Talk

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 5, Session 1 — 36 minutes

Summary: Russell frames the evening celebration and tomorrow's gathering around courage, Rudolf Steiner, and staying open without taking on a belief system. He links biophilia, domination, and technology to the need for embodied contact, then turns to inner voices, safety, and self-violence. He closes by setting the next morning's schedule and practice groups.

Opening notes

[Russell:] You noticed about a half hour ago it was really foggy. It's gonna be a very hot day. It's gonna be in the seventies.

If you go to the beach during the afternoon break, the first beach that takes the passes will be relatively easy to find parking. The second beach, midday Saturday, really sunny. It shouldn't take long, but you might have to wait a few minutes for parking. Especially if a few of you go to the other. I heard that.

If there's anything that you need logistically, for a start, that's what I want to talk about.

The evening celebration

[Russell:] So, I'd like to begin just commenting about the evening celebration this evening, so you have a picture of that.

Linda, with the Sophia Foundation. She's actually ordained as a priest, and that's in that group. So, you know, I can tell you at lunch, or something, about them, as she can.

They have a number of celebrations that they'll do. Linda does them here once a month, where there's different kinds of live piano music, and different kinds of readings, depending on the subject. And the subject matter is usually based on teachings from Rudolf Steiner.

I'm very impressed with many of the teachings that Rudolf Steiner brings, but, as you know, probably by now, I'm very non-ideological, in the sense that I'm interested in what I can experience. And so other people's descriptions of reality, whether they're Tibetan masters or Hindu people or Rudolf Steiner.

I'm agnostic in the sense that I like to listen to everybody, but sometimes almost to a detriment, I think. I just stay away from belief systems. So, I guess that's my belief system.

And I like being in an atmosphere that evokes certain feelings, certain insights. I listen well to the vibrations in my body and what's happening in the spirit.

So I say all that to say, for some of you, I think the readings that will go on — and you'll be invited to do readings, you don't have to if you don't want to, but you'll be invited to do some readings — the content might be really interesting.

This particular one has to do with what I think of as embodiment. It's what they call the incarnation of the soul.

And Rudolf Steiner — everything I can validate. Meaning, he developed biodynamic gardening, and the gardening is incredible when it's done biodynamically. So I can validate that he had an insight, even though some of it is very esoteric, burying cow horns at certain times of the moon to generate a certain energy into the ground.

Sounds crazy to me, to my historical belief systems, and what I notice is I can tell that this is like taking organic and raising it. So I've had that experience.

The same with anthroposophical medicine that he developed. The same with some of his architectural principles. You see some of them in this room, the way the molding goes from wider to narrower to raise the spirit upward, to have you grounded on the ground and lifting upward.

The respect for sacred geometries, that there are certain ratios that influence the human being. These are ancient thoughts, and what he was noted for was as a clairvoyant, and as a very highly developed master, they say, able to go into these other realms. Able to read the Akashic records. So this is the story about him.

And so he had a very detailed perception of what happens after you die, where you go, what happens in these different realms, which overlaps with some of the Tibetan teachings. That's a different celebration than the one we're doing tonight. Tonight is about coming in.

And so he has a picture of what we went through in order to take this body. And so my recommendation — for some people, that will be interesting. Literally, you will resonate with the teaching and you'll say, I'm open, this feels right to me, or whatever.

For some of you, I suggest, just let it be a metaphor. Maybe it's not about incarnation of the soul, if that doesn't fit for you, but rather than just saying no, just go, well, maybe this is a metaphor about living.

And for others, you can, in my opinion, totally get something of great joy and depth just letting the music move you.

Just like with the labyrinth, there's what Linda was talking about, a sacred kind of geometry that somehow relates to our inner geometry. It's what I call the inner body and the greater body lining up, having a resonance.

For me, the golden ball here, the golden ball here, and here. Yeah, so, these three centers. I get to experience into the center of the earth a golden ball, and into what we could call the galactic center, a golden ball.

So for me, when I'm doing these gestures and I say connecting to the great above and the great below, it's a lining up of the inner and the outer, the inner body and the greater body, being of one body.

So I work with that. Again, it starts experientially, and then I hear these ideas. So, we can say there is certain music, and from Steiner's perspective, Beethoven particularly was a vehicle for this harmony of the spheres coming through him. That he was a vessel for certain melodies, certain rhythms, certain harmonies that resonate in the human being, and can invite us to certain kinds of consciousness.

