Discussion

Angela 2 — Week 7, Day 5, Session 3 — 68 minutes

Summary: Russell contrasts oppressive help with dialogue in which every voice is respected, in aid work and in the inner life. The group reflects on threes, group mind, and Gene's picture of the body in a vast system. He names existential disappointment, shows how to tell a daily challenge from a learning context, and sketches the Embodied Life School.

Are all voices validated

[Russell:] Yeah. So for me — I did mention it, but I'll say it again, because it's easy to miss, maybe even easy to discount how important it is — the key difference for me between an oppressive relationship, whether internally or externally, is: are all voices validated?

And is there dialogue? And true dialogue means that each voice is respected.

And so true dialogue in this sense doesn't happen when — I'll give you an example.

That was moving to me when I understood this more in a social context. So many very positive intentions of donors in third world countries are actually perpetuating an oppressive culture. Because it's, I know what you need, and because of my good heart — and it is true, it's not like they're faking it — because of my generosity, I will take care of you, kind of like to a child.

But very rarely do those NGOs, or those impulses, say, let's sit down and talk, and tell me what you perceive in your village, and what you're needing, and what your experience is like. Because I'm interested in being a part of a solution, but I know the solution needs to come from you.

And so there are so many examples of things.

When I was in Nepal in '83, there was the Swiss group, very nice people, had built these toilets, because the sanitation was so terrible up near Annapurna, and the people wouldn't use them.

So they had this whole story about these primitive people who like to shit in the fields, until somebody finally was in close connection with — oh. One of their most important times of the day that they enjoy socializing is they go poop together, and they squat together, and they talk. To be in stalls cut off one of the main social interactions and enjoyable times. But no one looked at it. It was just a sanitary issue, and of course they'd rather be separate. But that's a show of cultural chauvinism. And there's so much of that in the well-intentioned community.

So that's —

[Participant 1:] No, that's really — isn't it interesting? Because the question is, you want all the voices to be heard, but there are people, they have no idea that they're missing a voice. So it's like all these voices that our culture — not deliberately closing out those voices, but our culture makes us deaf to the voices. And how — that's a really tough —

[Russell:] Really tough. It's not easy.

I don't want to — I mean, if you get interested in that, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, he gives really good examples, because he worked with it for years with the people.

[Participant 2:] In New York, there's an issue with the Orthodox Jewish community, with the bris.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 2:] I know, however you say it — mohels, the guys who do the bris — they use a baby's —

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 2:] And they're giving these babies herpes. This is this fine honoring —

[Russell:] Right, right.

[Participant 2:] That they are — that's part of their culture. And the health department wants them to stop doing this with their mouths, because babies have died. But they won't.

[Russell:] Right. Yep.

They're a great example, and there are many. In each culture there seem to be examples.

But you're talking about imposing our belief system, or cultural — the things that we think are important, or this is the way we do it and we know best.

[Participant 2:] Right.

[Russell:] And we don't want to discount some of the ways we might be beneficial, because they might not have the knowledge. But we can't assume that our knowledge is the only knowledge.

So, for another great example. The idea of boiling water for sanitation, in this village in Africa. And there was stuff that was getting into their intestines that they didn't know about. But for them, there was a holiness to the water from the river, that to boil it was not okay.

But in conversation, hearing about — respecting the holiness of the water, not telling them that it's primitive, but respect. How we can honor the water. And there are, within this holy water, there are things. And they could bring a microscope, and some of them — the village elder could actually see it. Many couldn't see in the microscope.

And so they got into conversation about — one solution was to get filters, but then they realized filters wouldn't work, because they would have to be resupplied, and chances are they'd run out of them.

So, in meetings with the chief and the shaman and the aid worker, who was really engaging respectfully with their world, and honoring these beings in the world — and they felt that respect — the shaman said, if we boil the water, and he had a certain thing, for less than thirty seconds, something, and I bless it, the spirits will be fine.

But it took significant dialogue, investment of time, and mutual respect.

It's different than the way we think about things so often.

Where it begins

[Russell:] And so, even in our inner world, there can be, I know what's best. But those voices that have been pushed around for a while often really need not just, okay, I'll listen to you — because they've given up their voice. They don't have their voice. They need to be really encouraged to help find their voice.

