Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 2, Session 5 — 91 minutes

Summary: Russell invites a check-in on what is alive and what the edge is. People speak of service, a death that opened a family, earning a place in the world, and old stories that pull them back. He distinguishes stories that connect from ones that repeat, and withness from a distant witness. Later edges include waiting, receiving support, asking, and belief.

Checking in

[Russell:] So, as we usually do, I like to check in with each of us, bring our voice into the room together.

It's a very important part of our connecting, and sometimes, of course, I'll interact with you around that. But for now, just maybe close your eyes, and get comfortable, seated, and drop down into your bottom, to feel you're sitting here.

That surprisingly powerful practice of embodying, pausing, dropping down.

And from this kind of connection, inviting from inside there. Inviting what wants to be known about what's been exciting and interesting in your embodied life's investigations, in your study. If you don't call them embodied life, just in your unfolding, in your learning.

What's an edge? What are you kind of navigating? They might be the same thing. What's thrilling, exciting, interesting, what's alive, and what's coming, what's next, what the edge is.

And just maybe you already have an idea. Maybe it comes fresh. And maybe you're even surprised.

And of course, what comes now, it can change. You're not predicting precisely what you're gonna say. It might be very clear to you. It might unfold in new ways as you listen to others.

Edges, challenges. What's been coming that's exciting and thrilling. Moving, touching, maybe surprising.

[Participant:] I think for me, it's a good time to say.

[Russell:] Let's wait just a little longer, and then I'll invite you to come.

Yes. Well, maybe let that kind of go into the background. That's working in you, and will continue to work in you. Get your eyes open, if that feels right, and I can invite Tom.

Fully in

[Participant 1:] I think the edge for me, in this segment of our journey, that I'm sitting with, and really looking for the felt sense in, is a desire that I have to be more committed to the service of the awakening of this planet.

And I think of people like Martin Luther, and Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela, and all the countless people that didn't get a name to their service, but in some sense gave their life to their vision, to being in service.

And the edge for me is, without yet being in that title of, say, president, or national figure, or whatever — where I'm at right now in my life — how can I still be with my life, my own desires, my wants, but really, there's something burning in me that wants so badly to be fully in, fully engaged, fully committed.

And I'm exploring that this week.

[Silence 32 seconds]

[Participant 1:] To feel alive to something that's bigger than me, than my wants, my story.

And to live down in the grocery store, the post office, the car, the highway, by myself. To be that fully committed to something much bigger.

[Russell:] Take your time.

Love and pain

[Participant 2:] As you may know from our last call, my son passed away on September 1st. He actually took his life.

And I don't know if you know that his mother, my former wife, also passed away about eight weeks later. Cancer, very unexpectedly.

And I want to thank all of you for the support that I have felt from you through this.

I don't want to just go into storytelling. This has been the most transformative event in my life, so far. It's particularly my son's death. And Rosalind, as I said to Russell, she's kind of on the back burner. I'm on the way to grieving her. My son's death is totally involving.

The first eight weeks were chaotic, because my personal self did not know what to do with this. I didn't know how to make sense of it. I tried to understand it, and it's not possible. I didn't know how to feel about it. I didn't know how to relate to him. I tried everything that I could to keep the connection. And he did come in a dream a couple of times, and it was really sweet and wonderful.

What I've found for myself over the last six weeks or eight weeks is that it's no longer a personal thing. It's no longer my mind trying to make sense out of it, or trying to relate. It's dropped down beneath that.

And it's just a place where it deepens, and it deepens, and it deepens. This place of both such love and such pain, that it's both just one thing. But it's bearable. And it has made my life much better, in the way that it has opened me.

In the same way, I guess it was about two weekends ago, we met in Portland, at Dan's house. My daughter came down from Washington, and my son Adam came up from Baltimore. And Mary, Dan's wife. Trevor, my son. My other grandsons. We were all there, and we ate dinner, and we were a group. And it was a family. It was a family.

And I enjoyed talking with each of them, one to one, being together. And I went to bed at eleven, and I learned the next day that my daughter and my son and my daughter-in-law stayed up till two o'clock in the morning around the table, talking and sharing what all of this meant to them. Because they lost a mother, too, not just a brother.

And so it's opened them up. In a way unimaginable, three or four months ago, that this could have happened. The transformation is incredible.

So it's so sensitive, so delicate, and so fine, like this beautiful spider web of interconnection that has formed. It's so delicate. And yet surreal.

