

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 28 August 2007

NEW GROUP! October 20th-21st, we'll be doing our first group in Boulder. Details are on page 13.

AND ANOTHER NEW GROUP! The group to be held in Scottsdale, Arizona, this November 16th-18th has been changed to a men's group (**MAN UNBOUND**). Details are on page 13.

Our CD is now being printed, and should be available by mid-August. You can purchase it through my website. Clips of each song should be up on my website in 10 days or so. It's been a long haul getting the CD done, and we're very excited to finally be able to get it out there!

My book on intimate relationship is very close to being published. I've tried on various titles, at last settling on ***Freedom Through Intimacy: The Journey Toward Mature Monogamy***. I'm hoping to have it ready for sale by mid-September.

I am now bringing my Practicum/Apprenticeship Training to the US, offering it in Seattle early next year (for more details, contact info@RobertMasters.com). A Practicum to be held in California (probably in the Santa Barbara/Ojai area) is also in the works.

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Can't fight this perpetual perishing any more
Don't even want things to be like they were before
My face is gathering enough lines to be a roadmap
And my body is clearly more than just a soul-trap

Can't right this sinking ship
Don't even want a longer-floating trip
My hands no longer obediently bail
Avoiding death is the surest way to fail

Can't relight these worn-out candles
Don't even want to retread my sandals
My heart keeps seeing endless emptiness
And keeps breaking open to hold just this

Can't ignite what's gone to ashes
Don't even want to redo my crashes
My dying flesh brightens as it ages
Freedom keeps on singing in its cages

Can't fight this endless dying any more
Don't even want what I wanted before
My hands reach out then return
The circle at last able to freely burn

It was by this that we were haunted
This was what we secretly wanted
And it is to this that we must bow
Deeply fully and exactly now

OURS NOT TO REASON WHY: MEANING, SUFFERING, AND FREEDOM

Life is too real to have meaning.

Given the actual conditions in which we exist, it is understandable that we'd look, and keep looking, for some sort of comfort or reassurance in the explanatory dimensions of consciousness, even though our attempts to find or extract or assign meaning — whether mundane or metaphysical — ultimately only pad the cell, distracting us from the raw contingency and absolute mystery of our existence.

We usually act as if we need a reason to go on (plus a reason to keep on needing reasons), but, as James Hillman points out, “A significant life does not have to find meaning because significance is given directly with reality.”

Significance, unlike meaning, does not explain, but reveals.

Many of us are attached to believing that everything happens for a reason. But it may actually happen simply because various factors, in their mutual intersecting and coming together — that is, in their inherent interrelatedness — have made such manifestation inevitable. Each of these factors has its factors, and so on, back and back and back, in surpassingly complex contingency. This, all put together, constitutes something far more real than “a reason.”

We may not want to fully acknowledge the contingent nature of whatever arises — including us — trying instead to assign some kind of meaning to it, but such explanatory strategies do not even remotely approach what is really occurring.

The assumption that anything possesses — or can truly claim — intrinsic meaning is one of our more popular delusions. Whatever its value may

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be developmentally and socially, meaning basically remains a cognitive creation that is designed, however automatically, to distract us — and, more often than not, protect our separative self-sense — from the bare reality of that which has spawned us and paradoxically also is, as always, literally making an appearance as us.

We make meaning, and it makes us, and on and on this goes in Möbius loopity-loops, all offramps erased as we do our rounds, circling ourselves so tightly that there's not much more to breathe than just more data. “Just when I found the meaning of life,” said George Carlin, “they changed it.” And we is they.

So is Life meaningless? Coiled deep within-and-beyond this question lies the “answer,” existing not as a facile yes or no, but rather in the transconceptual illumination of what is actually motivating the question.

Identifying who — or, more to the point, *what* — is formulating it is far, far more important than just attempting to reply to its content. Whatever is generating the question needs to be fully exposed and acknowledged, not only intellectually, but with our entirety. Then, and only then, can the actual relevancy of the question be viewed in its nakedness, so that it might spark a truly fitting response.

That is, when the question becomes primal inquiry, its investigation leads beyond the cognitive associations of the conventional mind into firsthand participation in deeper dimensions of Being. Something more real than answers — or what we “normally” think of as answers — is sought, intuited, taken in.

Life makes sense only when we stop trying to make it make sense.