And it's not — it's much faster just to tell you what to do than to engage in that kind of deep listening.

But that — and so where it begins. And one of the things I'm very grateful for, with Bernie Glassman and the Zen Peacemakers, is that the first principle is not knowing. And the second is bearing witness.

They actually — Bernie's wife wants to use the term presencing. She thinks that's better, but Bernie doesn't want to change it at this point. But it's the same thing.

It's how do we be present in a way that is not just going for solution, is not thinking it knows best, but is really opening to what is, and to all sides of it.

And I have found just so many examples, and it still happens, where I think — and something inside thinks it knows best — and something, some position that a voice inside, or Linda has, or somebody has, Lily, somebody in my world has, I can't get any wisdom in it at first.

And after a while, I would say almost never, at the end of real listening, do I end up with, there was no value in that position.

There's something in it that rounds out my understanding. Even if the majority of my understanding, as I'm still suggesting we stay with this, or that this has more weight for me, there is something in it that informs. And it takes a deep listening. It takes an attitude of respect.

The oppressive model, which again is — we can think of negative masculine. There's positive masculine. We're talking about negative masculine, which tends to be thought-dominated, head-dominated, wants to break things into categories.

And in relationship, that aspect is often very facile with words, and can be very clever, and cutting with words. It's not always the man. Usually it's not — it's a male aspect. And it's when cleverness is used to hurt and dominate.

And we do it in conversation. We do it with our own voices. Cynicism works that way.

And I just think it's really helpful if we start recognizing the culturally acceptable forms of violence that we are living in and with, and see if we're perpetuating that, and if that's something we want to do.

And it takes courage not to join in. Takes courage not to do tit for tat and jump in there and win the argument, or something. Or to have your heart when you're the only one who's feeling vulnerable, or exposing their vulnerability.

It takes a lot of courage. Right. We need a good ground. We need a good center. We're going to open our heart.

[Participant 3:] Is that it there?

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant 3:] You got big in it, yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah. It's something that I'm really studying a lot. I'm really learning about right now.

The threes

[Russell:] Yeah, so let's take a few moments. Maybe drop in and close your eyes and reflect back.

You can start with your experience in Greece. And I'm particularly interested in discoveries about process. What was helpful for you. What you learned in your own process, or by witnessing someone else's, that gave you an insight into something you want to do, or not to do.

There can be questions about other kinds of ways of working with the moment, or some guidance around something specific. I do that.

So I want to start with this subject, and then we will allow time. I know there are some other questions about some other things that have come up, but I'd like to start with connecting with those.

I know for a lot of you, the threes are really helpful.

Take a little time to open that up into the group mind.

We'll take another few moments. We're gonna open this window.

Okay, what might like to come?

[Participant 4:] Yeah. Okay. Like you said, the people that I was with really enjoyed the three.

It was a kind of a loose sort of structure within it, where two people were both being listeners, and the other to share.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 4:] And that was really helpful.

And one group, we agreed that the writing — people were glad it wasn't there, because that can be really distracting for the person who's writing, and you catch up, and there's one person listening, and one person that's not. Then there's an imbalance of some sort.

[Russell:] Yeah.

My experience thus far is that most people, three quarters or so, prefer not writing, and three quarters really like that it was written.

Sometimes that three quarters of people, you give them a choice — you know, it's better when, it's nice when I don't write, I can be more connected — but when they have it, and can go over it in that precision. The same people who don't like writing like that it was written.

So it's an interesting edge.

I think it can be valuable to have, especially kind of noticing how transitions occurred. But it's also — I agree, it can be — there's something so wonderful about the equality and flow that can be there when there isn't that activity.

[Participant 5:] Something else. Just to restate what you said about threesomes. I think we all — all my threesomes felt the —

[Russell:] Yeah. Yeah, that one.

Group mind

[Participant 6:] I had an experience of the group mind in a way that was interesting, with the first two groups.

I don't know. There was this moment where — and even the content was part of the experience — that it was in my first group. That set up. And I wasn't the first person, but when we were reflecting — I'm sorry, my focus, in turn, came — I had the experience of my two listeners kind of out there, but also then I would see them in here. And it was very much like turning a light around. And that was group mind.

[Russell:] Right. Nice, nice, nice. That's a beautiful picture, yeah.

