Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 3, Day 7, Session 3 — 50 minutes

Summary: Russell speaks about the gestures as a way to embody warmheartedness, and about three ways of turning the light: I am, I am here, and how am I? People ask about undeveloped places, fear of ice, a partner gesture, and dreams. He encourages sitting, focusing, staying connected, and a careful generosity in offering the work.

Gestures and warmheartedness

[Russell:] A few things I want to comment on, and in between, yours — comments or questions. I do want to do a movement lesson this morning, but we have time. One of the things we will get to are some of the ways of working in between sessions. A few comments I would like to make about that, but first I'd like to just feel the space that can come from this kind of work.

These gestures are quite — they carry a lot. Probably not everybody relates to them, but if you have some resonance with the gestures, let them be your frame. And just like the prostrations, for some of you they become a real friend. These gestures — it's surprising — instantiate in your body the qualities that we're working with. Get that living here. Sway. It can be so very supportive, so very supportive.

And that basic — oh — visioning, or orientation is better. That when there can be this larger sense of self that has these qualities, which are actually not made up. This is not only my experience. Much more developed historical teachers than myself speak about compassion or love being our very nature.

That's a whole other story that I don't want to spend a long time with. But what I'm suggesting is that this all-inclusive warmheartedness is not made up, and it can be accessed. And it takes some practice, because we have a lot of forces asking us to be living from a fear, self-protected place. And we don't want to give up the self-protected place. There's value there. We're not throwing anything out.

But as a basic orientation in our living, it becomes so much safer, actually, to live into our space, to have this sense of connectedness to life, which is not a concept. It's living out of the organism. But it takes time for our cells to get that. So it's not something we rush or push or demand, but to have physical practices and an orientation.

Oh, right, I'm all stuck in this place, and something comes awake inside, just like in the meditation, but in your everyday life. Often there'll be a physical contraction, and you're kind of tucked down, and simply the remembering of that — which you can have as turning the light around toward the ocean, or this larger being, or witnessing — or recalling that your inner life has that. And you might

find that it's more and more accessible, and not as an imaginary state, but really as something that you feel in your body.

The more we can grow that, that is one of the real fundamental conditions for our further unfolding: that we have the capacity of attention to have whatever is living in this personal self and this larger quality of being, that they can live together. I don't actually end up feeling like two things.

Three ways of turning the light

[Russell:] I so much want to encourage that turning of the light. There are three main ways I've spoken about.

One that we emphasize so much in our first two weeks, which was: I'm on this spot. I've got a ground. My ground is not just pulling me down. It includes the sense of, got a spine. I've got this center and this breathing. I'm here. I'm here. I'm not just anywhere. We're always in a particular place. We find that. And I am here.

This felt sensing quality — well, how am I? How am I? And it's not just the feeling state. We want it to enter that richness that is much more than the feelings we've been taught, or the language we've been taught to place on our feelings, and then we put them in the purse, put them in the box, and we lug that around.

But the felt sensing helps to open up that box, and it's got images and concerns, and this and that. And we learn a practice of turning the light towards that, listening to the feeling state, the felt sensing state. And even when you're not going to spend time focusing with it, just so often it's really helpful.

Well, you see, is it true? I'm posing that it's really helpful, and that your inner life is going to say thank you when you, with some regularity, say, well, how is it? Are you needing anything? Hello.

So we have — the first state is that I am state, which is that light shining, that beingness. It's often hard to start there. Sometimes if you get more and more familiar with it, you'll be able to zip right to that. But often we need to start in the middle, with I'm here on this spot. You get how that's — and from I'm here on this spot, you may then be able to go to shine. Or if there's a feeling that's pretty strong, you might just need to go into the felt sensing of, well, how am I? Gee, I'm feeling just this irritation about what they did. Oh, there's an irritation in there.

