

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 16 August 2006

SPECIAL ISSUE: **DOUBT & FAITH**

*You want me to stop
Speaking in riddles
But the final detox
Is to be totally at home
With paradox*

*When what is happening
Is not what is happening
And the ground is nothing
But quicksand and burial site
There comes a crack in the night
Just big enough to squeeze through
But only if you take nothing with you
Solo travel it may seem
But that's just in dreams*

THE ANATOMY OF DOUBT

Doubt is an inner questioning infused with uncertainty and, more often than not, enough agitation to make it a relatively unpleasant state. In an everyday sense, doubt is what happens mentally when we find ourselves stranded in ambiguity's carrels, trying to think our way out, stuck in cognitive traffic jams that catch us in their treads and flatten us as much as they fragment us. Trying to make a meal out of the grey fare laid out by the fractured realism of such doubt simply enervates and depresses us.

Typical doubt is not much more than skepticism that has lost its clarity and confidence, bound up in worrisome shades of uncertainty. Anxiety may be lurking nearby, ready to be recruited, bringing more of an edge to doubt. Although doubt is not dread, it can become dread if sufficiently fed.

Doubt can manifest as moral impotence, existential fence-sitting, fear of making a decision, indulgence in ambiguity, cognitive obsessing, avoidance of taking a stand, and so on; and it can also, albeit far less often, manifest as a necessary questioning, a courageous inquiry that can both tolerate and investigate uncertainty. Doubt is no more "bad" than "certainty" is good.

There's everyday, mostly neurotic doubt, a self-contracted questioning injected with constricted, unpleasantly turbulent feeling, moving with myopic desperation through the presenting layers of uncertainty; and there's another doubt, a questioning that carries us beyond facile certainties and automated beliefs deep into the inherent insecurity and uncertainty of Life, inviting us to adopt a nonproblematic orientation toward it.

But before getting into the latter sort of doubt — which it takes real faith to have — let's get more into everyday doubt: It's important to be able to work well with such doubt before going for the deeper, more awakened kind of doubt. And working well with it means knowing it well, even becoming intimate with it, especially in its darker or more contracted dimensions.

Everyday doubt is a collapse of heart that has gone to mind, an unhappy, unilluminated inquiry that's interested not in discovery or revelation, but only in persisting in repetitively touring its culs-de-sac. It puts a lot of energy into going nowhere, spinning its wheels until it's exhausted, leaving us asleep at the wheel.

Such doubt is the contracted and divided mind doing time in uncertainty's mental mazes, providing apparent justification for worry.

Whereas skepticism is a healthy, incisive, often robust questioning, everyday doubt is an unhealthy, indecisive, often anemic questioning, a dead-end inquiry, a bottled-up questioning terrified of being uncorked.

When the energy of such doubt is allowed to mushroom in our headquarters, it invades and stains whatever content is handy, immediately framing it in a darkly questionable light.

While immersed in doubt, we often inject fearfulness or negative anticipation into various intentions, plans, doings, and so on, obsessing about possible outcomes, chaining ourselves to chronic worry.

Doubt is what the mind tends to do both when it is cut off from the vitality and openness and primal intentions of our depths, and when rationality itself just does not satisfy. And doubt presumes to have an overview, but in fact has none — it cannot even see itself, let alone accurately assess its environment.

Nevertheless, doubt is not an enemy. What matters is what we do with it. Do we identify with it? Do we give our power away to it? Do we allow it to enlarge? Do we believe in it? Do we make decisions based on it? Or do we illuminate it, outbreathe and outdance it, crashing its slumber-party with such resolute focus that it cannot help but dissolve into a more Life-giving form?

In its unchallenged (that is, *unquestioned*) arranging and cementings of key thoughts, doubt is closely related to belief, being a blue collar frequenter of some of belief's sleazier hangouts.

