Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 3, Day 2, Session 2 — 75 minutes

Summary: Standing together, the group senses support, aliveness, and the up and down, then lies down for a lesson coordinating arms, pelvis, and head. Attention moves between the body and the space it points into, including perceiving back from a larger body. Coming up, people speak of safety, ground and center, and the Friend who meets loneliness.

Arriving on this spot

[Russell:] Stand together. I want to continue dropping in before we discuss too much. Make sure we're here, developing this bodily habit of sensing, I'm here on this spot. Always new, always fresh.

Feel this connection to this support, to this being of support underneath us. Something living in your interest. You bring it alive.

Famous Zen master Dogen would talk about blue mountains walking. Now, how can mountains walk, you know? But in a certain connectedness and depth, our own movements and the movements of the world synchronize. And of course, logically, we would say the mountains aren't moving, although they are actually physically moving a bit, but that's not the point.

Our attention brings the world alive. Our attention brings the world alive. And that's amazing, really. To have this living experience available.

Or sometimes it's too much for us, so we have to go dead inside, because we're not available for living. And we want to know that with kindness, as we are awakening, that there's permission not to be awake. Otherwise it becomes a burden.

And so something's alive here, and when we're available, it's precious to be with that aliveness. And somehow we're not falling to the earth, so there's a lifting up, the vitality.

Just shift your weight a little bit. Feel both the up and the down. When down gets too much, we get a heavy feeling. Up gets too much, we get a kind of flighty feeling. We need the up and the down, the vitality and the grounding.

Just slightly, letting the arms lift, and extending attention up, and down, down, down.

Want some kind of softness in the knees. Again, for the fluidity of connection to the earth, all of that yielding in the knees. And also the stiffness that develops in our ankles — it's really important that we find a way to invite a yielding right in those ankle joints.

It's another way we disconnect from the earth, when we don't have the energy moving through our ankles. It creates lots of repercussions in our backs. So very important. So easy to forget.

And then let's find our center, the golden ball here. Just as you're shifting a little left and right, as much attention in the back hand as the front. That sacrum is invited to be alive.

Hands down, just sensing that you can be alive maybe in there, and a little bit of turning, gazing around from your center out through your line, through the top of your head. Even let your eyes lead you. And you'll feel how just being conscious of the eyes going to their corners invites the spine to turn a bit more freely.

The spine is alive. It's not an object. In our usual language and our usual way of thinking, our vertebral column becomes a thing. It becomes a physical object. That's not completely wrong. We don't want to throw that out. Understand its shape and the vertebrae. But we also don't want to give up the sense of functional vitality.

When we turn, we realize we turn because we want to take in the world. We don't turn to exercise our back. It's nice for the back, but we turn because we want to be in this world and we want to connect with it. And when that functionality is there, it's surprising what the spine can do.

Even spines that on x-rays or on MRIs look like this or that, we don't want to fall for that as being the truth. That's just one version that's important, but incomplete if we want to be living. It's good if we're cadavers, but not if we're living. I mean, when you're living, you want to be connected to the world. I don't think the cadavers care. But I don't really know. But I suspect.

Actually, I think let's do a lesson on your mats. I think that would be the best way to start.

Lying down

Lie on your back, and take off your glasses.

You're on this spot, so sense that you're on this spot. Come out of the imaginations and come to this spot. The ground comes alive and your back comes alive together.

Let your eyes open and just softly gaze forward. Notice the ceiling. Even if it can be blurry, it doesn't have to be clear, but notice the distance of the ceiling. And notice something about the space in between you on the floor and the ceiling.

Let your eyes rest as you're noticing that. And can that seeing — again, not sharp, not focused, just kind of letting light in, letting space in, the ceiling, space — can that be there, and some sense of breathing? The breathing is kind of in the background, and seeing happens almost by itself. You're not looking for anything. Your eyes are open, and there's an occasional noticing of distance or something, but the breath is here.

