# Talk

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Angela 2 — Week 2, Day 4, Session 4 — 81 minutes

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*Summary: Russell explores gratitude as closer than the thinking self. After standing work with the pelvic floor, the golden ball, and ocean breathing, the group recalls sensory-rich moments of being touched, then looks at how attention grows life-giving states and a felt sense of interconnection.*

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## Vacations from thinking

*[Russell:]* Just sitting here, actually not thinking very much, and then having the thought come.

First it came as how unimaginable it is, me, to not have vacations from thinking. Vacations from my thinking mind, from that level of the mind or brain that — kind of like stomachs secrete acid, these secrete thoughts and stories and continuity. Continuity of a sense of self. Of a sense of a historically created or substitute self.

That's not a bad thing. That's what it does. There's a continuity. It has a function.

I'm just so very grateful for the clarity that that is not who I am. And I'm hoping that we all drink deeply from the well of something that is just truer and undeniable, as vivid and as solid as the world seems when the thinking mind has our identity.

It evaporates. Literally evaporates in moments of letting go of the separation of self and world.

It sounds big. It sounds mystical. It sounds like, oh, that takes a lot or something. It's actually very brief moments, over and over, till they begin opening further. Very brief moments. The end of an exhale, when maybe sometimes there's the sense of a gap, and actually it feels relieving. Maybe just a moment of stepping where there's nothing else, and there's a falling away of the sense of that separateness.

Little phenomena. Little moments that grow to where there's a functioning of a temporary self for navigating the world, and this timeless being that is never, ever, ever, ever, ever away from us. It's closer than our skin. It's before and after this body.

So there's a certain kind of ventilation. That's why I like this image of that door. The eye is a swinging door. Or, for me, it comes as this door in the desert. First we think this side is solid and that side is open, but then it's just — the inside is infinite, and the outside is infinite.

So what comes for me with that is just great gratitude. I want to explore that a little bit this morning. First, I'd like to stand together and do a little bit of movement together.

## Standing together

Just shifting. What do you think? Let tension go. Sense our standing.

As we deepen our appreciation for the power of our attention to create and to transform our life, transform our brains, transform what appears in our world, then we get very interested in, oh, I can feel myself standing. That becomes important.

Just giving the attention to here. Let's come here. Let's feel the center and the movement.

I recommend the back of the hand against the sacrum, so that we're not just in the front. There's a presence behind us. And the feeling of shifting is as if this carries you. Everything is instantly connected to this.

And then just pause a little bit. The knees kind of get a little bit soft, and just feel that you can pull in the belly, down where your hand is. Not only the upper belly, but this below your belly button. Quite important, the precision of that. Below your belly button, and notice that you can have this pulled in and still breathe. Find a way to breathe.

And anytime you want, just change over your hand so that they're not straining.

Now, as you're pulled in here, notice if you can have the feeling of pulling up your pelvic floor. Pulling up and in.

Up and in, and release. And then let the belly go.

So this up and in has a — and then this letting go.

And when we let go, sometimes it's helpful to have a very, very, very, very, very subtle push out, just to feel the activity in the pelvic floor. And then the pulling in.

See, as you're standing here, if you can get that feeling of in and out. Out can have a feeling as if you're pushing out contents from inside. But very, very, very subtle.

An Australian friend of mine, a woman who teaches this work, has the image for women — the pulling in of the pelvic floor, as if you're pulling a silk scarf into your vagina. And for men, the image I can come up with is as if you're holding back ejaculation, you're holding back peeing. A feeling of holding back, and it has a feeling of pulling up and in.

See if we have some activity that you can feel with that.

And then what we want to see, as you pull up — can you just breathe? Can you be pulled up for a few seconds, and nothing else is getting caught up at all?

Go. Pull up a little bit, and everything else is life, and breathing is happening.

Shift your weight a little bit.

And let's come around the golden ball. Just let the pelvic floor go in the background, and you're just going to turn, feet wide, wider than the pelvis. Turning as if this ball turns your entire body. Let your eyes also look where they're going, so that from the top of your head and your eyeballs, all the way through the feet, they're the same direction.

All radiates out from you, Nick.

And we at least have the feeling of connecting to the air above. And we'll stay standing, and just soft hands opening, and we come, inhaling down, all the way through. A little pause, and exhaling up.

