

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 32 December 2007

GROUNDLESSNESS & THE DARK NIGHT

We crave solidity when we lack ground, understandably getting very attached to what seems to root or reassuringly secure us.

But if we're to find truer ground, we'll have to endure being uprooted.

This means that we, for an unspecified time, will have to experience groundlessness, a free-floating, treacherously contoured, mapless zone that's more like a gap than a locale.

This gap, this no-one's-land, this amorphous and maddeningly blurry clearing, is horizontally elastic, stretched out between past and future, and is vertically without boundaries. We can rise and fall in it until there is no up and down, but only pure centerless openness. Or we can rise and fall in it until we are so desperate for clearcut direction and steady footing that we make ourselves overly susceptible to whatever — or whomever — convincingly promises us unambiguous direction and solid ground.

We all experience tiny moments of groundlessness every day, if only during almost immediately forgotten thoughts and intimations, but sooner or later we encounter not-so-tiny moments of groundlessness, from which we cannot so easily distract ourselves. Then, though there may be considerable fear or despair or depression, we have an opportunity to go not back to where we were before, but rather into a depth of Being that we could before only visit for the briefest of moments.

The Crucible of Awakening

The gateway to this depth is so narrow that we cannot pass through it if we insist on bringing the luggage of our past along with us. Everyday groundlessness only makes us cling more tightly to our past and the sense of familiarity that it brings, but existential groundlessness — wherein it seems that *everything*, including our very identity, is up for questioning — loosens our grasp on the familiar, potentially leaving us so raw and uncertain that we are opened to the unimaginable depths of Being right before us.

This is not to say that this is easy. In fact, it may be the most difficult passage of our life. Before the gate opens for us, there may fall a darkness like we have never known, which St. John of the Cross famously called the Dark Night of the Soul. Getting stuck in birthing canals can be remarkably hellish. Great doubt may arise during the Dark Night, doubt that masquerades as Truth.

Watch your mind madly churn and propagandize, while doing your best to anchor your attention to whatever feelings and sensations underlie all the cognitive commotion. Hope may flutter like a spectral flag, seemingly tattered beyond repair. Let it. Give hope the opportunity to give up its romancing of tomorrow, so that faith — which is to the present as hope is to the future — may deepen.

Doubt your doubt. Don't pressure anything to make sense. Open, and keep opening, to what is more real than meaning. Endure until you can wait without waiting. Shift, and keep shifting, from having faith in the solidity of things to having faith in Being.

In the Dark Night, we may feel an intensity of despair, fear, and depressiveness that seems intolerable. Yet as we somehow learn to bear the unbearable, we gradually settle into the darkness, sensing not only its heaviness and lack of light, but also its fertility. Seeds grow in the dark. So do we.

STRANGER AT THE GATE

*Once I had enough past to have a future
That was more than then
My history on the make
Burying me in its news
The old repossession blues
Doing time at the edge of tomorrow
Just another spin of the wheel
Trying to outlast the past
My cards face up, one-eyed kings wild
Each step the peak, each fall the fuel
Until the supreme dreaming
Catches me in its billion-eyed net

Down the tubes I once again go
Implanted in a speechless hello
Into the heart of now I am thrust
Gleaming at the tip, sobbing at the rupture
Everfresh frontiers flowering inside and out
There's no ending this, no mending this
No real explanation of what it's all about

And here's something upstaging my mind
And here's something no one can find
My dying flesh lit by its mad blooms
My every name devoured once again
Until there's nothing, nothing to reclaim
Hello to the stranger at the gate
Your face in one hand
Mine in the other
Erased
Ready again*

SUCH RAW BEAUTY

There's a heart-aching so sharp, so sweet and so bottomless, that both shatters and reassembles us. Such terrible beauty accompanies it, such fathomless yearning, such exquisitely painful gratitude. Endless is this beauty. Upon its shores we break and spill, emptied of the familiarity that self-centers our days and ways.

