Talk

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 3, Session 2 — 57 minutes

Summary: Russell shares waking at two in the morning in not-knowing, and how feeling the body opens him to grace rather than doing the work alone. He offers a Rumi poem on remembering, then speaks of asking and gratitude. Participants respond with stories of practice, trust, and the vulnerability of teaching while still in process.

Waking at two

[Russell:] Good morning once again.

So I realize I'm not sure at this moment what I'm doing. Meaning, I'm not sure if I'm giving a talk, or if I'm sharing what's been up for me. Because they're kind of going together.

So, I thought I was going to start with something, and I thought something, so I really don't know yet. They're somehow together, and it will get clear.

It's one of the — oh, some people think of it as positive qualities, some people think of it as a liability in my teaching, and it happens like that. Okay. I can see both.

Where to start?

I think where I want to start is waking up at two in the morning. Waking up with a feeling of, there's so much I want to bring, I don't know what to bring. I don't know what's needed next. And how can I be most beneficial?

And it was a feeling of really not knowing. And something inside feeling a little lost in that.

And in the feeling of lost, also a confidence that finding will occur. And yet the lost has got some anxiousness in it, some quivering, some grateful that it's two in the morning, I got a lot of time.

I don't mind not sleeping. Not sleeping's not a big deal to me. I enjoy often being up in the middle of the night. I don't have a story that says if I don't get enough sleep, I can't — that's not one of the stories I live with. So I can have numerous nights of two or three hours sleep and be fine. That's just the way I function.

Yeah, so what do I want to say? I want to say — well, I'll come back to that, because it connects.

As I'm with it, it's connecting to sitting here, sitting in the meditation this morning, and observing faces that were struggling, and seeing a sense of feeling — my imagination of people feeling that they kind of meditate inside themselves, and that they got to make themselves better, and that it's kind of a contained process, that's separate from the world, and separate from — the word that's most potent for me is separate from grace.

And it breaks my heart, because I feel I know what this connection feels like. This morning at 2 a.m., there was some of that. There was some feeling of — although underneath it, there's a confidence that, hey, I've been here before, I know the connecting will occur. In fact, this is part of the reconnecting at another level, is going through the not-knowing places and the uncertain places.

So I'm lying there. So what do I do? Believe it or not, I feel my body.

Because in the moment of disconnection, I'm like everybody else. I'm getting disconnected. What am I getting disconnected from? I'm getting disconnected from myself and from life process. I'm getting disconnected because — oh God, you know, I don't know. What am I gonna — how am I gonna —

Oh, and then there's some feeling of, well, you know, for these people, that will be helpful. Oh, I want to just stop teaching and just meditate. Maybe I could just go sit in a sanctuary and people would come when they want to. That's three o'clock in the morning.

You know, and so there's this — it sounds funny, you know. It's uncomfortable and workable, and uncomfortable, and I know I'm in a process.

And I'm stepping out for a moment to say, part of why I want to say this is for those of you who are teaching, to know — I don't know if that stops. I don't know if that ends, you know?

It's — I have this picture of me that's true some of the time, where there's no effort, there's no planning, I just come in, show up, and it just functions, and I can do that for days.

And then — I was just telling Linda on the phone, because I seem to be in a process that I haven't been in for maybe five or six training segments, but I remember this from some others, where there's a real not-knowing, uncertainty, what's needed, and something getting scared about that, and something holding the place that's scared.

Right? Because the moment I remember — which for me doesn't take long — come back to the body, and as soon as I'm back in my body, the language becomes very important.

Feeling my body. Oh, hello in there. There's that place that's feeling uncertain. Oh, you're there.

And in me, that place immediately triggers — there's a primal scene for me. It's not important that you know it, but just to give you a reference. Where, yeah, I'm very young, I'm three or four, and my parents are in this major argument, and they're getting — my mother's packing my father's bags, he's leaving, and I'm running up and down, healing, you know, making everything right.

So I've got this kind of little kid in there who feels like he can make everything right, or should be able to make everything right, and he can't make everything. So whenever I touch into not knowing, that place is — I mean, it's not like it dominates, but it's there. I don't know that that ever goes away, contact with that place. I don't know that it should. That little guy needs my care still. So, say hello to him.

