Talk

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 2, Session 2 — 25 minutes

Summary: Russell opens the week with attention, the stories we tell, and a loyalty to beingness that must not turn into self-judgment. He separates responsibility from blame, then names three movements: grounding in the body, felt sensing, and needs that can coexist with fulfillment. The group tests that paradox before coming onto the floor to practice.

The potency of attention

[Russell:] So there's a lot that I'm excited about to bring during this week, and to learn during this week together.

I'd like to begin. I want to say a few words and then have a practice together.

One of the main themes in our last meeting was about the potency of our attention, taking responsibility for our attention, and for the stories we tell ourselves about our life and about ourselves. That the world we experience grows from how we attend, how we're organizing our perception of life.

And there are such incredible examples of people in extreme external circumstances. Ordinary people like you and me somehow shifting how they're attending, the stories they're telling themselves about the people around them and about themselves, and radically altering the quality of their experience of living.

So that, for me, is such an insight into the potentiality of us as human beings. And it's important that we don't twist that into some sort of judgment on ourselves when we're stuck in a narrow frame, right? That's why we begin from that unconditional warmth and we keep working on that, because the habits of self-judgment and self-contraction are so strong.

And yet — and this will be a big theme of this week — and yet the spaciousness of being never goes away. It's either in the background or in the foreground. Sometimes when it's in the background, we forget it, like the blue sky.

And to get more and more — the word I used this morning has been really living in me so potently in these last weeks — a loyalty to our beingness, a loyalty to presence, and watching for that nefarious underside that then wants to turn it into some sort of judgment, some sort of constricted historical state. That, oh, I'm not that enough, I should be that more, or how do I forget it? Why do I forget it so much? I'm lost in my mind too much, and blah, blah, blah. And then we are once again tied in knots in our belly.

Yes. Yeah. Yeah, okay, thank you. Okay, so I guess, why do I choose a word like that? Thank you for bringing that.

Yeah, so let's go slower there.

On one side we can say that the strategy of the historical self to self-constrict has a positive intention. So let's not call it nefarious.

On the other side, I want us to have a really heightened perception of how — you know, for me, I so often live in an expanded state, and when I get stuck, it's so startling to me. And of course it's bringing empathy and compassion to the place that's getting stuck. So at that moment, I don't want to call it nefarious. But when I'm in the expansion — when I'm in, I don't even want to call it — when I'm in the beingness, from that perspective to see the —

But you're absolutely correct that letting go of the judgment is a good thing. So thank you for helping me clarify.

Responsibility for our state

[Russell:] Yeah, so this responsibility for our state. Responsibility for our state.

And when I think of responsibility, I think of it in two ways. I think of how I am with myself, and my radiance into the world. What am I radiating? We're all radiators, right? We're all radiating our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions.

Our actions are the most obvious, but our thoughts and feelings — we all know that we pick up each other, we feel each other. We get, you know, especially with our real close ones, we get with each other, and we radiate.

And to be responsible for that. And like I've said before, a radical distinction. And did we work with that in this group? I'm not remembering — between responsibility and blame. Did we linger there?

Okay. Oh, maybe on the phone. Okay, so we will linger there because it's a critical distinction. Not at this moment, but we will come back to that.

So this responsibility for how I am with what's living in here, and for what I'm putting into the world.

Three movements of attention

[Russell:] So, in the turning toward the movements of attention that we worked so much with last time, one of the somewhat unique things about the work we're doing is this emphasis on grounding in the physical body. Before the felt sensing, before the how I am, is I am here. And grounding in the just thisness of that.

And so that's one movement of attention that we've worked with from day one. We're gonna go into — you know, for me, it's constant. It goes on. If I forget it, that's where I come back to. That's the homing device, we could say.

And from there, from the physical connecting, anchoring, remembering, it moves into the felt sensing. How is it in here?

And I'll be introducing another distinction this week that is not radically different, but different enough that it's worthy of a distinction — of how connecting to our — what in nonviolent

communication they speak of as needs — connecting to the human needs, or we could say our values, or what's important to us.

