

# THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

**Issue 62 June 2010**

*When the darkest hour lasts too long  
When we lose track of where we belong  
When our faith's impaled on stony facts  
When we exchange our pen for an ax  
And when we trample our heart  
Trying to depart this dark  
We are closer than close  
To what we seem so far from  
Seeds grow in the dark — us too  
Let's bring our darkness out of the shadows  
Touching it and taking tea with it  
Until we know with more than mind  
That what we are touching  
Is none other than us  
Even as we are blasted open  
By the minotaur's bleeding howl of recognition*

*This is the shockwave we've straitjacketed  
The door in our dreams we fear to near  
The nightmare ripping back the covers  
While we try to put on our latest face  
Seeds grow in the dark — so do we  
Let's not be seduced by light  
Let's undress the night  
Building a faith too deep to be spoken  
A faith too central to be broken  
Until even darkness  
Lights our way*

## CELLULAR IMMORTALITY AMBITIONS: CANCER & DEATH

If we can speak of cancer having an intention, it is not to kill, but to avoid being killed. Period. A death-free horizon, a death-free future. As such, cells infested with cancer are, in a sense, smitten with immortality aspirations, however rudimentary. In obvious parallel with this is contemporary culture's denial of death and accompanying dreams of unlimited growth.

Normal cells are programmed, literally and precisely programmed, to die when they become dysfunctional or unnecessary. The term for this is *apoptosis*. Once it is activated in a cell, the internal networks of the cell are shut down and a series of enzymatic reactions are catalyzed, leading to a full internal breakdown that occurs without any significant fuss — no disturbance of other cells, no leakage of intracellular components into the extracellular environment. No mess, no inflammation, no dumping of toxins. No poisonous spill zones or pollution, no ecological disaster. A *clean* death.

Some call apoptosis cell suicide, but regardless of the anthropomorphic leaning and dramatic connotations of such a label, apoptosis is an elegantly efficient, ecologically extremely sound process. Recycling plus.

Cells undergoing apoptosis — over 100,000 every second in every one of us — signal their demise in timely fashion to the surrounding tissue, shrinking away from other cells without sucking them in. A for-the-greater-good-of-all death. The outer membrane of cells engaged in apoptosis undergoes a change that can be recognized by immune system cells, leading to a speedy removal via phagocytosis, meaning engulfing consumption by cells born for the task.

Apoptosis has a kind of grace to it. By contrast, cells that die because of mechanical damage or exposure to toxins usually have a messy departure, featuring inflammation of surrounding tissue, loss of membrane integrity, and a leakage of intracellular garbage, all of which of course negatively affects neighboring cells. Apoptosis, however, doesn't dump on its neighbors or otherwise violate their boundaries; it arises in individual cells, and does not

spread to other cells in the vicinity. It is clean, efficient, naturally protective of organismic integrity. A truly Life-serving death.

Cancer is largely organized around the unrelenting, full-out attempt to avoid apoptosis, doing whatever it can to fend off, deflect, bypass, or otherwise keep itself immune to our immune system.

The word “cancer” is closely associated with death for obvious reasons, yet cancer itself is death-avoidance incarnate, a fuel-guzzling, resource-draining clumping of decentered, toxically conforming cells marching together not just to a different drummer, but to a different band, setting the stage for a seemingly endless tomorrow.

Death not only serves Life, but makes Life possible. Level upon level, we literally die into Life. We could say that Life outlives us, but at essence we *are* Life, whatever form it may take. This is no consolation whatsoever to egoic us, but is living — and liberating — truth to who and what we really are. Cancer is operationally oblivious to all this, being biochemically mesmerized by its own endarkened agenda, much like those who believe in physical immortality, as if aging were just some kind of disease or error in the System.