So very soon we are gone, like dreams vanishing before morning's habits. Did we leave a mark? Only wingprints in endless sky, tracing evaporating goodbyes. Tombstones soon but stardust. Life is our signature, scrawled by the infinitely varied shape-takings of the Real. Such raw beauty, beauty to die for, beauty both to bow to and to be, beauty that simultaneously outlives and is us.

Death makes life worth living. Death makes beauty unspeakably obvious. Death makes love unsurpassably important. Death wakes us up. What better ally could we have than death? Death gives all the same opportunity. Death leaves no one out.

Life is, among other things, a near-death experience. The passing of all things breaks our heart open to what matters most of all. Only through intimacy with death do we find intimacy with the deathless.

Gazing into soft blue sky, dissolving in its boundless embrace, cradling each of its clouds, whether weeping or thundering or dancing. Beauty beyond beauty coupling with undisturbable peace, through their succulent embrace revealing — not explaining, but revealing — that each moment contains all moments. This the deep lovers cannot help but recognize, as they die into joy, surrendering their all to the Beloved until they are but clearings for that One. Naked openness, owned by none and belonging to all.

Avoiding death kills us. Are we not, when we truly tire of doing time and redecorating our cells, dying to live? Dying to really live, to fully live? Dying to stop pretending we are not pretending? Dying to at last enter

and fully, fully embody the life we were born to live? Such dying is but birth, a labor of love, a making room for a deeper life. The tenderest upstart green cracks and splits open the concrete sea upon which we are shipwrecked. The messy ecstasy of birth unravels our straitjacketed identity. We bleed and soar, waves breaking on ever-virgin shore, dying into the undying.

Silence is our witness. Silence has seen it all. Silence cradles our pain until its ache wakes us.

Death doesn't happen to life. Death serves life. The beauty of it all, the hyperbole-transcending majesty and wonder of it all, both brings us to our knees and wings us. We go from survival to living, and from living to being lived, and from being lived to being, losing everything along the way except what most matters. Loss breaks open the heart, dissolving its armoring. Loss gives beauty its true depth. Death is the mother of loss.

The blue fire of the dying poet's eyes makes ruggedly transparent art of his ravaged face. He cries out, his hoarsely impassioned words the last sigh of a vagabond wave, seafoam dying on some midnight beach. His freedom is in having no choice. His love empties his mind and leaves his body see-through. His final poem is an infinitely sadhappy smile as he freefalls into death.

And what is his message for us? Let go, let your heart break, let your life be beauty made visible, let all things awaken you, let your life be poetry, the music of naked truth, the epiphanously idiosyncratic soul-song of felt significance. And all the words die so, so soon in an avalanche of silence, their sound and meaning and audience gone. But how they danced in their bright sliver of a moment! And how we danced and loved and wept and blazed in our brief time!

The door is, as always, already open. Openness awaiting openness. The invitation that will not go away. We are dying to live. Let us not wait any longer. Let us do whatever it takes. There are not higher stakes.

WINGPRINTS IN ENDLESS SKY

*Coming through the gates, coming through wild
Legs a bronzed blur, heels but winged delight
Gates gaping green, inlaid with divine dreams
Creamy clouds piled dark and boiling bright
Blue burns the night
Trembling with so much to put right*

*Coming through the gates, coming through wild
Skinned to the core, longing passing pride
Off drops the armor, off falls the epic headgear
Gone to shining nothing is the root of fear
Blue burns the night
The supreme dreamer closer than near*

*Coming through the gates, coming through wild
Heart streaming through resurrected eyes
Flesh earth and starlight, mind cloudless sky
Cradling the broken cities' concrete cry
Blue burns the night
Death is not the final goodbye*

*Coming through the gates, coming through wild
Blasted far beyond the reach of mind
The great secret needing no translation
Understanding replaced by revelation
Blue burns the night
True is the light*

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 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 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.

“Robert is hands-down the best therapist I've ever worked with — in fact, I had given up on the “therapy game” until I read his fascinating book *Darkness Shining Wild* and was inspired to go to him for a session. Since then I've done much work with him, as have an increasing number of my friends — all of whom also give him rave reviews. In a few sessions I'd already done more substantial work on myself than in all my previous therapy combined (this is a comment I've often heard from others as well).

