Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 6, Day 3, Session 2 — 100 minutes

Summary: Russell opens with a brief grounding, then the circle continues, each voice coming forward. People share incremental change, grief, relationships, and the rub between deepening and daily life. He offers the Zen Peacemaker tenets — not knowing, bearing witness, and loving action — and stays with one person who does not want the gathering to end.

Opening

[Russell:] So maybe just take a moment, with your eyes open, and drop down into that intentional grounding. And pause.

Letting the sounds connect you to the larger space.

And the breathing comes and goes, and all that lives is kind of a GPS on the moment.

And then there can be that gentle inviting — what's alive in there, what might like to be acknowledged or noticed. I usually find a variety of things.

So my intention is we'd continue with bringing each voice forward. Hopefully it doesn't take all week to do this. But who knows?

The only caveat is if anyone has something that's really needing to come forward right now, anybody could speak, if there was something like that.

Yeah, go ahead.

Coming back

[Participant 1:] Just feeling very touched about being back with all of you.

And also a little kind of antenna that says, I hope it's okay for you — suddenly I'm not there, and now suddenly I am, and it's your last segment. So just a little. It's nothing, really. Just a sensitivity to the dynamic shift when groups lose and gain people. So it is a feeling, that little.

And in terms of my stage — very much like others here, in terms of this incremental, what feels like growth and increased awareness.

One of the benefits of my crazy lifestyle is that it means I see places and people at stages. Not only do I see their stages, because they've been gathered over time, but I also experience my response, and my changes. Especially when the historical self is being kind of out there.

And so noticing less reaction. More capacity to catch the historical self come blurring the lens, and being able to go, oh, let it go, let it go, and more often get back into right now, what's here.

So I'm really finding I'm turning towards that more clearly. It's a very clear trajectory now. But of course it doesn't last long. In fact I have to do it over and over and over again. But it is happening more and more clearly, more succinctly.

And then I'm truly grateful. I can feel that, having taken this period of years, of memory, to spend time studying and exploring human disease, and what it is to be human in all of this — I can feel I'm kind of ready to get back into service again.

So I'm looking at ways to reconnect, in a social change context. It's going to be very much within an environmental context.

Again, this thing of being in different cultures is about me finding out what it is. What is this human thing — not my particular human thing per se, but just what is this, you know?

And for that to really feel more complete, I have to be with other species as well. So I'm really noticing that.

And with this trip back to Australia, I went on retreat pretty quickly when I arrived, which was a great way to deal with coming back into Australia. That was a very reactive process for me.

And so it was in the bush, and the connection, the smell — you don't know what eucalyptus smells like, but it was this fragrance of eucalyptus, and it was potent there. Oh, the landscape just — and it always does. That's the one kind of clear relationship I have with Australia.

But it just made it really clear that the time has come to amalgamate, or to — I don't know the word right now — but integrate me with a bigger world.

And this is also part of understanding that this is just to be interconnected, you know. Just to be part of something, and not anything otherwise.

So that's where I'm heading.

And I just saw a documentary on elephant whispering that has completely undone me. And this woman was extraordinary. So I'm going to Thailand. I'm going to just say, I'll do anything. Can I please be here? And learn.

And I'm also going to be with an African woman who is doing quite extraordinary animal communication. Really, really profoundly connecting. And she's been tested to the hilt to see if this is woo-woo. There's a lot of evidence where she has really been of service. You know?

So this is what's going on. And I might be doing some training, if I can, with Feldenkrais and animals as well. So that's the way.

Thank you.

Oh, and just — if you haven't been there yet, in the Adventures, go there. There's a lovely topic at the moment being posted about Embodied Life and nature. And a gorgeous post this morning from a couple of Germans who went walking in Italy, doing Embodied Life practice.

[Russell:] Yes. Beautiful.

I'll speak for myself. I feel more whole with you here.

Saying hello

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 2:] Just first to speak to you. It was such a treat for my eyes to see you in the airport. We were supposed to meet at the park, and I had an hour. I said, I'll get a cup of coffee. And I went, and there was a coffee place, and I wandered over and looked in.

I love this connection. That was sweet.

I'm another kind of incremental person. My life doesn't seem to move in these — I mean, there have been moments of transition, but my life pretty much goes on an even keel.

And my practice is very much saying hello to myself. Whether I'm sitting, or just being in the world in any way, just remembering to say hello and look at what's here.