You see, even here with the felt sensing, I'm using kind of a subset of that larger space, because I'm not in the feeling state. I'm with it. So it's how the larger I am state relates to the feeling state. That's what we do during focusing, is that kind of being with. That's a kind of instancing of that larger space.

But I want to make it clear that it's not the only way we're entering that large space. It's not just about being with our felt senses, or what's going on. It's got a much more inclusive quality, a much more radiant, in all directions, quality.

So there's the I am, which has that feeling of the light turning around, a noticing of this one here. In traditional spiritual language, witnessing is often used, or the observer. I don't really love that language. But that quality of being with, and being with from a larger place. And I'm here, and how am I? That these become just part of your working vocabulary in the store.

You know, that it's just weird to you. A safe way — really hard — and a safe way. Really hard. Actually, you know, it's not. It's actually endearing. Walking down the line, sometimes I'll just say, okay, color. Because maybe I've been all spaced out and concerned about my lesson. Look at that, look at that. Feel. And then there's a tickle that goes on inside.

To grow the presencing outside of being in a situation, just like we do with our meditation practice in the morning — that you're growing a reservoir of that capacity. As a practice, that's what these movements can do. They're a practice that grow it so that when you're in your situations, you've got a bank account. You've got something to draw.

Okay, so let's see. What wants to come about all that? Just either the practices this morning, or any of what I'm talking about.

What wants to come

[Participant:] So it's pretty clear, pretty doable, pretty available. You know what I'm talking about. And I feel, as some of the things you're saying — let's see, taking it out of context, it might be something that I read or thought forty or fifty years ago.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And it flashed by. But it didn't have any support or relevance or context or whatever.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] But, you know, it really — yeah. So that's what I'm thinking. Skills. Transmitting skills.

[Russell:] Yes. Beautiful.

[Participant:] That's going, like telling how to take awareness, or light, into my situation. Not only in the difficult situation. It also brings me to those parts of my being that are undeveloped. And how it might — so this is a question now. Can I use that to help?

[Russell:] Yeah. And what you're helping me emphasize right now is, if we haven't gotten it already, how functional it is. Not only accurate and wonderful, but functional, that we cultivate this unconditional warmth.

Because when we touch those underdeveloped places, or stuck places, or places that get repetitive, the first thing that normally comes is our self-violence — our hatred of our undevelopedness in that area, and the pain that it causes. So, boy, it's why developing that compassionate heart, that loving kindness, is the first resource and the second resource, and it goes all the way through. Because when that's there, it's so much more fluid a path. It's even to bring the light — it's actually bringing it. In places where it may not be.

[Participant:] My picture of that is the same. It's like what's living in that dark place gets illuminated. So it's not actually bringing something else in. It's just turning the light on to it.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] Actually, this whole week, things have connected. But I was struggling with embodying this idea of turning the light around. And I did my last focusing session, asking for inner guidance about how to access, or how to know, or how to be with this sense of the figure. So I went in, and it was hugely helpful.

My heart was beating so fast. I won't go through my whole focusing session, but I realized at the end it was so excited. Thank you for asking. I was so happy. It wasn't happy. It was like, oh my God, I've been waiting here all this time. But it was interesting. I couldn't — I really have to befriend it. I have to be friendly to it. I think I was a little sort of, woo, it's too big, or whatever belief. But this sense of friendliness. So I could find it. I found the qualities within, interestingly enough.

And so then in the meditation today, there was a sense of familiarness. I had to make the experience a little bit smaller for myself, knowing it was much bigger. Anyway, I just want to share that, because it was a big surprise. I have some images from the focusing session that will help me ground that sense that I'm never alone, ever.

[Russell:] Yes, yes, thank you, and thank you for bringing that word friendly. That's so key there.

And I mentioned this before, but it's a great image to have, that beautiful one from Rudolf Steiner, of all these angels. The saddest thing he ever saw — I said this here, didn't I? The saddest thing he ever saw was all these angels, guardian angels, laying around, waiting to be asked.

