Talk

Angela 2 — Week 4, Day 3, Session 2 — 95 minutes

Summary: Russell teaches attention as a magical movement that gives birth to the world we experience. He distinguishes directed, open, and habitual attention, and offers three steps toward freedom: responsibility for attention, grounding in the body, and questioning thought. The group practices shifting between inner and outer, then holding ground while perceiving the world.

On this spot

[Russell:] Let's take a moment to drop down to the reality of your bodily experience, that you're here, you're on this spot.

You can sense the contact, the texture of the surface you're on.

Feel something about the temperature, maybe in your hands or feet or your face.

And you can shift attention to include the world around you. Sound, and other people, and space, extending attention out from your body.

It's a mapping of the world around us, mapping internally.

And just reflect for a moment on the movements of your attention during our meditation this morning.

Any discoveries, surprises, confusions?

Keeping your eyes open. Feel how you can be connected visually to the world and have yourself on this spot, connected to what's living inside, what feels to be you.

Can that be here, and there's some cognizance of the world around?

Attention is magic

[Russell:] This is a major subject for us. All through our course, but particularly this week — we talked about it some last week — this movement of attention.

For me, that's the most important movement that we have, that we can direct.

And it's actually magic. Attention is magic.

I think most of us forget that. But for me, attention is absolutely magical, because the world we attend to is the world we experience. We give birth to a world. We call it out of its nascent state, out of its background, and it comes forward.

It is godlike. Our attention is godlike. We give birth. What we attend to comes forward. It's remarkable.

And equally remarkable is how little guidance we're given in how to be magicians, and how to grow worlds we want to live in, and how to stop creating worlds that increase suffering.

So first, let's just reflect together on observations from your sitting. What did you notice in terms of shifting attention?

One distinction we were making is having it be more directed, or more open. Does it make sense? Can you follow that?

[Participant:] Yeah. Actually, it would be helpful for me if you went through that again, because maybe I was a little bit sleepy. But I got the directed one. The open one wasn't as clear to me. How I was open, or what posture I needed to be in.

[Russell:] Yes, yes.

So what you're saying is, in the nature of directed and open attention, the part of the mind that wants to make these distinctions — that we need, to make these distinctions — is much more familiar with directed attention, and has much less vocabulary, and way of identifying.

The part of the mind we use to communicate in words, at this kind of understanding — the other is going on behind the surface, so I'm always speaking to that also. But the distinction you're looking for is an essential one.

How do we divide things up so I understand this as different from this? Well, that is a direction. That is directed attention. That is a predominantly left hemispheric function.

So I want to say a couple of things. It's essential that we understand things in that way. It's also limited. And if we place truth in that way of knowing, we will take what is vast and open and confine it much more than it needs to be confined.

So we want to use that part of knowing to help navigate, but not to confine.

Three ways of attending

[Russell:] Open has the feeling of — well, let me back up again.

The open attention is the dominant orientation of the attention that I teach. And there are lots of reasons for that, and that's maybe a good conversation later.

The directed attention is also very important, for the open attention not to just become spacey, not to just become lost in the habit mind.

So we can say that there's directed attention, there's open attention, and there's just habitual attention, habitual processing.

What most people think of when they think of meditation is to use the directed attention so you're not lost in the habitual thinking, right? So we give ourselves something to focus on — a candle, a mantra, a breath — and it's very helpful. It's a good thing.

The implicit difficulty, or trap, of that kind of meditation is that it tends to solidify a person who thinks they're meditating, and later that becomes a problem.

So at first — solidify. What I mean is, there grows a meditator who becomes a good meditator or a bad meditator, who develops a style of meditation that is better than other styles of meditation,

and it forms an identity just as solid as being identified with one's bank account, or being identified as a father, or being identified in any other way, with my body.

Those identifications eventually bite us. They limit us, and they actually trap us. And one of the most difficult identifications to get out of is spiritual identification. It's what I observe.

And this leads — I hope I'm not being confusing right now. It's not just that it becomes habitual. That's one element.

There is the part of the human being that wants to be in control of life. There's a part of us, in every one of us, that desperately, in our DNA, wants to control things. We see it in our relationships. We see it in our approach to our own minds. We see it in the world.