Belief is static, abstract, perfectly reproducible, far too stiff to be Truth, hyperfocused on its own replication and confirmation, driven to see its flag raised everywhere and everywhen ("Belief is when someone else does the thinking," said Buckminster Fuller). Doubt is its less popular cousin, a grimy plebeian, just as mentally constipated as belief (even in its chronic changing of teams), but not so glossy or chrome-plated or mass-legitimized, being more musty, dingy, and decentralized, huddled up in less tidy or respectable corners of mind, except when shaved, bathed, dressed up, and brought into the antiseptic chambers of Science, where it, now more hardnosed skepticism than mere doubt, breathes life into scientific methodology.

The Crucible of Awakening

Doubt usually reinforces our sense of separation. Doubt tends to empower our unhappiness — however miserable doubt may make us feel, it is familiar, so densely familiar that it generates a sense of identity: I doubt, therefore I am.

Not many of us can stand being in doubt for extended periods of time. We crave breaks from it, but the breaks we ordinarily take from it do not undo it, but only remove us from it for a time. Doubt easily becomes the core of our alibi for holding back; we use our doubt to talk ourselves out of stretching to make the necessary leap.

Those who are mired in doubt have great difficulty in telling what is false from what is true. They get stuck in between, lost in the tales told and retold by their doubt.

Trying to work with doubt through mental means only doesn't really work. The self-suppression that catalyzes and animates doubt must be seen, felt, known from the deep inside. The whole being must be eased, expanded, given permission to come alive. The torso must be loosened, the limbs unfrozen, the heart entered, the reach made both powerful and vulnerable, the entire anatomy brought into supportive resonance with our core of Being.

Doubt must be seen for what it is, as it is, without getting lost or absorbed in its point of view; only then will it unfist itself, only then will our endarkened familiarity with it come unstrung, only then will our indecisiveness be unequivocally undone, flung into the raw Truth of what we are.

When doubt infects you, don't give it a thought. Neither avoid it nor let it recruit your mind.

Doubt your doubt, and then pour your full attention into the noncognitive openings generated by doing so. Go into its feeling dimensions, breathing them more alive, giving fitting expression to them; if this is overly difficult, consider going to a therapist who's skilled in working with such things.

When doubt does manage to infiltrate your mind, read its contents once-through as though they belonged to a supermarket tabloid, taking careful note of which headlines most easily snare your attention. Then immediately shift your attention, and shift it completely, to the physical and physiological correlates of your doubt, resisting the temptation to scoot back into your thinking mind.

No matter how tempting it is to immerse yourself in what your doubt is telling you, shift your attention from whatever it is that you're doubting to the actual phenomenon of doubt itself. Feel into and through its tensions, its downbeat textures, its contracted tones, its positioning, its emotional qualities, its bodily ramifications and anatomical peculiarities; feel what it is doing to you, feel what it is doing to others near you, feel how it's staining your speech, vision, hearing, perception, posture, your very being..

And do this without trying to change or trash your doubt. Sometimes simply keeping your attention on your doubt as an energetic phenomenon, as opposed to focusing on its content, will cause it to dissolve. Other times, deliberately doubting your doubt will make it dissipate. Doubt may also sometimes be defused by taking a risk of Being, such as a not-so-easy but much needed movement toward someone or a timely expressing of something painful that needs to be said, especially if these are done not in order to get rid of doubt, but because they are imperatives of Being, arising from something deeper than our everyday mind and conditioning.

Doubt is, among other things, a kind of low-grade fear. As we expand our energy, the contraction at the heart of doubt starts to loosen up, until we're not fearful, but simply excited.

Through attending closely, caringly, and carefully to the particulars of our doubt, we decentralize it, so that its viewpoint is no longer in a position to govern us.

When the light goes on in the slums of doubt, then doubt is little more than skepticism having a bad day.

The key is to actively and decisively disidentify with our doubt, while also allowing the surfacing and fitting expression of whatever feeling states are associated with it — fear, sadness, anger, shame, disgust, longing, and so on.

