Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 4, Session 4 — 45 minutes

Summary: A chair lesson continues from yesterday and prepares for tomorrow's sitting. Students sense the sit bones and lumbar curve, move long over the pelvis or articulate the spine, then lift each ischium with side-bending, rotation, and eye and head differentiation, also explored lying on the side and the back.

Sitting over the sit bones

[Russell:] Want to do another chair lesson that will begin where we were yesterday and grow from there. It's kind of preparation for tomorrow's sitting in a chair lesson. So it's layered in steps.

First just get a sense of your bottom, your sit bones, your heels, the shape of your lumbar spine relative to your sacrum and your sit bones.

And feel just a little bit this movement forward and back. This is kind of connected to the lesson from this morning, where it's not articulating in your pelvis, but it's moving over the sit bones, staying long, and just kind of coming forward and back, and your spine is long.

And it's also good, of course, the other way — another way that people do this, where they're articulating each joint in the vertebral column, right, or rounding down and arching up. We want to be able to be inside the vertebral column.

So I want you to, on your own, for the next two minutes, kind of go back and forth between how you can move over the hip joints and sit bones. It's like being one piece, but it's not being stiff, it's being long. How you can be one piece, and then how you can articulate each joint in flexion and extension. So you get the feeling of both of those possibilities, how the location on the sit bones changes with both, but changes in a different way.

Those of you who work with people in offices, or people who sit at desks a lot, these are so wonderful, because so many people don't translate the lying lessons into sitting so directly. And so doing sitting in chairs is really helpful.

When you pause over the middle, just to connect again with movement from before, interlace your hands around your right knee, and feel how you can come forward on your sit bones, get tall over your sit bones, how you can drop back, stay in that length.

And then you could also articulate in the lumbar spine.

And the leg can be soft. The leg doesn't have to be stiff. If you're sitting a lot, this is one of my favorite movements. When I'm being a Feldenkrais teacher, if I'm sitting on my stool for a number of lessons, I'll often enjoy talking to people and just rocking. Out of your pelvis. Living in the pelvis.

[Student:] I'm curious about the extreme crunchiness of getting rolled over those.

[Russell:] Right, yeah, those are tendons. Right.

This rising out of your pelvis is a very important image, I feel. This kind of sense of coming up and out from your sit bones. It's like your waist lifts and the top of your head lifts, and that tendency to crunch down that happens from so much of this contraction in these hip flexors. Right? That we rise up and out of our pelvis. There's so much dignity in that.

One of my longest-term clients — she died a number of years ago at the age of 98. She was a client of mine from the time she was 72. 72 to 98. And her husband was also. And, crazy. But Edith lived longer than Al. And Edith, maybe when she was a young lady, like 76, we did a session where we ended up with — she was very short, she must have been 4'11 or something.

I'm so tall. I'm so tall. I'm coming out of my pelvis.

And so ever from — she's from Vienna, so she had to relax. Whenever we do a session now, and I have a list of arms, the other list is, and it's coming out of my pelvis. When I'm in the shower and I shampoo my hair, it's coming out of my pelvis.

So whenever I would see Edith for the next, you know, twenty-something years, I don't think a session went by where she didn't at some point in the session talk about out of my pelvis. So I can't say out of my pelvis without Edith Eliza in the room.

She actually got shorter, which was really, you know — but sweeter. And she was walking. She wasn't wheelchair-bound. She was in assisted living, but not a nursing home. So she was still moving around and doing basic things. She couldn't walk far, but still, if she went outside with her grandkids and great-grandkids, then she would use a cane, but around the building, she was okay.

Lifting the left ischium

Okay, so feel, sit, and remember this pattern. Lift your left ischium. Feel the chest go to your right, right shoulder to your right. Let the head bend a bit left.

Just a number of times, feeling, getting that lighter and smoother, that sense of connectivity all through you, that the chest becomes much more ready for movement.

And so, thinking of the shoulders, chest, we come to both. Come to the other side, lift the right. It's actually nice to take a moment to feel any differences.

This is a brilliant practice, to just feel when you have five minutes — oh, how easily is this side lifting, and am I kind of more hunkered down on one side, and is that because my chest isn't ready to move, or because my head's not ready to give, or where in my whole vertebral column is there a sense that something is impeding the whole pattern.

