Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 3, Day 4, Session 3 — 83 minutes

Summary: Russell invites sharing about what helps in sitting. The group explores self-observation, the levels of I am, I am here, and how am I, and meeting feeling without being consumed. Later shares touch guides, pods, heartbeat, homesickness, and awareness used as a hiding place. The rawness of sitting closes the morning, and nothing here is a ladder.

Discoveries in sitting

[Russell:] So, just take a moment and reflect on what you are discovering that seems perhaps helpful in your sitting practice.

Or, I'm curious, any of the ways that you've been working with yourself. If any of the images have worked. What it was like sitting in a small group, in a pod with others. This sense of turning the light around, if that is having any intrinsic meaning, or feels obscure.

Picture of resting in the aliveness, not efforting too much. Basic attitude of welcoming.

So I'm curious. If we're making discoveries that seem helpful, that we can share them with each other is a great thing. If there are questions, places that feel stuck, that's welcome also.

[Participant:] There's something that's been difficult and confusing for me. Not in a bad way. For me, in observing myself.

And I can do it. My tendency is to kind of have another being, a friendly being, looking at me. And when I try to be myself looking at me, well, there's this quantum physics thing that kind of starts to happen. It's like as soon as I'm looking at myself, I change. And then what's looking at me isn't me anymore.

And something about holding some quality — a similar or the same quality in both places. Bringing that quality into this quality, and this quality that's really being. It's interesting. I've never kind of felt that tension. I've never tried to hold that, and it's hard to articulate.

[Russell:] Yes, yeah, I think I'm getting it.

[Participant:] So that's been a place that I've been.

[Russell:] Yeah. Very well. I encourage that place that you're working with. Yeah, I encourage it.

[Participant:] Something there. Fuzzy, very.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

What I can say in my experience is that there can be a helpfulness in emphasizing, on the one hand, just the sense — any sense of being alive. Starting with the body sense. On this cushion, I feel this breath, I hear this sound. I am here. I am here.

Then there's this. At first it comes in brief moments, and then it starts having its own longevity, maybe, or just the fact that it's always there gets clear.

At first it feels like a doing, turning the light around, noticing the self from a larger space. And the movement from here or there becomes a simultaneity where they're both there. They're both there, and then it's effortless. It's effortless, but it's not effortless at first.

[Participant:] When you move to the there, kind of. If I make it someone else or something else looking, that's easier, 'cause I hold on to myself. If I make myself the looker, then I lose the self, see.

[Russell:] Okay, yeah.

[Participant:] That's where the confusion is, yeah.

[Russell:] Yes.

So let me confuse you a little bit more. Not intentionally wanting to confuse you, but just to stay true and, in Peter's beautiful phrase, not dumb it down.

I'm differentiating phenomena that are not fundamentally differentiated. They live as a whole.

One can go very deeply into a breath or a pause, and it's like the infinite small opens. And it opens, and there's the sense that this vast space is in that inner space. And they're one thing. The breath is awake in itself, and that awakeness is way beyond body and mind.

I told you I'd add confusion. So now, that same movement can happen from going into that bigger space, and getting a sense of the one here. And there's a dissolving, we could say, into each other.

But now, instead of going from that pause between the breaths that opens out, right now it's here. There's the sense of Russell sensing his words, his arm movement, sound, his lips moving, noticing himself in this, and noticing that he's seeing all that.

And it's just happening. It's not like, okay, now I'm going to be here, and now I'm going to be here, and now I'm going to be there. It's referencing different aspects of the experiencing.

And when I break them down like that, it's actually a little artificial, 'cause I'm cutting up some things that are not intrinsically cut up. But differentiation can be helpful. We can emphasize this or emphasize that.

Our first weeks, our real emphasis was, let's get into this body. Let's drop down. And we need that. We need to continue that. I need that, and near as I can tell, for the rest of my life, I need this location.

But body and mind drop away. It's not an end point.

I am, I am here, how am I

[Russell:] Let me describe it like this. There are three levels that are one, but worthy of distinction.

The biggest place, the most fundamental, the most subtle and vast, is the I am experience. And the I am is — there's just awakeness. It doesn't feel like I'm in here aware, or that I'm turning around a light, but that there's a sense of here-ness that is much bigger. And it's awake in itself. And that's I am.

This sounds mystical. Everyone in this room touches it for half-seconds or seconds. You may not recognize it. Some of you do. And then it begins to sometimes last a little bit.

So there's the I am. We want to get our confidence, our knowingness of the I am, because it's the only place we can completely rest, as far as I know.

And there's a kind of connectedness to all of life. The I am, of course, is not I, right? We could just say am.

So it's alive. It's all alive, and there's a quality of effortlessness to that. When it's there. There's some effort moving towards that.

Now, it's very hard to start in that. What's really helpful is to go to the next stage, which is, I am here.