Do not make doubt wrong. Simply realize that when you lose yourself in doubt, you are shortcircuiting a deeper song.

Now toward the healthier zones of doubting! Even in the most deadening doubt there sometimes can be gems of insight, bits of intuitive savvy mixed in with all the mental debris. These often get overlooked in our trying to get away from our doubting mind.

The Crucible of Awakening

Doubt tends to be a big baby, and there's not much bathwater (having been displaced by doubt's multi-armed flailing), but even the little that there is is worth keeping; as it settles, and some clarity emerges, what's valuable in our doubting becomes more obvious. Various intuitions, for example, may now be accessible. (It's interesting to note that intuition sometimes masquerades as doubt, mostly when we don't want to hear it.) Growth-stunting beliefs, beliefs that we no longer need, may lose their grip on us. For a belief to be dismantled, doubt about it is needed. Doubt is a wonderfully deadly virus for belief systems that have outlived their usefulness.

When we give ourselves permission to doubt certain things — like “expert” pronouncements, self-proclaimed “higher” structures, religious and political certainties, impermeable belief systems (including our own!), and so on — and we do so without losing touch with our core of Being, we are then a little freer, a little less seducible by others' promises of security. Then doubt does not entrap or flatten us, but rather brings us closer to what is really happening, making us more at home with the Zen proclamation: “Great doubt, great awakening; little doubt, little awakening; no doubt, no awakening.”

Spending quality time with doubt makes us capable of what John Keats (in 1817!) called “negative capability” — or the ability “of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

Hanging out with doubt can be a drag, and it can also be a portal into the matrix and essence of Existence. It all depends on how we handle it. Initially, it's usually wise to work with doubt as an energetic phenomenon (noticing its characteristic sensations, staying mindful of breathing and intentions, keeping grounded, making room for emotional release, etcetera), only secondarily paying any attention to its content — we need to be able to be near it without getting sucked into its viewpoint.

This requires not only meditative practice, but also the ability to know and appropriately express what we're feeling. Later, we can move in closer to our doubt, entering not only its physical and emotional dimensions, but also its mental dimensions, and start mining it for its valuables. Still later, we can allow our doubt regarding the Big Questions to carry us — and not just intellectually! — into the mysteries of the Unknowable, beyond both certainty and uncertainty..

THE ANATOMY OF FAITH

Faith knows the way by heart.

Faith is radical trust in action. Trust in what? In Being, in our own Buddha-nature, in What-Really-Matters. We may not see It, we may not hear It, we may seem to stray far from It, but through cultivating faith we open to the recognition that It — however invisible It may appear to be to us — is ever with us, regardless of our thoughts to the contrary.

Faith is, among other things, intimacy with not-knowing.

Faith is forged in the crucible of our suffering, emerging as a dynamic openness that helps us navigate through zones of ourselves commonly submerged in darkness, despair, and depression. The presence of faith, however, doesn't necessarily mean we will have clear sailing. Even when our faith is strong, we may still find ourselves down in the muck on our hands and knees — but not so inclined to make ego-suffused drama out of our situation.

Faith responds to problems, but not on the level at which they occur. That is, faith takes a nonproblematic orientation to problems, providing a spiritually intimate openness that holds us and our areas of concern with great care.

This openness — sacred space in the flesh — contains without binding, and releases without abandoning. Its value is verified by direct participation in it.

Direct experience, not belief, provides the relevant data or material — physical and otherwise — through which faith is cultivated, known, appreciated, and more fully embodied.

Faith is not a matter of believing in something; it is much deeper than belief or any other mental construction. And nor is faith merely synonymous with hope — hope is rooted in the future, faith in the present.

Where hope promises, faith gives. Where hope dreams, faith awakens.

Where hope is nostalgia for the future, faith is acceptance of the now — not a blind, misguided, or submissive acceptance, but a dynamic acceptance, unpolluted by hope and other romancings of tomorrow.