So it's very often not in the place that's hurting, or that feels like it's the problem, that the impedance is. And so it's good to have a pattern like that in order to investigate the whole movement of the vertebral column. Right, when you get the, oh, that can be light like that, or that can move like that.

Okay. Just pause, and sitting for a moment.

And lift your left ischium. Lift your left shoulder blade, so the left shoulder, and it comes towards the ear, and you're feeling that movement through, and then you're very slowly letting it come down, down, down, down, down, and you get that increase in the bending.

And then let your right shoulder lift, and that will even help that bending get more clear, maybe. So your right shoulder lifting, which lifts those ribs. Don't strain, but feel the bendability of those left ribs.

Slowly lower the shoulder, come back to neutral.

Lift your left sitting bone, and chest to the right, shoulders right, head bending left, and raise your right shoulder and lower your left at the same time. Slow and smooth, don't strain here. It's easy to strain if you do too much. Let each shoulder blade invite the ribs, the right ones up, the left ones down.

Breathing, going inside your vertebral column, inside your ribs. Get that kind of image, x-ray vision from in there.

And then come back to being on both.

And then lie down for a moment, lying back.

On the right side

Can you lie on your right side for a moment, with your left leg bent on top of your right leg? Your head can rest on your right arm, or on a pillow, or on the floor.

So you lie on your right side with your left leg on top of the right, bent. Both legs are bent.

And just sensing, again with that kind of internal perception of the shape of your torso, the movement of your breath.

And reach with your left hand over the top of your pelvis toward your sit bone. And feel a movement you can make of your pelvis. Come over the top of your pelvis if possible, and your fingertips coming down towards the sit bones. So you're kind of coming over the outside of the hip if your arm is long enough. If not, then you might need to turn around back a little bit more. But more over the top, and let your fingertips come to your sit bones.

And with a movement — well, first, just lift your left foot in the air, keeping the knee down, and feel how the sit bone moves in conjunction with the hip movement. The sit bone likely moves, and it's kind of a lateral bending of your pelvis. You're not lifting the knee, you're lifting the foot.

And just really — your feet. So you're helping with your hand to guide the movement a bit.

Now without lifting your foot, feel that helping. What, in a sense, how you could do a comparable movement to lifting your ischium, but in lying. You need to activate some of what we were working on this morning, even in your pelvis, to lift that left ischium, and you can guide a little bit with your hand, as if you're lifting the ischium. Your hand will give the direction.

But if you want to sense it, can you find it more proximally through a movement of your pelvis? You're not bending from in there.

Okay, and then pause for a moment and rest here.

[Silence 37 seconds]

And lying on your right side, reach over the top of your head, your left hand coming to the right side of your head, over the top of your head, so the fingers are over on the right temple, or right side of your face somewhere.

And thinking of that lateral bending, not so much with the hand — the arm is a guide, but the movement begins more in your torso. And so begin that bending of the left side, helping with your arm, but not letting your arm be the main lifter.

Feel — this connects to your pelvis also, that same pelvic region. And this is very much like the movement in sitting. You feel how your chest — the sternum has to shift a bit rightward as the head lifts leftward.

And if I can see her — go slow, smooth, hand on the head, lower down, rest.

Please come up to sitting in front of your chair.

Turning to the left

So, again, lifting the left ischium, chest to the right, shoulder to the right, but turning your head to the left. And feel — close your eyes, and each time you turn, first think of the eyes kind of leading the movement, and come back to neutral. Then lift the ischium and turn the head, thinking of the nose.

Come back to neutral, lift the left side, and turn the head, thinking of the chin.

Come back to neutral, and then lift the ischium. Turn your head, stay towards the left, and feel your shoulder blades, and move the left back and the right forward, and when you do that, let your head look around to the left. You can open your eyes. And let the shoulders come back, but keep looking left, and then as the right shoulder comes forward, the left back, look a little bit more, and then let the shoulders come back to neutral, and then again, breathing, and then let everything come back to neutral.

Just pause and feel again the plasticity, the mobility of shape.

