Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 2, Session 6 — 46 minutes

Summary: Standing, Russell explores yielding the knees and shifting weight so the torso rises out of the standing leg rather than collapsing. On the floor, sliding each foot through cardinal directions and ovals, head tracking, clarifies the hip joints and pelvis. Walking shows the difference between carrying a leg and letting it swing.

Standing

[Russell:] Okay, so let's stand and sense the fact that you're standing. Sense the ground.

Shift your weight a little bit. Make a feeling, a fresh feeling. Let there be a little give in your knees so that you're not locking. You're giving your weight to the ground. If the ground can come up through, there's a relationship.

And feel what happens when you lock your knees. Feel what happens in your hips, in your lower back. Feel that whole pattern of disconnecting from the ground, and then letting there be just a slight give. It doesn't have to be where you're actively bending, but there's a yielding, as though —

And let the right foot be a little in front of the left. Just feel, as you go forward onto your right foot, lift the left heel. So you feel the weight on the right, standing over that right foot. There's a little give in the knee. Sense your hip. Sense your head. You don't have to drop down, but weight on —

And then come back onto your back foot, letting the front heel lift.

As you come forward onto your right foot, feel that shift of weight. Feel the left foot, the left heel come up. Feel your height.

And then, if you can, if your balance is — if you can do this slowly. If not, you do it quickly. See if you can feel the lifting of your left foot. And maybe even put a finger in the front, in front of where your hip joint would be, really in the front of your leg, not on the side. In the front. And feel that movement under your fingers, right at the top of where your hip is, where you can actually feel the leg.

You're taking weight on your right foot. Feel where you bend here, and where the hip joint bends in front.

And then put weight on the front. Come onto that — or on your left foot, the right heel lifts. Come back onto your right heel. Feel your height over your foot and leg, over that heel.

Then come forward. Feel the weight, some give in your knee, some buoyancy in your knee, and then height over that leg, some space in the front of this hip joint. You're not collapsing down. You're not falling down. You're actually coming out of the leg.

And even as you come back, you feel the heel. There can be some give in the knee without it collapsing in the torso.

Forward, up over that leg, and then as you're forward here, put your fingertips on the front of your right hip joint, and feel out where the bending is as you lift your right foot. Use a toe for balance if you need to, and come forward. Feel the weight.

It's interesting to get the feeling, that moment of pushing off the back foot, off that toe, and really coming onto the front leg, feeling your height. And then after that pushing off, that bending. And in this bending, a lot of us get pulled down.

A lot of us, the way the hip joint is connected to the pelvis — we're working on a lesson this morning — what happens is the deep musculature around the hip gets linked to the more superficial abdominals, and there's a pulling down. And lift the leg. And that's, in Feldenkrais language, parasitic to lifting the leg. You don't need to drop in your torso.

So as you take the weight on the standing leg, it's like you're coming out of the standing leg, and then this leg is free to come forward. See, if you don't let that — if you already begin to fall into that standing leg, then this pulls you down, like your hip joints are wedded to your abdomen.

So we want that freedom of the pelvis, so that your torso can come out of your pelvis, rather than being pulled down into your pelvis. And that gives a sense of dignity, sense of elegance, grace, length, and fun. It becomes forward.

It's interesting to feel. And even if it's not clear, just that you flood this area with your consciousness — how your legs bend, how they lift. What it's like when you contract and stand with those rigid knees, and how that contracts your back, and how you can soften the knees a little bit.

So I'd like to do another classic lesson on the ground, this time not working specifically with the four-phase breathing, but just clarifying some of the movements of the legs and feet. Let's come onto your back.

[Silence 58 seconds]

On your back

Bringing your attention in, feeling yourself lying here.

And from Moshe Feldenkrais's point of view, from his interest in human evolution, and also from his study in the realm of psychotherapy and all of that, which he was also interested in, saying that if you really want to get to the earliest patterns that we grow, you need to work through the body.

Before thought.

Learning how we exit our bodily experience, and how we can gradually learn to inhabit. Go in and be able to stay conscious within the body, and mobile in our attention within the body.

