

# THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

## Issue 45 January 2009

In looking back at how 2008 was for Diane and me, I see a yearlong sustained burst of work that was both very successful and very hard on us. Even if I didn't have cancer, we simply could not continue our 2008 pace. We took a three-day break at a local hot springs resort in mid-December to wind down and celebrate my birthday, and on the drive there tried to remember if we'd been there earlier in the year either once or twice, since in previous years we'd gone there maybe three times a year for a short break. Upon arriving we realized that this was our *first* time there in 2008! It had been a year without real breaks for us, group after group after group, with long hours, often 7 days a week, the time between groups consumed with taking care of business and doing sessions. Yes, the work itself had been very rewarding for us — seeing so many new people in so many new places deeply benefiting — but organizing and getting to that work had more often than not been exhausting.

So 2009 will be very different for us! Our well-being demands it, emphatically underlined by the presence of my cancer. I will not be doing any individual sessions because of the toll they take on my energy, energy that I need for my healing. This means a big loss in revenue for us, but I simply cannot afford to do such sessions. I will, however, be doing some couple sessions with Diane, as I find these not at all draining; a couple session is a mini-group, and groupwork that doesn't involve a lot of travel still is rejuvenating for me, especially with Diane there.

Even so, our groupwork has to be cut back. There is no way we can go back to England (we went twice in 2008 for extended working trips) or even to Boston (where we also went twice last year), simply because doing so would be too hard on us. So we'll be limiting our groupwork to places that are smaller, way more comfortable, and far more healing to be in:

Ashland, Boulder, Sedona. In these places I know that I can stay with my cancer protocol without strain. There is also a sense of community in these cities with which we feel very much at home.

Our main work focus will be on our Practicums, training groups/ apprenticeship programs in which I teach the art of intuitive integral psychotherapy, passing on what I've learned in over 30 years of working with and integrating the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. There is great satisfaction for me in such work, and great ease too, since everyone there is already fully committed to doing deep work.

And I have a new book, *Meeting the Dragon: Ending Our Suffering By Entering Our Pain*, which should be available in late February. I love to write, and will be taking more time to do so in 2009; I've already got some momentum, having returned to blogging this December.

There are two essays in this issue, both of which address the misuse of "Big Picture" perspectives. As always, I look forward to hearing your response.

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## **HAVING A NONDUAL PERSPECTIVE DOES NOT NEGATE THE NEED FOR BOUNDARIES!**

Living from a nondual perspective — which is VERY different than just intellectually operating from such a perspective — does not mean that no boundaries are present, nor that there should not be any boundaries.

Awareness itself is without boundary, but in the world of form — in which everything exists through relationship — boundaries are both

inevitable and necessary, from cellular to cosmic levels. Healthy boundaries safeguard and help maintain the integrity of our individuality, protecting what is being contained without crushing or atrophying it, making real intimacy possible (which requires not the shedding of boundaries, but rather the conscious expansion of them). In deep relational intimacy, we find freedom not from limitation, but *through* limitation, including the limitations inherent in boundary-formation. Just as good fences make good neighbors (as Robert Frost famously said), good boundaries make good connections.

We may, in the throes of embracing nondual philosophy, say that form is illusion (and therefore so are boundaries), etcetera after metaphysical etcetera, but getting caught up in such mentalizing simply keeps us from truly embodying ourselves. To the extent that form is illusion, so are we — but in the meantime we've got a lot of living and learning to do. Incarnation demands it.

Before we can consistently see through the apparent reality of form — nonconceptually recognizing its essential Emptiness — we need to get genuinely intimate with it and its structuring and evolution, resisting the temptation to mentally bypass or marginalize such undertakings. Making intellectual real estate out of nondual pronouncements does not constitute wisdom! Better to get out of our heads, and start really loving *now* instead of going on and on about unconditional love and other such should-infested ideals; better to fully manifest and deeply live our uniqueness instead of going on and on about our inherent inseparability.

Why let our recognition of our innate unity of Being separate us from our differences?

Honor the Absolute, and also honor the personal, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Yes, they all are essentially the Ultimate in drag, but unless we are already living in and as That, approaching them only from a nondualistically-based belief system will obstruct our healing

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and awakening, depriving our uniqueness of the attention and energy it needs for its ripening.

