Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 4, Session 1 — 82 minutes

Summary: After a short grounding, the group pairs and then discusses listening agreements, responsibility, and how to stay present in silence. A live process follows a hollow room into longing and possibility. The conversation turns to struggle, internalized force and resignation, and motivating by invitation rather than domination.

Coming to neutral

[Russell:] So, just close your eyes for a moment, and feel the letting go of the concern.

Oh, what do I do?

Feels good to feel that training.

So we can all just take a moment to sense the ground, whatever else is living — whether wonderful, challenging, both — the neutrality of presence. Neutrality doesn't mean blandness. It means availability.

So that sense of coming to neutral, coming home, to be available.

Grounding down, your body, a sense of breath coming and going.

So the ground, and the breath, and the sounds coming and going.

The particular feeling states can be acknowledged, but they're more in the background. And in the foreground is just this.

So it's first, I am here, on this spot, open to this world.

And then the secondary, and very important, question is: from this, how am I? How is it? How is the living occurring through me in this moment?

And there's this kind of back and forth, and that we don't lose that just openness — the sense that beyond, before, within any particular feeling state, there's just this. It's our home.

What might like company

[Russell:] And let's take a few moments to reflect on anything that might like to come right now. It could be in the form of reflecting on your experiences yesterday in your triad. Something that got clear in your process, learning about process, a question, a stuck place.

And it might be about something else. It doesn't have to be that. But you're opening to what's calling you, that might like some attention.

It's so helpful just to acknowledge whatever is there, and from this kind of grounded presence, we presence with that subject. We say hello and sense. Sense it in a feeling way. Sense whatever images or language come forth.

[Silence 31 seconds]

[Russell:] And then please just take a few minutes with a partner. We're going to talk as a group, but what I'd like is to allow a little time, like five minutes, for each person — not to work in any particular way, but to acknowledge, to offer some presencing with what's there that might like some company.

It might be something that feels wonderful. It doesn't have to be a problem. And it might be something that's kind of working in you that is standing out.

And if there's nothing coming at this moment, just when you have the time with somebody sitting in front of you, ask it freshly, and see what might like to be acknowledged. That's living.

And it could be five minutes of silence. There's no demand.

Okay, but just sit with the person next to you. Literally five minutes. I'll tell you when it's four minutes.

Okay, so figure out who's going to speak first, and the other person is just holding presence. The listener is just holding presence.

So it's not new for you to hear, but I want to reiterate that this way of first just presencing — with the neutrality of any given moment, the neutrality of I'm here on this spot, and before any opinions, any feeling states, there's the here — and coming to that numerous times a day, I find so helpful.

And then the second question, which I will do at least once a day, but depending on what's going on in my life, it might be more. Where I'm going: hello in there, how is it? How are you doing? How are you?

And it feels like that, like I'm checking in with this being. I'm the friend of this being that's living in here.

And that relationship is so — fills me with love, because I'm on both sides of it.

I'm the presence, because that's what I've practiced enough that I'm usually not lost in the state. I'm the presence, but there's room for — you know, a few minutes ago I'm there saying hello to the guy that feels responsible for the electricity, and whether everybody's getting a shower, and what if I don't get a hold of a — and so then, oh, hi in there, you're really concerned about that.

You know, they could take a shower someplace else, but I understand you're really concerned. And it just needed a little bit of that to get kind of — because he gets like this when something's not the way he wants it, you know?

But that doesn't have to hijack the whole being. And yet it doesn't have to be discounted or pushed away, or oh, I shouldn't feel that way, you know? There's room for that.

Okay. So that sense of just this, and how is it?

And what I find so often is, just the opportunity to be seen allows something to be in motion, that it doesn't stay just like it was.

Whereas if I'm kind of pushing it away, and I'm not in touch with it, and I'm just going about my day, it feels kind of like I'm carrying a backpack of something.

But the acknowledgement — it doesn't get solved necessarily, but it gets mobile. It gets lighter. Is my experience, most of the time.

So I just wanted to have that here as a reminder, that cultivating this kind of relationship is such a gift.

The floor is open, if there's something that you'd like to share, or look at a little further, or if there's an insight about any of this that might want to come, or confusion, or a request. We're going to take time to learn together.

Asking for what you need

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 1:] So yesterday, during our focusing session, something came up that was sort of like maybe a difference of opinion. It's really been settling in me. It was about my responsibility, or my collaboration, or my agreement, I guess you could say, with my listener. And their understanding.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 1:] Like, is it — my tendency is to say, I really don't need your help, thank you.

