Talk

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 4, Session 2 — 70 minutes

Summary: Russell teaches presencing as home base rather than a technique, and distinguishes responsibility for one's state from blame. With the group he explores disappointment, forgiveness, and the needs beneath blame, then stands to practice grounded, centered presence as a way back when the historical self takes over.

Arriving

[Russell:] If you take a moment to close your eyes and just pause, and step out of the inner dialogue, or the maybe usual state, and just feel: I'm sitting here. Sensing that ground that's here, behind whatever else is on top of it. Behind whatever the thoughts, concerns, that there's always this — could call it something like neutrality. I'm here. This spot.

It's helpful to have specific places to go with our attention. Otherwise we tend to keep recreating where our attention has been in the past. So, to have this feeling of the ground underneath us, freshly each time.

In the way that I've presented five check-in places, or body qualities, I'll usually go from the ground to what I'll call lengthening. Actually, lengthening is really what we could call not contracting unnecessarily. So it has the sense that you're giving full space to your spine. You're noticing any unnecessary contractions, and seeing if they're willing to lighten. And that could be anywhere. That could be shoulders, and your jaw, and your eyes, and your belly.

It's grounding, and then that quality of lengthening means we're letting each place that has shortened unnecessarily come to its true length, to its space. Not demanding that, but inviting that.

We come to sensing the center. Dropping the energy, centering the energy here, and noticing if the breath is welcome here.

And as we have this basic embodiment, we include the space around us as part of our body, as part of our experiential body. Not just inside here. We're in a space.

Let your eyes open. Still a few moments of letting all that help you in being present. And if there are certain strong feelings, or a jitteriness, or a tiredness, or anything like that, acknowledge it. And say, okay, that's there. And I'm sitting here. It's like you're noticing what else is there, and you're grounding yourself in the home base.

The attention comes out further, so that you're with yourself, and you're with the group, and speaking. All of this lives together.

Presencing as home base

[Russell:] So, something we've been working with since the beginning, but I think is forming more concretely for many of us, is this remembering of presencing. This remembering that, in addition

to the specific content of the moment — the feelings, the energy state from others, in addition to the content of the situation — that there's always these multi-layers. There's this layer of presencing that's noticing all of it.

Traditionally called witnessing. That could be a little distancing to me sometimes. But witnessing — there's what we could call an eye that is presencing with what's here.

And the groundedness in the body is such an ally for that. And also that presencing language, that I hope you're realizing is not for focusing, or not for embodied listening only. It's for living.

That's part of why I object sometimes to technique teaching, because it seems like, oh, I take my ordinary self and then I do this extraordinary thing to kind of get me out of it for a little bit, and then I go back to my ordinary self. Ordinary self being the repetition of your stories and self-images. And what I'm suggesting is turning it upside down, where our home base is presence. See? And yet it's inclusive. It's not judging or pushing away the energy state, the feelings, the fact that it's a tough moment, or the ways that it's a tough moment.

It's creating many pauses, many gaps, in the train of self-recreation, so that this presencing can shine through. And it's always there. You know, that blue sky, it's always there. But it needs encouragement, and that's the responsibility for our attention. It's taking responsibility for, where am I focusing? Where am I?

When I'm unconscious, I just drift into my ordinary, mostly about how I'm feeling, how life is going, and what I'm excited or disappointed about. You know, I go into this. When I'm remembering, that's all there, but it's there in this larger space.

[Participant:] Can you say that again? Just the last part.

[Russell:] Yeah. What I said was, when I go unconscious to myself, when I'm not in my presence, where I find myself is in what feels like my head, repeating something to myself, when I do get conscious of it. That I have my to-do list, or I have my judgments of myself or others, or I have what I call more historical Russell running the show, so to speak.

As soon as I step into presence, that's welcome. There's energy in the historical. But it's not who I am. It's, okay, I want to learn. I want to include that, because that helps me in this present moment. If I've got a certain feeling state that's other than radiant and open and connected to the moment, then I want to see, how are my needs not being met right now? How did I get into this contracted state?

