Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 6, Day 7, Session 3 — 81 minutes

Summary: On the last morning, Russell invites each person to go toward whatever draws them and say a few words. The group shares objects, poems, and stories of the week, then bows. He closes with a Rumi poem, certificates of completion, and a word on the privilege of knowing one another's lives.

Invitation

[Russell:] These movements with the bowing, with the midline, with the taking time with each side, can be wonderful just to visit briefly, just to feel, just give you a reference point. And even if it kind of seems a little mysterious, something happens in my experience that's worth continuing with.

So, there are two more things that I would like to invite. One is where you randomly stand up, you see something that attracts you, and ideally you just kind of — I mean, you can include everything. You can include your, oh, I've always wanted to read that book, or yeah. But really listen to what draws you, even if you don't know why.

Be with it for a few moments, just standing if you feel comfortable, sitting if you want. And if you can sense something about it that drew you, or anything that's calling you, and if nothing really comes in words, just say anything that you would like to say briefly, so that we can each say something. And then when we finish that, I've got a certificate of completion for everybody, and I'll want to say a few words and then offer those to you.

So anybody who would like to can start going toward — the people who go at the beginning have more things to draw them. Let's go one at a time, though. Let's go one at a time. We know who's second.

What draws you

[Participant 1:] From afar, it looked like a T. And I'm coming out of almost two years of finishing chronic sinusitis, so really that's what I wanted — to smell what this thing was. It does not smell strong.

And I think maybe somebody has found some sacred soil, but I'm not sure, so I'm going to take it with me. I don't know if I'll drink it, but I'll do it. Maybe a garden with it. If it turns out I can really smell it, I can figure it out. But I like that it's unlabeled, too.

Thank you. Whoever.

[Russell:] So when you feel finished, just give us a bow and we'll give you a bow.

Is it still your moment now?

[Participant 2:] Well, I thought this was leather.

[Russell:] That's what thinking will do for you. Do you have a surprise?

[Participant 2:] Surprise. Surprises. And then I also have this really practical side of me, where all these window coverings in our house have these drawstrings with a Hunter Douglas plastic thing at the end, and they just flap around in the wind and hit the wall, and they're plastic, and I thought of putting leather bags around them.

So I think I'll take this as a sign that that's what I should do. This even looks really cool. Now these are really good. I'm dying to know what's in here, but I think I'll just leave it.

[Russell:] And you can also use this time to say anything you want to the group. If there is anything further that you want to say, this can be a time for that. I think most of us said pretty much what we wanted to say last night, so there may not be that much more that wants to come forward right now.

You're free.

[Participant 2:] Yeah.

[Participant 3:] I'm drawn to the rock. I didn't know what I was going to say, but I'm drawn to it for grounding, and really being connected to the earth is really important to me. And it's just a token of my time here. I'll always remember being with all of you. Being here is quite extraordinary.

[Russell:] Is there a word on that crystal?

[Participant 3:] It says wisdom.

Thank you, everyone, for making me feel safe enough to blossom.

Feeling the bow

[Russell:] I'm going to suggest, when we bow, really feel that moment. It's so easy for the gesture to become habitual, and when it has just that little bit of sensing into, it changes everything.

Just this sense of how much we are supporting and supported by each other.

Stories and poems

[Participant 4:] Oh, a passport.

[Russell:] Is it an American passport? With your picture?

[Participant 4:] I feel a bit greedy, but I would love to read this book. Thank you, whoever, and all of you.

[Russell:] Yeah, you can do anything. It's your time.

[Participant 5:] What I love — rocks.

[Silence 33 seconds]

It's a feast just to look at. It's just fun to look at.

[Russell:] I wonder if just looking is receiving.

[Participant 5:] Well, initially, before I really looked, I was drawn to this, because I didn't know what was in there. It was kind of like a little something opening. I kind of feel like my inner life is

that way. It's like there's a little bit of opening, but I have a lot to continue to discover and hear. So I think that's probably the reason.

Actually, I want to share. There's been a lot, just about communicating with gestures. And although I have to share it with words, I have a story.