[Russell:] Okay.

[Participant 1:] I mean, I understand what's going on in me. But as a listener, do I have a responsibility to them? Like, when I say please don't, I don't need anything, but they have a desire to ask me a question.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 1:] Or something like that. So I'm wondering if there is, on my part, a responsibility for my listener.

[Russell:] Great.

Okay, so my idea about that is actually very much like my idea about relationship in general. That it's my responsibility to ask for what I want.

And what's different, if it's this specialized situation, where when I have a listener, I set up an agreement that the time is for me to use however I want, and they're there in service to me.

So my job is to define what I want. And if they have a different impulse, probably to remind them.

Kindly, you know. I'm sure you've got some great ideas, but what really works for me right now is just to be with myself, and to have your presence.

So sometimes that is a communication. I mean, very personally, I can say sometimes when I'm with Linda, sometimes I really love hearing back from her, her ideas about things. And sometimes

I really just want a presence, for me to speak out loud, know somebody cares, and let's see what comes for me. And anything, no matter how brilliant, is an interference when I'm in that space.

So I consider it my responsibility to take care of what my inner life is needing at a given moment.

And I have great compassion, because I know sometimes I speak when somebody has asked me not to, because I'm so excited to see — I'm seeing something, whatever. So I might need to be reminded. And hopefully that can be done with kindness.

You know, I really, really, really need silence right now. I really hope you can stay here. I don't want to hurt your feelings or anything, but it helps me better if I can just be with how it's coming.

And to honor — that's an honoring of your inner life. It's an honoring of the other person. It's not that they're doing something bad. It's that they're doing something that's not fitting for what you're needing at that moment.

Does that feel right?

[Participant 1:] Yeah, that does. I like that.

[Russell:] And so in that sense — now this is hard. To appreciate. Well, empathy is really easy to misunderstand, because I'm going to extend it out.

There is a world out there, and that world out there has influences. And, you know, somebody comes in here with a gun, it's a very strong stimulus.

But I really hold to the fact that I don't ignore that there are strong stimulants in the world. And my bottom line is, I'm responsible for my reactions. I'm responsible for what I do with that stimulus.

No one makes me feel angry, or helpless, or whatever. I need to participate in that.

Now, that's an extreme thing to say, especially in extreme circumstances. And when I say that, I don't want to imply anything like self-blame. And that's where the mind likes to dichotomize, and create some kind of a blaming something, or some kind of fault.

Well, of course I feel that way. They did that. That's what created it.

Well, someone else in the same situation might be responding differently.

So it's not to ignore that there is a world outside of ourselves. It's not some solipsistic universe where it's all subject. Subjectivism is not helpful. But objectivism — where, of course I feel that way, they did that — is eliminating human freedom.

So I want to live in the world where I acknowledge that there are some situations that are totally overwhelming, and really, really, really difficult to be with. And I have yet to encounter any situation, whether it's historical, from concentration camps to torture to the worst of the worst — I've yet to encounter any situation in which there wasn't a diversity of ways of living with that situation.

And that's human freedom also.

Yes, we need to influence the world around us. But the bottom of the bottom for me is to keep coming back to my capacity to respond a little bit more in life-giving ways. A little bit more this

way, a little bit more that way. And just having that attitude keeps me from blame, self or other, and gives me some options in almost every situation.

I say almost every, just because I'm hesitant to say every. You know, I can imagine something could be so, so, so overwhelming, especially in the short term.

I don't want to minimize how challenging life can be.

Silence and relationship

[Participant 2:] This came up with us, and I want to point to my limitations as a listener. That I had a lot of experience with people saying, I don't want to hear anything. Don't say anything. Don't.

And after a while, I might miss something, or lose something, and then I'm like, oh, I'm gone.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 2:] And I don't have permission to kind of say, oh, so you're feeling such and such.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 2:] Because I was told I can't say anything.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 2:] And then I'm like, well, you know, all right, I might as well just go use the bathroom.

[Russell:] Right. You feel worthless.

[Participant 2:] It's like pointless to be there.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 2:] And, yeah.

[Russell:] I do feel that it's a relationship. Which is not to say that there might not be times when we need some time not to do — to have, listen, just listen. But if I'm always going to be given that instruction, I'm not going to —

It's hard. It's really hard to stay present when you're being asked to be quiet.

[Participant 2:] Right.