Extend your arms above your chest towards the ceiling, and put your hands together like in a prayer position. Let the hands just touch each other. Feel your fingertips pointing towards the ceiling. Feel your hands touching, and that sense of directionality, a pointing upward towards the ceiling. In the background there's a feeling of breath, but you're extending attention into space. You're including space upward, as well as you here on the floor.

With the elbows long like this, just gently begin to bring them upward towards the floor in a headward direction. So now they're forward, now you're bringing them up. Go a few inches, then come back, and then go again a few inches, and just feel in your body how your shoulders and chest need to move, what happens.

We're intentionally varying attention between in the body and into the space you're pointing toward. That's one of the experiments we'll be working with quite a bit during this week, of attending to self and world, and growing greater simultaneity, where there's one world that includes self and what we think of as the external world. So we'll begin with that as a physical practice of attention.

And then as you come back this time, just lower your arms and take a pause. Rest your arms on the floor.

Let there be space for anything that comes. It can be, especially in this first day, that there are some things you left behind that kind of call toward you. If you find something like that, just acknowledge it and gently orient to being here.

Bend both legs. Sense your feet on the ground. Feel a positioning of your feet relative to your knees and pelvis that feels supported, the feet not too close together, so you have a good solid base. Probably something like the width of your pelvis, or maybe even slightly wider. So if your feet are closer than that, see if it would feel good to have them a little wider. If not, that's fine. Just experiment.

Also, if your heels are more or less under your knees, or close to that, that might help you be more supported by your skeleton. Again, if that's comfortable. And you can vary that as you experience what works for you.

Slowly begin to lift your pelvis, just a little bit off the floor, mostly feeling that potency through your legs and feet. That sense of, I can really take weight. I can feel the compressive forces that go through my bones. Into the ground, it's especially through the heels, although the rest of the feet are present. You're not lifting your toes.

Feel that connection between the earth energy, the ground force, and the up. The pelvis lifts, we could say, in consequence, or in concert, with the pressure into the earth.

We'll let that happen a number of times, lifting and lowering, pelvis rising into the air. And it can gradually rise higher if that's comfortable for you. Take your time.

You can also make some distinctions about the use of your legs. You might find one leg is doing like 60 percent. Good to sense that. One way to sense that is to go slow at the beginning. Usually the dominant leg will go slightly faster, slightly earlier. It's like it's more ready. Like the big sister or big brother leading you across the street. They're ready to step out. So just feel.

Is it possible to sense with equal clarity the two legs, or is one significantly more present? Well, significantly just means noticeable, that you can sense a difference.

Okay, and then a few times, just as high as is comfortable, lifting your pelvis. Let your pelvis come off the ground. Feel the weight into your legs, pressure through your legs. Kind of light, maybe even light and quick a few times, just so that it's simple. It's just kind of up, pressure into the ground, pelvis lifts, just kind of simple. Most playful. Yes.

Okay, and leave that. Lower your legs.

[Silence 44 seconds]

Bend your legs. Bring your arms towards the ceiling in the prayer position, and feel how you can have a harmony of movement, with the arms going upward overhead and the pelvis lifting. Feel how the pelvis coming away from the ground can actually help the hands lower more towards the floor overhead, maybe. That there's some relationship between the pelvis lifting and the chest and shoulders being able to move.

A classic Feldenkrais strategy for developing mobility: using what we call an auxiliary movement to help another movement. And then you'll see what we do with that next.

So the arms are going overhead on the floor in conjunction with the pelvis lifting. And you're sensing how they might be connected. Your hands might touch the floor overhead, might not. That's not the point. The point is they're moving in that direction, with a relationship to your lower body. And that you're sensing all through yourself.

Notice if your jaw clenches, or if your eyes fixate.

Okay, and pause once again as you come up. If you feel ready to pause, if you want to experiment a little bit longer, that's fine. Maybe now let's all pause for a moment so we can stay together.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Turning the light around

As you're lying here with your legs resting comfortably, long or bent, however is comfortable, bring your long arms towards the ceiling, hands together, and extend your attention again towards the ceiling. As if you can include that space between you and the ceiling. And then imagine, as if your consciousness could be on the ceiling, looking back at you on the floor.

