Talk

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 1, Session 1 — 31 minutes

Summary: Russell welcomes the group to the first Embodied Life week in the barn he and Linda dreamed of forty years ago. He invites a deeper listening for each person's calling, introduces biophilia and standing up for life, and sets the week's sitting schedule and house notes.

Welcome

[Russell:] I'm so grateful that we're all here, and that I've had a number of interactions with some of the people who are not here. Many people missing us. I'll comment on them, maybe tomorrow. Although you'll likely see two of them.

Pete Beck was very involved with the work, did the graduate retreat in November, and he just couldn't — he's got a lot of challenges at home, couldn't take off another week. But I've invited him to come sit with us when he can. He's got to be out of town on business, but he's definitely going to be here Saturday night. So he'll be here at least once, and maybe sit with us.

And Robert Tompkins will come over to read us, and maybe have a meal with us. We'll see the two of them.

One of the things that has been so alive for me, in preparing and in the expectation of us being together — I've just been feeling what a great opportunity this is. It feels like such a potent time for me personally, and for so many people that I've been in touch with.

It feels very expansive for me, and like there's more coming, and I'm wanting to listen really well to what's wanted in my personal destiny and in the groups that I'm a part of. And so to have this chance to be on my home court.

The barn

And yeah, this is — some of you know the story, I'll say it anyway. This is really the home court in that, literally forty years ago exactly, Linda and I moved into a barn an eighth of a mile away, just right over to the next road, and we lived in a barn.

I'd finished my first summer of the Feldenkrais training, 1975, and we're living in that barn, and we said, someday, wouldn't it be great to have a barn like this to teach in?

And I taught my first class at the Center for Well-Being in downtown Sebastopol, right near where you're staying, right down the road from where you're staying.

And after this incredible journey around the planet, and so many — being blessed with so many teachings in so many places, and ending up like homing pigeons. And together being able to manifest a dream. I am very indebted to Linda for carrying the aesthetic vision. And I was kind of the sous chef.

But in terms of studying sacred geometry, to create a space that has a certain feeling in it that many people can feel.

And before the foundation was laid, we did practices here, and Buddhas and crystals and the Heart Sutra and the Our Father prayer and the Our Mother prayer, all sitting in the earth underneath us, and in the foundation, actually, in the cement.

And the same for the labyrinth that is right behind me. In line with this, the middle of that, in the center, has the same kind of empowerments. And many people can feel something about that.

This group

But I've had the gift of doing the all-day sittings here, and some all-day workshops, and a few people have stayed over the years, Embodied Life people, and Linda's had Sofiana groups here.

But this is the first Embodied Life week we're having. And to have a group of people — this is quite special, because you're not only Embodied Life people, you're not only graduates, but you're part of the same group. So there's the already established safety and knowing, and so we start in such a different place than almost any other group of people I could be meeting with here, you know?

And so for me, that creates a very strong resonance for the kinds of inquiry that I'm engaged in, deep listening to what's called for.

So I'm very grateful that we can be here, and that we are here together.

The big questions

I so much want to encourage you to ask the big questions, if that feels right. If it doesn't, you know, you don't have to go with my story. But if it feels right, the sense of what's calling each of us. We each have a different calling.

And maybe there's a way of this setting being a vehicle for a deeper kind of listening — maybe, to hold that possibility at least. And if it feels accurate for you, to use this time to go deeply.

And we'll have the opportunity. We already know certain kinds of listening, and we know how being in the presence of others deepens that, whether it's in the sitting practice, or in the embodied listening practices, or in the movement practices.

The labyrinth

And we have this, what I think of as a great gift, of this really powerful labyrinth right behind me that we will walk. As a group, we'll walk it twice.

Tomorrow morning, and I'm inviting Linda to come in and give us a little bit of the history of the Chartres labyrinth. Then we'll actually be saying a little bit about it, a little bit of an intention for the walk, and then you just walk, and then we'll come back and actually start our — I can't say start. I say, we will meet here, we will go there, and we will come back here.

Standing up for life

I'll speak a little more about this, I'm sure, during the week, but what's very strong for me at this moment is the deepening understanding and interest in the connection of personal awareness practices and our interactions with the greater world.

Going to Rwanda, doing street retreat, other things that have been working, that have been inspired within me. And I'm really wondering about — there's a term I'll use, and I'll define it more later — biophilia, the love of life, and the different ways that, whether we're working to help the earth or working on our quality of communication with other people, this deep question of, are we standing up for life? How are we standing up for life?