Others — I mean, Bach, Schumann, there were others, but Beethoven was who we thought was the highest master of all that.

Again, you don't need that system. I'm just giving you some of that background, why some of this particular — you'll recognize it. Those of you who like classical music will recognize some of the pieces.

And I guess I'm very protective in a certain way. I can feel my wanting anybody who feels like, oh God, I don't relate to these words, not to just close down. Take in what you are open to. And don't try to take in other stuff. Be open to what feels right to you.

And if you don't happen to like classical music, and you don't like the words, you can practice what that's like.

But when I was experiencing this particular celebration for, I think, the third time, about two weeks ago, at the end of the celebration I just went to Linda. I said, can we have this for the group?

I went to Aki and I said, are you available two weeks from now to come up for dinner? I'll pay you, or whatever, and you can come, you can have dinner if you want. She said she'd love to do that. So that's where this is coming from tonight.

I guess part of what is so vibrant in me, and I'm really aware of the energy behind it, is my commitment to human freedom. I don't want you to feel like something's being imposed on you. That's really important at every level for me. So that's why I'm kind of wanting you to feel free, indeed.

See, I'm excited for it. Feels like it fits.

Courage

[Russell:] Then, I'd like to say something about how, for me, tomorrow morning fits that choice. Because I had the choice of — Linda was gonna do her — she had everything scheduled here, and we could meet up in the house for a meeting. No, this is a perfect subject, because the virtue that they're working with is this virtue of courage.

And that leads very directly into what I'm wanting to encourage for us.

You know, courage comes from cor. Cor is heart. Heart, in French. The heart of the lion. The heart of standing up for a lion.

This word I introduced before, biophilia. Lover of life, loving life, and recognizing the forces that ask us to close down to life.

And by life, I don't mean not including death. Death is part of life. But I'm talking about forces of negating the free human being, of objectifying, making us into things.

What's happened very often to the feminine, the female body becoming a thing, objectified, male bodies also. But that, for me, the whole energy away from life, whether we look at it as being passionate about the environment, about taking care of the earth, that's biophilia. And recognizing there are real forces in the human being that are trying to control life, trying to dominate life.

And that domination, maybe it begins as a positive impulse to take care of life, but it begins to turn, in most of the cultures that I see, toward this domination, controlling, objectifying others, objectifying the self.

And I see it. As you know, for years now, I've been just devastated to realize that I'm part of a species that throughout the world there is so much rape. I can't believe that that's part of my inheritance, and part of what I am part of as a human being.

That somehow, in so many cultures, as you start studying the different cultures — I used to think it was isolated. And then I start seeing, whether it's my daughter's research about college campuses. Ten years ago, five years ago, I had no picture of the numbers, or the research into just kids growing up, boys and girls, or in the military, where more than fifty percent of the rapes are man on man.

But this whole sense that somehow we have a consciousness that says dominating others, oppressing others, is legitimate. And I don't want to get into the historical, biological roots of that.

I want to say, I picture a world in which maybe our children's children's children are living where it goes, can you believe that was like that on our planet? That's not a story about some other — they were doing that. That it would be so.

So I'm seeing this connection — and I'm not unique in this, I'm not saying this is profound, I'm sure many of you have seen it — between how we take care of the earth, how we take care of the feminine, how we take care of life itself, and how so much of what's happening, right next to the really positive sides of modern technology, are these dangers, where people's addiction to virtual reality is taking people away from direct connecting.

You know, I like technology. It's not anti-technology. It's recognizing dangers in our children, in us, and how there is a force in us that seeks to go numb, that is an anti-life force.

Now, yeah, if I was going to unpack that, I'd say, yeah, sometimes we need to just shut down. Yes, sometimes we need to have good ways of — I'm not getting rid of any of that. I'm saying we need to be really conscious.

For some of us, to have one glass of wine, two glasses, is not a problem. For some of us, it takes us over, and we have lost our freedom. For some of us, that's with our technologies. For some of us, that's with certain foods.

And to notice the difference. The way the Zen masters would say it, when you are drinking sake, or something is drinking here.

And so, what I'm wanting to say is, all of these — the interest in social justice, the interest in the environment — all of these are so important, and for me, they are not the fundamental issue.

For me, the fundamental issue is, are we encouraging human beings to be in direct contact with their embodied experience, or are we making virtual reality more compelling?

