

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 26 June 2007

Following is the introduction to my new book, which is tentatively entitled *Toward Mature Monogamy: The Liberating Power of Awakened Relationship*.

I expect to have it finished by the end of July...

THE EVOLUTION OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Intimate relationship is, to put it mildly, at a very interesting point in contemporary culture.

In a small but significantly increasing percentage of the population, intimate relationship has over the last four decades evolved so far from its long-established ways — mutating in diverse directions — that its very nature and structuring, once such an unquestioned given, is now up for some serious questioning and reformulating.

Reformulating, revisioning, reinventing, restructuring — how we look at intimate relationship is changing almost as fast as intimate relationship itself.

One result of this is that many of us do not have a particularly clear view of intimate relationship. We look, but don't very often take the time to

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look inside our looking, being so caught up in checking our rearview mirrors or getting nostalgic for the future, that we usually don't see all that much of what is right in front of us. Nonetheless, we have to admit that *something* is different about intimate relationship now. We look back just two or three generations, and it seems as if we're looking back many hundreds of years. Things are moving that fast.

For a very long time, intimate relationship has been viewed and lived, with few exceptions, as an alternative — and not necessarily an equivalent alternative — to spiritual life. There was the householder, and there was the spiritual seeker, and there wasn't much overlap between them. As wide as this split was for men, it was even wider for women. Intimate relationship was something you did — or endured — until there was cultural permission for something “deeper.”

Now there is not only a significant amount — small by conventional standards, but still substantial enough to register on the radar screens of cultural evolution — of permission (cultural and otherwise) for something “deeper” or more profoundly connected to happen in intimate relationship, but also an increasing need for it. So intimate relationship has, at its leading edge, become less a prelude to spiritual opening and awakening, and more a crucible *for* it.

This is nothing less than great news. Grounding our spiritual dimensions in the stuff of everyday life (enroute to integrating all that we are), as is so amply supplied by intimate relationship and its daily dynamics, is much needed, especially with regard to the increasingly precarious positioning we as a species are occupying. Spirituality that is directly lived in the context of ordinary life is spirituality that can have a real impact on the quality of life — staying experientially connected with our spirituality during the bumpier times of everyday life provides us with a much needed perspective, greatly increasing the odds that we won't sweat over what's not worth sweating over. (Thus does daily life become contemporary culture's ashram.)

If we can access our spirituality — and access it at a deeper level than that of belief — during the inevitable trials and challenges of intimate relationship, we can probably access it just about anywhere.

Intimate relationship as a crucible for awakening from the entrapping dreams that we habitually animate — sounds good, doesn't it? But once our honeymoon with this is over, the labor begins. The path is not neatly laid out for us, in part because we, through our very relatedness with our intimate other, are cocreating that path, that relational unfolding, as we go, feeling our way — more often than not on our hands and knees — towards what really matters. In this, we travel together not only through adventures high and low, but also, as we will see, take up residence in deeper stages of intimate relatedness.

These are exciting — excitingly alive and excitingly unstable — times for intimate relationship. The playing field for men and women has, in far more ways than not, been leveled, making possible encounters and openings not generally available when women were second-class citizens or worse, cut off from their own voice and power. Now men and women have far more of an opportunity to meet eye to eye, belly to belly, heart to heart, without the disempowering ethics of earlier times. A meeting of true partners no longer has to be such a rarity.

However, a level playing field is not without its own perils, for it's easy to reduce it to a flatland of force-fed equality. Once that women had more rights and a more inclusive cultural context in which to live, they began leaving men, in trickles at first, then in droves — which brought more and more men to psychotherapy or at least to their knees — and men then began to realize that they would have to do more than flash some bucks, be nice for a while, or raise a fist to keep women with them. Many relationships became arenas of negotiation, wherein equality between the partners did not liberate, but rather only fed the status quo.

Neurotic egalitarianism seized the helm, declaring an across-the-board equality that not only increased comfort, but simultaneously deadened.