That is, when we cease plastering meaning onto Life — thereby giving Life more breathing room, more space to be — then Life's natural significance begins revealing itself to us. Meaning tries to explain the

Mystery, whereas significance deepens it (and the deeper our felt sense of the Mystery, the more at home we tend to be).

The entire issue of meaning and meaninglessness, if explored with sufficient depth, provides an opportunity to become more aware not only of the functioning of our mind, but also of our attachment to knowledge and its various framings. Stephen Levine speaks of how “no ‘meaning’ can hold it all.... There is an odd way the mind, particularly when threatened, attempts to find ‘meaning’ in life, to make some intellectual bargain with the unknown.” We forget that that which seeks to explain the Mystery is just part of the Mystery, as ultimately unfathomable as anything else.

However, the point is not to make existential real estate out of meaninglessness (which is where existentialism has floundered). When our mind is quiet and our heart open and our belly relaxed, Life can be before us in its horizonless, nameless, naked, ultravivid reality and absolute mystery, and we have room for it all to be just as it is, not minding that it carries no intrinsic meaning. Its bare existence and seeming paradoxicalness — a neverending perishing that is never other than Eternal Being — draws us to it, beyond the reach of our mind, until our relationship with it becomes, at least to some degree, identification with it.

Nevertheless, the usual “I” is but a thought away.

So easy it is to shift from Be-ing to me-ing.

Meaning provides a relatively secure sense of certainty, a psychosemantic hedge against the Wild Mystery of Being, a comfortingly shared or personalized flag to hold up and wave in the midst of Infinity, a neatly-bricked bastion of explanatory facticity (and corresponding values) in which to hole up when emissaries of primordial Being — like death and nondual stirrings — come knocking.

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As necessary as meaning is at times — as when it provides needed bridges over stormy or confusing waters — it is nonetheless little more than a mental strategy. It may take us to the very edge of the personal, but to proceed further, we must cease hanging onto it.

And we must also cease hanging onto meaninglessness. Where meaning seduces us with hope — nostalgia for the future — meaninglessness seduces us with despair — angst for the future.

Meaninglessness is a grave problem to many of us, a burdened sea with no habitable coast, the suffocating yet reassuringly familiar shadow of a brooding existential ghost. Meaninglessness — which is not equivalent to purposelessness — is the glum and sometimes intellectually smug companion and angst-crowned legitimizer of despair, elevating to pseudo-priesthood those who claim to be able to restore meaningfulness.

Nevertheless, the issue of meaning and meaninglessness isn't really that much of a core concern, being peripheral to the issue of purpose. In brief, purpose involves the uncovering and fitting-as-possible embodiment of a kind of personalized blueprint, simultaneously simple and complex, already written yet invitingly blank, rich with improvisational possibility. Purposefulness may seem to share some overlap with meaningfulness, but it is much more than a cognitive construction. Purpose is more organismic than meaning, rooted not just in mind, but also in body, emotion, psyche, and spirit. In such totality, there is a naturally felt sense of significance.

In the crunch, significance is not nearly so dualistically rooted or framed or limited as is meaning, signaling the impact, however slight, of direct recognition of What-Really-Matters, whatever the level. Significance transcends meaning.

Significance doesn't ask "Why?" — because it has no need to — but meaning does, and in fact is an attempt to meet "Why?" with answers/

explanations/beliefs that will shut it up. But “Why?” is asking for something very different, if we will but really listen to it..

When we are suffering, we may find ourselves asking: “Why?” There is, however, no genuinely satisfying answer at the level at which our suffering is the prevailing reality for us. And nor are the metaphysical and “spiritual” reasons and beliefs spewed out by our intellect truly satisfying.

The understanding we seek is not in our everyday mind. But it exists. It is often first sensed when we cease turning away from the pain that centers our suffering. And it is found when we — in the form of awakened attentiveness — penetrate that pain so deeply that we connect, intimately, with its essence.

Then suffering’s “Why?” ceases being a conventional question, and simply becomes one more catalyst for opening the book of our life to the most fitting pages.

Philosophically, we may rebut suffering’s “Why?” with “Why not?” or with cosmic smooth talk. But when we move beyond these and other such tactics, our sense of identity shifts from everyday selfhood — which both centers and animates that dramatization of pain which we call suffering — to the selfhood that knows itself to be but Being making an appearance. Pain may still exist here, but not suffering.