And it's very challenging to see myself with clarity. To really focus that lens, and know what I'm looking at. And know what is programming, and what is me, a deeper me.

I've been moving away from a family-of-origin programming that wasn't very happy.

And recently a friend — a few weeks ago, a very good friend died. Two weeks ago. It drew one community around her. And feeling myself a part of that community, and feeling a part of this almost joyous witnessing of her transition, felt so — yeah, I can say educational, but that of course doesn't capture the heart aspect of it.

And noting, for me, it was like clearly identifying this other realm. This realm of support and love, and this shining realm that surrounded her. And thinking back to this realm of paranoia and superstition, ignorance and suspicion — not superstition, superstition too, but suspicion — paranoia, that was my programming in early life. And really not easy to shed.

So you can shed it, and you can try to shed it, but that's easy — shedding it on a level.

So that's been very evident. Living in the realm of support and community is way, way preferable.

[Russell:] No question. No argument.

An edge, then not

[Participant 3:] So, since we've been together — a week after we parted last time, I started my women's embodied group for the second time. I did it a year ago. And that finished about a week and a half ago, maybe before coming here.

And I was less shyly sharing Embodied Life practices this time. And I have to say, in just working with people for almost twenty years in that realm, it's been the most stunning, touching, humbling, amazing experience I've had.

And they're setting up to continue to meet, and sit, and do gestures together. It's amazing. That was a wonderful experience all around.

And also within that, the five months since we've been together — some of you know I became pregnant, and then had a miscarriage at nine weeks. And I found just these tools so helpful. Bowing to what is, and finding life-giving relationship, really.

I wouldn't say it was easy, but it was surprisingly not stuck. Just like, we had moved.

And then about two weeks ago I started another experiment, teaching my first online class. Some of you are participating, much to my sort of delight and embarrassment.

The Embodied Gratitude Project. It's really fun.

And what has been alive for me, coming here, is sort of what we spoke about yesterday. I feel like I'm learning how to pay attention in much more profoundly life-giving ways. And what I thought my edge was, before yesterday — the good moments becoming extraordinary. And I just keep noticing this part of me that feels a little guilty about that.

I just came from being with another group of women, some just in their struggles right now, and I wasn't. And I feel worried about that. Not for myself, but like, am I unrelatable? But there's also this recognizing the good fortune to have these tools. And a little bit of, I really want to make good use of it. Not just make it all about myself.

So that's what I thought was alive for me yesterday.

And then being here, there's a vulnerability that rises up. Like you came over and said hello, and why am I crying? There's something about — like I said last night, I haven't had the image, probably since I was twenty, in a retreat, of like, I want to — something out.

And it feels like it has nothing to do with us in this context. And really, to staying here. Like my uptightness around a child, and the ashram, and wild boy energy. And I want to go away. I want to eat something different. And it's like, oh, what I thought — I was doing so good. And then, oh, I realize how much I've set my life up, and there's a skill in that, the purpose, to not have to deal with that shit that rubs me the wrong way.

So I thought my edge was, I'm so blissed out, that's edgy. And then yesterday I was so not.

Okay. Okay. The mystery — something that big, bowing to what is, like a relationship, easy, you know? With staying here, which is so like, big deal, it's really suffering, really. So that's hot off the press.

[Russell:] Oh, great. Thank you.

Too much

[Participant 4:] So I haven't been able to fully find my ground since I've been here. Been a pretty busy inner experience.

The three years that we've journeyed together have transformed my life in many ways.

Over the last six months I had this epiphany that came from being with this group. That my close friends, that I have in my life currently, I see, if I'm lucky, once every other week, on a Saturday night, for a few hours. And then sometimes it's more like once every three or four weeks.

And the possibility of creating more connection on a daily basis. Not just with strangers, which certainly I can do at any point, but actually have a sense of family, more than just once every other week.

And so I have been cultivating that more. It's been something I've been leaning into.

The night before I arrived, two of the guys that I've been really cultivating — a very joyous edge, leaning into, in everything that we do, whether it could be fun or whether it's something more intentional — I got a phone call basically saying that, hold on, they felt at times that I was too much.

And that kind of caught me off guard. Really caught me off guard.

And so I've found myself, normally one of the first people to raise my hand to speak, and I'm now one of the last people to speak, because there's a tough feeling about being too deep.