And I'm seeing — you've heard me say this before — I'm astounded by some of the kids I see in my practice, or at different times, who, twenty years ago, did not get bored the way they get. They're hungry for the electronic. They're addicted to certain things, and bangs and lights, and it's an addiction. It's like too much chocolate.

And it's scary for me, and I'm really wanting to stand up about that. And I see the embodied life work as a very small little place where the essence of what is being taken from human beings can be stood up for.

Now, it's really countercultural, so you have to have courage to ask people to feel their feet. I mean, it's gonna sound so stupid to most people. Or to feel their breath, or to turn the light towards what they're feeling inside, and that that's important, and not only important, it's fundamental.

And some years from now, it really could be that you get called all kinds of names, you know, if you're into the earth, back to the earth, tree hugger, you know, whatever.

It will get more compelling as the good stuff in technology grows. And people now have implants in their brain so that they can feel pretty happy all the time, or they have other kinds of devices that they can wear that can control their metabolism.

And some of these will say, well, that's a good thing, because that person would be dying without that, they'd be in pain without that. Oh, we just went from somebody being in pain to somebody getting a little stimulation that gives them a little high. How high do you need?

And there are going to be all these moral questions — not even moral for me right now, freedom questions. Where do we — and there was no firm line. But somehow, there needs to be people who can sit in stillness, because that's leaving. The idea of being not stimulated.

You know, my daughter's Waldorf educated, did teen retreats and meditation, loves meditation more and more, theoretically, now. And I notice that when she's with us, she really loves coming to the celebrations. But on her own, if there's quiet, she will check a device.

And she's starting to see it, and starting to see it as an addiction. And I'm guessing for her it will be temporary, because she has enough history in there that she will find the right amount, because she recognizes that, and some of her friends do. But they're rare ones in their social groups, that they sometimes say, you know, let's just not have anything on. That's a radical statement in certain social groups.

So I am so rarely alarmist about anything that the fact that this has me so concerned, for me, says there's something to be concerned about. Something of the anti-alarmist.

How courage was chosen

[Participant:] How did you choose courage?

[Russell:] Well, it was less my choosing courage than one of the things coming up as I came back from Rwanda. And I was so influenced by some of the people I met there. The courage of these people — that was one of the qualities that stood out.

And so we were talking about that, and then there were other things, of course, compassion and freedom, these other things that are central virtues for me. But then Linda, as she was organizing

her once-a-month Sunday meetings that we will go to tomorrow, called Rosa Mira. There'll be some kids here and adults here.

In the past, what she has done was, once each month, she would take one of the world's religions. Everything from different Native American tribes to Islam, to Judaism, to Christianity, to Rosicrucian. And each month the kids would learn something about that spiritual choice, and they'd learn a song.

The kids and the adults, we'd do a dance, and then we'd have some readings for the adults, and some things that were for the kids. It's short. It would be 10 to 11:30. It's an hour and a half, and it's lovely.

And as she was getting towards the end of this year, she was thinking, instead of — she's done those, and she has maybe four or five kids come, they've heard about all that. Let's go into this year doing a different virtue each month.

And in the Steiner world, the virtue for this month was courage, or the first virtue of the year, actually, was courage. And so I said, that's perfect.

This is a lot. Let's close our eyes and settle.

See which parts of this relate. I don't so much want to have a philosophical discussion about these issues. I just want to see where they resonate or don't, and maybe you have a very different perception of all this.

Inner voices

[Russell:] The next thing I want to emphasize, which I mentioned yesterday, and I guess is obvious, but I think it's important to say obvious things.

This kind of domination towards others, towards the world, that lives in every one of us, is the same as some of our inner voices towards our own inner life. The way there's this dynamic between oppressive voices and the places inside that feel judged, put down, oppressed.

And we have this kind of dynamic working in us, and a big part of liberation, in my opinion, is to heal that dichotomy, yet find other ways of motivating our behavior, that the alternative isn't just passivity.

If I stop being aggressive like that, if I stop being self-violent, it's not just, okay, well, that's just the way it is. There's still ways through compassionate listening, through deep inner connection, through taking responsibility for our attention, and noticing when our voice, whether it's an inner voice or a voice coming out, is full of blame and judgment.

And then not to judge that, but to see, oh, something is in pain, something is suffering. Hurt voices, hurt voices, hurting voices. You know, when we hear our own contraction, we can look for where is the suffering.