[Russell:] Right. And for you.

So I want to distinguish two things. One is, I really hear that if you're not hearing, and you're not understanding, and you're feeling lost, it's really hard to stay with the content of where someone is. What is the subject matter that they're working with.

And I think it would be really valid to say, one time anyway, you know, I'm not able to hear right now. And I hear you don't want me to be — I just need to check in. Do you want — in other words, you could clarify. Is that what you mean, at that level? You don't want me, even if I'm not hearing you?

And they could say — if they say, yes, I really need silence — my encouragement would be to find out, how can I be in relationship without any content, but with the being that's here and the being that's there.

How can I — and you may find that I can't find it. You do your best. But that would be the relationship challenge at that moment. To see, okay, I'm with somebody in a coma. How do I be with somebody in a coma, and not just space out, and not feel irrelevant? How do I be with, you know?

And so then you may find that, well, it really rubs against my grain to work with that. Then you'll find that you won't be in those — you know, and this is a difficult situation, because we're just with people, and they have different needs and different demands. But that would be the direction I would go for. And I would say that it's possible.

Does that feel okay? Yes or no?

[Participant 2:] In that conversation? Yes. Is that saying just — is this, speaking or not?

[Russell:] That is completely determined by the speaker.

[Participant 2:] Yes, but most of the time we don't make agreements. Being silent means also, but having a —

[Russell:] Right. So if I was asked to be silent, I would likely have my mm-hmm going on, and I would need to hear from the person, either through their facial expression or verbally.

So, but what's great is, you know, whatever a mistake is, it's okay. We do our best, and if there's goodwill there, then we work it out. And that's true whether in this dynamic or in life in general, is my experience.

[Participant 2:] Because yesterday, being the speaker, I felt there was really a good reflection. Yes, I like it a lot.

[Russell:] In fact, when I'm teaching people to be listeners, I will specify: you're not saying anything, but it's fine to — you know, I give a few examples. You're not away. You're with them. Right.

Okay. Something else might like some acknowledgement.

Following a thread

[Participant 3:] The way she was even talking about this — it was fascinating to have the labyrinth walk and the triad on the same day. And it was brought up in our group, you know, how the labyrinth was so refreshing because it pulled us in.

And yet as a speaker, you're sort of finding it. And I was in a situation where that's what I was. And sometimes I was just waiting for it to reveal itself. And it wasn't enough. You know, I wanted somebody else to have gone ahead of me, and it just simply wasn't there.

And I mean, you can't ask the listener — fantastic listener — you can't ask the listener. You're just there with them.

Can you help it reveal itself, or —?

[Russell:] Well, as you and I were talking about, this is a real step of learning. Of how to follow a thread. How not just to jump around.

You know, there can be a little jumping maybe at first. But if it's staying at the same level of depth, then usually jumping is kind of not so helpful. I mean, at the beginning there can be. But what I notice is, it usually takes a little bit more time.

If we're jumping, there's a part of us that doesn't want the quiet. And you know that that's a challenge.

[Participant 3:] Okay, so I felt this little bit of something in my belly, and I had this image of something, and I'm just kind of waiting. How long do we wait, right?

[Russell:] And so I would say, especially when one knows that their pattern is to be a jumper, you wait a little longer than you used to. Because what you think is long is probably not that long.

If you tend to be a real — I know some people who are quiet for ten minutes, and they're just waiting, and nothing's coming. Chances are there's a lot of small invitations that are not being seen.

So we need to know our style also.

And when one is not simply just jumping, but is given a little bit of time — there's been a pause there — my experience is, on the side of trusting what emerges in the field. Whether it's a sensation, whether it's an image, whether it's a thought that comes.

But if it comes, let's say, as a thought, and you're not sure, well, is this some kind of random phenomena, or does this have value? Well, we need to take that in, and see, is there some kind of resonance with it, some kind of energy?

So we get to learn, by giving our inner life enough time, how it lets us know that something has some energy.

And if it does, don't expect to understand it. But you just — it's like following what they like to say in Europe, the red thread. You follow the red thread.

It's out of this nothingness comes something that emerges here. You know, I don't know what it means, I don't know what it is, but that's here. Clearly that's here.

And then you stay with that for a while, and see.

And what I want to say is, when you've allowed some pausing, on the side of trusting wherever it takes you. Especially when you're not understanding it. Right?

So that's different than jumping, jumping, jumping. It's allowing some pausing, and allowing, out of the kind of darkness, a little teeny, teeny, teeny something that is more attractive than the rest of it.

