Talk

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 2, Session 1 — 30 minutes

Summary: Russell invites a brief grounding, then speaks of being here as an individual, part of the group mind, and a cell of a greater body. Linda describes the Chartres labyrinth and its geometry. After a short exchange on the Black Madonna, he offers a way to walk and a few movements from the center.

Sensing the ground

[Russell:] So let's just take a moment to drop down. Sense connection to the ground, the earth, and the upward response. Vitality upward. Grounding and the lightening. Gravitas and levitas.

Sensing the breath towards the golden ball.

Individual, group, and greater body

You have the picture, if you find it true and helpful for you — the picture that we are here as an individual, with our own particular gifts that are unfolding, our own particular learning, our own particular nexts that are coming.

We're here as a part of the group mind, the being that forms by us being together, which some of you have heard me talk about a little bit. For me it is actually an entity, a being that works with us and through us, that we influence and that influences us.

So there's here as an individual, here as we could say a part of this group mind, and then for me there's also this picture of being a cell of the greater body. That this body lives in the greater body, just as the greater body lives in these individual bodies.

And so part of being here, from my point of view, is our personal intention. But there are also forces working on us and through us that, in my experience, are beyond our conscious mind, beyond our knowing right now, that can sometimes be seen in retrospect.

So it's, for me, thrilling and awe-inspiring to know that, yes, my intentionality is important as part of the collective entity and as part of this greater body. That my intentionality is an important ingredient, and yet my experience is not limited to my intentionality.

And to just allow, without any particular beliefs necessary, the possibility that there are many learnings, many opportunities emerging in our life that we're not yet knowing, and that we are participating in.

By doing the kinds of practices that we do — the reason why I call them authentic practices is they're not based in some limited belief system. They're based in actions that we can do, attitudes that we can embody, and then we experience the unfolding of that.

Like Gautama Buddha saying, be a lamp unto yourself, and don't believe what I say, but practice what I suggest and notice the effects on your life. If they're not positive, change your actions. But if you're getting what feels like right direction, continue. Listen to the feedback.

So I hold us together at each of these levels, absolutely honoring and respecting your individuality, and appreciating your contribution to the collective consciousness, and often amazed and surprised by the gift you bring to the greater body.

And it's the exact same thing for me. I'm here as a learner, equally as being a guide or a teacher.

Our first adventure, as I said last night — I'll be walking the labyrinth this morning. The labyrinth. Linda and I have known labyrinths for a long time, and she has really investigated them much more thoroughly, has been going to Chartres in France, where — that's the window of the Chartres Cathedral up there — that silk is based on that window. And behind us is the labyrinth that lives in Chartres.

And Linda's been going there for 10, 11 years. Every year. And she is quite intimate with this labyrinth, and with the majesty, and where all this grows from.

So I wanted Linda to speak a little bit about labyrinth, and then I'll say a little bit about why I think it's good to walk it at our beginning together.

The labyrinth

[Participant 1:] Well, the labyrinth, which is sort of rooted here — this is a Chartres medieval labyrinth. It's considered the classical labyrinth.

It's not a maze. A maze is meant to confuse and confound, and you may get lost. A labyrinth is a centering process.

The Chartres labyrinth especially is created from sacred geometry. It's worked with the golden mean. Everything is in right relationship to each other. Every pathway is a certain width. Every turn comes at a certain moment. Every turn is completely measured to be in right relationship. Everything about it is done that way.

So I see it as taking our sacred geometry, our bony system, our formation, and putting it within that sacred geometry. And somehow, something very special happens. And we don't know how.

But there are 28 turns in the Chartres labyrinth. And those are some of my favorite parts. I'm in love with them, because as you walk it, when you come consciously to a turn, it opens something else that's new each time you turn. It's like a turn in our lives, and there's another new pathway. There's a way to start again.

It can be for you the past, it can be the future, and hopefully it's all in the present moment as well.

You're free to pass one another. If someone's going too slowly, just step out of the lane, step back in the lane. It's completely free. I was stuck behind someone for 45 minutes my very first, so it means a great deal to me.