And as soon as I'm with that, it's not attention. It's not tough. It's a tender — a vulnerability that's tender, and yet that sense of not being alone, that sense of being held, first by my presence.

And then as soon as the presence is there, there's the sense that it's not just me. It's this larger process moving through me. And that's not conceptual. It's the body opening, and realizing this is not separate.

And when I see people sitting and struggling, and looking like they have to do it themselves, there's this sense of disconnection from what Jean would call larger process. You can call it God, you can call it the flow of life, call it your true self, call it essence, call it whatever. It doesn't matter. I don't think it cares what it's called.

But that we literally cannot do it ourselves.

Historically, that meant you had to have a belief system about what helps you. I don't. I think about a bodily experience. It's fine to have the belief system. I'm not throwing those out. But that doesn't work so well for me. The system rebels against it.

But that bodily process opens, and in that opening, it's as tangible as — I cannot deny the air coming in and out, and that it's not all inside my body. That I'm not just sitting on my bottom, but I'm sitting on something. It's as tangible as that.

That obvious physical largeness, or something, that I'm immersed in, is also part of my mental, emotional, feeling, spirit process.

And as soon as I'm dropping in the body, saying hello to the places, feeling the opening — it's still, for a while, the next hour, still forming. It's still, in terms of what to do, unknown. That's okay. I know that it's in process. I don't have to have the solutions now. I just need to stay in process, which means in connection.

If I start getting lost here, it's — oh, feel the coolness of the sheets. Oh, there's a nice breath. Oh, it really wants more. Oh, yeah, okay. And then this opening begins.

And again — this particularly didn't happen super, but I've had it happen like that, and this was some hours of feeling something else, some kind of grace, some kind of infusion. And then this lightening. And then it moves from just the sense of larger process to being immersed, carried, light.

And remembering. And from that comes, oh, we need to do this, we need to do this, we need to do this. That comes later. Comes from the connectedness.

And it's very touching to speak about it, and there's more that wants to be said, but I don't know what it is yet. But it's very tender.

Permeability

[Russell:] And there's — I guess there's a wanting to invite. Yeah, I guess invite you to let the opening in your body, to let that softening occur so that you can be permeable.

That we don't kind of seal ourselves off as these separate beings, and then wonder why we feel disconnected, why we feel isolated, why we feel like our old history is the whole story of who we are.

And that's just such a heartbreaking place to experience, when I observe that in others. Because it's like the air. It's almost like somebody going, I don't trust the air. And it's — see, I'm right, it's

not a good place to live. I'm getting it confirmed every moment that life is not a good place. And I'm gonna try really hard. It's like that.

So the permeability to air, and the permeability to life, and the permeability to sound, in some ways are metaphorical for our permeability to life spirit, to all of it, and that we are part of a larger process. And that's the amazing thing of the inner listening, the embodied listening, the focusing — whatever words fit for you.

Is that when we get in touch with what's living, it puts us in touch with — we could say nature, or life force, or the movement of life. It's not just in touch with yourself. It's in touch with life moving.

And then you're back in the river of your life, and you're not living in the iceberg that's sitting in the river, that got frozen away from the flow.

Yeah, so there's this opening, the dropping in over and over.

I know that when you haven't experienced it frequently enough, it's easy to forget. It's easy to lose confidence. But I'm here. Part of my function is to encourage that — that you are never outside the process of your life.

And you can — we have human free will, which means we can cut off from it as a conscious experience and feel isolated. We are given that right.

But we don't have to give up the value of our autonomy and our individual gifts in order to be carried by the stream. But it takes an attention. It takes an intention. To be a human being and a spirit being at the same time. To be one being that has all that.

Doesn't feel like I'm going to speak about it. Let me just come a little bit more down in, see if there's a little more.

The poem

[Russell:] So, okay. So I want to give you — yeah, this is what I want to say. I want to give you a Rumi poem that I love, and then I want to take just a little more time to then thread what I've just talked about into what's —

So the Rumi poem goes like this.

Lo, I will be with you always.

You promised that.

