Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 7, Session 2 — 61 minutes

Summary: A movement lesson on letting the pelvis lead. From sitting into lying, the legs, head, and arms are invited to turn, fold, and lengthen from the center, guided by the breath and by the image of an infant moving as a whole. A short standing exploration closes the hour.

Sitting

[Russell:] So, starting. Sitting has freshly come to the bottom — your connection downward.

So helpful, as we feel the earth connection, we also open upward, so we don't get too heavy. Too much earthly gravity, not enough celestial gravity, gets heavy. So we need both directions.

Sensing the breath down, through the tanden, towards the sacrum, even towards the sitting bones. Sense the space between the sitting bones.

And with an inhale, as you feel the inhale, invite a very subtle movement of your pelvis forward. Pause for a moment so you're slightly taller, and then there — it's a subtle movement of your pelvis, then connected to the exhale, a little bit backward. It might not even be seen, but it's clearly felt. So the contact point of the sit bones changes slightly.

Very lightly, as you exhale, shift your weight slightly to the right sit bone. Just very — it's an inner movement that is barely visible. As you go towards the right sit bone, the left lifts infinitesimally away from the floor, and the left ear goes infinitesimally towards the left shoulder.

So the weight shifts. You exhale, the weight goes towards the right sit bone. The left sit bone lifts very slightly. The left ear drops slightly towards the left shoulder. If the movement was bigger, it would feel like the left side was folding.

Come back to neutral.

And with an exhale, the weight comes to your left sit bone slightly. Let the right ear come towards the right shoulder, and the right sit bone just lift ever so slightly.

Inhaling, come back to neutral. Exhaling, let the left sit bone lift slightly. Let there be a pause. Inhaling, you come onto both sit bones. Exhaling, you come leftward. The right lifts slightly. The right ear comes towards the right shoulder. And we have this very subtle connection, pelvis to the head.

Maybe it's not so clear. It's okay, just keep noticing.

The legs follow the pelvis

And pause for a moment. We're going to have to come down to sitting, Linda. And you'll need to come off your cushions if possible. If it makes it not workable for you, then it's possible to stay on your cushion.

Let your feet be a little bit long, and you're leaning on your hands behind you. And again, please don't do anything that feels like it's too much for you. Adjust. If you need a cushion, use a cushion. If you need to have fists rather than hands, use fists.

Very lightly, just let your right foot open out to the side and the knee begin to bend out, very lightly.

Now let that movement begin with a slight shift to your right sit bone. If you can find a way that there's a subtle movement across your sit bones.

And let the foot drag up a little bit more. Let the weight come a bit more rightward. As you open out like that, let your head turn to the right. As the weight goes to the right sit bone and the knee opens out to the right, there's a subtle turning towards the right.

Come off your hands.

Back to your hands, and your legs a little bit —

In this movement, feel how, as you open the right knee out, as the pelvis shifts right, and you open the right knee, and you turn a bit rightward with your whole spine, you let your left leg turn inward and begin to bend. Let the knee bend rightward on the left leg, so you're really coming onto your right sit bone.

Let's see. Go very subtly. You want to go through each of these moments where it kind of doesn't know what to do. Where are the gaps in the pattern?

If you had baby legs, they would just fold open like that. As you turned your pelvis, your legs would just go like that. So there's often a lot of stiffening in that left knee.

See if we can come across onto that right sit bone. The movement kind of anchors into that, into the earth through the right sit bone. Your head turns rightward.

Let's do the turning rightward with an inhale, pausing, exhaling back. And pausing. And see if you can get that smoother and smoother. Even if it needs to be smaller —

The feeling is that the legs are being moved by the movement of your pelvis. So your legs get free because they're carried by your pelvis.

From Feldenkrais's point of view, this is the essence of judo right here. Your head moves from your pelvis, your legs move from your pelvis, and your legs are free to do leg sweeps and do all these fun things. And if you're not doing judo, but you're walking, your legs are free not to have to carry so much weight in those little joints.

And then just sit comfortably. I promise you'll lie down in a few moments.

Just feel all that lives in you.

As you sense the breath, notice if there's a very subtle yielding in your pelvis. Not that you're even doing it, but that, again, if you watch infants breathe, you can actually see this movement through the body, through the whole body.