Premature claims to nondual understanding are, unfortunately, quite common, especially among the cognocentrically inclined and the blindly compassionate. If we are insufficiently honoring the personal, intrapersonal, and interpersonal — which requires, among other things, developing and maintaining healthy boundaries — then we are also insufficiently honoring the Absolute.

So beware of employing or operating from behind — rather than just referring to — a nondual perspective when you're not significantly *living* it. It is very easy to intellectually appropriate nondual teachings and use them to justify certain of our actions, such as disrespecting our or others' boundaries — after all, if we are all one and everything is absolutely perfect just as it is, then what's the harm in saying yes to everything? What a treacherously slippery slope this is, laden with mindfields, spiritual naïveté, and the detritus of regurgitated nondual teachings!

The Absolute is IT. And so is the Relative. If we truly are abiding in and as the Absolute, we cannot help but honor and take wise care of the Relative, understanding right to our core that just because — as the Buddha taught — Form is Emptiness (and vice versa), it still gets to be Form. It may be an illusion, but it's a real illusion. And Form, in order to be Form, needs boundaries, whether they manifest as membranes, walls, immune system policing, or the capacity to say a clear and unequivocal no under certain conditions.

If you are only saying yes to your yes, in the name of unconditional love and other such concepts, you are far from home. Let yourself also say yes to your no, without meeking it down, unapologetically letting your boundaries be known, ferociously if necessary!

Our work is not to be without boundaries — which would dishonor and vastly dilute our individuality, leading to a kind of psychosocial

homogenization, a pabulum of differences — but to develop the capacity to both contain and de-contain ourselves. How can we open our borders if we don't already clearly have them? Those who cannot contain their anger are a danger, but so too are those cannot express their anger.

So, yes, open the gates, but under the right conditions, realizing that opening them just because of some “nondual” notion of unboundedness or wholesale acceptance is far from a skillful practice!

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## **ARE WE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CANCER?**

Are we responsible for our cancer? There is plenty packed into this question — which is often more statement than question — asking for much more than just a simple yes or no.

Let's start with what could be called the New Age yes. From this point of view, we are responsible for our cancer, simply because we have created it. That is, it is our fault that we have cancer; we are to blame for it. To hold anyone or anything else responsible is simply delusion. If we really want to be well, and totally believe that we will get well, then we will get well; and if we don't get well, it must be because we didn't really want to get well. After all, we create our reality, don't we? If we have cancer, it must be because we have chosen it for ourselves, for reasons karmic and otherwise.

Those who adhere to such a belief system leave themselves little room in which to maneuver when they find out that they have cancer — they believe that they have brought it into being, they have manifested it, they and they alone are responsible for it. This of course generates almost ideal conditions for the arising of guilt: If I now have cancer,

then I must have done something wrong; otherwise, I wouldn't have cancer. And so those with cancer who have swallowed such New Age dogma find themselves ricocheting between the grandiose, inflationary high of having supposedly created it all and the decidedly deflationary low of feeling guilty for having created something as life-negating and unspiritual as cancer.

The naiveté of such a yes is not very hard to see, suffused as it is with magical thinking (prerational cognition) and me-centered overestimations of personal power that are natural to young children (who openly assume that the world revolves around them), but not to actual adults. It could be argued that those who buy into the New Age yes — with minds and wallets undiscerningly open — have grossly overcompensated for a deep-rooted sense of disempowerment and dissatisfaction, clinging to whatever concepts, metaphysical and otherwise, can sufficiently console them in the face of their actual situation. And there are many who, though not fully buying into such a belief system, still find it attractive, perhaps even comforting, in its sunny side-up promises. Magical thinking can be very appealing to us, regardless of our developmental level, when we are under unrelentingly heavy stress or are suffering a major shock (as when someone very close to us dies — Joan Didion articulates this with stark clarity in *The Year of Magical Thinking*).

Beyond the New Age yes, there is another yes regarding our being responsible for our cancer, a yes that does not say that we created it, but that we, in many cases, bear at least some responsibility for the very conditions that made possible the arising of cancer. This does not, however, mean that we actually CAUSED our cancer, but that there appears to be a positive correlation between certain of our actions/choices and the presence of our cancer.

If I am eating a diet loaded with white sugar, unhealthy fats, and hormone-suffused meat, and am highly stressed, sedentary, and sleep-deprived, then I am increasing the odds that I will get cancer. I could eat such a diet and have such a lifestyle and still not get cancer, but if

I was eating a healthier diet and had a happier, more active lifestyle, I'd be lowering the odds that I'd get cancer. The fact that some who have very healthy diets and very healthy lifestyles still get cancer does not invalidate this. There are so many factors involved in the arising of cancer — including ones over which we have no control — that we cannot decisively say that THIS or THAT actually causes cancer.