And to do that without judging it is why that unconditional welcoming is where we start, and keep returning to. Because those habits of turning it into some sort of whip on ourselves are so present in us.

Responsibility is not blame

[Russell:] You know that story. I've told it to you before, of the shock and grief of the Dalai Lama when he was with a group of American psychologists, and just couldn't understand that we were so lost in our self-judgments, in our guilt and self-assessments, that the translator had to keep saying, why do they feel so bad?

He'd say, well, we just have this sense that we're supposed to be better, and that we're not living —

But what did you do wrong?

No, no, it's not that they did something wrong. It's the feeling that — but what did they do?

And can't they, if they did that, couldn't they forgive themselves? They did that a long time ago.

And then when he realized that this was — we were born into a culture. He was simply toast, you know. His culture didn't have that particular thing, and it was almost incomprehensible. And then he just ended up crying when he realized what was being said to him.

I guess maybe in some retreats or some places I've told it. But it's such a moving story. And yet, isn't that part of the awakening process? I mean, it's a central part of the awakening process. How can I include the historical without being dominated by the historical? Is that possible for human beings? That's what we're investigating.

Maybe there are some conditions where it's not possible, and maybe somebody's in a certain state where it's not. But for many of us, at least significantly, we can move toward what I call freedom. It's freedom from having to have that pattern of thought, feeling, and behavior.

So I want to go back and take this step by step. When I say responsibility for our state, which is what I was talking about a lot in our last meeting — responsibility for our state, which is responsibility for how we're attending, and the stories we're telling ourselves about ourselves and others. Taking responsibility for that, I want to immediately differentiate that from blaming ourselves for being lost in some old story.

And it's tricky territory, because we're really good at that blame. Blaming others, blaming ourselves, and boy, that goes very deep in our culture, in our histories. And I can truly say we can be free from the habit of blame. And if it arises out of unconsciousness, you really don't believe it anymore, very quickly. Whether it's blaming someone else.

Now, it doesn't mean we don't hold others responsible for what they say to us, or for what they're telling us they're going to do, or hold ourselves responsible. But can you feel a differentiation between being responsible for what you do, and that that is completely free from blaming yourself for not doing it?

And how can we be with not living up to our intentions? How can we have that — this is a serious question. I'm not a lecturer. This is for us to work with. How can we have what's good about blame, in the sense of wanting to hold highly to certain values, and feeling, for me, something like the disappointment of not having that?

Disappointment feels authentic and real, and at a different level than blame. Do you start feeling something like that? So there can be real disappointment there. There can be, oh, sorrow. There can be maybe even some kind of anger. That can be a life-giving response. And it doesn't need to turn on the self in terms of one's badness, one's essential badness, that kind of self-judgment.

So this is a fine differentiation that is really essential, because the feeling energy of our disappointment and our anger can be life-giving. It's rare that the blaming states, whether towards others or towards ourselves, become life-giving. Or if they do become life-giving, you have to go through a lot of toxic moments to get there.

And we need to see that the blame is a different level than the disappointment, than the urge to — again, what I'm calling the positive side of blame is, in my experience, its intention, we could say, is to motivate behavior, to kind of get it next time. So it hurts this time, so you have motivation. Well, I'm saying that that's an unfortunate motivational system. Just like the same thing can be said of most of our judgments, in this sense of it.

I want to distinguish judgments from making distinctions. And that's not the same thing, just like being responsible is not the same as blame.

And we need these fine distinctions, because it's not about just accepting everything, everything's equal. We do want to grow in certain values and certain qualities that we're radiating into our world and into our lives. It's not only acceptance, and everything is equal, but how do we non-violently deal with our dissatisfactions, or disappointments?

So again, the presencing is so key here. The presencing language. That we cultivate that in the less demanding moments, so it's there when we're in, oh God, I blew it. I blew that.

It used to be for me, if I made a mistake that really inconvenienced somebody, oh, it was like some sort of deep wound in me would get activated. And it's so helpful now just to feel, oh, I made that mistake. I dropped the ball. I'm sorry.