Now, I don't see in those realms personally, but it fits, from my understanding of how hard it is for us to ask, and to open our bodies enough to be receptive to what comes. I don't think there's even a better. What fits for you — to think of it as your larger being, or another being — doesn't matter. But it's the asking, and the opening of the body. See what happens.

Walking on the ice

[Participant:] That's kind of an application question. What I'm thinking of — one of the situations in my life that really physically causes me a lot of stress and anxiety is walking on the ice. And I can see that I just get really contracted and tight.

As we were doing the exercise yesterday, about the focusing and the diffusion, I could tell that when I did this diffusion, it was more graceful, more relaxed. I cannot, however, imagine being able to do that when I'm afraid of falling. And so I'm wondering if you have any suggestions. How can I rethink this so that I can still be safe on the ice, but not in anxiety?

[Russell:] Yes. Thank you for such a practical example.

I really want to encourage you to find a place where there's some ice, and there's something you can hold on to, and that you can actually train yourself in a safe enough environment. So you begin where you're holding, so that you really know that if you lost your balance, you'd be okay. And you might have to do that numbers of times. Don't try to go fast. Give yourself plenty of time. If it feels okay, let one hand down.

Pressing down, like you did in the second — pressing down with your exhale, the opening of the twin, like the other hand, rising fingers. You make it a very gradual step, safe enough, that your inner life and your nervous system get to have the experience of: I'm on ice and I'm not holding my breath. I'm on ice and somehow this is okay.

Then, very small steps. Don't try to push it. And the part of the mind says, yeah, but that's not being really out on the earth. I know you're here, and I know you're really worried. I know you think this isn't going to work. I'm with you.

And so then you see, can I have one foot forward and one foot back, and just have this sitting above so you could grab it if you need it? So you actually take steps to educate. Can you imagine that?

It really — I know this works, because I've worked with people who've had strokes, who were afraid to let go of somebody holding over. I know if you give your nervous system small steps of success, it begins to get confident. And we want intelligent confidence, not stupid confidence, because one can slip and fall. So we want it to be doable.

The partner gesture

[Participant:] I like the practicing of opening out, whether you're near the ocean or whether it's — yeah, I like that practice.

[Russell:] Yes. And I understand that when they're separate.

[Participant:] And I don't know if it's better to practice them separately. But if you have a partner, I get lost, because when you're breathing in, there's some symbology that's really — okay. I mean, when you're exhaling, and so the ocean's exhaling goodness, basically, and the person on the other side can visualize himself as asking for help and absorbing it.

[Russell:] That one's easy. That one's easy, right.

[Participant:] So then it's two persons, right? And so the first person — this is the one I have the most trouble with — is exhaling out as they come forward. And are they symbolically sharing themselves into the larger form? Because then the ocean's on the other side, and they're exhaling out inside. Now, the individual self going forward.

[Russell:] You be the ocean, okay? Left foot forward. The individual self with the right foot forward. I am going to be back, and you be forward here. And now as I come forward, I'm inhaling.

[Participant:] You're inhaling going back.

[Russell:] Yeah, you're inhaling going back, and I'm stepping into my life. Okay? You have inhaled anything that is impeding me, anything that I'm ready to — and you are just welcoming.

And I am here, kind of like — when I do this, I have the sense almost like I'm on a precipice, and I'm looking out at the possibilities of being alive. And that image that I had the first day, that we are a universe. And it's like what I want for my daughter, and all the kids I see, to feel like: you have purpose, and your uniqueness is valued here, and go for it. Stand in your life. And it's going to be tough sometimes, but you're not alone. Your larger self, or beingness, is there with you.

And then you will exhale going forward.

[Participant:] I will exhale. And the ocean has come toward me, and I have received that. I am just acknowledging — yeah, it's great standing up in my life, but I can't do it.

[Russell:] That's great. This is about you.

[Participant:] I get a little lost here.

[Russell:] Yeah.