And when we receive it from somebody else, if we are present enough, don't get activated in our reactivity, we can listen for the pain that's there, the need that's there.

That's such an act of kindness for you. When we can give that to another, and if we can't, we can give that to the fact we can't — we're suffering.

So, a last thing that's applicable for our inner work, and also for those teaching the work. The first requirement, I think, for this kind of shift, is how do I create safety?

Safety, if I'm leading a class, how is it safe enough? And if I'm working with myself, how can my inner life feel safe from my own self-violence, when almost everybody in this room has used some kind of self-aggression to try to control ourselves? Because we learned it. We internalized it.

So our inner life rightfully is nervous when we start. Even if we start coming in with a sweet voice, it doesn't trust us. Rightfully. Oh, don't worry, I'm not.

So we need to demonstrate reliability. And that's what these listening practices are so much about. If we start getting caught in an old pattern, that we call ourselves on it gently. Oh, so our inner life begins to trust that even if we start blowing it, it's not gonna get a rant.

[Participant:] Can I say something? I had an experience in our recent focusing where there was this little girl who was angry, really angry, and the part of myself that laughs at myself. When, you know, like if I were to see a kid having a tantrum, the tendency would be, not in violence, but just in the humor of life, or whatever.

And I started laughing, and that little girl got even madder, and was like, I'm sure this is why I didn't want to even be here. You're laughing at —

[Russell:] That's a great insight. Yeah. Yeah. Sure.

And I'll put a footnote on it and say, my inner life loves humor. My inner life loves a certain kind of laughter, even at it. But it likes when I don't take it too serious. But if I laugh with a kind of derision, that would be different. So we have to listen to how.

[Participant:] So can I tell her that I'm not laughing with derision? Or does she laugh?

[Russell:] Who knows? I mean, you're the only one in the whole universe who's going to be able to grow this relationship and know the answer to a question like that.

No one in the whole universe is going to know that, except for a response that goes on inside. Which is kinda cool. Okay.

So, that's what I wanted to say this morning.

Tomorrow

[Russell:] Anything — I have a few different minds going on here in terms of where I want to go. A part of me would like to invite the last group of threes to complete that practice this morning, so that everyone will have gone, and we can work with anything that came up later today.

Wondering if that would feel okay for you. Gonna switch our agendas a little bit. Does that work for you?

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Labyrinth tomorrow morning. Okay, so let me describe tomorrow morning. What happens is we sit at 6:30, and I invite everybody to see if you can get here. Okay, 6:30.

And then bring your coats, because if it's like this morning, it was cold. I mean, it's hard to believe now, but it was really cold at 7. So have your coats, a hat, whatever you need, so we can walk the labyrinth after one sitting. Okay?

And then we'll finish the labyrinth. If it's not uncomfortable, I want to all stand around the labyrinth again and do a few gestures together. And then it'll be time for breakfast.

And there'll be time for you to kind of get your bags together. You need to change the sheets in your room. There are fresh sheets in your room, and then we'll gather all the sheets and laundry.

And we will then be here by 10 o'clock, 10 to 11:30. Then we're gonna have one more meeting, just us, before lunch. So lunch will be later, 12:30, quarter to one, like that. And that meeting's important for me also.

So that's what the schedule looks like. That's from 10 to 11:30. 11:30 to 12:30, quarter to one, like that. Yeah, clear?

Okay, so I think let's do our last round this morning. And we will still have time to do a movement lesson. Then that leaves me a good period of afternoon for what I'd like to complete the day with.

So, who are the four people who haven't gotten to bring a subject? Yeah, good? Yeah, you're one of them. And keep your hands up. And so, if you have not been with any of these people, go to one of the persons you were not with.

Yeah, somebody. Okay, was anybody not with this person? There must be some people who were not with this person. Oh, yeah, okay, you've got three. Yeah, there we go. There we go, okay.

Was anybody in this group not with this one? Okay, well, as long as — okay. Yeah, okay, so that works. Perfect. Yeah, perfect, perfect, perfect.

Okay, so you all know how to do this. You all know the process. What I'd like is that it'll be slightly shorter than yesterday, okay, so you'll be finished in an hour and a half.

Okay, so the first person practicing, maybe do twenty-five minutes instead of thirty, and your last round will be fifteen instead of twenty. Okay? And that'll do it. So we come back.