And my edge, as I see it, is to keep that transformation alive, and not just go back. Not to forget it. Not to go back. I mean, I don't know what's going to happen.

But one more thing. When I go to Portland — and I've gone at least five times in the last few months — and I meet Dan's colleagues. He coached basketball, because he was a six-foot-eight basketball player. And so he coached at Catlin Gabel, a very good prep school, where his son goes.

They structured their teams, when my grandson was a freshman. They have to play everybody, so the worst players were on this one team, and they gave that team to Dan. And they lost every game by an average of thirty points. But in the end, he gave them pride in themselves. He knew how to do that. How to give them pride in whatever accomplishment they might have made, or in trying.

And I kept hearing these stories of love and grief. And his life was a beautiful thing. It's just a beautiful thing. And I have no sense of, oh my God, this is negative. It's not negative. Not at all.

Strange, though. It's very strange.

And his son, and his semi-adopted son, are both going on to college. And they're doing —

[Russell:] Thank you for taking us there.

Earning a place

[Participant 3:] The first thing that I heard when I got here was Russell saying something about stories, and I went, oh my God, I have so many stories. And I forgot that whole concept, that I tell myself stories.

But, having said that, I have a story.

This summer I had a conversation with a woman that really hit home. It was one of those conversations where I knew that I could feel the truth of it. I knew it was true. And she was talking about herself, but it was me.

And the truth that I realized was that when I was in utero, I was an unwanted pregnancy. And I received a message there that I wasn't welcome here.

And that all of my life, everything that I've done in service to other people has been motivated by this belief that I need to earn my spot here. That I have to prove that it's okay for me to be here, that I'm good enough, that I belong, or that I've done my part to earn my spot.

And I could really see that.

But what happened was, I believed that that was who I was. That service was part of my soul. That service to people and to the world was — not really a better way to describe it. Like, if you have an Enneagram, and you come in with a certain thing, that that was who I was.

And when I realized that the motivation for that was not really who I was — it was this desire to try to prove to the world that I needed to be here — all of a sudden, I didn't know who I was anymore. If that's not true, that I'm not a service person, maybe that's not who I really am. That that's just something that's driving me. Then I don't know who I am.

And if that's not true, maybe that I'm a spiritual person, or that I'm a good person, or any of those things — maybe none of those things are true. And all the structure that has held me in place might just be an illusion.

It's like the walls fell. And what happened was that old habitual stuff dug its claws in. And it's like there's this battle going on. I know that it's old, and I know that it's not the truth, but it's like I'm being pulled back in. There's a battle going on between what's changing and what's there. It really doesn't want to let go. Doesn't want change. It's holding on.

So I feel a lot of anger, and a lot of just unfocusedness. Chaos, depression, those kind of things. Those are all old. Those are all those old habitual things that are pulling at me.

And I'm seeing that I'm on the edge. That's the edge. How can I hold onto that hope, that presence, that beingness, so that can pull me out of this? That I can let go of the old, and I can embrace this unstructured, who knows what it is, and go forward.

I had a moment of clarity. I had a massage the other day, and I hadn't been touched like that in a while. And I connected to my breath, and I connected to my center, and I went, oh yeah. This is what I want. It's to be in this presence. It didn't last all that long, but it gave me a sense of, okay, it's still there. Enough to be.

Anyway, I feel that the timing of this retreat is really good for me, because I need to be pulled out of the mud. I feel stuck in the mud. And the transformation is right there. I'm right on the edge of it, but it's just eluding me in some ways.

That's what I'm feeling right now. Frustration and anger. I never felt anger. It wasn't an okay emotion to have. And so it goes right into that — well, maybe I am a bitch. Never thought I was, but it was possible, if I'm not any of these things. And so, anyway.

[Russell:] Can I ask you a question?

Well, first, thank you. All that you're living with right now.

I'm wondering, what kind of energy you're giving to the places that feel like they're pulling you back.

[Participant 3:] Well, first of all, the stories that go with those places are absorbing me.

[Russell:] Okay, so that's very important, right?

[Participant 3:] Yeah, because when you said stories, that's what I was talking about. It's like, I forgot.

[Russell:] Right, so that means something's remembering right now.

[Participant 3:] Yes.

[Russell:] So let's just go slow here, to feel the remembering that's occurring. So we can begin to remember also a way of relating to the places inside that feel stuck, feel like they're pulling.

Something like, I know you're there.

Something like, I'm with you.

Would that feel okay, to be with them in that kind of way?