Dreams

[Participant:] A question of interest. The larger self — an entropic self, a larger self that knows.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] That's the same as the dreamer, or the dream. But I'm personally very interested in dream. And I know Gene — working a course with Gene. And so I wonder if this is perhaps not our work at all, but bringing that in somehow.

[Russell:] Right. Okay. So what I feel comfortable saying about that: I love what Gene does with dreams, and it's not my expertise, although I love dreams. I don't work a lot with dreams. But what I want to say is, it's not so much the dreamer, but the wisdom that can work with the dreamer and the dream.

[Participant:] You mean the dream ego?

[Russell:] No. Let's leave this for another time. It's a more personal subject. But the two of you can talk about who's the dreamer. I think we're not going to spend time right now.

Between sessions

[Russell:] Okay, so let me make a few more comments about our work in between.

You know that I recommend the sitting practice. I can't emphasize enough how valuable that is, even if you think nothing's happening. It's Suzuki Roshi's image. It's like walking through a mist. You don't know you're getting soaked. Not like a rain. It's like a mist. And you find out you're wet, and you don't know what happened. So you just do it.

And this is a place that I ask you to have some trust. Don't believe in me, or believe in the teaching, in the sense of I know this is going to — but have trust that it's worth doing regularly, to see what happens.

I record. Most of the time — every time this time, and I think most of the time in the past — I make a recording of our first sitting. So the words that I give before we sit, the invitation to bow, the words I give before we sit, and then the comments that I might make during the sitting, are there. It's usually a 30-minute sitting. And some people are using those really well for their own. It's a very helpful resource. Some people put it on their computer. Some people have a CD.

I think eventually it'd be nice to make a whole collection of those, and just be able to have those available. Because what is being emphasized in our way of sitting, what I'm bringing in our way of sitting, is not very common in terms of most sitting practices. And I'm very biased toward it. There are wonderful practices out there, but they all affect you differently.

And there's something about this, like I was talking about this morning — this emphasis more on intimacy with self. Not getting this quiet mind, or getting, but being in this warm-hearted, intimate: how can I know what's alive now and say yes to it? Or how can I welcome the part that hates being me? How can I welcome the part that wants to jump off the cushion also? That there's room for everything. And there's this attitude of, can I be intimate with life, with this living moment?

So I really want to encourage you to work with the material.

And the focusing attitude, that turning toward, like I was talking about before — that that be part of your day, numbers of times. And then I do encourage everybody to have, once a week or once

every other week, if it feels right, an actual time that's just yours. Thirty minutes, whatever, to be surprised by what's alive in there. Let it come. Or with a partner.

Let me say this. It's challenging in some ways to lead a group, because each individual has different learning styles, and different needs. So I try to structure my language so that you know that I bow to your autonomy.

And in some ways, one of the areas that I'm still learning — sometimes gaps in my own inner development, I think — is that there's an over-concern with — oh no, let me put it the opposite way — of such a great valuing of your individual freedom, that I don't push enough sometimes. I don't say, this is a really great thing to do, I recommend doing that four times a week. Until I know that you're choosing that kind of relationship with me, that you're wanting something more intentional like that.

So I want you to know that it comes out of respect. I love that about Moshe. He gave us, take this and work with yourself. And I worked with myself a lot. And there's something very precious about having some guidance, and I didn't have a lot of guidance. And the kinds of guidance I got along the way were sometimes helpful, sometimes not.

But one of the things I very much want to encourage — and it's not right for everybody's learning style — is stay connected. To at least somebody, or some pods in the group. I don't know what the conversation was like last night, but I would love it.

In Europe, there are some — sometimes it's three people, sometimes it's six — who say, hey, let's work with the Uchiyama Opening the Hand of Thought book, and let's be on the phone every other week. Some people love that kind of connecting. Some people will take one of the articles that I have as a handout and work with it together, or take one of my writings. There's some good stuff in there, some stuff that's really germane to what we're doing. That's where it comes from.