The Crucible of Awakening

Faith deepens through situations that test it. Without such conditions, faith remains in the shallows.

Pain comes with Life, and what better use to make of pain than to deepen our faith? Instead of turning our pain into suffering, we can allow it to fuel our way into a deeper life, a life abundant with faith. Then affliction is not so much a fall from Grace as it is Grace in its dark, deglamorized disguise, providing the very conditions through which we can more fully awaken from the entrapping dreams that we habitually fuel and populate.

There is perhaps no more worthy gift to have than unshakable faith.

What are the ingredients of such faith? First of all, a strongly felt connection to Being, in conjunction with an ongoing recognition that this connection still exists when we don't feel it. Second, a non-despairing abandoning of all hope of fruition, an unforced letting go of being invested and caught up in particular outcomes. Third, a patience that waits without waiting, that endures without having to have a clear endpoint. Fourth, a dynamic embracing of not-knowing (and not having to know), honoring the knowledge-transcending Mystery of Being. Fifth, accepting what is exactly as it is, including our feelings and intentions and actions regarding it. And, last but not least, cultivating gratitude for what we currently have, including the ability to develop faith.

Faith makes us feel good even about not feeling good.

If our faith is well-rooted, we usually do not forget it for long — we cannot help but remember what gives us faith, even when our remembering is gray, opaque, or far from stable. Faith provides not an antidote to our suffering, but rather a compassionate space for it, in which we can more clearly hear and sanely respond to what our pain is telling us.

Although faith might not make pain go away, it takes the suffering out of it. Faith does not necessarily still the storm, but allows us to be with it — and to become intimate with it — without losing track of What-Really-Matters.

Spiritual stamina.

Faith teaches us not to control, but to let be. This is not mere passivity nor some sort of spiritualized irresponsibility, but rather a powerful quietness or stillness out of which can emerge fitting action, choices made by something

wiser than our mind. When our faith is strong, the necessity of the situation is the only catalyst we need for taking fitting action.

Faith is often made synonymous with what is commonly referred to as “blind faith.” But real faith is far from blind — though it may sometimes lack clear vision, it knows the way by heart, even if it has to inch along on its belly through the sniper fire of doubt.

Faith allows us to live sanely and compassionately in the midst of all that is happening. Bad days don’t destroy or cripple it, but only strengthen it. So for faith, suffering is not just bad news. The presence of faith does not signal an end to difficult states — as in fantasies of saintly detachment — but rather an appropriate context for them. Bringing things to an end is not the point; radical trust in Being is. Faith is the embodiment of such trust.

Faith is the highest form of devotion.

Faith is the lifeblood of real patience, explaining nothing and revealing all. Through it, we find the necessary energy and endurance for the most significant journey of all.

Faith knows the way by heart.

FREEDOM THROUGH INTIMACY

A Weekend Intensive For Couples

Sept. 30th-Oct. 1st, and Nov. 18th-19th, 2006

with Robert Masters & Diane Bardwell

Intimate relationship has immense transformational possibility, especially when we approach its difficulties as opportunities instead of as problems. Opportunities for what? To know ourselves more deeply, to love and live more fully, to become intimate with *all* that we are — in short, to be freed from our suffering.

The Crucible of Awakening

In the liberating bondage of committed intimacy, we enter the One through the two, finding the Beloved in both depth and surface, so that the very details of daily life become a potent awakening path. Freedom through intimacy.

This group is for couples who want a more conscious, loving, and liberating relationship with each other, and are ready to cut through whatever's in the way. Even if you already have a good relationship, consider coming, and taking your relationship from good to great to what it really can be.

Individual work will be given as much emphasis as couples work, using a spontaneously structured approach that creatively mixes psychotherapy, bodywork, dream exploration, spiritual practices, and dyadic deepenings.