I mean, it was — I mentioned in our second week, I think. I'm not sure if it was this group. I think so. But one of the ways I started to discover the work with breathing in the pelvic floor was changing my daughter's diaper, and observing that her breath and her anus were connected. And that there was this pulse, this vibration, and it was like, oh my gosh, she's breathing. That's what they mean by breathing through your whole self.

Okay, and just begin. Keep it subtle — the breath and the pelvis moving a little bit leftward, inviting that left leg to turn a bit and the knee to come out a bit. But the key here is it's not, oh, I move my pelvis, now I'm bending my leg. It's that it's out of the breath and the pelvic movement. There's this unfolding into the bending.

So the leg is intimately connected more proximally. And let the head turn a bit left, as the spine turns a bit left. Feel the right side coming away from the floor a bit. Be very subtle.

And then feel how the right leg could join in, because the right side comes away from the floor, and the right leg can fold in. Again, let that feel — what needs to yield so the knee feels more natural, opening leftward.

That's a real difference between adult legs and baby legs, because they don't have the kinds of history and contraction. And also, to get that kind of pliability in an adult leg really takes some deep listening and some real subtle connecting through the pelvis.

Turning your head left helps. The whole organism prepares to go leftward, and that helps remind the leg of why it's bending. It's not an abstract idea. It's a preparation for movement.

And then a few times, just go — shifting your pelvis right, go to the right. Shifting your pelvis left, go to the left. The legs don't have to bend a lot. They can, if that feels good to you, but just that you feel that they're ready to go.

Okay. That's enough. Lie on your back. I'm going to ask the audience.

[Student:] It's really initiating.

[Russell:] Yeah, right. Thinking. Well, thinking into your pelvis, and your hip gets carried by that pelvic movement. And then as it integrates — and that's a perfect word — as it integrates, the pelvic movement invites the hip, invites the knee, invites the ankle, and it's all functioning. It's what we call a functional pattern of movement. That's not this, this, this, and this, but is a whole constellation.

[Silence 51 seconds]

On the back

Lightly let your head roll a bit. Just feel that down through your back.

And then exhale, breath down through your belly, into your pelvis, and just a few times some intentional four-phase breathing, attending to the shifts between the phases so that there's a sense of smoothness.

[Silence 31 seconds]

And now, connecting to the inhale, feel a subtle movement of your pelvis rightward that can begin a pattern of the right knee opening out, the right leg turning. But let it begin from a movement in your pelvis. If you can feel it, the movement of the pelvis is subtle. It's not like it's one big turning and then the knee goes. It's just —

Alexander had this great phrase, looking at movement. It was, one after the other, all at the same time. One after the other, all at the same time. So that means it's not like there's a gap between now I'm moving my pelvis, now my leg is moving. But there's a sense of the movement coming from deeper in the self, and the leg just being ready, and it comes like that.

If you can get a feeling for letting that knee be connected to the part of the family that's closer to the center. And let the outer part of the foot slide up a bit. Let the knee open out. Let the head roll rightward as you do that. And feeling, if it's okay for your knee and other joints, letting the knee just be open as it opens out, and then lengthening.

That's great. And just do that a few more times. Just clear four-phase breathing — inhaling out, pausing, exhaling back. If it's a strain on the knee to open like that, then you need to not open it as much, or just do the beginning of the movement. Take care of yourself, always.

Comes from your pelvis. Feel the shift of weight. Feel what happens.

Okay. Yeah, okay, maybe a pause is good.

[Silence 54 seconds]

Both legs

Okay, so as you're turning your pelvis to the right, and your head's going to the right, and the right knee's opening, begin to sense how the left knee can go towards the inside.

Yeah. As you're turning the pelvis a bit rightward, and the right knee is opening, and your head is going rightward, sense when that left knee can begin to go rightward. So the right leg begins to rotate, the left leg begins to rotate rightward, and there's a softening in the knee. It's not such an easy movement, but just even the beginnings of it are helpful for that whole left side to learn its connectedness deep into the pelvis.

So even if you can just get a little bit of it, it's helpful. The feeling of the turning of the pelvis, inviting that softening in the legs.