So that part of the mind creates maps of other people, maps of the world, that fixate. It gets them so known that I'm not going to be shocked or surprised. That's why the most difficult people for you to cultivate new behavior around are the people who know you the best. Because they want you in the boxes as much as they want you to be free. And it's a real conflict. And that's true of us in ourselves.

Conservation and growth

[Russell:] There is such a strong impulse in the human brain towards conservation. Conservativeness means keep things the same.

The fundamental program being: my program is to stay alive. I am alive, so what I'm doing is working. The fundamental prime directive of the organism is keep going, stay alive. So from that point of view, there's a strong bias towards sameness.

Now, there's also this incredible urge within the human being towards growth. And these forces run into each other. It's the old story of the unstoppable force and the immovable object. This is working inside of us — this deep longing for creative possibilities, to live into those possibilities, and this deep place that says, no, I can manage this much. And we're navigating those forces all the time.

So it's part of what makes habits so difficult to change, even habits that are not life-giving. There's order.

And Feldenkrais's definition of the brain was to create order out of chaos. That was its prime function.

So — okay, this is — boy, we're going to go wide here, I think. Let's see if this can not live just in our heads. Bring it down.

We cultivate a default position of where we place the I, based in our history. That's where we return to, that default place, with those thought patterns, that way it feels to be you.

And to be fresh in our experience requires being able to see the default pattern, and not be controlled by it when it's not in touch with the present reality.

Three steps toward freedom

[Russell:] So we're going to say there are three steps here that I'm talking about.

One is: if we don't develop some mastery of our attention, we will be locked into the world that we created. We will repeat our perceptions, and we'll be able to add to them, so we can have some sense of newness. But it's within — it's like the old image was, decorating your prison cell with new furniture.

So you're in the same territory. You're kind of shifting things around, you're adding new furniture in, but you're not getting out of that box that you've put yourself in.

So the first thing is, how can I begin to attend differently to my life?

Taking responsibility for our own attention, and how our attention creates our experience.

For that to be really fresh, it needs to be grounded in the body. That's why this work is embodied life. Not because we worship the body, but because it's a doorway to presence, which is the doorway to the creative moment, the moment where you can step out of historical identity.

And so the first thing is to take responsibility for the attention — how we're attending, what we're attending to.

The second step is to ground ourselves in our bodily experience.

The third step is to hold lightly, or be willing to question, the thought structures that appear.

Normally, in our default mode, the assumption is that our thoughts are true. In our default mode, we believe what our mind says.

In presence, we can question it. That's why we need our bodily state to enter presence, so we can say: is that thought that I'm stupid — is that a helpful thought right now? Is it a true thought? Is that accurate?

Is that thought that if people really knew me, I would be banished — whatever some of the thoughts are — or is the thought that I'm superior to everybody, and I'm smarter, and all? We can't question that when we're in that. And the default mode takes all that as true, as its ground assumption.

So how can we begin to actually question the things that we've been thinking for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years? How can we do that?

Well, come into presence, and then this amazing capacity of attention — for attention to turn toward the one who's attending.

This is the beginning of awareness. When attention turns toward the perceiver, toward the one who's here, and says, hello there. Is that true?

Okay, sense yourself. You're here right now. Is that — okay, let's hold it lightly. This is a hypothesis about yourself, or a hypothesis about life, or a hypothesis about your wife or your husband, or whatever.

Is that a helpful hypothesis for this moment? And one can then examine it, as opposed to being led by it.

So this — we're really talking about the ground state of human freedom. The possibility that we are not bound to our conditioning. That's what we're exploring here. Awareness is the essential ingredient of the possibility of freedom.

Those are big words. But freedom is a joke if we are bound to our conditioning.

Taste it now

[Russell:] So let's pause there for a second, because this is quite a big subject. It could easily be just a very abstract philosophical subject, and I really want to see, can we ground this in our experience?

Can we sit here right now, and be embodied thinkers? Meaning we're here, and kind of tasting freshly. Not believing what is being said, not disbelieving it, not fighting it, not agreeing with it, but can we actually kind of bite into it and step forward and say, whoa — what do I get about this?

Do I know what he means by this default place that I kind of fall back to when I'm not awake in myself?

Is there some relationship of the attention to that?

How is that state helpful? When is it helpful?