The other thing is, if a stone — they're not cemented in. The deer — I just ran out and put one back, but the deer had moved one this morning. So, yes, if a stone comes out, just put it back in. Nothing breaks in there. It's all okay. And I don't think you'll lose your way. It's rare.

There are many ways to walk the labyrinth, and I think Russ will talk more about the intentionality — or not intentionality, but when you were just speaking — and the bringing in to the golden ball.

As we began to sit again together and convene, I was taken to Chartres, because the labyrinth was created there. I don't remember the date, but a very long time ago, and the stones are absolutely a glory, having been worked for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

But it's a Catholic cathedral, and there's no crucifix in that cathedral. It is all dedicated to the divine feminine. However, the clergy there have always been frightened of the labyrinth. And so it's a little bit scary, a little bit pagan.

But yet underneath is the crypt with the Black Madonna, in the crypt, which has been a place of healing. It has been a hospital and a healing place, and that's always how you entered that cathedral, was through the crypt. You went underground first, and then you came above.

So there's a 40-ton Carrara marble statue of Mary, her ascension into heaven. That's what's in the front of the church. Underneath her is the Black Madonna.

And we finally found out — and the clergy just found out — about this golden ball that originally the bishop — this was just unearthed in writings. And now the diocese is happier with the labyrinth, that the bishop once a year would come out with a golden ball, and he would stand in the middle of the labyrinth, and the priesthood and the clergy would work with this golden ball in the labyrinth.

And since they found this out, they haven't told us what they did with the golden ball yet, because they have to keep some secrets. But it's clear now to them that, oh, this had great meaning. We should discover this as well.

So they greet us with open arms, and they ask us to be modest, because some people like to enact their lives. We've had people here who come and do their thing. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

It's not really a place of self-expression, as it is a place of opening to receive and to reflect.

And I'm so glad you're going to be able to bring yourselves to this labyrinth and walk your footsteps on this. It will make it even more beautiful that you do. I'm just so grateful for that.

I'm so grateful that you're sitting here and bringing yourselves to this place. Every breath makes it that much richer here.

The Black Madonna

[Russell:] Thank you so much. And Barbara, I think you have the question about the Black Madonna, right?

[Participant 2:] Yeah. So, shall I say something?

[Russell:] Would you like to say something?

[Participant 2:] So, from what I've been learning about the Black Madonna, in Europe there are various places, usually devoted to healing, where what's called the Black Madonnas appear. There are various theories about their origin. It's not precise when you look in history as to where they arose. Mostly in Eastern Europe.

Yeah, usually there are paintings of the Black Madonnas, and they're dark, they're black. There are icons, and it's known that some of them became black, like in Sofia, Bulgaria. It's always in places dedicated to the feminine.

And there were fires. And these Madonnas were the only things that lasted through the fire. Everything else was destroyed, so they ended up all ashen, all black. So they became known as the Black Madonnas, and then people would go to them as healing places.

There's a place that I teach in, Germany, Eisenbuch Zen Center. And in the town next to Eisenbuch is a famous Black Madonna. And so the people of Zen Center brought me there one time, and it's this big park in the center of town, and this kind of humble little chapel, and all these crutches and canes hanging outside, of people who've gone in there, sat in front of the Black Madonna, and walked away. It's kind of like the Lourdes of Germany.

So there are a number of places, a lot in Eastern Europe, where Sofia — and this town, the city of Sofia, Bulgaria, as an example — Sofia, the divine feminine, has much more respect and love than in the Western churches.

[Russell:] Is there more you wanted to say?

[Participant 2:] Well, I also think that the Black Madonna also has roots in the fact that ancient people of Egypt, ancient people of the Middle East, were dark-skinned. And so there are many Madonnas that are dark-skinned. It wasn't until more recently that they began being painted white-skinned, pink-skinned. There are many Black Madonnas.

And in a way, I think we can look at thousands of years before Christ. There are divine feminine sculptures. There are feminine symbols and icons from all over the world that have been happening since the beginning of time. So the Black Madonnas are particularly kept underground, which is fascinating to me.