And connect that whole movement to an inhale down into your pelvis, a pausing as the knees are out to the side, and then exhaling as you come back. So the left knee at some point will really point rightward. The leg bends. You slide that left foot a bit on its inner edge. The inner edge goes towards the floor. And you may need to add a little bit more bending into that left knee.

Let the head turn rightward. So the whole self is ready to go rightward. The eyes go rightward.

Like, I'm lifting the mirror. You're sensing the disconnection between your pelvis and your leg. And so now you want to get more loving and curious and interested in — you mean that could be softer and lighter? I can't imagine it, Rick. That's where you have to trust me in saying that maybe,

maybe it could be easier. You don't have to go, I know it's going to be. You can say, maybe that's possible. That's all you need is a maybe.

Okay, let's see what happens when we go to the other side. See if it's the same.

Well, wait a minute. We'll find out if that's a bias of just liking that, because that froggy kind of pattern is another pattern of movement that makes sense. That would make more sense if we're moving the pelvis forward. So there might be a bias that you and your brain could learn about. We'll see if it's different on the other side or the same.

Okay. You know the pause. That's a great, great thing. There's a lot of — like Feldenkrais says — a lot of meat on that bone. I don't know if that analogy works. I don't believe it still works.

Where it comes from

Great. Okay, so let's just get the feeling of turning the pelvis leftward, letting the left knee open. Feel that inhale. Feel that across your pelvis. It's not uncommon to anchor the movement with your right heel. And so we want that right leg to be just kind of resting and ready to move. That's right.

And then you begin to see, can that right leg begin to turn a bit leftward? Can we let that right leg, as the right side of the pelvis comes away from the floor, can that right knee open a bit? Or go leftward a bit?

[Student:] So that my right gluteal also gets involved.

[Russell:] Sure, yeah, your whole pelvis will be involved. That's right, that's right.

And as the weight shifts and you begin to feel the turning in the right leg, then you can very subtly add a little bit of bending in that right knee as you're kind of coaxing the connection. So you're not kind of lying there just dormant. You're inviting that right knee to turn inward, the right foot to turn inward, and then you see, could I do less and still have it come in that direction? Could it just be nudged in that direction?

So what would you think? What would your answer be?

[Student:] My answer would be, it feels like it's coming more from the upper body.

[Russell:] Yeah. Well, what we would say is that — is it okay?

[Student:] Sure.

[Russell:] It's okay to do anything, and it will be really interesting not to use the anchoring in your upper body to feel how else this movement could be done.

[Student:] I was wondering if you got anything. More like this — what I'm feeling is, I need to move my upper torso to get my leg to come up.

[Russell:] So then your opportunity is to feel, can the upper torso feel it growing out of the pelvis, out of the movement of the pelvis?

Okay, so both knees end up pointing a little bit left, and then come back to neutral and go a little bit right. We'll do a little something to make this easier, lighter. Your head is turning. At some point your nose is pointing right, and both knees are pointing a bit right, and then at another point your

nose is left, and both knees are a bit left. But the feeling is that everything starts in the center and grows out of center.

Let that go.

And see, this is a really great example of Feldenkrais learning. It's like some part of your mind might say, well, show me the movement, and then I can copy it and do it, and then I will have the movement. But this is a process of learning. It's a process of uncovering the interconnectedness within.

And when it's difficult, it's because the interconnectedness is not clear. And so then we have all sorts of compensations we do to get through the movement. But it doesn't feel light and easy and harmonious. And these principles are great for everything, every new behavior.

So just rest and enjoy lying here. Notice any additional thoughts you bring in, or see if they're helpful.

But even behind something like frustration is a fulfilled need. What is the fulfilled need? Well, we look towards what feels like the deficit, which is, I can't do the movement. Well, there's a wanting to learn. And we can experience, oh, my inner life really likes to learn and has learned so many things in this life. Can I have this experience of the joy of learning as I'm having difficulty? It doesn't mean we have to throw away the frustration, but we can also have the satisfied being that's behind.

On the side

Please come onto your — one second — right side.

And put your left arm on your side, and then let your left elbow and hand, slowly, gently, enjoy the journey, come to the floor behind you. So feel what needs to change throughout your body. What are the interconnections?

The left leg is on top of the right leg, bent on top. It can lift off of the leg if needed for your back. It's fine. So you'll find —

[Student:] Huh?