And at the top of your head, out your fingertips, continuing out into space, and inhaling down. Through the bottom of your pelvis, into the earth, exhaling up from your middle.

Enjoying the palms.

These directions feel counterintuitive. Inhale up, exhale down. Just — that's a fine thing to do. That's just another influence on us.

Have this sense of following the diaphragms coming down. Having that feeling of something coming from above, and then radiating up.

Now, also this next movement. Actually, let's start with the feet together. Also for many it seems counterintuitive, but you're standing at the beach, you're looking at the ocean, and as the ocean is gathering its force, you're inhaling. And then you're letting all of that, as it breaks towards you, just come towards you.

And even let your head drop a little bit, as if you're opening your body, and with the exhale you're softening, letting this life force in, and then inhaling. And picture the water going away and forming into its next gift. And feel all the way through the ground. Your knees, your center.

Out your fingers a little. Just feeling that.

So one foot in front. Just put the right foot in front.

Inhale. So your center has come over that forward foot. You've got this golden ball, and you have this support. The center and the ground are intimately connected, and then you're receiving the heel lift.

It can come down. Feeling of softening in the chest, even the fingertips towards the breastbone, towards the heart here, the center.

You're long. Your spine is long. It's a sense of, I'm here, open to this world. My chest is open and full of air, full of potentiality. And I'm receiving.

Notice if there's extra lift in the shoulders. Can even let your face open.

Wonder. Something more humble, and more inner.

Open out beyond your fingertips.

Change things a little. Breathing changes. Now you're the ocean. You're the universal self.

Here, we'll start with the right foot forward. So from here, as the ocean, you are coming forward. You're coming forward with an exhale. So you're radiating all this forward. Really be over that front foot, so you've got this feeling — your center and your ground.

And then, as you come back, you're inhaling, gathering. And as you come back as the ocean, keep your head up. Sense of length now over the back foot.

And if it's a sense of radiating forward and gathering — this rhythm of life, of expansion and contraction. Gathering our forces and giving up.

We'll start. Exhale, forward.

Experiencing as the ocean, you see what's true for you is, the face is more neutral. It's open. It's not changing a lot. The feeling is one of just opening, giving, gathering forces. Doing what I naturally do.

So, feel your breath. Middle.

Notice if you can have the feeling of a gentle push down and out. Out, backward and forward, and downward. Gentle.

Then notice if you can have that little bit of fullness, and pull up your pelvic floor. Not pulling in your belly. It's not easy for a lot of us at first. So just be aware if your belly starts coming in. Or see, can there be a subtle fullness downward, and an up and in in the pelvic floor.

So, just wait.

## A moment that touched you

I'd like you to close your eyes, sitting here.

And come down, just feeling, without any particular doing. There's some vitality, some aliveness in the bottom of your pelvis. Without forcing, is there any feeling that breath comes in that direction, maybe even sensing it? Actually, between your sit bones. Again, not trying to create that. We'll experiment a lot more with these things. So really listen to what's there spontaneously.

And listen to the golden ball. Letting the picture of the back of the hand, the front face of the sacrum, in back of yourself.

Just a kind of picture as you breathe, as if the pelvis is alive to breath, without force. That there can be a relationship of breathing downwardly.

And bring attention just to your inner life, inside your throat and chest, inside your belly, in your torso.

And just invite, as you scan back through the morning, invite a moment that you feel grateful for, that you feel an appreciation of. It can be a very, very small thing that touched you. See if there's a moment.

And when you find a moment, cultivate that moment, in the sense of go there, and help it to grow through sensory-rich memory of where you are in space. Give as much information to your brain as possible. Where are you?

Are you sitting, standing, walking, driving? Who's around? Sound? Other beings?

If it comes in color, let color be there. Smells. Just the aura of the moment. Let that into your body. So you really let yourself be there.

It's very likely you'll experience it more strongly now than you did then, just by giving it this attention.

And see, as you let it in, feel what happens in your chest and belly.

Find another moment. Just look for any moment where you felt touched by something. It can be as simple as maybe you can remember the feeling of — or something in you can remember the taste of your tea, or coffee, or warm water going down your throat. The feeling of the air at some

moment. Or just, maybe you took a shower, and something in you, even if you were completely distracted at the time, felt the warm water.

And you can actually go back and let the place that is always awake come forward and say, "Oh, something in me did experience that."