And when are we being entranced in states that are the opposite? And I get these terms from old-time psychoanalysts. Erich Fromm is the first place I heard of necrophilia, when the forces of death are calling us.

What does that look like in our world? I'm calling the forces of death that which is not the natural forces of death — those are part of life. I'm talking about what entrances us, whether for some of us it's the way we get hooked on the internet in a way that becomes not positive.

It's not that the internet's bad, or that the media's bad, but the way it can overtake us, or alcohol, or drugs, or sex, or just, you name it, the way we can become entranced. And we know that this is me getting stuck, and sometimes feel powerless in how to stand up for life at such times.

So I'm very interested in these forces in the world right now, and in our practices, how we can see that when we sit on these cushions and come back to presence, even for a moment, we're standing up for life.

So I see it in a much larger context than used to be my own awakening, or my own joy in life, or something. And those are — I don't throw those out, those are good too, but I see there's a much larger journey here that's just really been dawning on me the last year, very potently in the last months.

So this time together for me is very, very important.

Tonight

So I encourage you, even tonight perhaps, to kind of open yourself in your dreams, in your conscious thoughts, in your less conscious thoughts. What are the one, two, or three things I'm really ready for, hoping for? Maybe some of that can be conscious, maybe not. Maybe you can write a little bit about it. I can give you some paper if you want to do a little writing.

And then we'll do the walk in the morning, and we'll come back in here and do some writing.

A blessing

So I also want to say, while we're here, just to include the remembrance of what a privilege it is to be sitting in such a beautiful, safe, nourishing place.

I think of what's happened in France of late, and suffering. A personal friend who lost a child two days ago. There's so much that is challenging in the world at this moment. There are so many places where people are frightened for their lives, and fighting for their lives.

And my deep hope is that our intention to come to life, to honor life in our own particular path, also is beneficial in some unknown way for these other situations in the world.

I know for me, it seems so important to include that as part of our practice, or at least to acknowledge with great gratitude what a blessing it is to be of such a community of people, and such a spirit together.

The schedule

Logistical things.

For anybody who'd like to have a 20-minute private meeting, like we did during the programs, I've got some times here. I'll put it out in the foyer. If the weather's nice, it can be nice to walk up this lane if you'd like to take a walk. If not, we'll sit in the office over here. I'll show you where that is. They start tomorrow at lunchtime.

The schedule changed a little bit since we mailed you a schedule. We did mail a schedule, didn't we? Yeah. Well, you know, I don't understand him sometimes, but he just surprises me and says, we're going to do something different. So I listen when it sounds right.

So this is not so different. We've done this before. I think we did this with this group, with most groups. Where I'll have an early sitting. Did we do that? Where we'd meet sometimes at 6:30?

So the way I've set it up this time — and as always, this is my encouragement and inspiration, and if it's not right for you, like I know Valerie's driving, so the early might not be the best choice, and that's totally great.

But for those who would like to, I'm setting it up similar to the all-day sitting, where at 6:30 I'll be starting to sit. There'll be a soft bell. After 25 minutes, about five minutes before 7 o'clock. If those of you want to sleep in, come at five to seven. Those who'd like to join me, come at 6:30.

And then, if you are joining me at 6:30, if at five to seven you'd want to stand up and stretch or do something, you're welcome to do that. I'll likely sit for the 50-minute sit — two 25-minute sits, or one 50-minute sit. So I'll sit until 7:20, and then there'll be a 10-minute walking till 7:30, and then another 25-minute sit till five minutes before 8, and then we'll do our bowing, and we'll have breakfast at 8 o'clock.

And Linda will be putting out breakfast. Clean up the dishes afterwards, and go on about the day. That can be finished at nine. We'll start at — yeah.

So then the rest of the day, I'll give you each one of these schedules. The rest of the day is very familiar. 9:30 to 12:15, 12:30 to 3:30, there's a break, 3:30 to 6, we'll have practices.

Now, at six o'clock, we need to prep dinner, like heat it up, get stuff ready. So we'll see if dinner might be like 6:15, 6:20, could be 6:30. It'll be sometime, however long it takes. I'll try to get the prepping done so that the helpers can just replace the covering. Oh, great. Yeah, so hopefully we'll eat more like — great, thank you.

So it says 6:30 for dinner, but chances are it'll be more like 6:15 or 6:10 or something like that. And then we start again here at 7:30, and unless there's some work from the day that we need to complete, I'm expecting to do a similar schedule at night to the morning, a 50-minute sit or two 25-minute sits. Pause, a walk, and then further.