And that there are certain qualities of — and I'll say this a number of times, so don't worry if it's confusing at this moment.

When beingness is here, we are fulfilled. And even when, on the level of relationship or the level of life needs, there's a deficiency, there's always a fullness also.

So I want to explore how we can be both deficient and absolutely fulfilled at the same time. Sufficient — is that the word?

That we can be deficient, that some part of ourself can feel a deficiency. We're wanting more connection with a loved one, or we're needing more rest. We can feel on one body-mind level a deficiency, and how at the same moment we can begin to also experience our fulfillment without negating the other.

That it's not an either-or proposition. Like that, yeah, yeah, and again, it's just hitting you how important that is, that we make use of what's growing in us to include these opposites, these paradoxes that are alive. But I don't have to wait until everything is just right in my life to feel wonderful. In fact, there can be real challenges, and beingness can be alive, and fulfillment can be here.

And that's not to — again, watch constantly, need the caveat — not turning into some negativity if I'm not feeling fulfilled, right? We gotta keep reminding ourselves of that, because it's so easy to take our ideals and turn them into whips.

Right? Take the whip of not whipping myself, right?

So, grounded in the body, cultivating this quality of presence, right? And it begins with this bodily sense, including the felt sensing. How is it in here? How can I be with what's alive in here in a life-giving way?

It's different than being in your feelings, although it includes your feelings. How can I be with the felt sensing in a life-giving way, and how can I get in touch with both levels of need?

That there's a need, maybe in my social situation, maybe in how I'm navigating with myself, that sense of something is missing that wants fulfillment, and the quality of fulfillment that's already there when we're in touch with the being. And how they can relate to each other, actually. We'll get quite specific about that.

Okay, so those are three directions we could say, or three levels of attention.

Hearing it back

[Russell:] And before we do the practice I want to do, let me hear back a little bit of what you're getting right now. See, you can say the same words or say them in your own words, but what's impacting, that feels, that seems, that resonates.

Yes, please.

[Participant:] Forgive me, I was resonating with felt sensing in a life-giving way.

[Russell:] Okay, the third is the kind of new language I'm introducing this time, which has to do with our needs. And two levels of needs is what I'm defining. Needs as kind of on the body-mind — what do I need in this — what's missing for me that would feel better if we could have more of this.

And then I'm also saying that if we shift our attention and can get in touch with beingness, even in a moment where the body-mind is feeling like it needs something, that we can actually experience fulfillment in ourselves in a moment like that.

And that fulfillment doesn't negate that I might want something still in the relationship, or in my life at that moment. Right? I want to include all of that.

Okay? Please.

[Participant:] Right. Beingness is what would be beingness, and fulfillment that can work.

[Russell:] Yes. Even in the presence of needs, they sort of go together.

[Participant:] So that's like — that's always — that's the unchanging thing that's always there, is that we sort of —

[Russell:] What's the unchanging thing?

[Participant:] This beingness that we lose track of.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] We really are fulfilled, even in the moment of greatest need. That's really hard.

[Russell:] That's what I'm talking about. That's what I'm talking about. What would it be like if, in a moment of feeling tense, and getting in touch with — let's just stay simple — a need for relaxation, a need for ease, that one could, in one part of attention, bring attention to the tension, bring attention to what's needed here.

Oh, I'm really carrying that voice. That conflict I just had with that person — oh, there's an anger, there's a tightness. So we start felt sensing with it and let it unwind itself through attention. That's one side.

Another side is, in a moment of feeling the tension, I can sense the place inside that knows relaxation. The being that knows that when it's not tense, it's relaxed. That knows, when it's not caught up in the current something, its natural state is this.

What's happening in this configuration, the cloud formation of this moment, has not eliminated the sky. I don't want to discount the clouds, but I don't want to take them as the only reality that I have access to right now.

That's part of why we sit so much — even when you don't know what's happening, you get closer.

Oh, right. Oh, good. Well, that's all right. This must be an important one for you, right?