You can find a moment where you were touched, and shower that, water that moment, through letting it be sensory rich.

Be specific, as much as you can. Give your brain detail. If you can, cultivate it, and let your body have — your chest and belly have that sense.

One more moment. Either by inviting a moment that you already feel grateful for, just in scanning through your morning, or if nothing comes in terms of gratitude directly, just a moment that touched you. And notice if gratitude is living inside the feeling of being touched.

So it's not conceptual. It's bringing yourself into that moment in a sensory-rich way. Inviting your body to have it, even if you missed it the first time around.

Whatever your body has brought you right now, just thank your inner life that it's there. And even if it felt like you had very small contact with what I'm talking about, that's fine.

And if it's true, let your body know you'll be coming back to explore this further.

And then let your attention come to just being in this room, feeling you're sitting here. You hear the sounds. Let your eyes open.

## Something always present

Let's bring the attention back out. And I'm curious what happens. What goes on?

We're doing this kind of research together, and I've got some important experiences in my inner life around these qualities, and in my deeper life. I want to start with, what happens? What goes on? Could you find moments? Does your body respond in some way? So let's feed each other some — yeah, Carl.

*[Participant:]* Something really woke up when you said to tune into that aspect that's always receiving it, or not receiving it.

*[Russell:]* Yeah.

*[Participant:]* Well, I actually felt that I was so much more nourished by those experiences now than I was then, even the ones that I was pretty present in a bit.

*[Russell:]* Yeah.

*[Participant:]* Appreciative of it in the moment. It was deeper and more touching when I revisit it.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, yeah, yeah. Two really, for me, two really important things that I'd like to underline there, Carl. And I saw a lot of nodding, so I think this is not just your experience.

One is — this, for me, was a remarkable discovery. And maybe it's not so remarkable for others. For me, it was a remarkable discovery. After spending so many years dedicated to here and now, here and now, here and now, here and now, discovering that even when I was unconscious, even if spaced out, not very present, something in me was always present.

You know, sometimes called Buddha nature. That's not something that comes awake later. It's here, now, experiencing life. This intrinsic awakeness. And that we can access that, and actually have a stronger experience of the here and now later than then.

Kind of turns it upside down. Now, you still need to be in here-and-now bodily connectedness for it to resonate, at the levels where it's not just a fantasy. Not just an, oh, it's a nice memory, or I wish I had that. That your body can have it now.

There is tremendous life-giving, health-giving potential in this discovery. I believe it's one of the great gifts we can give our immune systems, as well as our heart-opening sense of connectedness to the world that is there when we are in our flow, in harmony. That it's a way back to it.

So that's one thing. Even when we miss it, if we take a little bit of time, something in us got it, and our body can grow it.

And the second thing is that even moments that we're pretty present for — to give some more seconds of attention. Attention is like this great compost. It lets these plants grow.

And I call this cultivating the field of gratitude. Cultivating the field of gratitude.

And it's very simple, and for most people, a very reliable practice.

*[Participant:]* More — yeah, it's kind of — again, it was something. It was actually a text message that I got from my wife. It was really, really sweet. And I had a feeling of being sort of touched, grateful. But I also feel that this is a perfect example of things that happen every day, that my mind says I'm grateful, but I don't have the experience of the touched gratitude that it is.

And even trying to revisit it, I had a little bit more than whenever I looked at it. But I know that there's something deeper there when I think about it. There's a real strong feeling that it gives me. A very vulnerable, sensitive, touched place.

But what I'd like to get to is, my grandmother sent me a card in the mail a couple months ago, and it was so sweet, but I read it like I would read a magazine. And then I stopped and thought, how can I get to a place where these day-to-day small things become embodied?

*[Russell:]* Yeah, yeah. Beautiful, beautiful. Thank you. And I just want to make one word. It's a practice.

And it's amazing, because it seems so simple, but I just so much want to encourage us. Not to let our minds saying it's too simple stop us from doing the empirical experiment. What happens if each day for the next three weeks — three weeks is a good time for cultivating a habit — each day for the next three weeks, three times a day, I cultivate the field of gratitude. Is there a significant shift?

You can be quite empirical about it. That's what I loved about Buddhist teaching, is that you can put it to the test. It doesn't have to be, well, I hope so.