I am here means I've got substance. The I am here gives me location in time and space. Which is, according to some mystics, what the angels envy us for, having these bodies. The Tibetans always say, we've been waiting millions and millions and millions of years for one of these, to be able to learn the kinds of things that we can learn by having these, even though they hurt a lot.

And my interpretation of that — I don't really know, I'm guessing here — is, well, how difficult it would be to locate, to be substantial enough to have consistent kinds of interactions, to learn the kinds of lessons we can learn in one of these.

So the I am here is less subtle than the I am, but absolutely essential for growing into the I am experience. Because it gives you substance, and it gives you a location, and it gives you something.

Okay, I may not know anything. I may not know who I am. I may be completely confused, but I can feel my butt on the seat.

I may know nothing else about how to interact, whether I should leave this job or leave — but I can feel my right hand here, and I can feel this breath, and I begin to get some kind of inner stability. The way I feel just blown out by everything in my life, I can locate myself.

And if I can get something here and something down here, I feel like, well, maybe there's a chance that I can survive even this situation. Maybe I don't need to go into my historical way of surviving, that I know is going to end up leaving me unhappy.

Got something. So, I am here.

So there's the I am. There's the I am here.

And then there's the third level that we work with, and we're going to be focusing on this morning, which we'll explore through focusing processes and other processes. It's how am I?

How am I? It's another level.

If we get lost in the how am I, and we don't have enough of I am here, we'll get carried away by our feeling states.

So we want very good contact as we're growing into this I am-ness.

Now, we could even say that someone could have a cultivated contact with the I am-ness, and maybe lose contact with the how I am — their individual self, their related self. And unless you're

living in a very particular kind of situation and role in life, if the vertical is so much and the horizontal isn't there, the relationships get mucky, and the people around you often don't blossom so well.

I don't know if you know what I'm saying right now.

So I find all of these so helpful, and they're all there, and different ones get emphasized at different times.

[Participant:] Yeah. The little platform — yeah.

In describing, I am seen by myself. I've been using a visual metaphor. Could it also be, I am felt?

[Russell:] Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

[Participant:] Thank you.

[Russell:] Yes, absolutely.

The important thing there is that it has that quality of larger than the historical self.

And whether one has that — I am loved by Christ, or by myself, by who I really am, by an angel, by a Buddha — that, as far as I can tell, is pretty irrelevant. At my level of understanding, it's irrelevant.

What's absolutely relevant is that a human being is not trapped in their historical identity.

[Participant:] Yeah, and the image of light is really helpful. Because it was like there's a knowingness in the light that goes out or in, that could also be multisensory. There's a knowingness of feeling, or smelling, or seeing. And it was easier for me than when I was imagining a form or something, a me up there. But light shining, I was able to connect with that, and also still have the sensory experience of this location.

[Russell:] Right, right. Yeah.

[Participant:] It's more like that for me.

[Russell:] I don't have a particular image of myself, or a being shining, but more like a stream of light. And sometimes it's visualized, sometimes it's just the sense of what life implies, which is a knowingness, a warmth, and a clarity. All of that feeling is coming.

And when I'm resting in that, I know I'm at home. I know I'm safe. I know I'm welcome.

Not leading with belief

[Russell:] Did you all see that article, that really beautiful article? For our culture, I think it's so important. I actually gave it to Pete. This neurosurgeon who went into a coma, right?

And his description — he spent a week in a coma where his cortex was not functioning. Some people will argue about the neurology, maybe he had a moment of cortical function, but what's important here is, he is the perfect witness, because he says, this is completely against my belief systems. I am a rational scientist. I always have been. I'm empirical. I don't believe in the spiritual world, and this was my experience.

I was met by beings, and their message to me was that I am loved, I have always been cared for, I am not alone, and this was realer than anything I've ever experienced in my life. And I don't understand it. If it wasn't so wonderful, I said, I wouldn't believe anybody else who said this. I would think they were one of those nuts.

So, but he's got a book out now, and there's been a couple of articles back and forth in Newsweek, a rebuttal, and then his rebuttal to the rebuttal. And it's good that this is out there.

[Participant:] Yeah. It's worth reading.

[Russell:] Now, when I say all that, let me give the other side.

The other side I want to say is this. I don't want to encourage our belief as a lead. It's helpful to have some of that out there, to inspire our digging in the ground.

We've got to do our own digging, and our own digging is getting on the cushion, or however we go deeper, because we don't get confidence from secondhand descriptions. We can get inspiration from secondhand descriptions.

I hope not.

So, okay.

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah, right, okay. No, no. It was through a — he had a bacteria, and then he tried to —

[Russell:] Okay, so I don't want to continue on that. I want to come back to the meditation work. What you're discovering that's helpful. What you're challenged by, that feels like you're not sure how to work with it, so that we can help each other.

