Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 3, Day 3, Session 5 — 43 minutes

Summary: After the blindfold work, people share what stayed with them — quality of touch, the two sides of the body, and the difference between a blindfold and closed eyes. Russell speaks to keeping an inner connection while being with others, then introduces a practice of naming sensation, first with eyes closed, then open, then standing with inner and outer sensing.

Reflecting

[Russell:] You close your eyes for a few moments and drop down.

Since you're sitting here, you're on this spot, you're right here.

Sense the breath.

And as you connect to yourself on this spot, it can be a sense also, through the sounds, that you're in a larger space, the space around you.

And just take a few moments to reflect back on your experiences. With the blindfold, with moving, with that environment of not seeing, and sensing what?

And the particular work of being on one side of the body and sensing into space, orienting without seeing, the other side of the body crossing the midline.

There were so many different aspects. Just to reflect back, and listening inside, what seemed significant?

Probably a number of things were, oh, that's kind of interesting, but doesn't kind of grab you so much. But there might have been a few things that go, wow, that seems important in some way in my living. Something in that. That shows me something, or is a doorway towards something.

Just invite your inner life to speak to you.

And if something comes, kind of check it in your body. As you have the memory of, oh, it was like that, check into a felt sense of that kind of moment. Just feel how it lives, how its importance or its meaningfulness is sensed.

It could be that not much is coming, and that's fine. Welcome that.

And let's begin to bring the attention more out, more into the space, including the others in the circle, the space around you.

Keep your eyes open as they feel ready to.

I'd like to spend a little time just finding words for something that seems valuable, important, touching, confusing, terrifying, interesting, that's got energy and life in it.

Yeah, please.

Sharing

[Participant 1:] I experienced sort of a difference. When I was on the same side, it sort of felt like touching, but as I crossed over to the other side, it felt more like caressing. There was a difference. I didn't understand why, but it did feel like the reaching across to touch the other side was more like caressing, and the touching was the same side.

And I really found it interesting, in a way, that I was touching myself in the way that I'm often touching other people. And that was interesting, because I'm a massage therapist, and it brought to life a quality of touch on my own self. And so it brings a question of, in the future, sort of experimenting with that. If there's a difference in the quality of touch when I'm working on someone else.

That was really neat to experience, sort of experiencing my own touch on myself. I've often wished I could give myself a massage. I give a pretty good massage.

[Russell:] And the touch that felt like the touch during the massage — was that more the same side, or the other side?

[Participant 1:] It was more the caressing touch.

Yeah, but there was a question. I was like, oh, I wonder — I don't know, is it the same, or am I just touching people, or am I actually transferring that? Because sometimes it feels like it. I suppose it depends on if I'm present or not. There could be a real difference in the quality that's specified by my presence.

[Russell:] Absolutely, yeah. Thank you.

[Participant 2:] Well, I experience something. This side — it has to be slower, and it's more mysterious, or it's more hidden than this side. This side does more and looks after more, and is more out in the world.

So this side — I guess I left with just a real curiosity, wanting to know how to be with it even deeper. That is not always understood. And I don't want it to be less mysterious, but I want to be able to be more with the mystery without making it into this side.

There was just a deepening sense of the beauty of that. Some appreciation of the beauty, realizing it needs to be slower, and mysterious. And it moves slower, more graceful, and it's got some hurt in there, it's got some injury in, but it's a beautiful darkness.

[Russell:] Oh, lovely, yeah.

I just want one more second to feel beautiful darkness. I think that was kind of lingering around here. Something. That combination.

[Participant 3:] What I experienced was —

[Russell:] A little bit louder, please.

[Participant 3:] Touching, like with my right hand, my right side, or my left hand, my left side. It wasn't unpleasant. But when we moved over to touching opposite sides, a little like someone

was saying, it felt so natural and so flowing. Then this touching the same side was much more mechanical. Touching and touching, but this was just so flowing and natural.

[Russell:] Interesting.

What else came to you? What else? Yeah, please.

[Participant 4:] On the same side it was me touching myself, and crossing, it definitely felt like someone else.

And then when both hands were on, it felt like one body, like two sides, two legs, so then there were twins, twin siblings. It was kind of like the twins, and then when we did this one, it was like the twins meeting each other. It was really sweet.

[Russell:] Yeah, good.

So often we'll use the word, when we're working to the other side, a sense of integrating, a sense of bringing together.

[Participant 4:] Yeah.