And in my journey, my family have told me, the last ten years, that sometimes they feel like I'm sixty or seventy years old, and they just want me to be the old me.

It's challenging. For me, life is — I don't know. I'm having a lot of fun. It comes with lightness and joy for me. But sometimes we just want to not do anything and watch Family Guy, or just watch a TV show. And it's like, okay, then go do that. Because I don't want to do that.

I used to go to bed depressed, and not talking for eight hours, after my basketball team would lose. It's like I can't even believe that's the same life.

So I deeply appreciate what I have. What's opened in me from this experience with everyone here. And at the same time, there's a fear of going any deeper, because of what that will open up — what that will show me is not opened in my life. And that makes —

[Russell:] Can I ask you something? That feel okay?

[Participant 4:] I'll let you know. You can ask.

[Russell:] Yeah. I want to see if I'm getting it just right.

I'm hearing two big things. One is about the friendships, and how much there's a longing for a feeling of family, of community, in a consistent way, with the people you're close with. And it's kind of startling to get this feedback of too much. And I'm imagining that kind of shakes up some of what's wanted there. Kind of confusion about all that.

And then there's another thing, kind of next to that maybe, of in yourself, wanting to go deeper, and some fears come up about what it might reveal. What might be in there. Is that —

[Participant 4:] Just the last part, I would say, it's the fear. It's the fear of building on what we've been building on in this journey together, and then making that feel even further away in day-to-day life.

[Russell:] Oh, yeah. Okay. Okay, so — right, right. Some sort of rub between everyday life and what's going on in your deepening, and in this kind of work.

[Participant 4:] Like, I've found few beings, outside of dogs, children, some seniors, that thoroughly want to shine. Shine love, shine light. At least have the intention to — not always be able to, but at least have the intention.

And so to receive that message was completely — I mean, it came from a good place. It came from a really good, intentional place, and I appreciated the trust and the courage that he had to share that. But it was really shocking, because I thought that we were in this space of just being like children, not needing to worry about it being too much.

And there's some kind of connection, or oneness, between too much and too deep.

I think over the last ten years, I've constantly, anytime these kinds of things have happened, only looked at me. And it's now like, okay, I'm still willing to look at me. I'm still willing to learn, and become more intuitive. But how much of it is also — I'm just holding the possibility — how much of it is others being scared to fully shine their light?

And then there's this deep longing for the family, the group of people. It's tough to talk about, because of the fear of being misperceived, as if I'm sitting there talking about the world every second. This can be throwing a frisbee. I think my nature is pretty playful. But I just enjoy adding consciousness, mindfulness, behind watching a TV show.

I checked out for most of the beginning of my life, and now I just want to check in.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, I hear you. I hear the challenge of that.

Just in touch. Listening. Connecting with you — with the relationships for me that needed to end. And the ones that didn't. Not because they were somehow people doing the same thing I was doing, but some relationships didn't have it anymore. And sometimes I caught it quickly. Sometimes I caught it ten years later.

[Participant 4:] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. But when you describe this friend's letter, I go, oh, well, there's love in there.

[Participant 4:] Thank you very much.

[Russell:] Yes. Go ahead.

His invitation

[Participant 5:] Because the history of us coming is really his initiative. I wasn't going to come. Not that I knew what I was saying no to, but he just said, I think we're going to do it. I think I really want to go to this program.

You really must be ready not to do any more programs. I didn't want to be like a spiritual junkie. And I wanted to really be — but I realized he didn't do as many programs as I did, so maybe I wasn't against that.

And then a week later I'm like, your husband just asked you to join him on a spiritual journey. Why are you just saying no before you've checked it out?

So I just said, okay, let's check it out.

And then as we began it, it was like, well, how are we going to do this and stay intentional about our inner work, our work separately, and not make it about us together? I think we talked about how we navigate that — couple and individual.

And so my M.O. is separate, separate. We're going to just do my — oh.

It's been very much a together process, although it's been equally as valuable for each of us. And anyway, I'm probably more in love with my husband now than I ever am. I'm deeply grateful that he invited me to come and join him.

And there's a freshness. It wasn't — there's just a blossoming of being with one another. The same, and very different, after thirty-two years. Which I never would have thought was my intention about being here. That's the surprise.

So anyway, I just want to acknowledge that it's beautiful, it's fresh, it's new, challenging. I'm looking forward to whatever we have to get in the future.

