Talk

Angela 2 — Week 6, Day 2, Session 3 — 31 minutes

Summary: Russell teaches why basic physical sensation matters in focusing, distinguishing the physical body from the feeling body. Ground can steady thinkers and strong feeling, and bridge kinesthetic sensing toward feeling tone. He tells of Gunnar feeling his sit bones in a high-stakes meeting, and of small extra moments of attention as a ground for freedom.

Physical body and feeling body

[Russell:] So before we continue, I want to use this as a learning opportunity in another way.

What's your sense? What happens, or what's the importance of that work that I encourage at the beginning, that a lot of focusers do — some much more, some much less — but it's, in my opinion, often overlooked? I would say, the little I know of whole body focusing, they do a great job of not overlooking the basic physical sensations.

And I'm wondering how that lives for you. What's important about it? Do you sense an importance about that?

[Participant:] Yeah. Yeah.

[Russell:] Okay.

The emphasis on physical sensations — and I'm distinguishing here. Can you remember something about how I would distinguish physical body from feeling body?

Okay, let me say briefly.

They're not great terms, because the feeling body is part of the physical body, so it's not like they're separate. But there's a difference. We could say, we can all sense something different. I can sense my bottom on the cushion. I can sense my hand moving in space. And I sense a little pressure in my belly around trying to speak and get this across. And there's a little excitement in the chest, lifting as I see people nodding. And then I go back to just my hand moving through space.

And there are lots of sensations that are not distinctly one. It's not like there's a big line — this is the physical sensation, this is here — but it's a worthy distinction. There are sensations that are more connected to what we can call our feeling life, and sensations that are more — we can find a connection to our feeling life for anything. But when they come, there's the sense of more the proprioceptive, kinesthetic phenomena that are part of living in the moment. Then we can have feelings about that, but in themselves they are not rich in feeling tones.

You get what I'm saying?

And that distinction I find very helpful.

A missing link

[Russell:] And what I notice is that many people who are getting tuned to their feelings leave out or lose the basic sense of physical body. Or on the other side, people who are not tuned to their feelings, but lost in their thoughts, also lose their physical body.

And so I see emphasis on the physical body as kind of a missing link for a lot of people.

For dominant thinkers, the physical body is a segue to the feeling body. It's for somebody who has constructed their life not to feel very much, but to conceptualize a lot. To go directly into feeling is often too much. But the physical body is a doorway that's closer.

And when somebody tends to get carried away in emotional life very strongly, grounding in the physical body is kind of an anchoring in substance. I'm here. I'm less washed away by what came, and I'm more here. It's a neutralizer, is one way to think about it.

And that's especially true of ground sensations, but not only ground. Ground is kind of the easiest access to that, what I call neutralizing sensation. But we can have it when we sense ourselves and our volume, or our sense of even the space around us. All of those kinds of things tend to be a little freer from the feeling of the moment.

Now, are you — so you're all getting that? That was my short answer. Sorry.

[Participant:] Yeah, yeah, yes, yes.

[Russell:] Right, yeah. So somebody who tends to be very kinesthetic, or sensationally oriented — with them it's usually a different need, which is to connect to emotional tone in a sensation. So it's helping them feel beyond what they obviously feel.

Is there some more energetic quality that you can sense in your belly? And you just know — go, well, you know, now I just feel — I can feel my belly, I can feel my ribs moving from side to side. And it can be very challenging for dominant sensors, especially kinesthetic sensors, to sense feeling tones.

So then what I look for is words that live as both physical body and feeling body, like the sense of heaviness. A kinesthetic person can feel what heavy feels like, and it could be a doorway into, you know, I feel heavy today.

And yeah, so we look for invitations like that.

From the room

[Russell:] Okay, so that said a little bit about what's so important about physical body. Anything else want to be said about that? Anything else that you think of, for you?

[Participant:] Yeah. To me, touching the sensations helps to reverse. Like, I can — I do not — like, I do not reverse. Right. Once I am in the sensation without reverse, I can be.

[Russell:] Nice. Oh, that's good. Thank you, Bruno. That's a nice distinction.

Yeah. Yeah, good start.

[Participant:] Yeah. For me, it's also like tracking change in the experience. I just heard Macy's at nature tracking, and so that word came — like, when, how the sensations were shifted.

[Russell:] One of the things I get when you say that — I'm not sure if this is part of it, if I'm tracking your meaning in tracking — is a piece of that also, that by being with the physical sensations, you sense change happening. You sense, well, this, and then this, and then this. Whereas often when we're in our feeling life, it feels like, oh, that old thing that's just there.

Right? So we're already tuned to movement. That's a nice piece. Yeah.

[Participant:] Somehow I think I've interpreted this before as when I — yes — yes. I'm not looking for those things often. I mean —

[Russell:] So what you're saying is a dominant piece, but it's not the only thing. It's also — so it's what I call — I think this is in line with what you said — that the physical sensations bring you back from when you get lost, right?

But also both when you get lost, kind of disconnected from yourself, and also lost in a feeling state. Would that be true?

[Participant:] Yes.

[Russell:] Okay, great. So physical body is great for that.