You turn the light around and notice the one on the floor. You're taking your attention and turning it around, sensing the one on the floor from a larger space, connected to this body, but not actually inside the body, but with access to the inner body.

Then just move the arms a little bit in the direction of overhead, with again this picture, this experiment, of extending attention from the ground out, turning the attention around. And can there be the sense that your larger self, we could say, or your larger body, can gaze back towards this one?

It's helpful to sometimes close your eyes and then sometimes open your eyes, as you experiment with shifting the location of the self.

[Silence 50 seconds]

Would you feel ready for a pause? Take a pause. And then let's all pause.

[Silence 56 seconds]

Bend your legs, arms into that position, and lift your pelvis in the air, and bring the arms overhead towards the floor, as far as is comfortable. Keep your arms there, and slowly lower your pelvis, and feel: can the arms comfortably stay here, or how much do you need to lift them as you lower the pelvis? So don't bring them all the way back to the beginning position unless that's what's needed.

We're experimenting with, can some of this new territory be lived in even if the pelvis is resting? You keep your arms as much overhead as is within your comfort, so that you're not hurting yourself.

Then you raise the pelvis again, and you feel, oh, maybe the arms go even a little bit easier, and then you experiment. Can you use this movement of your pelvis to learn about your shoulders and upper back?

In the background is your breathing. Can you sense the direction your fingers are pointing toward? Can you imagine where that wall is? Its distance from you? If it's easy to go to the wall, you could even imagine further out.

And then this experiment of turning the light around, to notice the one on the ground there from that larger space.

[Silence 44 seconds]

Okay, and then come back up, and pause comfortably.

[Silence 60 seconds]

Just even as you're resting, experiment or play with the shifting of location. Usually we feel like we're in here, sensing the world around us, which of course is important and valuable. And then feel that shift, that maybe has intrinsic meaning and maybe doesn't right now, that you could perceive, we could say, from the point of a greater body, or a larger body outside this physical body, and orient attention back.

Feel what happens to the sense of the physical body when there's this perceiving from outside in. The spaciousness. The space between this physical body and where the perception is occurring from.

Again, if that has no intrinsic meaning or experience right now, still play with it. Experiment. Something may come of value.

Lowering the arms

Bend your legs, and bring your arms above your chest. Feeling your hands touching. Slowly lower these long arms downward towards your pelvis, down towards between your legs. Go slow. Feel when the elbows want to bend, and go a little bit, and then come back.

Begin by sensing the ramifications within the body. Down your spine, does your pelvis know the arms are moving? What happens to the shoulders? Is there a change of weight in the feet?

Do the eyes somehow track the movement? Why do the eyes feel more independent, just resting there?

Say out loud some of what you can sense throughout your body doing this movement. Maybe we can learn from each other. What's something?

[Participant:] The tailbone tends to lift.

[Russell:] The tailbone tends to lift when you move your arms. Now feel if there's any response in your tailbone. Something else.

[Participant:] Back of my neck lengthens.

[Russell:] Back of your neck lengthens as the arms come down.

[Participant:] Lower ribs closer to the floor.

[Participant:] I exhale as the hands move down.

[Participant:] Pubic bone and sternum come closer together.

[Russell:] Pubic bone and sternum come closer together. Okay, let's pause with that for a moment. So many interesting things.

[Silence 2 minutes]

A larger body

Just think for a moment of the space that your feet are pointing toward. Think of where that wall is. If your legs were long, where that space is.

In the language of the movement lessons, we would call that downward. It's as if you were a standing person. So into the floor — what is down in relation to the room, we would call backward. It's back in relation to yourself.

Think in a downward direction, meaning out where your feet are pointing if your legs are long. And extend attention that way.

Then again, just turning the light around, imagining that you're actually filling this big space and can orient back towards the physical body.

Imagine that your physical body is part of a larger body. That your consciousness can be much more spacious. In fact, the physical body is really too small for the awake, experiencing human being. It's a tight shoe.