This turning the light around, towards this perceiver, this liver.

[Silence 37 seconds]

[Russell:] What happens when I shift how I attend, and what I attend to?

Is grounding in this body really so important?

What does it mean to hold thoughts, opinions, preferences, even feeling states — to hold them with curiosity, and with some sense of a warm-hearted questioning of their truth, or their helpfulness?

So I need to hear something about how all this is landing right now.

Yes, please.

[Participant:] What I get is that practice is a way to avoid the trap of the thoughts. The trap of the thoughts, of thinking.

[Russell:] Say it again. Say it again.

[Participant:] Practice, practice, practice. It's not a thought. It's a practice. And the practice is the way through, to escape staying there, staying in the self.

[Russell:] Right, yes. Staying in the — yeah. The only thing I'd want to add to that is, from the practice we can then have what I would call embodied thinking, or awake thinking.

We're not getting rid of thinking. We are bringing a presence to the thinking, so that those functions are connected to the living moment.

Yes.

[Participant:] When we observe our thoughts, and by observing our thoughts and identifying those which are habitual to us, by doing that, we open up to the possibility of something fresh and new.

[Russell:] Yeah. See, that's one of the key parts of what I'm speaking to. Thank you.

And that's one way the practice allows you to cultivate a curiosity that goes with the awareness. Because sometimes I'll find myself saying something and I'll think, oh, I don't think I believe that anymore.

[Participant:] Yeah. Oh.

[Russell:] Those are great moments.

[Participant:] And also the curiosity and the kindness, so you don't get hooked into, oh, you know. You go, oh, that's interesting. I wonder what's there instead. It takes you. It is a doorway, that curiosity, the kindness.

[Russell:] Yes, yes. So we see how key those qualities are. The curiosity, the kindness, the turning of the attention back toward the one.

That's what we do in every movement lesson, with warm-hearted attention. We're turning the attention to here. We're doing that in our meditation, in our dialogues, the focusing, our body listening. We're practicing this way of —

And the intention, the hope, is that we find ourselves sitting at the dinner table with people, and sometimes pausing. And my experience is that people love it when the moment comes alive, mostly, in that way — where I'm actually questioning what I'm saying. I'm not questioning them as much as questioning: that's new for me. Wait a second.

So we're moving through that fairly rapidly.

A continuum

[Participant:] When we were in the practice, you were saying, bring focus to — you said focus, or remove its resolution. Both. I use both. And then you would say, and then soften, right?

Now, in the directed practice, that's easy to do. In the open practice — at the risk of sounding ridiculous — I don't know what the practice is yet, to know whether to focus it or soften it. Because I don't know if I'm focusing on being open, which is a directed approach.

[Russell:] Yeah. Okay. Good, good, good.

So let me get back to there, and then we'll need to leave there, and then go back to there again. I have to do it in layers.

It's a continuum. It's not directed, open. It's a continuum. There's more directed, there's more open.

Open still has, most of the time, some sense — at least an orientation toward the present moment — which is a subtle kind of directing.

So the strong direction could be: okay, count each breath, and feel it right here. That could be a strong direction.

Now, most people, when they direct their attention, tend to focus precisely. It's also possible to direct your attention in softer ways, but still it's on the breath, and counting.

In the open arena, most people, when they're more open, tend to do that in a softer way.

But it's very helpful when we can have — like right now, you can be listening, and even looking at me, with a sense that the background can also be there. The eyes can soften, and you're receiving

the words, but you're receiving them not trying to get it too precise, in a kind of more open, spacious way.

Okay, so we have this open feeling of receiving what he's saying.

Now, one could have this open attention, and have the whole field be quite a sharper resolution. Clear and bright, but not just on my words.

This is trickier. To have the whole experience, instead of diffuse, actually be like the lights were turned on all over your experience, and the words are there also.

Now that's a crossing of less habitual mind states, or attentional states. But those crossings are really helpful for creativity, for growing new moments of experience.

To be able to be — okay, so I'm going to lay out all these distinctions a little later. Right now we need to cultivate this whole field, and then I'll get more specificity for you.

Go ahead.

[Participant:] When you are in directed mode, you're more prone to be coming out of your classic self.

[Russell:] There's a tendency in that direction, yeah.