Then what Bruno brought us to was that sense of, okay, I can also be spontaneous, maybe more spontaneous. I have less stories connected to the this is here, this is here, this is here, this is here, than when I get into a feeling state.

Right? So there's that.

Let's see, what else would we want added to that?

Living, not a technique

[Russell:] You know, yeah, let me just — I want to say it this way, because it's what you're saying, but it's another — I guess I just value this so much. I want this language in the room also.

For me, it's so helpful, whether I'm with myself, or if Linda and I are in a difficult dynamic, that right in the middle of some strong state, the physical body is there.

And it's not there just as an escape, and it's not there to further the feeling. It's not — it's just there. And that there-ness kind of has a quality of neutralizing enough to be more effective in the difficult moment. Well, effective for myself and the other, usually.

So it functions like that. And part of what I'm hoping to get across is that these are not techniques to do, you know, when you are focusing only, or when — but that these are living. These are living in us.

These are — you know, almost every time you go to the store, your body's not far away.

Right? And so, wow, you know, what an ally for the connecting — but also, and now I'm going to go further. And I'll get into this at some point this week.

Also, it's my experience, and it's for your questioning, not to believe it, but from my experience — with a certain movement of attention, as I've said before, there's always a blessing. Always.

And I'm not saying we should always feel blessed, that we shouldn't feel grief and difficult moments, of course. But I'm interested in the fact that there's such a potency to the attention that when I come into my body, I have more say over how I'm attending to my world.

And as you know from last time, and also our fourth week, in my opinion, how we attend to the world is a big part of the creation of our experience.

And so the ground of my physical body is the potent state for creating a new reality. Now I can't — when I say new reality, I don't mean that I can change all the external conditions, but I can almost always be better or worse in the external conditions.

And for me to find that potency — and that's real potency. That's, you know, do I have a say in my life? That's what freedom is about. Do I have a say in my living experience?

And for that, my physical body is so key, to bring me into the moment to remember that I have some choice here. About how I'm going to live in this pain in my body, or this difficult moment with a loved one, or this person dying, or this, that, that.

The external condition doesn't create my response. It influences, stimulates, but doesn't create. And that is a radical statement for a human being to live into.

And how can we do that? Because that's too much for us much of the time.

Well, okay, I'm here. Even with all this going on, you know.

Gunnar

[Russell:] I told you the Gunnar story. Gunnar, I'm sure I did. Huh?

No, that's Bruno. No, that's Bruno. Nice association. No — Gunnar, the Swedish special forces guy who was in the Embodied Life program. I never told you that?

Okay.

Okay, so Gunnar, he only did two segments. And then he started a foundation to work in Africa, but — interesting guy. So this is really a fascinating story, so I'm gonna take a few minutes to give it to you.

So I was working in Sweden. I do a summer workshop, a summer retreat each year, and this handsome big guy comes in. He can't speak.

And he had been working with a Feldenkrais teacher who recommended that he come, and so over the course of the week, there was real transformation. And we did one piece of work, a focusing-type guiding — you know, my kind of awareness process — where he found his voice.

And he hadn't had his voice for, oh, it was either a year and a half or two years. I mean, it was pretty dramatic, that he was almost at regular volume. He needed some work with his breathing after that. But he went from here to, I can't believe I can speak this loud. There was still a lot of extra breathiness, but it was literally coming like this, where you could hear him across — whereas at first you couldn't hear.

So, the story with Gunnar. He was in special forces, NATO, stationed in Africa. I believe it was Congo.

And he was under the command of a French colonel, and he came upon the French colonel torturing a young African. And it flipped him out, and he —

He was a major. No, I'm sorry, he was a captain. Gunnar was a captain, and he really loved the armed forces. He loved being a captain, and from his version, he says, my men really loved me. They felt like I was really good, I was good at my job. And he was very identified with himself as a soldier doing the right thing.

And when he saw this, and then he realized this was going on, and he'd witnessed it, it really went him to where he asked to be transferred. They wouldn't transfer him. And then when he went back to Sweden, he reported this, and they basically said, thank you very much, and nothing was done.

And it really upset him. So he went public with it.

And when he went public with it, the armed forces called him in — actually the defense minister, and I don't know what level general they have over there, but a very high general over in Sweden. And they said, look, we will destroy you if you keep talking about this. We can't have this be public. We have a relationship with the French. All of NATO is connected to this, and there are certain things that need to happen on the battlefield, and, you know, basically man up.

And it was driving him crazy. It was just — it hit this place. It hit the best part of soldiering, the best man, you know, the kind of archetypical masculine protect, that kind of thing that he carried very much in his stature.

And so what they did was, they actually went to the people — his men, he called them, I don't know how many there were — and threatened them that they would be kicked out of the army if they didn't speak against him. And they formed a case against Gunnar so that they could kick him out of the army.

And they told him if — you know — and so he has a child, he had a young child, and this was his income, and he had had all these, so he was in this very difficult — so he said, I won't say anything. I won't say anymore.

It was so literal. They shut him up.

Well, even when he had lost his voice, he said, I can't live like this. So he went back to the media, and it was on the 60 Minutes of Sweden, and he just blew the whole story up, and it became a major story.