The husband typically depicted on television sitcoms — sexless, inept, and supremely unattractive — reflected and reinforced the notion that for men marriage was, whatever its trappings, a *trap*. And so on.

Intimate relationship shifted, to a significant degree, from barbaric to bland, infecting many with nostalgia for the barbaric, because at least that had some juice, especially for the men. Affairs multiplied. Pornography infiltrated the mainstream, attracting refugees from the wastelands of conventional marriage.

There had — and very much needed — to be a move away from the banal stagnation and plastic tedium of such conventionality, but it mostly went backward instead of forward, while often acting as if was indeed moving forward (as exemplified by multiple-partnering practices and their accompanying rationalizations). Monogamy itself started to take some heat, getting overassociated with the flattening or deadening of passion.

Nevertheless, amidst all this relational upheaval there was something else emerging, something neither barbaric nor bland, something at once deeply passionate, caring, awakened, and rooted in integrity and love — a stage of intimate relationship that I call *mature monogamy*. The practice and living of mature monogamy is at the heart of this book. Much will be said about how to move through the territory between immature monogamy and mature monogamy. That territory, that fertile zone of potential relational evolution, features a rich mix of landscapes, emotional and otherwise, and can seem overwhelming in its complexity and overlapping concerns.

And so, as an orientation/travelling aid, I have throughout this book explored most of the topics through the lenses of four stages of intimate relationship — me-centered, we-centered codependent, we-centered co-independent, and being-centered — which I'll introduce after saying a bit about stages.

There are stages (or stably established levels) to intimate relationship, just as there are stages — to take but two examples — to cognitive and moral development. A stage exists not as an organic entity or thing unto itself, but rather as a cohesive, nontransient assembly or “structure” of coexisting qualities. We don’t so much directly experience stages as *arrive* at them (though we do experience firsthand the various qualities that constitute them), at some point recognizing through a variety of signs, behavioral and otherwise, that we have arrived at a particular stage.

This is simpler than it might sound; there is, for example, plenty to consider regarding an egocentric stage of morality — huge amounts of developmental research and conjecture having been invested in considering it — but most of us easily grasp what it actually means to be at this stage of moral development. The same applies to a prerational cognitive stage as compared to a rational cognitive stage, and so on. What follows is not *the* stage model for intimate relationship, but simply the model that makes the most sense to me, based on all the work I have done with couples.

The first stage is me-centered relationship. This is an ego-governed arrangement, with the egoity of one partner usually dominating that of the other. Each partner’s credo, however well camouflaged, basically is: “What’s in it for me?” Some may appear to be more selfish, more full of themselves, but others, perhaps nicer or more passive, are still obeying a what’s-in-it-for-me dynamic, if only to ensure or reinforce their security.

Not surprisingly, the dominant member is usually male, although that has started to shift somewhat in the last few decades. So we basically have two egos — two cults of one — in some sort of coalition, however uneasily governed. There’s not much ongoing intimacy here, but there may nonetheless still be times of profound connectedness, union, and love — that is, elevated *states* — the presence of which may create the illusion that the couple is doing better than is actually the case.

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In me-centered relationship, there is not much intimacy with the various factors that together make up the relationship. We might, for example, know next to nothing about our anger (its signs of arising, its originating factors, its behavioral manifestations, and so on), even though we are frequently angry. By contrast, in a truly intimate relationship, intimacy is cultivated with each partner's anger — and also with every other aspect of the relationship — as well as with the relationship as a whole.

Monogamy at this stage is immature, held in place through a power dynamic rooted mainly in fear and obedience (frequently featuring the man holding most of the power). Non-monogamous urges are only superficially curbed, and are, whether acted-out or not, often indulged (this ordinarily being far more characteristic of the man than the woman). Betrayal of the relationship, whether through sexual or emotional affairs or pornographic obsession, is common.

The next stage is we-centered codependent relationship. It is not without me-centered tendencies — for each stage not only transcends the previous stage, but also *includes* it, however peripherally or slightly — but is not so readily run by them. Here, the notion of equality is paid more than lip service. The couple is now not so much two cults of one in coalition, as one cult of two over against the rest of life.

