Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 3, Session 4 — 39 minutes

Summary: After a brief sitting, Russell invites those who have not spoken to share what is alive, an edge, and what is next. People speak of gratitude, fear and calling, balance between distance and another's pain, a hair's difference in grace, generosity toward oneself, and habits of judgment and caretaking. Russell reflects on witnessing and compassion.

Opening

[Russell:]

We're sitting here. It's the same principles, right? We've got now our seat.

Think of your sit bones are like your heels. They're the bottom.

I'll show you on the skeleton tomorrow when we work more with that.

And from your sit bones, actually — the base of your head can get support all the way from your sit bones. They can be an up and a down.

Sensing some welcoming of the breath, some presence in here.

Your eyes are not fixed. Some movement in the jaw. It doesn't have to move, but some — that could easily move.

So, grounded, centered presence in sitting has the same basic principles.

So, the people who have not said something about wanting to focus in mostly on what's alive for you in your learning, in your practices, and of what's next.

If the word edge works, you can use that, or just what you feel like you're in process with, or what's coming, or what's next. And those might be the same thing.

What you're excited about in terms of what's been coming for you and what you're working with.

So those who have not said — and if those particular invitations don't work, you say it in your way, what you'd like us to have.

An inner voice and a calling

[Participant 1:]

I think I'll speak. I don't know what I'm gonna say.

[Russell:]

Yeah.

[Participant 1:]

I think my impulse is usually to share sooner, but there's a sense of — there's been so much up for me, I don't even know where to begin, or to share. So I'm just gonna pause.

The first thing that comes is just, in the moment, incredible gratitude to be there, steeping in our field together, and just the caring and affection and love I have for everyone. That's really present.

And what comes is, Carl and I were talking a little bit last night after we left, and I was having this image of — let me see how this wants to go.

In my previous years of working in the Buddhist tradition, the teacher that we worked with for many years really emphasized vertical, and so a deep connection, spacious, present.

And this image I get, in moving in this direction, there's still some — my internalization of that teacher, my little inner character. Rejection of some of the stuff that that teacher would say.

There's a — like almost slapping in the gestures. Like, don't. How dare you. I'm not making myself in this.

I noticed it even when Wendy was sharing last night, of I want to share this work.

This little inner character, having spent so much time with this teacher — I know how he would respond, or I imagine how he would have responded once upon a time. And there's an inner, who do we think we are? We've only been doing this for so long.

My main response is, awesome, I can't wait to see how you share this work.

And I was sitting with that last night, and caring for the part of me that has that how dare you, who do you think you are, voice, mostly with myself.

Okay, so I'm going to pause. So — wants to come.

I shared with you in an email, Russell, this word that feels really apt for me, that I learned in the last year. I guess it's a Hebrew word that I really valued very much.

And the way it was explained to me was a distinction between two different kinds of fear, two different words for fear. One was called pahad, and that is like lizard brain fear, when you're really afraid.

And the other word that was so helpful for me is called yara. And yara, the way it was explained — my best articulation of it is the quaking feeling when you're being called to inhabit a larger space than what you're used to.

So it's like a positive fear. It's not the collapsy fear, but there's something like, whoa. That feeling.

So I feel that. That's an edge for me. We just had our fun experiment with teaching for a week in Costa Rica, and the whole thing was like, whoa.

Just riding this unknown, but trusting the wanting to — that it's a beginning, to let it be okay to do some of this.

And I also want to say, there's something that's so — surprised, I feel tears coming with this, but it's like embarrassed, or I'm too much, I shouldn't be.

I felt so embarrassed when Nettie was sharing. Like, oh, I said something, that I go to her house and I'm spouting some great — like, who do you think you are? Or I said something to you and you're sharing about it.

I just feel this wanting to not be too much or something. It's really tender. So it's an edge with them.

Also wanting to share the beauty of this. How much this work resonates.

And when I go home, I feel like Chinese New Year really kind of feels like New Year, because you're like, okay, we've had all these travels and holidays, and ready to kind of settle.

And there's a real wish to just — so resonating with what you said about just simple.

I recognize a part of me that wants to make complexity your problem. You're thinking about it. And there's a wish to just deepen and be simple.

And I have a second round of this women embodied group starting on Saturday, a week from today. I'm excited about that.

And just to see if that's complete.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Russell:]

You know, like in the deli counter in New York, you gotta take a number. So just check your number and see if it's up. Maybe everybody's calling.

Looking for balance

[Participant 2:]

Much of what I heard yesterday — pieces from here and there, from each of you that were sharing — connected and put together, could easily be what I would bring forth.

My edge at this point is, I heard the word calibrate yesterday. I'd say that's close, but balance is probably closer to what I'm working towards.

I lost another family member recently, the last of my siblings. But I gained a grandchild.

Part of what I've been trying to learn for quite some time is to accept that I really don't have control. It was a wonderful image for a long time.

Now what I'm trying to get a better handle on is, I find myself at surprising moments easily emotional, which surprises me. This is me.

On occasional other times, in difficult situations — I was in the hospital with somebody this last week, a difficult situation. I actually found that I had succeeded in developing that step back, maybe a little bit too much.