[Russell:] No, just coming naturally right to your side there. The elbow and hand coming towards the floor. You might feel the left knee slide a bit. You might feel it lift. You might feel it — somehow your pelvis is going to move your leg a little bit.

And so you're letting that happen, and you're just noticing the pattern, and then from your pelvis, from actually deep in your tanden, you begin the movement back of bringing the arm back up, from deep in your pelvis. So you're, in this case, connecting your arm, the activation of your arm, to deep inside yourself.

That's it. Then your head rolls, of course. Your chest turns. That's good.

And then pause with your arm on the floor and your head turned towards the ceiling. Your left knee, however it needs to be to take care of you, so that it's a comfortable place, a comfortable movement. That's good.

And slowly slide your right arm upward, your left downward. Get a little bit of a preview of a pattern we'll work with next time.

And just slowly, inhaling. Let's see. Oh, you have your left arm — right arm. Slowly lengthen your right arm a bit. Feel that pattern. Inhaling, letting the right arm get longer in the direction it's pointing. Yeah, well, just comfortably. It doesn't have to be straight overhead. It can be this way. Well, you don't have much room there.

Feel how you can lengthen that right arm a bit. And even, could you have some feeling that your right arm lengthening is connected to your pelvis? Could there be anything like that, that there's a —

And that you inhale, and the pelvis maybe goes a bit forward as the arm gets long. Pause, and then exhale, and let the arm come back a bit.

The left knee — the left leg is not long, if possible. If it's too much to have the left knee pointing rightward, you can stand the left leg. If it's too much on you, for whatever reason, to have the left knee pointing rightward, stand that leg. Don't lengthen.

Good. And then slowly come back to pausing on your left side. So, lower. Just easy. Back. I'm sorry, right side. If you need to come onto your back for a moment, if it's uncomfortable at all to be on your side, do so. But if you can be just easy on your right side, just come back. I'm sorry, right side.

Your legs are bent. You're lying on your right side. Lower your left arm back once again. And lengthen the left arm down just a bit. Feel how you can do that. Let the head roll a bit leftward as you reach down.

So the left arm's on the floor behind you and stays on the floor. You reach down a bit. That's good.

And then just pause here comfortably, and slowly feel how you could begin to slide your left leg backward. In space, the inner edge along the floor, as if you wanted to touch your sole towards the person behind you. Going to touch souls here.

So you're reaching back, and as you do that — this will sound a little strange to some — feel if you can have a little bit of feeling of connection to your pelvis. That the reaching back with your foot actually is a slight forward movement in the lower belly. As if the lower back going forward empowers that foot to come back. It's a subtle movement, but a very important one. See if you can feel something like that. That's it.

The inner edge of the foot slides a bit on the floor, goes back. It may not be a big movement. And you feel the belly going forward as the foot goes back.

Did you get me? That's nice, right there. That was smooth. Very empowering from that. You okay with that?

[Student:] Sorry, excuse me, I hold my foot.

[Russell:] Right. And I guess, yeah, now this — let that belly come forward. There we go.

Okay. Great. Come onto your back. Have a little pause.

Your phone has been so light and easy on the last day.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Come onto your left side. And your right arm on your side. Just feel the pattern of lowering that arm to the floor, connecting the arm somehow to your pelvis, especially coming back up — the feeling that the lifting begins in some kind of turning and presence in your middle.

And you go back. Of course your head rolls. You're not holding. You're not keeping the arms separate from the torso or head. It's a pattern of your whole self.

The beauty of watching so many animals move, and often children, infants especially, move, is that they're not moving in parts. They're moving as whole beings, and our division into parts ends up really hurting us. So we're reconnecting.

Okay, pause with the arm back. Just bring the left arm upward on the floor. And just feel — how could you lengthen that arm? It's not a huge movement. It's lengthening the arm with a feeling that it's connected to your pelvis. That's the key here, that we're connecting the limbs to the middle. That there's some way in which your pelvis going a bit forward can let that arm inch up a bit.

Could you lengthen your right arm a bit downward, find a way to do that? Funny, also with the pelvis going a bit forward, that somehow —

It's looking much better here.

[Silence 40 seconds]

[Student:] What do you think — both arms have the same kind?