When feeling wants attention

[Participant:] Yeah, I have a question about sitting. And based on what you just said about the I am versus I am here, and this is how am I — the three layers.

And sitting, for me, a lot of times what comes up is feeling that there's something there emotionally that needs to be addressed.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And I kind of have your voice in the back of my mind, that you don't go into focusing unless absolutely necessary in a meditation. So I keep trying to stay with this awareness. So I guess what I'm wondering is — I don't really know what my question is, but if you could speak more to the sitting practice, and how maybe it's cultivating somehow the ground for all three of these levels. I can feel that, but I don't exactly know what's needed when.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] Is it ultimately that we're looking for the I am experience? That's sort of — although I know there's no goal, so to say. So I guess this morning I wanted to ask you if you could speak more to just sitting.

[Russell:] Yeah.

I would tie these pieces together. So I want to start where you started, with feeling states wanting more attention.

And I would encourage approaching those states in a similar way to physical sensations wanting attention. Where there's a warm-hearted acknowledging. Oh, there's that. There's that discomfort in the right side of my left knee, and there's that place that's really sad, and a kind of heavy feeling in the chest.

Back to the next breath.

Not back to the next breath — but back to the next breath means this can be in the background. This can be in the background. The moment is incredibly generous and big. It's not a narrow little thing unless we make it into a narrow little thing.

And of course, what happens when we get consumed by a particular sensation or a particular feeling, it feels squeezed into a narrow thing. And sometimes that's just the way it is. And then, how can I befriend this narrow place, this place that feels —

And sometimes that means changing position, in the physical sense. Sometimes it means bringing a little bit more attention to the hurting place. Once in a while, it may mean changing it into a focusing-type session. But I would encourage, at first, cultivating the spaciousness for that, and then coming to something more neutral, like the breath, like the ground. And then hopefully this other, more neutral place that we're growing — that there's just this noticing of her having all that. Noticing of her, with warm light towards the one in there who is struggling with that heart that's wounded.

So this practice of having space for that which normally magnetizes us, and having space that's warm and caring, but also can stand next to, can turn toward. That's hard work. That's what we're doing. It's a maturation.

And as that happens more and more, it gets more and more effortless. It's still — I'm not saying my sitting is always effortless. There are times when it's work. It's work. But I know that there is great value to that work.

And I'd say the spontaneous effortlessness gets more and more. But I'm not living in a place where it's always effortless. That's not my experience.

Already turned around

[Participant:] So I have to talk about this, the reason why I feel okay. It actually started last time we were together, and I had this sense of — I call them guides, or whatever, some other kind of energetic entities, but they were behind me, sort of encircling.

And so that sense of being supported comes often in meditation. It's actually a sort of comfort. They say, everything's fine.

Now, if I try to bring them around in front, it doesn't work as well. And you keep inviting this turn the light around. So I'm saying, okay, let's get around, guys. Because I figure they're part of my I am.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah.

[Participant:] But I figure it'll just come in time.

[Russell:] So let me jump in there.

They are already turned around. In other words, turned around doesn't mean they need to be in front of you. It means they're radiating towards the one that's sitting there.

[Participant:] You get it. Yeah.

[Russell:] That's fine.

And let them be where they are. For many, many people I've worked with, it's up and behind that this presence tends to be more. For some, it's right above. For some, it's behind. Occasionally in front. Usually, if it's in front, it's further out. And some have nothing like that. So I don't think you should have it show up like that.

But the sense that the one sitting here is perceived from a larger place.

Most of the time, we have the feeling that we are here looking out. That I, Russell, am here. And even sitting and meditating, there can be the feeling of, well, there's Russell noticing his breath. There's the subject Russell noticing the object breath. Or there's the subject Russell noticing the object, weight on the cushion. Or there's the subject Russell hearing the sound, the clicking sound, or that wonderful bird this morning.

But then there's this larger awakeness that notices Russell hearing the sound. That the sound, the hearer — thank you — the subject, object, meld. And that is all perceived in this subtle — call it light, call it larger being, call it — all the names are wrong. But it's different than I am perceiving that, although it includes I am perceiving.

There is subject, object, meld in awakeness.

Yeah, I just keep confusing everybody.

I got Aaron first, and then — yeah, go ahead.

Being the space

[Participant:] Several interesting experiences from that work we were doing yesterday evening. One was this sort of chronic, for the last several years, kind of work in my middle back, especially what I notice when I'm sitting on the cushion a lot.

I was just so surprised it was gone during our sit last evening. And the physical movement that we did in the ATM was not that big, and not something I'm unfamiliar with, that we do often. It's really clear to me that it was that. Like what Carl's describing, in the right and left comparison after that touching lesson. There was a seamless field, and then like a body on the other side, before we had done that. So it was a field experience in my back. I wish it stayed gone, but it's not.

[Russell:] But you know it's possible. Yeah, yeah.