And when I realized it was true, my soul flared up.

All unhappiness comes from forgetting.

Remember, and be back close to the friend.

And for Rumi, friend was — be back close to essence, be back close to yourself, be back close to God. He called it friend, with a capital F.

So I'll give it to you again.

I have one little disagreement with Rumi. He says, all unhappiness comes from forgetting. I don't have that experience. I have — because I can be in connection and be unhappy. The unhappiness doesn't feel troublesome particularly. It just has a certain flavor.

Sometimes something's happened to a friend and I'm in great connection and there's a sadness. I'm equating sadness and unhappiness. So I would say something like, all disconnection comes from forgetting. All suffering comes from forgetting.

So he said it like this.

Lo, I will be with you always.

You promised that.

And when I realized it was true —

Oh, let's stop there.

Hello.

I will be with you always. You promised that.

You know, can we really believe that? All the disappointments we have.

And when I realized it was true, my soul flared up.

All disconnection and suffering come from forgetting.

Remember, and be back close to yourself.

As realization deepens

[Russell:] So, what's been living for me, which seems, as I look back historically, to be true in the past.

It seems that as my realization deepens, the challenges deepen. Things get much easier. Most of life gets much easier. But the things that come, as the something feels like it has more potency in it.

So I'm having more and more and more experience in my sitting of what can be called the just awareness is there. There's no separation. So that's wonderful. We can have that as something that occurs, and the challenge there is not to prefer that. And that's challenging.

So, like, some of you might have read what I wrote about — my all-day sitting was more challenging this time than usual. I'm used to being carried after a few hours. This time, it was not a struggle, but it just wasn't new.

Felt quite long. A lot of hours in a day.

There was something that felt, like I said at the end, something that felt kind of noble, or good, in sitting with that, and realizing how easy I have it so often, a certain way. And there's something courageous to sit through, and just sit through.

And I want to stand up for that courage in a human being, so I need to be able to demonstrate that in myself, and recognize the guy who really prefers when it's easy. That's carried. And without turning that into good and bad, or right and wrong, or anything, but just — the preference is still there.

You know, from what I've heard spiritual teachers more evolved than myself, no doubt, say — eventually you'll be beyond any preferences. And I'm not there.

But I see the danger in it also.

So there's that occurring, and I'm having my first really challenging community experience in one of my training programs.

I don't want to give a lot of the personal details, just enough context that you can follow it. This is where story is helpful, but I don't want to go too much into the story.

So, there's one person in the program who's been working with me for many years, comes from an extremely troubled background, and has made incredible progress over the seven years. She's gone from being completely disembodied to being able to hold her presence and be committed to her practices. And she's been wanting to get into a mentorship for some years, and I accepted her. I thought she was ready.

She has also a fairly well-known public history that is frightening to some people. She's not a danger, but it's frightening to some.

So we had a great first week, amazing first week, but there were some people in the program who realized something about her, looked her up online, and found out about her history, got really scared. Their experience of her was fine, but the history, and learning about her, was very challenging.

No — yeah, scared because — I mean, scared. No, they weren't worried. They say they weren't worried about what she would do to them, or something like that, but it was just —

She expressed in the past some very radical opinions. So maybe, as an example, that maybe it would be right to — she didn't do this, but maybe it would be right, she would argue publicly on television, to blow up the cars of some of the people who owned major corporations. Or deal with — if we're gonna save the environment, we have to be ready to declare war against certain people who are really destroying it.

We don't have time to — it's better to be peaceful, try to be peaceful, but if it's not working, and the elephants are still being shot, you have to be willing to do something more. And it's — better to be nonviolent, but stand up, for the earth is dying.

And she put this out very radically, and other things as well. So these people were very upset. Very upset with me. It triggered a lot in a lot of people. Let's just leave it at that. It triggered a lot of different things in a lot of people.

And, which of course became a disruption in the group mind that I've been working with. But it's my first experience of that kind. And it brought up different fears in me, different sense of, what's my responsibility here? Jeez, is this group gonna fall apart? You know, was there other actions I could have taken? What?