[Participant:] Moving on this continuum to the open mode, it's like the example you gave, that I can listen to you but see the larger you. And so it's like listening to you with my head, but our souls are connected. Our spirits are connected. And so I'm seeing you as a much broader entity.

[Russell:] That's right.

[Participant:] So on that continuum, I'm shifting more from the head to more of the body, mind, soul. It becomes a larger environment for the meditation.

[Russell:] Yes. Absolutely.

And for being with people, even being in a business meeting or whatever, one will get different kinds of information according to the way one is attending. To shift the level of focus — that it's not always narrow, sharp, and clear, but sometimes more spacious and open. You get access. Different parts of you are receiving the communication. Your intuition can come alive.

[Participant:] Watching somebody across the table, talking to you, your mind has to function on that continuum, because you're trying to read what they're really saying. Hearing these words, really trying to connect. So you're holding this. Balance it.

[Russell:] Right.

And just so that we don't bias things: someone could be in a very open, spacious space, and what they need to do is narrow it more, to get more of the information to feed their system. They're missing out on some of the information, perhaps.

So we're not saying that the more focused is always more heady, and that this is better in some way. This can be missing out on just as much.

So we're looking for that variability of attention, and even to cross things, where one could be in a directed, more narrowed state, but in a soft way, and one could be in a softer state, but in a more focused way.

And to begin to recognize our dominant default states of attention. Every one of us, when we go to meditate, we begin in our default place, the one we're familiar with. And to push that around a little bit, to kind of play with it, to make it a little less this or that, is very helpful for the inner life — to diversify, and to have new experience.

And if we practice it on the cushion, we can extend that into our life.

The first distinction

[Russell:] Okay, so let's do one practice now.

Yeah, I think this — let's get together into groups of three. Groups of three, and if I participate, we'll be exactly groups of three.

Okay, so get together in groups of three, and let's use the whole room. We'll do a practice that is familiar to you, but we'll do it in another way.

So let me have your attention, please.

We're going to do a practice working with what I would call the primary, or first, attentional distinction that organisms make as consciousness grows. It's making the distinction between the internal world and the external world, that we begin to map out a boundary.

And that boundary is essential. To have a clear boundary, and then also to be able to become, as you all know, permeable in that boundary, and to have moments where the boundary is completely absent. Those are very special, particular moments. But different levels of permeability to the boundary.

What I'd like to experiment with is a stream, like we've done before, a stream of consciousness around our bodily sense. This time it'll be similar to something we did with the blindfold, where the person speaking will take, oh, ten, twenty, thirty, forty seconds — some not too long, not too short period — describing some inner sensations. Inner bodily feeling, proprioceptive, kinesthetic, something going on in the body. Temperature, pressures, weights. Being as precise as you can.

You want to help grow your vocabulary for sensing. So as much as you can, when you have a word that's kind of general, stay with the sensation and see if more will come.

Listeners, you are in the same area. Not trying to have the same experience, but seeing what you sense in there. What would you say about that area?

So a person speaking, after ten, twenty, thirty, forty seconds of being inner, begins to open attention outward. You're describing sounds. Have your eyes open, seeing.

In your seeing, as much as you can, it's less "I see a shirt," and it's more: there's green, and there are these folds, and I see where the green meets the beige. So less the labels — shirt, or skin — and more, what are the sensations I'm seeing? Colors, the shapes. As much as you can.

So when you find you're speaking in terms of labels, keep letting it unfold. Keep going, thin slicing it into what it actually is that's being perceived.

You get how that's similar to — I could say, this is not true, but I'll say it for right now: I have a pain in my right shoulder. That's what I would call a label. And then I could go, okay, there's a place about an inch in from the top bone of my arm, and it goes about a quarter inch deep, and it's kind of cold, and it's a kind of piercing feeling. Those are the descriptions of what is being experienced.

You get what I'm saying? We want to move from label to experience.

In our life generally, that's so very helpful. In our conversations with each other, in talking about other people, to move from the shorthand labels — kind of our diagnoses of their problems — into the behaviors, and what we're seeing, what we're noticing.

It means being in the experience, not in the thought about it. Is that clear? How the labels are the step removed.

As we can come through the label, we can come toward what is. We can open the box up and see, what am I actually experiencing? What is that, really?