Thank you.

What I didn't want

[Participant 6:] Can I share my P.S.?

I need a minute, because I'm still — I just need another minute.

[Russell:] Those are the right happy, rapturous tears. Golden nectar.

[Participant 6:] Sorry.

So I was at Breitenbush a couple of weeks ago with Russell, and I managed to get my partner to come with me too. And he said to me, a couple of days before we came, how did you convince me to go to this thing?

And I said, I paid for it.

So last time Russell was talking about other people who were living the things that he had wanted to have in his life, like he had to walk away from the beautiful world. But my experience being here has been a kind of envy, and a sort of regret, and a resentment — not deep — but sort of about, how come I didn't have that? Like what some of you have, couples here together. And feeling like, gosh, I want my partner to do this with me, and I want him to go places with me. And contemplating, well, maybe I don't have to have that. That these people are getting it for me.

And so when we went to the retreat together, I was so happy. I was like, oh, he's so great. He's going to be there. And he didn't really enjoy it very much. He was a little grumpy. To me it's a blessing and a joy. To him it was a disruption of his life. His life is quiet and calm by the river, and this was a disruption.

And he did actually get a lot out of it. He was glad that he came. And I was so grateful that he came.

But what really happened was an incredible freedom within me, because I realized that I had been wanting something that I didn't really want.

It was so much nicer being someplace just on my own, individually, than having to worry about whether he's enjoying it, or is he getting it, or should I say something or not say something, or he doesn't like the food, all that stuff.

And I just realized how completely and totally blessed I am that he supports me in what I want to do. That he's happy to be there, and he's happy that I'm gone. He's like, see, I love you, now have fun. And I'm like, okay, thanks, bye.

And we have this relationship where that's really supportive, and that's really great. And if he were to decide that he wanted to pursue that, I would be happy about that too. It's not that I don't want him to do it. But he would have to pay for it.

[Russell:] Right. Perfect. Perfect.

Was that the P.S. you wanted to give yesterday? So I'm so happy we waited.

[Participant 6:] We didn't wait. It waited. And it's a perfect moment, right?

Not knowing

[Participant 7:] This will be very short. I forgot to include it. The four-part breathing that you've introduced so many times has been one of the most helpful integrators for me over the last five months.

[Russell:] Oh, great. Oh, beautiful. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

We'll weave it in here, because it's such an ally. Such an ally. Just sitting on a bus, sitting on a plane, anywhere. With movement, or not movement, but creating those spaces. Very quick shifts inside.

Yeah.

You want to start with your P.S., and then go?

[Participant 8:] It's okay not to know. And I'm just — that's where I am. And I started out here. That's hot off the press. That just came through. I did start out here. That was how I started. The whole concept that Buddhism introduced to me, about I don't know. That was okay with me.

And I didn't realize it's been three years, until everybody said. It's been like lightning speed for me. This period of time, when I look at where I was, where I am, and what I've been doing in between.

The incrementalism that everyone's spoken about is just that. It's really difficult to see the change until you look at those milestones, and three years is a pretty big milestone.

And — go as a river. This is my last Thich Nhat Hanh retreat, and I saw that. And that's been that flow, that idea. There was a story that he wrote about — I'm sure it's an old story — about the clouds and the rain and the river, and it's always there. And it brings in that concept of home for me.

Everything that you summarized yesterday, and the night that we got here, has been so true for me. I've never been a particularly negative person, but the not dwelling on things, and not carrying the backpack — over time, it's really nice to ride by the seat of my pants again, which is what I used to do when I was young. And I didn't realize that. I didn't used to make plans and goals. I just made decisions, is what I saw it as, at every fork in the road.

And kind of doing that again, and it feels really good. Feels very like I've got this base, this foundation that's supporting me. And that, even if it's not all right, it's all right. That I don't know what would happen if I take the other fork. It's probably fine. It would probably be all right. Could have been so pleased with this direction, where I am this moment.

And the striking part, especially hearing you summarize what I've been thinking the last month, is — am I feeling so good because I have such a cushy life? People tell me all the time how I have a cushy life. And I don't have to worry about the material things in life. I don't have a cushy life.