Does that make sense?

And it's a practice of trust, and pausing, and trusting, and listening to how the little energetics go on in there.

Very often, I think — I'm not sure I made this clear enough over the years — for many of us, it's not so much that you'll have this sensation in the left side of your belly, or that thing up in your — but it's more of an energetic.

There — oh, there's something opening. Or there's something, there's just kind of a heaviness that I'm sensing inside. And you don't even know where it is, but it's bodily, and yet it's not specifically located in a certain spot.

So don't expect — some people get very much specific places. A lot of us don't. A lot of us, it's more of an energetic movement that one can be in touch with.

Often connected to things like opening, closing, heavy, light, tightening, loosening, narrowing, widening.

Often it's these kind. And this is — my picture is, this is actually happening cellularly. There aren't that many ways your tissues and your cells can move. You know, they can expand their boundary, they can narrow their boundary.

So, learning to listen to the energetics is very helpful.

A hollow room

[Russell:] Let's just take a moment. Can we do one more moment? Is that okay for you?

Okay, so close your eyes. And just invite — we'll do this fairly briefly, won't spend a long time — but just invite something that's alive in your life that feels like, oh, if there could be some unfolding around that issue, if there could be some learning around how to deal with that, that would be a good thing.

Something that feels like it's maybe a little bit stuck, or a little bit concerning. Just find something. Can you find the subject?

Okay, so just let some image of that subject, some way that that comes to you. It might come in words, it might come as a picture. And just invite your inner life to show you how it's carrying that subject.

And see if there's anything that occurs inside as you invite your inner life to show you how that's in you.

[Participant 4:] It's like a hollow room right there.

[Russell:] Just take a moment with that place, sensing this hollow room. Does it resonate with that name? Does it feel right in there to call that hollow room?

Yeah, nice.

Let's go slow here. So just stay in that dark room with the light bulb hanging. It's got a hollow feel. And there's something about abandoned. And just see if all that feels right.

Just, if so, just kind of be with that, and see what it might like you to know, or where it might like to move.

[Participant 4:] So as I stay with it, I become more aware of the floorboards, the grooves in the floorboards, the light, where it's passing, dark.

Something in me — lost. Suddenly something seemed unknown, unrevealed.

[Russell:] Yeah. You're recognizing something in you that's wanting someone, or something, in that room. And just let that place know you know it's there.

There was the beginning of another voice saying, yeah, but it's probably not possible, or something like that, right? So we can acknowledge that also.

But let all that — you're present with all of that. This hollow room with the dangling light, the wanting for company, and a place that feels kind of hopeless about it.

If any of my words are off, throw them out. And just let that place know you know it's there.

See what kind of company it makes.

[Silence 41 seconds]

[Participant 4:] I have sensed light in other areas.

[Russell:] Yeah, there's light in other areas. And that's good to acknowledge, that it's not all this hopeless, kind of dark place. And so we can acknowledge all that light, and give a little bit more presence, if it can feel okay, to the place that really is carrying the hopeless.

And feel how that energy is alive in your body, that particular energy.

[Silence 33 seconds]

[Participant 4:] A light thumping.

[Russell:] Is it in a particular place? Inside the room — is it in your body in any particular place, that thumping? Kind of behind where your hand is?

[Participant 4:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Okay, so just let that thumping find the hopeless place in that room. Know you're with it, and letting it know it's not alone. That you are with it. You're keeping company with it.

And you're gently sensing anything it might want from you.

[Silence 46 seconds]

[Participant 4:] The energy is blurry.

[Russell:] It's blurry.

[Participant 4:] And it's —

[Russell:] It looks like another few moments. And if it would feel okay, invite that whole inner place to show you how it knows what it's longing for. It actually knows.

See if that's true, that it can show you — behind the unfulfillment of it is the knowing of what it feels like, fulfilled.

And see if your inner life might like you to also be in touch with how it knows this company in this room. It knows the — yeah.

[Participant 4:] And there's a flight of stairs. I think they share the floor of the room.

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, let yourself have all of that. There's that room, there's the light bulb, and there's this light streaming in somehow, this staircase.

And I'm guessing — and this can be wrong, but I'll just put it out — I'm guessing that within that, there's some hopefulness in that light, or some knowing of some kind of fulfillment in that light. And there's the plank floor. That's all there together.

If that's true, or something like that, you just let all of that live together for a few moments. See what that feels like.