I shared our horizontal and vertical practices with a group of women at a women's retreat. It's a covenant group in our church. And we were at the beach, so it was wonderful. We were by the ocean. One of the other women had us — we all drew a labyrinth on the beach. We had our own labyrinth, and then we walked our labyrinth.

But one of the members of our group is blind. And so she sat with her service dogs, one who's not in service, one who is, and she played the flute for us while we drew our labyrinths and walked. We were almost by ourselves. It was amazing.

And after that, we gathered with her, and I took her hands, and I said it was the first time I'd really spent time walking with her, and she's very independent, just incredible. Anyway, so I thought, well, I don't want to leave her on the labyrinth. So I actually then just knew. I just stood behind her, and she was able to walk. I offered her my labyrinth.

And at the end, because I had introduced the vertical and horizontal practices, in the middle of the labyrinth she chose to do those practices. This is all in silence. And later she said she almost knew, and could see, the practices better than I could. And she said later that that was one of the most significant things that she was introduced to. And so I just received a different sense of those practices.

So as I say this, the next time that I do it, I'm going to do it with my eyes closed. I've never done that. This work touches us, and then surprises, and we see how it touches.

[Participant 6:] Well, I know what I'm going to pick, because I looked before. I'm picking the poem. I am not I.

And I remember from day one that Russell said, you should all try memorizing a poem. And I've been fighting him for three years. I didn't want to memorize the poem. But in hearing this poem, I think I'd like to memorize this poem. And I think in doing that, it will remind me that our work is a continuing process.

And I guess what I want to say is that, at present, I don't anticipate being at the January program. But I think I wanted to say that, and to say I don't see the work stopping for us. I mean, I see the work continuing. I don't see our relationship with Russell stopping. I anticipate being at future graduate programs, and/or Brighton Beach, or other programs like that. So I don't see it that we're ending our relationship with either the program or with you folks.

The odds are we'll probably see each other in different ways, or different places, and different locations. Even you, because it's fascinating, the idea of doing something in Europe. I think it'll be a lot of fun.

So I really enjoyed my experience with the group. I was a slow starter. But I think the group process really helped me not only relate differently, but get to know myself a little better. So I thank you for that.

[Silence 30 seconds]

[Participant 7:] This one is the heart of the Buddha. That's what I would like to cultivate. So thank you very much. I suppose it's always a pleasure to be with you. And as someone said, this pleasure will be with you.

[Participant 8:] I'm not sure how many elements there are here. You may have all seen this rose, and I think it symbolizes maybe all of our blossoming, and the simple clarity of the ocean and sky, and the clarity that has emerged has been very special.

Can you just let us see, while I try this? It is a seed of a kelp, and the dream image of it, and the sense of its being so deeply rooted that it's not blown away with the tides, and yet intimately sensitive to the slightest changes, because it's part of the ocean, and moving with the changes. So deeply rooted.

And then two leaves gave themselves to me this morning, just to bring some earth into it. So, thank you all. Thank you all so much.

[Participant 9:] I'll take my own, because it's a poem that I want to read. And it's by John Donne. I'm honestly not sure what the title is.

Human skin is porous. The world flows through you. Your senses are large pores that let the world in. By being attuned to the wisdom of your senses, you'll never become an exile in your own life, an outsider lost in an external spiritual place that your will and intellect have constructed.

[Participant:] Can you speak it again, please?

[Participant 9:] Human skin is porous. The world flows through you. Your senses are large pores that let the world in. By being attuned to the wisdom of your senses, you will never become an exile in your own life, an outsider lost in an external spiritual place that your will and intellect have constructed.

[Participant 10:] I'll take it back to rejoin Saskatchewan, and we smudge in the morning. And so the little ones running around. And this time we smudge, and this time when we smudge, I can smudge the little one. So it'll be a beautiful reminder of these practices, and then I can bring it to the family. And it's a beautiful smudge. So yeah, I hope.

[Silence 54 seconds]

It has warming and natural spices.

[Participant:] Thank you.

[Participant 11:] I'm drawn to these. I think I remember these being called angel cards, from working at a New Age bookstore twenty-something years ago. And I don't know, they're magnetized to these, and something about — I don't know about angels, but I'm open to support from unseen beings of mercy and persuasion.