These combinations are so wonderful when you're working with people with scoliosis, and wonderful for many people, but you can really help people sense that the scoliosis is not fixed nearly what their self-image is. You can actually begin to experience differentiation in the vertebrae, but not just working with rotation — combining the bending and the rotation really helps.

Okay, lifting the left ischium, turning to your left, looking leftward, right shoulder forward, left back, and now here, turn your head. Keep your shoulders and pelvis as they are. Turn your head and eyes to the right.

And head and eyes to the left.

And keep your eyes left, turn your head right.

Turn your eyes right, head left.

Eyes right, head left. Don't let your shoulders go. Eyes right, head left.

And keep your eyes right, turn your head right.

And now move head and eyes to the left, right shoulder forward, left shoulder back.

And come to neutral.

And just stand and walk a little bit.

Not to force, but to differentiation, skillful attention, and really invite movement in places that don't ordinarily move.

Yeah, I know. Right, right.

Okay, come back to sit. There's one more piece that we need to get to here, to be ready for the lesson for tomorrow.

Eyes toward the floor

Lift the left ischium, chest right, shoulders right, turning left. Think of your nose, your chin, your eyes, looking to the left, right shoulder forward, left shoulder back, and now lower your head and eyes towards the ground. As if you're looking past that hip, or looking to the floor. And then, keeping everything the same in your bottom, don't let your left ischium drop down. Lift your head to look at the ceiling, and keep your eyes up and lower your head. You may not see the ceiling the whole time, but don't let your eyes go with the head. Then lower your eyes and lift your head. Don't move your pelvis. Lift your eyes and lower your head. Lower your eyes and lift your head.

Bring the head back to neutral. Stay with the left ischium lifted. Right shoulder forward, left back. Look around to your left. Right shoulder forward, left back. Come back to neutral.

Just one last time. Lift your left ischium, feel the bending of your torso, and then turn and look around yourself.

Rest on the ground.

Rest in any position you would like to rest in, just to sense yourself. Let the ground and gravity work on you. We'll be coming to work with the other side shortly.

[Silence 55 seconds]

Let's move to sitting, please.

The right side

You can almost guarantee something inside's gonna go yes when you get to do this first movement.

Lift your right ischium. Let your chest go to the left, left shoulder go to the left, the head drop right.

Feel how — get that inner sense. Be inside your skeleton.

And as you move leftward, raise your right shoulder towards the ear. Feel how you can decrease that space, and then lower the shoulder. Come back to neutral in your pelvis.

Raise the right side of the pelvis. Raise your left shoulder. Your head is down to the right, and lower your right shoulder. And don't force, don't be aggressive. Just feel how the shoulders can help you bend. The head hang. Breathe.

And back to neutral. Just feel yourself sitting. Feel how quickly your system adjusts.

One more time, lift the right side of the pelvis, let the left shoulder go left, chest left, head drops right.

Lift your left shoulder, lower your right.

Bring the shoulders back, but let everything else stay as they are. Shoulders back to neutral.

Raise the right shoulder, right ear towards the right shoulder, lowering your left. Feel what happens in your torso. You're still sitting on your left ischium, your right's raised.

Now very slowly, feel deep in your skeleton as you reverse your shoulders, right down, left up, not letting anything else move significantly, meaning your head stays as it is, your pelvis. So feel your ribs, and come back to neutral.

Feel what's happening in your shape, and in your sitting, right now.

Lift the right side of your pelvis, move the chest left, the left shoulder left, head right. No, actually, head turn towards the right.

Lifting the right ischium, your head turns right, and feel — stay with your head right, your right ischium lifted, and move your right shoulder forward, the left back. Stay looking to the right.

And now the right shoulder back and the left forward. You'll probably look a bit further right. Your right ischium stays lifted.

Move your shoulders again through neutral, to where the right one comes forward, but let the ischium stay up. And then reverse your shoulders, right back, left forward, looking further to the right.

And come back to neutral, and pause.

Feel your size. Feel what's happening to the length of yourself, the carriage of your head, how your head comes out of your torso.

Lift your right ischium, chest to the left, shoulders left, turn your head to the right, thinking of your eyes leading the movement, right shoulder back, left forward.

