immediately, just in the languaging, there's an I and an it.

Now, this gets a little bit subtle. At the beginning, there were some phrases that I was very much appreciating. There was a use of I. I really want to have kindness towards. I really want to travel with connection and grace. And for me, it felt like that was coming not from a part, but from himself.

So I'm fine. If someone's saying that, it doesn't feel the same as a little later in the session, when there was, and I'm wanting something to change. Then I would have said, oh, there's something in there that wants that to change.

Now that's a little tricky. Why was that I okay, but this I? You get what I mean? Now we're getting a little more subtle. Saying, does it have the feel of the whole self? Or does it have the feel of a part that is trying to — you get what I mean? So this is subtle, but important.

Again, from my point of view, presence is spacious. And you'll hear me say this ten thousand times. I hope it impacts sometime. Presence is spacious. There's room for anything. It's not identified with anything. There's room for anything. And there's light. Capacity for seeing what's there.

So when longing appears, you go, oh, I'm noticing this place. And that's wonderful. That's not at all a bad thing. But that our feeling life, what's living in us, is met by a presence — that is the relationship that is moving, and healing, and wholing, for the inner life.

Now, there was a place — I want to talk a little bit more about presence language. Is this still okay? A little bit more.

There was a moment — it actually was beautiful, the way it unwound. There were so many touching moments, to be with your process. It was a moment when you were with this and this, and there was something in here. Before it got a name, there was something in here. And I might have encouraged, because that was a clear moment — maybe see if it feels okay to sense a quality. Just a possibility. A little bit further.

You got a word, because, oh, it's like a void, and I'm afraid of falling into the void. Void was there. And so it's a powerful moment. And actually you went back to it later, because that's one of the key ingredients that grew. Can I, like at the end of the session when I said maybe stay with it a little bit longer — oh, to be with this a little longer without going to here. It's challenging for all of us.

I would say it's really helpful. This is surprisingly helpful for challenging feeling states. To not just say, void, but to say, I'm noticing something like a void in here. Because in a moment of something that is strong, there's a part of us that doesn't want to be there at all, so we will go into something else. But if the I can notice — that's an example of presence language. I'm noticing something like a void in here. You've reaffirmed that you're present with it. You've entered the I that is with you.

And as I said at the end this morning, if we can have that experience — anything comes, and it is not alone. It is not alone. Even something like the void is not felt as alone, when this presencing comes. So, powerful use of presencing language for moments like that.

So I tend to really be — again, it has to feel authentic. If it doesn't, if it feels like just words, then it's not helpful. But when there are strong feeling words, not to just give yourself the word. Oh, it's anxiety. Pain. Fear. That tends to exaggerate the feeling.

If I can have something like, I'm noticing a lot of anxiety, I think it is. I'm here with it. Does that get the feeling of that? And I'm with it.

Key: if I get too far away, where it feels like I'm distant and observing it from out here, it probably is not going to feel safe. So in cultivating the clarity aspect of witnessing, we also want to keep that warm-hearted aspect.

This is called practice.

[Participant B:] Isn't this the whole purpose of cultivating the resources, so that you call upon your resources? If they're not far away.

[Russell:] Right. That's my understanding. The reason you cultivate your resources is to have them, and access to them, when you're under stress. That's certainly one of the really important parts of the resource growing. To actively use it.

So give me an example of what you mean, so I make sure I'm getting it.

[Participant B:] Well, if I'm having difficulty being with something, saying hello to something, I call up my resources to be with me with it. Or to envision them with it. There's that support. It's like I call up support. Because I can't do it myself.

[Russell:] Okay. So for me, in that moment, I would notice something there that doesn't feel like it can do it. And I'm just saying — I'm not suggesting for you. I'm saying for me. And in that moment, my resources come forward. That's the way my process works.

[Participant B:] Right. They don't just appear.

[Russell:] Great. Okay, so this is a good hint. For some of us, actively calling the resources that you're growing can be really helpful in a moment that feels like it's too much.

What I can say is that, for me, the presencing that we're talking about is the dominant resource. And as long as I have access to that, as long as that is functioning — if something is really strong and I start losing connection to that, then I'm finding that the presencing language, and the coming back to my physical body, being here, is really helpful. And I might need a partner, if it's a strong moment, to support me in that.

And I'm hearing from you that what you find really helpful in those moments is consciously calling up a resource.

[Participant B:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. That's beautiful. For me, again, one of the purposes of the resources is that they become more present in my ordinary life. Not when I'm dealing with something particular. That those qualities are spontaneously appearing. And I find that you cultivate them, and you visit them, and if you have an image that helps them to come. And when you're not under stress. It makes the ordinary more wonderful. That's what I'm very interested in.

[Participant N:] I would like to reflect back your gestural language, which was eloquent.