The blindfold

[Participant 5:] Why use the blindfold instead of just eyes closed?

[Russell:] Well, let's find out. It's a great question, and I'd like to spend a few days seeing if an answer comes, and then I'll give you my ideas about it. But let's see. Does anybody have anything right away to say about blindfolds and eyes closed?

[Participant 6:] Yeah. Just in my personal experience with the exercise, I realized that when I crossed the midline, I had a feeling of my leg, as if I was seeing it. And I was like, no, I'm not seeing it. So I just thought that was interesting, since I was definitely blindfolded.

[Russell:] But that maybe could have happened if you had your eyes closed, so in terms of —

[Participant 6:] Right. Oh, right. Yeah, that's right. It took away that. It went around in my mind a number of times.

[Russell:] Right. Yeah, so you likely could have peeked, yeah.

[Participant 7:] I find that with the blindfold I have a greater sense. The senses came out. There's a heightened awareness, as if I was truly blind.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 7:] So I have to be much more conscious of what's around. It's like a different level of darkness than just closing my eyes.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 7:] Because I can't open my eyes. So it actually reminded me a little of that, one of the books that you suggested. The blind gentleman.

[Russell:] Right, right.

[Participant 7:] Trying to get that heightened sense of awareness.

[Russell:] Right. Exactly, exactly. That's where this grows out of, yes.

[Participant 8:] Well, I thought too, if you're touching the whole body, there's a level of intimacy about that. And if everybody's blindfolded, I can be more — touching parts of my body that I can't touch in public.

[Russell:] Yeah, right. Sure.

[Participant 9:] Yeah, I've heard a lot of people say that. With the blindfold on, I felt like nobody could see me.

Felt like I had greater freedom to move when we were moving about the planet, mindful. And I had greater awareness of the connection with myself.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yes, please.

[Participant 10:] It reminded me, when we go to Shanghai, there's a number of massage places, like on every other corner, and the majority of them are very routine. They just have a routine, sort of getting you in, getting you out. But we found this, really back in an alley house. There are massage therapists that are all blind.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 10:] And we go there, and they've been blind for most of their life, and there's someone there that takes payment and everything, and will get them to the table.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 10:] But there's a real exploratory quality, just even getting to your body.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 10:] And then when they're on your body, there is a sense of presence, a sense of mindfulness, because they have no idea what shape — how thick or flat or tall or short. So they are really exploring and getting to know your body in the way of massage. It's very powerful.

[Russell:] Yeah, beautiful.

[Participant 11:] I had a different feeling in the other. There were certain parts when I touched, and I think it was when I crossed, that there was this tingling, like the nerves were firing along.

[Russell:] Yeah.

Something from you? You've got a smile like you're —

[Participant 12:] I noticed a real difference in my engagement with vision afterward. I went back, and it's like it kept flashing. I got to go for a little walk on the break too, but first, being in the room, I kind of lost it during lunchtime, in interaction with other people. But just that.

There's a description that I've heard and used before that feels apt, although there's something more to it, about receiving instead of retrieving the visual field. So it felt like receiving, but also like where I couldn't see, too, so I felt my spatial awareness.

[Participant 13:] And one of the things is sort of a combination of what others had said. When I came out of the exercise, I was sharing with the people at lunch that I felt much more present and

focused with them, without mind chatter. Without thinking of what I was going to say in response to what they were sharing, or anything that was going on.

There was a real okayness with just being. And I think that came from the safety that Participant 9 had said, of nobody being able to see me with my blindfold on. It allowed — a certain mind chatter that may have been there if I didn't have the blindfold on. Is anybody peeking? That mind chatter wasn't there, and it really allowed me to go to a very focused, present place within myself.

[Russell:] Yes, yes. These are really important.

Inner and outer

[Russell:] As we learn, how can I have a deep connection to my inner life and be a social being?

That's one of the questions I'm very interested in. How do I not continue, when possible, that sense of now I'm inside, now I'm outside, now I'm social, now I'm myself.

I can remember this wonderful discovery some years ago. I was teaching a seminar somewhere, and I went back to my room, and as I closed the door, I realized I didn't sigh.

And in that moment, I realized that almost always when I got out of the public space, as the teacher, there was a sense of now I'm home, now I'm safe, now I don't need to be anything. And the absence of that made me aware of how often that was there.

And so I'm often interested in that. It is something like that there, that I'm kind of getting relief from. Not that it's bad if you have that, but I love that feeling of harmonious being.