[Participant 3:] There's a fine line between I know you're there, and I'm with you, and it's okay to do this, and you might as well just give in to it.

[Russell:] Right. So we need to see that there's a place in you that's really worried about giving in. That's another place.

[Participant 3:] Right.

[Russell:] So you're in touch with this place that feels like it's gotten lost. Right now, you're in touch with it, right?

And there's a real worry about getting swamped in that, because you know how big it can be, and you know how compelling it can be.

And just for a moment, to be in this Lori who sees all that. Just for a moment, right now, to be — oh, right, there's that swampy place that I can really get caught in, and that scares me. There's a scariness about it.

Just to acknowledge that that's all living in there.

And I'm guessing — throw it out if it's not right — the seeing of it feels very tenuous. Feels like it could lose it easily.

[Participant 3:] Yeah. It doesn't feel like there's very much space in between seeing it and being in it.

[Russell:] Right. There's not very much space. But does it feel right to say there's a little space?

So, a little space is space. Okay?

A little space is made of the same stuff that a lot of space is made of.

[Participant 3:] Really?

[Russell:] So a little space is what we need.

And it's great to be absolutely honest, that it feels very little. And to feel that right now you're sitting here. Right now you've got your bottom under you. And there is a sense of this place in there that pulls you down, pulls you back, got its nails in you. And also that there's a fear of that place. And that you can have all of that right now.

And for now, that's all we need. For right now, we're cultivating this place that has never gone away. It's just been forgotten. It's just gone underground. That sees all that.

What it modeled on

[Russell:] So I want to say one more thing. And this is a story. I want to say something about stories also, but first I want to offer this. I'm not asking you to believe it as the truth, but it's something that I've noticed over and over, that may add some helpful confusion. That's what I'm hoping. To add some helpful confusion.

The thing that I've observed over and over is that our strategies of stuckness are based on who we really are.

The person who is the compulsively nice person, because that's how they survived childhood — when they get over their compulsion, turns out they were really nice. Because what did they have to model on? The only thing your neurosis has to model on is who you are. That's what it uses, in my experience. That's what I keep seeing.

The people who are really kind of mean, and aggressive, and hurtful, turn out, when they're free of that, to be very clear, incisive, making clear distinctions. They had an ability, a capacity, a healthy something in them — whether it's towards service, or towards kindness, or towards incisiveness. That's what the organism modeled on. But it became contorted, or it became compulsive, and it became, this is what I have to do to survive.

So I'm not saying to believe it. I'm just saying, don't throw out the possibility that you, in your true being, service is a calling.

Okay? So, just to add a little confusion to figuring that out.

[Participant 3:] You said a person who's compulsively nice is basically nice. Isn't that also saying the person who's a bitch is basically a bitch?

[Russell:] No, no. What I'm saying is, the person who comes off as a bitch, when the bitchiness is unwound, it's usually clarity that's living under it.

In other words, it's not the behavior. What lives on is compassion, is kindness.

Every contracted state has a liberated state that's directly connected to it, and a way of being in the world that's directly connected to it. It's like the shadow side, on one side, and the way it appears in its actualized form, are quite close. It's just no longer compulsive, and no longer life-defeating. No longer tries to hurt life.

So when you see it in its contracted form — whoa. Even when it looks like it's helping, there'll be side effects, as you know well. But when it's liberated, it's life-giving.

Two ways of telling

[Russell:] And so the next thing I want to say is, this word stories is used in a lot of different ways. So I want to be a little clearer.

What I notice, for human beings, our stories are important. The stories of our history, the stories of our lineage, the stories of how we got to be the way we are. All that stuff is some of what connects us to each other.

When I learn something about somebody's history, it often touches something in me that links me to them more.

So let me try to make some fine distinctions, because the first level is obvious, but the second is not.

The first level I want to say is, of course that's different than the stories you keep repeating to yourself about yourself, or the stories you keep telling yourself about other people. Do you get how we're using the same word in different contexts?

In this case, it's not the fact that this happened to them, but the way you're carrying them, and the way you're carrying the pictures of yourself. It's that kind of story that is not so helpful.

When interacting together — so this is the next level — when the stories become so dominant that we're no longer in presence, that we're just repeating what we already know, and we've said it to a hundred other people, this happens a lot in a lot of forms of therapy. You're just solidifying your old story.

But to be in presence, and freshly experiencing, can allow that story to unfold.

