

# THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 11 March 2006

*A Special Issue Featuring Essays About*

## SHAME & GUILT

*(Plus Workshop and Training Opportunities, A Listing of the Contents of Previous Newsletters, and A Couple of Poems)*

# Shame: The Exposure That Shrinks

Shame may be the emotion for which we have the most aversion. In a famous poll that asked what one was most afraid of, dying (as I recall) came in third or fourth, with speaking in public atop the list (speaking in public while naked was not on the list). *Mortifying*. The fear of making a fool of oneself, the fear of being humiliated, the fear of feeling full-out shame. Ultra-negative exposure.

Though shame itself is not fear, we fear it.

We may blend — and *blanch* — shame with fear, thereby whipping up some guilt, or we may push it into the background, letting other emotions take center stage. For example, if we are in a situation that triggers shame in us, we may get angry to such a convincing degree that we genuinely believe that we are *only* angry, whether our anger is directed at another or at ourself. In either case, our anger — especially if it becomes aggression — distracts us from our shame.

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Shame plunges us into a nastily gripping sense of being seriously flawed in the eyes of an convincingly critical audience, outer or inner. Not only does shame expose us — or at least our actions — as defective, but also emphatically deflates us in the face of such exposure.

Unlike fear and anger, shame readies us not for action, but for on-the-spot shrinkage or collapse — not necessarily full collapse, but enough to strongly *interrupt* us, to stop us in our tracks.

Shame has the power to impede what until a moment ago had been enjoyable, or at least interesting. Its signs typically are: a sudden loss of muscle tone in the neck and upper torso, so that the head slumps forward; a downcasting of the eyes; an increase in the skin temperature of the face, which usually produces blushing; and a brief but intense period of confusion and disorganization.

The slump, droop, and sag of shame shows up at an early age. More than a few adults look as though they are permanently shamed — and how surprising is this, given how pervasively shaming modern culture tends to be?

It is interesting to note that shame reduces our coordination, which gives us a perhaps timely time-out or separation from our current circumstance or task, while at the same time highlighting our failure, thereby leaving us in a position where we cannot help but contrast where we were before shame kicked in and where we now are.

This contrast, at best, sobers us, so that we become less conceited, less full of ourselves, less immune to remorse, less caught up in overpursuing pleasure (and less prone to indulging in that commonplace pride that is but everted shame).

Just as disgust curbs hunger, shame curbs positive feeling.

But where disgust is a kind of “off-switch” for hunger when certain substances (like food that is starting to go bad) or situations (like unappealing behavior) are in too-close quarters with us, shame simply reduces our level of interest in situations where just about everything else is still operating in the context of amplifying our interest. This has survival benefits, protecting us from overattachment to maximizing our pleasures, especially when it’s not safe or socially appropriate to thus indulge.

However, in its toxic forms, shame simply crushes us, making us feel like disappearing or even killing ourselves — hence *mortification*.

Shame, whether healthy or unhealthy, shrinks us. The commonplace labelling of psychiatrists as “shrinks” may have some of its origin in the near-inherent shame — and accompanying self-shrinkage — so many have felt when going for psychiatric help.

Probably the most neglected emotion in psychotherapy *and* spiritual practice is shame, even though at the same time it may be the primary emotional force animating our neuroses and spiritual ambition.

The more defective we take ourselves to be — as signalled by the presence of shame — the more driven we are likely to be to seek some sort of compensatory solution, be it narcissistic behavior, aggression, people-pleasing, withdrawal (shyness, depression, dissociation, metaphysical or spiritual escapism), hyperrationality, psychic numbing, self-deprecation, excessive interest in sexual possibility, and so on.

But let us not be too hard on shame. Without the capacity for shame, we would be devoid of conscience.

The morality of shame — and I speak here of healthy shame — is responsibility. On the other hand, the morality of guilt — unhealthy shame, shame polluted with fear — is blame.

Guilt masquerades as conscience, but shame awakens or reawakens conscience. Conscience is simply the activated presence of our innate moral sense, its core of compassion arising from a mix of empathy and shame-informed (but not shame-dominated) contemplation. Moral intelligence.