Now, why am I increasing sitting? I'm finding it helpful for so many people. I don't know if you remember that I sent out an email before the all-day sitting, encouraging people to stretch

themselves, and I got seven emails back of people who had never sat longer than our longest sitting — 30 minutes before — and they decided to sit a quarter of the day. And they said it's just changed their relationship to sitting, just by getting that encouragement.

And so I know some of you struggle with your body. It may not be right, and I don't want to make it sound like, well, the good people are doing the more, and bad — you know, that's not my story. You can have that story. I don't have that story, but I do have the encouragement to see what it's like. To sit, and to extend the sitting. You might find that it gives you surprising benefits.

Is there anything you want? Yeah, go ahead.

The sitting in the evening used to be — slightly, yeah, I am extending. Yeah, it used to be a 30-minute sit, a 10-minute walk, and a 25-minute sit. Now I'm doing it as a 50-minute sit, or a 25-minute sit, stand up, stretch, take a pause, come back for the second sit, as much of it as you want, then a walking meditation, and a final sit. So, slow walk. That's assuming we have completed the practices of the day, and we're free to do this.

The house

Yep. There is a book in the dining room that has the jobs, and a brief discussion of things. People will bring you up to snuff, I'm sure.

A couple of things that some of you don't know. This is a second bathroom here. I call it the sacristy, because it has all the candles and all the floral stuff, but there's an extra sink and an extra toilet here.

And also in the mornings, it can be a little slippery on the decks, so we have two rugs. And I just use them all until it's summer. This is the northeast side of the barn.

Yeah, also the other little decks in front of your cottages can get slippery in the morning. So you just have to be mindful, but if you go quickly, you might let Mason know. Yeah, so they get slippery.

So we have some beautiful deer on our property, and we have some foxes, and sometimes a gang of wild turkeys. You can't miss them. They move like a gang. But the deer are very tame, and if they're on the deck, if you see them on the deck, try not to spook them, because I'm worried that they'll go down the stairs and hurt themselves. They like the ladder.

The other important thing is not to overuse this in the morning. So I'm thinking Karen is in the sanctuary guest room, and this is her shower and bath. But Bruno, I'm going to assign you also to this bathroom. It's the closest to you. And Cece and Barbara have a half bath, so you'll use the bathhouse as your shower.

And the rest of you, there's a bathhouse — a tub and a sink room, and a shower and a sink room. If you've forgotten your towel, there are some extra ones there, so you don't have to run across the property naked. We haven't had anyone do it yet.

And so I would recommend, at dinnertime, to put the outside light on, so that you find your way home easily. And there are flashlights in every room. And I think those are the safety issues.

And this room is very special to us. It's been our home for quite some time. We have only people here this week, so you can leave anything extra. It's completely safe. Don't lock any door, because one time somebody lost every key, so they had to get a lock expert out there. So don't lock doors. Just the deer here.

I did say in emails to bring water bottles. And we might have some extra. Yeah, if you need a water bottle, you know.

And the rest of them are in charge of the heat in here. But except for the last person, which is probably you or me, we'll do the lights and the candles in this room.

Yeah, this is your home for the week. Treat it as your own, and enjoy it. And anything you need, I have extras, probably, and everything else. So just let me know. There should be extra blankets in every room, extra down comforters, and if you can't see them, look on top of closets or under beds. They're all there.

Two other animals to be aware of. If you hear a very eerie sounding noise, it's a peacock. And they sound strange. They can be a little scary if you don't know that they're a peacock. And we've got some wonderful red-tail hawks that live on the lines around here, in these eucalyptus trees. But you'll hear them.

It's beautiful to walk up the lane. Horses up the lane.

The closest beach is a little over twenty minutes away, about 22, 23 minutes, but you have to pay to get in. If you ask me for my car sticker, I can give it to you. It's a little thing that you can just show them, and so you get in at no cost. We each have one, so two, yeah.

Now, that beach is a beautiful beach. It's a protected beach, so there aren't large waves, and it's nice walking. But if you want to go to a real wavy beach, it's about another ten minutes more on the same road. And that one you don't need a sticker for. But I can tell you how to get there. It's basically one turn from here.

The Wi-Fi is Sophia, and there's no password. No computers and stuff in here, or cell phones in here, but you can use them on the deck, you can use them in the dining hall. Yeah, up in the office. Most places you can. If you guys need it, I can give you a booster that can help you down there.

Any questions?

[Participant:] I didn't know why you speak for, on your way here.

[Russell:] Oh, I couldn't think of anything.