So I'll give you a really good example. This is not good enough research to hang our hat on, but it's very recent, very exciting research about post-traumatic stress, which shows that when people can tell their story in a way that their feelings are allowed to live in it, and someone's really listening to them, as they tell their story many times, the trauma of it can get released. Because it's being felt through the body, it's being heard, and there's a lot of repetition of it.

If the story is simply told over and over without the felt sense, without it living in them, and without it being heard in that way, it vivifies the story. You get it again. It's like you're going through the trauma once again, and your nervous system is not processing it. It's a circle. It's not working itself out.

So, for me, I don't want us to think that we should not tell people what's happened to us. I love hearing the shares. Giving birth, and your experience of that. These things connect us to each other, but especially when we are present and alive, and the energy is being conveyed. The energy of it is living.

Does that make sense to you? There's more. I don't think I'm being so clear, but I'm kind of getting it across.

[Participant 4:] Yeah. The clarity of the distinction between two ways of telling the story. One that seemed like there's the aspect of the listener — that it's being welcomed — and that there's a connection to the many levels of experience. The images, the bodily sense, the feeling states. Is that it?

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, I would say so.

That's my strong sense. This is stepping further than the recent research that I read. But that kind of integrated experiencing, where the body sense, the images, and the feelings are all there, and they're being received in a caring, loving space, can allow that integration of that experience, so that it completes itself.

And in Zen, from a completely different point of view, the picture is that you can enter certain qualities of consciousness where a completion occurs. And in that completeness, you're not bound to the past of that pattern, that thought pattern, that behavior pattern. It completes itself through being wholly experienced.

Now, that's relatively rare in the sitting world. Those are enlightenment experiences. I think that kind of integration can happen in ordinary ways.

[Participant 4:] Is it that quality of listening? And to me, also, from other kinds of teachings that you've given us, it sounds like that witnessing is also important.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 4:] That's how I describe it when I talk to my friends and they ask me, what is it that we're doing? And it's evolving in myself and my mind. That's how I come to think of it.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. It's this beautiful word.

In with

[Participant 4:] Well, it's two words, but there's with. You're with something. You're witnessing something, so you're right next to it. You're with it, and you're in it. You're close enough to it that you're not too far away. So you're with. It's within. It's within, within, within.

[Russell:] I like to actually call it in with, just to confuse people. Because within sounds like it's too much inside. I like in with. In with.

And what is in with? Witnessing, the way I like to use it, feels perfect. It feels like I'm very close to what's happening. But I actually like — I think I've used the word here before. Withness. Have I used that?

[Participant 4:] Witness.

[Russell:] Huh?

[Participant 4:] Oh. I've never heard it.

[Russell:] Okay. Well, I'll be talking about it this way. I've got a nice thing to bring over for you.

So, witness is what I realized when I saw that when people hear witness, they get a little distant from their experience. A little bit too far away. It's like, I don't want to get muddied. There's a danger of the witness standing back. That's a whole spiritual tradition, and then I don't get into my feeling. So I don't want that.

So then I started calling it a withness. The withness is closer than the witness, but still not inside of it. Right?

So you're in with. You're in with something. You're not quite in it. You're not just witnessing it. You're in with it. You're very close to it. You're holding the baby of your experience.

[Participant 4:] Yeah, and I'm talking about me with me.

[Russell:] With me. Yes. When I speak about embodied listening, or listening-speaking, listening is listening as we're speaking, and listening for the responses.

[Participant 4:] And I just find it so very helpful. A number of times a day, we're in with what's happening here. And then, in interacting, listening as speaking. So there's a noticing here, without stepping so far away that I'm losing connection with what's living, but I'm not so far in that I'm just in the story of it. I'm in with it.

Equal. Both.

[Russell:] Yes. With. Yes, that is the essential practice.

Essential, Linda. What we're working with is how to be the best friend of whatever's going on in here. But the best friend doesn't just go along on all the joy rides. The best friend is next to, and tempering when needed, listening compassionately when needed, placing a hand on when needed.

Right? That's really powerful. That's what is ordinarily talked about as self-focusing. This is what I talk about in terms of living everyday life with that friendship in here. And forgetting it, and remembering it. But the more you remember it, the more you remember it.

And so there's implicit space, but not distance. Distance isn't helpful. Being wedded isn't helpful. Being right with. In with. Within. It's a very helpful positioning.

And sometimes we need a little bit more space. We need to be able to stand back a little bit more. And if it's a very shy kind of place, it needs us closer. So we have to be able to modulate our distance from our inner experience.

[Participant 4:] Yeah.