He really meant it when he said it was secondarily about the improvement of the body itself. Really about our capacity to be alive in our experience, that we exited certain ways at a very young age.

Just feel your breath. Feel yourself lying here.

Bend both your legs to standing. Sense your left foot and leg on the floor, so both legs are bent. Sense your left foot on the floor, and how your left leg is bent, and how you can enter from the foot through the lower leg, with the knee and the thigh, into the left hip joint. Sense the left side of your pelvis.

Just to be able to move through those inner regions. Know you're alive there.

And gently begin to slide your left foot away from your pelvis, so in the direction it's pointing, downward. Slide away only as far as you can go where the whole foot still maintains contact with the floor. As the ball and toes start to lift, you come back, and come back to where you started.

So you're sliding the foot forward, sensing your leg. What happens through your leg, and you're coming back. Because when your ball and toes start leaving the floor, you don't have to go. It's not about going too far. It's listening to the connections, from the leg to the hip joint, the hip joint through the pelvis, all the way into your lower back, especially.

Feel how you mobilize that leg.

Just add, as you do that, letting your chin come down towards your chest, as if your head is kind of connected to that foot, and the chin is being pulled down. And then as the foot comes back, let the neck go back to neutral.

See if you can find a connection where you can have a kind of — as if they're moving together, they link together, and you can follow with smoothness.

Okay, so it's not lifting the head. It's just letting the chin be pulled down. So it's a small movement of the head, as if the back of the neck is getting longer as the foot slides. So it becomes one movement through the whole of your body. One movement.

Okay, I'm gonna pause for a moment. Just let that rest.

These simple movements of your legs can be quite demanding, so take pauses if you need them before I give you them. It seems so simple, but it really calls a lot.

Okay, bend your legs once again, and this time have your right leg long, and do the same movement with your left foot and leg and your head. Sliding away and coming back.

Your pelvis moves differently with your leg long. You'll bend the other one in a moment again just to compare them, but for now, have the right leg long. Left leg moving away, and you're tracking all the way through your whole body. You can even feel your eyes go down and up with your head.

That's good. And then the next few times, do it with your right leg bent, and see if you can feel any difference. For some it'll be very obvious, for some not.

Okay, good. Leave that. Pause with that for a moment.

[Silence 40 seconds]

Toward the pelvis

Your bent legs, both legs. Slide the left foot towards your pelvis. See if you can slide the left foot toward — feel how your pelvis moves to slide the left foot.

Doesn't have to be a big movement, but listen to what happens through your leg and pelvis. Does your breathing still occur?

And as your foot goes towards your pelvis, let your chin come away from your chest a little bit. You're looking up a little bit.

Good. And do that movement with the right leg long. Again, let your attention flood through that whole left side as you do that.

With that right leg long, go all the way forward and back a few times. So away from you, back, only as long as the foot can stay in contact with the floor, letting the head mirror the movement.

Yeah. And then the next few times with the right leg bent also, and feel that movement go through you. Again, for most people, it's easier with the other leg bent. Maybe that's not true for you. There's some kind of support from that foot, and some mobility in the pelvis. It's a little bit easier.

Great, and leave it. Pause. Lengthen your legs. Just feel what's coming alive, particularly in your left side.

[Silence 48 seconds]

Side to side

In this very innocent way, ask, what's alive in my left leg? What can I sense?

Anything — calling what's alive, meaning anything you can sense, anything's there.

Then both legs. Slide your left foot leftward. And as you do that, let the knee go rightward, so the whole foot stays in touch with the floor, and you're sliding out to the left, and letting the knee go a bit rightward.

Feel that movement. The leg is not lengthening too much. Lengthen slightly, but not very much. It's mostly leftward, and you're feeling how that action goes through you.

Is it possible to slide the foot leftward and have the knee go rightward? See how that. You have to really differentiate your hip joint.

