Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 3, Day 5, Session 2 — 53 minutes

Summary: Standing, the group senses ground, sky, and the space in and around the body, then uses the hands to feel volume in the skull, pelvis, and limbs. A partner touch explores staying with oneself while sensing another. Russell speaks on constriction, radiance, and the boundaries that both protect and contain.

Standing

[Russell:] Let's start standing, please.

Connect to this ground. Such a helpful bodily habit, to know I'm on this spot, supported on this spot. From the ground, that upward response.

And between the earth and the sky is this center. Feel with the breath, this feeling, this shifting of our weight. Feel some connection to the center.

Right foot forward, and just the feeling of moving from center. Feeling the ground, the sky, the center.

Open into the space right around the body. Hands held. This space that is really part of our bodily living. We allow it to be this world, right?

Space above. Behind. The backspace is such an important ally.

Just include, kind of around your whole body. It can be near your body, a few inches away, or feel how far you can sense this. A real bodily sense, the radiation of your own heat.

Pause for a moment.

So there's the space right around your body. There's the boundary, this permeable boundary of the skin, semi-permeable boundary of your skin. And then there's this space within the body that, depending on how we are living, how we are feeling, that space gets contracted, where the space within the body feels quite constrained. And one can also feel quite spacious within our body.

One of the most consistent phenomena I've ever heard is when people go from feeling not so connected to more connected, or not so well to more well, invariably there's a sense of, I feel more spacious. I feel more sense of space.

I don't think I've ever experienced someone saying, I feel tighter, when they go from feeling less connected to more connected. You feel more self-containment, but they don't feel a sense of tightness. They feel a sense of spaciousness.

The skull

[Russell:] And so, just feel your skull. Put your hands on your skull. Close your eyes for a moment, and notice the boundary. Texture of hair or skin. And then projecting through the hair and skin to feeling the bone.

Like one can feel the hair, the skin, the bone, and even project deeper into the space.

I recommend using your full palm. It can change location.

Now, as you project into the space, there might be some signs of life, some tingling. It can be simply the sense of extending your attention deep to the surface. It can be helpful to have the sense of breathing towards this space. And shift your hands again.

When it's comfortable, have your hands kind of opposite each other, so you can project into the volume as you're breathing.

Shift your weight. Sometimes your hands come down. Shift your weight. Feel the volume of your skull. Movement from center.

The pelvis

[Russell:] Place your hands on either side of your pelvis, the big pelvic bone. And just think into — well, first feel the surface. Feel the cloth.

You've got probably some material that you're touching, and it has texture that you can sense, and you can know its texture. And then, in an amazing ability, you can layer your attention to come through the cloth and feel the skin.

It's remarkable.

And then you can actually come through the skin and feel there's something hard under there.

We could really bow to that ability. It's amazing.

And coming through the bone, projecting attention towards the interior. And again, every once in a while you shift weight, so you're alive in the ground. Your knees are awake. Or come up in the middle.

Shift the hands a little bit, but stay on the sides of the pelvis for now.

Can you create some kind of connection to the space between the hands? A sense of volume in your interior?

You know, the visual image is not exactly like you, but in terms of the skeletal image. So we're working with this goal, the object of attention. Why is it important for the object of attention to be interior?

Well, from my point of view, to sense the interior of the body, the space that can be there — that, as we'll do shortly, and as we did in our second week, connect breath to the space inside the body — is such a helpful ally for dealing with the sense of constriction, sense of no space, sense of pressure inside the body.

It is usually the feeling of, it's not so much space here. So much of our feeling constricted in our lives is this sense of pressure. Sometimes we feel it's pressure from the outside, but it's felt in the body as a decreasing of space, a pulling in towards the center.

And so cultivating a sense of, oh, there's variability in the spaciousness of my inner body, that my cells actually have variability. And this is literally true. The cells themselves can pull in at their membrane, can shrink the membrane.