I have to allow that to deepen, and then wake up to the fact that it's there, and it's still so strong and present. I'm not making sense, but it's in no way diluting the power of that — what had drawn me into this relation of some sort. It's really powerful, the part that draws us back, draws us in.

And I'm finding there's a pattern that my whole life has repeated itself. And as I got a little bit more aware of how it operates, it comes in at a deeper level, and a more powerful level. I was like, oh, I'm doing it this way.

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

And that exact process, for me, is why my sitting is so central, because that's the great space. And as you get more confident in the spaciousness of being, you can go through those deepenings without it getting quite so tragic. You know what I mean?

[Participant 4:] Quite so. Yeah.

[Russell:] It gets compelling.

Great. Can we go back to hearing people?

[Participant 4:] Oh, perfect. Thank you.

[Russell:] Wonderful. Perfect, yes.

I've missed you

[Participant 5:] I was asked on a hike by my sister. She said, well, how is your life going to unfold this year? Or something like that. She probably didn't use that language.

And I said, well, I'm thinking that I just want to really deepen the practices that I'm already doing. I'm feeling very committed, and glad that I have this regular practice. Meditation, and focusing, and movement.

So then, in my recent focusing session — my focusing is just, I'm going to be writing all about it, because I write afterwards. I'm going to do a little pulling that out, and do some writing about it.

I hadn't been focusing. I had missed a few weeks, due to travel, and then an illness of my focusing partner. So I get to drop in, and what I heard was, I've missed you. And I mean, I just heard this lovely, kind, I've missed you. Thank you for coming back.

And I was thinking of all the times I say, somewhat automatically, I'll be back. And then I wait for my partner time to do that. And so I realized, it was really an invitation to start integrating self-focusing into my life.

I'm really hoping that I'll also get ideas of how to really integrate self-focusing more often, and more regularly, because I just feel there's obviously a real invitation there. So that's my — I'm like, oh, okay, I understand where I'm going.

The other is, I see a lot of my suffering is actually subsiding. What I held in great tension a year ago, I only hold in compassion now. And I am liberated from this tension. Action, or doing something, or making it different. I really have, at least, a freeingness.

And so when I see that happening in others, I want to offer some other doorway. They have to find their own door, their own way to go in, but I want to open a door. And they're not in a program. There's a richness of being connected to a group, and having the kind of support that we have.

So I'm just really desiring ways to connect this work. Translating, in a way. Open doors in simple ways. Not make it so complicated, or like you have to do it a certain way.

So I'm just gonna — maybe I think, well, I have six more months, and then I can get more guidance. I guess I'm feeling like, wow, I want to bring this work out. I want to. And that's just my hope. And so maybe by bringing it up — I mean, you're not the only one. Everybody can be my teacher. And if there are ways that people have translated, shared, opened the door.

[Russell:] Yes. Thank you, Wendy.

So I want to say two things.

The first is, I just want to affirm, there's such a softening in your field over the last years, and I really feel that. So it's known from around here.

The other thing is, I don't know if it's interesting, or if it's a form that works, but there are some really good conversations on the board about bringing the work into the world. As a topic that's been worked with. And still, other people in Europe and around the country are teaching days, or teaching classes, or offering in different settings, whether it's in business or elsewhere, and they're kind of sharing their experiences.

So there is some juice there, if the form is not too unpleasant.

And phone calls, now. It's interesting, about exactly that question. People who are coming from really different places. Which really thrills me. How it can be less Russell-centric, and more people feeding each other. That is such a relief in my body. I can't tell you. And it gives me great hope, actually.

Yeah. Thank you, Wendy.

[Participant 6:] Can I just say one thing to Wendy?

[Russell:] Go ahead.

[Participant 6:] If you don't want to be on the board, there's been an off-the-board small email exchange about it, and I would love to connect you with that, if that would be about phone calls, or connecting.

[Russell:] Yeah. Go ahead, Karen.

Waiting

[Participant 7:] So my cutting edge is waiting. And I'm going to tell a story. So this is a story that I live by.

About, I think it would have been fifteen years ago, I was up on a reserve, and it was a reserve with a lot of conflict and addictions, and everybody was getting drunk. It was a Saturday night.

And then people came in from a neighboring reserve, which was a dry reserve, and they just did a circle, and did a sweat. And they just sat there. And everyone else pretty well was drunk, kind of around, up in the hills. No one came down.

So we sat in a circle, and then after a while I asked one of the elders what he was doing, and he said, waiting.