So what we're going to do here is, you'll take ten, twenty, thirty, forty seconds to be with stuff in the outside world. That can include extending attention outside, behind you, above you. It can include what you see, what you hear, what you smell, any sense of the air around you.

And then you'll go back, ten, twenty, thirty, forty seconds, inside.

I want you to find how you can make the shift, and how you can go not just on the surface, but go deep inside fairly quickly, and then be able to come out and be in the outer world fairly quickly, and not just on the surface of it. Go into it, then be able to return.

So we're cultivating a particular movement of attention that is very, very liberating for our lives. It's a natural movement. You're making it much of the time. But for most people, when they're in the outer, when they're busy doing stuff, they lose touch with the inner world. And then they go to meditate, they're in their inner world, they lose touch with the outer world.

And we want this fluidity, until we begin having both alive together.

Okay? So, please.

Your nervous system, almost since the beginning — when you first exited, actually, it begins clarifying itself. It begins creating maps of the world, maps of the beginnings of a sense. It's just the very beginnings at birth, and it takes a while to develop, of a me, not me.

That's the boundary of self. The me, not me.

Your brain also begins to develop a map of an inner world. So there's this outer and inner that is a very important distinction to be able to make.

People who don't make that distinction well are generally not enlightened. They're generally psychotic or dysfunctional. We need to be able to have a sense of: I end here, this is you, this is me, this is my chair. So there's a sense of the boundary.

But once we have that fairly functional, we want to be able to deconstruct the sense of self in healthy ways. So that it's a malleable sense of self, stronger in some situations, less strong in others. That it has a continuity with the environment. That we get much more fluid in our living that way.

That make sense?

So what's great about this is you get to actually practice that, not just read about it. You get to practice.

Decide who is one, two, three, without speaking.

And listeners — if the person is seeing something, you can look at the same thing. If it's awkward, you don't have to. You can look at something else. But if you can see what they're looking at, or if you have access to their sounds, you can be on the same subject.

[Participant:] How is the time?

[Russell:] Okay, thank you. So, how is the time? I'm going to get my bowl. I'm the only person who has to think about time, so no one person is going to have to speak longer than an hour.

Okay. When you're ready, please begin.

One second. It's about ten, twenty, thirty, forty seconds in. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty seconds out.

No, no. The second person doesn't go until I ring the bell. You keep going in and out. Sorry, I was not clear.

So, one person is speaking, and they are experimenting with their attention. My recommendation is to vary the length of time. So maybe at first, go a little bit longer, so you're going a little deeper in, a little deeper out, a little deeper in, a little deeper out. Then let it get a little quicker, where you're moving from sensing the right foot on the floor, to observing black and white stripes.

Yeah? Okay?

[Participant:] Do you recommend eyes open or closed when we're going in?

[Russell:] Probably closed, to start. And then as you proceed, see if you can keep your eyes open, doing both.

Other questions?

Okay, you ready? Have a ball.

Rounds of sensing

[Participant:] Okay, so I'm sensing some weight of my body on the chair, and trying to focus on feeling where the weight is. It's a little bit centered on the sit bones, and it feels heavy. This feels very heavy.

But I'm focused also on this blue mass that's right in front of me. Now it has a kind of orange head on it, and it's very distracting, because it's white and colorful, and I respond to bright and colorful. At the same time I have this feeling in my left foot, and the feeling in my left foot is a non-feeling. It's not pervasive. There is not a whole feeling to this experience of the foot. There's the ability to feel around the toe pads and to feel the heel, but there's a void between those two. It's almost wholly distracting, trying to measure. I feel how much that changes, day to day.

But at the same time, I'm holding this pink thing.

[Russell:] Pause for a moment. Pause. Settle.

And, speaker, let yourself be at a pace where you can feel that you are being revealed to yourself. Meaning that your words are not so much reporting to your partners, as much as you're in your experience, and simultaneously, from in there, speaking out.

So: sensing, right hand, hand down, tongue moving, lips, cool air, sound, a sighing sound.

So the words are in touch with the experience as much as possible, in the moment of arising.

Continue.

[Participant:] Sorry. Thanks.

