Talk

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 3, Session 2 — 29 minutes

Summary: Russell distinguishes physical-body sensations from the feeling body of inner life, and describes congruence — when image, sensation, and meaning line up — as what carries a process forward. He invites more attention to ordinary moments of beauty and care, then outlines the afternoon's sitting lesson and small-group listening process.

Physical body and feeling body

[Russell:] We'll shortly go into a movement lesson, but I wanted to just take a few minutes. I want to make a few comments, and then if you have any questions that are relatively brief around your process — I'm thinking more process than content — we can do that.

What I want to say is, I think there's sometimes a little bit of confusion around what I'm meaning by body. And let me know if I'm not speaking loud enough, okay? Go like this or something. Please. That would be very nice for me.

So, in this context, when I'm speaking about listening — going in, sensing what your body is, sensing what's going on in there — for me it's synonymous as saying, checking in with your inner life. Checking in with your inner life. I'm using it in a synonymous way. So it's a very particular use of what we could call bodily process.

And I distinguish, although it's not a sharp rigid line, between what I think of as primarily physical body and what's primarily feeling body. That's the way I talked about it in your group, but it's sometimes obscure where the boundaries are.

A lot of people, like Feldenkrais people and movement people, people who are kinesthetically aware, are quite comfortable with noticing physical sensations. Like, I've got pressure in the right side of my bottom and a little pain in my left knee. Those are all wonderful physical body sensations. To notice them, and maybe spend a few moments with them, can help you get into the present moment.

But those sensations are rarely connected to what you're feeling in your inner life. They're kind of infrastructure phenomena. So we don't want to think that having a tightness in your belly is the same as having a pain in your knee. The chances are they have different inner meaning.

And again, it's not like a sharp black line, but chances are, when you have an image that comes and it comes with a tightening in your belly, it's still possible that that's gas from your burrito. And we don't want to eliminate that possibility. But as we listen more regularly, we can go, oh, oh no, that's really coming with that image a little bit, or there's something going on there. And it's likely that's different than when you get something that I would call more — and this is terrible language, but maybe you can understand what I mean — more purely physical.

Like, my elbow has an ache in it from playing tennis or something. Chances are that elbow ache is not connected to what you're investigating in your inner world. Chances are. You get what I'm saying?

So we want to be intelligent about it. For so many of us, this way of listening to bodily phenomena and being in touch with bodily process is still so rare and so culturally unique that it seems almost like uncharted territory. So anything you feel in the body kind of feels important. And in a way it is, in that it is a doorway to presence. But let's get more sophisticated in some of our distinctions about meaning and phenomena.

Sometimes, as a listener, I wonder. I'm sensing into someone being stuck in that place, and I don't know.

[Participant:] Because I literally said how my knee was bothering me, my knee pain. And so I knew that with that, I couldn't sense into myself, so I adjusted myself. So I'm wondering, because this life felt very similar. So we make you comfortable — you can't sense, you're going to go there. So I'm wondering if we don't have that added level — if you hear somebody reflecting that or describing it, to try to get them to become more comfortable so that they can go inside and notice.

[Russell:] Yeah, I think that's some—

[Participant:] Without adjusting in some way.

[Russell:] It makes sense. And I think some of it will be, if we're with somebody over time, a kind of educational process of how to be with your process. I think there's some of that. But sometimes it's just really hard to say something in that moment that doesn't sound like you're directing their process. And yet you can sense that they're getting confused by some of the information that's coming, by some of the sensations. They're kind of looking for meaning where it's unlikely to open up.

So I've had people where, especially if I know I'm going to see them a number of times, I can use afterwards an educational moment about physical body, feeling body — how they're not distinct, that they're worthy of distinction — and use examples so that, just like I'm doing right now, we can get more cognizant of it.

One more thing. Because the majority of meaning-filled sensory experience tends to be between the throat and the pelvis — since the majority tends to be torso — that maybe would put the face in line also.

I might say, oh, so you're sensing that kind of discomfort in your knee. Well, maybe just acknowledge that for a moment. If there's a way to get more comfortable, maybe do that, and then maybe notice if there's something in your chest or in your back. So I might help orient the attention more proximally, more into the viscera.

But yeah, it can be tricky. How to support someone's autonomy, their self-authority, and give direction can be challenging.

Resonance and congruence

[Russell:] For me — as you noticed, maybe you noticed in my process — I value very much the images that come. Or if a thought comes, I want to take that inside and see, is there resonance? And

sometimes that resonance will be an opening in the chest or a closing in the belly. Or sometimes it'll be more like, there's just a sense that that's right. And now, what am I getting with that? It's hard to describe it as a sensation exactly, but it's not simply a thought. It's a resonance.

And how do you know? Well, you just got to spend your time doing listening processes, to listen to how your inner life communicates.