[Participant 6:] And then it happened to me. My second group, the image of the listeners came in very clearly. And I was wondering why that they were, because I watched them focus their witness, so I could see their deep going-in-ness and all of that, and that came in, and it was like, oh, that's group mind too.

It was really nice to feel these different ways that my body, or my image — whatever — my process was reminding me of them.

And in the second, the middle group, I was the first questioner, or the first focuser, and I don't know, there felt like a profound healing ritual all around. Not just for me, but for the whole group, in my experience. Which was really something else. It was like a way beyond the exercise, or even a focusing training. It had much more like —

[Russell:] It's sort of an enlightened conversation.

[Participant 6:] Yeah. It's really — yeah, yeah, yeah. Thank you.

And the third group was much more spacious, because we didn't have identified roles, kind of. So we were both listeners. My felt experience was way more spacious. And when we had the structure, it provided a kind of pointing.

[Russell:] Right, right, right.

So would you say this was wider, and the other was deeper? Would that be the dimension?

[Participant 6:] That could be true. It was definitely a feeling of — horizon-y sort of thing.

[Russell:] Yeah. That could be really true. Like a deeper thing.

[Participant 6:] Yeah. It was almost like a little more ordinary, this spacious one. Like, oh yeah, this group mind too. But the other ones were really pointing.

[Russell:] Right. Yeah, nice. Thank you. That's nice distinctions.

My picture — and various people over the years have confirmed this, over the last couple of years that I've been doing this — is it's like there's more energy available for whatever's being gone into.

And there are ways in which, sometimes very obviously, sometimes not, the way in which somebody else is touched by what you're working with, that in a non-linear way sometimes circles back, and a door opens.

So I had people describe it as shamanic in that sense. These kind of opening places.

Any wanting of guidance, or about specific issues? You had something you wanted to say?

[Participant:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Yeah. Great, great.

A gigantic system

[Russell:] This picture — which is not just metaphorical, or nice sounding, to me — that we are part of a greater body. And these moments where the owl appears, these kind of things that they speak about in shamanic journeys, I experience quite often in this kind of safety, and this kind of deep listening.

And then things start happening, where a dream comes, an offhand comment by somebody. It's like there's an activation of an investigation, and we start having an experience that — well, Gene's famous phrase.

Your physically felt body is in fact part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people — in fact, the whole universe.

This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the body as it is felt from the inside.

How cool is that, right? And I'm going to give it to you again. Okay? Because this is —

So I say to Gene, you know, Gene, that's a deeply spiritual statement of interconnectivity.

He goes, it's whatever the fuck it is.

And he knows it. And I so appreciate that he doesn't.

And you don't — I printed one of these out for everybody. Okay, so you don't have to write them in. But I'm gonna give it. I don't want you reading it at the same time. So I'm gonna read it to you, and then I'll give it.

But just feel where this lands for you.

Your physically felt body is, in fact, part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people. In fact, the whole universe.

This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the body as it is felt from the inside.

That part was where, in my experience, some ways doesn't make sense logically. But when I was saying yesterday — we'll get back to this point, it's an important one — that even in our moments of deficiency, of lack, of need, of want, of longing, from the point of view of beingness, the experience of being deeper, when all these centers are lined up, there's also the knowing of this other time of deep satisfaction and fulfillment.

That other time might be in the future. It might be in the past. It's another time. But from the point of view of being, it's time. But it's a knowing, and a sensing, from the inside.

And if we can acknowledge the voices of sorrow and grief, and I don't have it now, and maybe never have it again, all the fears of the future — if we can acknowledge those voices, but be honest and spacious enough to realize that those are voices within a vast field. That they are not the I. They are voices, sometimes very big voices, in a vast, vast field.

And for me, the meditation practice is about affirming that field over and over, so we get confidence that even if you're real busy, even if you're struggling, that this doesn't go away. This vast system that we're a part of.

[Participant 7:] Lovely. Very lovely.

[Russell:] Yes. Yes.

And there's something — maybe you can appreciate that progress. Did we get enough of those?

Okay. We can appreciate the progression from how we need to be well-grounded, we need to be centered, we need to be here enough, in order for it to be safe, and not a pathological disassociation, to open to that larger system. That there needs to be enough here-ness for us to — otherwise stuff like this becomes just like, good term, spiritual bypassing. Or process skipping, in Gene's language.