Yeah, a little thing. Yesterday, Michael came up. He drove an hour and a half to come here. He had written me a letter a few days before, because we had talked briefly about meeting with Aaron and Carl and coming up here. And I was waiting for them to come back from Costa. Somehow I had it, and I was, I'll get to it, and then I totally forgot about it.

So here he's doing this very generous act, he's waiting to hear from me, and it's Friday night. I go back to my room and there's a phone message, you know, should I come? And so in that moment, it's like, blew it.

And it was so nice, actually, to feel the owning of the error. The feeling briefly, oh, I hope that didn't put him out. And just saying, I dropped the ball, hope you can come. And of course he was fine with it.

That's a very tiny little something, but that same thing lives for me when I disappoint Linda in something. So I'm very interested in how we can be responsible beings. That we can make mistakes responsibly, without the whip coming out.

[Participant:] Yeah. I had missed it in raising my child. This way. Big mistakes. I didn't know better.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And then I began to awaken. That I made that big mistake. In a certain sense, it wasn't me. I didn't know that. Right?

[Russell:] That's absolutely true.

[Participant:] I did.

It could not have been different

[Russell:] Okay, so we need to go very slowly there. We need to go very slowly, because here we're at the edge of the paradox of the continuity of the being, and the arising of what's possible at a given moment. Yeah?

And that's where forgiveness is so key. Forgiveness is so key, because when you're unconscious to something, you don't have a choice. And then when you wake up to the fact that your unconsciousness created some effects in the world, if our heart is open, we feel some breaking of our heart.

And that moment can be a shattering, or a breaking open to empathy. For the dad who wished he had that. For the suffering that he was under, because when we're in our unconsciousness, there's other kinds of stuff. And for the sorrow that, in presence, the sorrow that he's feeling now. I'm with you. I'm with that place that's carrying that. All of that.

And if it feels right, as it does for me — I would say always, although I always get hesitant, almost always. If it feels right to say, and it could not have been different. So it's not an arguing with life.

And feel how that changes things. That we can have enough space for the regret without it becoming, and I was wrong or bad. And if the wrong or bad is not there, it opens the heart. When the wrong and bad are there, it shatters, or closes.

So this is really key navigational skills right there.

[Participant:] I really appreciate that. Thanks. It's new to me. But there's something like an off-gassing.

[Russell:] Yeah. That's a good image.

[Participant:] Yeah. Off-gassing. Oh, damn.

[Russell:] Yeah. I know that well. Yes, the off-gassing. And again, in presence, it can be, oh. We can even have some laughter with it, in moments.

Okay, so really, the awareness that you're in right now is really key. Because in our unconsciousness, we will close the door so the gas stays in the room. We won't leave the windows open. And with the windows open, you can deal with the off-gassing. But you close those windows.

And what closes those windows are those unconscious, or those habitual thought patterns, like, oh shit, I should have been different. Why, what was wrong with — oh, damn it.

Actually, just one moment. There's a lot. There's a lot we're processing, and if we take the extra few seconds, we can let it go through our bodies, and it can actually become influencing behavior for some of us. Boy, that's some important something. So let's just take a moment to drop down. Let it settle in. What's resonant for you?

Of course, that pausing and dropping down has that, oh, I'm with you. I'm with whatever's alive in here.

Needs rather than fault

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] Well, you just explained what I — like fifteen years ago, whatever it was, my life that I feel called — and that quality of waiting that those elders were doing. Like, that's what they were doing.

And so my practice of deepening my waiting for myself, and the deepening of waiting for the youth that I work with. That's it.

[Russell:] Yeah. And it really touches me so much that you're bringing that space to those people you work with. Yeah, and yourself — I'm very happy with that. But at this moment, what I'm feeling into is that somebody is holding that space.

Okay, so, can we continue? Go ahead.

[Participant:] What about the blame that is outwardly directed, rather than inwardly directed?

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] So many do. Is that like a cover for not growing, and for — how do you interpret that?