And it's hard to work with it just by yourself, and something really comes when you have a conversation with one other person, three other people, whatever. So I really encourage, as much as it is helpful for your learning style, to have that.

I know when we're all out in our life, we feel way too busy, and it feels like a burden. I don't want another something in my book. It's too much. But the kinds of connectedness you feel right now — there's going to be a losing of that. It's likely that you will feel more isolated. And there's a naturalness to that, but there's also so much that can happen in relationship to each other. I want to just encourage that a lot.

As you know, and some people choose to do this, I am available for your communications. Some people just like to keep me informed as to how their practice is going. I'm very happy to read. Sometime, if I know you want a response, I usually let you know that I got it. If I know that you're wanting some guidance, I'll give you that. But if it's just to know that I've read it and that I take it in, I work with that. That's part of my practice.

Offering the work

[Russell:] Let's get your questions and comments. There's one last subject I'm going to need to get to, but I don't want to do it right now. So go ahead, if there's anything that you're wanting to either question about or bring up.

[Participant:] You talking to me?

[Russell:] No, no. I'm to the group.

[Participant:] Is the next subject maybe covering this? It's just in relation to what I raised yesterday, I think, about the future of the work. Kind of wanting to really explore how to begin to use the work.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And I began to do some of that in Warsaw, with the APFI that I was doing. And I found it made a difference. I mean, they found it made a difference, significantly.

[Russell:] Yes. So people ask me, can I offer a sitting group now, or can I teach some of the Embodied Life work like that? For me, it's always individual. Where are you, and what are you wanting to do? What's your situation?

I've been in situations where people are around people who are asking. And if the world is asking, can you show me how to — you don't have to be a meditation teacher to be able to give people a setting and a basic form. It's helpful, if you're uncertain about it, to ask me, to send me something, if you're uncertain about what to bring, how to bring, and then we can interact around it.

These are gifts that some individuals can use, at the right times. So I like to make this work generously available, and to recognize our limitations, both sides. I like to be in conversation with you about what you're thinking of offering, what the environment is like that you're in.

Because I've got some people, like in Europe, like these Zen monks who did the program. They're starting to teach meditation outside of the Zen center, more in this form, which is Zen-like, but a little bit different emphasis. And so they're clearly ready to do that. One of them is ready to also add some movement to it. The other one really hasn't put in his time on the floor enough, in my opinion, so now he's working on that. So we navigate this territory together.

There are no — if you pay attention to the board, there are some good conversations going on, usually inspired from Europe, of people who are bringing some resource work into their — some people are doing half-day workshops. Some of this is on the graduate board, so you don't get to see that, but some of it's on the everybody board. I guess it is more on the graduate board. There are threads like that. Bringing it into the world.

So for example, when somebody's doing a half-day workshop, they'll often send me some of their ideas. I'll feedback something. I don't organize it for them, but I give them my impressions, my feedback, what I think works better before something else or after something else, or I'll ask them why they think that would be a good thing to do. So we have some interaction around it. Because that's something I've done a lot, and you're going to do it in different ways, but there's a benefit to having my experience as part of yours.

[Participant:] Because there was just another dimension that I was curious about. I appreciate we have to kind of define this around ourselves and our environment, because of changing environments, and therefore being in more of a project mentality. I was also just curious — and if there isn't an answer to this, that's fine. I was curious as to whether, just in your being out there in the world teaching this, where you're seeing little kind of opportunities for where a project that relates to this work would just be perfect. I was kind of curious to hear what you're imagining, too, about

where you feel there are tangible opportunities for things to think about, in terms of building a repertoire and ideas.

[Russell:] Yeah. I'm not sure. What I know is, what's out there right now are Feldenkrais people widening their practice to include resource work, to include sitting groups. So that's one element that's out. Then there are a few people who are, in their either university or business environments, offering a sitting in this form. And a couple of them are also offering themselves for this kind of listening attitude. They don't actually call it teaching focusing, but teaching this way of listening to yourself. And that's very —

So there's a variety out there, but I don't have a particular picture of that.