Looking between the legs

Bend your legs. Interlace your hands under your head. Just slowly raise your head as if to look between your legs, feeling the bending of your chest, how your shoulders fold forward, how perhaps the pubic bone and the sternum get closer together.

Feel that whole pattern, the folding of those upper ribs.

And periodically, change between eyes open and eyes closed, so you can experiment with: can I sense myself kinesthetically with my eyes open? And similarly, can I sense out into the world, and even back toward myself, with my eyes open or closed?

For many of us, when the eyes are open, it becomes more challenging to sense the physical body. So that's a good practice. I can be here, on this spot, even with my eyes open.

Put your hands on your chest, your left hand in the middle of your sternum, your right hand on top of it. In the middle or upper part of the sternum. You'll feel where it's just right once I tell you what you're doing.

Slowly, imagine that you want to see between your legs. Let your head lift, and give a little pressure on your breastbone, so that your head can get lighter if your chest and shoulders participate. See

if a little bit of pressure with your hands can remind you that your chest can fold. When the chest stays rigid, the head's very heavy. And if you let the shoulders roll forward, if you let the chest drop, the head can get lighter.

Leave your head on the floor. Extend your hands towards the ceiling, touch them together, and as you lower the hands towards your pelvis, lift your head, if you want to see your fingertips pointing towards the wall that your toes are pointing toward right now. And then come back up.

You're extending yourself out into space along this long vertical.

Just these last few times, imagining perceiving the physical body, the one on the floor here, from that larger space. The direction you're pointing toward, as if the light is turned around, and you're inclusive of the space between the physical body and where you're observing from, from this larger place.

Let's pause there. Rest now. And just lightly turn your head a little bit so you make sure your neck is free.

[Silence 36 seconds]

Just rest here another minute, noticing how you're being influenced so far by these experiments, in both movement and in the movement of consciousness.

Head and pelvis

Bend your legs. Interlace your hands non-habitually behind your head. Sense yourself just in this position. How the breathing is influenced by being in this position. The shape of your back. The feeling of yourself right here.

Of course, as we include this sense of perceiving from the greater body, or from outside the physical body, we are not at all wanting to minimize the value and deep importance of clarifying our kinesthesia, our proprioception. Our feeling of, I'm right here, and I can make a lot of distinctions in this physical body. And really appreciate how I can feel the breath moving, and the shape changing.

Slowly lifting your head, looking between your legs, feeling that process. Do you want to be inhaling or exhaling? What helps that movement? And then as you lower your head, begin to lift your pelvis. At a certain point, it'll feel natural, even before the head is all the way down, to begin the pelvis lifting.

Just take your time. There's so much in this movement. You can spend a long time feeling the contact of your feet, and how the weight goes through your legs, the mobility of your chest and shoulders, how your eyes influence the movement. So much here.

Notice, at some points in here, move the attention outside the body, and notice where it's easiest for you to perceive from. Is it from the ceiling in front of you? Is it above your head, that direction? Could it be anywhere? Or are there some locations in space that are somehow more available?

[Silence 36 seconds]

Pause once again.

Good. Bend your legs, bring your arms towards the ceiling one more time. As you bring the arms overhead on the floor, lift your pelvis, and then continue, bringing the arms over your chest as you lower your pelvis, then going all the way through, lifting your head and pointing downward.

Once you have that basic pattern of movement, take your time. You can have pauses when you want, but experiment with perceiving from within the body, making the distinctions that you can, to perceiving from outside.

Let the direction your fingers are pointing in give you a kind of indicator of where you want to perceive from. See if that works for you. Experiment with different locations.

[Silence 2 minutes]

When you feel satisfied with that, just pause and sense yourself. Sense your length. The quality of yourself on the floor. Turn your head a bit. Make sure your neck is free.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Roll to your side and come on up. Take your time. Kind of stay in yourself, sensing the influence of these experiments. Take your time so that you're sensing not only yourself, but the space around you.

[Silence 50 seconds]

Coming to standing

So helpful when we first come up, to have a real curiosity as we orient. Usually there's a little instability as we come back up and orient to being vertical again. Notice what kind of emerges, subtle and sometimes very clear and strong, but often very subtle experiences of shifting.