I feel different when I'm alone, sure. It's different being in public, being alone, being with one person, being with a group. Everything is different.

But there's really something else that I notice, that was wonderful to be free of, to feel free from, and to be able to feel like there's a consistency of inner connection with outer connection.

And one significant part of that for me is this sense of space around the body, the sense of contact, spontaneous and effortless contact to my physical sense of self. The kind of infrastructure that I feel — myself on this spot, in this ground, with this breath, as I'm making contact.

And it's not like I have to hold something back to pay attention to that, but when in harmony, that's just all there. That inner and outer becomes irrelevant. It's just a world that includes this body, these feeling senses, and what I'm seeing, and who I'm with, and it feels harmonious.

Yeah, so part of my picture of working with these blindfolds is, it helps with some of that, and I'll talk more about that at another point.

Participant 14?

[Participant 14:] I think that might explain a little, maybe, what my reaction was, because I actually was surprised, when I put that blindfold on, of how like a panic it gave me. And it really surprised me. I wasn't expecting that. But I think that I do a lot of internal work, either by myself or one-on-one.

And I mean, I really trust this group, and I feel like I go deep when I'm here, but I'm always aware. I guess I'm just relying on my eyes being open. Nothing I can do either. I don't know.

[Russell:] Right, right.

[Participant 14:] There's something really scary about it.

[Russell:] Yes, yes.

[Participant 14:] And then, once I was able to drop in, I was okay, but I was aware of it the whole time.

[Russell:] Yeah. I've been waiting for who has something like this. I've had some people where we really needed to work with the panic responses, with short doses, and work, build up to it — that not being able to scan the environment easily.

[Participant 15:] I had a little disorientation. Well, at one point, everywhere I turned on my mat was an edge.

[Russell:] So, was what?

[Participant 15:] An edge. And I kind of got anxious. And that sense of not knowing how to navigate, or where the space goes. Where you go off an edge.

[Russell:] Yeah, interesting.

[Participant 16:] I found myself orienting very much to your voice, where you were in the room. So this sense was out. This was heightened.

[Russell:] Right.

Naming sensation

[Russell:] Okay, I want to do a practice, and take this another step.

Let's get into groups of three. I will join a group. I was just about to say, I'll join the English-speaking group.

So find two other people, then I'll tell you what we're going to do.

Okay, so this practice is a progression. And decide who will be one, two, and three — who's going to go first, second, third. And you, of course, have a fourth over there.

Okay, so let me have your attention. This is a practice based on a practice we've done before, but it will grow into some new territory as well. So of course, it's always new if you do it fresh.

So what's going to happen is, you'll have your eyes closed. Everyone will have their eyes closed. And a person will be speaking, and is just going to slowly offer some sensation that's alive.

I'm noticing right hand. Right leg. Sensing the end of the middle finger on the right hand.

And a breath comes.

Left hand comes in, feeling of mostly the base of the hand.

Then the left front of the foot arises, sensing the contact of that foot.

And a breath comes.

A pulsation in the scalp.

The heel of the right hand is there again, the right edge of it. Just a sense of weight and contact.

A little coolness on the tops of the fingers.

And the breath comes down in the belly, and the forehead lifts, and the lips move.

And the breath comes a little higher, and the exhale pulls me down towards the right.

Breath comes, and another breath.

Forehead lifts, lips are dry.

The weight on the right knee comes. Front of the right foot.

So it's a stream of consciousness. Not too fast. Listening. Not knowing what you're going to say next, because it's coming, and as it comes, you say something about it.

You're not trying to stay any place. You're just — whatever appears, you give that some words.

You can see what feels right. For me, it often feels right not to have a pronoun. It's not necessarily my leg or my hand, it's just hand on leg. But there's no rule about that.

Generally a kind of succinctness of language is helpful. It's more haiku-ish than prose. It's just this.

And the people listening, you're following the experience and tuning into your own bodily process, sensing where you go, and can you follow their process in your body? Not to feel the qualities that they feel, but the places that they're feeling. If they say right hand, left hand, go there.

And one person will do that. Eyes stay closed for everybody, and I'll ring the bell after a little bit. The second person will continue, same idea. And I'll ring the bell, the third person will continue.

And then we'll go around again, but there's a second practice that we'll do, and then we'll go around again with a third practice.

Any questions right now?

And I will come over to you to move you a little quicker, so that you are in harmony. You finish at the same time.

So, take your time.