And so I know that I'm not just happy because I have a cushy life. I'm happy because this stuff works. And because I've tapped into those parts of me, and I've tapped into the outside of me, and it's all coming together. And there's so much support there. Strength. And yet I don't feel like I have to work at it, because of whatever, incrementally, that I've been doing — through your teachings, through my mom's teachings, through the other teachers. And tapping into the wisdom out there has been just such a lovely place that I've come to, which is here with all of you.

All of you have contributed, I feel, to my growth. But the I don't know is still there, and that actually is very comforting.

Thank you.

[Russell:] The famous Zen story — if you think of it as the essence of Zen. It's a Chinese story. This monk was wandering, as they would, and visiting a famous Zen master. And the Zen master asked him, what are you doing here?

And the response is, I don't know.

And the Zen master says, not knowing is the most intimate.

Intimate. Not knowing is the most intimate.

And we can't really think about it. We can either feel that or not. It doesn't make sense in a certain way. We could say it's the first teaching of Zen.

And the folks I went to Rwanda with, the Zen Peacemakers, make this explicit. This Zen teacher, Bernie Glassman — in Zen Peacemakers they have three tenets, three kind of organizing principles.

The first is not knowing. That when you enter a situation, don't go in with all your knowledge in front of you. Don't throw it all. Let it be there, but let it be behind you. Be more naked to the situation. Don't go in with solutions, or thinking you know, or thinking you know what should happen, or what the best result is going to be.

And as we all know, over and over and over, we forget that, and then remember, forget, remember. But to enter a situation not knowing, with that kind of openness, that kind of sense of possibility, is very intimate.

There's a certain kind of vulnerability that it requires, not to lead with our knowing. A certain kind of trust that something will come that will be of value, and won't be either dangerous or foolish, but something will come.

So there's not knowing.

And the second, he uses the term bearing witness, which is really the same as presencing, as we've worked with it together. The Zen Peacemakers are really liking that term right now, presencing, as more inclusive in a certain way. But bearing witness — meaning, whatever are the sorrows and joys in that situation, you're shining your light towards it. You're bearing witness. You're presencing it. You're listening well. Not from knowing what should happen, or what the results should be, or what you're going to do to fix it, or anything.

Not knowing. Bearing witness. This is what's true.

And we've spent our whole time together — which is actually two and a half years, I must tell you. We meet twice a year, but three years will be in January — bearing witness. It has this quality of what we work with all the time. Just, can I be here with what is, and open my heart to it, open my senses to it, open my caring to it, and really kind of inhibit the urge to create a solution.

To kind of create more — I don't love the word, but it's at least a big part of it — tolerance for, capacity to bear. Which is what so often drives us — try to change the situation, try to fix it, try to heal it, try to make it better — is our own discomfort with how it is.

It often looks like you're fixing things for other people. And that's true too, often, if you're oriented the way many people are here. But we also need to see the inner discomfort. At least I find that really helpful, because that shows itself to me fairly regularly.

So, the not knowing, the bearing witness, and then once all that has occurred, the third is loving actions. If there's anything to do, once you've been not knowing and taking it all in from that place, then you do it.

It's not that you don't do things. In fact you might do a lot of things. You might dedicate yourself to the environment and work with it. And each time there's a new situation. Can I be not knowing? Can I be really bearing witness to the needs of the people cutting down the rainforest? Can I bear witness to what their picture of life is, without convincing them that it's wrong? Can I hear what's life-giving in their point of view? Can I get so big that I can include that, recognizing that everybody is taking care of their life to the best of their ability, given what they know?

And nobody's going, I think I'm just going to enter this and be a jerk, and make life really hard for everybody, and be as stupid as I am. Nobody intentionally enters situations that way. We all try to make life function according to —

Hi. Do you need something? What are you looking for?

If you go straight across, there's an office over there on the left. If she's not in there, go up those stairs, and inside you'll find somebody.

Well, you've been most welcome.

Can anybody remember where I left off? Oh, yeah. So — huh?

[Participant:] Do.

[Russell:] The individual situations — to create plans, but for their own needs, I would say. That's right. That they're always satisfying something, based on their worldview of themselves and others.

And if we can get that, and try to get — and it's challenging — enough space inside that there's room for seeing that too. Doesn't mean agreeing with it, but that there's room for that too.

From that space, what I notice, for myself — and you'll just have to check it out to see if it's true — I don't actually have to sit back and make decisions about things. Decisions happen because of not knowing and bearing witness. And really listening.

