Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 3, Day 3, Session 6 — 10 minutes

Summary: The group looks at attention as something alive — moving in and out, growing and shrinking — and at how fixation narrows what can be experienced. A distinction emerges between paying attention and fixating. Russell adds the relief of naming what is alive, then underlines fluidity between inner and outer before the next lesson.

Attention in motion

[Participant:] Just feeling like, while thinking like, even as an artist, or if you're looking at something with attention, you're noticing the subtleness, probably, that it's —

[Russell:] Right. Right, right.

[Participant:] It's a lot. It's mobile. It's naturally mobile when we're in connection with something. When we are an artist looking at, you know, it's getting bigger, smaller, coming here, moving there.

[Russell:] One of the movements of attention that we're working with now that is so essential for social beings is the movement in and out of attention. Into the extroceptive and the introceptive. That dynamic.

Then, an example that you're pointing out is another dimension of attention. Do we tend to be people who favor small, precise images, or do we tend to look toward wholes? They're actually different perceptual or attentional biases.

And what I'm suggesting is that when our attention gets fixated in habitual ways, we get to have particular slices of the world, and we're missing many slices of the world.

Paying attention or fixating

[Participant:] What I was actually thinking of was attention to solely what is. What does it mean to pay attention that's different from to fixate?

[Russell:] Beautiful. Yeah, yeah, yes. What does it mean to pay attention, as opposed to fixate?

That's what I'm — yeah, so much here. This is one of my favorite subjects. So, but what you're bringing is important.

What I want to say just for now, for this part, is the key work in the whole Feldenkrais work, and key to an authentic and alive meditation practice, is that our attention is alive and it's moving.

But it's not just running around cause it's frightened of being in some place, or it can't. But it has a fluidity to it, and it gets smaller and it gets bigger, and it goes in and it goes out, and it gets different rhythms. It gets a little faster and gets a little slow. It's alive.

And most of us have limited our attentional spheres. And that limitation limits what we can experience and fixates us into certain patterns of repetitive experiencing.

And so then we start noticing how we fixate on certain aspects of our world, certain aspects of our spouse's behavior. That's a favorite fixation.

You know, you may not see anything else but that underwear on the floor. You might not — you know, we fixate on certain aspects of our environment, certain aspects of — and that creates your experience. And you can't believe that no one else is annoyed by that, because you've got this.

You know, for some people — I don't know if it's happening in this group, but there was somebody in the last Angela group that she was ready to shoot that clock. The tick, tick, tick, tick. Her mind melded to that.

And she got to see, not only auditorily, but the way this works in other places in her life, when there were certain phenomena that were repetitive and that she didn't feel she had control of. They controlled her. They absolutely controlled her experience, and she could be pissed off for a couple of days.

And when she got to see that — the clock — she was creating an experience of that clock. The clock was there, but her experience was hers. And it was based on how her attention got fixated. Major lights went off.

[Participant:] That feels to me like there's a difference in terms of paying attention to your present. But when you fixate, you're no longer present.

[Russell:] Good, that's nice. Yeah, I think that that's really true. Could you say that again, please?

[Participant:] That when you're paying attention, your credits are available for that moment. Whatever it is, it's capturing your attention. But when you fixate, you're no longer in the moment.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, I think that's really, really important.

Name it to tame it

[Russell:] Yeah. Oh, yeah. And overwhelm. Cause this stuff is living.

You know, that nice expression — I forget who came up with it, I didn't invent it — but it really has a lot of accuracy. Name it to tame it. Name it to tame it.

In other words, when that is living in us, and it's not just given a general name, anxiety, but it's that particular something that you're sensing in there, and you can really sense how it's alive and what it is, and it gets your presence, and it gets some language, it gets some naming that feels right to it — there's a relief.

[Participant:] So this almost, though, as our society is so in order to be whatever it is we're supposed to be, productive members of our society, we need so trained from on to contain and keep inside so much of our individual experience. I wonder also if that is part of why we think sick people that somehow affect the environment. Because the ways in which it's channeled to sustain — I don't really know, but it's like —

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. Good. Yeah. Yeah.

Fluidity of attention

[Russell:] Yeah. All of this is so important. And the thing I want to just underline, and then have a brief pause and a lesson coming up, is the fluidity of attention.

That is the dominant movement in our — in the creation of meaning in our world, in the creation of our experiencing of our world, is this fluidity of attention.

And one of the key matrices in the movement of attention, one of the key dynamics or ways of looking, is: is my attentional bias more internally or more externally? That's a key move. Introverts, extroverts.

And it's fine to have — we'll all have — we're not going to be 50-50 in all these things. But that there is a sense of fluidity of movement of attention between the inner and outer world is one of the key dynamics.

Not that it's going to be equal, not going to be the same for each other, but that it's less often wrenching to make that move. And less often feels fixated. It feels like a choice, or like a drawing toward.

And to be conscious of that can be very helpful. To develop the capacity for — okay, this is the next step, and then I'm gonna stop — is, I'm talking about the movement internal and external, and that's very important. But then that other point that I was talking to earlier today, that we can have a fluidity that is such that the inner and outer are simultaneous.

That it's not this and this, but it's a bigger sense. Like on the cushion. Like on the cushion. And that's where we're going to in our next lesson.

That we're gonna go to right now is, I wanna continue this movement of connecting into space, feeling the body, feeling out, turning the light around, all that work which we've just scratched the surface of.

And I'd like to do it with blindfolds, and I'd like to get the floor cleared, and we'll allow five minutes for bathrooms, and then we'll continue.