So when you, in your suffering, ask “Why?”, shift your attention — your undivided attention — to whatever it is that you are feeling. Thoughts may be campaigning for your attention, but shift, and keep shifting, your attention from thought to sensation and feeling (including the feeling of being). Don’t try to silence your mind; simply let it be as you focus in on the feeling dimension of your suffering. Enter it. Explore and illuminate its geography from within, touching all of it with care. See it without eyes, hear it without ears, know it without thinking. Don’t stop short; enter it fully.

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Permit yourself intimacy with detail — detail of location, shape, texture, pressure, temperature, speed, color, directionality, imagery. Don't wait for a seemingly more auspicious moment; go, go this very moment, now. Enter it deeply, passing through it until you reach the place where pain is but fierce grace. Then closely observe who or what it is that is asking "Why?" — is it really you, or is it just a habit that has been given permission to refer to itself as you? Looking for meaning here is just a detour.

Check out the billboards lining your journey into and through the associations and feelings that are central to your suffering. Notice which ones grab you, seduce you, hook you. Maybe ones like "Life's not fair" or "I don't deserve this" or "Why me?" snare you. Don't, however, get focused on the dramatics at this point — it's enough to simply recognize that you're caught. All the places, faces, and embraces that hook us weave the net of our suffering.

Suffering can be one hell of a drag, but it also gives us an identity — I suffer, therefore I am. We tend to be reluctant to give up our suffering. What would we then blame for our failures? And who would we be (and who would we be responsible for being) if our suffering were to cease?

The end of suffering — which does not mean the end of pain! — means, among other things, ceasing to adopt a problematic orientation to Life. Then every feeling and thought and state, however dark or tight or dense, becomes a portal into Being, the open sky of which effortlessly renders transparent suffering's "Why?".

As Presence — the self-illuminating, effortlessly sentient imprint of Being — becomes primary and perception secondary, we find ourselves reassembled as transparently personalized openness, as at home with the ouch as with the aahhh!

The answer to suffering's "Why?" is not really an answer, but rather an

openness ablaze with a recognition before which the mind gets so quiet, so unburdened by meaning, so dynamically empty, that the arising of a single thought is thunderously apparent.

Instead of trying to get rid of suffering's "Why?", we could instead treat it as a kind of divine appetizer, signaling a feast not so far away, to which one and all are invited. The main course includes the self that turns pain into suffering, cooked to perfection. Not exactly tenderloin, but quite edible, nevertheless, and easily digested when not allowed to become food for thought.

Suffering is no more than pain that's gone to mind. Instead of minding pain — thereby letting it overfuel thinking and thinker — be with it, breathe it, feel it, inch closer and closer to it. The more intimate we are with our pain, the less we suffer.

Ours not to reason why, ours but to come alive.

Perhaps later on we will understand what is not ours to understand now, but that is not the point — what matters is the degree of intimacy that we cultivate with our not-knowing and the unfathomable Mystery to which it points.

Allow suffering's "Why?" to be like a roll of newspaper used to stir a fire; soon, it becomes food for the flames, its transformation its gift to us, the ever so brief calligraphy of its ashes eloquently traced across Big Sky.

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Everything matters
Including dreams that say otherwise
Everything is closer than close
To being already shattered
Gone to infinite pieces
Yet still mattering

Let the words sink from sight
Until what they describe
Rises bare and bright
Amidst the fastmixing ripples
The smallest of the small
Packed with the eternal vast
Each moment too real to last
But still mattering
Requiring for its birthing
All that ever was

Everything matters. Nothing matters
Since both are true
Both part of the same supreme view
What will you do?
It depends on where you stand
Now and Zen
Wordplay evaporating
Just like us
Seafoam swallowed
By an undying sun
Singing its lacy traces of song
Leaving nothing
But what's been here all along

UPCOMING GROUPS

AN OVERVIEW

The Situation:

You've done some work on yourself and have opened and benefited (and want to maintain that openness), but find certain issues surfacing again and again — relationship difficulties, insecurities, emotional inhibitions, and so on. Now, more than ever, these are in your face — perhaps because you're now ready to fully face them — asking for your undivided attention. And, quite possibly, also for a suitable setting, featuring both highly skilled, cutting-edge guidance and the company of others who are as committed as you to healing and awakening.