This is not our imagination. You take any of the cells, whether we're talking about blood vessels constricting, or we're talking about muscle fibers made of cells getting less space. The molecules actually being dropped closer together. And our consciousness, this amazing ability to enter here, can allow the space to open.

[Participant:] I can't hear what you're saying. I just want to make sure — I feel uncomfortable, and I don't want my picture taken.

[Russell:] Thank you. Thank you for speaking up. But I didn't hear anything. But I got it somehow.

Can someone say something about what I said? Does anybody remember?

[Participant:] We were just talking about the cells constricting. When we constrict, it's happening on every level, including at the cellular level. So the cells themselves are where constriction is being initiated. And also how they expand when they are created.

[Russell:] Our encouragement — the encouragement of the light of our presence, our breath, our sense of when we feel safe enough — can actually invite the inner space.

And developing that as a bodily habit, a bodily practice, to realize how often we shrink from not only the space, the big space we're working with, but we shrink from our own boundary.

You know, we occupy, many of us, much less space than maybe is our birthright, or we can, or we're entitled to, or something like that.

Getting the sense of, wow, there really is an inner space that grows and contracts, and I have influence with that. That some of my feeling of spaciousness or constriction in life can be sensed and worked with from the sense of, am I allowing this life energy?

And then we begin to enter the territory where it's not only to the skin. But we actually live through this semi-permeable membrane into the space around us. And then behind that, as we've been working with, we can extend as far as we can imagine.

Out and back

[Russell:] Now, two other things there, and I want to come back to this point.

First, we have this picture of, I'm here, from the center, boundary, out, as if I am projecting out from this place. I'm here on this spot, projecting — like in the practices we do sometimes — projecting my caring into the world, thinking of others, becoming radiant.

Again, one does not have to have a belief system about our connection to others. You might experience that. You might not have that. But the idea that you can think of another being and radiate your attention towards them is knowable to you. The fact that you can sense a warmheartedness towards someone and wish them well, and that you can feel something in your body about them.

There's an interesting move that goes on. The simultaneous movement out from this center, and then the turning the light around, where it's both directions. It's out and back.

So there really is a sun that's radiating towards us. We're receiving, and we're inhaling this world. We're taking the nourishment from the plant kingdom, and we are nourishing the plant. This interaction is happening on all levels.

So this permeability of our body becomes very, very knowable and significant. That we have the space within the body. We can sense the bodily boundary, because boundaries are important. We can sense the space around the body. We can open space out into all directions, and there can be a radiant spectrum.

They are important for the totality of our embodiment.

[Participant:] The sun shines on us.

[Russell:] I wonder if our seeing the sun is giving back, and so forth.

[Participant:] Yeah. Opening out.

[Russell:] Yes, yeah. I have that sense.

I also have a sense — and again, I'm not here to give you some particular belief. That's for you to work with. But the radiance coming from the sun — it's only since the scientific revolution that we think of that as simply physical energy.

You know, that we receive this radiance from the sun, combined with this earth, gives us our food. This supports our life. We get life from what many people would call that being of the sun.

And whether you want to think of that as a living being, along with this living being, and that we are actually connected to these beings that support us, or you simply want to think of it — well, it's literally true. Without that, I'm not alive.

The golden ball

[Russell:] So let's come back to feeling. I'm here. I can sense. Let's go to the front and back.

But I want you to have this image of, like we did last time, but it grows somehow for some of us. If we can see it, we can bring it in a little bit. This feeling of the sacrum, and here, in the space between the hands. Shift your weight.

This is, again, one of — if there's an external sun, and maybe there's a sun in the center of our chest, here's another. This golden ball that radiates, that moves us.

And then you can lift a little right and left, so it's not only front and back. There's a sense of circularity. And as you're shifting your weight, letting your legs bend, letting your hands and your movement help you feel the roundness.

Figure eights can be quite wonderful to help you feel that roundness.

Space between your hands, but you're not flat. In the space, there are different volumes.