[Russell:] So, when I hear words of blame coming from here, I am very sensitive to it. And I know from experience, from practice, that I'm not being responsible for my state. I know that I'm giving some situation, or some other person, responsibility for how I'm feeling. And I know that that's not helpful, and not accurate.

That when I return to presence, I have the capacity to feel differently in that situation. It doesn't mean I like it. But the shifting from feeling disappointed that a need of mine wasn't met by somebody, or that an agreement we had wasn't kept, or something like that. And I translate it in terms of my own needs, for honesty, or my own. It's not their fault that I feel this way.

I have certain needs, and if they're demonstrating to me that we can't be in relationship, okay. If the relationship's important to me, I'm going to want to say, what goes on in me when this behavior happens? What happens in me?

And I like that language of needs. What's the fundamental human need that's not being met in that moment? Is it for safety, honesty, connection, kindness? What's not being met for me?

And when I focus on that, then I'm no longer making them responsible, and I'm empowered again. Does that make sense?

[Participant:] Can we say the very last part again? Then I'm empowered again?

[Russell:] Empowered. Empowered again.

There was a time when, if I had a friend who was late very often, and I noticed it, I would get annoyed. Especially if I had a kind of busy time. And then I started noticing I got annoyed when people were late. And then I realized — not as a concept, but in a real feelings way — I realized that sometimes somebody's late and I'm enjoying the time.

I got an extra fifteen minutes to meditate, or to have a cup of tea, or sometimes I'm happy they're late.

So it's not their being late that's annoying. It's what I tell myself about their being late. Through my own thinking, I'm creating a feeling response, stimulated by their lateness. But they didn't

cause it. The stories I tell: they don't respect me. I'm not important to them. If they respected me, they would be here on time, and they're —

If I get lost in that story, I can really think I'm right. I can blame them for how they hurt me. They don't respect me enough, or whatever.

Now, if it's something that I'm not comfortable with, I can say, you know, I notice I have this kind of annoyance here. It's important to me, when we say nine o'clock, that you're really there within a few minutes of that. I just notice I'm getting upset about it. And you're not actually doing anything wrong. It's fine for you to come late. It just doesn't work for me. But if you want to keep having meetings, would you be willing to come by five after, at the latest?

And if they say, you know, it's really just too much hassle for me. I really don't like keeping track of time. I say, that's totally fine. I want you to feel free to be late, but we're not going to meet in that way. Maybe if it's an important relationship, let's come up with another way that your need for freedom about time, and my need not to be waiting, can be met. And then we can navigate that territory.

But I don't find it helpful, or honest, to think that they're creating my upset. My thought patterns get activated. So they stimulate. It's not that they're not involved. They stimulate something, but they don't cause it. That's an important distinction.

Okay, I want to go back. Go ahead.

When blame comes toward you

[Participant:] When things turn around. When it's others blaming you.

[Russell:] Right. That is tricky.

[Participant:] You're talking about — yeah. It's actually, I think, the beginning of what can become a —

[Russell:] Right. So it's a difficult energy. It's difficult energy to be with.

When I am in good presence, my response is to really listen to what's living in them. Because when somebody is coming with that energy at me, there's something upset in them. And if I can really be present, I don't have to take in their — but I can really, oh wow, you're really upset. And I can make a guess at what's living in them, how they're seeing me in that moment.

As soon as I go into defense, it begins to — because then they have to defend themselves. And I — so somebody who is ever at the consciousness that they can be in presence can respond in a different way.

And it might be that at first I need to say, whoa, whoa, whoa, there's a lot. I need a minute just to process this, because I really want to be able to connect with you. I can tell how upset you are. I can feel myself getting ready to kind of fight back, and I don't want to do that. So give me a minute. Sometimes I need to do that. Sometimes I don't have enough presence immediately. I need — sometimes I need to take a few breaths, or even, you know, I need to go to the bathroom, I'll be back.

But then, to the best of my ability, when possible, I listen for, what is their need that's not being met?

Feelings are always connected to human needs. By needs now, I'm talking in more the NVC kind of language. Not, you know, I need a yogurt. I mean, I need to eat. It's universal, human. We need safety. I don't necessarily need four locks on the door. That's a strategy to get safety, right? There's a distinction between what the need is, and what the strategy to get it is.