“Robert meets people where they are, and with a compassionate and insightful gaze finds what they need to take the next step in their

development. His work is deeply embodied and highly integral, working with all aspects of a client's being. While extremely practical and grounded in his approach, he is deeply aware of (and embodies) deeper spiritual aspects of life, and can guide people to those places in their own being if and when they are ready to do so.

“As effective and inspiring as he is in individual sessions, Robert truly shines in groupwork settings — reaching such deeply universal issues that the work of anyone in the group feels personally relevant to everyone present. The openness and love of a group of people who have just done a workshop with Robert is a joy to behold.”

— Arthur Gillard

A Deeper Life

A FIVE DAY RESIDENTIAL RETREAT

IN HAWAII

January 25th-29th, 2008

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 CAD\$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. There are a few spaces left.

Breakthrough

A TWO DAY GROUP in SEATTLE, Feb. 23-24

Tuition: CAD\$625. A nonrefundable deposit of \$300 is required. Full tuition due one month before group begins.

Location: Seattle TBA.

Maximum number of participants: **12.**

Breakthrough

A THREE DAY RESIDENTIAL GROUP in ENGLAND, April 4-6

Tuition: CAD\$775, which is approximately £395. A nonrefundable deposit of \$400 CAD is required.

Food & Lodging: \$295 CAD (or approx. £150).

Location: Bawdsey Manor, approximately an hour and a half from London. Built in the late 1890s, Bawdsey Manor is a large and beautiful house, set in 150 acres of historic parkland overlooking the Deben Estuary in Suffolk. The location is outstanding, close to the river and the sea, surrounded by classic Suffolk scenery — boats, birdlife, reedy marshes and tranquil pebble beaches. See **www.bawdseymanor.co.uk**.

Maximum number of participants: **14.**

Breakthrough

A TWO DAY GROUP in BOULDER, April 26-27

Tuition: CAD\$675. A nonrefundable deposit of \$350 is required. Full tuition due one month before group begins.

Location: The Solstice Center, 302 Pearl Street, Boulder, Colorado.

Maximum number of participants: **13**.

Man Unbound

A WEEKEND GROUP FOR MEN

JANUARY 12th-14th, in WHITE ROCK, BC

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: \$595 CAD plus GST.

Maximum number of participants: **10**

“I have facilitated hundreds of groups for men, for professionals, for youth, for parents, and for couples over the last dozen years. I have attended dozens of workshops, learning about working with anger and many other aspects of counselling/therapy. I have practiced yoga and many types of meditation over the years, but have never attended anything that moved me in the manner that Robert’s groups have. Each and every man in the three groups that I attended gained profound insights into their lives. Men from all over the U.S. and B.C. and Alberta attended. We all deeply gained from each other and Robert’s skillful facilitation. For those who want to face their fear and gain from their experience, this is the way to go.”

— Alistair Moes

ATTRACTING YOUR BELOVED

A Group For Singles **with Robert & Diane**

January 19th-20th, 2008, in White Rock, BC

So many are yearning to be in a truly intimate relationship — a relationship that consistently enlivens, deepens, and awakens us — and wonder why they continue to find themselves either without a relationship or in relationships that don’t really work for them (but that they keep *hoping* will work for them). Many are having a relationship not with the other, but with the other’s *potential*.

Some think that all that they have to do to attract their beloved is to wish and intend for that one to somehow show up, but wishing and intending is not enough, no matter how ardently we may believe in our power to manifest what we want.

Something more is needed, namely to face, really face, and work through whatever it is in us that's in the way of attracting our beloved. This means not only facing our doubts and self-defeating beliefs, but also facing and working through the *originating* forces that underlie such doubts and beliefs. We'll only have our heart's deepest desire when we cease fighting the preparatory fire.

