Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 6, Day 2, Session 2 — 45 minutes

Summary: Russell speaks of taking in the presence of others as teachers, then begins a movement lesson on the midline and a breath that moves through the center without lifting or collapsing. He links earth and sky, and sets up a short partner practice of pausing, inviting, listening, and speaking.

Inviting a model

Each time that I have a model of anything in the world outside of me, I like to invite it, because everyone's a teacher, in modeling something that could be more developed in here.

I don't know the limits of development, so there might be things where I feel, oh, I'm a little bit developed there, but who knows what's possible? I know that there's more. I know that it can move in a better direction.

When I get touched by someone's presence in a certain way, like a welcoming presence, first I just feel it, and we all feel it, but then I like to just linger a little bit. It's very likely that at some point today, or before I go to bed, I'll go back to it.

In some way that her embodiment was taken in, not so consciously seeing all of it, but something inside felt more than I'm conscious of right now. And that's potential learning from my inner life to my inner life. You know what I mean?

I find it so helpful. And the challenge really, when one takes that up, is there are so many examples each day, actually, of moments of a certain something.

What I've been noticing — and this was a surprise when I began to notice it, not so long ago, a year or two — that the models could exist even in literature, or in movies, or on a television, if I'm listening well enough. There's something for me still more poignant about body to body, person to person.

But a really good writer or poet, describing something, when I listen to the resonance in here, can not only — I mean, it was always as it is for all of us. You get touched, you feel something, and you go, oh, they're a good writer, because you felt touched.

But I'm looking at a next step that for me requires usually some invitation. Just a little bit more time to let that fragrance in, let that example in.

To me that's recognizing, in Buddha language, that Buddha is always teaching, Buddha is always there, and the bird is Buddha, Elizabeth is Buddha. I just mean that that's an example of humanity being human.

Of course, I'm not saying the bird is human. But I'm saying that the resonance that can exist, the example and the response — when one becomes a good host, then you have a lot of Buddha guests. We tend to dwell on the disturbing guests.

If you were ever a waiter, or if you ever served, that really demanding person who was never satisfied tends to stay in your mind, and the people who were very kind are easy to forget. But that's just a matter of training ourselves to reorient to the blessing, right? To the teaching, to the example.

That's what I really love to do, and I forget to do, and then I remember.

Sensing the middle

Let's stand up together.

So we have what I think might be an interesting experiment for us. I could say, a movement lesson that will occur in four, five, maybe six brief segments. We'll be revisiting. And we're starting that now, so we're starting it now. Of course.

Just in a sense of cervical and lumbars, front of the vertebrae, pretty close to the midline. Last vertebrae, just quickly. It comes through the upper cervical vertebrae, which come in pretty close to the ear holes, towards the top of the head.

We want to be able to think up from there. Or when we're doing this breathing practice, the breath comes down through here, through this center. We're not trying to stay on the vertebral column, right? But through this center line, and having some sense of the center line coming down through your pelvis.

And there's some value, I'm suggesting — you'll see if it's true — to keep returning to your sense of the middle. It may not be the exact objective middle. But it's your sense of your middle, and that sense can shift.

Feldenkrais made a big deal about, in terms of our orientation in space, how human beings create left and right. How we have some sort of middle off of which we create something called left and right, and out of that begin to map the world.

It begins kind of in and out, but then he's saying that there's some way in which we begin to function in space. And to feel this midline is a wonderful — how do you say — important capacity.

So we have this midline. It has one way of centering, vertical. This place is centering.

[Silence 2 minutes]

This kind of sweeping of tension. Wonderful breath in the meditation. Sweep the breath through, strong feeling also.

So now, looking with an intention to look forward with your eyes closed.

[Silence 4 minutes]

[Silence 46 seconds]

[Silence 2 minutes]

Don't need to sit up here. Slow down.

Sense your breath. Mostly just pull your attention along that midline through your body. And once you have a barely good sense of where the top of your head ends and the bottom of your pelvis, with some kind of feel for that, move beyond into the space, as if you're traveling through that line above your head and below your pelvis.

Very lightly rocking over the spot. Just doing this movement to sense that whole midline through yourself and above.

The movement is there to help you sense the middle of yourself.

[Silence 33 seconds]

Just two or three times, sweep the breath through the central line, the central axis.

Imagine that your eyes are slightly — your right eye is looking slightly right of center, and your left eye slightly left. You're just inviting that sense of widening.

And as you're having that widening, again, a couple of sweeps through the center. You can have both living together.

[Silence 33 seconds]

That's the beginning of a piece of work that I think will work. We'll see. See if we get something.

Any questions right now? I'm just gonna wait a second. Who wants to? Yeah.

The breath

Okay, so there's a few reasons, some that make sense, some less sensical.

The first is, I began this out of a meditation practice that I spontaneously started, not something I read about. I just started to experience this movement through. And it got affirmed in a remarkable way over the following two months, where I had a client come who was a Tibetan Lama, brought by one of his students cause he had hurt his back.

He was sitting on the table and I was guiding him in this breath. And he said, oh, that's a breath that we teach too. So that was very interesting, cause I didn't know where it came from. And then I had the same thing happen with a Qigong student. Oh, we work with something similar. So that's kind of interesting information.

So what I'm curious about in this, what I experience, is most of us have a tendency to inhale up, lifting the chest, and a feeling of falling down with the exhale.

I find it really helpful if we can disengage the lifting of the chest — exaggerated lifting of the chest on the inhale — and kind of feel settled as the air comes in, and not collapse on the exhale.