So the larger universal is, we share these needs cross-culturally, mostly. And if I can sense into it, behind the feeling is always the need.

So with my inner life, my feeling is an indicator of my needs being met, or not being met. Anytime I'm in what I call neutral, which is open, available, warm-hearted, expansive, ready to meet — my needs for safety are being met. I know, because when I don't feel safe, usually I'm not feeling that way. My needs for connection with self and world are being met. So my basic needs are being met.

When I'm feeling any kind of contraction in my moment — you know, when I'm lying in bed at two in the morning, and I woke up, and I thought, well, I'm not sure what to bring these people, a couple of days ago. My need to feel capable and competent, and participating helpfully with the people around me. Those are what it was connected to.

So, feelings. Behind them, when you're in these open, positive states, many of your needs are being met. When you're in a contracted state, it's really helpful to look toward, not to dwell in the feeling. Let the feeling lead you to your felt sense. Let your felt sense lead you to, what are the needs that are living in this felt sense?

The needs that, for me personally — one of my very strong needs is for connection. When I lose connection to myself, I really — that's part of why I meditate a lot. That's part of why I have a lot of practices, because I'm uncomfortable when self-connection begins to get wavery.

My connection to other people. I've had to learn over the years, when Linda's not available, how to be. I know how to withdraw, and that's usually not so helpful. And I know how to be kind of seductive in trying to get it, and that doesn't work. It feels sticky and yucky, and she's great at giving me feedback if I'm coming from there.

So that's the negative side of it. That's when the positive part of needs becomes neediness. And that doesn't feel great.

But I've been learning over the years, and it continues to grow, how to recognize the need for connection. And if it's not going to be met by them, it's not their fault. How can I get my needs met here? And I've found a new state. I don't need to just withdraw, and I don't need to put it on her. That I can connect to — this is going to sound really, really strange. We'll unpack it over days.

I can connect to the life-giving feeling of connection, and how wonderful it feels when connection with the people I'm with is there. That's living in me, in addition to the wanting of connection with Linda. It's a resource.

And what I'm saying is that we live at multi-levels. At the level of the mind-body historical self, there's sometimes deficiency, in which I want to, in my social situations, see if I can get my needs met. Or in myself, or in whatever. When I'm in touch with beingness, there is fullness, and there is satisfaction.

So when I switch into the connection to this presencing, to this larger self, I can feel the place that is already connected to Linda. That doesn't need anything from her to be connected to her.

Now, I realize that may sound really strange, but these multi-levels are happening simultaneously. When I'm talking about responsibility for our state, I'm talking about, how am I going to listen well enough, and shift my attention consistently back to that presencing? That I can feel the place that's already complete, and whole, and satisfied.

And from that place, if I then want to go to her and see — maybe a few hours later, she would like some connection. That energy is totally different. And in fact, even if she's very busy, when she feels me in that energy, she usually wants to stop and at least have some moments of, oh, who doesn't want to be around that?

Responsibility for the state.

Now, one second.

Again, keep footnoting. That's not blame if you can't find that. Not blame if you're stuck. Right? We want to be very clear that as I'm describing our potentialities, that doesn't become whipping. Opportunities. I have to be very conscious.

The ground is an unconditional warmth. That we give empathy, kindness, care, to the one who can't do it differently right now. Always.

When that becomes your ground — that your inabilities in a certain moment are met with your kindness — this work gets so much easier.

And that's where, you've heard me say before, I so appreciate those old Zen masters. You know, one mistake after another. This life is, I keep blowing it, and then, okay, I'll try again this time. You know, ten thousand mistakes a day. Okay.

To let go of that old idea that I have to get it right the first time, which is one that was living very strongly in me for a long time. That kind of perfectionism, and that kind of, you know, I should know what I don't know.

What's wrong with you? You don't know what you don't know.