## Not more, not less

*[Participant:]* Yes. I was very aware of feeling better today, which was wonderful. But I also was very aware, when you were asking us to recollect, that I was kind of valuing, in order — like, no, that wasn't important enough. No, that's not big enough. That was just pulling the covers over, and it felt warm, but come on, can't you have any better than that?

I was trying to find that moment, the text, or something that had, in my judgment, more reason to be reflective on, until you invited the warm water. And then I just loved how amplified the moment was. So much more amplified than that moment. Wow.

*[Russell:]* Yeah. Underline, underline for all of us. That's such an important contribution, I think.

The being is this vertical. This timeless is our being. Everyday life is the world of time. That's the world of the mind. Of better, worse, good, bad, more, less. And we need that.

In this world, a little bit of just the feeling of the covers pulled over — in terms of the neural chemistry, in terms of the neurotransmitters, it's just as good as a really big one. Because from this point of view, it's not more, less. It is, or not.

And that's an important knowing. Because if we can step out of the storyline of, well, that was just a little thing, and that was a great thing, and all like that — then we have all these gifts.

You know, Sherry probably can remember. We haven't done it here so much. I did a little bit, I think, last time. We used to do quite a bit of ending the day, going back through the day, looking at moments of gratitude, moments of being attached. You can go at it either way.

And after a few times, about half the group goes, I can't get through the last hour. You only gave us fifteen minutes. Good on you.

## Crop rotation

*[Participant:]* Well, two things came. The first thing that came was similar to Tom. I was going through moments, and I wanted to vivify those moments, to make them as vivid as moments of pain, because I know I'm wired to recall moments of pain very vividly. The images are bright. And so it only made sense to me that I should be able to recall moments of pleasure equally bright, high in my mind, multi-sensorily.

And what I was aware of was, the difference was, for instance, a lot of my moments come over email or text, and there's no face connected with it. And the mirror neurons read faces in the brain. So when I recalled a text and layered over it that person's face, I had this rush of pleasure. So it wasn't just the alphabet anymore, but it triggered that whole empathetic web in my brain and heart.

*[Russell:]* Feel the pleasure.

*[Participant:]* And when you used the phrase to cultivate the field of gratitude, I thought, well, I spent so many years cultivating the opposite field. It is only fair. And I make these images just as intense, just as bright, just as high in my mind, just as multidimensional. And because I have so much —

*[Russell:]* Did you say crop rotation?

*[Participant:]* Yeah. Crop rotation.

*[Russell:]* Crop rotation.

*[Participant:]* When I was writing down your suggestion, each day for the next three, and I wrote years. It's like, wait, no. But even now my mind is going months, you know? I think that something's really suggesting strongly that this is something I could live with for quite a long time.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, yeah. I think my experience is that that's enough time for it to become spontaneous, for it to become part of your habit body.

And as Donna was pointing toward, there is a pre-wiring to be selective toward that which is dangerous, and that which is painful. So part of the function of the newer parts of the cortex — the awareness function — is to be able to choose what kind of neural networks am I going to grow.

Left to our unconsciousness, we will fixate on the problems. Or some of us fixate on pushing away the problems, which still fixates us on the problems.

To actively cultivate the life-giving experiences, your brain is absolutely willing to grow those networks, and to have that chemistry. But unless it's a really big moment, it takes an active intentionality.

And when we get that potency of our attention to actually grow our brains — that's amazing. I mean, I say it and it sounds like it just rolls off the tongue, but when I hear myself say it, I go, here, hear that again.

The potency. You know, that's when Feldenkrais talked about the possibility of freedom in the human being. Well, if we can't grow new brain states, then there ain't no possibility for freedom. And that's remarkable, that we actually now have some of the specific skills to do that.

## Breath and image

*[Participant:]* Yeah. It makes me also — the health thing — because I was conscious of what some other people experience. But as some of us carry the aches and pains of growing older, I was surprised that during the exercise I totally came out of it feeling comfortable, instead of my normal aches and pains, because I had focused on something.

*[Russell:]* Right, Fox.

*[Participant:]* I know it's obvious. It's like, I need to build it anyway. Because normally I just sit around and moan about my aches and pains.

*[Russell:]* A gratitude practice to help you.

*[Participant:]* Yeah. More valuable.

*[Russell:]* Yes. Really, really important. Yeah, Fox.

*[Participant:]* You talked about us having free breath. What part does the breath play in this neural development?