Some have claimed that cancer is just the body’s attempt to deal with some very difficult conditions, like a lack of oxygen. Yes, if available oxygen were at a very low level for a significant period, it would make organismic sense to find a way to adapt to this, such as generating cells that could live on little or no oxygen — which of course is characteristic of cancer cells. But cancer is extremely maladaptive for us; its capacity to live without the oxygen that normal cells require does not lead it to generate functional tissue so as to prolong organismic life, but rather just depletes it, sucking the juice out of it.

Cancer could be described as cellular selfishness and shortsightedness, making unlimited growth into an unquestioned good, plundering other cells and their pathways for its own ends with colonial ruthlessness and a complete lack of ecological savvy. Anything to avoid death. For cancer, apoptosis is something to eradicate or at least rob of any power. Keeping alive at all costs is cancer’s central strategy, in much the same spirit as physicians who keep patients alive as long as possible, no matter what their circumstances, even when such

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prolongation of vital functions is far from Life-affirming for them and their significant others.

But death is not the enemy. Death is not in the way. Avoiding death deadens us, but being intimate with death enlivens and deepens us.

Being intimate with cancer means, in part, being intimate with that in us which would rather avoid death than face it, through all sorts of means, including being obsessively hyperfocused on material gain and expansion. But no matter how much stuff we own, we are not safe from death. Accumulating more and more and more is cancer's way. In stark contrast, opening ourselves, with compassionate clarity, to the inevitability and necessity of death is the way of basic sanity. Sounds akin to apoptosis, doesn't it?

Apoptosis as a term is of Greek origin, meaning “falling off or dropping off” — as in leaves falling from trees or petals dropping from flowers. An utterly natural letting go this is, untainted by me-centeredness or overly individualized concern. Whether it is conscious or not, apoptosis is sacrifice for the greater good, a dying clearly in the service of Life. Cancer, whether cellular or cultural, personal or collective, is out of touch with this, fleeing the dying that gives Life, estranged from the very wholeness out of which it first arose.

Dying into Life, we are never so alive. Dying into Life, we are never so here. Are we not all dying to live, to *really* live? We die, and we do not die — this we intuit, right to our core, beyond all of our knowledge. Like our cells, we inevitably come undone and dissolve (like a cell in the body of humanity), yet also remain present in — and *as* — the very essence of what persists, eventually letting go of all of our dreams and ambitions and hopes of being an Enlightened somebody, so that we might be present as pure being, at once deeply individualized and emptied enough of ourselves to have room for all.

## **SPIRITUAL BYPASSING**

### **WHEN SPIRITUALITY DISCONNECTS US FROM WHAT REALLY MATTERS**

*This, my next book, will be published by North Atlantic Books at the end of June (and distributed by Random House), and is available for pre-order on Amazon. Here is part of the chapter on boundaries:*

...If we are inclined to be overboundaried—overbudgeting for defense—we wall ourselves in, confusing security with freedom. On the other hand, if we tend to be underboundaried—leaving the gates too open—we float on the periphery of embodied life, confusing fusion with intimacy, limitlessness with freedom, and excessive tolerance with compassion. Boundaries make containment possible, but does such containment protect or overprotect us, entrap or serve us, ground or cement us, house or jail us?

Those who are underboundaried tend to mistake collapsed boundaries for expanded ones; especially in the realm of spiritual bypassing, a collapsing (or outright dissolution) of boundaries is seen as letting go or even transcending them. A similar mistake is made in our idealized view of romance, where the overwhelming urge to merge is seen as the ultimate state of love rather than as a temporary fantastical state that inevitably unravels over time. We may rationalize or glamorize this abandonment of boundaries as a kind of liberation, a casting-off of shackles in the service of transcendence and spiritual realization. As much as we might conceive of such radical expansion as a wonderful thing, confusing our flight from boundedness with true openness, we don't realize that the actual practice of spiritual bypassing does not expand boundaries, but rather neglects and disrespects them. For example, someone we are close to speaks very disrespectfully to us, clearly crossing a line, and instead of asserting ourselves with them, taking a needed stand, we leave their behavior unaddressed and unchallenged, thinking we are being compassionate with them, thereby disrespecting the very boundary of ours that was inappropriately crossed.