And spending time with it. As you know, I've been sitting for a couple of months with what feels like new things are coming. I think I've written a little bit about it.

And along the way there are some urges to, well, I could do that, and I could do that, and I could do that. I could kind of take care of the not knowing very quickly. And they're all — I'm so blessed, because they're wonderful things that I have options for. But what's feeling right is listening. In not knowing what's wanted of me.

So it's an interesting shift when the question is more than what do I want — which is also important — but it shifts much inside when I'm listening to what's wanted of me.

And they're certainly not exclusive questions, but they tilt the inner life differently, and they're both important in different ways.

And keeping enough space for that not knowing. Not jumping to, oh, I can satisfy that with that and that. And giving room for the places that get scared or concerned, and they look at everything, from financial considerations to other people's considerations, and what people are wanting. And really holding the space of, I'm waiting for what? I'm waiting to bear witness till the next makes itself known.

And it's not like I'm passive. Show me — it's a very active engagement of shining the light, listening, not looking for a solution, but keeping the process alive and moving and going, and letting each corner of it come out.

So just in the last couple of days, some things are starting to come, it feels like. I'm not ready to jump, or to start to write an email this morning. I still need to sit a little longer about next.

But the capacity to put our knowing behind us, and meet, in that more naked way, the situation that we're in.

You know, when I used to teach — I still do sometimes teach Feldenkrais practitioners — I'm almost always saying, don't go in looking for what function to do. Let all that be in the room, but let it be behind you. Let it be around you. In front of you is just you meeting this other.

And then out of that, bear witness to what's happening in them, in you, with them, between you, and begin to follow. And then you can call up your toolkit, or something. You can start thinking what might be. That's fine. But it grows out of that not knowing and bearing witness.

I guess that's what's most alive for me right now.

Yeah.

The right place

[Participant 9:] So the first thing — when we did the various tasks yesterday, one thing came out quite clearly. I am in the right place. This is the right place for me, yesterday and today as well, and tomorrow.

And some shift in my life, in the way I live, during these years. And I think one important shift is around achievement. And the achievement is in the not-achievement. And that's much more free of achieving something. That's nice.

From making the world better — it's not under my capacity, but it's just not the point.

So I think it's something quite different from what I was before I started doing this.

What has been very useful for me has been the resource growing practice. It's very useful. When I do that, I'm recalling the moments, and the intense situations. That has been very useful.

And my stage is living this way in my ordinary life, and with people, at first. It's a strange development. So it is kind of spiritual as well.

And I saw how I manage people now. I wouldn't say it's different. It's the same, but deeper. And that's what the work brings to me — being deeper myself.

So, being with people. And my wife didn't come to the retreat. It has effects on her as well. Well, I think it was a nice thing also, for my couple, to be here alone without my wife. And she feels it. She feels it, and she told me that.

[Russell:] Thank you. Yeah.

Forgiveness

[Participant 10:] Really, really, this is huge. And I didn't put it all together until this morning.

I came to a Santa Sabina workshop before this started, on forgiveness. And thinking, oh, this is the answer. I'm going to find forgiveness. And I walked away not finding forgiveness.

And there had been some real — I just need to take a minute here.

I felt like devastation in my home, prior to this. And I couldn't forgive others, and I couldn't forgive myself.

And my husband and I are separated. We've been separated really three years now. And we've had the commitment to come together, and we've done it in a setting with a therapist, to really communicate everything that needed to be communicated.

And through all this work, I've been able to actually get in touch with what needed to come forward. And somehow I never planned on it. It just came. Anger at moments, the blame — I actually just allowed that to come forward. But then everything else came too.

Something about love and appreciation. And I don't even know — I can't even quite describe it, other than it's been magical. There's been this real acceptance of it all. And I feel that going two ways. And there's no clarity about what might happen in our relationship in the future. It's more about, we can show up and be with whatever's there.

And sometimes it takes a couple of weeks to do that. It's not a quick process sometimes.

And the forgiveness — somehow the forgiveness, even of myself, is so present. Like there's a space that I didn't have.

[Russell:] Thank you, sister.

[Participant 11:] I'm sitting in a room — I don't remember where it is — but it was even before that Santa Sabina workshop, someplace, when you were telling me the stories of what you were dealing with.

And just being with who you are now, and who was telling me the story then — it's just so amazing. My inner life just gets so hopeful. Like a big flower opening in the chest.