That is, to attract our beloved, we cannot just sit back and think positively or do some affirmations — rather, we have to do some real work on ourselves, deep work, in order to be sufficiently *ready* for our beloved. Full alignment with what we long for — a relationship that actually works on every level — is necessary, and this requires that we not only clearly see our conditioning, but that we also cease letting it run us. And we don't do this by somehow getting rid of our conditioning (such eradication being but a New Age fantasy), but by relating to it instead of from it.

In this group, we'll look at what is in the way of us truly attracting our beloved, and then we'll work with it, directly and deeply, through an intuitive mix of psychotherapy, bodywork, emotional release, Gestalt, and spiritual deepening practices.

All you need to do is bring your longing for deep relational intimacy to the group. That longing, that primal need, is your truest guide to attracting your beloved. This group will teach you how to make wise use of such longing, so that you can get on track for meeting the one with whom you can be truly intimate.

LOGISTICS:

The group will be held at 16133 9th Avenue, Surrey, BC V4A 1A5, from 10:00 am to approximately 6:00 pm both days.

Tuition is \$595 CAD plus GST.

We are only taking **10** participants, so early registration is recommended.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

Integral Psychotherapy Practicum 2008/2009 APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM in the USA (TBA)

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 March 7th, 2008. Tuition is CAD\$5900 plus GST. A deposit of \$1000 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.

Practicum Schedule

May 2-4, July 25-27, September 5-7, October 17-19, December 5-7, 2008, and February 13-15, 2009.

“Over my 10 years as a counselor, I have consistently sought out additional training. Many times, I have felt information overload (the skills felt mechanical). My experience in Robert’s Practicum was different than that. The practicum was profoundly experiential and there was support to integrate the skills. I feel much more confident as a therapist, and overall in my ability to be in contact with others. It’s not just what Robert is teaching, but his strong presence that provides the opportunity for deep personal healing. Diane’s presence adds a sense of being sweetly held, and at the same time, she persistently nudges for more authenticity. It is through this experience that I have expanded my ability to provide a healing presence for others.”

— Deanne Cousins

O BREATHE US DEEP

Composer and recording artist Diane Bardwell, along with Robert (her husband), has created O BREATHE US DEEP, featuring genre-transcending music that reveals, explores, and celebrates our deepest dimensions with passion and grace. Diane brings her remarkably rich voice to each song, singing with a full-blooded, heartfelt fluidity unburdened by sentimentality. Complementing her voice are the eloquent lyrics, based on poetry written by Robert. Some songs are devotional, some are raw; some soar, some sing and bleed; but all are presented in the spirit of awakening to who and what we truly are.

O BREATHE US DEEP is an eclectic mix of deeply spiritual (but not New Age nor conventionally religious) music that is as evocative as it is original. What connects its eight songs is not a particular style (a wide range of styles is used — from ballads to Celtic to Native American to hard-driving), but rather the poetically-articulated embracing and living of a deeper life, a life in which body, mind, emotions, and spirituality function as a natural integrated whole.

“The music in each of these beautiful songs takes my breath away. The soul and emotional depth expressed through both the lyrics and Diane’s magical voice moves me to tears. I relate to every feeling in every song. Thank you for this amazing and heartfelt gift.”

— Pamala Oslic, author of LOVE COLORS

(To hear sound clips, go to MUSIC at www.RobertMasters.com)

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.

Payments for groups (and my books and Diane’s new CD) can also be made by credit card online at our new Store; simply go to www.RobertMasters.com and click on STORE.

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

To view Robert's blog, go to www.RobertMasters.com and click on the *BLOG* button.

ROBERT'S 2008 WORK SCHEDULE

January 12-13	Man Unbound: White Rock, BC
January 19-20	Attracting Your Beloved: White Rock, BC
January 25-29	A Deeper Life: Hawaii
February 16-17	TBA
February 23-24	Breakthrough: Seattle
March 1-2	Alberta TBA
March 7-9	TBA
March 14-16	Breakthrough: Phoenix
March 29-30	Breakthrough: Ojai/Santa Barbara
April 4-6	Breakthrough: England
April 26-27	Breakthrough: Boulder, Colorado
May 2-4	2008/2009 Integral Psych. Practicum: USA TBA

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