So even have a slight feeling that there's — so let's say this. For most people, the compulsive breathing pattern. For many people, a compulsive, exaggerated — and wedded into that are certain inner states, like a tendency to collapse, a tendency to hold oneself up.

That's why Feldenkrais invented all those lessons we did in the second week, of differentiating the chest and the torso, exhaling down. Remember, we'll do some more of that. I'm going to resurrect some of the golden holdings this week. Because we need that. I need that for sure, and many people find it helpful.

And so there's something about connecting this fullness here without collapsing.

Okay, so lengthening. Also, physiologically, the air comes from up here, goes down. We're following the movement of the diaphragm in that image. Right? So we want that.

There were a couple of other important things there.

Opening, with the inhale, opening into the pelvic floor. It's very helpful. So the sense of breath coming down, filling, and going through. And then with that exhale, the feeling of almost like bringing something out of the earth upward.

Now, sometimes, partially because of learning with Moshe Feldenkrais, and partially because I also find it valuable, I will have a breath pattern breathing up from the earth. And most people find that more familiar, more comfortable, but they often get into habitual breathing patterns with that.

Let me give one more piece there.

In meditation — sorry, I have this at other times too — and again, I don't ask you to have any kind of belief system about this, but I do experience, as you've heard me say many times, a different offering, or energy, or quality, from the earth and from the sky.

The earth — I'm a very literal, simple guy — support. You know, it gives me life through supporting me. And the big inspirations — toward, or direction, or towards what's coming to me — I have the experience of coming down from above. So it feels like breathing in.

You know, Rudolf Steiner would talk about that, or the esoteric folks would talk about it, that the stars are living beings who are radiating teachings to us. I don't have that particular belief system, for it or against it, but I know that there's something very inspiring when I look up. And there's something that feels very different when I'm looking down.

And down has an earthier quality, a weightier quality, a more substantial quality. There's a lot of good stuff in that. You know, it's more — we're embodied on this earth, we're made of earth stuff, this body is.

The more etheric, or the thought realms, or the more subtle realms, is more air-like. Right?

And so to open to the above, through into the earth, and then from the earth back up. It's like the sense of being a channel for that, taking in from above. But again, that's a kind of esoteric description that is not essential in any way.

What I want to encourage is sensing what happens in you when you do this, when you do this. What do they each give you?

Welcome. There's a spot right over there. There's a chair there too.

Yeah, just really experimenting. Thank you.

Pause, invite, listen

Let's find two partners. So a group of three people.

So this is the practice I'd like to do together.

Being connected to ourselves, having our voice here, is really important. It's not new to you, but just to say it again. The basic practices that I like to do many times a day, that I invite, begin with a pause, right?

And pausing includes a kind of dropping down and in. There's a pause on the train of thought.

I have a big P — pause.

And from the pause, once there's a sense of connected to presence, there's an inviting in the inner world, right? So there's this pausing to come to presence. Next thing, once I feel here, there's an inviting of, how is it in there? Hello in there.

From being this host, with this invitation. This gracious host, hopefully — that's the intention — is to have this absolutely welcoming energy.

So we could say it begins with a pause, goes to an inviting, and then there's the listening. Pausing, inviting, listening.

And then from the listening comes, in this practice, a speaking. And if I'm by myself, I'll sometimes do that out loud. But what speaking is, in a way, is an interacting of my linguistic mind, of that part of my cortex, that part of myself, with what's coming from my listening, right?

It's what Gendlin would call resonating. You know, getting something resonating, listening to what the response is, going back. So there's this kind of fluid process.

Pausing, which has that quality of coming into yourself, grounding, dropping down. Inviting is that sense of a gentle asking. Listening is what comes in that gentle asking.

So both the inviting, which has that gentle asking, and the listening — both of those for me live in the word hello. The asking is, oh, hello in there. How is it? How's it going? And then the hello is to whatever comes when I ask that. Right?

So there's the pausing, the inviting, the listening, and then finding words, and interacting with those words, bringing them down, resonating with them.

And in this practice here, speaking out. And sometimes with myself, I do the same thing.

This is going to be a relatively short practice, so you're not going into a focusing process as much as just acknowledging, just saying hello to. And what will we say hello to?

Well, my recommendation is this. Each person's going to have about ten minutes. Actually, you'll have ten minutes. Because at eight minutes, you're going to hear a bell. And then when we get to ten minutes, I'm going to ask you to stop, okay?

And then we'll probably just stand for a moment and then come back, and the next person will go. It'll be like that.

I recommend that you begin speaking out loud from just sensation. Ground yourself in the physical body, like those practices we do each time, anything that's alive in sensation. So you might do that for a minute or two, or longer. It's the beginning.

And then maybe there's pausing in that, and being — what might like to be acknowledged?

It can be a very open question like that, and you can take anything. It might be that you stay just with physical sensations. It might be that there's some feeling state, or some thoughts come. Or it might be there's something going on in your life that's still with you from last week, or last month, or is coming up, and that comes.

If something comes like that — say, oh, there's this thing about my daughter that's there — take at least a few moments to sense how that is right now in your body. Without going into it. How you're carrying whatever it is that came, right?

So that there's always a connection to the present moment. Even if it's something living outside of this room, it's felt here, right?

So anything that you say, see if you can have some kind of way that it's experienced. But then you leave that, and you come back to your body, which is a great way to neutralize. Just come back to sitting here, and if there's time, you go, what else is there? What else might like to be acknowledged? And you see what comes.

You're not looking to have it be logical, or have it be what you would write down as what's on your mind, or what you're concerned about. It's not like that. You're just really innocently asking what appears. And whatever appears, you're welcoming it and being with it. Okay?

So any questions about the process?

Great. I encourage you to enjoy yourself.