And I said, well, how long are you going to wait?

He said, as long as it takes.

And at that time I thought, okay. I thought, it's so important for my practice, and that is so important for the people that I work with. That this is a time of waiting.

And the elders believe that it's going to take seven generations to heal what happened with the genocide in residential schools. And we're into about four. Three and a half, four. So it's a really important time.

And then in Regina — I went there about five years ago. So I started working with a lot of the youth that I work with when they were about eleven, twelve. And now they're five years older, so they're fifteen, sixteen. And they're in trouble, right? They're AWOLing, and they're in jail, and they're suicidal.

And I have to really deepen my practice of waiting. Just waiting for them to get through.

So, and then in my own practice, even in that embodied kindness. Avoiding, for me — I think it should be faster. I think, God, this is the third year.

So, yeah. And I'm getting more patient, and I'm kinder, and I'm waiting more. But it's just such a poignant, beautiful word. Waiting.

And in my practice right now, there are kids that are gone. They're missing. And I just — I have faith, and I just want to deepen that belief. A waiting. And it's embodied. It's holding that space there, and holding that space in me for my spiritual growth.

[Russell:] Does the waiting for the others, and waiting for that inner place, feel the same?

[Participant 7:] Yeah, it's the same. It's exciting. There's this movement right now, Idle No More. It's a First Nations movement. Okay, we've waited long enough. No one's doing anything. And no one's doing anything with these treaties, and there still isn't running water on reserves. And so it's a peaceful movement that just says, we're not waiting anymore. Things have to change.

[Russell:] Well, yeah. Isn't that perfect? That out of waiting grows Idle No More. And how do we wait, and be idle no more?

Wow.

[Participant 7:] Yeah. So there's a real embodiment. And I just want to share that my partner's here.

[Russell:] That's great. Thank you.

Receiving

[Participant 8:] One of the most profound, heartfelt experiences is receiving support, and being okay with it, and not pushing it away.

And in turn, what I'm learning is to support myself more, or places that I maybe didn't see, or haven't felt. And so that's really unfolding for me. More of a believing in myself.

And I'm deeply touched by all of you, shining the light, and supporting me coming here. This work means — it's a life-giving force, and it's opened me up in ways that I don't even recognize myself. And at the same time, I'm grinning off my face.

And I'm just learning to be really kind with myself, even in the face of an oh-shit moment. To even cultivate gratitude, even on another level that I didn't know. So open. So I'm even more expansive than I knew, or felt.

And some wild things have been happening, as far as just receiving help. When I opened your email, I was dripping and smiling at the same time, and both my cats were pressed up against me.

And I am learning that these really subtle, in-the-moment, in-this-minute things are really precious. Really dear, because I don't know when I'm gonna feel that, to that level, again. And you guys have touched me so much, to be here. And to feel support on something that I really love to do. Not feeling support for something that I wanted to do eighty percent. But this is really huge pieces of me, that I get a community. Not just two people, but a community of support. And I've never had that, at the level of the work, of the essence of who I am.

And it just makes me think of what we're capable of. What I'm capable of. What communities are capable of.

And it feels like there's always an answer. It's wild. This stuckness in me, something flew out of me. This stuckness of, I don't know if I can do that. I want to do it, but I don't know. Now I'm feeling like it feels different. I can do it by asking for support. Where I was always the one supporting others, or rallying the troops to help people get together and have a potluck, or help someone build a fence, literally. But when it's me, I feel like I can do that myself, when I really can't.

And so to ask for help more and more, my life has become richer with myself.

And in the spirit of gratitude, for all of you, I made, in those boxes over there — it's a little offering. An altar of fresh flowers. It's your embodied life altar, for the week that we're together.

Oh, well, that's Russell's. This is yours.

And every room we're sharing gets an altar, and each of you gets an altar. And with your altar, you get three stones. When I was doing this in my kitchen, the boys, Ringo and Cash, my cats, were laying on the flowers and playing with the stones. So their energy — they're very much my family. Of course, my fur children are very much part of the whole scene.

I lit candles all over the house. I had music going. And it was really fun to put this all together for you guys.

So the clear stones — and I put a description over there, but just so you can envision, I picked specific stones for our purpose, for what we're doing.

The clear quartz are universal stones, and they're pure, and it stimulates the brain, and it's excellent for meditation, and it brings harmony.

The carnelian, the orange, opens the heart. Enhances the connection with our inner self, and it's warming and joyous.