What a shame it is that we so easily treat shame shamefully, even as we assign a negative connotation to being shameless. So, so much of what we do is just a strategy to avoid shame. So much shame about shame!

The key to working with shame is to meet it with kindness and a nonjudgmental eye. This gives shame room to breathe, room to openly be itself without fear of being looked down upon.

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Also, we need to differentiate shame from the fear, anger, hurt, or disgust that may arise from and camouflage it. Does the felt presence of shame drive us into compensatory emotional activity? What do we tend to do emotionally when shame is catalyzed in us? Addressing these and related questions is an essential aspect of working with shame.

Shame is painfully imbued with self-consciousness (which is a misnomer, since when we're self-conscious, we're not so much conscious of our self as we are of the other[s] apparently watching us). Becoming conscious of our self-consciousness — that is, allowing it to be the *object* rather than the subject of our attention — when we are in shame's grip allows us to examine our shame with at least some degree of healthy detachment.

Better yet, let us bring our shame into our heart, wakefully and openly, letting its heat flush through us, while granting its message, however dark or misshapen, an audience in chambers of compassionate clarity.

Only diseased shame seeks or makes a virtue out of vengeance. Such shame, steeped in humiliation, narrows its capacity for satisfaction to the machinations of revenge; an eye-for-an-eye morality is its warcry.

If we are sufficiently shamed or humiliated, we are, in most cases, culturally sanctioned to feel justified in pursuing revenge, as is so lavishly illustrated by cinematic hero after cinematic hero enduring being shamed and then going after the villains, the more violently the better — after all, don't the bastards deserve it? On the other hand, healthy shame aims not for vengeance against our offending others, but for forgiveness — not premature, shallow, token, or politically correct forgiveness, but forgiveness nonetheless.

Let us cease shaming ourselves for having shame.

# Guilt:

## One Hand On The Candy, The Other On The Whip

Whatever its anatomical complexities, guilt is little more than frozen shame, shame that has been paralytically infused with fear-driven and fear-making thought, manifesting as the *self-punishing* sensation of having violated some sort of contract or moral agreement.

Where shame exposes us, guilt *splits* us — and at the same time compensates itself for this by *continuing* to engage in whatever “bad” act supposedly is its “can’t-help-myself” *raison d’être*.

As such, guilt means we get to stay stuck. And *small*.

Guilt is inherently self-divisive: One aspect of us, fixatedly childish, does whatever it is that triggers — or “justifies” — our guilt, in conjunction with another aspect of us, fixatedly authoritarian, which righteously punishes the doer of the supposed crime or misdemeanor. The relationship between these two — basically a nastily stalemated child/parent conflict — is the essence of guilt.

At the same time, however, guilt is something *we* are doing to ourselves, something *we* are superimposing on ourselves, something that can be counted on to keep us divided, disempowered, stuck, and predictably exploitable.

Guilt means we get to *again* do whatever it is that seemingly “makes” us feel guilty — we permit ourselves to do it over and over again, even as we simultaneously punish ourselves for such transgression. We may complain about — and broadcast — the abuse we are suffering from our own hand and self-incrimination, but that very punishment, if sufficiently severe, significantly *lessens* the probability of “outside” punishment, while ensuring — and perhaps even, at least to some degree, *legitimizing* — our continued participation (as “victims,” of course!) in what we “shouldn’t” be doing.

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Thus does guilt allow us to remain selfish. And irresponsible.

Guilt's prevailing reality is that of toxically simplistic right and wrong. Its moral stance is stubbornly *prerational*, dutifully skewered by the ossified finger of blame.

Guilt remains — and makes sure that it remains — irresponsible, making impotent or already-doomed efforts at responsibility, which it consistently confuses with blame. Its mantra/bleat/excuse is “I’m trying.”

(Trying — the mechanically ambitious intentionality not of us, but of a *piece* of us — carries within itself a largely unacknowledged counter-effort or oppositional intention; this is why trying is usually such a sweaty, anxiety-riddled activity. Try to pick up your pen — don't *actually* pick it up, but *try* to pick it up — and the innate impotence of trying [as opposed to *doing*] will be obvious to you.)

Guilt means that we get to stay small, “safely” tucked away from truly taking charge of our lives. Guilt ensures that we won't — and won't have to — grow up.