And as you do that, let your head go to the left in harmony with the foot. If you can find a way to have the foot sliding. The foot begins a little bit wider than the pelvis, so they're not too close together when you start. And then you're sliding leftward, the knee's going rightward, and your head's mirroring. Your nose is turning as the foot goes out, coming back.

And feel where you go to. Feel where's the comfortable limit there. And then do it a couple of times with your right leg long. Feel how the pelvis moves differently. The hip joint moves a little differently.

You're sliding the left foot leftward, and the right knee is going rightward as the foot is going leftward. I'm sorry, the left knee is going rightward, yes. Yeah, that's what you were doing. Yes, you were. Now, that's it. Yeah.

And then go right into bringing the right foot to the right — towards the left, actually. Bend the left leg again — I'm sorry, bend the right leg again. Bring the left foot towards the right foot.

So, towards the right foot, the left foot stays in contact with the floor, and then slide the left foot out to the left. Let it go through that whole range. The left foot goes left, and the knee goes right. The left foot goes right, and the left knee goes a little left.

So have your feet kind of wide, so there's enough space for that foot to move. If the right foot is too close to center, there won't be any space for the left foot to move to the right of center. So we want some space.

Maybe your left foot could stay on the floor. Keep the whole foot on the floor, though. The whole foot on the floor. When the foot goes leftward, the knee goes rightward. When the foot goes rightward, the knee goes leftward. But only as far as the foot can stay flat on the floor.

And let your head turn with the foot. So when the foot goes rightward, the head goes rightward. Foot goes leftward. There we go. And feel that through your whole hip joint and back.

Okay. Good. Okay, pause with that.

Yeah, and just feel how your pelvis and —

Bless you.

Bend your legs.

An oval

Okay, now, sensing your left foot and leg, slide your left foot away from your pelvis, the first movement we did, straight down, and feel where is the comfortable place it reaches to. When the foot — mark that point in your inner sense. And then slide the foot towards your pelvis and feel where it goes to comfortably without straining, and mark that point.

And then go out to the left with your left foot and feel where it goes to without straining. The left knee can go rightward as you do that. And then bring your left foot to the right, letting the left knee go leftward.

You mark those kind of cardinal points. Now you're gonna make an oval with your foot, connecting those points.

Right. It's not a circle, but it is an oval. And notice if your head could map the same circle. So your head goes right when the foot goes right. Your chin comes down when the foot goes away. Your head goes left when the foot goes left. Your chin goes up when the foot gets near your pelvis. And see if you can have both of those tracking at the same time.

Let the whole foot stay in touch with the floor.

Nice. And do the same. Change directions, and lengthen your right leg. See if you can have the oval be just as smooth with the leg long. That's it. And you're sensing all through your body.

It's good. And then as the leg gets long, just let it stay long. And feel how the two legs are lying here right now.

You know, the two sides of the pelvis, lower back, are here.

[Silence 31 seconds]

Standing to notice

Just for a few moments, roll to your side, come to standing, and see if there's something significant that stands out in the two legs, in the two sides. How it is to stand, and how it is to step.

Feel the weight in each leg. Feel the way your height of yourself when you stand toward one leg, or stand towards the other.

If you experiment with some of the movements we did at the beginning, of just stepping forward, stepping onto one.

And if you have something that's getting your attention, put it out. Say it again.

[Participant:] When you go on your left leg like that, really stable. It's lighter. So I come onto my right leg, there's much more of a dangly quality. When the left comes forward, it just kind of swings forward.

[Russell:] Yeah. The swinging is an interesting word. So the distinction between having to carry the leg and the leg swinging.

[Participant:] Yes. More than the right.

[Russell:] More than the right, yes. Great, great, great.

[Participant:] Does that mean the pelvis doesn't drop?

[Russell:] Yeah, so you're supported on that leg. That's interesting.

What do you sense in your lower back?

That's a glitchy place for you, and so when that gets mobile, it somehow gets freed through there.

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah, interesting.

The right leg

Okay, so let's come down. Come lie on your back. I'd like to sit on the other side.

Yeah. And again, this fascinating possibility of bringing a consciousness through the body. Taking our time to be able to enter places maybe we haven't sensed before, or in a long time.