Yeah, and feel what's happening in your body as you're with that. What happens in there?

[Participant 4:] I see the tensions. I'm admiring it, for its possibilities.

[Russell:] And let your body take a few moments to feel — your inner life to feel — what that sense of possibility feels like in there. In your solar plexus, in your chest, belly.

Just see if there's some way that that wants to be acknowledged.

[Participant 4:] So it's hanging, and I feel warmth throughout, as I look at it.

[Russell:] Here, just take another few moments to let that be.

Just notice, does it feel right, as you feel that warmth, and you're looking, to resonate with that word, possibility?

Just take a moment to thank your inner life. Let it know that there's — I'm guessing there's more to be learned. If that's true, you can let your inner life know you'll be coming back to find out more about all of this.

There's more about the abandonment, maybe. More about the possibilities. More about — but all of this is there when you're wanting to get more intimate with all of it, if that's true.

And let your attention come to just being here. Feeling the bottom, feeling the chest, feeling your hands, hearing the sound. And when you're ready, you can let your eyes open. Just take your time.

[Participant 4:] Yeah.

[Russell:] So. You get a sense of following what's there.

[Participant 4:] Yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] It can be like that, you know. We're so used to knowing what's next, or being in charge. To allow it to show you — it's uncomfortable at first.

But does it feel okay?

[Participant 4:] Sort of. Yeah.

[Russell:] Well, take it as a gift. Take it as a gift, and not as a conclusion.

You're at a step in your process, and right now it comes — with the frame came a sense of possibility. So I'll take that. But I'm not going to end up with, where I end up is a framed picture, I'm done.

It's, okay, now you go in again. Maybe the frame appears, maybe it doesn't. But you're in a process. It's not completed. But trust what comes.

Our inner life — what I'm awed by so often is — do you need that shade shifted, or shifting over?

I think it might be working. We might need to move. You could also move. Either way. Oh, it's the top one. Yeah, it's not going to work. Shift down a little bit.

Let's see.

So I'm awed by the self-regulatory capacity of our inner life. That if we're not aggressive, not pushing it, not pushing away or grasping — if we're following the process — my experience is, almost always, it gives you what can be taken for now.

And it's authentic, and real, and good. It's not the end. It's on the journey. And maybe the frame changes into something else. Who knows?

But at this moment, in my presencing with you, it felt like, oh, I can see that. And at the same moment, a sense of possibility comes.

Great. That's brilliant. See, to me, that's wisdom body functioning. Giving you something you can handle right now, that brings something. Get what I mean?

And that's my sense of process.

Just like Moshe would say so often, and Gene would agree: there's a longing in the direction of living.

And, you know, that phrase that Gene had — every bad feeling is the energy toward the right way of being. It knows what it needs.

That's why I brought up this strange question.

Fulfillment in the need

[Russell:] What I realize is, every time that we feel we need something, there's the sense inside of what the fulfillment of that is.

We don't long for gulagaka ice cream, because we don't know what that is. But we long for companionship. We long for connection. We long for respect. Why? Because we've had those experiences. We don't long for what we haven't experienced.

And so, that being true — now this is a crazy step — is, I believe our inner life can find fulfillment in the need itself, and not it being satisfied necessarily by somebody else.

And I'm not asking you to believe that. I'm asking you to try on the possibility that within the organism, being in touch not just with what I want, but in touch with — wow.

I'm really needing — say a situation where I felt like I didn't get the kind of respect that I — I really am in touch with. And so then I go through, you know, what was missing, what I wanted, what's the bad feeling about it. And I want to give that enough time. But I then also want to go to the place that — oh, to feel the need of respect, I'm in touch with that place inside that knows respect.

So I don't want to just stay with the place that feels like it didn't get it. I want to also go to the place that knows it, and let that be here, and let my body show me, when it's remembering respect, what that feels like.

I'm not pushing away what needs to be handled in that other situation. But that other situation doesn't take from me all of the respect that I know in my organism.

And if it's companionship, or connection with another, that we can say, oh, it's just sad to feel that I'm not getting it. Well, we need to feel the sad, the longing, the wanting, but also the place inside that values all the companionship I've had. That knows what that feels like.

And actually — and this sounds crazy — to let go of the concept, I don't have it now, and go to the place that knows it outside of time. That knows the fulfillment of companionship.

And love begins to be in your chest, and you feel that. And you might feel it even connected to that individual in the past. Or you might feel it just as a quality, not connected to that person, but that I know what that feels like. And it's not only that I know its absence. I know its presence in my body.