And the amethyst is purple, purple and white, or purple. And they're stones of peace and strength, and they're also good for meditation.

So you each get one stone.

[Russell:] You have something different, though, for later in our talk. So you don't get — no. A different stone.

I don't want everybody stoned around me.

[Participant 8:] And there's also little pieces of square paper, and those are yours. You can take whatever you're wanting. Just take them until they're not there. Maybe three or four, and then maybe you can make your own as the week goes by. But your altars — you can put your wishes on there, or things that you would love to dissolve. Or if you're out in nature, like we did at the other center, a lot of us on our doors put little offerings. Those little baby pine cones, I remember, and little sweet things. And it was really beautiful.

So we can also put those on our altars as well.

And I'm really just touched by all of you, and you all mean a great deal to me. So thank you.

[Russell:] Thank you.

Asking

[Participant 9:] In the vein of speaking, I guess. I had for years been telling my Seattle friends how fabulous I thought Feldenkrais was, and they'd say, who? Christ? Or, you know, I never found the right words to compel them to try it out.

So then we moved to Arizona, and I actually was without my many Feldenkrais classes, and it was painful.

So in coming back here, I took a different curve, and went first to Seattle, and came down. And I had a little dream that these friends were gathered and having a Feldenkrais class.

And so I sent an email to the three teachers I know in Seattle — fabulous, they're sort of my angels, I guess, or everybody's angels, but mine in particular — and said, hey, I had this dream. Would there be a venue, say maybe January 15th, happens to be my birthday, where we might be able to have a little class, and maybe I can invite the people?

And they put it together. I mean, it was just a matter of almost minutes. The emails came back and forth, and Vicki had an idea, and Leanne had an idea, and Becky had an idea. And so boom. Leanne, who brings Russell to Seattle every March, had a class on Wednesday at a fabulous studio in Seattle, in the Roosevelt District, and I was welcome to invite friends.

So then I sent out the email, and said, hey, it's my birthday, and how about coming to a Feldenkrais? A little leverage there.

And a variety of, somewhere out of town, this, that, and yes, maybe. But we figured how many we thought were coming. They confirmed. Got in at eleven o'clock for Leanne's class, and there were twelve mats laid out. Nettie was the only veteran.

And it was the field of dreams. I mean, they all came.

And it was an extraordinary class, and I got to stand at the very end. I indulged completely in it, because it felt so great to be back on the floor. But then I got to stand aside as everybody got up again to walk around, and watch these dear, dear friends of mine walking taller than they had ever been. Stars in their eyes. Just having had this great experience. Finally, they got it. It was marvelous.

So, asking. It was an amazing thing. And the ownership. Everybody on it. I wasn't guiding it. I wasn't micromanaging. It was just amazing. And exactly the right number of people. It was a thing that was wild. People coming in we didn't think were coming. Just amazing.

So thank you, all of you, for making that asking an instantiated piece. And Russell, you really have given us that. And I got to use it.

[Russell:] So let me ask you. That's a beautiful story. I love it.

And for your unfolding, is this asking an edge? Is this one of the places — is it alive?

[Participant 9:] It is. It is alive. It is alive. I'm still reeling from it alone.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

[Participant 9:] I don't know if I can own it as an edge.

[Russell:] Right, right. But it's definitely palpable.

[Participant 9:] It's palpable.

[Russell:] The reason why I'm speaking now is because it's easy for an experience like that to become an experience that lives by itself.

And something in you resonated. Just the way you said, numerous times, the word asking. It's coming from a place in you that feels important, and resonant.

I don't know how that is for your inner life, or what parts of your life, or what directions of asking. But it sounds like it's something coming from in there that I would recommend giving some attention to. Not to just let it become a good memory.

And we'll see if it has — I might be wrong. Let's see if it has something that's wanting more from you.

Curiosity and love

[Participant 10:] I would like to share my edge. Because she's here today, it made it clear to me.

It's our friend here who talked about this very issue of moving to Arizona and not having any Feldenkrais practitioners at the ready.

And I had just had an interaction with Carl, and then about somebody trained in Feldenkrais who practices Feldenkrais. Because I had just been reunited with my Feldenkrais buddies that I trained with in New York last week, and not a one of us is practicing.

And then the interaction was, oh, well, would you like to do that? Would you like to practice on this retreat?

And I immediately went, oh. I have not felt that in a long time. I've not felt anything like that in a long time.

And I just said, I have a lot of baggage around practicing Feldenkrais.