And I found myself questioning where the depth of compassion was, that I was able to distance myself from the pain.

So I've got what feels like potentially being in the extremes on both sides of the evidence. And I'm looking for balance.

That's all I got.

[Russell:]

I'd like to ask you a question.

When you go back to the hospital experience, and you felt you were distancing from the pain, did you cut off all feeling?

[Participant 2:]

No. I was actually able to play the role that was expected of me under the circumstances, and I think I did it confidently.

[Russell:]

But you felt like your heart was somehow not open?

[Participant 2:]

Yeah, and part of that was the relationship with the individual I was involved. If I'd gone across the hall to a complete stranger, the chances are I would have done a better job, because there are so many barriers.

[Russell:]

Okay, yeah, so there's more. I just wanted to check if I was also hearing that, in order to have my heart open, I need to feel their pain. And I would like to question that, in my experience.

[Participant 2:]

That is the question for me, though, so I guess that's very accurate.

Witnessing

[Russell:]

What is the definition of empathy? What is the definition of compassion? To what level do you have to be in their shoes? Or in this case — right?

What is witnessing? What is it to be close enough where we're in touch with our heart?

Maybe sometimes it brings us into their pain, but more often we might feel our heart touched, and something in the direction of vulnerability, and touched, and moved.

And yet, for me, there's a distinction there, to feeling their pain. And feeling their sorrow.

So, as an example, I have a very, very good friend who was in the hospital, almost dying, last week. And we had a very, very touching meeting in the hospital, with many tubes coming out of his body.

And what he really wanted was to be touched. And so he's lying there — got to find a place where you're not knocking on a tube. And this amazing number of tubes you can put into a human body.

And just connecting.

So I'm not presenting this as an example of, this is a way to connect, okay? But I'm just resonating with your story, and realizing that he was going through a lot, and I could feel very much my heart and my caring, and I didn't have a story of sorrow layered upon it.

I feel for his suffering, but without a story that it's somehow wrong or bad or shouldn't be happening. That from the reality of this is what's true, the heart could be touched.

But I know the place inside, in my past, that could create a sorrowful story about the situation.

And I don't know if this is true or not, but it seems practicing being with what is allows a different starting point for the connecting. That I no longer have to go through the fighting of what is, or the stories about it not being this way, or shouldn't be this way, which seem, for me in my past, to generate a lot of my suffering around people's pain.

And of course, I've had a lot of experience with that. Because I have a lot of people coming to me in a lot of pain, so over the years I really needed to learn how not to close my heart — because I went through that period, I couldn't take it — how to have the availability for intimacy without this layering of my fear of their pain, or my story that it shouldn't be.

And so what this friend of mine said to me a week later, a few days ago, when I got to see him, was just how refreshing it is to be with somebody who is not reacting to his pain, and therefore he has to take care of them, because everyone is so upset.

And to get upset that somebody's in pain — there's something maybe natural about that, but it wasn't helpful for him.

So it's interesting. How do we find that place that's neither closing off — I can be with this person and take care and speak very logically and say the right things and play my role and all — or being in it with them?

How to find that. It's the same thing we're learning about in our own inner process, what I call that witnessing, which is a changeable distance. It's not one place.

Right? And it's listening for that movement of how to be with a challenging moment, so that you don't drown in it, but you don't separate so far, and you're feeling what's helpful here.

I have an image I'll bring to you a little later of that.

It's such a key thing, that, for us all with our own inner process, right? If we get too far away, we get petty about it, or too disconnected. If we get too in it — it's fine to be in it for a while, but what it needs is our presence.

Just like what suffering people need from us, right?

So, yeah, finding that balance.

[Participant 2:]

Thank you.

[Russell:]

Who else has not spoken?

A hair and a thousand miles

[Participant 3:]

Hello.

Well, getting very excited. So it's really alive for me right now, the difference in what I'm feeling today and yesterday, and what I was feeling two days ago.

It's that classic image that you produce — it's a hair, and it's a thousand miles.

Being in this container with all of you, and with Russell, I feel like I've got a hair's more openness to grace, and a hair's more trust in my capacity. A hair more sensitivity to the movement of my ankle. And it's so different.

And just being out, and the lesson we were doing out there, there was this feeling of almost an ecstatic quality of grace, shifting, with trusting everything else that's been happening in my life up until this point — coming onto one foot and coming onto the other foot, and not hulk and not vulture.

So that kind of edge for me is what the difference is in that hair that I didn't have two days ago, that I have now, and that perhaps I'll have.

[Russell:]

Yeah, and that — that's just, it's not so much different, and it's so much different.

[Participant 3:]

And I want to have so much different stuff.

[Russell:]

Yeah, yeah. You just meditate at Sophia's and I'll just come and hang out.

[Silence 31 seconds]

The in-between

[Participant 4:]

I found it remarkable to arrive here and realize how, just in us coming together, I felt so like I could breathe again.

And when I listen to everybody talk, I almost have this — I'm drinking it in, this mother's milk of hearing all my experiences being told by many. And it's so satisfying.