So it was bringing up — and there were people who were questioning, how could you accept her? You know, who were angry at me. And so I was working with a lot of different energies. I'm still working with it.

So let me pause here, because it's now becoming historical, and I want to be alive with it.

So. What I can recognize is there's energy here. There isn't the — it's nice to feel that it's not this tied-up feeling that I had for some time about this. It's more like, I want this to work out, and there's a lot of energy. It's been calling on a lot of my resources, a lot of my sending care into the world, and a lot of my concerns. But now it's just living as an energy, a concern.

And there's a little fear in there still. What's gonna happen? We're having a conference call soon. There's some concern about it.

Yeah. Yeah, so that's one example of things getting bigger in my life, in terms of more demanding of my presence, and challenging to my practices. To being able to be authentic with the people I'm involved with, authentic with my own inner work.

And it seems that each time I have an unfolding in my sitting, I'm gifted with something in the world that wants more care from me, wants more consciousness from me. So it feels like that's been in the foreground of my process — has been the grace that I'm experiencing more and more and more, the potency of just asking for help.

Asking and gratitude

[Russell:] There was one more thing I wanted to say about grace, which you all know from me. Obviously, I think at this point, in addition to connecting to self, and dropping in, and becoming permeable — that process of asking.

It's amazing how we don't ask. We don't ask. We somehow have got lots of opinions about asking, lots of maybe experience of disappointments or whatever, but every time I put my head down, there's an asking.

Many times a day. I'm asking for guidance. I'm asking for support, asking for clarity. So asking, I encourage very much.

And then maybe it's the other side of asking. Is it? I don't know. Is the gratitude. Is the gratitude that can always be there, as soon as we turn our attention to one of the gifts that's alive right now.

I don't have a moment that doesn't have a gift, even if that gift is just the air.

Feel gratitude for something that's not — you know how compelling it is when we have a pain, and we give anything for it to stop, and the pain goes away, and for one minute, or ten minutes, or an hour, we feel so relieved that we're actually happy that we don't have pain.

Well, that's an indicator that maybe if we can tune into just feeling warm and comfortable, we could be grateful for that. And again, without making that into a should, not a demand, but a practice. And then you get to live in gratitude. That is an opening.

Gratitude and grace, even linguistically, go together. The thankfulness, and the offerings we are graced by, and the only response is thanks.

That these are — the beauty is that it's neither something you have to believe in, nor is it something that you have no say over. It's a practice. You can actually do something to help you open to — to ask and feel gratitude is a practice.

You don't have to believe in it, but don't discount it till you've given at least two weeks of everyday practice, or a month ideally, and watch what happens to your life when asking for help, and

looking toward what you're grateful for, many times a day. At least five times a day, but it could be a hundred. But at least — because that will, that's a form of remembering.

And in that remembering, you don't feel alone.

Tony

[Russell:] Would you be willing to — no is a good answer — share your story about Tony? And does that feel alright, or not really? About Tony, and the — I'm thinking of two things. About the gratitude, and is that okay? And just even the breathing, that you led him through a process, and how he could feel.

[Participant 1:] Try to feel this in my body as I speak.

Back in October, Erin came to visit us in Seattle. She spent a few nights with us.

And the first night we have dinner together, the three of us, Tony and Erin and I, and said, can we just hold hands for a moment before we start dinner? And Tony rolled his eyes and he said, uh-oh, she's gonna pray. He said, you must be Catholic.

So I said, well, why don't we — and see what comes out of this.

So Erin explained that she had been — and you may just, it's time to correct me, because my memory is only as good as my recent practices around this.

Erin explained that this was a gratitude practice, and she was thankful for what she had, and the things that she had experienced during the day, and that she was happy to be with us. And so we took turns. And then he said afterwards — I think he said, I like that.

So the next day, Erin and we had dinner again, and we did it again, and he actually made a contribution as well.

And then when Erin was gone, I said to him, would you like to continue this? And he said, yes.

And at first it was kind of easy for him to say, you go first, and then he would say, I'm grateful for all that too. So I was trying to bring him out a little bit, and say, are you grateful for the sunshine? Are you grateful for the walk that we had in the park this afternoon? Are you grateful that you were with me while I was shopping? He said, yes, yes, yes.