The self-accusations of guilt are in the “spirit” of the other-accusations of resentment. To the extent that guilt is an amalgam of shame and anxiety, resentment is an amalgam of shame and aggression. In fact, one could describe resentment — especially in its globally hypercritical stance and underbelly of toxic impotence — as everted guilt.

Resentment is all about dragging others down; guilt is about dragging ourselves down, giving ourselves such a heavy dose of condemnation that we all but guarantee our domicile in guilt, thereby stranding ourselves from any significant intimacy with responsibility and love.

Healthy shame does not take very long to flush the entire system. Instead of continuing to contract our organic impulses (which it does initially), it sooner or later unknits and expands them — we blush, our blood flows more freely, our body warms up, enriched with an admittedly uncomfortable yet nevertheless enlivening passion. As such, the whole body is then simply just a confession of *felt* responsibility for what has happened. There is a powerful, deep-rooted impetus to coming clean, letting go, and healing, a painful yet heartfelt resolution to grow.

But guilt, on the other hand, is not really interested in healing. The guilt-ridden and guilt-spurred do not have much energy for genuine growth — they are driven to “do it” (the thing they feel guilty about doing) again and again, and in order to justify “doing it” again and again, they *have to* keep the threat of parental punishment hanging over them.

When we are stuck in guilt, we are just repeat offenders keeping ourselves behind bars, playing both prosecutor and accused, but without any genuine resolution, chronically resurrecting our courtroom drama and suffering the pains of once again fitting ourselves to its loveless script, while finding a “needed” (and perhaps even pleasurable) release through once again “doing it.” Here, not far below the surface, there is such grief, such a lack of self-compassion, such an agony of desperation and addiction.

Guilt is not only a refusal to love, but also a refusal to sanely parent oneself. In our guilt, we childishly cling to — and react to — outside parental forces which we have deeply internalized. By contrast, healthy shame provides fertile conditions for reconnecting with the parental authority that’s native to us.

Shame can catalyze an environment in which genuine forgiveness can bloom; it is an opportunity to come clean and enter a truer scene. Guilt, however, works against the possibility of forgiveness.

Guilt fills churches and empties hearts. It is a psychological parasite, a destroyer of love, claiming temporary insanity.

Nevertheless, guilt is not some kind of entity at which we can or should throw darts, or which we can exorcise or exterminate. It is something that we are doing, something that we may not want to see that we are doing.

Guilt is a suppression of Being, a withdrawal from real feeling, a flight from integrity, the very epitome of “divided we fall.”

The guilt-ridden are easy to control and exploit, for most of their power is consumed by their internal warfare.

The very disempowerment generated by guilt empowers us to persist in it.

Guilt reduces God to the ultimate parent or punishment-wielding overseer, a

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fact exploited by more than a few religions (as exemplified by the inculcation of the doctrine of Original Sin).

Guilt is false conscience.

So how to work with guilt? First of all, don't approach it with a closed heart or with moral righteousness — feeling guilty about having guilt won't help. Get in touch with the shame, fear, anger, and hurt that underlie guilt. Identify them, get detailed in your attentive survey and investigation of them, and do so as compassionately as you can.

At the same time, do what you can to expand your energy, and do it awarely. Do not let yourself automatically bounce between the childish and parental sides of guilt — recognize that neither one is you. They are just polarized personifications of guilt's script. Instead of identifying with either one, sit where you can naturally and compassionately hold both and know, right to your marrow, that you are neither.

See and feel them as clouds, and be their sky. Literally. Introduce them. Unmask them, bridge them, bring them together without taking either side, letting their mutual rainburst be your cry.

Thus do we let go of the whip, and also of the morality of blame. Thus do we shift from guilt to shame to freedom.