*[Russell:]* So, my experience and understanding of current research — this brain is very connected to the rhythmical systems of your body. Heart, lungs, breathing. Which connects very much to things like blood pressure, some of our strong stress responses.

But when this part of the brain, when these neurons are in a congruence, and the rhythm is congruent — both in itself and in its relationship to the cortex — that congruence creates the feeling of space. And it brings us in the direction of what we can call loving feelings.

When that's incongruent, when it's at a different rhythm, there's a discordance that is felt as something's wrong here. And the blood vessels constrict. Blood pressure usually goes up, depend-

ing on the person's tendencies. There's an increase of tone in the musculature. The sympathetic nervous system tends to get activated.

And it's not like this functions independently, but that's the linkage. And this might be more than we need right now, but the linkage between this, to the medulla and to the hypothalamus, is a very rich connection.

No — then it goes from limbic brain up and down, cortically. So the imagery that one then develops feeds both down and up.

Towards the end, like week five and week six, we'll do more detail on neurology. But that's as much as I want to cover at this moment, because I want to stay with this. Is that okay? That's as much as I can give you now.

*[Participant:]* It's interesting. You say, imagery that one develops? What kind of imagery?

*[Russell:]* Well, what I find most potent, Robert, is the imagery that comes out of bodily experience. That's one of the brilliances of the whole embodied listening, focusing work. When something comes that is — sometimes at the end of a session, it's like, my chest feels like champagne opened, an ocean filling, or a radiant sun.

When those things come like that, it's like potent dream images, but now it's coming from in there. And we can cultivate those as allies from our inner life. Very life-giving allies.

And what I want to say is, for years I thought of this psychologically. Until, you know, twenty years ago, or actually when I started with Moshe and began to think neurologically. So that was a pretty long time ago. But the switch from psychological thinking to neurological is very important.

It's not that psychological is not important. But somehow, when you talk in psychological language, many of us feel like, oh, it's all in your head. But somehow, when we speak neurological, oh, this seems real.

So it's important that we can embed it there, at least a little bit.

*[Participant:]* Yeah. I mean, it really does. And I actually felt really childlike when I moved in. So something is happening in me with the power of imagination that is here, but I more referenced it when I was a child. So I just wanted to acknowledge that I think we all have that capacity to have a very vivid — using Donna's — sense of imagination. And so I don't know if I'll ever be able to brush my teeth the same way. I will have that aliveness. So I do want something simple that I do regularly.

*[Russell:]* Hey honey, let's go brush our teeth. Oh, I've got a headache.

## The potency of a word

*[Participant:]* I'd like to share that my experience was interesting for me, because it was easy for me to capture that moment that I had such gratitude for, and felt such gratitude for. And it was like this wiggly — it's really nice to be sort of babyish right now, like discovery. This body, and tying it into my brain.

So it came very, very easy. And then as I was playing, being with it more and more and more, it's just great to feel it in my body. I felt it in my belly.

So I'm going to grow that. And then I want to share that then I thought, oh my god, I read it wrong. What happened was not what I thought it was. And so it just took over. I feel like I could cry, because it was so powerful.

And so I felt that too, and it just is nice to share that. Then I came back to, well, that's what I thought, so that's what I'm going to go with.

*[Russell:]* I lost you at read it wrong.

*[Participant:]* I know.

*[Russell:]* Okay, okay.

*[Participant:]* So, read it wrong in that I was interpreting an encounter that I had this morning. It was just so much fun for me. And plus I was playing it out and feeling it even more. I somehow — it just popped into my head, oh, maybe that wasn't what was said. So it was a word that was exchanged, and I thought it was a word that I'm going to say. But then, as I was thinking, does this make sense? As I was thinking about it, another word popped in there. So the word was — can you tell me what?

*[Russell:]* The detail's not important. What I want to underline, what I'm getting, is that you were having a bodily experience of something that was very joyful and wiggly and fun, and a thought came of a memory, of another word that you think was really said. And maybe you're not sure. And that really changed your experience, to have that other word.

*[Participant:]* Right. I got you.

*[Russell:]* Yeah. So a couple of really important things we see right here. How potent language. How potent our thoughts are for what's going to happen in our body.