Did that come when you were sitting with the others?

[Participant:] Both. It was there.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And then, in the speaking trio, at the end of it, Valerie and I were laughing, observing that after you invited us, maybe not using so much "my" — like "my hands" — how I kept finding myself in that. There's my hands. And that I wouldn't be aware, after the fact, that I had used that language.

But then in the sit, I don't remember which one last evening, there's some momentum of being the more spacious me, noticing. And as I was sitting, it struck me later, a few times, that my experience was being the space.

Oh, concern for her son. And it wasn't mine. Oh, thinking about her work. It was like what you just described, this sense of, it wasn't mine. And it's also probably why my back was so —

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Participant:] And then, can I share one more?

[Russell:] Yeah, but let's just pause a second, because I want us all to hear that. And that move of using the third person can often be so helpful.

Oh, she's — oh, that's how she — but not as a distance. Not, oh, that's how she is. Oh, you're concerned — the second person — oh, you're concerned. Or, oh, she's feeling that.

Beautiful, yeah.

[Participant:] So, another something that I was experiencing. I too have some challenge with — I wasn't wanting to anthropomorphize it, some figure or something like that, but this spacious, aware beingness.

And I think it started during the pointing lesson, and then also during the sit, when there's a turning the light around. Something felt really funny about turning it around only to me. Like, oh, well, I'm turning it around, and there's Sisi on this side, and there's Sarah on that side, and there was lightning below my feet.

And then I had a curiosity about your just incredibly inspiring way of listening. And I wonder if you're doing some of that. Like this larger — I don't know. There was a curiosity about not being so in myself, or so self-centered.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Very interesting.

[Participant:] Yeah. And of course, I couldn't feel into the intimacy of what was going on in the same way, you know, with the beings around us, with this one.

[Russell:] Right, right, right.

[Participant:] That there was —

[Russell:] Yeah. That's great.

Following the heartbeat

[Participant:] So, last night — yesterday, I should say. Blindfold exercises. Coming out of them, I felt very, as I mentioned yesterday, focused and present. And after the first one, going right to lunch, it felt a bit jarring to jump right into conversation with everyone. It slowly sort of evolved.

And last night, before dinner, after our blindfold exercise, I had this very strong sense to have dinner blindfolded.

And over the last few years, I have been doing this practice that's been very, very strong for me, and that's following the heartbeat. And it started with just a moment, maybe one heartbeat, while waiting for the bus or something. And then that would get so compelling, because it would bring you to such a present place, that now it's driving a car, listening to people. And so coming into this week, I had a few intentions of finding my heartbeat in areas where I haven't been able to find it yet.

One of them was, in the full inhale and the exhale, can I still feel my heartbeat? Which I was able to do yesterday. Another one is while eating. Another one is while listening, which I've been able to do. And the other one is while talking. And I haven't yet mastered that one.

So when I decided yesterday to do that, I had the mind chatter of, well, will people judge me? Will they think anything? Will they cast anything in my direction that might feel negative? So I considered strongly just grabbing my meal and going to my room and doing that exercise in my room. But it was very clear that the lesson was really meant to be in the environment of everything that was going on.

And I was very fascinated by the experiment of what I learned. Just hearing all of the conversation, and at one point the laughter of you leaving, and Mesa telling you that he's coming with you. That was really great.

And just the whole being present, and remembering where everything was. Before I put the blindfold on, I had a pretty good idea of where I had set everything. And really just tuning into my heartbeat.

One of the things that I noticed, with everything that was going on around, was I couldn't hear my heartbeat when I chewed my habitual way, because I was chewing so hard that it was so loud I couldn't hear my heart. So it made me soften my jaw, and soften my chew.

And so then, while I'm of course still experiencing the every-so-often feelings of wondering if people are thinking anything bad or negative, suddenly I have just a wealth of support. I had four people that had come over in the course of the dinner. And the first person, I still don't know who it was. I think maybe it was somebody that works in the kitchen. Honestly, I was like, do they think that I'm funny? The other three, I knew exactly who they were. It was just really wonderful to feel that. I was so supported, you know, so cared for. And, is there anything I can do for you?

And even Christina came over, and I was feeling this sense of guilt, because I knew that I had a lot of food left, but I was full. And one of the things I also came in with was, I changed for this week, as an experiment, to be on the vegetarian list, because I know that I've unconsciously been eating way too much. And for many reasons. Because the food's good, because I don't breathe, because there's just not presence, and I'm just —

So I knew that there was way more food than what I had room for. And I was asking Christina, is there more food on my plate? Kind of whispered. And she's like, yeah, it's between two o'clock and three o'clock. And I'm like, okay, yeah, I got it. And she's like, but your soup, you did great on.

So I'm sitting there, dealing with all of this, and I sat and just meditated and took everything in. And I decided it was time to take the blindfold off, and I looked, and I just felt this huge feeling of guilt, because there was ninety percent of my food still left on the plate. And I was complete. I was fulfilled.