## CRYSTAL COVE

*Can't remember what I was reading to you  
When over my rocking-chair shoulder  
Through the window's wintry view  
A jagged dome of blackened rock  
Did squat upon the flaming horizon  
Underlined by broken white thunder  
And your sudden gasp and rise  
Turning me around to see  
Nosing up right beside  
And high as the stony dome  
An oblong smoky and shiny dark  
Rivers of silver below its throat  
Big mind in the waters  
Casting its eye  
Upon this waiting shore  
Just long enough  
For us to see  
Attaching our bare gaze  
To the foaming border of sea and sky  
Waiting without a thought  
For the depths  
To eject more  
Of itself  
And us*

## HUSBAND OF YOUR HEART

*(For Diane and our marriage, to take place April 2nd, 2006)*

This edgeless depth we share  
This fluid mutuality so bare  
This meeting nothing can delay  
This quick-kindling ecstasy  
Leaving us bonelessly asway  
In love's everwild eternity

We trade the slightest glance  
And our flesh starts to dance  
Sweet sweet electricity  
Such sublime simplicity  
Touching the one through the two  
Meeting beyond what we knew

Your delight in my newly shaved head  
And in how I said what I just said  
My delight in the naked ease of your care  
And in the ancient deep of your gaze  
Is but part of a very long list  
That began long before we first kissed

The more we blend  
The more we don't end  
The more we embrace what really matters  
The more we don't mind the weather  
Expanding to include each other  
Our only shared name that of lover

I the husband of your heart  
You the wife of mine  
Long have we been apart  
Now begins our awaited time  
Bound together yet free  
Twin flames of intimacy

# *Letting Go*

## **A DAY OF DEEP HEALING**

**April 15th, 2006 in White Rock, BC**

**April 22nd, 2006 in Ojai, California**

**with Robert Masters  
(assisted by Diane Bardwell)**

Real happiness takes root when our longing to be truly free is stronger — or permitted to be more central — than our longing to be distracted from our pain.

In this group we'll face, move toward, and learn to make wise use of our difficulties, through a dynamic, intuitively structured mix of spiritual practices, bodywork, dream exploration, conscious movement, and psychotherapy.

**TUITION:** White Rock: CDN\$275 plus GST. \$100 deposit required.  
Ojai: US\$275. \$100 deposit required.

**LOGISTICS:** 10am to 6pm. Limited to 8 participants only (so early registration is recommended).

Diane (Robert's partner and wife-to-be) is an intuitive energy healer and Reiki master, using sound to deepen healing and well-being. She is a songwriter and professional singer, with a gift for accessing the Sacred through sound. See [www.dianebardwell.com](http://www.dianebardwell.com).

**For more information or to register,  
contact [info@robertmasters.com](mailto:info@robertmasters.com)**

# **FREEDOM THROUGH INTIMACY**

## **A Weekend Intensive For Couples**

**May 20th & 21st, 2006, in White Rock, BC**

**with Robert Masters, assisted by Diane Bardwell**

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 couple work, using a spontaneously structured approach that creatively mixes psychotherapy, bodywork, dream exploration, spiritual practices, and dyadic deepenings.

**Logistics:** May 20th & 21st, 2006, 10am to 6pm. Limited to 5 couples.  
\$1250 plus GST per couple. \$300 deposit required.

**Diane** (Robert's partner and wife-to-be), is an intuitive energy healer and Reiki master, using sound to deepen healing and well-being. She is a songwriter and professional singer, with a gift for accessing the Sacred through sound and song. See [www.dianebardwell.com](http://www.dianebardwell.com).

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

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

## **Psychospiritual Counselling Practicum**

### **2006/2007 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.

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 June 23rd, 2006. Tuition is \$5300 plus GST. A deposit of \$750 is required. The training will be limited to 10 participants only, so early registration is recommended (**Note:** there are currently only **2** spaces left).

The training is a prerequisite for further trainings, including the Bodywork and Working With Couples Apprenticeship modules planned for 2007.

### **Practicum Schedule**

June 23-25, 2006, Sept. 15-17, 2006, Nov. 3-5, 2006  
Jan. 5-7, 2007, Mar. 2-4, 2007, May 4-6, 2007

## To view previous newsletters, go to the links below:

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/May05.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/June2005.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/July2005.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/August2005.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/September2005.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/October2005.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/November2005.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/December2005.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/January2006.pdf>

<http://www.RobertMasters.com/newsletter/Feb2006.pdf>

## Contents of Previous Newsletters

### April 2005: Issue #00 (Introductory Issue)

**Poetry:** The One Moment That Is All Moments

**Essays:** Introduction to Body, Mind, Emotion, & Spirituality  
Suffering Versus Pain

### May 2005: Issue #01

**Poetry:** Don't Lose It In The Translation

Seeing What Is Out Of Sight

One Fine Morning

**Essays:** Working With Fear

Choices Without A Chooser

A Cartography of Scentuality: Rose and Jasmine

What Is Truth?