Inside, I'm kind of feeling a tiredness in my back. The tiredness is from holding the back straight, and so the tiredness kind of comes around from the center of the back. It contributes, probably, to that sense of heaviness.

But at the same time, there's this pink object. Visual. Taken too quickly to blend with the blue.

It's hard for me to let go of the internal experience as I go to the outer experience.

There's a coolness I feel on my legs. An ice coolness, like a breeze. It creates a cool feeling on the inside, and complements how my feet are sitting on the floor.

Shifting to the outside.

[Russell:] Just pause for a moment. Just sensing. Breathing.

And the second person, continue.

[Participant:] Noticing when I'm sitting more on my right side. More on my right.

Noticing some little tension in the back of my legs. Again, it's quite visual. Like I can see vertical lines, a little grayish, darkish.

Noticing the grain of the timber of the door, the curliness of the grain, the wave of it. My eyes are dropping as I notice it. The brightness of the color, changing to dark and light, down the floor. My eyes are caught by the purple knitted shawl.

Coming inside, noticing a rocking, or soothing somehow. An expansive peace. It allows everything still.

Sandy color, blue. I'm hearing the sounds around.

[Russell:] When the third person is ready, they can begin.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:] There's one more step here, if you want to stretch or stand up. Does anybody need a bathroom break, or are we okay? Can we go another ten minutes?

[Participant:] I would like to.

[Russell:] Great. If you need a stretch or anything, just thirty seconds.

Okay, let's come back.

So now we'll be cultivating a sense of opening the field, where the foreground and the background can be there together.

There's a feeling of moving back and forth between the inner and the outer, but feeling the right foot, and seeing the scratching of fingers on the head, and the foot is still there.

So there's a kind of lingering from the bodily. Feeling the movement forward, and the hands lift. There might be a few things described — the weight shifting, and hands lifting, and the purple knitting, the lavender, and the hand going around shaping it, and seeing the ground, and fingers, and sensing the ground under the left foot, and hand touching leg, and fingers lightly moving.

So you're going in and out. But you're noticing: can there be some — not so much holding on to the other, but it's kind of like when a sound is still in the air. It's in the background, but you're bringing your attention toward something else.

So, especially noticing: can there be some sense of your body in the background when you're attending to the world around you?

You might need to go a little slow, so as to see. Looking at the blinking, and feeling the hands in the air, and sensing the bottom moving, and the periphery. Someone looking this way. The bottom's still there. So now we're connecting.

Practice.

Okay, so same order. It'll be a little shorter. When you're ready, please begin.

[Participant:] I'm feeling a thickness in this part of my leg right now. I think it's probably from not moving it too much, and so I'm just kind of hanging there with the same feeling.

Looking at that exercise mat over there, which is calling to me to get on it. Moving my leg now — it feels good. It feels good to move my foot.

At the same time I can get the feel of the carpet, because I'm moving against it, and so there's a tactile sensation that I can feel at the same time as I'm doing the movement.

And I'd like to kind of hold that, if I can, sitting at the same time. Looking at, kind of exploring that picture. I didn't see it last time. A photo which has probably been in here forever, but I don't know that I've ever noticed it.

[Russell:] Next person.

Remember, it's for you to be drinking in your experience. It's not so much that you're reporting it to the others. They happen to be eavesdropping on you deepening into your own experience.

Ready. Begin.

[Participant:] Noticing this desire to continue this slight pelvic clock here. It is keeping me mobile, sensitive, and open.

And noticing — again, I'm drawn to this subtly, brightly colored, woolen pile of a shawl. It's giving me so much pleasure. I'm still aware of this movement over the sit bones, enjoying the richness of its joy, and noticing the light as if it was a thing with us.

A sensation in my chest.

[Russell:] One last one. Sorry, I forgot this one. One last one. It's short, don't worry.

And this is the next step, which is: you are specifically connecting to a ground sensation. Your bottom, your feet, and any other way your legs feel ground.

You speak a ground sensation, and you let that sensation continue as you take in something in the world around.

So you identify a ground sensation. Then, even as you see the nodding of a person, you're also intentionally feeling your bottom. Your attention has both at the same time.

You start sensing the bottom, and you don't have to speak it each time. So now I've said "my bottom," and the implicit is that that's continuing as I'm noticing the nodding. And if I lose my bottom, then I want to do something to find it again.