And so I had that old voice of, you got to finish what's on your plate, and people in the world don't even have food, you should be grateful for what you have. And then, are the cooks going to think that I didn't like what they made? So I really had to be with all of that.

And so I took the food and put it into the compost. And then this morning, I decided to get a little bit less food. So I got about a quarter less than what I would normally eat. But I decided — thankfully we were still in the silent meditation — to still do the practice without the blindfold. And even taking a quarter less, I still only needed about half. So I could have reduced it by half of what I got this morning, and still been full.

And I guess the one last thing was that after dinner last night, I felt this expansion in my belly, with my breath, that I hadn't experienced yet, being here. And I have some strong intuition that that had something to do with not over-gorging myself with food.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. That's inspiring for me to explore.

[Participant:] Yeah, thank you.

[Russell:] That's great. Yeah.

All sickness is homesickness

[Participant:] Oh, it was, definitely. Excuse me. With my experience of what I think you're talking about — isn't that what we're talking about? And you may not have an answer to that. I have no experience, but I'm trying to express it. So I'm kind of curious about —

[Russell:] I want to invite something, if that's okay. Can I interrupt you for a moment? I already did.

Pause for a moment and see if you can connect, Grace.

[Participant:] I'm just wondering whether a practice that I've found is increasing for me, through other influences, is the same.

And it partly relates to that big dark space that I referred to yesterday, which has in fact got lots of light in it. And it's the space that, when I can be there, feels like home for me.

And it's home because my historical self is not ruling who I am, or how I'm being in the world. It's there. It's not disappeared. It's honorably part of how I've come to be here now. And it's just the way it is.

And so when I can actually release myself from the bonds of that historical self, and expand to what you suggested earlier today, which is go beyond the historical self, to allow oneself to open out to a master being — I'm not even sure I would call it a self — in that moment when that happens, the I am kind of disappears. It's as though I've become blended with everything around me.

And that may not be everything that I'm aware of. I'm just immersed in space. And there is something that is still remaining, that is of some kind of I am, some kind of self, that is aware of being there, aware of being totally available to what is around me.

Totally open, completely curious, very light. Open-hearted, but not vulnerable. It's a vulnerability that is healthy. It's strong. It's got a lot of courage in it.

And I get there not through a particular method, and that doesn't matter. It's when I can sense the historical self is confining me, and it's preventing me from going the old way, and allowing what else can be discovered in this lifetime to happen. To allow, allow, allow.

And so I get there from a felt-sense place. I don't get there from a — maybe I did once. I think the beginning place was coming home to your body, no question. And it was very much within a sense of coming home to your body. And that led into the earth. And then from there I was able to kind of shed the bondings of the historical.

So I don't know if that feels the same, if that slots in.

[Russell:] Sounds real good to me. Yeah. Sounds real, you know. Yes.

[Participant:] Thank you. Yeah, it feels like home.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. Right, right, right.

Well, you know, there's a beautiful old phrase, that all sickness is homesickness.

All sickness is homesickness.

And when one feels their home — no. One is not sick when one is back. Homesickness means you're longing for home. So all sickness is homesickness.

And finding our home, that sense of, I am, I am here, I am welcome, I am.

And it's not secure in the sense that we know what's coming. It is secure in the sense that we're free-falling, but there's no ground.

Or you step off. Another image from Trungpa was that you think you're stepping off a mountain. So you're really scared, but you find out it's really a curb. But when your foot's in the air, you don't know how far down it is. But you do know that your foot needs to be in the air.

At that moment, yeah.

Okay, I want to stay with this, 'cause there's a bunch I'd like to do this morning. Observations, questions about the sitting practice.

The small pod

[Participant:] Yeah. You asked about the triad.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And I personally really like that. Because even though my partners are on this side of me, when we were in the triangle, I can feel their energy. It's like overlapping energy.

[Russell:] Overlap. Yeah.

[Participant:] More in that sense of the larger energy field, you know, the great one.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And so I find that when I'm in that experience, I'm actually much more tuned to my meditation. When I'm by myself, or people are in the larger circle, I tend to get tired. And I really have got to focus to stay in the meditation.

When I'm in that close confines, there's just feeling people's energy fields, which I tend to do. It's exhilarating. It makes my meditation feel so much nicer.

And the few times that I've ever done it in our community, I don't do it anymore, because after the meditation, people want to know how your meditation was. I was like, I don't want to share it. And it's like, that's really what I did. You know, it's me.

So I like the fact that we come in, we can experience that energy, and then we can just be with ourselves. We don't have to process.

[Russell:] Right, right, right.

[Participant:] So I really like that.

[Russell:] Great. Nice to hear.