The Context:

You might think that these issues are blocking your path, but in reality they are *part* of your path, and need to be treated as such. All you have to do is stop turning away from them, stop trying to rise above them, and make the journey into them, with awareness, compassion, and curiosity. This is not necessarily easy — for if it was, you probably would have already done it — but it can be done, leaving you more whole, more alive and present, more functional in every aspect of your life, allowing you to live a life that is as practical as it is liberating.

Who It's For:

My groups are for those who want to make wise use of their difficulties and who are ready to work through whatever is obstructing their well-being. Such work is especially suited for those whose longing to be truly free is stronger — or allowed to be more central — than their longing to continue distracting themselves from their suffering.

About the Work:

My groups are small and intimate, being limited from 8 to 14 participants

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only (depending on the length of the group), so that there is enough time for everyone to receive in-depth high quality attention.

The groups involve psychotherapy (in their focus on personal history), and also involve much, much more than psychotherapy, given their integral nature. Deep catharsis, psychodrama, and spiritual breakthroughs flow in and out of each other during the groups, in spontaneously apt ways.

All kinds of issues and concerns — from the deepest trauma to the seemingly trivial — are dealt with, through a dynamic, creative mix of psychotherapy, bodywork, spiritual disciplines, dreamwork, and group practices (improvised and otherwise).

The atmosphere is one of deep trust. The groups are safe places to let go of playing it safe, providing a crucible not only for personal healing, but also for awakening from all of our entrapping dreams.

Participants learn, at the optimal pace, 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 groups is not preset, but instead arises in fitting accord with both group and individual needs. Each participant has an opportunity to work, in relevant detail and in sufficient depth, with his or her particular concerns, and not necessarily just once in the group.

In every group (except for the Men's groups), I am assisted by my wife and spiritual partner, Diane, whose presence, insight, and deep heart add immeasurably to each group.

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

Breakthrough

A TWO DAY GROUP

DEVOTED TO DEEP HEALING & AWAKENING

in BOULDER, OCTOBER 20th-21st

Tuition: US\$680. A nonrefundable deposit of \$340 is required. Full tuition due one month before group begins.

Location: The Heart Fire Healing Center, in downtown Boulder.

Maximum number of participants: **13**.

Man Unbound

A THREE-DAY GROUP FOR MEN

November 16th-18th, 2007, in Scottsdale, AZ

Man Unbound 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 our depths.

Tuition: US\$795. A nonrefundable deposit of \$400 is required. Full tuition due one month before group begins.

Location: Franciscan Renewal Center, located on 25 acres of secluded desert grounds in the heart of the Scottsdale/Paradise Valley resort district of Arizona. For more details, visit www.thecasa.org.

Maximum number of participants: **14**.

A Deeper Life

A FIVE DAY RETREAT

DEVOTED TO DEEP HEALING & AWAKENING

January 25th-29th, 2008, in Hawaii

Location:

Yoga Oasis, a beautiful, secluded retreat center on the eastern tip of the Big Island of Hawaii, 5 miles from the village of Pahoa and 2 miles from the ocean. Located on 26 acres in lush rainforest, Yoga Oasis is a short drive to surfing, geo-thermal warm springs, tide pools, snorkeling, kayaking, natural underground saunas, and a black sand beach. For more information, visit **www.YogaOasis.org** (check out the video showing the retreat). The Big Island itself, which you'll likely want to spend some time on after the group, is a marvelous place to explore and relax, with its otherworldly volcanic park and astonishingly varied terrain.

Tuition, Lodging, & Meals: US\$1895, or CDN\$2195 (includes GST).

Rooms will be assigned according to the date of registration; the earlier you register, the more room choices you'll have. We are only taking **14** participants. A deposit (nonrefundable after September 1st, 2007) of \$400 is required. Full payment is required by November 1, 2007. The group is now half full.

Breakthrough

A THREE DAY RETREAT

DEVOTED TO DEEP HEALING & AWAKENING

September 7th-9th, 2007, in Calgary, Alberta

September 21st-23rd, 2007, in Ojai, California

Tuition: US\$795 (or CDN\$875, plus GST). A nonrefundable deposit of \$400 is required. Full tuition due one month before group begins.

Lodging & Meals: US\$250 for Ojai group (which will be held on a private hot springs property on the shores of the pristine Matilija River).

Maximum number of participants: **14**.

Embodying the Deep Masculine

A TWO-DAY GROUP FOR MEN

September 29th-30th, 2007, in White Rock, BC.

TUITION: US\$550 or CDN\$595 plus GST. Limited to **10** men only.