And it's so life-giving to be self-responsible in that way, without then saying, oh, well, I don't have to deal with the longing part. No, there's room for that too.

So there's — as a friend of mine speaks about — there's a beauty in the need itself, if we let ourselves get out of the thoughts about it and feel into it.

And it kind of breaks all the rules, in a certain way, to even speak like that. But I'm telling you, in my experience, it's a life source living in us, waiting to be tapped. But we have to get beyond the concept.

And it's interesting. I've met people who, after dealing with the loss of a spouse, say with Alzheimer's, or the actual death of a spouse, and goes into the pain of loss — also connecting to the wonderful feeling inside of the connectedness that I have known.

And that that brings not only the absence, but also its presence, because that presence is living in me.

And that's really something remarkable, and life-giving.

So when I'm feeling in deficit of some sort, I want to acknowledge the place of longing, of wanting, of learning. But I also want to spend time with how the fulfillment of that very thing is also known in me, and is not dependent on that person giving it to me, or that situation giving it.

And that's a big step into freedom.

Let's just — I'll get there in a second. Let's just pause, because this is really — I don't want you to be trying to believe what I'm saying. I want you to see if you can sense kind of underneath it, because it's so contradictory in some ways to our usual approaches.

This is going further with Gene's idea. We can ask the inner life to show us how it will be when it can be. That's the phrase that I've put on. But he would ask people, okay, you've got all that going on. Ask your inner life to show you how that will be when it's — if it was all fine, how would it feel?

And many people, most people, can find something about that. It's already known, how it would be if it was really fine.

And then you're living in this world of longing, or disappointment, about something that's a loss in your world. And at the same time, you're in this timeless being that knows this energetic state, knows this possibility, knows this. And you got to get big enough to include all that.

You're not totally inhabited by the disappointment of longing, but there's enough room for it.

If there's not, then it's just kind of Pollyanna idealism, wishful thinking, or something that's not going to go deep enough.

Just a light sharing.

[Participant 5:] I'm so grateful for you bringing that in.

You know, over the holidays, people are together, and the spouses and partners in my family are on the East Coast. And some of my friends were saying, oh, you're going to be alone. And I took all of that experience of being by myself, and I did, without knowing, just doing a checking in, and did that.

And I actually — I was with friends and stuff like that, but I wasn't feeling lonely, or sad, or wishing, or wanting. I was celebrating. And I did it in a real life-giving way that was really new for me, but on a deeper level. Like, I've done those things before, but this new concept was really solidifying someplace else in my system.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah.

[Participant 5:] I was really happy.

[Russell:] Yeah.

The edge of practice

[Participant 6:] Can I ask a question? I'll try and see if it's appropriate.

[Russell:] Go ahead.

[Participant 6:] Well, it clarifies — it's about struggle.

So yesterday, you were saying, putting out there the possibility that it's not bad for Mesa and Lizzie to be in struggle.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 6:] You've said that to me before. Let them struggle.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 6:] And it's connected with several things, and several questions, I think. But I'm connected with — I'm loving my meditation practice lately. I've stretched the length in the morning. It's great. I've been enjoying this, and then the last half hour at night, and I'm so tired. All this pain is showing up, and I'm just struggling.

And I was saying to Lori as we left last night, like, is that helpful? It felt humbling, and funny in a way, to notice, oh, practice is pretty easy when I'm feeling pretty good. And I was like, is it a useful learning to push into the struggle, where I want — oh.

[Russell:] Yeah.

So I can tell you — I don't know. I don't know what's right for you. But what I do know is, on a daily basis, I find it helpful not to struggle with my practice.

And periodically throughout the year, I like to create situations where I'm up against my edge, and find out how — what is my capacity for being warm-hearted, generous, caring, and staying. The courage to stay with.

Now, if I really feel like I'm hurting myself, no. I don't want to — I don't encourage a kind of masochism like that.

But I've gotten so much value from the humbling. So much value from, how do I find a kindness within knowing some of my —

At least once during almost all the all-day sittings, and sometimes longer, that's part of their function, is for me to demonstrate peace is possible. Even in this. I mean, I'm not comparing this to somebody who's really in danger. It's chosen. There's lots of reasons. It's not — just like the street retreat is not really homeless, this is not.

But if I can have moments of being up against my wall, and somehow finding a generosity, a humor, a kindness, or something, that adds to my capacity, is my picture.