[Participant:] Yeah. I just wanted to say, in the group as well, the meditation, that there was something about each breath giving a better experience for those people in my group. So there was something of a team.

[Russell:] Yeah. Isn't that interesting?

[Participant:] Karen and Carl and Russell, in my group. It's more about them than me. There's something they're giving me.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

[Participant:] It was very powerful.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] That also helped me stay connected.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And I think that's such a beautiful image of how, from that, our circle of caring can grow. But we need to maybe also have some smaller pods to grow in, as we're learning that span.

Awareness of awareness

[Participant:] Yeah. Oh, I just wanted to say — the column you had written, and what grabbed me. I saw it just before you arrived.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] Awareness of awareness has been so alive for me the last few months, and not just in the sitting practice. More so, in a way. What is so important to me is bringing this practice alive, moment to moment.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] And especially when you're going through something, and you're having to really actively deal with something that doesn't allow you to sit for forty minutes. You're going eight hours, and you're really — so just hovering up there, and watching myself, and just being aware like that, has been so grounding and powerful. And especially when it's something that's really stressful, how, bottom line, helpful it is.

But also, I've been wondering, what is mindfulness when you're not on the cushion? How do we tell people about it, when people are asking me, you're studying, what is this? And I need that. I know full well that a lot of those people probably are never going to get on the cushion.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And so my curiosity is really hovering around that. Well, how can I explain this, where they might take a tidbit, and it'll change the way they —

[Russell:] Yes, yeah, yeah.

[Participant:] It affects them the way I was feeling during those stressful times. That same thing as on the cushion.

[Russell:] Yes, yes, yes.

And let me just say, for those who are planning on teaching the work, I highly recommend, don't go to awareness of awareness until there's a ground in the body. It can take people away from a grounded experience.

So there's a progression. I mean, it's great. I'm so happy that you connect with that. And if you're offering it to others, grounded first is my strong encouragement.

[Participant:] Yeah, and it definitely took this long to get there. And I would never have recognized it.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. Go ahead, Pete.

[Participant:] Yeah. Awareness of awareness can lead you in the direction of becoming dissociated from being involved, particularly if it's something you won't be involved in, or if it's somewhat overpowering.

[Russell:] Yes. Yes. It can become a hiding place.

Well, it's what I was just saying. Anything — any practice can be co-opted in a way that is not life-giving. Any practice can become a hiding place.

And in this case, awareness of awareness, if we're not present in our bodies, it's very possible to dissociate, to get mental about it, to get off and — yeah, go ahead.

[Participant:] What if the awareness in your body is not pleasant?

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] It's desirable to dissociate.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] What if you're carrying a particular issue, or a load?

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] Something that you'd rather not do. Get tired of carrying.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] You'd rather be over here, just observing that individual, that person, that being.

[Russell:] Yeah. Beautiful.

That can be a beautiful location of awareness. One can have some relief from the burdens. The question for me there is, is there a connection to the one who is suffering?

[Participant:] To the edge.

[Russell:] And that's where, whether it's other people or this one, if the heart is closing, it's likely a strategy of, this is too much for me, I want out of here.

[Participant:] I'll try. I might need help.

[Russell:] What I'm listening for, as Pete's describing it, is — it can be wonderful. Okay, there's this difficulty that I'm carrying, there's this pain, and oh, I'm finding a way to be out of it, to be next to it, to be not in it. Great. Relief. Good. Whether it's with another or with yourself, great.

I'm suggesting, if it's not a cutting off, if it's not a pushing away, if it's not an avoidance. And the way I know the difference is, has my heart closed to that other person, or to that situation, or to this one who is struggling with that?

And the capacity for warmth and space is what I'm looking for. And maybe sometimes the best I can do is step back, you know, but —

[Participant:] Excuse me. Then, to me, what you had said is not awareness of awareness.

[Russell:] Okay.

[Participant:] Does that make sense? Because that's not where I came from. And where you were saying it's sort of a hiding place — to me, it's sort of being aware of being present.

[Russell:] Right. Okay. Now you got it. You got it.

What we're saying is that one avenue one could go, from that place, is if our historical self kind of begins to use it, it can be disconnecting, rather than connecting.

[Participant:] Yes, exactly. And then we come back to all of that, so we get bigger than that, and then the awareness is there again.

[Russell:] That's why it's very generous. I'll get there in a sec. It's very generous in the sense that we can keep falling down, and we're caught, and the light is there.

[Participant:] I think what they're talking about, or asking, is the difference between awareness of awareness and dissociation.

And there's times when we have to dissociate. When you have a car crash, right? You dissociate. You're not going to be — or you might be, if you're a yogi, aware of everything, but you're probably going to just dissociate. But then, at a later point, you might choose to process, be aware of what happened, bring awareness.

But when does it become a problem?

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] So I think it becomes a problem when you think it's a problem.