And so I immediately went for these two. Hey, actually it was Erin. I just need — I lost that confidence. A number of things happened during my training, and even after.

[Russell:] I'm going to interrupt you for a second. Just as you're with this now, drop a little bit. If that would feel okay. Let it come fresh, so the essence of what is living in you can come.

[Participant 10:] So, there was that. I think a sense of wanting to ask for that moral support, and help. So there was a wanting. There was that feeling, that glitch inside. And I haven't felt that in a long time.

And then there was this feeling of insecurity, or just somehow also a wanting to, and reaching out to somebody that I thought could support. And would Erin be interested in being there, coaching, being that.

And she gave me something that was a support beyond my wildest dreams, of the support that I was looking for. Which was, well, Russell had once suggested that you could just practice on me, and I can give you that kind of feedback.

Were they Russell's words?

[Participant:] Valerie's words.

[Participant 10:] Valerie's were.

And you have curiosity, and you have love. So just basically dive in, is how I took that.

Because I said — and it's just like that place.

It's more than — I'll just back up, because one of the things that I was happy about, and felt really intrigued about in myself, in this journey, is that my automatic response didn't come out. And that my curiosity was piqued a little bit, and that I wanted to — oh, that's kind of intriguing.

And then reaching out here, and thinking, well, maybe I can have that kind of lifeline. And then those words. And I could immediately put that into how I've been living my life, I would say, in the last year at least. I have everything I need right here.

[Russell:] Can you say that again? Go slow.

[Participant 10:] I have everything I need right here.

And I lack no curiosity. I have that in plenty. And love is coming pretty strong. I love myself.

And so I just immediately, yes.

And that was that stuckness. That stuckness has been there. And I could sit there and I could analyze it, but I know that that's not what it needed. And those words really just gave that fresh air, just breezing through.

And I'm thinking about Erin, because it was a really — it is that piece of me where I haven't known a lot about it. I'm not sure where this stuckness comes from. And I've been okay with letting it be okay, letting it be stuck. There's lots of other things that I'm interested in. And it just got its little opportunity to show up.

And then, I don't know if it was just that, but those two words that I really enjoyed hearing. Curiosity is one of my favorite words. And curiosity and love. And I just resonated.

[Russell:] Thank you.

I need to hear from one more person, then I'll take a break. And then we'll do some movement, and come back to this later. But we need to shift to one more person.

Yes, Barbara.

Missing someone

[Participant 11:] On a more somber note. Some of you know. Not long after we last met, a dear friend of mine was in a horrible hit-and-run accident, and was in a coma for four and a half months, and died in December.

And I don't know that I've grown from this, or opened from it, but it has been a different experience for me. A new experience. To really miss somebody.

People have gone from my life who I haven't missed. So it was, in a way, joining the family of man, woman, humans, to lose somebody and miss them terribly.

So that's definitely been with me this period.

And this other thing, that when Lori was speaking about story. I've been very aware of what I feel is deeper than story. It's the beliefs I carry about myself.

And I wake up in the middle of the night, and I have these thoughts. Generally pretty negative thoughts, and very strong beliefs about myself. And I know I say, well, they're not necessarily true. But a belief, I realize, a belief is something in you. It's not rational. It's there.

And they're really like trees planted in me. Very strong.

So I've just been aware of that. My beliefs. The beliefs that I carry.

And also, I'm really very glad that Christine is here, and that we were all able to come together in this way, and be, and really be a community. In a very real sense. Not just an idea.

[Russell:] I was very grateful for your impulse in that direction. I'm very grateful to you.

A belief about beliefs

[Russell:] So, can I say something about belief? Is that all right with you?

For me, the deep beliefs that we carry are our deep stories. I use that word for that. And the real question for me, as you were speaking, was — is the belief that beliefs, at some point, get so intrinsically wed to our essence, or to who we are, or to ourselves, that they're intractable, so to speak? Or that they are the lens through which we will see life?

Is that the belief about your beliefs?

[Participant 11:] Yes. That's what I guess.

[Russell:] That's your belief about your beliefs.

[Participant 11:] Okay. That's what I suspect.

[Russell:] Yeah. Good. Good place to pause.

Let's take ten minutes. Thank you so much. Ten minutes, and then we'll do some movement together. And we will come back. I want to hear from everybody. We'll come back to this as part of our meditation this evening.

We eat at six. Can we come back at 7:15 tonight? Does that disturb anybody's schedules?

[Participant:] I don't believe you.

[Russell:] That doesn't go with my beliefs.