And for some of us, because we've really separated for so long from the meaningfulness of our sensory life — even people who've done a lot of kinesthetic work have not necessarily been in touch with the meaningfulness that lives in these feeling sensations. So it can take some time before you learn how to trust an image or a thought or a word. To know that no, this is really coming from — it has resonance in a deeper place — or it's just a kind of hopefulness that's appearing in my mind or something.

What else do I want to say? And if I'm not sure — is this just kind of some — well, then I can bring that down inside and see. I just got this picture, let me see. Because sometimes, I don't know about the way your life works, but sometimes I have kind of random phenomena that don't have a lot of guts in them, or a lot of depth in them. So I say hello to it, but not everything that appears gets resonance in here.

So I'm looking for that sense of line up. Some way in which the feel — again, that beautiful term from Carl Rogers that I so value, congruence — that there's a congruence of the imagery and the feeling in the body, and in that moment of lining up.

There's a forward movement — that's Gene's term — of what happens in that moment of congruence.

And the understanding, as I spoke about in the graduate retreat, has gotten so much clearer for me, about when there can be a lining up. Physical body: I'm present, I'm here, I'm sensing myself. Feeling body: there's some way in which I'm feeling about whatever I'm investigating. There are images, symbols, gestures, metaphors. And when those line up, and I'm connected in a moment, usually with another person — or if I'm doing it with myself, when I get this kind of lining up — something inside opens and goes yes.

And in my experience, invariably, there's either a small step or a big step, but there's some kind of movement.

Ordinary moments

[Russell:] The other thing I notice is, as one practices more and more — and not only with difficult things, but to bring this good energy to wonderful moments. To have more congruence in wonderful moments, or more congruence in ordinary.

Because, as you've heard me say before, when I have this kind of presence in an ordinary moment, and I give it about five to ten seconds of more attention, the ordinary goes from, oh, that's nice, to, oh, this is deeply satisfying. A sense of meaningfulness, a sense of gratitude. The difference between doing a drive-by on the surface of the light coming through the eucalyptus, or giving it another five seconds. And when I give it that extra — it could be three seconds, it's rarely more than seven or ten — something goes, oh.

And I have the experience of meeting. I'm seeing it where it feels like it's seeing me. It's a moment of meeting. When I'm rushing through the moment, I can say, oh yeah, that was a beautiful light. And it touches something. Sometimes I don't take the time to pause, but my experience is it takes very little time for ordinary moments to become satisfying.

And since most of my moments are ordinary, the extraordinary moments don't need a whole lot. And the difficult moments, I need to learn how to be with them. But the bell curve of moments — the most are in that kind.

And so the potency of bringing that little bit more attention. Dropping in, feeling I'm here in my body. Physical body brings me to the present moment. Oh, right now, let that rose in. It takes a few seconds for it to reconnect to the place that I use — that whole. And I can pass by it many times a day, but give it an extra few seconds, and it serves the function of beauty, which is to awaken us.

We are surrounded by beauty when our attention is oriented towards the ordinary beauties. And then if you cultivate your environment to have a little bit more of the things you enjoy, and you see them again. Sometimes it's nice to move some things around so you see them freshly.

But that's a kind of responsibility for our own attention, in growing the moments where that place inside can be touched.

And even if you live in a beautiful place like the Metolius River or something like that, sometimes there'll be totally no effort. It comes in, you see it, you appreciate it, and then probably sometimes just a little bit more attention, and it comes in again. It comes in fresh, it comes in deeper.

You may like or not like the Japanese Zen aesthetic, but the function of that kind of minimalism and precision is not simply to be obsessive-compulsive — although you see a lot of that — but it's also to create these vignettes that stop you and bring you in. And there's a moment where you're not cluttered, and your inner life moves. And the whole structure of the Zen center is to bring you to many moments like that. See that there's a sense of the simple harmony of your inner world and your outer world.

But especially, we're not living in Zen centers, so it takes a conscious action on our parts to be responsible for locating the beauty in the ordinary moments. And to let it penetrate.

Little moments of care

[Russell:] Or, as we've looked at many times before, the way we get touched in little ways. And if we bring a little bit more attention, what happens?

For me, there are so many little moments. I'm on a plane and the stewardess gives you an extra smile, or goes and gets you something. And if I recall that a few times during the flight, I am living in a love environment, because this moment of human caring wasn't just that I got that cup of water, but there was actually this moment of seeing. And then I'll replay that, because I want to be responsible for the kind of food I'm living in.

And my experience is, every day I'll go home at night, and before I go to bed, there'll be moments with some of you, moments of the day that will come and that I will seek, and have some of that food.

And they're often very little things if you verbalize them. But the place inside, in my experience, doesn't distinguish very much between big and little. It doesn't have a lot of that. It's more infantile in the sense that it has yes and no.

And if I'm unconscious, I spend a lot of time in the no. And I want to acknowledge the no, but I want to give my inner life the gift of those little precious moments. Those looks that come from people, that smile, the time when somebody holds the door for me. Those things can have legs later on, if we choose to cultivate.