But spiritual bypassing, where you use the, oh, I'm just part of everything and it's all love, and you use that in order not to feel the painful place.

But if we're grounded enough, and present, we can open to allow the paradox. That in this moment of longing for connection — some part — a tissue? Yeah, they're up there — of longing for connection, or whatever the longing is, that we can honor that, value that, give space for them, and feel the place that, even in that moment, has deep connection.

And it's paradoxical.

[Silence 44 seconds]

Existential disappointment

[Russell:] Of course, this is difficult. You can't just talk about this stuff at the beginning of working with people. It's too — it's not congruent with experience.

There needs to be enough experience within people of moments of shifting, deep listening, changes in one's body, that one's solidity of identification with one's disabilities —

And one's, what I've come to call — was it a phone call with you?

[Participant:] No.

[Russell:] Were you on the phone, the last phone call? Oh. So a term came out of some presencing on my part that was really right, and I've been using it since. I haven't used it this week, for some reason, but a lot of people have been connecting with it.

So you see if it connects for you. It's recognizing the existential disappointment. Existential disappointment, that one can be in touch with.

The sense, for me, when that phrase came, it comes from any sense of, or voices within, that — thought I'd be done with that mind state by now. More than that there's something that kind of knows that it causes suffering, and yet it still has magnetism.

And there's this, what I've been calling existential disbelief. I think I used that in the barn, didn't I? Yeah, a lot of people were talking to me about that.

[Participant:] Right.

[Russell:] And it comes for me in two ways.

It comes, people's disappointment towards the world. Is that all there is? Is that the way people want? Is that as good as it gets?

Is that — I thought if I did all the right things, that it would be more like something. And there's this kind of like, huh?

And sometimes that's out towards our relationships, or towards life, or towards our culture, or towards our world, or towards any groups. And sometimes it's towards oneself.

The number of people that I meet who feel like, I missed the boat.

You know, kind of like in the old line of Tennessee Williams, I could have been a contender. I could have been a contender. Somehow — right, On the Waterfront. Oh, it's On the Waterfront. Somehow I missed the boat.

Is, you know, oh, I'm too old to start. Oh, I would — God, you started meditating when you were so young. I'm fifty-five. What? I'm starting to meditate. Something in me wanted to do it back then, but I just ignored. I hear that. Or somebody, you know. I want a do-over.

That sense. And I just think it's so important that we cultivate a generosity — that we don't — now, how do I want to say it? That we be conscious if we create shame out of all that. And that we approach that.

First of all, I say it out loud because it affirms — it seems to be affirming many people that they're not alone in that, when that feeling comes up. That, oh, this is so common it even has a name.

I named it. I'm sure that there are other popular names for the same. Existential disappointment. Some people find it.

And so it's really, really something to be with that place. Because what I notice is, when I approach that place well — and well, for me, means with clarity and warmth, is what well means. Is that I'm not just warm, which means I'm kind of like a grandmother wrapping it in a blanket, and I'm not just clear, which can get a little cool, but I'm clear and warm.

That's what I find most effective.

When I'm with a moment like that, I realize, oh, there's energy here that can be one of the new sources of mobilization. That I don't have to go down the route of either shame, or down the route of self-violence. Yeah, I really blew it. What's wrong? Oh, you. And then, you know, our old vocabulary. You're too this. Oh, you're shitty this way, or you're that. We probably all have a way that we castigate ourselves in those moments.

But to be able to be present with that place, that painful place, like you're with a kid who just found out there's no Santa Claus. And how to bring an energy to that moment that allows a new Santa Claus to appear, that fits, or a new something that gets mobilized. That, oh, we get to be generous with each other.

And all of a sudden, the loss of Santa Claus becomes the mobilization for love of some sort. Do you get what I mean?

That there's a way of being with it, because energy gets liberated, in my experience, when the voices are heard, when the places are met.

Let's just take a moment to settle, because there's a lot of this work. Till the next year of work.

[Participant 8:] Something — so what we do is existential re-enchantment.

[Russell:] Nice. Existential re-enchantment.

It works in English beautifully.

It's really important. You know, I love that. Thank you so much. I will credit you when I steal it.