I'm not saying that's true for everybody, and I'm not saying that that's always true. But that's why I think it's sometimes helpful to push that edge.

And it's even helpful to then — maybe it's, if we come to a point where we say, you know, this isn't right, I'm leaving. And we walk out. Can we walk out in dignity? Or what are the voices that come?

And then we have a whole other thing to work with. It's not blame. Hopefully it's not, oh, I'm this terrible person. It's, oh, this is what I do when I — I've set up — oh God, I have images of Russell thinking this of me. Oh, it's something about authorities too. Oh no, it's me thinking, oh, I'm having that old thought that I'll never be, blah, blah, blah.

Oh, you're here again. I recognize you. You've been here since I was five. I see you. Oh, I've got that other.

So it then becomes opportunity to see, what do I bring to a challenging situation. And everything that comes, if you're in the mode of inquiry, is helpful for the unfolding.

But that's why the first thing we got to put in is kindness, and then humor, and that we can have enough presence. And that's why I don't do this at the first week or the second week. We have enough presence that we can know, oh, I have been in difficult situations and had my kindness, but now I'm in this new one. Oh, this is, you know.

I don't know how long it took Nelson Mandela, in his cell, to get kind towards — I don't know how long it, you know? I'm sure that there are most — this is too much for me. Okay, this isn't going well, I've got to get —

But that's what these situations are for, in a way.

[Participant 6:] Yeah. Well, the morning energy is really different than the evening.

[Russell:] It's really different. I mean, for most of us, you know.

I go back and forth as a guide for the process of, you know, bringing in some movement, or bringing in another process in the evening. And I might — you know, sometimes I do, sometimes I don't.

But when I don't, it's not because I think you're having a wonderful time. Or because I'm having a wonderful time. But if I'm not having a wonderful time, hopefully I'm still in learning mode about how I am in challenging situations.

[Participant 6:] I appreciate the way we're being, you know, special in this container of inquiry. Behind us, the world that's really emphasized. I've sat through the long days, but it really — you know, there's like, I can —

[Russell:] Right, but, well, you know, let me say, I know it's probably too many words, and I probably need to move a little bit, but —

I've mentioned this a little bit, and I guess it's kind of coming out in dribs and drabs. This emphasis for me, right now, in my perception of how our practice is connected to the larger culture.

How the systems of control, domination, and even we can use the word oppression, that we were raised in, that create these what we think of as natural voices of self-judgment.

Oh, you're so — that were actually voices we took to. They were originally used to motivate behavior. It's like you think of, in the extreme, you think in the army: hey, you candy ass, get up and run.

That energy, which grows — we can call it out of patriarchy, out of this domination model, that if you're not in control of life, anarchy will take place and it will kill you. That's the basic model.

And we internalize these voices.

And so it's so easy for us to judge others, and then some of us get over that somewhat, and they get quieter, and they live in the background, but they still can arise. And then some of us are so devastatingly violent towards ourselves.

And often those of us who aren't simply go to the opposite extreme of resignation.

And so either we mobilize our energy through this kind of — or either we're completely undertoned, there's nothing I can do, I'm resigned, and we might get cynical, and we might get blah. Or we're like this.

And, in my opinion, unless enough of us develop some other forms of self-motivation, and can bring that into the culture — the models we're working on, and we have internalized this. It's just easier to see out there, in, you know, the radical Muslim Islamists or something. It's easier to see the behaviors. But the same kind of impulse toward oppression lives in us.

And for authentic freedom to arise, there needs to be another kind of way that energy gets mobilized. That it's not simply resignation or force.

Remember when I taught, when we did some of the mind mapping, and I talked about how most of us at the new year especially, but often during the year, we go through this —

The floor can be slippery here. You okay? Yeah. Nice roll.

I think I probably — I don't know if at that stage of the course I did. Did I talk about the fixer and the depressor? Did I use that terminology?

So there's that part of us that goes, oh — often this will happen. I need to lose weight, or I need to stop watching television, or I need to, you know. We get some picture that might have some intelligence in it. It's rarely that it's completely gaga. It has something connected to your life. But the way it comes on: I'm going to fix myself. I'm going to run every day. I'm going to do that, you know, because that's what I got to do.

And that usually comes with this kind of energy.

Now, the problem with it is that it actually, at first, releases some endorphins, and we get a little bit high on the first days of it.