[Russell:] Yeah, that's probably pretty good. You'll feel it. You'll feel it.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] I think you're right. Yeah. I think you're pointing to where they rub toward each other.

Car accident — so, from chopping wood at the Zen center, about twenty-five years ago. And a log falls on my hand. I placed my hand down. I didn't realize this was going to — it fell on my hand. Oh, God.

And I go walking. The first thing Roshi says to me, did something happen? Meaning, did you have an awakening experience, at the moment the log fell on your hand? He was much more interested.

I said, no, Roshi, I got to go get an x-ray done.

He goes, yeah, folks, did something happen? You don't want to waste a good log falling on your hand.

Okay, go ahead.

[Participant:] I got caught by my conditioned self. I go into a state of anxiety. But now I know, in that state also, that one of the things that I'm doing is misinterpreting reality.

[Russell:] Yes. Yes.

[Participant:] But I want it. But I want to do that.

[Russell:] Right. Right, right, right, because it's got some energy. Yeah.

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Right, right. Yeah.

Widening the moment

[Russell:] Real — I mean, that's so key. This points us back to what we were looking at yesterday, in terms of our attention.

The world we experience is the way we attend to it.

And our historical self has certain very deep grooves of attention. And those grooves will manufacture our experience over and over and over again. And we'll have the same relationship, or the same quarrel in the relationship, or the same perception of self or other.

And how do we work with that?

What a blessing, to have something else to attend to. That's not because I don't want to see that. It's because I want to grow this moment out into something more than this.

And the knee on the ground, and that breath, can allow me to sit with Linda in a challenging moment, in which I don't have to recreate her as my mother, or recreate her as the one I have

trouble with when she's like this, or recreate him who responds in that way — but can actually bring more into the moment, so that there are other possibilities.

And it's not even, directly, oh, stop doing this. No, it's widening the moment. It's like, okay, there's that moving. Something is seeing that. Okay, there's weight here, and — okay, let's go back. I can hear it now.

The historical self doesn't go away immediately.

[Participant:] Correct.

[Russell:] It just starts to loosen.

[Participant:] That's right.

[Russell:] It gets more permeable. It gets wider, and the moment gets more. And then a great thing can often happen, is some humor can come in, because the historical self often can't laugh at itself when it's in one.

[Participant:] Well, it depends. If I'm laughing at this one, she absolutely does —

[Russell:] My wife loves when I go, oh, he's doing it again. He's stuck. He's stuck in his — you know, I want to blame you for it, but I notice I'm stuck in that place again. She loves that.

[Participant:] I would too.

[Russell:] Oh, this is so good. This is so good.

[Participant:] You got something? That humor. When we were doing the movement, and you said, I'm here. And you said — that wasn't right. But it was so right, the way you did it, because it had that humor.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. Right. That's there too.

He wants to, right? Is that a spaceman, that guy, right?

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. Room for it all.

When sitting is raw

[Russell:] Yes, Nettie.

[Participant:] Been struggling with meditation for a long time, and I thought I should bring this up, because after Barbara said that she was struggling with meditation, I thought, finally, somebody here is struggling with meditation. It's not just me.

[Russell:] Raise your hand if you're struggling with meditation, at least some of the time.

Okay, thank you. Go ahead.

[Participant:] Helpful to me.

And I find it's almost harder to meditate in this group setting than I do at home. I have a very small room, where I sit on my firm, three layers, and I'm comfortable on it. And I sit for the time that I sit, and I mostly sit for about twenty, twenty-two minutes.

And I don't know what I do when I sit there. I'm not focusing. I'm not doing anything. And it's still a struggle.

And when I listen to my breath, and I try to follow the inhale and the exhale, I get very anxious. I get a very short breath. And I thought that maybe in the group setting I would grow out of that, and it hasn't happened, after these three sessions, or now two and a half sessions. And I found no relief in the pod setting either.

So I feel that I'm kind of stuck.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah. I hear you. Stuck.

Was it different in the pod, or just the same? Was it hard in a different way?

[Participant:] No, it was the same.

[Russell:] Same, same. Okay.

So, what's that leave you? Are you frustrated with all that, or sad, or all of that, or is there anything else?

[Participant:] Frustrated.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] And sometimes I'm wondering if I'm using that as an escape, just sitting there. When I sit at home, the time seems to pass faster than it does when I sit here.

[Russell:] You probably have some way of entertaining yourself.

[Participant:] Probably.

[Russell:] Well, what do you do?

[Participant:] I hear songs in my head.

[Russell:] And maybe you do that a little less here?

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. Well, it's hard. It's hard.

There's a part of us that wants anything but being just with this. And you're facing that wall very closely. At home, the songs can help you kind of get through the night, so to speak.

[Participant:] Right.

[Russell:] And here, that's less available, and it's more raw in a certain way.