So I don't think there's any truth about it. I think there's a lot of meaning in there for it.

[Russell:] So, thank you. I can feel a strong presence talking about all of this.

One more thing. Icons are meant to be a possible opening to another reality.

So I didn't ever know this till I went to the cave in the middle of the Dordogne a few years ago, a 40,000-year-old cave, and looked at cave paintings. And I kept having experiences. I thought, well, what are these cave paintings? All of a sudden, the whole thing opened. And I got a picture. It's a possible entryway to another reality, and that's what all these were for people, for a long time.

So it's a possibility.

No, that's a friend of mine from Italy.

Before we walk

Okay, so, a couple of things I'd like to say before we walk.

First, as you know, and it's very important to me, you don't have to have any beliefs, any ideas. You can just take a walk. Just take a walk. And it happens to turn, and you just follow it, you end up in the middle, and then you come out. That is plenty.

So it's very important to me that we know that. It's walking one foot after another, and you have some kind of experience. And it's probably best not to go — just take a walk.

You can walk slow, you can walk fast. As Linda was saying, you can step over the stones, you can step back. It's not like — be at ease, enjoy yourself. Stay in the center as long as you like, then come out.

Please don't touch the crystals in the middle. They are just formed. They're not cemented.

And some people like to go in with a question. Some people go in just open-minded, waiting to see what comes.

As I've been walking labyrinths more and more, because it's right here, I notice that each walking is new, each is different. Sometimes one walking connects to another walking. Sometimes I get something clear, something comes to me very quickly, and that goes very deep. And sometimes something comes quickly, and it's later that something else comes.

So it's kind of like doing a movement lesson, or doing the focusing process, where sometimes you get the depth right away, sometimes you think you get something, and then something else comes later.

And so just an attitude of openness is the best way. Not grasping. Just take a walk.

And if you feel warm enough, at the end — the way we've designed it, and I so appreciate Linda being very precise — we hired an expert in labyrinths to measure each angle and each dimension, because I wanted a walking circle for a meditation walk around the outer edge. Which meant every pathway and the center had to change in size, so that we kept the sacred geometry of everything.

So it's quite a large labyrinth. It's the largest I've ever seen. And 66 and two-thirds wide.

And if at the end, if you're warm enough, I invite us to stay in that outer circle. And if you're cool, come on in, get a cup of tea or whatever. But as we finish, if it's warm enough and we could be in that outer circle, that would be lovely.

From the center

So let's stand together. I'd like to do just a little bit of movement together.

And when we do go out, if you are there before Linda or I, wait at the bottom of the stairs, because we are the metering lights. We send people in at a certain rhythm so that there's a little space between, like that.

So let's just begin sensing the ground underneath you.

Just see, you're waiting, feeling the movement from your center, from this golden ball.

We're going to be doing a series of movement lessons that I'm hoping will bring even greater contact with what it means to really move from our core.

And you can begin right here, just putting your hands around the middle, getting a sense of this remarkable relationship — from this center grows out the top of your head and grows down into the earth.

Stay on one leg for a moment. From this center, a little give in the knee, we go simultaneously down and up.

From the center over, simultaneously down and up. And next, change to the above and below.

One hand below the belly button in front, and the other hand behind. That feels right.

Having some kind of freedom in the knee is an important part of differentiating the middle from the legs. We can have a potency around the hip joints without tightening the knees, without tightening the ankles.

Let's bring the right foot forward.

Let's do the gestures with the vertical arms before we go in.

Inhaling, feeling the arms float up, and fingertips towards the sky, palms toward each other. Sense openness above and below.

Picture that as you come down, it's like there's some substance or something that's entered you, that as you bring your arms down, goes through your body, through your whole self, into the earth. You are connecting above and below.

Inhaling, floating up with the arms, out of your legs, and fingers opening to the above. Top of your head open, the fingertips open, legs and feet open, coming from center.

Left foot forward. Exhaling forward and letting the head drop back, jaw up. Inhale. Right in.

[Silence 2 minutes]

So we'll gather at the stairs around back. If you need the bathroom, of course.