[Russell:] These are the things you need to learn about where you stiffen yourself.

And then just come up onto your side for a moment and pause.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Reaching forward and back

Put your right arm on your side. Lower it back down to the floor. Begin to slide your right leg back in space along the inner edge, so the knee is pointing leftward, but you're reaching back. Reaching back. Somehow there's a connection to your belly.

And as you do that, let your left leg go forward. Your left foot reaches forward, as if you're hurdling — you're going over a hurdle. You're reaching back with your right leg. Your left leg is lengthening forward, the knees unwinding a little bit. That might help you to feel. It's getting straighter as it comes out. Yeah.

So the space between your legs is growing, and this is a tremendous empowerment for your middle, your lower back, for your belly. So really see if you can feel the connections of the legs splaying open like that, reaching forward. Forward with your left foot, so it's not just downward. The left foot actually reaches forward or leftward. And the right foot reaches backward or rightward. And there's a big distance between the feet as you reach out. And your right arm stays behind you on the floor.

Right foot back a little bit, left foot far forward. Reach back and forward. The belly is coming a bit more forward. That's it. And just pause there for a moment. Let your head turn freely. Left, right, but your head is free from the movement.

Left leg is reaching forward. Space between your feet and this chair. Is your head free to turn? Jaw free? Can you look towards the right as well? Turn your head.

And it's — onto your back. Come onto your back. And just feel the influence.

[Silence 49 seconds]

What's happening?

[Student:] Rest goes.

[Russell:] Let me hear it a little bit.

[Student:] Quality movement.

[Russell:] And one last time to the right side.

That's it, Tom. That's right. That one was a little bit closer. Could you feel it?

[Student:] It was a little bit closer. Yeah.

[Russell:] But the way you were experimenting is the right direction.

That's a wonderful thing to do for twenty seconds here, thirty seconds there, lying in bed. When Cher is feeding the baby, you can just kind of move your pelvis and let your knees bend.

Lower the left arm back to the floor. Slide the left leg backward, and the right leg reaches forward, and then they kind of scissor a little bit closed, a little bit open. And as they open, feel through the lower back, that empowerment into the lower back. That's it.

The reaching back with that leg has something to do with, rather than just folding the left side of the pelvis back towards the floor, there's actually a slight movement forward. That's great. Great.

And then just let both arms be out to the side for now. Out, kind of straight out, or something like that. Just to the side, some comfortable place. And flip your legs over to the other side. Flip your legs over and see if you can continue the same movement of reaching back.

So your left foot now reaches forward in space. You might be kicking your neighbor. Your right foot is reaching back for your neighbor behind you. Your feet are really far apart, and it's all growing out of your pelvis.

Pete and Peter are kicking each other. Come on, boys. Come on, boys.

Okay, flip your legs to the other side. Reach, reach with both legs. The feet go far apart. That forward leg reaches out. It gets longer. The feet go very far apart. Front leg reaches, back leg reaches, and then from your pelvis you flip over.

Okay. Lie on your back. Lie on your back. Just feel the influence. Feel the influence of these moves.

[Student:] You don't straighten like that — you keep it in the scissors?

[Russell:] Well, it doesn't straighten completely, but it's moving towards — it's lengthening.

[Student:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, the feet are going far apart from each other.

[Student:] Yep.

Standing

Please roll to your side and come on up. Just take a few moments in sitting here, sitting, leaning on your hands, and just feel the movement from your pelvis of letting both knees open to one side. Now open to the other side, and feel the connection from your pelvis to your legs. Right.

Kind of let the feet drag up a little bit, one on the inner edge, one on the outer edge, but it all grows out of your pelvis. Like your pelvic movement, and the legs are ready to get solid.

[Student:] Which week? The last eighteen hours is like my favorite.

[Russell:] Great. And come up to standing. Feel if you can sense something about that in your walking.

Standing. Take your time to explore. Feel how your legs move in relation to your pelvis. Can you carry the leg forward?

Okay, what stands out for you?

[Student:] Feeling of readiness, like it could move — yeah, move in any direction.

[Russell:] And move a little more quickly. You could also try going backwards and sideways, just kind of shift around.

Yeah. All right. Good. We're going to take a little pause, then we're coming back —