Let's now look at the notion that we are *not* responsible for our cancer. Proponents of this view see cancer as an alien invasion, something that can strike anyone, regardless of how healthy or young they are. They point to our increasingly carcinogenic environment as an inescapable reality, which can be combatted only so far by healthy practices. They also point to the emergence of cancer in young children, to show that cancer is not something for which we are responsible — who would blame a young child for his or her cancer? And they tend to equate saying that we may bear some responsibility for our cancer with the New Age yes, not seeing that taking responsibility for OUR possible part in the arising of our cancer is NOT an occasion for sinking into guilt, but rather for life-giving reflection and fitting change.

New Age advocates view cancer as something we *should* be able to eliminate — after all, if we created it, we can uncreate it. By contrast, those who claim that we are not responsible for our cancer view it as something that we cannot eliminate, attributing to it a power that cannot be fully overcome. They commonly tend to see conventional treatments of cancer (surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, hormone therapy) as *essential*, even if they also are open to “alternative” approaches to cancer. In his otherwise excellent book, *Anticancer*, physician David Servan-Schreiber emphatically states that there is no alternative or natural approach to cancer that can by itself cure it, while mentioning elsewhere in his book the reality of “spontaneous remission” (which may not in fact actually be *spontaneous*, but rather an *approach, deliberate or not*, through which the natural healing power of the body decisively takes over in a relatively short period). Not that conventional and nonconventional methods cannot fruitfully coexist in cancer treatment (ideally in the context of

integrative, psychospiritually-awakened oncology) — but it seems that almost all physicians, however open they may be to nonconventional ways of dealing with cancer, feel an obligation to not grant to any of these, however uniquely individualized, the possibility of actually being a successful primary treatment practice.

If we, after learning that we have cancer, look back at our lives to see what we may have done that contributed to our getting cancer, we don't have to get New Agey about it, blaming ourselves for our less-than-optimal choices. We could instead simply cast a compassionate eye upon such choices, recognizing how they arose and how they affected us, working with all of this to bring ourselves into a deeper sense of wholeness. No guilt. Just a deeper opening, a deeper understanding, coexisting with the realization that we did not CAUSE our cancer, but rather did or allowed certain things that may have made it easier for our cancer to take root. And so what if we did? For some of us, the presence of our cancer may be the best thing that ever happened to us.

Once we come to recognize how some of our choices may have contributed to our getting cancer, then we can work with them (and also with the anatomy and evolution of our choice-making mechanisms). For example, I can look back and see how driven I have been, for better or for worse, since I was in high school; yes, I also learned to meditate deeply, to really relax, but I still kept driving myself on in most areas of my life. Did this create my cancer? No. Did it create conditions conducive to the arising of my cancer? Probably. Does ceasing to drive myself thus — which I am now happily engaged in — mean that my cancer will disappear? Not necessarily. But letting that drivenness soften and ease, level upon level, is making me more receptive to what is needed, leaving me more dynamically alive, more open to both my death and my life, which I strongly intuit is increasing the odds of healing my cancer. Will the odds be increased enough? I don't know. It's enough that I am alive, and getting more alive.

If we don't heal from our cancer, despite doing all we can to deal with

it, this is NOT a sign of failure! There are many factors contributing to cancer, some of which we can control to varying degrees, and some which we cannot. All we can do is deal as best we can with those factors over which we have some control. It is simply magical thinking to assume that we can, if we just wish or affirm or visualize it hard enough, overcome our cancer. Yes, bringing a spacious awareness to our cancer, in conjunction with a wholehearted faith in our body's capacity to heal itself, can certainly help, but it may not be enough — this is not a belief, but a living reality, made all the more vivid by our bare awareness of our mortality.

I didn't create my cancer (and *we* don't create our reality — regardless of our dreams of omnipotence — but rather our *experience* of our reality), but I *am* responsible to a significant degree for some of the conditions that made its arising possible. As I listen to my cancer, I hear more than my cancer. My whole history is before me, with all of its twists and turns, bound in a weave of dazzling contingency, bringing me to more than my knees. I am literally dying to live, more than ever before.