Find your sit bone on one side, pubic bone on the other, so you can think from sit bone to pubic bone. You can think across. Because those volumes — the musculature attached to your sit bone is one of our places to go into deep contraction.

Many of us chronically hold in. Pushing out and pulling in on the sphincter a bit — that's a helpful reminder.

The other side.

These bones are attachment places for the musculature, and your pressure, your gentle but clear pressure here, influences the tonus of those muscles that are attached.

Pause with your eyes closed. Feel the volume of your pelvis.

Breathe the breath down. The golden ball, sacrum, towards the floor of the pelvis, towards those sitting bones.

Upward, something with the exhale. The diaphragm comes up, and there's an energetic upness through your spine, so you're not collapsing.

Your right foot forward, forward from center. Feeling yourself really come over that front foot. Pause there. Your down, your up, your center. Something like the volumes in the interior.

[Silence 35 seconds]

Both hands, and just feel, so they're on opposite sides. The idea here is less about the stroking and more — you have the surface, but you're thinking into the volume, into the interior.

It's not so much rubbing yourself. It's just projecting attention into, I'm here, I can feel my boundary. And there's space between my hands. There's something between my hands.

And to the other leg.

Front. And whichever parts of your torso, use the back of the hand. It's often easier to use the back of the hand on the back of yourself.

Wherever you can touch easily, and have a feeling that, if not directly across from each other, there's a sense that you can use both hands to project into the volume. Feeling of space in between.

So you have a moment with the boundary. A moment with, oh, I'm here, I feel my physical body here, and I project attention into the space between.

Let the breath help you.

Any places that feel like they're constricted places, places that would love to have more space, pause there. Invite your breath. Don't try to force it or press. Just invite your consciousness to ride on the breath into that space.

Start feeling. Once you're kind of using your ground — or you tend to be there — it should sway a little bit.

With a partner

[Russell:] Find a partner.

Would you be my partner? So let me give you a sense of it. You're going to start just letting your interest, attention, care. You're not doing anything. You're not a healer. You're just present.

And through the texture of the hair and the skin and the bones, that you breathe. And if your arms get tired, you put them down. So it's not an effort.

And then you're both extending attention through the surface into the interior.

Wonderful, yes.

And you're going to do this, or maybe you'll touch three, four, five places, and then I'll signal you. The person who you're touching can ask for a place, and you'll find a way not only to touch that place. Let's say someone asked for a place between the shoulder blades. A possible place.

Then I'll try, do my best, to find an opposite place. Of course, if it was right on a breast, or if it was — I'm not going to make it uncomfortable socially. I'm going to get as close as I can, to be not only on the surface, but including the surface.

I don't want to skip out on the cloth, the skin. If there's bone there, I'd feel that, and then I feel the signs of life, the breath, and the inner movements that are going on. It's so alive in there.

And then I sense the space between my hands.

This is an attention practice, because I'm also not losing my feet. I'm not getting lost in my partner. The subtext of this — it looks like I'm touching my partner, right? The subtext of this is, I'm studying, how do I be with myself and another without losing either?

And of course, it's great when you lose one, because then you get to practice. Oh, it's easy for me to sense myself, but I kind of leave them out. Or, wow, it's really hard for me to have my breath and my feet when I'm in touch with another. How can I do that?

You get what I mean? That's the subtext of the practice.

I see that your eyes are open. Either way, my recommendation is to vary. So if you start feeling like, be connected, I'm connecting — how do I find me, them, and whatever comes, with my eyes open? Or does that take me away?

But layer it. It might be, I can't even think of opening my eyes yet, because as soon as my eyes open — but then don't bother. Just work at whatever level you can.

Main thing being, you might find that, wow, if I try to feel into the interior, I completely lose myself. Okay. You just feel the cloth, and see what you have to see. Layer it at the level that you can have some sense of self in another. Okay?

[Participant:] You want us to stay standing?

[Russell:] I would, yeah. I would encourage you to stay standing, unless someone is uncomfortable standing.