This may not always be as isolated as it sounds, for the membrane around the couple may be somewhat permeable, but there still is a strongly guarded separation from whatever exists outside their coupledness. Within their self-contained world, they negotiate over what would seemingly best serve their relationship — they are important, but their relationship is more important. It is their security, their sanctum, their bubble of immunity, and whatever might threaten it from within is defused, diplomatically and otherwise.

Monogamy at this stage is also immature, held in place by a power dynamic rooted in overdone or force-fed tolerance (generally shared equally by both partners). Non-monogamous urges are generally curbed,

muted, or repressed, at best being only vicariously indulged. Outright betrayal of the relationship is uncommon; the betrayal that does occur is mostly a betrayal of the potential of each partner for the sake of the safety and comfort provided by their relationship.

The third stage is we-centered co-independent relationship. Here, both partners make a priority out of maintaining their individuality, while also remaining, at least to a minor degree, a cult of two. Negotiation over differences is still commonplace, but there are more interpersonal risks taken. Tolerance is not so rigidly enforced. Autonomy, though much more adult here than in me-centered relationships, is often given too much weight. There usually is insufficient vulnerability between the partners. And though there is more passion here than in we-centered codependent relationship, it is not usually permitted full expression. Promiscuous urges are usually neither indulged (as in the first stage) nor suppressed (as in the second stage), but rather are exposed and discussed in a manner that does not threaten the relationship.

Monogamy here is starting to shed its immaturity; there is some sense of a deeper kind of relationship, with some steps toward that perhaps being taken. What needs to be surrendered at this stage is each partner's overattachment to autonomy and aversion to deep communion (which they tend to associate with romanticism or neurotic fusion).

The fourth stage is being-centered relationship. It does not hold itself above the previous three stages (doing so would be a first-stage habit), and does not even want to, for it chooses intimacy with *all* its qualities, however dark or immature or unappealing, and it recognizes that all of the qualities that characterize early stages of relational intimacy are, to whatever degree, *part* of it.

Rather than just transcending these qualities, being-centered relationship also cultivates *intimacy* with them, so that they are not only included in it, but are also known from the deep inside. (Thus do we relate not *from* our neuroses, but rather *to* them.)

Monogamy at this stage is mature, possessing an integrity that's firmly rooted in shared love, shared power, shared depth, shared presence. Non-monogamous urges present no problem, because they have all but ceased to exist; there is simply no interest in them. Betrayal also has ceased to exist, the very seeds of it having no soil from which to sprout.

Monogamy now is not a choice, but a profoundly obvious and sacred *given*. Finding *freedom through intimacy* is a living reality at this stage, consistently and naturally and fully participated in by both partners, because they have reached the point where there is no real alternative to doing so.

For those in being-centered relationships, the limitations of monogamy are not entrapping, but *liberating*.

At the far reaches of mature monogamy, relationship enters such a depth of intimacy that that which is beyond all relatedness infuses the relationship. This does not mean the end of the relationship, but rather only a further grounding of it in Being.

Mature monogamy may sound wonderful, but how do we get there? After all, we can't just read about it and then go live it. Much has to be done before mature monogamy is significantly available to us. For starters, we need to expose, face, and directly work — and not just cognitively! — with whatever is immature in us. We can't, for example, remain emotionally illiterate or morally stunted if we want to be in a truly intimate relationship.

Much of this book therefore concerns what needs to be explored and done in order to prepare us for mature monogamy. The passage from immature to mature monogamy is not just a journey of ripening intimacy with a beloved other, but also a journey into and through zones of ourselves that may be very difficult to navigate, let alone get intimate with and integrate with the rest of our being.

The longing for a being-centered relationship, the aching for mature monogamy and passionately awakened partnership with our beloved, is our primary guide when it is openly felt, providing incentive and inspiration for exploring places and patterns in ourselves that we otherwise would likely avoid or only marginally visit.