This was a definite gesture. Very strong, very clear. And then the void was unformed. But later, you did this. And you were sort of working in this little zone — emptiness, that you had no way you wanted to connect to. So one of these strong gestures.

Another one was — I believe it was something like — and it drew into one. So this was also a place in between the two extremes, which you're saying you want to learn. In case you didn't know it.

[Participant O:] I would like to just comment. I think that we use that word I, and then the reference to your eyes. There was a lot more there. There was a huge sense of vision, not only of us, but inside. There's something there. Some kind of vision. You're kind of still finding.

[Russell:] So — the letter I. I think we'll end this here.

[Participant P:] Yeah. I don't think it was only the gesture, from the back side. But there was a moment that someone mentioned, and I don't recall if it was you wanting to see us, or us wanting to see you. And I almost interpreted it as both. You want to be seen as much as you want to see us.

And it was interesting, coming from the back side, not being able to see a lot of what was happening in front. Just really tapping into the audio of it, the hearing. There was that moment when you said I. It almost woke me up, in a sense, because I started getting tears in my eyes. And I looked across the room, and there were a few other people that had tears in their eyes.

And I now look back at that moment and think how inspiring that is. Almost like it came out of nowhere. And I felt it in you, and that exuded, and almost felt like it filled the entire room.

[Participant Q:] I put your words together with what I am beginning to understand. Is there a possibility — better late than never, I guess — to understand that being seen and seeing could be a beneficent experience?

In that saying, truly, you said, my ears and eyes know that I'm drawn to all of you. There's this beautiful separation. My ears and eyes, meaning my truth, know that I'm drawn to all of you. And I want to learn to shuffle between the left, responsibility, and the right, music, dancer. It's so beautiful to watch you gracefully shuffle between the two.

I hear your words, and I'm still back here, reaching to be truthful. Reaching toward it, and I need to name it — only to be present and forthcoming. I'm still back here wondering. And so you deserve full attention. I don't have that.

[Russell:] Okay. Would it be okay to ask, what was that moment that hit you, and then you saw others? Maybe it's helpful.

[Participant P:] It was a real place of vulnerability. A place that felt — I was you. And you really were. It was almost like watching a movie, you know, and just sort of eating some popcorn, and then all of a sudden something happens in the movie that leaves you stunned, and impacted. Touched.

Carrying it forward

[Russell:] But we're going to end this. Just one last thing, and this is to the others more. This may be too much right now.

In a moment, coming to an end of a session, when there's something like — and in this case it was said so explicitly — something like, I really want to learn how to integrate these qualities. I often find it helpful with myself, and I'll do it with others, in certain moments, if it feels right.

Well, ask your inner body for some guidance about this. And sometimes I'll do it right in that moment. See if it has something it wants to offer you right now, for the unfolding of this quality. And then await. See if something comes forward.

We're so ripe for our wisdom body in those moments, because of how we've been within listening. We have that resource available to us. And it often will not come forward without an invitation. Sometimes it just kind of comes, but with an invitation.

The other thing I'll sometimes do is, please show me, for the next week, helpful ways that this quality can unfold. Something where there's a future invitation that is keeping it alive, moving

forward. So that I'm inviting the whole universe, which is connected to the wisdom body in here, to be alive and active.

And I believe, and experience, that with that in the air, more often those funny kinds of coincidences happen. Something triggers something, from a funny phone call, or from something you see. It's like you've created a field of receptivity around that subject. And it's already there. I'm not saying it's not there. But I underline that often, towards the end of a session.

May that quality grow in a harmonious way.

Let's take a little pause, and then what I'd like to do is be with a partner and do some listening. And this is the way I'd like to suggest that. If it feels okay to the speaker, for the listener to jot down some notes while they're listening. That can be just to remind you of some things that you got curious about, or wanted to say.

Now, I want to be more specific about what we comment on. We can comment on being touched. Let's be very conscious of not analyzing their session. Not drawing conclusions about their session. Not interpretations. Not even kind of like, that was great when you did that. That's a judgment. Great is a judgment, just like I didn't like it is a judgment.

So we're cultivating a language that is authentic, and yet it is quite precise in a certain way.

[Participant R:] You don't have to privilege words. Sometimes in a response you can do it in a gesture. Or in a painting.

[Russell:] Yeah. Nice. Oh, thank you. It doesn't have to be words.

No, no. Not during. That's just at the end.

And again, what I'm looking for is, we have a preciousness here. We have a group mind, and we have access to so many teachers. And how somebody is with their process might trigger a little something for you, so that your process is influenced by their process.

And when it's hot, and it's really alive in your presence — somebody's, oh, I noticed this, or I was curious about this, or I was touched by this — that can help, for both of you.

Okay, great. Let's take ten, and we'll come back.