If someone is uncomfortable standing, or you can't reach, then you can sit. Okay, so if this practice is going to go on for a little while, if the standing becomes a challenge, it can be done sitting. Yes, but if you can be standing, stay standing. Okay.

So we will continue. Go ahead. I will guide you.

You're free to touch anywhere right now, and then at a certain point, I'm going to say, ask the person where they would like to be touched, and they'll get to choose one.

Always take your hands off if you need to reconnect with self. It's possible that it will be hard to sense yourself when you're touching another. That's not a problem. You can always take your hands off and reconnect.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Step away for a moment. Feel yourself. Let your arms rest.

Person who's been touched can feel the influence thus far.

Person being touched can request a place they would like to feel.

[Silence 54 seconds]

You're in this place. You can still make micro-adjustments. You don't have to stay in exactly the spot. You can shift a little here and a little there with your hand.

Both meeting in the interior. So you're not moving them. You're sensing between your hands. There might be some movements that they spontaneously have, that you're not trying to move.

[Silence 33 seconds]

You'd feel how that influences you.

You just walk a little bit. Just kind of free the space a little bit, and then we switch over.

Living in the space

[Russell:] So I just want to make a few comments. And I don't want actually a long conversation, because there's another practice we'll go into after a break. There'll certainly be space for a few comments or questions.

First, just even as you're sitting here now, notice space.

This question of space in and around is a really fertile ground. It's a fertile ground for each of our inquiries in our embodiment, in our living.

And it's not so much a progression that I go, well, first I'm going to work with the inner space, and then this space, and then that space. They all feed each other.

Sometimes — this is especially important for those of you who work with other people — sometimes the best way of working with a chronically contracted area within the body is to work with the space around that area. Actually help the person project attention. If their back is consistently hurting, include the space behind. We open out. We don't just focus in the place, because we embody space also.

Yeah, so, to experiment with that on your own. When we're eating a meal — I'm not saying to work on it when you're eating, but to notice when you're constricting from the boundaries of yourself, when you're kind of pulling in. And is that where you want to be at that time? Is that what's needed? Or is that a habit?

You know, some of us, as soon as we go to pick something up, we pull down and in. And it might feel right. It might feel possible to have more space, both in the body and around the body.

Often a quality that we associate with grace, in a dancer or in an athlete, is that the space hasn't gotten constricted, but they're living in the space that they're moving in. And we all have that. It's not for performers. It's us, when we're inhabiting the space. And that's so important for our feeling of ourselves.

So much of the inner sense of, I don't quite belong here, this isn't my home, I'm not safe, is a pulling in, not only from this space, but from this space. And when it can feel safe — and often that's a habit, a bodily habit. And we may find that, oh, I don't need that in this situation. And we start growing something else.

And then at some point, there can be this shift where we actually find, I feel safer when I'm living into not only my space, but the space around me.

And that's a real inner turn of events, when one feels at home in this larger space.

And again, it's not always a progression. Sometimes that step will happen when, for some of us, we're still working with this constricted inner space, but we can get that light turning around. And that helps us to feel safe enough, and welcome enough, here on this planet, or in this universe, or in this body. That we can — oh, it's okay to be here. It's okay to be me here.

Wonderful.

And of course, you know this, but I will say it anyway. I'm so grateful that our embodiment gives us a doorway to these different dimensions of being. An actual tangible way of working.

From our body grows this attention, and this attention includes space, and this space is part of our body, part of our living — not part of our physical, but part of our living, part of our experiential body. To be able to work with it so tangibly is something very great.

Boundaries

[Participant:] The thing you mentioned — they were spherical. And then beyond that, you suggest that we extend farther.

[Russell:] Yeah. That's right.

So, my experience — and you'll see how it is for you, and I'm not alone in this — is that there is a worthwhile distinction of the boundary of the physical body. That's helpful to know about. It's not ultimate, but it's good to distinguish, because it's permeable.