Yeah. The center is always there. The center is always there. And you can have it as a friend, even with your legs broken.

[Participant 12:] I think I need to bring my roommate's perspective home with me. Partly because I just want to have a memory of the day with me all the time, and every time I use it — you can think

about that prayer flag or something. But I also want something about discipline, like a person's spiritual discipline, somebody to kind of —

Yeah. It's my first group in all this year, and so it's something about —

[Participant 13:] Those are some of my favorite things.

[Russell:] Those particular picks?

[Participant 13:] Yeah. In fact, if you ask my wife and daughter, they're always stocking stuffers at Christmas. My father was a dentist, so it's kind of one of the jokes in the family that I'm a little obsessive about it.

[Russell:] That's right. I knew that.

[Participant 13:] And that he just kind of picked that up without —

[Silence 42 seconds]

[Participant 14:] I'm excited to see something. Last night I was. And I don't know, maybe you've felt this craving. I was experiencing some resistance to being here, to being a part of it, which is something that I kind of struggled a little bit with. And you've all been so incredibly gracious and accepting of my being. And the gift that you've offered, in giving me a purpose for being here, has been the only way that I could be here. So I'm so grateful for having that. And I am thankful, and on top of it there was just so much, because that was the gift for me.

It was lovely this morning to be with myself, and with my feeling of not having contributed last night. Never being able to find the time, and give myself that, to be able to create a flag or any of that. And it was wonderful to be in the group last night with that feeling of not wanting to be in the group, and just experiencing that kind of veil.

And it was lovely to contribute this morning, and to contribute with all of my unworthiness, or whatever was there, all of it. It's so lovely to just be here, and to have grown steadily with you. So I just wanted to thank you all so much. So thank you for being here.

[Participant 15:] I'm enjoying breaking my habit of being the last person. And if I've done this with people, I would put at least one, but I usually put two or three things, just in case somebody forgot. I always want to make sure that even if you forgot, you're always welcome.

[Participant 16:] Like the black, the contrast. Or, well, actually, the harmony is better than — it's the contrast that evokes the harmony. For me it's like, as I sit here with it, I realize that it's just that appreciation of the differences blending together to create the whole. And therefore it's usable.

And knowing I can't improve on what's already written, but I can mess up the pages a little bit. I have a feeling this will be for poetry.

[Participant 17:] I don't know if you know this. I love tobacco. That's one of the most satisfying experiences I have every day of my life. Numerous times a day, whether I'm with a group or not, whether I'm with other people or not.

I remember the highest and the deepest, the oneness. I remember not doing, and being. And I remember that what is in another is in here, and what is in here is in another. And that beyond our

differences, beyond our confusion, beyond our struggles, this moment is always that vast blue sky and bright, warm sun. So for me, that's a gift many times a day.

So it felt really right, having time in our last week cultivating this, because that atmosphere, the gesture, evokes an inner invitation. To bow to what? To bow to our life. You know, that the moment that I'm in, my situation, is of greater value, or lives above my opinion of them, my reaction to it. At first there is taking care of the situation that I'm in. And so I need lots of reminders, because it's very easy for me to side with my preference. I like to feel good a lot. It's one of my addictions. So it's important for me to have good reminders of just what is.

[Participant 18:] This looks fantastic. This is the original soundtrack of Himalaya.

[Russell:] Of Himalaya. Oh, yes. Is that right?

[Participant 18:] Well, at any rate, the soundtrack looks wonderful. And I do love music. Only a third of it. Wish we had a bit more. But anyway, it's in my life.

And I wanted to take this opportunity as well to just say how extraordinary this has been. And it will live with me forever. I don't know if you know, but shortly before I joined the group, I had a hip replacement. And so I wasn't certain that this would work for me. And then, Russell, when you suggested that we try something new, or refresh something old, I immediately thought I'd return to the piano, and chose to play that. But then it just wasn't happening. And so what I did was I started paddleboarding, which is something I couldn't have done before.

[Russell:] Paddleboarding?

[Participant 18:] Yeah. And it's been extraordinary. With my husband, with a little bravado, I can really navigate the seas. So I thank you for encouraging me to push the edge a little, and for the support and the container to actually be able to do that, and record it. So thank you. Thank you very much.