This afternoon

[Russell:] Wait, I want to get into this lesson. So what's going to happen this afternoon is, what I expect to happen is, we're going to do a sitting lesson. We're going to do the first of a series. Linda did the first. I'll be giving you a series based on that. It's sitting in chairs, also some lying on the floor, some movements that I love, and we'll do the first section of this next part this afternoon.

And then you'll be in groups of three, and one person is going to bring a subject that you want to learn about. Something that's important to you that you want to learn about. And you will have two partners. It's probably best if you choose one to be your listener. I mean, you could have two, but that might get a little chaotic. Have one.

If you would like — do you remember, before, we wrote down sessions? If you would like that, you can ask for that. So one person could be a recorder, one person could be the responder. If that's not important to you, the other person can just be a witness. But stay present. Stay present, listening, both in the sense of learning from their process.

One of the gifts here is that we each approach our inner life differently, and everyone who you are with has something to teach you. Either because they're doing something helpful that you don't do very much, or they're doing something that you don't find helpful, and it reminds you of what you do find helpful. So either way, you can have a learning about what works for your inner life.

You want to give your inner life the opportunity to show you what it wants and needs for your deepening, for your ease, for your—

I have the experience that my inner life has developed such trust that almost always I can take some time, like I did here, if I have somebody listening to me especially, and sometimes by myself, and get value. It's not fighting. It's wanting opportunity. So learn how your inner life wants to speak.

Then — I'll repeat this timing this afternoon — the first person who's bringing the subject will have 30 minutes to really spend time with the subject. And then a brief pause, five minutes, stretch, go to the bathroom, come back.

The second person will take what's living in them. Not about that other person, but about how whatever that person was working with relates to your inner life. What you want to learn from listening to them. There's something, as we learned the last couple of times in our group process: whatever somebody's dealing with, there's some aspect of that that has meaningfulness for you. So you see, what's alive for you that came from listening to them? You're going to spend 15 minutes with that.

Third person, same thing, 15 minutes.

Little pause. The first person goes again, having listened to all that, and now you spend 20 minutes. It's your last process of investigating how your issue is alive, now that all this has been in the air.

The way it works is 30, 15, 15, 20. After the 30 minutes, there's like a five-minute pause. Then you have two 15s, and then I'd say another five- to ten-minute pause, and then the 20. So the whole thing is going to take somewhere near two hours. About an hour and 45 minutes, depending on how long your breaks are.

Thirty, an hour, an hour twenty, an hour thirty, an hour thirty-five. An hour thirty-five, an hour forty-five — but people tend to extend their breaks a little bit.

Not today. Over the three days.

No. What I'm thinking of doing — and we'll see if this gets too complicated. I'm wanting people to have as much exposure to different people processing. So my thought is, today you'll be with any two people, then tomorrow at least one person is new for you, and we'll see if that can work. And then the third day again, we'll try to get one person new. We may end up where that's challenging, but I'm hoping that you'll have numbers of different people to be in the presence of.

Tonight, just for this evening's preparers who are going to help Linda, you will meet at 6:15, and dinner will be at 6:30. So that I have time to do the first part of that chair lesson, and you have time to go through — oh, this was the part that you're missing. I didn't say it.

At the end, you have another 20 minutes for discussion. That was the part that most people were wanting last time, not to feel so rushed in the discussion part, because I used to leave 10 minutes for you. So now I'm trying to leave a little bit more time.

And I'll remind you of those things, but I wanted to go through it this morning so I didn't have to spend so much time this afternoon.

[Participant:] Do we go in without a subject, or do we want to come in with a subject?

[Russell:] My suggestion is that you choose something that you would really like to learn about. It could be connected to something that came in the labyrinth. It could be something you've already thought of, or it could be something that you reflect over lunch.

Wow. Where I encourage you to go is, this is a unique opportunity. I'm going to spend time with something, and I really hope you're willing not to go in — I've got to find the solution — but I really want to give my inner life a chance to show me what I don't know.

And so you hopefully will take a step. And in listening to the others, they may be talking about something very different that got inspired by you, but you'll be surprised, as most people have said in the past, that it somehow ended up circling back to what was true for you. And that's what's so cool about the process. That's what I get very excited by. The group mind seems to function in an unpredictable and very helpful way.

And then who knows, it might be that over the next days, more will come about that issue. And so we're opening up the subject. So I recommend choosing something that is meaningful for you, and chances are your inner life will take whatever you choose to work with and apply it to what it's ready to learn.

So that's kind of exciting. And then tomorrow morning, what'll happen is, there'll be time for anybody who would like to — either a person who was the main person, or any of you who would like to look further at something, and I'll guide you — to be with something a little bit further. So figure one person. Good?

[Participant:] Good.

[Russell:] Okay. I would like to do some movement together.