Then keep your shoulders and ischium as they are. Bring your head back to neutral with your shoulders.

And then turn, thinking of your nose leading the movement of turning. So your right shoulder is back and the left shoulder is forward, and it stays like that. And then your head comes back to neutral in terms of your shoulders.

Then your chin leads the movement to the right. And your head comes to neutral with the shoulders, and then everything comes back to neutral.

Feel just the readiness to turn around the vertical.

Lift the right side of your pelvis, turn to the right, right shoulder back, left forward, and turn your head and eyes to the left without moving your shoulders, without moving your pelvis.

Head and eyes to the right then, and then keep the eyes right and the head left.

Head right and the eyes left. The eyes right and the head left. Head and eyes to the right. Right shoulder back, left forward.

Come to neutral.

Rest back in your chair.

[Silence 31 seconds]

Move forward once more.

Lift the right ischium, chest left, shoulders left, head turns right. And look down with your head and eyes towards the floor. Up with your head and eyes — still, your right shoulder stays back, left forward, right ischium lifted. Lower the head and eyes. And keep the eyes lowered, raise your head. Lower the head, raise your eyes, breathing. Notice if there's excess tension in your arms and hands. Raise your head, lower your eyes. Raise your eyes, lower your head.

Come back to neutral — your pelvis, shoulders, head, and eyes.

And then one more time, lift your pelvis and just turn to look around yourself to the right. Lift the right side of your pelvis, let your shoulders turn.

Come back to neutral, lift the left side of your pelvis, turn to look around, right shoulder forward, left back.

Come to neutral.

Feel your inner sense of your vertebral column, of the length of yourself, the strength in your vertebral column.

On the back

Come on your back for a few moments.

And the length of yourself. Just the inner sense of your whole vertebral column, your skeleton, and then the kind of inner feeling that comes with this, with these movements.

Interlace your hands under your head. Have your elbows out to the sides.

And sense the bendings of your spine, first to the left, letting the head slide, letting the nose stay towards the ceiling. There's just a sliding. Feel the influence down through your pelvis.

And then come back to neutral and go down to the right. Gently feel the influence all the way through. And is there a way that the movement can originate more proximally, more with something in your torso and pelvis? Is there a way that you can think the movement from in there?

And then, the next few times, from the bending, go to the turning. So when you're going to the right, bend, turn to the right.

And when you — so when you bend to the right, it feels like you want to turn to the left. Turn to the right.

[Student:] Turn what?

[Russell:] Your head, your nose. Your nose will point right. You're bent to the right, and you're letting your nose point to the right.

And then you bend to the left, and you're letting your nose point to the left.

No, so listen carefully. When you bend to the right, you're letting your nose turn to the right. So the back of your hands are on the floor. Slide to the right, turn your nose to the right. That's right.

It feels strange, but these vertebrae, as they bend, the rotation towards them — it amplifies.

So, sliding and bending. That's right. Feel all the way through to your pelvis.

And then — good. Good. Think all the way into your ribs, down to your pelvis. Great.

Okay. And come back to neutral. Just let your arms come out.

Lightly turn your head a little bit.

Feel the length of your spine.

Putting the movements together

One last time. Come up. You're sitting on the chair.

Lift your right hip, chest left, shoulders left. Let the head begin to bend a little rightward, and then turn to look around to your right. So the right ear goes a little towards the shoulder, then you look around. Feel that your pelvis lifts, but it might also begin doing something else. And that'll get clearer tomorrow.

Yeah. Lifting the right side of you. So the same basic movement — now you're allowing a little bending in the head, so the right ear goes towards the right shoulder, and you're turning to look around to your right. So we're putting together those two movements.

And then we'll do the same to the left, where you lift the left ischium. The same pattern is there. The head begins to bend, and then you look around to your left.

When you come back to neutral, just feel, are you ready to come off of each side of your pelvis? Are you ready to turn easily?

Come up. Feel when you come up, you know, in a fresh way. What your head is like. What the stature is like when you sit. What the carriage of your chest is like. These locations may affect every vertebra. Those thoracic vertebrae between the shoulders — are you activated?

Okay. Great.