[Participant 19:] I feel really full and complete. Around feeling called to anything, that really comes from a good place, not from feeling rejected because I didn't participate or something like that.

[Participant:] Sorry, go ahead.

[Participant 19:] But I just wanted to say, I feel like I said most of what I wanted to say last night to all of you. But I'm just sitting here and I'm watching everyone, and it feels really amazing, because to see the creativity pulled from this group — whether it's a little light and black notebook, or toothpicks, or anything that's been maybe seemingly meaningless to the ordinary eye — it's really wonderful to be a part of. Because I'm usually that person in my life that picks up a stick and says, look at this, and everybody's like, stick.

And so anyway, it just feels really, really beautiful to be a part of a group that leans into seeing beyond the ordinary.

[Silence 2 minutes]

[Participant 20:] The egrets have been my teachers this week. Something about watching them, finding something new in me. In being with all of that, watching them and the little ones, I made up that they're finding their midlines. And then all of a sudden they start to do their turn again. It

takes a fair amount of time before they can do it. They turn, and then they do it again. But pretty soon they're doing it, and they do it so beautifully.

And I don't know why. It just felt that there was something. But also in that, it's almost like they're starting to find their wings. And they don't flap when they're still at this stage, as far as I could see. But then, once this is done, their flapping comes in, and it's a little uncoordinated. And this kind of just stops, and then they start doing their flapping, but then gradually they flap, and there's this short movement, like a short flight. And I didn't see any of them really take flight, but they take their time. And each stage, they wait until they're ready.

And they too have an inner knowing, and I feel like that's what I'm finding.

And I just want to read the poem here.

Take flight, my friend. Enjoy the space all around you. Sense the cool breeze that lifts you and takes you down. Take pause, my friend. Perch on the vistas that feed.

I get to make it up.

Listen to the quiet cacophony of inner land. Land — I don't know. Sense it all as new. Be you bird, elephant, or lion. Lean into it with fresh, soft eyes that delight in each new discovery.

And I think this speaks it all. Thank you, everyone.

[Participant 21:] There's no going down with the ship.

[Participant:] Well, we decided not to let that happen. Yeah.

[Participant 21:] This is a postcard from Brighton Beach.

[Russell:] I recognize it. I know it very, very well. I've been in it more than once.

[Participant 21:] There are certain things about going last that I enjoy.

I wasn't going to let you go down with the ship this time. But there are certain things about going last. Keep going. About thinking you're last.

I've said more in the last couple of days than I had expected to, with a lot of help from my friend. There are definitely things that I still need to get out. The journey through the inner world is a challenging one for me. But I'm slowly making my way, with a lot of help, and you've all helped, everyone.

And I will add just one thing. A couple of people have asked, and I should tell you that, like many other things in life, this is better the second time around.

[Participant:] Yes, yes, you can.

[Participant 22:] I'm learning about angels. Like, visible angels. And a nighttime blessing. Oh, and this is beautiful. In the mind of gratitude. This is a nighttime prayer, a nighttime blessing. And this one: angels light the way.

I tried to give it away so many times this week. It came to me from a sister when I visited the store. She just gave it to me. And I thought I would give it to her, when we were there that night.

[Participant:] Oh, this is for her. She's talking about angels. The angels are going to be here. Come on, we're getting there.

[Participant 22:] And turning the light around, and light. Yeah, this is all really, really wonderful to take.

My dharma name, that I got as a refuge name two different times, has the same light in it, the same chu — like a torch. Children? Like a children in Tibetan. So light is a thing. Okay, okay. I mean, I'm getting it.

And I wanted to say something else from last night, when I was speaking about my friendship with you. It was also kind of something about last — it coming to feel very clear in this last segment. And with a capital F, I said.

I think when I first came, I know when I first came, I felt quite resistant to anything, like even teacherness. I mean, in a way I wasn't really sure about my resistance, but I think I can clearly say that's what it was. Teacher, and institutional. Not that — I mean, I don't feel that this Embodied Life school quite has that sense for me at this point. But I had just come out of a really long eight years, and then preceded by about twenty years or more of this kind of other, very strong institutional spiritual path, which was blessed by incredible teachers, but there weren't the people running this joint and stuff.