Yeah. You know, one of the things that I had mentioned in my talk — and Ben, I might have mentioned it the other day too — that it breaks my heart to see how many kids I'm meeting who the sense of wonder is already diminished.

And that's so much more than my experience with kids fifteen years ago. To me it was a sense of wonder, wonder and awe, which is that re-enchantment, that sense of playing forever and there's no time.

Yeah. Somehow got sucked out. And that, just the beautiful re-enchantment.

The challenging moment

[Russell:] Okay. So one thing that Bruno was asking about — well, why don't you ask it, so I can, about the challenging.

[Participant 9:] Yes. So, why do we talk about the gratitude practice, the daily gratitude practice? You mentioned the daily challenge practice.

[Russell:] Right.

[Participant 9:] You told us that we would talk about how to tell about the challenges in a positive way. A less self-destructive way.

[Russell:] Yeah, yeah, yeah. He would ask that. Yeah, I think that's good.

So, the first thing that's really helpful, and I think everyone in this room can recognize it, although you can't impose this on a partner anyway, but you can live from it.

It's how helpful it is when the context of your life —

[Participant:] Let me help you. Warming me up. Just swimming in the ocean. Are you okay with that?

[Russell:] Yeah. It's the glare, not the actual sun.

So, my experience is, everything gets so much easier when the context of one's life is something like — whatever language works, whatever feels authentic — but something like, I'm here for learning.

I'm here for learning. Or some people, it's the exact same thing to say, I'm here on a spiritual path, or I'm on a path of love, a path of unfolding. Whatever is the authentic expression that your life has a larger context.

Therefore, whatever happens in my life fits into my path. Whatever happens in my life is there for my learning.

So when that's true, it's so much easier to go back to a challenging moment.

Now, the way we would do this, the way I do this, the way Linda and I do this, is we'll often do the gratitude moments in present tense language. That deepens them, enhances them. We both get to experience it. But if it doesn't feel right to do it, it's not imposed.

And the challenging moment, we'll usually do in more ordinary language, saying, I was in town, and I had this conversation with my accountant, and there was some — so we would tell it like that.

So the beginning is describing what the challenging situation was. And again, if the ground of it is already not who was right and who was wrong, but what's in this for my learning? So that immediately creates a context that allows it to be not steeped in judgments.

Like I said before, this is hard, because it's giving up blame as a fundamental defense. It's giving up.

So you might have to say, okay, I'm gonna blame for a while. I know I'm blaming. And I know it's not fundamentally helpful, but I need to do it for a while. So to be that honest with it, with yourself and with another. I'm just — I just want to be judgmental right now. And so it almost becomes humorous. It does often become humorous. But sometimes you need that permission.

[Participant 10:] Yeah, I think that's helpful.

[Russell:] One of the great strategies that I find, especially if this is your fundamental attitude, is I'll ask myself — I just want to take a minute to see, knowing what I know now, how I would have liked to have been in that moment.

And then I will pause and listen to what comes. Or I might say, if I'm in a moment like that again, what would be the way that would feel most satisfying to be in a moment like that?

And then I call on the moment. I'm sitting there. Now I will go into presence. I'm sitting there, and I'm waiting for forty-five minutes, and then they say that you need to come back in two hours, and I don't know what. And so then I work with it.

What are my choices? Some of them are behavioral. Asking the secretary a few times, how's the timing, like that. Some of it is just internal.

Now, if you have a meditation practice, you can know that moments are never intrinsically bad. So waiting is not a terrible thing. It doesn't require anger.

Now, if the place in me is feeling not valued, not respected, and that place needs some care — the place that needs, wants, longs to feel respected — and if in that situation I'm feeling overlooked, discounted, whatever. Okay, how can I be in this moment?

Because I know what's creating the feeling of disrespect is not waiting for forty-five minutes and being told to come back in two hours. What's creating the disrespect is my thought. People shouldn't treat people this way. If they respected me, they wouldn't treat me — those are the thoughts that I'm creating that are creating my feeling.

I know if I was sitting there and having an enlightenment experience, I'd be fine. Let's make it three hours.