Okay, so we're literally practicing having ground and perceiving the world in the same moment.

[Participant:] Speak, and the sound?

[Russell:] Yes. You speak the ground, and then you're not going to say, "ground, smile, ground" — implicitly. You can, I guess. I don't have to say you can't do that. But what I'm looking for is that you identify, verbally, a ground sensation.

And of course, when I say identify verbally, I don't mean the usual language, where you come out of your experience to speak about your experience. I'm talking about a different way of embodying language, where you're feeling your bottom as you're describing sensing the bottom. I'm not coming into my head to remember that I had the bottom a couple of seconds ago. I'm in my bottom, speaking my bottom, and seeing the finger on the lip.

And if I lose that, then I want to take my time. Because as you grow this, this becomes such an ally for living this work in your life. You begin to find it's unusual that you don't have your ground. And that's an amazing reversal of most of our experience.

So we want to practice: there's ground, and something continues as I see the fingers and the lips.

Enjoy yourself.

[Participant:] Well, I'm certainly conscious of where I'm sitting, and I'm very conscious of the sit bones and the lower back. Hardness, and all of that. So I just kind of hold that all the time. I don't tend to look at the movement of the people, like your examples.

I'm looking at that bouquet of flowers, and I'm fascinated by the fact that the flowers are kind of grounded in this vase, as you're talking about being grounded. And these stems are reaching down, and they're green and yellow, just like my bottom's reaching down at the same time.

And then I can look at the openness of the flowers at the top, just seeing how much they open. Maybe this is my head working, and not my mind.

And I hold the bottom of the flowers in the vase, at the same time being open to what's happening up on the top. So it's an interesting metaphor, to try and keep that balance going. I'm holding the bottom and looking at the top and saying, how does this reflect life in general?

And of course, at the same time, I can now see you both, moving and smiling. So I can hold that. I can hold where I am physically.

Just sensation. It's a little uncomfortable after a while, but I can hold that while I'm listening.

[Russell:] Second person.

[Participant:] A kind of discovery, or rediscovery, of being grounded in this more adult form.

I feel the ground under my feet in the form of, I guess, concrete under the carpet. And I'm feeling the carpet as a surface, to a felt sense of the ground below.

Feeling my feet needing to gently push into it, which also enables the grounding of my sit bones. This kind of skeletal connection from the ground up.

And again I'm drawn — as I'm just feeling this gentle mushing into the ground, and going up — also just drawn to watch the curves of the grain in the wood again.

And just noticing that I can experience the beauty of that at the same time as feeling the ground coming up through, into my skin.

I can feel this pull of the eyes down to that shawl again. And it's kind of there anyway. I can look at it right away. At the same time, there's this continuation of just feeling the ground.

[Russell:] And the last person, when they're ready.

[Silence 34 seconds]

[Silence 37 seconds]

Afterward

[Russell:] Discoveries, surprises — anything that wants to be said before we take a little break.

[Participant:] You did a grounding, a sort of grounding, before we started, but we deliberately finished with a grounding. So just from the teacher's perspective, I'm interested to hear your approach.

[Russell:] Okay. So the question is about how the practice was organized. About the pedagogical choices in the structure of the exercise.

[Participant:] Pedagogical?

[Russell:] Teaching. The teaching strategies.

And so the intention of the practice, of course, is the inner and outer movement of attention. And at the beginning, I wanted to go slow, so that you could deepen. That it's not just a jumping. And it needs to be affirmed. I had wished I said this at the very beginning, but then I had to stop and say it, which is okay — that it's not reporting to your partners so much as a deepening into yourself.

Because again, language, the way we usually use it, takes us away from our experiencing. And yet it can take us into. That's the difference, usually, between prose and poetry. But we can become poets of our life, in which our words are actually enhancing experience.

So, taking the time of the inner and the outer, so we can feel that movement. And then, from there, getting a shorter interval, so that they start lingering with each other. Start merging with each other.

And then finally — in that middle, it could be with anything inside. In the last, it was really wanting people to specifically feel that you can be in touch with your outer world and have your ground at the same time.