[Participant:] I love it. I love it. Yeah. I actually think that in a different culture, we would all really get exactly what you're saying. I just — our culture is so dualistic that you're inviting us to look in a way that's holistic. And our way of attention is either-or, right? So it may not be as hard as we think it is.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I'm with you.

Big enough for all of it

[Russell:] And that's part of where all this groundwork we've been doing is preparing us to — can I actually be at that level of self-responsibility? Me? God, this guy has got all this, you know, difficult mother and stories from his past and all. Can this guy actually have both a respect for the momentary situation and the contact with that universal being that has never gone away?

And I'm actually suggesting something that — you know, there are popular spiritual teachings that are deep and beautiful, of Advaita and of oneness, and all is one. And I'm saying, for me, they're usually incomplete, because they're not also including the relational and the place that gets challenged, and that it's not one, not two.

It's not only duality, it's not only oneness. It's, can I be big enough to live in all of that?

You know, can my heart be broken still, that it's not immune, just because I see that everything is okay the way it is?

In the difficult moment

[Participant:] So, if I may. It's one thing to sit here in a comfortable environment. Hopefully, with problems in the world set aside for a few days. It's another thing when you're in a situation where you feel like your insides are wrapped in barbed wire, to get outside yourself.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And have that moment of clarity.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] Being grounded, going to the breath, remembering to do that, I think is one of the perpetual keys. But if you could speak in knowing —

[Russell:] This is what we're doing. We're talking about how — so it begins with the groundedness and the breath, grows into — and we might need to separate temporarily from the situation, sometimes for a second, sometimes minutes, sometimes hours, to get the sense of spaciousness, to remember the being.

Some of us will do that in a different way. You might go up in your plane, or you might go for a walk in nature, or you might be able to do it in a sitting practice.

Now, I'm also speaking about — okay, so two different levels. One is through our practices, getting a big enough bank account in there, so that we can remember ourselves in more and more complex situations, more and more challenging situations, which is really the focus of the week we're in: how to have this grounded, centered presence in challenging moments. Yeah?

So the groundedness in the body, the ways of cultivating space within and around. I'm suggesting learning how to turn towards the felt sense, how to talk to the place that's contracted. That's always a key move — that we're not in the barbed wire. We're with the place that feels all this barbed wire.

And some part of us goes, well, yeah, I've done that for a few years, I should — you'll do it the rest of your life, and you'll forget it and then remember it. Remember that you are not just that.

And that move into the spaciousness is the beginning of the spaciousness of being. You remember, I can be with the place that's stuck. I can be with the place that feels there's no way out of this. I can be with the place that feels like barbed wire.

Yeah. Okay. And now we're going to a whole next step in that. And saying, while respecting the place that feels like this in there, is there any remembering of how this will be when it can be? How it would be if it could be? How it is when it's not caught like that?

And what I'm saying is, I have more and more and more of the experience that I don't need to push this away to connect to this. It can exist simultaneously. And this — sometimes this then melts or unbinds immediately. Sometimes it just softens in its contraction. It rarely stays in the same state. It doesn't necessarily get all wonderful.

And there's sometimes this sense of — it's like I'm carrying around this hurt child, and yet I'm not. There's some sort of confidence that the child's not dying. And it's okay. So I can have a sick child and have a loving heart, and even enjoy the flowers around sometimes, even though it's not complete abandon. No, I still have this.

Yeah, so it's a much more complex territory in there. I don't even want to say that. What I want to say is rich territory.

Onto the floor

[Russell:] But let's just pause for a second.

This is what I'd like to shift a little bit. I mean, this is wonderful where we're jumping in, but I feel like we need to do a little ground and come back.

Okay, I'd like to — we're not all settled yet here. We're all, I think, open to what's being said, but we need a little bit more ground. So I'd like to do a little practice first and then come back to working with these things.

Yeah, that feels right. So this is what we're going to do.

Let's see how it is. Let's see if we need to move stuff out of here to have comfortable spaces, all on the floor. First, I'm not starting with a movement lesson, although we're gonna start on the ground for a little bit.

So, clear away all the paraphernalia to the sides, and let's see if we organize ourselves. Does that give us enough room?