So, now this does not — the conclusion of this is not that I don't also get to say, I really — it's really important to me to have my time valued. And when I was sitting here for this long, I felt a kind of disrespectfulness, or my need for respect was not being met. And I need you to know that if we have an appointment, I really want it to be honored, or I want to be told sooner that it's not going to be honored.

So that is not in conflict with the fact that I don't have to go into, you are being disrespectful of me. I don't find that either effective, helpful — it's an old way of blowing off steam. But it's not, for me currently, a necessary or most helpful way of being authentic in that situation.

So I don't have to give up my inner life. I can ask for what I want, and find the place that doesn't need them to validate my inner respect. And all of that can — let's get it. And when it can't, I want to study that.

I want to study when I've given up my freedom, and let other people determine how I feel.

So I don't want to discount any of the reactions, voices, whatever. But I don't want to ever assume that this is, of course I feel this way. This is what anybody would — I don't want to limit myself to what is familiar.

So, ask my body how it would like to be in a situation that was challenging.

Sometimes I find it helpful, without going into a whole focusing process, just to sit. What made that so hard? To really feel into what made it so hard, and not get lost in, well, they were like this, and they — as soon as I start talking about them, I know that I'm not paying attention to what's gonna be most liberating.

Is, what was I doing that was making these moments hard?

And again, that does not preclude me from asking for behavioral changes from the outside world. It's not an either-or. But in terms of my feeling state, I'm responsible for that. And I think that that is — I'm very grateful to see that so clearly.

Sometimes I find it helpful to go — I'll play with the moment. What made it so hard is a good one. How could it have been worse?

Because my inner life likes to see the movement that's possible. And it somehow opens the situation. Because if I'm getting stuck, I'm seeing it just like this. So if I can even allow it to be worse, there's some movement in it.

It's not just — and sometimes it needs to go in that direction before it could say, well, how could it have been better? It doesn't want to look at it better yet. But it brings movement in.

[Participant 11:] So you're going where it moves first.

[Russell:] Let me see what else comes.

One of the things that Linda and I have found over the years is that it's not uncommon that the challenging moment and the moment that we're grateful for are hanging out in the same territory. They're either the same or very close to each other. But that's kind of evolved over time, I notice.

[Participant 12:] Somehow seeing it liberates it. Makes it to something that could be great.

[Russell:] Yes. Great. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And here, with all of this, we see how important it is to be able to develop that witnessing consciousness, that presencing, that turning the light around toward.

And if you've been working with people for a while, you know that that is not a common capacity, especially when people are stuck.

And to have practices where that is growing over some years, so that it becomes a reference, it becomes an availability for the more difficult.

I think in movement lessons, helping people to shift where they're attending, where they're perceiving from, seeing themselves from the outside in, movements of attention like that, are really helpful for helping them move toward being able to see that they're stuck in a state, and that that's a voice, and that's not them. And because they've already experienced moving attention, moving where they're perceiving from.

[Participant:] Sure.

Feelings and needs

[Participant 13:] These card things.

I just wanted to share this other tool that has been very helpful for me, in terms of a lot of what you're talking about. In terms of seeing the other end of this — the deprivation side, or the positivity side of things.

And it's the lists that we've gotten from Russell about feelings and needs, but they're in these card forms.

And I don't really want to take everybody's time, but it's pretty amazing to sit with a deck of feeling cards, having gone through, or being in, a challenging situation, and just go through the ones that feel resonant, and separating them out and laying them down on the ground. And not analyzing it. Just going through. And then after you get a collection of them, you sort of look at them. And it's very much like just getting it outside of your body and out on the table.

And then go through the needs cards and do the same thing. And these are beautiful. They're like inclusion, to have your intentions seen, intimacy, acknowledgement. It's really like those needs that are the things you really want to stand up for in life.

And putting those down on the table too, and seeing how they relate to each other. It's a really wonderful thing to do with yourself.

It's wonderful when you have a situation with somebody else, because you can put down your cards and they can have a look. You don't have to talk about it right away. And then you can look at theirs, and you can get a whole sense of what's going on.

And then online you can see — I can give you the reference for them if you want. I was telling Karen, yes, it was an NVC teacher. That's what they are now.

[Russell:] Yeah.

I was telling Karen that in the first Embodied Life groups, I used these cards. And I don't know why I stopped, because they were quite helpful, so I might bring them out again.