So it's not just any inner sensation. There's something about knowing that we have the earth under us that is so empowering for dealing with difficulty. Not only difficulty. For showing up for our life in the way we want to show up. Not just reactive, not with our old stories, but to be able to really be there for what's being said to us, or for what our response is, and not have to just be reactive.

So the ground is the key for that. I wanted that to be specific.

And then, specifically, within that specificity, tailored so that the suggestion was to linger with the one while the other was happening. In the middle we were still back and forth, but there it was: okay, it can be here, and here. They don't have to be just in and out. This becomes one.

[Participant:] My biggest experience, initially, was resisting having to go outside with my experience.

[Russell:] Yeah. And I want to say that that could be a very important message from your inner world.

How many of us — it's especially true in dominant feminines, but it's true in men as well, or dominant masculines as well — have to give up our inner life to be with the outer world, to take care of it, or to tend to it. And so of course it's hard to go out there if you have to give all that up.

And so, how very helpful to have a connecting, a larger world. We want to know inner and outer, so that there can also be a breakdown of inner and outer, as helpful distinctions sometimes.

[Participant:] Was there also, in that exercise, the diffused and the focused? The earlier part seeming to me more open, diffuse, and then more focus?

[Russell:] Not intentionally. Not intentionally, but likely many people went there. But we'll go further with those distinctions later.

[Participant:] I was aware of reflecting on the many internal boundaries. Like the tongue, and the boundary between tongue and mouth, eyeball and tongue, and how — the whole idea of not me — but going from tongue to hand, like they were separate entities. It's not like, oh, this is me and that's me. Tongue and hand and eyeball, and each of these has its own boundary. That was interesting.

[Russell:] Yeah. Further differentiated, that whole inner space.

[Participant:] I found that. It was particularly that second one. I felt my whole experience growing, in a way. Particularly the emotionality of being in the outside — much bigger than my normal experience of being in. It was a big, big surprise. It was like, where is this coming from? A lot of deep emotionality around just being in this place. And just seeing, and I was like, wow, I don't normally experience this place. So I thought that was a big surprise.

[Russell:] Yeah. Interesting. The intimacy, yeah.

[Participant:] It wasn't reporting. Very intimate.

I was surprised, in the last phase. I was watching. They were speaking, and I got the sense that I could see what they were feeling inside. They were accurately communicating through their words and their bodies. And it was kind of very intimate. I really — they know what they're saying. I got the feeling I was with two people who are really doing what they know they're doing. It was a skill. I appreciate the skillful articulation, the self-knowledge.

[Russell:] Yeah. Well, this expression of what both of you are saying, this intimacy — to really hear what's living in someone in a moment.

And we do have these literal brain structures that are designed to resonate, and can. Often we're so busy, we kind of skip over that, into our thinking or into something else. But just to take the time to let that resonance occur can be so touching.

You know, in Feldenkrais, especially, sometimes you want to raise your shoulders, raise your arms to shoulder height, and then check: are they really at shoulder height? Are you doing what you think you're doing?

And I got the feeling I was with people who know what they're doing.

[Participant:] I think we started it laughing, and we ended it laughing. Just this spontaneous — just about playfulness. For me it was a little bit contagious.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] I don't see myself as being comical at all. This is just sharing. It actually came out of the whole experience of privileging words, and I don't privilege words. And so I always forget, when I'm here. I think, well, I have to voice everything, but I don't have to voice everything.

And so it just seemed ridiculous that I was using words, when I should have been describing it in a way that made sense to me. I started laughing because the words — that's not my first way of communicating. So I have to remember that I can do movement. I can do something else. That's why I was laughing, because the words were meaningless. And it seemed trite, when the experience was like I should have been moving.

[Russell:] Yes. And I'm curious. When you hear another, do their words touch you at all, or does that feel irrelevant?

[Participant:] Sometimes. A lot of times. For me, words aren't the way I authentically communicate.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And it's not that I don't. But there are other ways of communicating.

[Participant:] So humorous to me, the last exercise. I really felt grounded. I felt this tripod sprout. And then when I was looking outward, it was more or less as usual, looking to describe. And then this apple in this cup just went, wow, I'm here. Whoa. And it was wonderful.

I forgot my ground.

[Russell:] Yeah. Okay, great. Thank you.

Take a pause. At twenty-five after, we'll start a lesson.

Thank you.