And so that kindheartedness is so key for the unfolding of this shift we're talking about. Of taking the historical mind-body state and placing that under this beingness, this presence. Not getting rid of it, not throwing it away, but not having that in charge of the organism. Most of the time, we shift it.

Now, we all feel that shift — and I'm getting to you, I just need to finish this thought — that we make that shift, at least in some moments in our meditations. In our listening sessions, we feel, oh God, this is me when I'm myself. Right? You don't feel like, oh, this is me in this extra state. This is me when I'm not interfering with myself. This is how I am.

At the end of some movement lessons, you get up, you walk, you go, you know, kind of, this is me when I'm not adding a contraction to me.

Room for what is alive

[Participant:] Yeah. Well, actually, I wanted to — not a question, really, hopefully — about this blame and judgment.

So anyway, I got to be the witness of my daughter sending a text, and a lot of blame and energy. I mean, I didn't receive the text, but I got the phone calls from each daughter.

So the point was, one daughter felt very lonely and forgotten over the holidays. And so she responded to a Facebook message by the other daughter. And there's this lot of anger, negative messages sent to the daughter. Like, you care about your other nephew, and you don't care about your niece, and what a bad person you are.

So anyway, she calls me, like, what am I going to do with this? And I'm like, very interesting. I feel like I'm this witness.

And I guess, in responding, I did okay, but there was no way she was in a position to give any response, and she did. So she did a very unskillful response. But I just invited her to do that self-care. Like, how to find that place of comfort, in a sense of feeling judged and blamed. So I just invited her to be with her. It's like martial arts, that's what I said. Just receive, and release, and be with that.

And the other daughter was unskilled. Well, she said, don't contact me for a few days. I'm really busy, you know. So then she calls me and says, oh, I was kind of mean and unkind. And I decided not to be the translator.

Because what I think is, she gets to live with her meanness without it being responded to. She gets to sit with it for a while, and maybe self-discover how she might want to — I thought, well, I may. I don't know. I mean, I didn't suggest anything.

So then I'm hearing that I was skillful, in trying to invite her to be with her own experience. So anyway, it was just a very interesting position. Nobody to —

And I get it. It would have been interesting if I could have been a little more skillful. Where in your body are your feelings, that experience of feelings. You know, could you hold that? I didn't invite that conversation. But I'm just saying that sometimes those experiences need space more than anything. You know, you just have to let it find some space, and then the inner knowing of how to respond to yourself first.

You can't come back when you're really upset. And that may mean not withdrawing, but just taking care of yourself, I guess, before you might invite a different way of reengaging. Whatever happens.

So anyway, just saying, I think there's a lot of receiving, and then giving, to both ourselves and then to the other.

Actually, I thought it was skillful that they would get perspective from someone that wasn't engaged. And I thought it was relatively skillful of me, not to give very much of any bias.

[Russell:] That was the difference. Yeah, you didn't get in there fixing it.

[Participant:] I hope that what I responded wasn't perceived as fixing it. I hope I could listen. But I didn't tell the other one that I heard from the other one, either. So I'm like, oh, that's weird. But anyway. Don't have too many kids.

[Participant:] Right. Just about that self-care piece. Because what I wanted to grab — this, too, hearing that from you — but also a recent experience of a friend kind of expressing disappointment.

And I might have taken it on as blame, but it also had that feeling. You know, like that language, I'm disappointed, can be a cover for blame. It seemed like it was, too, especially since it was so off the wall. And when I felt it, the story of — but it also was like a third strike. Like I'd done all these other things. It happened over a period of time, and it was a pattern that she was doing.

And so we did a lot of space in figuring it out.

But the first thing that happens is this incredible sadness, grief, of not being seen for who I am. And so that's why the self-care is so necessary. Just really, really getting that peace for myself, and really giving that to myself, that self-empathy. Wow. She doesn't see that I'm not doing that.

And then, so, on this third time, after that, I was able to really clearly just say, I'd really like you to stop blaming. I'd like you to take responsibility for your own feelings. Because we're that close, that it's an honest relationship, or wants to be.

So that also didn't feel blaming, but it felt like a request, I think, from that space.