Which does point towards — I don't know when it's gonna happen, but my intention of a next graduate meeting is gonna focus on communication.

I feel like I haven't offered as much. We've done a lot around deep listening, but about taking the listening and bringing it forward, I've hinted at it, and I think we can do a lot more with that. So I want to make that a subject, and I'm not sure when to do that. Something I wanna do.

Go ahead.

So, what I'm gonna recommend, knowing you a little bit, knowing Tony a little bit, I'm gonna recommend that you still emphasize the gratitude, and that you allow just a little time in there for acknowledging something that is challenging. Not so much going into it, but just bringing it forward.

It'll be, I'm thinking, with the experience that you've already had, it'll actually be a nice connector to hear, when you were away at work, and he might say, when you were away at work, and that I didn't like the woman who was helping me. I didn't like the way she cooked my lunch, or something. It could be something. And just, it'll be a moment of meeting.

So I would recommend either starting with a gratitude, adding a challenge, ending with a gratitude. See if that works. If that's too long, see if that works. I think that would be the best way. So you can surround the challenge in gratitude.

So try that. Let's get started.

What's next

[Russell:] Any other questions, wants?

[Participant 14:] Yes. The short share, which is, I've been sitting today with delight in how much I — part of me was disappointed that I didn't get to try your last rigorous sit.

[Russell:] That's great. That's great. That's great.

You know me. I'm just out to disappoint you.

Just so I know that there's some interest in this. In case — I'm thinking maybe at lunch tomorrow we can talk a little bit about what's happening in the Embodied Life School, and if you have questions about that.

What I'll say now is, we're working on a questionnaire that's going out to the community, hopefully fairly soon. Get some feedback about some of the wants, some of the pictures.

I know, just so that you — one of the things I'm definitely doing is in June, there's a weekend at Santa Sabina, a public weekend from Thursday to Sunday, and I'm adding some days to that for graduates.

So my picture is five to ten graduates will be at the course, along with fifteen or twenty general public people. I'll teach a public weekend, and then we'll use that teaching as a model for people teaching the work.

And we'll kind of use that as a base. We can deconstruct. Why — you can ask questions. Why I taught that lesson before that. How that resource process was presented. What you thought you would do in that situation, or why that would be difficult. That we can use it as material.

Because doing the public weekend is not a waste of time for you either, in terms of your inner practice. It's not like, oh, I mastered that already. And then it can become good material.

So I'll be putting that out. And depending on a number of different things, we'll either continue those few days down at Santa Sabina, or we'll shift up to here for those days at the end. So I'll let you know.

I like that model in general. We'll see if it works.

I had the idea — and again, I'll get feedback from the community. There's another Santa Sabina weekend at the beginning of December. It may be too late in the year for people, but I was thinking, oh, I could follow that with a graduate retreat on communication. And people could either come to the weekend or not. That one wouldn't be a deconstructing of the teaching. Early December.

[Participant 15:] How do you think you will make public this deconstruction?

[Russell:] Well, that won't be there.

I'll make recordings, and — okay, this is further than I want to go with this, but I'll just say this much.

I'm looking at perhaps creating some tracks of some people who want to be on a teaching track, and see what kind of curriculum I can develop for a teaching track.

And then other people who want to stay connected to the work, or connected to me through the practices, but are not really looking to teach the work — they have that track.

And then of course there'll be people who won't be on either track, who just either feel complete, or just want to come occasionally to a course, but don't want a kind of organized study around that. And that's great too.

But I'm getting more requests for something more organized, and I don't quite know how to do it yet. So part of the function of the questionnaire is to get more feedback from the community, so there's more voices speaking into what would be the most valuable uses of my time, and how to support people in — how to support peer group learning that doesn't include me, and how to interface in ways that are helpful.

[Participant 15:] That sounds like a good plan.

[Russell:] Yeah. Good.

Okay, what I would like to do next is a brief pause. I'd like to do a chair lesson. And since we don't get to sit tonight, after the chair lesson and before dinner, I'd like to do a meditation. Okay?

So, for the chair lesson, it'll be mostly sitting in a chair, but you will need a mat, because there'll be some lying down in between. So let's say a ten-minute pause. We'll do the lesson, then we'll have time for about a twenty-five-minute sit.