And so a lot of people in Sweden knew of Gunnar, because this was a big happening.

So when I saw him the first time, it had already been a public story. The case was being made against him, and he was kicked out of the army, but he was now gonna fight it.

And about three months after the work we did — maybe three or six months after the work we did — there was a meeting, because of all the publicity, of the three top French officials, two generals and a defense minister, the guy in Sweden, the defense minister, and his major. They all gathered in a room and called him in.

And Gunnar went in, and this was his report. This was after our first — in between all this, he had joined the mentorship and done his first week. And this was his report in the second week of the mentorship.

Russell, I was — his voice was now even stronger, so that was not just — I was sitting there, and you should see all the colors on their breast, and I'm sitting there, and you know what I'm sitting there feeling?

My sit bones.

They were trying to say that they could do this to me and that to me, and I just sat there. And then they had a conference, and they called him back, and the French defense minister apologized. They gave him his lost earnings.

And he did decide to leave the armed forces a little while later, and he started a nonprofit foundation for building basic structures for families that got their structures destroyed by the fighting in Congo.

I'm just here

[Russell:] But the reason why that story came to me is his physical body. I would hope that if I was in such a demanding moment — I don't know how I would be — but I hope I would be able to look the people in the eye and feel my body.

I hope I'd be able — you know, if we all are lucky enough to live a number of years, we're going to receive tragic news. To be able to feel that, and somehow also have our presence there.

I don't know any other gift greater than the substantiality that we incarnated, and that this incarnation gives us a ground for relating to everything that occurs.

And so to emphasize that, to keep bringing it forward, to not lose it, so that it becomes spontaneous. So that it becomes that it's just there, and you notice if it's not. That the habits of being lost in thought and feeling get overtaken — not that they go away, but they're infused, either at the same time with all this, or there are many gaps in the thinking and feeling habits that can include our, I'm just here, this is all going on.

And in that moment of I'm just here, it's actually free from that feeling state. And I just love this fact that I can be in a challenging moment.

This happened yesterday. Linda and I were having a difficult conversation in the morning. We're out in this gorgeous garden. And it was so interesting to be able to just hear that morning dove. And realized, in that moment of hearing that morning dove, I was not in this difficult moment. I was not escaping from it, but there was this other thing also, and that I didn't have to have the difficult moment as a constancy, but then I could actually bring that freshness back.

And then one more thing, and I'll get to you, Karen.

Have you noticed it's so easy, when we have some difficulty that's stronger than our normal difficulty? We all can find difficulties at any moment, you know, challenges, let's say. Something that's not just right.

We could all find something to work on if we looked for it. But what I get interested in is, you know, when you have a pain that is really more or less chronic, what happens in those moments that you really see that flower, and really take it in?

And some of us have the concept that, well, I can't enjoy anything because of this. And I think it's very important for our freedom — in my experience, it's very important for our freedom — to realize that these moments have lots of gaps, if we want them to, and that we're not required twenty-four hours a day to carry the big thing that's living in our life.

That we're allowed to — it's not avoidance to really let the birds in. It's not avoidance to also be touched by a person's smile.

And how we are carrying our challenging situations is of great importance to me.

[Participant:] Yes.

[Silence 30 seconds]

[Participant:] Yeah. Yes.

[Russell:] Thank you. Yeah, it's a good word, basic sanity. Yeah.

Ten or twenty seconds

[Participant:] What I get — biggest times, when I hear a bird, and I hear it in a way that I don't normally hear the bird.

So I can go into my body and in some normal way feel my sit bones, but I'm not really in my body. When I feel my sit bones in the way that I hear the bird, then I'm free.

But how do you get to that quality of feeling your sit bones?

[Russell:] Right, right. Yeah. Okay, so I've got a suggestion.

It takes about ten or twenty seconds. You can't do a drive-by. You can't — it takes, and I'm not saying every time you go ten or twenty seconds it's gonna be there, but it takes a little bit more attention than the initial, okay, there are my sit bones. Say I'm not feeling — you know, oh, okay, let me see, let me see. But what's happening in that moment is, I'm guessing, if it's the kind of moment that I'm imagining, the other phenomena are strong enough to pull you away.

So it takes more intentionality for it to go longer. Great. Okay, good.

This whole relaxing going on here, after having made the question. Yes. Now relaxing down into the listening. Yes. Being with. Yes.

So as it goes on here. Perfect. And then down to the — yes. Yes. Yes. Perfect. Okay.

And you know what's amazing, Robert — and actually for all of us — I find it really easy to miss the moment. I mean, the reason why I work with all this stuff is because I was a pretty distracted person. I lost a lot. So it took me a lot of attention.

But then I realized it's not some — I don't believe it has to do with all those years of meditation. I think that helps, but I think it has to do with just many times a day, spending that extra fifteen seconds with the flower. That extra — close my eyes — and an extra fifteen seconds with the flavor, chewing a little bit longer.

And it's not like a big amount, but it's enough that it penetrates. And the habit mind is jumping on. But.

Good. Can we go on with the third person?