Then there's a space around our body that we live in. And if you just think of it in terms of movement, in terms of how you organize yourself in space — are you bumping into things? How are you socially? Are you too close, too far?

How we inhabit the space around our body says a lot about our interaction with the world, our sense of self, our sense of safety, our sense of vulnerability, all of that.

So as we enter this space more, and we feel, oh, I've got this here, a different quality comes.

Beyond that, as we open into this larger space, it's more subtle. It's like going from the tissue to the warmth and radiance that's happening out here. This is another level of subtlety.

In some traditions, they would talk from the physical through the astral to the etheric, but that's not my particular language. But there's something about that that's helpful.

So this larger field, again, we can work with it methodically. We can work with it tangibly, first through attention, opening out, feeling, I can extend my connectedness. Right now, you and I are connecting through this larger space. I can connect to someone through my caring attention towards them. We can connect to the beings in Africa, right?

So we can extend out our sphere of caring, and then this magical turning the light around, feeling a radiance towards this one.

And one begins to live in a field of — I call it love, because I'm comfortable with it. We can call it goodwill, warmth. And these practices, going from this deep center — we are a universe, and the central sun is here. And we are part of each other's universe.

It's so interesting that so many — I don't think I want to go there.

Yes?

[Participant:] You did talk about something you're not emphasizing. For some of us, there's a sense of being too large and spaced out. And you did already touch upon feeling contained, and boundaries. I just think that for some people, the constriction I recognize — I know that is usually often the case — but there's also the case where it's like, you're unbound.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] You're over-swollen.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And the shape is not there.

[Russell:] Right. Very, very helpful.

We need this. We need to know that boundary. These cells don't function without a membrane. This body doesn't have cohesion without skin. And so we don't want to just get amorphous. We need shape.

And we'll go a little further with boundary tomorrow, but just to drop a little hint about it.

At least two senses of boundary. We need our boundary to keep things out that are not helpful for this organism. That's why it's semi-permeable. There's a lot of stuff out there we don't want in here, right? So we don't want to be foolish. It's like what Trungpa called idiot compassion. You don't want that, welcoming of things that are not healthy for this organism. So there's a protective boundary.

But equally important is what was brought the first day, said in another language: a containing boundary. We need to be able to contain our energies, that we're not spilling over. Sharing all of our stuff, giving — that can be a spilling over that's not helpful for self or environment, for self or others.

So finding the accuracy of our own boundaries. When we won't let anything in or out, we get isolated. When there's no boundary there, we dissociate, we get lost, we get —

So it's very helpful. We'll get a little further with it. But we're already exploring, finding this space.

Okay, one more.

[Participant:] The question of the boundaries. Yesterday you were saying, when you reach out, and if you can't handle it, let it go by.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] But I got a sense today that if — not my first-level boundary, but if my second-level boundary was a little wider, I'd be more open to hearing compassionately. So I'd have a place to hold it, like holding it right here, because this is scary.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] It's really scary.

[Russell:] Really good.

[Participant:] It's not as scary. That's like creating space for that compassion.

[Russell:] Perfect. Perfect. Again, you're doing a great job of predicting tomorrow.

Yeah, talk about a space suit. That we have this territory. Because when things get in — a lot of us feel this. I know I do very much.

This was actually a very important insight for me, working yesterday with a partner, working with the senses of vulnerability, and realizing that when I'm in an unhelpful vulnerability, I'm getting kind of knifed. This is the way my body feels it. I feel like things are entering my body.

And when I have this sense of spaciousness around, the things don't land here. They land here, and I have more versatility working with them. I can respond to the world more effectively.

As soon as it gets into here, my old patterns come up, reacting. And what my body needs is more protection.

Oh, yeah. So take it in here. We feel it. It's still touching us, but it's —

Okay, let's leave that for now. We're going to take a little break. Ten minutes is good. And I want to come back and continue this exploration through movement. You'll need your blindfolds and your cushions, your pants.

Yes.