Let me have your attention for another moment, please. What I encourage very much is that you enjoy your living process, that you're not speaking for your partners. They're kind of eavesdropping on your experiencing, and you are taking your time to enjoy.

Maybe it can be enjoyable. Maybe it can even be something new about being — just bringing language, and being with what comes.

Okay. The first person, when they're ready.

So after about four minutes of each person speaking, we're going into the next.

Eyes open

[Russell:] So this next round is the same, except everyone has their eyes open. But with your eyes open, you're not looking at each other.

You can look around, but all of your comments are about something within your body. So you're not talking about what you see or what you hear. It's still kinesthesia, proprioception. It's still bodily, interoceptive phenomena.

Does everybody understand what I mean? Was it understandable?

[Participant 17:] I'm less interested.

[Russell:] That's right. Who cares if they can understand it? He's over the top of the mountain. When you're making jokes about yourself, you're over the top of the mountain.

Okay, so same practice, but we're actually literally practicing. How can I have the visual world, the external world, more present, and yet I'm oriented?

And do your best not to close your eyes in order to go inside. Even if you have to be much slower to find what you're going to say, it's okay. You're not doing this for others. You're practicing a skill.

It's an attentional skill that, as it gets developed, can live in you in social situations without effort. And you feel a quality of embodied presence that doesn't withdraw you from the people that you're with, but also gives you a ground.

So this is the next step in that cultivation.

Your eyes are open. You're not looking at each other. I mean, you can look at each other's legs. You're not making eye contact. That's what I mean by not looking at each other.

Again, I'll ring the bell for the move, so we can again go one, two, three, four, and I'll tell you when to move.

And after each person speaks for one minute, we do the next practice.

Standing

[Russell:] Let's stay quiet. Let's all stand together.

Move as you like. One more step here in this experiment. So jump, or do whatever you need to do. Run around, jump up and down.

Remember, you're throwing it so that somebody can catch it. You're giving it in a way that it can be received. Giving a gift.

[Silence 36 seconds]

Brilliant. Give it another throw. Take your time, take your time, so we have the sense that you feel your body, your space, and the other.

If you need the bathroom, use it. We are going to continue quickly, or soon, so don't dawdle too much.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Move it faster if you can make connection with somebody. Don't just throw it hypothetically, but have a connection.

[Silence 36 seconds]

Can you get in your groups of three? So stand up. Stand up in your group.

So this practice. It's on the recording. Oh, it's been on. Okay. We just played some ball. Remember that.

So in this practice, you'll be standing so that you can be with each other, sort of alike. And begin with your eyes open. You're not fixating on a point. You're awake in the room. You're gazing. You're not looking at each other, but you'll gaze by. You're not keeping eye contact. You'll gaze by.

And something that you sense in your body. Something else that you sense in your body. Maybe three or four things that you sense in your body, and then something that you see.

And when I say something that you see, what I want to encourage — there's no rigidity about this, but what I want to encourage is, it's less "I see a chair" than "I see blue and black, and a shape coming up and around." Less the noun of the object, and more some of its qualities.

So, I see a white, and it's cylindrical. And it's sitting on the shelf, and I feel my feet on the floor.

And about three, four, five inner sensations for every outer.

You can also include sound. So, I'm sensing my arms moving. Shifting of weight. Notice movement across these purple pants. Shifting of weight.

Pauses are welcome.

Hear a sound. Mechanical sound. Shifting. Tingling in the fingers. Breath. Weight in the left foot.

Up, down, nose. Breath through.

And if I say a door, it's fine to say a door, but stay with most of the qualities. There's metal and silver coming out, and a window in the middle, or words across the top. And I hear a yawn. I feel the weight in my feet.

Mostly bodily sense. Three, four, five in your body. One, two outside. Mostly seeing. Can I have my eyes open? Can I actually be in touch with my world and still have inner?

It might be really challenging. Don't be surprised if it's really challenging and you need to take your time.

Do your best, if possible, not to close your eyes in order to sense. If you happen to close your eyes, it's not a problem, but we want to cultivate — the attention can go in when the world is very present for me.

So again, I'll tell you when to shift. It'll be a little faster than the others. It's not going to be quite as long a practice. We'll be coming back to different versions of this kind of practice. So we're just introducing it now.

Start with what we see, or what we feel — start with inner bodily sensations. Start with three, four, five things that you sense, then go to one, maybe two externals.

Exteroception, interoception.

You can move. You don't have to stand still. You can move a little bit.