[Participant:] Maybe you'll address that. But part of me is saying, this Embodied Life program is one that's very dependent on you. If you're not here, it doesn't happen. And I feel grateful that I've connected to the work, but I'm thinking, my kids may never get that opportunity. They wouldn't do that. I don't know if you're looking at a future. I don't know whether that's the topic we should look at.

[Russell:] Yeah, that's great. I would invite some communication about that. That's a subject we have.

I've got — there was one or two other programs that have had really great teachers. And during the course of the program, programs start shifting, organizing what will happen later, and the program time gets used up talking about how to extend. That's really — although I think it's important to introduce here, I think the depth of the discussion would be out of here.

[Participant:] Absolutely. I agree with that.

[Russell:] What I can say is, I don't know how to do it, and I'm learning, and my students are teaching me. I would say it's not my strong suit. I have a pretty big vision of what's possible here, but because of the sincerity of some of the graduates of the program, they're helping me.

There are numbers of people who are redoing the Embodied Life program, because in six weeks you can't get this whole thing. Some people just because they want it for their life, but some people because they want to be teaching the work, and they want to be in the room at a different level, so to speak. And so there are a couple, especially in Europe, who are going to the next level. In the group, they're doing — I'm still teaching the whole thing, but they're doing some guided listening on the side, or they're doing some conference call leading. So they're beginning to get their feet wet in that. So I see that happening over time.

[Participant:] Almost like a graduate.

[Russell:] Something like that. There is a graduate program in the sense that I always do one week in Europe and one week in the US for graduates. But within that, there's a particular stream that are wanting to go further with the teaching. Let's just leave it at that.

Okay, that's enough.

[Participant:] I'd like some focusing contact with people. And the groups — if anybody's interested, not on a weekly basis, but in having an occasional focusing phone session, let me know.

[Russell:] Beautiful. Are you raising your hand? Great. So connect with each other at a break, and create some contacts. Anything else want to come up in this vein right now?

Sensory stream of consciousness

[Participant:] Yes. We have a quick one, and this may use our flexibility, but is there a name for the exercise that we did, where we had three parts of our body, and then we saw something — we didn't name it, but we saw the shape and the color of it. We brought it into us. And then, is that a blanket?

[Russell:] Wait, okay, so let me get which practice you're talking about. With three — can you help me?

[Participant:] No, I recall that.

[Russell:] I'm sure there's something that you're remembering here. It's just I'm not remembering.

[Participant:] That's fine. When we were sitting —

[Russell:] Was it when we were sitting? Were you meditating?

[Participant:] No, it wasn't. We were standing up. And we were doing that, and we were in a triad. And the idea was to — I think we first talked aloud. And then there was maybe heartbeat.

[Russell:] Okay, yeah. Sensing, and then stopping and describing. Right. So we have done, and will continue doing, what I call sensory stream of consciousness. And it's an important practice for us. We'll do it almost every time. We hear a different style of sensory stream of consciousness, growing that capacity for a mobile attention, and a deepening of our capacity just to be with the basic phenomena of life, and feel into its richness.

What we get first is just the surface, but if we stay with it a little longer, it opens. And if we're with other people, we will learn from what opens in them, and our vocabulary and our capacity to sense gets enriched. And it's an important part of our work. It's part of the guided inquiry element of our work.

[Participant:] So when you say other people, do you mean other people within the program, or other people outside?

[Russell:] I'm thinking right now within the program.

[Participant:] You said that you had read the Richie Davidson book, which I had read by the June segment, and asked you if you had seen that one single page that I recalled. It sounded just like Embodied Life to me. And that he was essentially saying, this is the new. He provides a lot of great neurological evidence for what we do. And therefore, to me, when we're thinking about where is this going, how can we know? Because it literally is this — pretty much that absolute foundation.