And it's certainly not that we want to get into some kind of denial of difficult moments. We want to learn how to be with those in life-giving ways. But in the ordinary, everyday moving through life, where it's not particularly wonderful or particularly difficult, to cultivate this field so that the ordinary background state is full of those kinds of chemicals in your body that come when you are in this quality of appreciation, quality of gratitude.

Why do I choose that? Rather than, oh, well, why aren't you cultivating just love, or peace, or joy?

Well, what I have noticed is, for most people, gratitude is always available if one orients their attention towards it. The other qualities are sometimes available, but there's a lot more — okay, I want to feel my lovingness — and one can sometimes really have that. But the appreciation and gratitude is somehow under all of that.

And that was another piece of discovery that I'd like in the air for your investigation. Is it true, my proposition, that in moments of being touched by life, implicit is this sense of thankfulness? That it's not we're adding to it because we want to be good people, or nice boys and girls, or we should say thank you. It's not that. It's implicit in the touched — the feeling of, oh, thank you.

In big moments, that's obvious. Something wonderful happens. Something you feel like you were graced by. By the way, gratis is thankfulness, is gratitude, is grace. The root of grace and the root of thankfulness is the same. And that's very nice in terms of in and out, in terms of giving and receiving, in terms of the wholeness of a moment.

So when we feel blessed — even if it's something like, something dangerous was going to happen, and our car started spinning, and now it's, oh, thank you so much. It's already there. Or when we're tasting something that's really off the chart. Implicit in that is a kind of thankfulness.

*[Participant:]* So you're saying that's an innate human quality, gratefulness, like other qualities?

*[Russell:]* Yeah. I don't want to answer that right now, because it gets a little complicated. But I'll get there in one sec. I just want to stay with this for just another moment. That the doorways between being grateful and feeling touched go both ways.

This has to do with our connectedness to life. So I want to say a little bit more about this, so we get this, because this goes back to where do we place the I?

## The I is a we

Is it possible that the I is a we?

Not a we-we. A we.

So, yesterday we were looking at, well, what is this I? Where is this I? And there's this part of us that wants to find a solid location for it, a solid picture of it. And that's not a bad thing. We need to have the horizontal I that has a continuity in time. That the Russell who was at home with Linda this morning is related to the Russell that's sitting here. And that the guy who gets mail that says Russell Delman on it knows that I got to pay that bill or something.

That continuity is important. If we don't have that, chances are we're not enlightened. Chances are we're psychotic or something. We're not functioning in our everyday life.

But we also need the I that doesn't exist until this moment. That we are sitting here creating each other, in this living experience, moment by moment.

On the one hand, it makes sense to think of ourselves as solid beings. That we were the same person at breakfast, and now we're bringing that person here, and we shuffle these around, and we have different situations in which these solid beings relate. That's one not inaccurate, just incomplete, picture of the I.

There's also the absolute birth, in this moment, of Russell, from my point of view.

Is that the eye — excuse me, the I — in the space between? It's the I as inseparable from the environment. It's a swinging door. It's inseparable. It's just like we can't have these bodies without gravity. We are inseparable. We would disintegrate. We can't be having this conversation without air. We can say that our air and our lungs are mutualities.

Feldenkrais put it as, if there was no light, there would be no eyes. If there were no eyes, there'd be no light.

Gene Gendlin talks about it as, we are interaction first. Before we are people, we are interaction first. That we form through our interaction —

Now, when we can have both of these realities lived, that's a more complete picture.

And most of our deep pain, in my experience, once we have some sense of our individuality — most of our deep pain comes from this sense of isolation, of separation. The kind of feeling of walled off from the world, and that I don't connect deeply with anything.

And it's right that that feels painful. The organism is seeking connection. And the beauty for me of gratitude is, it's implicitly connecting. We're grateful for something larger that is toward us. And there's this opening, that we're no longer alone in our separate universe, but we're now interconnected.

And that's such an essential insight of Gendlin, essential insight of Moshe. But in the most global way I've ever seen it, that's the centrality of Buddha — Gautama Buddha's teaching — is we are interconnection.

That to try to know yourself as a separate being is delusion. Yet we still need to have the sense of, I'm here, and I'm working, I'm responsible for this. It's not getting rid of that. But to know the self in isolation from interaction is the reason —

So we are always an integration. To have our physical body, our feeling body, our thinking body, and our spatial body, or connection to the world, all congruent, all functioning together — that's the feeling of being whole, being in harmony, being.

And in my experience, that's the ground of our deep health, on all levels.