Then explore, in whatever ways feel right to you, to define what comes alive. It can be very helpful to look for language that feels accurate, and sometimes even stumbling to find language is good, just like in focusing process, where, I'm sensing something here in my neck, I'm not exactly sure what to call it, let me see. And sometimes it comes very clear.

So if you have some emerging language for experience, put it out, and we'll all learn together from it.

[Participant:] Your weight feels really back.

[Russell:] Your weight feels really back.

[Participant:] Back in your heels.

[Participant:] Turning goes more back.

[Participant:] Chest is more open.

[Participant:] My upper spine feels kind of like a bungee cord.

[Russell:] Like a bungee cord. Yeah.

[Participant:] Can go in any direction.

[Russell:] Nice image. Upper spine like a bungee cord.

[Participant:] Just feel very sure-footed.

[Russell:] Sure-footed.

Take a moment. Let both arms lift. Let's keep it congruent with the lesson. And look up. Let this help you up a little bit. Come up and out of your low back.

And slowly forward, elbows long. As you come forward, let your knees soften a bit, and actually look down. So you let a little bit of bending, a little bit of rounding in your back. Shoulders come forward a bit. Your elbows are long. You feel that all the way down through your feet.

And then again, slowly coming up, feeling as you lift your arms, can you sense some kind of connection into your lower back? Maybe?

And this experiment of turning the light around, of perceiving from outside, perhaps from the ceiling or the wall, noticing the one here. Extending your perceiving to include. You can begin from here out. It's easier from here out, to where you perceive. And then we see, is it possible — almost like there's a golden thread, and that thread can be from that other end, looking back.

Like you can look towards the sun. Maybe the sun can look toward you.

Just walk a little bit. Feel how that is. What comes to you from all that?

[Participant:] Less likely to bump into people.

[Russell:] Less likely to bump into people. Do you have more to say about that, then? Is there something about that?

[Participant:] Well, I mean, there's 360 degrees, the awareness all around. More sensitive, that there might be somebody somewhere I'm not looking, but maybe they're there.

[Participant:] More aware of the movement around.

[Russell:] More aware of the movement around, yeah.

Three ways of being here

Just pause for a moment and notice how we can have the sense, I'm here on this spot. We can have the sense, perhaps, of growing out from this spot to include what we think of as a spatial body, a body around us that is alive, that we can have a sense of.

And then even that spatial body, as it grows, perhaps we can be noticing from here out, and perhaps the light can turn around. Actually have the feeling that the consciousness lives in this larger space, maybe.

Maybe you can feel, if we just experiment with that, does that do something to your sense of yourself, your sense of your own shape? Weirdness?

Move a little bit, just kind of experimenting. Wonderful to be in here. It's wonderful to have my in-here include the space around me. So I still have a sense that I'm centered in here, and there's a larger space that I can consider part of me, but I don't just end at the skin.

And then the third thing is that sense that that space can be fully conscious, and a sense of noticing the one here from a larger point of view.

Each of those so very helpful, so very different. Again, it may not have intrinsic meaning right now, but we're going to be experimenting with what it's like to grow into the space around the body, and even to be able to perceive the one here from this larger territory, and what that produces in one's experience.

Safety and the Friend

Any things to report thus far, from the trenches out there?

[Participant:] Good lesson.

[Russell:] Huh?

[Participant:] Good lesson.

[Russell:] Good lesson. Getting used to letting people first think.

[Participant:] Yes. Because for many years, being open to the outer space was not safe.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] You were evaluated. You were looked at. You were judged.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] So you — I'm speaking for myself.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] You tend to close in.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] To protect.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] Now you're asking me to actually open out.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And be vulnerable. With them.

[Russell:] It feels vulnerable as we open to that.

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] So really grateful for that point. There's something about safety. Something about safety in this larger space.

And one of the things — you want to go? One of the things that maybe is true, and we'll have to find out in our experience, is that actually living into this larger space is actually safer.