Abandoning our boundaries is not indicative of a higher or more noble state—however much we might spiritually rationalize this—but is just escapism

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and aversion, an avoidance of facing, entering, and moving through our pain. Dissociation in spiritual robes is still dissociation! We may make a virtue out of moving beyond the personal, perhaps thinking that we are transcending it, when in fact we are slipping into the domain of depersonalization (a well-known psychiatric disorder featuring disconnection from one's sense of self). But depersonalization is not the same as the self-transcending or "no-self" realizations of advanced spiritual practice! It is just another form of dissociation (or unhealthy separation).

And what is arguably the opposite of dissociation? *Intimacy*. And intimacy requires healthy boundaries. Healthy boundaries protect but do not overprotect; they stand guard but do not jail. If we keep ourselves overprotected, we don't thrive but stagnate. And if we keep ourselves underprotected, we also don't thrive but open ourselves undiscerningly, left in a state in which overabsorption is inevitable. The spiritual bypasser in us might protest: shouldn't we be receptive? Yes, but overabsorption and receptivity are not necessarily the same thing! Consider the example of a man who is exaggeratedly nice and almost always smiling, even when he is treated badly. He may appear very receptive and unusually open, but in fact he is taking in much more than is healthy for him, perhaps because this strategy—never saying a clear "no"—helped him survive difficulties in his early years.

Having healthy boundaries doesn't mean a lack of receptivity; instead, it is a discerning receptivity, an openness that can just as easily say a full-blooded "no" as a "yes". The indiscriminating openness and too easy "yes" (and possible show of equanimity) of those who are underboundaried is especially difficult to cut through when it's taken to be a sign of spiritual attainment. When we cannot voice and embody an unequivocal "no," allowing ourselves to be closed at times, our only way of protecting ourselves is to dissociate, to get away from what's difficult rather than face and pass through it. Where being overboundaried appears to promise freedom through security, being underboundaried seems to promise freedom through limitlessness. But both cut us off from living fully. This fact is usually obvious when we overprotect ourselves but not necessarily when we underprotect ourselves, especially when we legitimize our actions spiritually, making an unquestioned virtue out of our indiscriminating openness...

“This is a wonderfully significant and important book, and is highly recommended. Its contents are truly mandatory for this day and age.”

— **Ken Wilber, author of *The Integral Vision***

“This timely and penetrating analysis of spirituality’s shadow provides a much needed counterpoint for those who tend to get blinded by its light.”

— **Stephen Batchelor, author of *Buddhism without Beliefs***

“There is much wisdom and good information in this book. Robert joins a growing number of wise teachers who understand that the personal and the universal must be combined to bring true and genuine spiritual awakening.”

— **Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path With Heart* and *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry***

“Uncompromising and truth telling, this book is an antidote to spiritual obesity. What emerges is the call to psychological clarity as essential to the mature spiritual life. Here is soul fuel for those who would enter the road less traveled — the deeply examined life as part of spiritual practice.”

— **Jean Houston, Ph.D., author of *A Mythic Life***

“Robert Masters has given us a great gift — a tremendously useful guide to examining our tendencies to spiritual bypassing, clearly the most comprehensive and accessible treatment available of this crucial topic. His work is a great contribution to the ongoing integration of psychotherapy and spiritual practice, and to our understanding of the meaning of spiritual maturity.”

— **Donald Rothberg, Ph.D., author of *The Engaged Spiritual Life***

“This book is a sobering and powerful reminder that our present embodiment, in all its flawed, messy humanness, cannot be conveniently sidestepped, and so invites us inward to a face-to-face encounter and embrace with the raw truth of who we really are. Masters’ unique and at times disarming prose style blends a poetic sensibility with a surprising stark clarity that points us to “What-Really-Matters.”