[Russell:] Right. So we can ignore all techniques of communication, and really focus on the energy that one is coming from.

Behind the demand

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant:] You say, listen to the need. My experience in professional situations is, it's often rather desires than needs.

[Russell:] Yeah, sure.

[Participant:] Often the main desire is to be obeyed. And I can't tell it is a need, perhaps.

[Russell:] Well, yes. So can I interrupt for one second?

If we see any contracted behavior, like a desire to be obeyed — you have to obey me. If we look behind it, there'll be some human need that we can relate to. It's not to be obeyed, but it's maybe — I'll give some examples. They're probably not the ones. Go ahead.

[Participant:] The point is that the desire has a need.

[Russell:] Oh, yeah. Good.

[Participant:] The person is not aware of his need.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant:] And so, how do you cope with the desire?

[Russell:] Right. Well, different ways. But one familiar way for me is, if I'm hearing something like, you've got to go do this and this and that, listen to me, this is what I want you to do.

When I'm conscious, I might ask, well, are you really worried this job's not going to get done, and that it's going to just all fall apart? That there's something I can relate to behind the demand.

Whenever there's a demand, I know that person's in some sort of contracted state. And behind that, there is something going on that is universally human. Sometimes it has to do with their feeling of security, or safety, or competence.

[Participant:] Right. You don't acknowledge the desire.

[Russell:] What I — in a way, if possible, depending on the relationship and what the moment is like, sometimes I'll just, okay, they really need that. Right? Okay, I'll go do that. And it feels fine to do it.

If I start feeling myself contracting, and getting into judgment, then I go, it's not fine. Okay? So then we might, again depending on the relationship, invite a pause, and look at, am I right in thinking that you're feeling a lot of pressure right now, and whatever that's connected to. And then as soon as we connect with what really is going on, there's a — it's like what happens in Focusing. There's a letting go, and we can either choose to work together, or not, but the tension really releases.

So I will often really listen. Sometimes I will just internally know the need, and not bring it up. But when I'm in touch with the need, I can be more willing to do the action than when I'm in touch with their demand for me to obey.

Because I have a strong need for freedom. And when my need for freedom is being compromised by someone else's demand, if I'm not conscious, I can have a contracted response to that. You can't tell me what to do. You're not the boss of me. Right?

So, is that okay?

[Participant:] Yeah. Good.

Grounded, centered presence

[Russell:] Okay, so what I'd like to move toward is this picture. That we are learning to be responsible for our states. That consistently coming to — call it neutral, call it home, call it that which is living deeper, behind the surface feelings and demands of the moment.

That in order to do that, we need to pause. We can't just do it. The pause can be brief, often, or sometimes needs to be longer. There needs to be a pause where we're dropping in.

Our body is a tremendous ally. To have some place else to go, other than the story we're telling ourselves. So to feel — and when I say body in this case, I don't mean the feeling body yet. Don't start in the feeling body, I recommend. If possible, start in the more neutral sensations of the physical body. Feeling the ground. And not yet going into, maybe I'm also feeling heavy, and weighty, and tired, when I feel the ground. Letting that come second.

First, orienting the attention to the more, I feel my feet on the floor. I feel my legs. How my knees are all tightened. Feel that for a moment, and see, would it feel right to let them bend a little bit. Oh, I'm aware, not breathing very much. It would feel okay to let the breath come.

So we use these key places to reorient to presence. And from that, we can use presence language. Like, oh, what's going on in there? What needs my attention? Oh, something in there is really feeling lost, or upset.

And so once I have my physical body there, and I can have my presence language, then I can keep company. I can do the I'm-with. I can be presencing with what's alive, and that is the big shift. Doesn't necessarily feel wonderful, but it feels workable.

So, a couple of things I'm emphasizing. Actually, let's stand up.

I'm using the same embodied qualities that we've been working with from the beginning, but I'm giving a little bit more detail. And you use whichever parts of these feel helpful for you, and you might have others.