[Silence 42 seconds]

Bend both legs.

And sense your right leg and foot there, and just feel that motion of the foot maintaining contact. Right foot in good contact, good space between the feet, with your pelvis or a bit wider, and sliding the right foot as far as it goes comfortably without lifting off the floor. And then, right, go through the whole motion back towards your pelvis. So go through that whole pattern, feeling how your pelvis moves.

Okay, with the left leg also bent, you probably have some more give in your pelvis, and you can on your own compare that to having the left leg long, but you're still just sliding the right. And as the foot is going away from the head, you're lowering the chin towards the chest. And as the foot goes towards the pelvis, the chin comes away from the chest.

And take your time to explore it.

Again, so we're just going away from the pelvis and towards the pelvis, but you're free to experiment with the left leg long or bent. So you have some sense of how it's different, what happens in your pelvis.

Okay, then pause with your legs bent.

And just imagine sliding your right foot to your right, and the right knee going to the left as you did that. Just get a picture of that. What would be happening in your hip joint? What would be happening in your pelvis for the right foot to go right and the right knee to be going leftward?

Picture that. Just do it in your imagination. Picturing what would happen to your femur, to your thigh bone, and how that would rotate in your hip joint, and what kind of invitation that would give to your pelvis and lower back.

And then imagining going through where the foot is now, and the right foot going leftward, and the right knee going rightward, and imagining that movement through your hip joint.

And then go ahead and do that. Go ahead, experiment with that whole movement.

That's it. Breathing smoothly.

Let your head go in the direction that the foot is going. Listen to what happens in your lower back, and in the front of your hip joint. And experiment at least a few times with that left leg long.

Again, for most people, when the leg is long, the pelvis doesn't move as freely. But the interesting thing in terms of Feldenkrais learning theory is that then, when you go back to doing it with the leg bent, often the pelvis now moves more, because it had to deal with a more challenging situation.

The interesting part of his learning theory was, like he might take a musician and have them stand on rollers and play. And then when they get off the rollers, it's so much easier that their arms are now so freely moving. So it's intentional difficulty.

Of course, it has to be something intelligent, not just making it more difficult.

Nice. You're so smart.

And pause. Leave that for a moment.

[Silence 45 seconds]

Both feet

And then bend both legs, and just a few times, just really four or five times, make a big circle with that right foot. Track it with your head, going all the way through. The whole foot in contact with the floor, so you don't have to go any further, and making that oval.

Knee goes leftward when the foot goes rightward, differentiating that hip. Knee goes rightward when the foot goes leftward. That's it. The head is tracking.

Good. And then how about both feet?

Yeah, that's a tricky one, isn't it? No, not — no, both feet. Okay, what I mean by both feet is, yeah, they go away at the same time, but they go in opposite directions. And both heads spin. You can do the up and down, but not the — unless you want to find a way to do it.

So the knees go toward each other when the feet go wide. It's not so simple. See if you can find that. It really asks you to get clear in the movements of the lower back and sacrum.

That's it. And change direction. Smooth together. Enjoy the feeling of your feet on the floor.

We don't have to. And that's it. That's it.

And then just randomly, just slide your feet. Just random. Just kind of paint the floor. Paint the floor with the soles of your feet.

Karen and my kids love working with this, this kind of lesson. Painting the floor, the images of painting, moving their feet, walking their legs. It really helps organize the pelvis and hip joint.

Okay, let's leave that. Lengthen your legs. Just feel how that lives in you.

Standing again

And roll to your side. Come on up.

And again, feel the connection all the way through you, to the ground. Feel the movement if you take a step forward. Feel how the legs move, both. How you take weight on a leg. How the leg swings forward. The support you get through the top of your head.

Backward steps.

And then just stand for a moment and just feel the connection through to the earth, through your pelvis, through your head. Quality of just standing there. Which parts of your feet are clear on the ground. Connection from your heels through your hip joints.

Okay, we're a little late for dinner. Thank you so much.