So, just want you to know, I really know what that feels like. I've felt the rawness of sitting there with the feeling of no escape, the feeling of being trapped. Yeah, I can feel that as a great claustrophobia, almost like I'm in a closet, like the walls are right here around me.

It's hard when that's there.

Well, I think — I hope, but first, I don't know. And then I'm going to give you some ideas, and then you'll let me know what's helpful or not, okay?

But it touches me, I realize. Both because I know how painful — for me, the pain of that kind of moment is the raw experience of most of my pains in life, but without the diversion of the situation.

You get what I mean? In the situation, it can be, well, I'm feeling this because of money, and I can put all the energy onto the money. Or it's because my wife's this way, and I can put it there. But here I'm just sitting. It's the same pain, in some fundamental way. But there's no other place. It's just all here.

So it touches me a lot, what you're saying. And I so feel you, and would love to help you find out that the door is not closed.

So let me see some ways.

First, let your eyes open, or close. Don't stay in one way with your eyes. Let yourself look around, and target colors, or something. But stay with it. Don't just jump, jump, jump, jump. Stay with something, and let yourself — you can even say to yourself, I'm seeing red, and let it in.

Take a breath.

Those are beautiful socks you've got. Did you make those? They're lovely.

So now I'm not even going to label all the colors, but I'm looking, and I'm letting it in. Okay, now I'm going to close my eyes for a moment, and literally say to myself — verbalize to yourself — sensing bottom on the cushion. Sensing a breath.

So let there be actually a fairly frequent noting, verbally, almost out loud. Of course you're not saying it into the air, although at home you could. But saying it, so that there is contact with something in the moment, but you're giving your mind something to do.

And see if that can bridge you. And let it be sometimes something in your body, and sometimes something around your body. And let it move.

Okay? Let's start there, and see if that opens some space in there. Okay?

And please let me know, after a couple — maybe tomorrow afternoon or something — if there's been some movement there, or if there's more needed. Okay?

[Participant:] Thank you. Thank you so much.

[Russell:] Okay, we're going to take a pause.

[Participant:] Yes. It's really, really there for me, how much I appreciate what you just shared. It helps me. So, not alone.

And my tears are about that. About, wow, I'm not alone.

But I want to just add to what you're saying, Nettie. And that is, every time I come here, there's more added on. And I'm still back there, and I feel like I'm a fuck-up because I'm still back there.

And so now we're all over the world, you know, we're all over the universe, and light is shining, and oh my God. I don't know. I know I'm intelligent enough, you know, to track this information, but I'm not sure.

I think I need the space in here, and maybe other people do as well, to slow down. And again, go back to those first weeks, those first years with you. I hear some people talk, and they're just —

I've listened to some of the phone calls, and whoa, you know. They're esoteric. They're out there. And I'm still — I don't know.

[Russell:] Yeah. Thank you.

[Participant:] So, thank you.

[Russell:] Thank you. And thank you all.

And I want to say a few things.

One, I want to say that it's all there in the very beginning. You don't need anything more than what's at the very beginning. It's all contained.

[Participant:] I don't need to be here. I'm already done with the beginning.

[Russell:] If you can maintain — yeah, you don't need to be here, and you absolutely don't need to be here. I think for a lot of us, we'll find it very helpful, but not a need.

I'm certainly not giving you something you don't already have.

But in terms of what you were saying, the emphasis on just feeling yourself sitting there and breathing is plenty.

And to teach twenty-some-odd people at the same time — it's not even a question of different levels, like somebody's more advanced and somebody's less advanced. It's different needs, different ways of processing, different skills. Certain of the things we do resonate with some people and not with others.

You're not going to resonate with every image, or every practice. But hopefully one of the reasons that you're here is, enough of what I have to bring to you resonates with you in a way that's helpful. And then you work on those, and then you kind of taste some of the others, and you see, maybe later on they're helpful, maybe not.

But you want that kind of listening. And you can ask me about it. Question. Bring it up like you're doing now, which is so very helpful.

But the two things I want to make clear. It's not a progression like better, worse, further along, less along. It's different resonances.

And to trust what's resonating, and grow on that, and still dabble in the others, because sometimes we shift, and something shifts inside. And I've had people where all of a sudden this larger perspective came.

And after twenty-five years of sitting — the first maybe five or seven years of counting breath — I went back to counting. It's not a question of this, this, this. It's layers, and this, and what's needed now.

So I encourage you also to notice — and this is a turn the light around, in a certain way — to notice the place inside that feels like the fuck-up, and to be very gentle with her, and to know that she's not just appearing here right now, around meditation, but she's been with you a long time.

And so she is coming for your care.

So I really love the resource building.

[Participant:] Yeah, beautiful. Thank you so much.

[Russell:] And we'll be doing more resource building.

You can't stand that stuff.

Let's take — we're going to do some movement before our lunch. Let's take, oh, ten to twelve minutes.

Thank you all.