Talk

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 2, Session 7 — 19 minutes

Summary: Russell shows the walking hand and a short step over the center, then speaks of not going anywhere — each step enough, like a labyrinth and a life. Questions open into gratitude, walking for others, and sympathetic joy. A participant sends kindness to people she has hurt. He describes each step as a lifetime, with a brief pause between.

The walking hand

[Russell:] Give you a sense of the walking hand, and then, is there questions?

So, you know the mudra. Left hand in the palm, fingers around. Hand is below the sternum, right hand in front.

So, for me, the first direction is this connection to this verticality, extending attention way up and way down, feeling the movement from the middle, the feet moving not very far, maybe a half step.

This foot doesn't get completely in front of the other, so I'm really over the center of breath. And I'm never, never reaching for the center of breath.

Center of gravity is home in here. This leg is free.

If it's comfortable with an inhale, either sliding or lifting.

And then shifting. It's really the golden ball coming over that calcaneus.

And there's this feeling of this downward and upward energy, support, with the middle right over.

And I like pausing in between, just to enjoy standing, breathing, seeing. Feeling.

Not going anywhere

[Russell:] One of the things I love so much about the walking — in some ways it's even more blatant than sitting — that I'm not going anywhere.

And I so love that, because it feels like the labyrinth. It feels like my life.

Walking the labyrinth is walking your life. Walking the circle, it's like, the only place I'm gonna end up is back here.

Which means the only place I'm gonna really end up is dying. And wherever I go — and the rest is my whole life.

And so it really is a question of, is this moment enough or not?

And if I have any stories going on about being bored, or being this, or wishing I was — wishing it was finished, or wishing it went on — I see that story in my whole life.

Any moment in my life where I'm saying, oh, this plane ride is too long. If I have a thought like that, there's no judgment on it. It's just saying, oh, really? This is your life?

Everything else is your imagination.

So I say to myself, you don't have to like it. This is your life.

And so for me, walking includes every step. I know every step can be completely fulfilling. I know every step can be enough.

And so I get very curious when I create some story that gets in the way of that, and yet to see that with great kindness. Not, oh, I'm bad for doing that. Just to see it.

So I love that opportunity to just be in exactly what's here, knowing, well, when this is over, I'll get to sit.

You know, like, if you don't like walking, great, you get to sit.

So any illusion that you're somehow gonna get to a more entertaining place — I see my mind clearly. And I must say, I get to, most of the time, really just be grateful for the ability to walk, for the sensations of walking.

Walking for others

[Participant 1:] What did you say to us about walking? For some, think about it as if you're walking for somebody who can't walk.

[Russell:] Yeah, and that's beautiful.

Anytime. And one way that works for me, and works for some other people, for cultivating gratitude for anything that's ordinary, is if you've ever had the experience of having such a bad cold that you can't smell or can't taste, that as soon as you can taste something, for at least one day, you're ecstatic about eating your eggs.

And if you're ever up all night coughing for some days, and then you don't have your cough, it's not just that you don't have your cough and you're back to normal. It's like you feel wonderful that you're able to sleep and not cough.

So I began to realize a lot through my students. They had taught me this, I would say, over the years, being with so many hurting people. One does not have to experience a deficit to appreciate the presence of something ordinary.

So I've been with enough people who couldn't walk that at any moment, when I'm walking down the lane, going to get my newspaper, I'm usually enjoying walking in the air, but there's also usually some place in there, some sense that I'm walking for others.

It actually connects to this whole other thing about gratitude, when I realized that there are so many lives I'm never going to live.

And I had this experience — oh, it was many years ago. It was when I realized kind of the shape of my life, that I was committed to Linda, and that there were two lives, two very deep, attractive lives that I was not going to live.

One of them was the part of me that thought he wanted to be a monk. And so when I would see monks, I would say, thank you for living that one for me.

The other thing was the part of me that really wanted to continue being with a lot of women. So I got to say to the players I would see out there, thank you for doing that one for me. I don't have to do it.

And so it was like the opposite of jealousy. It's the feeling that once one has the experience of being interconnected, and feeling that — all these lives I'm not living.

There's a very small percentage of lives. In fact, one out of — that I'm going to live. So other people can do that.

It's like there's an old Zen saying that goes, I drink water and your thirst is quenched, or you drink water and my thirst is quenched.