TUITION & LOGISTICS: 10am to 6pm both days. Limited to 5 couples only. \$1250 plus GST per couple. \$300 deposit required.

***For more information or to register, contact
info@RobertMasters.com***

RADICAL OPENING

THREE DAYS OF GROUPWORK DEVOTED

TO DEEP HEALING & AWAKENING

with Robert Masters & Diane Bardwell

December 1st to 3rd, 2006, Brew Creek Lodge, BC

This 3-day residential intensive is for those who want to make wise use of their difficulties and who are ready to work through whatever is obstructing their liberation. It is especially suited for those whose longing to be truly free is stronger than their longing to continue distracting themselves from their suffering.

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

The group will be small and intimate, being limited to 14 participants only, so that there is enough time for everyone to receive in-depth attention. The group will involve therapy (in its focus on personal history), and will also involve much more than therapy, given its integral nature. Deep catharsis, psychodrama, and spiritual breakthroughs will flow in and out of each other during the group, in spontaneously apt ways. All emotions are welcome.

All kinds of issues and concerns — from the deepest trauma to the seemingly trivial — will be dealt with, through a dynamic, creative mix of psychotherapy, bodywork, spiritual disciplines, conscious movement, dreamwork, and group practices.

The atmosphere will be one of deep trust; the group will be a safe place to let go of being safe, providing a crucible not only for personal healing, but also for awakening from all of our entrapping dreams.

Participants will learn to become more intimate with all that they are — dark and light, high and low, shallow and deep, neurotic and transcendent, dying and undying.

The structuring of the group will not be preset, but instead will arise in accordance with group and individual needs. Each participant will have an opportunity to work, in relevant detail and in sufficient depth, with his or her particular issues, and not necessarily just once in the group.

LOCATION: Brew Creek Lodge (15 minutes south of Whistler, BC), a magnificent, secluded resort featuring rustic luxury set amidst lush forest. Buffet breakfasts start the day; gourmet lunches and dinners (three courses) follow group sessions. A river flows directly below the group meeting room; previous participants have especially enjoyed braving the river's cool depths after spending some time in the hot tub right beside the river.

FEE: Tuition: \$775 plus GST. Lodging & all meals: \$250 (includes hotel tax). A deposit (nonrefundable after October 15, 2006) of \$200.00 is required

Contact info@robertmasters.com to register, or for more information. Early registration is advised, as the group is filling quickly.

Embodying the Deep Masculine

A ONE-DAY GROUP FOR MEN

with **Robert Masters**

October 7th and November 25th, 2006

Embodying the Deep Masculine is about doing what's necessary to reclaim our balls without armoring or numbing ourselves, becoming warriors who, finding a source of strength in their vulnerability, can take needed stands with both heart and full-blooded power.

To enter our true manhood, we need to stop turning away from the wounded boy in us, both protecting him and giving him what he needs to heal. We also need to become more emotionally literate, not turning our anger into aggression, nor our shame into guilt, nor our hurt into an excuse to shut down or get heady.

As we assume our real power, we must at the same time step more fully into our heart; otherwise, we won't be capable of real intimacy. No more hiding out in cognitive strongholds, no more avoidance of our raw strength, no more bypassing of our wounds, no more avoidance of the Deep Feminine. In short, birthing the man.

This group is about working through whatever's in the way of entering and living our full manhood, through a dynamic, spontaneously structured mix of psychotherapy, bodywork, dyadic encounters, dream exploration, and spiritual deepening practices.

TUITION & LOGISTICS: US\$250 or CDN\$275 plus GST. A \$100 deposit is required. Limited to 8 men only. Early registration is highly recommended!

**For more information, or to register,
contact info@robertmasters.com**

Reclaiming Your True Voice

A ONE-DAY GROUP FOR WOMEN

Sept. 23rd, Oct. 28th, and Dec. 9th, 2006

with Robert Masters and Diane Bardwell

Many women do not have full access to their true voice, and as a result have not sufficiently represented themselves, attracting situations and relationships that have only reinforced their inability to truly speak for themselves.