And so gratitude, for me, is an essential piece into that interconnection. And it's the most simple one I know.

## A shower of blessings

It was connected for me personally. Just to tell you a brief personal story. My first, what I'd call opening experience in meditation was on a beach in San Francisco. Baker Beach, in San Francisco. I was twenty-three years old. I'd been sitting for about five years at that time. And I was sitting on a — I actually wrote a poem about it. A zafu made of sand. That's the name of the poem.

And there was an opening that occurred. I don't need all the details of that. And then the only want that existed was, how do I return this?

And it's the one and only time I ever heard a voice that said, appreciate.

And from that time on, I realized that this sense of gratitude for the gifts is the only thing I can give back.

And then I started to experience what I now call the shower of blessings. That we are living in a shower of blessings if we pay attention, and we miss them when our attention is lost in the narrow band of self-interest that keeps me from opening to the blessing that's occurring.

And by blessing, again, I mean very, very little things. But if I give them my attention, they light up in my brain.

And so we already talked about the little joys that happen, the little moments of being touched.

I also have a discovery. This is again for your investigation. That I can have authentic appreciation for the absence of something difficult.

Whereas most of us feel this when we've been sick and we feel better. There's about a day where we go, God, it feels so good to feel well. You know that experience? Or you've had a toothache and the toothache is gone, and you go, God, I feel free. And you don't only feel normal. You feel great that it's not there.

And I began to wonder, do we have to have the something to create the other? And I began to experience that my attention can do that. That I can be grateful for the capacity to sit and breathe, and open my heart to the people right now who have lost the ability to sit, or who are dealing with a struggle breathing, and how grateful they would feel to be able to take an easy breath. And I don't have to lose that to have it.

Now, I'm not getting it right now because I'm talking. But if I take anywhere from five to twenty seconds, it usually takes that for it to form in the body. Something like that. As you practice it, it can happen more like five to ten seconds.

And so I find that that can be a connector to other beings, through suffering, and a gratitude. An absence of something.

*[Participant:]* What if I'm being touched intensely by suffering? Like, whether it's witnessing or experiencing. It doesn't seem that gratitude is always the first thing implicit.

*[Russell:]* Right, right, right. That's a really good point. To be touched by the suffering of another.

What I can say for me is, there is an opening in those moments, and a connecting in those moments. And if I don't get lost in the story that I begin to create about the moment, the sense of connection, with its flavor of something like sadness — the connecting feels very touching. Later, the gratitude can be sensed. In the moment, it's got this flavor.

Now, if I get lost in, this kind of thing just shouldn't happen, and I start running with it, then I start growing other inner states. Which, in certain moments, might be mobilizing for action. It's not wrong to do that. But our heart can get, as you know, broken open. And light comes in, in those moments.

So we're working with cultivating the field of gratitude as a resource. For me, it was the first of the resources, and it becomes just part of our living. The potential. And gratis, grace, and thankfulness.

This picture, which again is not presented for you to go, oh, that's true. It's to go, he's talking about a shower of blessings. Well, I feel crappy a lot of the time. So, is there actually, in this moment that I'm feeling crappy, anything here that feels like a blessing?

*[Participant:]* What's that? Slide this way?

*[Russell:]* Yes.

And so I want, again — I don't want to deny or push away. I'm not talking, on that side right now, of how to be with the crappy, so that we can turn our attention toward it in a way that's life-giving. What I'm also seeing is that cultivating this capacity — sense this.

A key point that was made by a couple of people. Barbara, in the last — Barbara's share — that it become a bodily feeling is central.

It's a difference between, say, visualization work, which might be helpful, and one could say embodied, and when it's embodied. When it's embodied, you get the alignment through the whole system.

In my strong bias, that's what creates deep shifting in the human being. When all of that is there. If we leave out the physical body and just go to the feeling body, I think we've left something out. We need the physical body, the feeling body — which is also physical, but more connected to how it feels inside. Right?

So there's more. I'm standing, I'm here, alive. I feel myself, before the feelings are there. Then feeling the feelings as bodily experience. And then having this sense of gratitude, and images and thoughts that come with that, and having all of that together. That's called integrated, in my vocabulary.

It's connected to a particular moment in time and space, so that the other is always there.

*[Participant:]* I just felt, as you're saying that, like I'm getting it, in that sense too.