But anyway, so what I wanted to do was to insert, in my story that I read last night, a verse, after I said that part about just getting to become friends with you in a way that feels really comfortable and lovely and beneficial.

The Hafiz poem I quoted from the other day — not the whole thing, it's a lot, but a little verse from it that is the beginning of it. And I'm just going to — I think if I start it from there, then I'll find the part that really fits, if I can do it.

I know the voice of depression still calls to you. I know those habits that can ruin your life still send their invitations. But you are with the friend now, and look so much stronger. You can stay that way, and even bloom.

I'm going to stop there, but it goes on. It's even better.

[Participant:] Thank you. That's beautiful. The one you always have.

[Participant 23:] A couple of people had asked to let her know that they enjoyed their experience. I'm not saying everybody should. I'm just saying, for those people who had asked, I had said I would pass along how to reach her, and I never did.

[Russell:] Yeah, go ahead.

Closing

[Russell:] So I want to say first how — I mean, it's obvious to all of us, but I want to say it — just how authentic and moving our time has been, and our time last night. So many moments. The dancing. This incredible expression that each person gave through their art and through their speaking just really went deep for me. And it means a lot.

In fact, this week is part of my getting clear about doing another program. That happened after our first or second day during this week, when I realized I will find ways, as I said last night, to work more with graduates and create ways of helping graduates teach more. But I need to also keep growing the invitation for this kind of experience that is — and there's lots of beautiful, beautiful work around, and this is its own gift. And for the people who are attracted to this, it goes very deep. To feel and see your transformations in your own ways, I just realized that.

So that was part of the message of, how do I make decisions? I listen, I see, and then, accompanied by an email of a new person saying, when are you going to start? I've been waiting for that. So the right timing will arise, but you helped me get clear about that.

This we have now

[Russell:] And you know, I gave you this once before. It's just coming to my head right now. I hope I have the whole thing. This Rumi that I love, which really speaks to the space that we're in.

This we have now is not imagination. This is not grief or joy. This is not a judging place, an elation, or a sadness. Those all come and go. This is the presence that doesn't.

What else could human beings want? When grapes turn to wine, they're wanting this. When the night sky pours by, it's really a crowd of beggars, all wanting some of this.

This we are now, this that we're sharing, this we are now created the human body and the universe. Excuse me — created the universe and the human body, cell by cell, like bees building a honeycomb. This created that. This consciousness created us. The human body and the universe came from this, not this from the universe and the human body.

So that last part we need to get. The ordinary evolutionary theory covers part of the ground, but it doesn't cover the whole ground. We need that paradox. We come from consciousness. We're not only moving toward it. We are made of love. We are made of love. We grew out of a love impulse.

The human body and the universe came from this, not this from the universe and the human body.

Certificates

[Russell:] So, I've got a certificate that I'd love to give you each, and you can just —

The guys all have V names.

[Silence 45 seconds]

[Participant:] Just keeps going. So amazing to me.

[Russell:] One of the gifts that I get — it's part of why I like to know you. I get those very short twenty-minute times together, as well as other ways, other things that I have with everyone in this room. I have these threads of your life, and these pictures of your partners, or your kids, or your grandkids, or what happened that was a difficult time, or what you're working on. But each person that I see, it's not that I think about all that, but that's all there. And it's so rich, intimate, and privileged.

It's a real privilege to have an entryway into what classically would be called the soul level — the way you're living in your life — as well as where we also meet in the absolute realm that's beyond everything. And of course all the relationships are within.

And we don't only deal with what's difficult and what's wonderful. I guess we also get to step into that larger space and remember. But then I get to also know about enough of the somethings that it's so personal. You know? That's such a gift. It's a lot. And I feel particularly blessed.

I think a lot of, quote, spiritual teachers — I don't know if this is a lot of that name, but it's not completely wrong — only get to live in that larger space. And so many, like a leader or a counselor or something like that, get to live almost completely in the personal space. And my life is dedicated so much to the integration that is a oneness of form and emptiness, and you get to help me live in that.