And at some deep level, when one is not contracted in a self-identity, it's not just a kind of thought. One gets to experience the satisfaction of others.

Sympathetic joy

[Participant 2:] I forget. There's actually a Buddhist name. What's the name for the type of joy?

[Russell:] Sympathetic joy, right?

[Participant 2:] Sympathetic joy.

[Russell:] Sympathetic joy is one of the four inestimables that one can experience.

When one begins to feel so happy that others are happy. When one is no longer jealous about what we don't have, and is so happy that others are happy.

And that's a wonderful experience. This is kind of connected to that.

[Participant 3:] So, is that, when you're saying you're walking for others — if I was walking the river for others, is that the same?

[Russell:] Same, because it's not like, oh, someone's walking it for me. But I know this is so wonderful, and I can do this for other people who haven't experienced it before — who have, if you were there.

It has to feel authentic, so I'm not giving this as a, you should do this. But have you ever had the experience of enjoying, feeling so blessed by the river, or by something, that you kind of wish it for others?

[Participant 3:] Yes.

[Russell:] And so it's kind of connected to that feeling. But instead of just, oh, I wish you could have this, and kind of having a kind of constriction — oh, I wish I could — it's like, I'm thinking of you as I have this joy. You are here with me.

Radiating it out, not holding it. And including others.

Sending it back

[Participant 3:] That's interesting, because when I go to Hawaii, which I get to do every year, and I feel incredibly blessed about that.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 3:] There's a lot of people in my life that send, like, oh, I'm so jealous, or, oh, she's going again, you know, that send that kind of energy towards me.

[Russell:] Right, right.

[Participant 3:] And the return energy is, I'm sending this wonderful experience back for you. See if you can feel it. No shame.

[Russell:] No shame.

[Participant 3:] It's been hard. I'm like, oh, see, here they think I'm bragging about it.

[Russell:] But again, you don't even need to speak to them about it. You can just radiate. Just radiate.

Just include others in your field of joy, in your appreciation of beauty, that it's not just for ourselves.

There's something that I experience — and you have to see if it feels authentic or not — but there's something I experience about sharing the joy. They don't have to know that I'm sharing it with them.

Oh, I'm very happy. Yes, Barbara.

Loving kindness

[Participant 4:] I wanted to share something I've been trying to practice.

It just came to me. There are many things in my life that I've done that I'm not proud of. And there are times when I'll remember something I did to somebody that I feel was wrong, and I can get stuck in just feeling bad about it.

And I came up with this alternative practice, which is, when it happens, when I think of somebody that maybe I mistreated in some way — and sometimes there's no reason — I send them loving kindness.

When they come to me, I just say, you know, may you be happy. And I really try as hard as I can to generate as much goodwill toward that person.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah. Right. I'm with you.

That's another one of the inestimables, a kind of loving kindness.

The Dalai Lama calls that a certain kind of altruism. I'm losing the first word.

Yeah. It'll come to me in a few minutes. I'll give it to you later.

It's a sort of intelligent way of taking care of yourself. And it's a kind of activity in which you take care of yourself.

But yeah. That's — thank you.

A pause between lifetimes

[Participant 5:] Okay, question.

[Russell:] Yes, go ahead.

Yeah. Right, yes.

I wouldn't say there's anything wrong with having it be continuous, really.

For me, this step has this feeling of this momentary pause. There's still a slight inner shifting, but it's really mostly a pause for that moment, where it's kind of like each step is a lifetime.

And there's this inhale where I feel like I'm going on my journey, and taking off on this life, and climbing this mountain.

And I've got this moment where I'm sliding, or I'm carrying my foot, where I'm climbing, climbing, climbing. And there's a moment where I'm at the top of the mountain, and then I'm coming down, and exhale.

And then, before the next life emerges, there's a pause. It's like I'm in the bardo before my rebirth, or before the next mountain, and I'm just kind of surveying the whole universe.

And it's this moment of quiescence. And it's very brief, because the next birth and breath emerges.

So another life comes, and I get to carry, place, exhale, and — wow, here we are again.

What a life that one was.

So it's a brief pause between lifetimes. Is what it feels like.

Okay.

I'm happy to say that Linda, who is, for me, a great, great teacher and a great muse — so, in her way of working, it is a continuity to walking. And at first she was not so stoked about it. Now she just loves it.

But it really took some time to go through it, because she was always used to the continuity.