Thank you so much.

[Russell:] Yeah. Very brave work.

[Silence 51 seconds]

I don't want this to end

[Participant 12:] I have noticed this landing has been different than other beginnings. I tend to, usually by the first ATM, be fully arrived. And it's felt like I'm still — and I've kind of heard that from other people a little bit — like I'm still arriving. File uploaded, maybe seventy-five percent.

And yesterday there was a real exhaustion, and a kind of cloudiness. And it's in very sharp contrast to what was here on leaving, in terms of the crispness and lightness, and such a sense of possibility and integration, and the way of gelling as a group.

And so there's something that's wanting that, wanting to deepen it. And also, in my listening session yesterday, there are so many layers in the heart of being here. The celebration of what's unfolding. The kind of sadness and fear of this container coming to an end in a few days. And yeah, there's a lot.

And it's really fun, having an epic morning lightsaber battle on the deck with a child.

And it's interesting — there hasn't been a fighting of the cloudiness or the heaviness. But I notice, in just naming it, there's something that drops in a little more.

[Russell:] Would it feel all right to spend a little time there?

Yeah. Go see if it has more it wants you to know.

[Silence 30 seconds]

[Participant 12:] Does it — has it dropped?

And it was just something. It almost feels like different layers of texture in the heart area. And there was a voice that just said, I don't want this to end.

[Russell:] Maybe if it feels okay, let it feel that layer, and anything else that wants to be there. Just a gentle invitation that you're sensing.

Just be — I don't want it to end. Does that feel just right? And does that want to be known further? Or something else. Just stay with it a little.

[Participant 12:] Yeah. So as I resonate with that one, there's not something else.

[Russell:] Yeah. Right.

[Participant 12:] No. It's that I sit with it. There's a sense of room opening up in the heart center. And also I feel something beyond, into it.

[Russell:] Yeah. I sense some room in there, and something out further. And staying with — there's this room. And if you go in that room and you sense all the way through, what's wanting to be acknowledged?

[Participant 12:] Yeah. But as more space is opening up in there, I'm just sensing all of these layers of this particular week, and this particular moment in life. There's a lot in there. There's a lot there.

[Russell:] Yeah. So let it know you know that it's a lot, and that there are many layers, and you're just going to spend some more time, as long as it wants you there, to feel into that a lot, and those layers.

[Silence 59 seconds]

[Participant 12:] So as I'm staying with it, it's kind of just flashing on different — they're showing up as voices or images. Lots of different textures in the heart.

And with each one, there's a kind of, oh yeah, that's there. Oh, and that's there too. And there's something that's real. It's also opening to the back, toward the shoulder blades. There's something that feels like it's softening and opening.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yes. You're feeling all these layers of the heart, and this roominess and softening. And with all that, just very gently, sense — is there something that would like to be recognized that hasn't been sensed into yet?

Just very gently. Listening in, without hearing.

[Silence 44 seconds]

[Participant 12:] And so to that, there's no kind of clear response. It just seems like a little blubbering, and then something kind of softens back in, and then arises a feeling of — yeah, there's room for these divergent places, these opposites.

[Russell:] And maybe just — we can end in a few moments — letting your inner life know, if this is true, you'll be checking in regularly. Especially for anything that's feeling pushed to the side, or unwelcomed, or somehow maybe even welcomed but not encouraged to open.

And that we really will come back, so it can know that you'll be back with that kind of invitation.

[Participant 12:] Thank you.

[Silence 33 seconds]

Freedom

[Russell:] Hello. This is the last one. I think so. Is that true?

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Oh. I guess we spoke in person. Okay. That took care of it.

[Participant 13:] I feel like this has been an extraordinary journey. I'm just really happy with all of you, and the learning process, and the support, and the love. It just feels so unique to me. It's like a gift. It just makes me smile inside now.

I'm such a feeling person, so I go to that place of the feeling. And I've been pretty blessed lately. I've been feeling extraordinarily happy, and grateful, and watching my journey unfold from being gainfully employed to not being gainfully employed, and taking the courage to be self-employed.

And a lot of you, and Russell, have really supported me in this, which has been very scary. It doesn't feel so scary now.

Even midstream, thinking, do I even do the Embodied Life? Can I even afford the Embodied Life? And then there's this thread, that I couldn't see myself not in the Embodied Life. But by being honest, to say, I don't know, Russell, if I can even be here. What do I do? But I want to be here. And by being really, really honest, even knowing that maybe I couldn't be here, I was here.