## Another influence

*[Participant:]* I just wonder if there's a little bit more about what Barbara brought out, about the words that we are bringing to it. The interpretation that we're bringing to it. Is there anything particular to say about that, except maybe to notice what that is?

*[Russell:]* Yeah. I don't really have more right now, Sherry, except what you're saying. The potency of the particularity of language. To listen to the effect of it. It's not just words.

There's a lot of work with that, you know, with reframing and challenging the beliefs and all of that. And so, without entangling them, also just wanting to realize that's a piece of all of this.

Right. And then take the word, and as you know well, to go all the way down with it, so that the word is an opportunity for resonance at all these levels. That we don't just keep it in the head.

*[Participant:]* You said something this morning. Another influence on us. We were doing the movements.

*[Russell:]* Yes.

*[Participant:]* And you said, after maybe — we were doing another movement, not the movement you asked us to do — and you said something that freed me from losing my embodied experience, which was, that's another influence on us.

What you're saying, and what Barb is saying, is just another influence. Note that, instead of negating it, or finding a judgment. I love that invitation. That's just another influence on us. Hey, I came right back to that good stuff.

*[Russell:]* So, you've come up with more. And maybe some of these don't work for you. But something about attending to the simple moments. Giving more attention. Giving more attention. That's the power of attention.

That being touched and appreciation are doorways to the same place. A sense that we can be appreciating the absence of something, and in a moment where, oh, I can actually appreciate just sitting.

It's one of the great gifts of meditation, even if you only have a few moments where just breathing feels satisfying. That becomes a reference. Wow, I've had the experience of just breathing and sitting there being enough.

And this intentional scanning of the moment. Like right now, if you take ten or fifteen seconds and just let a color come in. Any color. Doesn't have to be your favorite color. Just see a color. Look around the room, find the color, and just let it in. Let the color be breathed in, sensed in.

That's enough.

When something permeates, when something penetrates, in my experience something gets touched. It's a practice of attention. So we will grow our experience of life through how we attend to the world.

A remedy, when one is lost in reactivity — just to pause and look at color. Look at things.

You're so dear. Bring you back into the room. Yeah. Beautiful, yes.

*[Participant:]* It just occurred to me that, by revisiting these moments — and I was just reflecting on Wendy's comment about the toothbrushing. She'll probably never brush her teeth the same way again. And so the more we cultivate moments where we're really appreciating the moment in the ordinary, the more your ordinary life becomes vibrant.

*[Russell:]* That's right.

*[Participant:]* And it just seems like you're just repatterning your brain.

*[Russell:]* That's right. Yeah, that's a lot of people's experience, that I get in emails, from even people who take this up from workshops. They'll say, I started going back through my day, and I did that. Now my day's coming at me.

And for a lot of people, it begins like this. Well, I was walking around, and oh, that's a moment I want to remember tonight before I go to bed.

I used to do that. Take five minutes and go back through your day and think of moments. So they'd be walking around and go, oh, look at the sky, I got to remember this one. Let me really let that in.

*[Participant:]* I'm just looking at the word gratis, and for some reason this jogged my mind. In Swedish, the word G-R-A-T-I-S means free.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, it's gratis. Yes, that's right. Yeah, free. That's nice. Oh, that's sweet. I like that.

*[Participant:]* And then if you add another T in Swedish, G-R-A-T-T-I-S, it means congratulations.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, yeah. Great.

*[Participant:]* Yeah, one more, if I can.

*[Russell:]* Yeah, yeah.

*[Participant:]* I became aware that it wasn't the totality of the experience that was so touching to me. It was just an instance. And as you were talking now, it just sort of clarified for me — and I'd like to play with this concept a little bit — those little moments. They're so small and so big at the same time. And it seems to me that a little moment, thinking of it now, is like when something pierces this wheel of time.

*[Russell:]* Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Five years ago, I was driving down 101. Not a particularly anything day. There was a lot of traffic, and I needed to get to the off-ramp, and I didn't get over in the lane, twice. And I catch the eye of a woman. She's got black hair, she's got light eyes, she's wearing glasses, and I go, and she goes.

She lives in me forever. I just got onto the exit ramp. She's an angel in my inner life. I can find her right now, and I can feel life is good.

Okay, let's take a pause, and we're going to come back and do more movement with the tandem, and the pelvic floor, and breathing.