And it is into these places and patterns, these areas of darkness, pain, and heavy wounding, that we must go, if we are to be truly ready for mature monogamy. This is not some kind of romanticized or paint-by-numbers shadow-work, but rather an odyssey that, asking everything of us, readies us for a life *big enough* to include mature monogamy.

In short, moving toward mature monogamy matures us.

Part of the problem in writing about intimate relationship is that it loses much of its aliveness and visceral authenticity when chopped up into categories. So I will not be as neat as perhaps I could be in my structuring of this book, letting the contents of its chapters mingle and overlap some. (Some of the chapters may seem familiar to readers of my other books, as they've been taken from these and modified to fit this book.) Each aspect of an intimate relationship affects and is affected, however indirectly, by every other aspect of the same relationship; this book will resonate, as best it can, with much the same interactive, intersubjective spirit.

Mature monogamy, if it is truly mature, does not look down upon immature monogamy, but instead cultivates intimacy with its qualities, however lowly, dense, or dark those may be. Everything has its place. Egocentric impulses, for example, are not banished or subjected to spiritual ambition's ego-eradicating programs, but rather are approached with sufficient depth and clarity to divest them of any power to threaten or otherwise undermine our relationship, leaving them — like the rest of our “lower” qualities — as no more than colorful, functionally peripheral threadings that simply enrich the weave of our relationship.

So, in the spirit of intimacy with all that we are, including knowing that we'll be aligned with our heart's deepest longing when we stop fighting the preparatory fires, I invite you to explore with me the anatomy, evolution, and awakening power of intimate relationship, with a special focus on mature monogamy.

AN OVERVIEW OF MY GROUPWORK

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. This healing is what this group is all about.

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, 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**

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.

Breakthrough

A THREE DAY RETREAT

DEVOTED TO DEEP HEALING & AWAKENING

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

September 28th-30th, 2007, in Ojai, California

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

Tuition: US\$795 (or CDN\$875, plus GST). A nonrefundable deposit of \$250.00 is required.

Maximum number of participants: **12**.

Embodying the Deep Masculine

A TWO-DAY GROUP FOR MEN

July 14th-15th, 2007, in White Rock, BC

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..

If you are looking for a powerfully transformative, exceptionally deep and illuminating group experience with other men who are as committed as you to deep work, this group is for you.

TUITION & LOGISTICS: US\$550 or CDN\$595 plus GST. Limited to **10** men only. 10am to 6pm both days.

Reclaiming Your True Voice

A TWO-DAY GROUP FOR WOMEN

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

with Diane & Robert

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\$550 or CDN\$595 plus GST. Limited to **10** women only. 10am to 6pm both days.

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.

The training is a prerequisite for further trainings with Robert, including the **Bodywork/Energy-work** and **Groupwork Practicum modules**.

Practicum Schedule

Nov. 2-4, 2007; Jan. 4-6, Mar. 7-9, May 2-4, July 11-13, and Sept. 5-7, 2008

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. Comments on the blogs are welcome; send them to info@RobertMasters.com.

Robert's 2007 Work Schedule

May 31-June 3	Bodywork-in-Psychotherapy Practicum: Whistler, BC
June 8-10	2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
June 16	Reclaiming Your True Voice: White Rock, BC
June 30-July 1	Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
July 7	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
July 14-15	Embodying the Deep Masculine: White Rock, BC
July 27-29	2007 Practicum: Bowen Island, BC
August 18-19	Reclaiming Your True Voice: White Rock, BC
August 25	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
September 7-9	Breakthrough: Edmonton
September 15-16	Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
September 22-23	Embodying the Deep Masculine: White Rock, BC
September 28-30	Breakthrough: Ojai, California
October 5-7	2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
October 11-14	Bodywork-in-Psychotherapy Practicum: Whistler, BC
October 20	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
October 27	TBA
November 3	2007/2008 Practicum: White Rock, BC
November 10-11	Reclaiming Your True Voice: White Rock, BC
November 16-18	Breakthrough: Scottsdale, Arizona
Nov. 30-Dec. 2	Radical Opening: Whistler, BC
December 7-9	2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC

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