It is my sobering joy to be as responsible as possible TO my cancer, to do all I can to de-inflate it, so that it does not obstruct my living. Rather than attacking it, I am cutting off its supply lines as best I can, with some very skilled help.

Will this save me? I don't know — I'm not doing it only to save myself, but to deepen my life. I would love to live much longer for all kinds of reasons, and I feel strongly aligned with whatever might bring that about, but I know that my time may be much shorter than I would like; being at ease with this is not at all fatalistic, but rather realistic, bringing me into deepening intimacy both with what dies and with what does not die.

# ***BREAKTHROUGH***

## **January 17th-18th in Ashland, Oregon**

Deep, efficient, highly effective work for those who want to make wise use of their difficulties, and who are ready to work through whatever is obstructing their liberation.

THIS GROUP IS LIMITED TO 12 PARTICIPANTS ONLY, so that everyone will have time to do in-depth work. All kinds of issues and concerns — from the deepest trauma to the seemingly trivial — will be dealt with, through a dynamic, intuitive mix of bodywork, psychotherapy, spiritual disciplines, dreamwork, and group practices. Structure will not be preset, but rather will spontaneously arise in accord with individual & group needs.

**LOCATION & TIME:** 171 Oak Street, Ashland, Oregon. The group will begin Saturday January 17th at 10:00am and end Sunday January 18th at approx. 6:00pm.

**TUITION:** \$550. A nonrefundable deposit of \$200 is required. Full tuition is due by December 29, 2008. There are 4 spaces left in the group.

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# ***BREAKTHROUGH***

## **February 21st-22nd in Sedona, Arizona**

Deep, efficient, highly effective work for those who want to make wise use of their difficulties, and who are ready to work through whatever is obstructing their liberation.

THIS GROUP IS LIMITED TO 12 PARTICIPANTS ONLY, so that everyone will have time to do in-depth work. All kinds of issues and concerns — from

the deepest trauma to the seemingly trivial — will be dealt with, through a dynamic, intuitive mix of bodywork, psychotherapy, spiritual disciplines, dreamwork, and group practices. Structure will not be preset, but rather will spontaneously arise in accord with individual & group needs.

**LOCATION & TIME:** Sedona Community Center, 2615 Melody Lane. The group will begin Saturday February 21st at 10:00am and end Sunday February 22nd at approx. 6:00pm.

**TUITION:** \$600. A nonrefundable deposit of \$200 is required. Full tuition is due by January 15, 2009.

**NOTE:** There will be a free evening talk/event (featuring lots of Q & A, plus music) with Robert & Diane 7:00pm to 9:30pm Sunday February 15th at the Sedona Community Center. For more information, contact David Sunfellow at [integral@nhne.org](mailto:integral@nhne.org).

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*An opportunity to directly learn from a master integral psychotherapist and groupleader (1) unique, exceptionally effective psychotherapeutic, spiritual, and bodywork/energywork skills; and (2) how to creatively and effectively integrate these in counseling work.*

# Masters Integral Psychotherapy Practicum

## 2009 USA 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.

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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 in great depth with body, mind, emotion, and spirit. Love, integrity, and presence will be the cornerstones of our practice.

### **WE WILL ONLY BE TAKING TWELVE PARTICIPANTS.**

**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 (and interpersonal and transpersonal) 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 a setting, there's 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.

**LOCATION & STRUCTURE:**

The Practicum will take place over 5 four-day modules. Some of the modules will be held in Ashland, Oregon, and some in Boulder, Colorado.

Each module will include individual and group work, plus facilitation by participants of each other's work (with fitting feedback and guidance from Robert).

After the training concludes, participants who have attended it in its entirety will receive a diploma indicating that they have completed a one-year training in Masters Integral Psychotherapy with Robert Augustus Masters.

**PREREQUISITE:** Previous work with Robert.

**TUITION:** \$7000. A nonrefundable deposit of \$1000 is required. Half of the tuition is due at the start of the first module; the rest is due by the start of the third module (unless other arrangements have been made with us). Lodging and meals will be extra. Contact [info@robertmasters.com](mailto:info@robertmasters.com) to arrange payment.

**SCHEDULE:**

April 16-19, June 4-7, August 6-9, October 8-11, December 3-6..

**There is considerable interest in this our latest Practicum. If you are thinking of possibly participating, please contact Robert.**

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**Some Further Notes on the Practicum:**

The work done in the Practicum differs from the work done in our other groups in a number of ways:

- 1) Much of it occurs in the context of Practicum members doing work with each other under my supervision, pairing up and practicing what I have taught.
- 2) I oversee all of the work; Diane and I circulate among the six pairs of Practicum participants to help guide each session in more optimal directions.