**Movie Review:** Fight Club

### June 2005: Issue #02

**Poetry:** All This In A Moment

Back, Back Goes He  
Your Flaws No Longer In The Way

**Essays:** A Cartography of Scentuality: Sage and Frankincense  
Patience: To Wait Without Waiting  
Heat, Madness, & Sacred Fire: The Psycholinguistics of Anger  
Taking Charge of Our Charge

## **July 2005: Issue #03 (Special Issue on Terrorism)**

**Essays:** Revisioning Terrorism  
No More Turning Away  
Getting Intimate With Anger

## **August 2005: Issue #04**

**Poetry:** There Was A Long And Unbreathing Time  
When We Stop Trying To Make It Make Sense  
Sacred Hymn

**Essays:** Sometimes What's In The Way Is The Way  
Freedom Through Limitation  
Prayer: A Divine Personal  
What Do We Know?

## **September 2005: Issue #05**

**Poetry:** What Seems Real When We're Doing Time  
And Again  
When I'm My True Size  
Airport Blues II

**Essays:** Komodo  
A Cartography of Scentuality: Cinnamon Bark and Angelica Root  
Thank God For Dragons

## **October 2005: Issue #06**

**Poetry:** Don't Stop Short  
Blue Burns the Night  
Look For Me  
What You Do To Me  
Somewhere Past The Edge

**Essays:** Tarzan Must Weep: Toward A Deeper Manhood  
Behead Your Hope

**Movie Review:** A History of Violence

## **November 2005: Issue #07 (Special Issue: Intimacy)**

**Poetry:** Your Face A Landscape  
It's Not Our Heart That Cracks  
Wallflowers Suddenly In Bloom  
Undressing Me From the Inside  
I'll Meet You There  
Long The Wait Has Been

**Essays:** What's Right About What's Wrong In Relationships  
Keeping In Touch When We're Out of Touch  
The Importance of Safety In Intimate Relationship

## **December 2005: Issue #08**

**Poetry:** And This Too Am I  
O Breathe Us  
To See This As It Is

**Essays:** Anger-In Versus Anger-Out

## **January 2006: Issue #09 (Special Issue on Sex)**

**Poetry:** Blues For Sex  
Eternity's Kiss  
What Then Shall I Call You?

**Essays:** An Inside Look At Eroticism  
Pornography Undressed

## **February 2006: Issue #10**

**Poetry:** Bow To It Until There Is Only Bowing  
When Cracks Appear In Reality  
Forever's Gypsies

**Essays:** Being Messed-Up Doesn't Have To Mess Us Up  
Spiritual Shortcuts

## Robert's Work Schedule for 2006

March 3, 4,	2005/2006 Practicum: Whistler, BC
March 18	Letting Go: Ojai, California
March 25 & 26	Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
April 8	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
April 15	Letting Go: White Rock, BC <b>(NEW)</b>
April 22	Letting Go: Ojai, California
May 5, 6, 7	2005/2006 Practicum: White Rock , BC
May 20 & 21	Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
May 27	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
June 3	Letting Go: Ojai, California
June 10	Integral Naked Breakthrough: White Rock, BC
June 17 & 18	Radical Opening: Calgary or Edmonton
June 23, 24, 25	2006/2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
July 8 & 9	Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
July 15	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
July 22, 23, 24	2005/2006 Practicum: White Rock, BC
July 29 & 30	Radical Opening: Ojai, California
August 26	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
Sept. 8, 9, 10	2005/2006 Practicum: White Rock, BC
Sept. 15, 16, 17	2006/2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
Sept. 30-Oct. 1	Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
October 14	Letting Go: Ojai, California
October 21	Letting Go: White Rock, BC
Nov. 3, 4, 5	2006/2007 Practicum: White Rock, BC
Nov. 18 & 19	Freedom Through Intimacy: White Rock, BC
December 2	Letting Go: Ojai, California
December 9	Letting Go: White Rock, BC