So the general category of grounding, when we're standing, has the sense of these feet on the floor. A connection. Some give in the knees. Generally, we lose our ground when we get into locked knees. And sometimes I'll do some work with my ankles, if they're feeling stuck, because some of the ways, when I get contracted and disconnected, these are some of the key places. I need that ground. It's quite literal. You know, it's not metaphorical, the ground.

So you shift your weight, you bounce, you do whatever, to feel, I'm here. In the midst of a difficult situation, a difficult conversation, go into the bathroom, find your ground. And finding this center.

So centering has two aspects. Again, I'm taking the general quality and now giving a little more detail. The centering is both, as we do in meditation, a location of consciousness, that one can be here, one can bring attention here, and the place I move from.

So that the movement one goes into, when one begins to activate, comes from here, rather than — when we're caught up, many of us move from up here. Or if we're kind of not wanting to go, we're kind of holding ourselves still, we're moving from our legs. But when we're moving from here — let's move around a little bit. Feel how you all know it, from all the lessons and all that we've done, what it feels like to move from centering. You can use your hands there if that's helpful. What it feels like to move from your middle, and feeling your feet on the floor.

So we have the ground. We have the centering.

Pause once again. And of course, if we were sitting and checking in, and looking for this, what I call grounded, centered presence. Now it's a kind of presence we need in challenging situations.

Feeling the breath down through here is a tremendous ally. Because the breath, when we are under pressure and we're unconscious, tends to go high. And consistent high breathing goes together with the inner sense of anxiety. So we generate anxious states in response to a demanding situation. And some of us even hyperventilate. It's some people's response to a demanding situation.

So, getting the bodily habit of dropping the breath here. Not that one should always only breathe here, but especially in these challenging moments, where we're wanting, how can I be present when my daughter is yelling at me? How can I be present when this — ground, something alive in the center, the breath down here.

And then, as I said before, that picture that I usually bring you, with grounding, of lengthening. I want you to think of that as not only the spine, but any unnecessary contraction. That as we get

more security underneath, we can be more in presence by having our openness. And key points there: shoulders, jaw, heart. These are kind of cardinal places that we tend to lock in, grasp.

And maybe that's the best we can do in a moment, and then we're bringing empathy, because we feel really frightened, or we feel really it's too much for us. Sometimes it's like that.

So we're holding this direction of embodiment not as a should, not as a demand, but as a direction. Right? So we have to keep reminding ourselves of that. Otherwise it'll feel like it's too much for me, and my challenges. You're going to forget this stuff. But to have a return. Have a map of what it's like when you've got your grounded, centered presence.

So there's something about these legs and the ground, the feet, maybe including the ankles and knees. Something about moving from center, locating consciousness here, more here than here. Breath. Scanning through for the contractions. You know, when I'm feeling under attack, now I start protecting. And if I can find my security from below, I might be able to really listen to the needs behind the words that my historical self is getting defensive about. I might be able to be in touch with the needs that are living in here.

If I start getting defensive, often my need for safety is up, and I need to take care of that. How can I feel safe in this moment, so that I can be present again?

And these bodily cues are key. You know, like we worked with in the third week, the softening eyes. Often really helpful for decontracting the spine, as well as — actually, more security, rather than the contracted eyes, the focus fixating.

Last thing I'm going to remind us of is, from this state, the presencing language in our everyday. Oh, there's a place in there that's feeling really scared. Hello there. I'm with you. Hello, hello, hello. I'm here with you.

As soon as that feeling state is met by that presence, there begins a shift. We have the bodily base, and then a way of connecting to what the feeling state is.

Pause for a moment.

So, we're going to be growing, today, also two different resources for grounded, centered presence. Some of the work we're going to do today. So we realize that we start with the feeling in the body. We have this presence language.

Now I want to have you discover some images from your past that connect you to this bodily feeling. Because having a resource like that is really helpful.

So we're going to do two different ways, and I don't want to describe one and lead you through that yet. But I think what we need to do first is have a little pause. Let's do a movement lesson, because there's been a lot of talk. I want to just drop in further, and then I'll lead you through at least one of the resource processes before lunch.

Thank you.