And that opened up something gigantic for me, in my healing process, and confidence, and support — mainly within myself. Knowing that I was having outward support, but so much of the support grew within me.

And there was one profound lesson, the last segment, when we were doing a movement lesson, and we were working a lot with the ankles, and doing so much self-reflection of the ankle, which is support.

And I'm so visual, and so intuitive, that I was literally seeing shackles around my ankles. When I got up from the movement lesson, they unlocked. And simultaneously, as they unlocked, I was dripping, and Russell says, what is that all about? All in one moment.

And you guys, truly, I was free. There was this true sense of freedom. And from that moment, right here, my life continues to be free.

And I do so much of this work. I'm so self-motivating, more on my own. Kind of, oh, what am I going to do today? I'm going to pop in Russell's voice. So I might be doing something in the house, but I'm listening to his voice. Or I'll invite a friend over — do you want to do a movement lesson with me? Like, what are you talking about? Just try it. I think you'll like it.

And the four-part breathing has been really essential in my moments of gripping within myself, or contracting within myself. And I find, in my everyday beingness, my language goes back to, I can feel my bottom.

And when I came into the program, I was having major back issues, and it was really hard for me to even sit. I would lean up against the wall. I don't know if you noticed that when I first came. And I feel tall, like a giraffe. I feel so unbelievably tall. Something has freed within my system, and in my mind, and in the way I even view myself in the world, and look at the world. This is so profound to me.

Friends, maybe who I haven't seen in a while, will say, geez, you look different. And I'll say, yeah, I am different. And I get comments like, you're radiating, you're glowing, you look beautiful — because I feel that. I truly feel that.

And when I am not doing something embodied, something is missing. I now am gravitating towards being more embodied. And there's more. I just now feel like I'm a beginner. I feel kind of like a beginner.

And even getting here, being so excited to see all of you, like a tribe and a family. It was cool, because I did a solo trip, and I packed my mountain bike, and I planned for afterwards. And I can afford to do things afterwards. I'm really happy I get to do that.

And my practice is taking off. Something has shifted. Something is totally shifted. And I'm really self-employed, and I'm really making a living.

And I'm doing it by way of all of these tools. I mean — it's profound.

And so on the drive over, reflecting, I often pull your faces in during my life, to help me in my day, or if something gets stuck, or a word, or a moment with somebody.

And I was in the Klamath area, and there are a lot of hawks there. And this hawk came in front of my windshield, as if moving in slow motion, and time stopped, and he or she turned and looked at me. And as I'm driving, I saw every detail of this hawk. And later I had to pull over, because to me there are messages in that, and why did that happen.

And so I left with plenty of time, and I'm just jumping to getting here, getting lost. I got lost in Sonoma. I felt like I was in the vortex. This road said this, my map said this. All of that, and I still felt my bottom. I still knew I was going to be here. I didn't really freak out. I was just taking in all the golden hills, and being grateful that I still get to go to this retreat.

And then I lose my ring. And my foot is infected. I still feel pretty happy.

I mean, I know that ring is from Italy, and it represents so much. It's not just a ring. It represents courage and adventure. But it's all inside of me. My foot will heal. And I just feel really loved. And I just feel really supported. And I just really want to thank you.

[Russell:] This is a great ride, man. Sometimes even in the mist, it rains.

The basics

[Russell:] If you don't want to say anything, that's okay.

[Participant 14:] You said that not knowing was the first step.

The internal landscape has a few obstacles, a few challenges. And this week I picked up a recent and larger bag of rocks.

Coming here is the equivalent of pouring oil on the troubled landscape, the troubled waves. It's calming. It's refreshing. It's slowly educating.

The basics. For me, it's all about sticking with the basics. There's no epiphany. There's no leaps of understanding. It's just a gradual growth. But the fact is, for the current measure, going back over the time we've spent together —

Physically, I have learned to deal with my inclination to carry everything. That grew significantly.

Mentally, understanding, comprehension — it'll be a perpetual road, but I enjoy going now.

I appreciate all the sharing, and all the wisdom that I hear here. I know it's not easy to do, but I certainly respect and appreciate it.

So, thank you all.

[Russell:] Well, I've got one last thing to say. I need to pee.