**Eliezer Sobel, author of *The 99th Monkey: A Spiritual Journalist’s Misadventures with Gurus, Messiahs, Sex, Psychedelics and Other Consciousness-Raising Experiments***

## ***BREAKTHROUGH***

**June 26th-27th in WHITE ROCK, BC**

A weekend of deep healing and awakening.

Cutting-edge psychotherapy, bodywork, and spiritual deepening all brought together to generate exceptionally effective work.

THIS GROUP IS LIMITED TO 12 PARTICIPANTS ONLY, so that everyone will have time to do in-depth work.

**LOCATION & TIME:** 16133 9th Avenue, Surrey, BC. 10 - 6 both days.

**TUITION:** \$550 plus GST. Nonrefundable deposit of \$200 required.

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## **CALLING IN YOUR BELOVED**

***A Transformational Group For Singles***

**July 10th & 11th in Boulder**

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 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 more fully on track for meeting the one with whom you can be truly intimate.

We are only taking **12** participants, so early registration is recommended.

**LOCATION & TIME:** Boulder TBA. 10am to 6pm both days.

**TUITION & PAYMENT:** US\$550. Nonrefundable deposit of US\$200 required. Payment can be made online at the STORE page at [www.robertmasters.com](http://www.robertmasters.com). Full tuition is due by June 1, 2010.

## ***BREAKTHROUGH***

### **July 17th & 18th in Boulder**

A weekend of deep healing and awakening.

Cutting-edge psychotherapy, bodywork, and spiritual deepening all brought together to generate exceptionally effective work.

THIS GROUP IS LIMITED TO 12 PARTICIPANTS ONLY, so that everyone will have time to do in-depth work.

**LOCATION & TIME:** Boulder TBA. 10 to 6 both days.

**TUITION & PAYMENT:** US\$550. Nonrefundable deposit of US\$200 required. Payment can be made online at the STORE page at [www.robertmasters.com](http://www.robertmasters.com). Full tuition is due by June 11, 2010.

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## **MASTERS INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY PRACTICUM**

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

### **2010-11 Apprenticeship/Training 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, energetics, and spirit.

To this end, the training will blend exceptionally 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.

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

NOTE: The Practicum is intended for those who want to learn and practice a deeply intuitive, integral, and bodywork-including approach to psychotherapy, and who at the same time also 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 counselor), 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 counselor-to-be.

### **LOCATION & STRUCTURE:**

The Practicum will take place over 5 four-day modules in Boulder and Ashland. Each module will include individual and group work, plus facilitation by participants of each other's work (with fitting feedback and guidance from Robert and Diane).

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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.

**PREREQUISITE:** Previous work with Robert and Diane.

**TUITION:** US\$7000. Nonrefundable deposit of \$1000 required. Lodging and meals will be extra. Contact [info@robertmasters.com](mailto:info@robertmasters.com) to arrange payment.

### **SCHEDULE:**

September 9-12, November 11-14, January 6-9, March 3-6, May 5-9.

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For more information regarding groups and trainings with Robert and Diane, contact [info@RobertMasters.com](mailto:info@RobertMasters.com).

To join the Masters Center for Transformation (Robert and Diane's online work), go to: [www.masterscenterfortransformation.com](http://www.masterscenterfortransformation.com)

All checks (deposit & otherwise) should be mailed to Robert Masters, 16133 9th Avenue, Surrey, BC V4A 1A5.

Payments for most groups and trainings (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.

For other payment arrangements, contact [dianebarwell@gmail.com](mailto:dianebarwell@gmail.com).

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.

To get Robert's daily posts on Twitter, go to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and join, and then go to [twitter.com/RobertMasters](https://twitter.com/RobertMasters) to "follow" Robert.

## **2010 Schedule**

June 26-27: Breakthrough, White Rock, BC

July 10-11: Calling in Your Beloved, Boulder

July 17-18: Breakthrough, Boulder

September 9-12: Integrative Psychotherapy Practicum, Boulder

September 18-19: TBA, Boulder

September 26-October 2: Bodywork Practicum, BC TBA