And yesterday, I thought I heard Russell say we were gonna learn how to be in the in-between place. And I don't know if that's what he said. Something. And it was like —

I've said it. I don't think I said it yesterday, but I definitely have said it to you a number of times. I was starting to write this thing about that in-between place, but we might get there.

But this just kind of curiosity, which I'm incredibly grateful for, and anger. About when it's not that, and when it's pain and limitation, and can't or won't. All of this.

And a lot of shame. I mean, I work in the happiest place on earth, like golden land. Still so left.

And a beautiful thing we did last time was the treasure mapping. And something came up that I was surprised about. This idea came up: need nothing, take nothing. And it was so arrogant.

And I got this gift. And in the fall, I hurt my shoulder, and I couldn't move my arms for about three weeks without really bad pain. And it's just been this constant unfolding of, I don't want to be with this. Just don't want to be with this.

And yet I've been with it. So it's a coming about. And where I want to be is — tonight, I'm going to be very sane, but to be as generous with myself as I can be with others.

Oh, I'm so sorry. It's so good to stop hurting, or whatever it is. Just miss.

And yeah.

Well, today, in meditation, just that vast blue sky came. For just a little while. And I was just like, oh my God, I'm there all the time. And so, one thing: where is that?

So that's my hunger right now.

Thank you.

[Russell:]

Thank you.

And what's coming to me, just listening, is really wanting to support you in the turning around of the care that you give, and how much care you gave to bringing us together here.

There's a lot of work shifting centers. Valerie really spends time figuring out all the rooms, and visiting, and who would fit where, and what do we do, and how is this going to work for them. And so I'm very touched by that, and that caring that I see from you, so regularly.

I love when I hear that coming from you to you. I love that.

Befriending the critic

[Participant 5:]

It was a surprise to my tongue. But it doesn't taste sad. I didn't know that would be the note.

I thought I would jump in there early. I was so stopped by what I was hearing — the sound, listening and growing. Maybe share.

I love the one, like where Pete went. There was this verge, this silence, where I knew there was a bunch of us still that hadn't shared, and we were all in the same boat, maybe being the next one.

But there was this lovely feeling in my body of the attention to all of that, and everyone who knows they already went and are going to listen. And just that was such a lovely feeling.

I wasn't worrying about going. I was just enjoying it.

Yeah, so maybe that's happening more for me.

That's sort of the edges of places that have felt, or feel, frightened — to kind of ease into them a little more, in a way that's spacious, and to receive the gift of what else is there.

The wisdom from the Radical Acceptance chapters, about the two parts, and listening to different voices, has been so helpful. That way, to feel that the judge and critic can — and to see that it's there, and to befriend it, and see what's under it. What's it protecting? What's its job? What's your job description?

So I think, in a bigger outer world way, I'm dealing with that too. Like in my work as a dance mover in the world, and teacher, and traveler, running into lots of communities, lots of dancers — particularly this form that I have been so close to, this contact improvisation form.

And I've heard people speak about golden cries, or meditation, in a similar way. Like the spirit, or something that's been — that touches me so deeply about that dance form. And that so many people out there are just using it and not really doing it anymore. And it's just like this other thing, and it's about tricks and socializing.

I mean, it's just so deeply social. You can't even talk. You just dance with each other. And anyway, so there's a lot of judgment that comes up for me.

And I'm trying to turn that around a little bit in my approach. It's not so great to just come to a new group of people and say, that really sucks what you're doing. I really wish you would just try the language. It's a language of slowing down.

So this is body-life language. An application I did earlier, and I wrote something about wanting a language. I think so. It's really what's coming. Which is so interesting. Like something new, some harmony.

Yeah, and I find that people really appreciate the takeaway from it, whatever it was.

Boy, there's so much happening. So, let's see. What else is there?

Yeah, that story of — well, the caretaking story has been a big theme in my life within the last few years, and recognizing it for about the last three years.

So I've been working with healing that part of me that feels like it needs to take care of others, or control others, in order to feel safe. And the sense of not knowing who I am if I'm not doing that.

And the moment of that was a real wake up. There was one moment of that. And also my partner — I realized I didn't know who he was either. So there was this fabulous gap that felt really fabulous. It wasn't scared. It was opening and awakening. And a real fresh, like, wow. Wow.

But the habits are so, so deeply strong. So deeply strong.

Just the other day in Berkeley, I was with my friend, the one who lost her child last time we were together. And she's still going through, and she's starting to come out, to go to job interviews, and she was talking about whether or not to let people know what happened.

And I'm like, I have an opinion. I have the subtlest words. You went through the voice. I know. What does it have to be?

Later on at night, I can't believe it. Feeling that went away with me to bed. Oh my god, that was so obviously just so scared to hear what she's going through.

Just like, I think you should do this, that, and the other thing, and let them know that. But really it was, how painful that is for her. So hard to hear that, and to let that just be the first response.

Like, I want to be a first responder. I mean, I really want to respond, really, always, to a place. Trust my instincts.

I think I'm going to stop there. I think there's more to come.

Thank you.

Closing

[Russell:]

In five minutes, we're going to start a movement lesson. So please set up your mats. Use your bathroom if you need to.