So now he really got the message that there are other things that he can be grateful for, that don't have to coincide with what I am grateful for.

And then a few nights ago — I think it was Monday — I asked him if he was interested in doing some focusing with me. I've been doing quite a bit of solo focusing, mostly because it's available when I need it, and when I want it, and I can do it anytime during the day or evening.

And he said, yeah, but not now. So I thought, okay, I'll bring it up at some other point where it seems it may work.

And we went out Tuesday afternoon to do a little bit of shopping, I think. I don't remember exactly what we were doing. We had two Netflix movies. He said to me, when we get back, would you like to watch a movie? And I said, oh, we could focus. And he said, okay — which is like, that's not what a fun afternoon looks like to me, but —

So I put away the groceries. I started reading the article that we just got from Valley, that Valley emailed, about focusing for the first time with somebody who's doing it for the first time. And I tried to absorb as much, and memorize as much, as I could from that, but it's about ten pages, so there's a lot there. I'm not exactly expert at keeping all that in my head.

So we sat down, and I said, just feel how you're sitting here, and pay attention to your breath. Close your eyes.

And at first, nothing. He was really very eager to talk, talk, talk. And I said, see what comes in your body, anywhere in your body. If it's in your head, anywhere, see what you can find.

And he found indeed something. And he was very, very moved by it. And he felt that this had brought another dimension to his life and our lives together. He said, I feel much closer to you.

And I also — Russell — that I admire him greatly. And this is very much a turnaround for him, because although he totally approves of my being here, and he doesn't have to approve, he's just happy that I am doing this for myself.

He's always sort of pooh-poohed it. He doesn't think that that's really worth getting involved with.

And that same evening, during our gratitude practice, he said, I'm very grateful for what we did this afternoon, for what you've introduced me to, and I'm also very grateful that we're doing the gratitude practice, and that we're continuing this.

And it was so moving to me, because he's come out of his head into his body, I think, with this experience. It was very moving to me.

[Russell:] I've met Tony. He came to at least one of my talks, I think. Yeah, and at Santa Sabina. And so I know. He's a writer, isn't he?

[Participant 1:] Yeah. He's a really delightful man, very, very intellectual, and — to hear —

[Russell:] You can just feel his body opening, just hearing the story, and introducing the gratitude. You never know what effect we have on people.

And how simple, right? How simple. It takes some courage to offer it in an environment where you don't know if you're gonna be received, or whatever.

So I guess — yeah, that's good to hear.

Faces

[Russell:] So. Yes. Please.

[Participant 2:] I just want to talk about what you just talked about.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 2:] So, a part of me thinks that I probably do that a lot with my face. And yeah, because sometimes I really struggle, and I probably think — faces. So then immediately I thought, okay, now when you're meditating, you're going to think.

[Russell:] I wasn't talking about your face.

[Participant 2:] And then part of me thought, oh man, he doesn't trust that we're really getting this, and that we're coming in and out of it, and that I have these deep, deep connected meditations because of the practice. And then other times they're terrible.

[Russell:] Sure. Yeah. Yeah.

[Participant 2:] But anyway, part of me just wanted to tell you, I hope you trust.

[Russell:] Yes, I do. I do.

[Participant 2:] Thank you so much for saying it, though. You know, I come from a really long place.

[Russell:] I know. And — Karen, it touches me.

But your guy's sitting in a hotel somewhere, and it touches me that you do, and I appreciate it.

And if what I said gave the impression that I don't think you're getting it, or something, that's not really where I'm coming from.

What I'm — my intention is to encourage. And to encourage, not that you're less compassionate, but that for those who feel that they have to do it themselves, that they're maybe including the possibility of grace. The possibility of something is working with you here, even if we don't know what it is, and even if we're not going to label it. Just that possibility.

That was my intention. That if the feeling is that meditation happens by me, in me, let it open a little bit. So that was where I was coming from. And for some people, that's not a necessary message.

[Participant 2:] No, and I go there. Thank you.

I was more concerned when you're thinking about smiling. A little smile, I mean. So in my practice of sitting, when I feel the joy and smile — most of the time it's because I'm thinking of something.