And the problem, if you're in the ideology — the inner ideology, again, based on the outer ideology of oppression — what happens is, after a few days, a week, two weeks, three weeks, often the opposite kicks in, in what we call the depressor. Or the one who's used to — who's just waiting for you to fail, and waiting to come in.

We all know this, right? This is not new. And you keep going back and forth between these energies. And it's because it's locked into this system that we internalized, of self-violence, or a violent, oppressive voice that then — that part of us that feels weak and small, and then eventually either rebels or goes to sleep inside.

So what I get very interested in is, both in terms of the larger culture and in terms of —

Something — electricity. Was it the GFI? Yeah, thank you.

So I want to bring up, if this is an exciting and important subject for you, the investigation of what alternatives are there for motivating behavior, if I'm not motivating myself through disgust, and anger, and what's wrong with me, and that kind of domination.

I'll get there in a sec. That kind of domination voice, where I'm not using the voices of domination, but I'm also not just becoming passive. How do I activate?

If I'm not doing it for an authority outside, or an authority inside, let's say — how do I activate?

And my way of working is exactly what we've been doing. Is working with presencing the various voices. Being in such good inner dialogue with all the voices in there, that they all have space, but none of them dominate.

So the spaces that are lonely, that are hurting, have space. The spaces that know fulfillment, and satisfaction, and wholeness — they don't depend on other conditions. They're always here.

And I don't have to have that as a belief system, but as an invitation for them, with a question like, how would it be if it was all fine? Show me that. Can I have that?

And maybe it won't give it to you that moment, but maybe a little later.

But so that we are using this awareness process in a much larger way than maybe we imagined in the past. That we're actually cultivating a different way of mobilizing the inner life.

Where the tree is now

[Participant 7:] Oh, I wanted — I realized that I think this is relevant to what you're saying. But first I was thinking of that pendulum swinging, and how we need to be able to explore the whole

length of the swing, you know, instead of just feeling discomfort in the extremes, and not really facing fully, or experiencing fully.

And I was thinking about how I've been working off of the wrong image for healing. That I think I've carried a certain image for healing, that healing would mean I would become who I would have been if I hadn't been hurt. As opposed to healing being who I can become, having been hurt, including that.

[Russell:] Oh, yeah. That feels just right. Yeah.

[Participant 7:] And then I had an image, about how I just keep going, holding that. And — you know, there's a tree. A tree gets pushed over, and it can't straighten itself back up. But it starts to send shoots up. So it looks like this, you know? It's not ever going to be.

So I'll just kind of throw that in the pot.

[Russell:] Yeah, I think that's helpful. I think that's helpful, that there's something in that tree that still knows of a direction from where it is now. That is a life-giving direction.

Yeah, that's really important. Where it is now. But it hasn't lost its life-giving direction. It's just not going to look like it would have looked if it didn't have that. But it still has its life-giving direction.

And that — I will stand up firmly that that is living in every one of us. I call that wisdom body, that's living in that tree that sends the shoot up.

And how do we help activate, or stay in touch with that? Well, it's the kind of listening process that I find so very helpful. Listening in these ways.

And notice, this is really different than most psychological listening, which tends to — though it can be helpful, it can be meaningful — it tends to go down into the problem, as if the solution is going to be in the problem.

And we don't want to ignore what's difficult. But our awareness process needs to be much wider. Much wider. So we can access what's real, what's wild.

An invitation

[Participant 8:] To me, this oppression-resignation thing is really well solved by Moshe Feldenkrais, in the way he gives advice. Because I use this like a template for motivating teams, and things like that. So the scope is much larger. And it's invitation, and going where it moves.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 8:] And people — an invitation to explore.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Participant 8:] And not to explore somewhere foreign, from somewhere foreign, but from where it moves.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 8:] And I think the motivation is always here. It's only that the invitation is really different from the operation.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 8:] And in that, I, as a practitioner — you don't resonate with that. The resignation doesn't exist as well.

[Russell:] Yeah.

So there's a way, with the invitation and the exploration. Yeah, I agree. I think that's in the ATMs as well. That kind of invitation, that kind of exploration, that kind of going in there — not pushing through, not demanding, pausing, going back, being curious.

Yeah, so that's a really great model for us to apply to these other situations.

But I think that's as much talk as we can do right now.

[Participant 8:] I think that's good.

[Russell:] I think that perks us a little bit. Let's take a pause. Get some tea if you want. I want to come back and do some movement together.

I had these on the back. Most of you have probably seen these.