Now, I don't want you to assume that until there's some knowing of that, but the biological response to threat is contraction.

As we get perhaps toward the gift of an awakening consciousness, perhaps we can find something like the difference between somebody who fights like this, or a samurai who's filling out the space and responsive to the space in all directions.

Is there something like that? That's not really about fighting, but it's about a way of embodying. And there's something I'm very interested in. When does it feel actually safer to have this larger body? When not?

We don't have to make rules about it, but we want to explore it, and really notice that there's a big difference. When I'm living, sometimes I don't even reach the boundaries of my skin, I'm so contracted. Do you ever have that feeling? Like you're just living in a very small space.

And then sometimes you feel like, oh no, I'm — and sometimes, especially when we're feeling a sense of love, a sense of deep connection, we get this great spacious feeling. I'm very interested in that.

[Participant:] That's what I was going to say. It just makes me aware of how it changes moment to moment when I'm doing my field. And, you know, it's somewhat familiar to feel real big. It's very familiar to feel small.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] And I think safety is really the key. The ingredient.

[Russell:] Yes. Yes. Okay, so this is so important.

You know, our first week, so much of the work was the sense of ground, right, which includes that path, and then so much with the second week, that sense of center and red. It's so much about wanting to give an infrastructure of safety, an infrastructure of support, and we have to keep working with that. Of course, it's not like you do it and it's done. It's lifelong.

But those are embodied elements of, I can deal with this. I'm here. Got something underneath me. I'm grounded. Got some support. And I've got something in here.

Well, you might have heard me say before, I really question spiritual approaches that try to open the heart without something really developed underneath it.

So it is a kind of progression that's important for human beings, to be able to embody who we are when we're really in connection.

[Participant:] Yeah, because I noticed, actually, it was a challenge with that. The cultivation of ground and center, it felt like, oh, this is something real. And then when something was up there, the anchoring of my sensations in my center made that almost more challenging. Like, well, what's this imaginary thing that's up there, looking at something that's real and here?

[Russell:] Right, right, right. Yeah. You know, if we go through the elements, the earth element, we can have much more solid contact with the earth element than we can with the air element.

And as we work in different levels of consciousness, different elements become more dominant. And the sense of it is less tangible.

Good to hold it lightly as well. Is this just my imagination? Am I making something up to try to feel something? Or is there something where I can begin to get confidence that there is a value here? So I want you to hold that lightly. Yeah? Because you're right. We are moving from something more tangible to something less tangible.

A sense of us, that we are interacting, and that there's a space that we're interacting in. And it's much more solid. I can feel my feet on the floor.

Now, I know I'm being influenced by the beings around. We want to keep growing. So I'm suggesting that that will be helpful. We'll see if it is.

[Participant:] Yeah. I experience a surprising sense of self-love when being looked at, and it would be very present if I wasn't moving so much. But when I was moving, it was more difficult. I think this is what you're saying, that it was more difficult for me to access that.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] But it was huge.

[Russell:] Huge, huge. I'm so happy that that's that quality of, you know, in the —

[Participant:] Vast is a better word.

[Russell:] Vast, yes. In some traditions, they speak of the Friend. And the Friend is that us, in that larger space, who has that unconditionality.

And to reconnect with our friend is so precious. Feel that welcoming, that unconditional, even strong. There's an unconditional loving, caring, in that larger space.

[Participant:] Well, I think that connecting with the Friend reduces any loneliness.

[Russell:] Oh boy, isn't it true? I am right with that. And I want to say, if you can connect with our friend, that reduces the amount of loneliness you may feel.

[Participant:] Yeah. Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah, that — you know that sense. We all know, from when we have our deep painful experiences, whether physical pain or emotional pain, how isolating especially long-term pain can be. Because no one, even when we have people close to us, no one knows really what it's like in there.

So there's something so fundamentally isolating, that at some level I'm the only one who really knows what it's like in there. And to have the Friend — that's why that language of, there's something in here, I'm with you here, is part of that cultivation of a larger being.

Good. Let's take a little pause. Thank you all.