[Russell:] Right, yes.

[Participant 2:] And to me it's a way to notice the thought.

[Russell:] Nice, yeah.

[Participant 2:] And I stay with it, with the thought and the tension of the muscle.

[Russell:] Yeah. The tension.

[Participant 2:] Yes. And it's something quite recent I do. And it felt really interesting, as a meditation practice, to stay with it.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 2:] And see, and be with it.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 2:] And just being with it, to me, is a kind of meditation.

[Russell:] It's absolute. That is meditation — is just being with it.

[Participant 2:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 2:] It unwinds itself. It goes on its own.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Underline that. That's just what I would encourage. That's embodied meditation. Oh, that's there. We don't just stop it.

[Participant 2:] No.

[Russell:] And the moment of being with it, something will shift.

Vulnerability

[Participant 3:] So I wanted to just say a few words around something that you said that really touched me, and spoke to me, with my current process.

You mentioned two words which can be perceived through what you're going through. One that spoke to me was liability.

And a few of you know that my mother-in-law had been living with us for the last three months, and without going into any story, it's been greatly challenging.

And I can recall there being an evening where a client came over and went into a session, and after the session I'll share with my wife. She'll say, "So, how was the session?" And usually it's, "Oh my god, it was amazing." "Oh yeah." And this particular session, it was really confusing.

I thought, man, I felt like I was the client. Like, I'm so vulnerable because of all this stuff.

And I guess, so, part of my process, and what I'm going through right now as a healer, as someone that strives to bring more presence in my own life and therefore others in the world, is this edge of vulnerability.

And what you're talking about right now, Russell, brings — for me, it brings a lot of hope, and even more authenticity to what's in my heart. That is.

In so much respect. So much respect for, once again, modeling a period in your work where it seems there may be unexpected challenges, and rather than deal with those later and have it all figured out, it's —

There's so many, for me, there's so many fears around that liability piece of being so vulnerable, while people have come to you for their process of growth.

And I think that we all, as teachers, experience this in one way or the other, whether we've lost someone and we're going through grief, or whatever the challenge may be. But stuff happens, like you said yesterday. We can't — we don't know what's going to come into our life.

And how to be real, and yet also deal with those parts of myself that think, well, if I be real, then are they going to look at me as, God, this guy doesn't know what he's talking about. You know, why am I coming — why am I sitting with him for my self-journey when he needs to go see somebody? And so there's all of that.

That's right at the edge for me. And it's in every single aspect of me coming forward, and being more of what this deeper yearning is calling me into being in the world. Is — where is that, if there is a line? Is there a line? Because I kind of don't want there to be a line.

I don't want there to be the line where it's like, maybe I shouldn't go there with these people, because then I'll lose my credibility.

And I think that's been such a huge piece of my deeper yearning, wanting to come forward and be a bigger voice, a bigger presence, is — I don't know how not to be vulnerable.

And I almost feel like it's toxic to be anything other than vulnerable. It's really scary.

[Russell:] There's that part.

[Participant 3:] Yeah.

[Russell:] There's that part. It's really scary.

[Participant 3:] And so.

Sitting here and being with you in your process of whatever — whatever that's going on in your other room, and whatever happened at 2 a.m., and whatever's happening right now — it's really — I'm so appreciative.

And I say that to you, but I say that to every person in this room, because over this last two years, I just feel like I've — without knowing what you do day to day, in your jobs, with your spouses — I see each of you in your own way bringing this into the world.

I see all you teachers, each one of us as teachers, and the five or six people that come into Lisa's house and lead. All of the things that we all share is like one song.

So I don't feel like — it's been very — this moment has been very sweet, and safe.

And there's some part of me that wants this in everything that I — and trusts that life can work.

[Russell:] So much living here. Encourage us to drop down, so there's space for it all.

Shift yourself. Do whatever you need. In fact, let's stand together.

You know what, I think let's take an early — let's take just a 10-minute pause. Not really long. Really, ten minutes, back. Just, we're gonna shift the energies a little bit. We stay. Still want the people to have a chance to speak, but we're going to take a little pause first.