This group is about taking back power that originally was given away in order to survive difficult conditions, and taking it back not just cognitively, but physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Doing so involves expressing, *fully* expressing, what has been held back in the name of fear, insecurity, and social pressures.

Part of what is needed is a reclamation of anger (plus a clear differentiation between anger and aggression), so that it becomes a resource, a guardian of boundaries, a potent catalyst for needed change.

This group'll involve deep letting go, through a creative mix of psychotherapy, bodywork, and spiritual deepening practices (led by Robert), and it will also involve toning, chanting, singing, and healing through sound (led by Diane). The release-work facilitated by Robert will let loose *your* voice, and the sound-work guided by Diane will wing, fill out, and celebrate *your* voice.

TUITION & LOGISTICS: US\$250 or CDN\$275 plus GST. A \$100 deposit is required. Limited to 8 women. Early registration is highly recommended!

Diane (Robert's wife), is an intuitive energy healer and Reiki master, using sound to deepen healing and well-being. She is a songwriter and professional singer, with a gift for accessing the Sacred through sound and song. See www.dianebardwell.com.

**For more information, or to register,
contact info@robertmasters.com**

An opportunity to learn (1) unique and exceptionally effective psychotherapeutic, spiritual, and bodywork skills; and (2) how to combine these in counselling work.

Integral Counselling/Psychotherapy Practicum

2007 APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

The purpose of this training is to deepen the capacity of participants to effectively counsel others through a dynamic, intuitively structured approach that integrates body, mind, emotion, and spirit.

To this end, the training will blend deep work on oneself and equally deep work with others, in personal, social, and spiritual contexts. Healing will be the primary intention and activity. Approaches that are taught and practised will be held, as much as possible, in a perspective that transcends them.

You'll learn to not rely upon nor necessarily impose structure, but rather to let it naturally arise from your relationship and interaction with those you're counselling. Working this way weans us from the security — the eventually deadening security — of operating from behind a preset structure or methodology, leaving us in a position that requires an appropriately creative response from us. Such creativity keeps us fresh, open, and alert.

Throughout the training we will be working with body, mind, emotion, and spirit. Love, integrity, and presence will be the cornerstones of our practice.

The training will take place over 6 three-day weekends, beginning February 2nd, 2007. Tuition is \$5400 plus GST. A deposit of \$750 is required. The training is limited to 10 participants.

The training is a prerequisite for further trainings, including the **Bodywork Apprenticeship module** planned for 2007.

Applications for the 2007 Practicum are now being taken.

Practicum Schedule

Feb. 2-4, April 6-8, June 1-3, July 27-29, Oct. 5-7, and Dec. 7-9, 2007.

To view previous newsletters, go to the links below:

- <http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/May05.pdf>
- <http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/June2005.pdf>
- <http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/July2005.pdf>
- <http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/August2005.pdf>
- <http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/September2005.pdf>
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- <http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/June2006.pdf>

Robert's Remaining 2006 Work Schedule

- August 26 Letting Go: White Rock, BC
- Sept. 8, 9, 10 2005/2006 Practicum: White Rock, BC
- Sept. 15, 16, 17 2006/2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
- Sept. 23 Reclaiming Your True Voice: White Rock, BC
- Sept. 30-Oct. 1 Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
- Oct. 7 Embodying the Deep Masculine: White Rock, BC
- Oct. 21 Letting Go: White Rock, BC
- Oct. 28 Reclaiming Your True Voice: White Rock, BC
- Nov. 3, 4, 5 2006/2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
- Nov. 18 & 19 Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
- Nov. 25 Embodying the Deep Masculine: White Rock, BC
- December 1-3 Radical Opening: Whistler, BC
- December 9 Reclaiming Your True Voice: White Rock, BC