Woman Unbound

A TWO-DAY GROUP FOR WOMEN

August 18th-19th, 2007, in White Rock, BC

with Diane & Robert

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An increase in power does not have to mean a decrease in femininity.

Being fully alive — passionately and deeply embodied — is every woman's birthright. Such aliveness requires embodying real power, so that what needs to be done and said gets done with maximum effectiveness.

But many women, however loving they may be, don't have full access to their true power and voice, and as a result have not sufficiently represented themselves, attracting situations and relationships that have only reinforced their inability to truly speak up and stand up for themselves.

This group is about taking back the power that originally was given away in order to survive difficult conditions, and taking it back not just mentally, but also physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Doing so involves expressing, fully expressing, what's been held back because of fear, insecurity, and social pressures. Sometimes this is gentle and flowing, and other times it is necessarily fierce — whatever helps the passion flow.

Part of what is needed is a reclaiming 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 will involve deep letting go and opening, through a creative mix of psychotherapy, bodywork, sound-healing, group exercises, and spiritual deepening practices.

The maximum number of participants will be 10, so there is plenty of time for each woman to receive in-depth high quality attention. One space left!

TUITION: US\$550 or CDN\$595 plus GST.

FREEDOM THROUGH INTIMACY

A Weekend Intensive For Couples

September 15th-16th, 2007,

in White Rock, BC

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.

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. US\$1200 or CDN\$1250 plus GST per couple. \$300 deposit required. Full payment required one month before group begins.

Integral Psychotherapy Practicum

2007/2008 APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

in White Rock, BC

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

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 November 2nd, 2007. Tuition is CDN\$5900 plus GST. A deposit of \$750 is required. The training is limited to **10** participants. Previous work with Robert required.

Note: The Practicum is not just for therapists who want to learn a more intuitive, integral, and bodywork-including approach to their practice, nor just for those who are wanting to work in the counselling/psychotherapy field, but also for those who want to participate with kindred spirits in a year of exceptionally deep personal work, during which they will learn skills that will serve them in every area of their life.

Graduates of previous practicums have not only found themselves at home with new skills (sufficient enough to begin working as an integral counsellor), but have also done work of such depth — and not just a few times, but many times — during the practicum that they invariably emerge more grounded, open, intuitive, and confident about both themselves and their ability to effectively guide others.

Much of the depth and quality of the work done has to do with being with a group of individuals who are all deeply committed to their own healing and awakening. In such an environment, there is not only more than enough safety and trust, but also a rare intimacy, generated by

sharing such deep work both as a participant and as a counsellor-to-be.

This will be the fifth such Practicum that I've done; I expect that there will be many more. It is a prerequisite for further trainings with me, such as the advanced bodywork/energy-work modules (integrating bodywork, energy-work, and psychotherapy) in the Summer and Fall of 2007, as well as not-yet scheduled modules in Gestalt, Couples Work, Sexuality, and Leading Groups.

Practicum Schedule

Nov. 2-4, 2007; Jan. 11-13, Mar. 14-16, May 9-11, July 11-13, and Sept. 12-14, 2008

Integral Psychotherapy Practicum

2008 APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

in Seattle

TBA

For more information regarding groups and trainings, or to register for them, contact info@RobertMasters.com.

All cheques, deposit and otherwise, should be mailed to Robert Masters, 16133 9th Avenue, Surrey, BC V4A 1A5.

To view previous newsletters, click on the Newsletter button at www.RobertMasters.com.

To check out Robert's blog, click on the Blog button at www.RobertMasters.com.

Robert's 2007 Work Schedule

- August 18-19 Woman Unbound: White Rock, BC
August 25 Letting Go: White Rock, BC
September 7-9 Breakthrough: Calgary
September 15-16 Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
September 21-23 Breakthrough: Ojai, California
September 29-30 Embodying the Deep Masculine: White Rock, BC
October 5-7 2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
October 13-16 Bodywork-in-Psychotherapy Practicum: Langley, BC
October 20-21 Breakthrough: Boulder, Colorado
October 27 Woman Unbound: White Rock, BC
November 3 2007/2008 Practicum: White Rock, BC
November 10-11 Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
November 16-18 Man Unbound: Scottsdale, Arizona
Nov. 30-Dec. 2 Practicum Graduates Group: TBA
December 7-9 2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC

**For additional information,
visit www.RobertMasters.com**