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3) When I am working with an individual in front of the group, I may explain in some detail — without lowering the quality of the session — what I am doing and why, so that the session also becomes a teaching opportunity.

(4) Each participant gets to work, often very deeply, four or five times in one module, as opposed to once or (now and then) twice in a regular group.

There are five modules, each lasting four days. Between modules 2, 3, 4, and 5, participants practice what they have learned, both with each other (if they live in the same area) and with suitable others (who are not charged for such work and who are beforehand informed that they are working with a trainee). After the second module, their sessions will last about half an hour. After the third module, their skill level will have increased quite a bit, so that they can now offer longer sessions, and bring more depth to their work.

Between modules, participants are not only expected to do a certain number of sessions (which they will keep notes on), but also to work on themselves in whatever ways are needed. This will include a daily meditation practice as well as keeping track of their dreams. All will have the opportunity to have phone consultations with Diane and me to discuss questions and challenges concerning their practice.

Modules differ. The first one is an introduction, the second is mostly about working with emotions, the third mostly about working with body, the fourth mostly about working with mind and spirituality, and the final one is all about integrating what has already been learned. Spirituality is part of each module, as is dreamwork.

The Practicum quickly becomes a crucible/sanctuary for very deep work, providing a remarkable support system for personal evolution. In the final module, we all brainstorm and give input to each person, sharing our insights about what the post-Practicum work they might do could look like — not as a clone of me, but rather in the context of their unique abilities and talents, fittingly expressed through their own style, incorporating, to whatever degree, other healing modalities that they may already be practicing.

The Practicum is a prerequisite for further trainings with us, including advanced bodywork/energywork, working with couples, and leading groups.

## ONLINE COMMUNITY

**FACEBOOK** has a group for people who have worked with me and/or who are interested in my work/writings to connect and discuss my work/writing or anything related to it. Once a week I answer questions from group members, which are sent to me from the group administrator, Arthur Gillard. If you're not already a member of Facebook, it is easy to join at: **<http://www.facebook.com>**. Once you have joined, simply type "Robert Augustus Masters" in the Search box and then click to join the group.

**GAIA**, a social networking site (free to join), also has a Robert Augustus Masters discussion group, featuring the same intention and invitation (and weekly Q&A) as my Facebook group. The online culture of my Gaia group is vital and inviting (and far more active than my Facebook group), and its powerful forum software is perfectly suited for meeting, discussing, and sharing with others who are interested in authenticity, healing, transformation, and Awakening.

You don't need to be a member of Gaia to see the posts there — just go to **[http://pods.gaia.com/robert\\_augustus\\_masters](http://pods.gaia.com/robert_augustus_masters)**.

But if you would like to participate in the discussions, you can join Gaia by going to: **<http://www.gaia.com/apply>**, or email Arthur Gillard ([thinkintuit@gmail.com](mailto:thinkintuit@gmail.com)), the cultivator of the site, who will send you an invitation.

The format of my Gaia group makes it very easy to navigate through, with everything organized into eight main categories: *Introduce Yourself; Ask Robert; Announcements & Feedback; Doing the Work; Dreams & Dreamworking; Robert's Writings; Other Influences, Teachings, Lessons, & Exemplars; and Potpourri for the Soul.*

I hope to hear from you, whether via Facebook or Gaia; feel free to jump in at any point. There are almost always a number of vital discussions going on in my Gaia group, among which you very likely will find some things that stir your interest.

## The Crucible of Awakening

For more information regarding groups and trainings, or to register for them, contact [info@RobertMasters.com](mailto:info@RobertMasters.com).

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

Payments for groups (plus Robert's books and Diane's CD) can also be made online at our Store page; simply go to [www.RobertMasters.com](http://www.RobertMasters.com) and click on STORE.

To view previous newsletters, click on the NEWSLETTER button at [www.RobertMasters.com](http://www.RobertMasters.com).

To view Robert's blog, go to [www.RobertMasters.com](http://www.RobertMasters.com) and click on the BLOG button.

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## **2009 Work Schedule**

January 8-11 Integral Psychotherapy Practicum: Ashland, Oregon

January 17-18 Breakthrough: Ashland, Oregon

February 21-22 Breakthrough: Sedona, Arizona