

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 59 March 2010

Dreambeings we appear to be
Mushrooming from starry Mystery
Weaving selfhood from slices of history
Swallowing certainty infusions
Nostalgic for tomorrows free of sorrow

When our dreams no longer star us
There is nothing we don't encompass
What needs doing is done best
When in utter Mystery we rest
Drifting deep into the wilds of Being
Until the dreamer of dreamers is seen

Eternity's offspring we appear to be
Playing hide-and-seek with our history
With more than enough time
To show up as every possible design
If appearing as all things is our destiny
Then being awakened by all things
Is how we are set free

Bow to this until there's only bowing
Only what lies beyond knowing
Calling us into its great Heart
Its untranslatable presence
Its endless art
Its absolute
And absolutely eloquent
Silence

Only Broken Waves Know the Ocean: **The Nature of Grief**

We all have grief, however much we may mute or bypass its expression. It is what we feel when our heart registers a loss that is of considerable significance to us. There is grief over the death of a loved one, grief over missed opportunities, grief over damage suffered by someone else. It is intensely personal, even when it stretches us far beyond our usual selves.

Grief breaks the heart, however concretized its “casing” may be. The broken heart can go into endarkened contraction (a myopic shrinking or “going to pieces”) or it can go in a very different direction — if allowed to, grief doesn’t just break the heart, but *breaks it open*, ultimately breaking us open to unbroken Being.

Grief includes sadness, but is much more than just sadness. Its tears may burn, but sooner or later they also illuminate. In grief, we are stripped down to our feeling core, registering the bare facticity of suffering — and quite often not just ours — without any buffers.

We begin with “my” grief and may remain there, but sometimes this shifts to “our” grief as our rawness of heart radiates out compassionately, and then may shift even further to “the” grief, as we feel our collective/shared suffering and allow that feeling to pervade us — which doesn’t bring on more sorrow, but rather more love, love that remains itself no matter how deeply we are crying. Huge heartache, huge hurt, huge opening — carrying us through the deepest sorrow into a spaciousness as naturally compassionate as it is vast. In such spaciousness, such exquisitely raw openness, there is, eventually, room for all.

A famous rabbi, when asked what could be done about the Mideast conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, said, “Both sides have to grieve together.” *Together*. The deepest grief is, however solitary its expression,

a communal event. It touches all. Its hurt blows the cover off its sky, carrying us far beyond the dramatics of conventional sorrow.

Grief is a *passion*. Sadness is not a passion, nor is sorrow, but grief is.

Like other passions — rage, lust, ecstasy — grief has the power to overwhelm us, for better or for worse. Grief usually works best when it is uninhibited. So many want to hush it, to muzzle or mute it, perhaps so as to minimize any potential embarrassment — such suppression being quite common at funerals. Anyone who really wails, really lets it out, often tends to be looked upon as behaving poorly or inconsiderately. Not surprisingly, many end up doing therapy years after the fact, dealing with the grief that was not expressed, or expressed fully enough, back then.

Unleashed grief is not mere venting nor self-indulgence, but rather Life-energy on the healing loose, cutting new channels in the terrain of self, uprooting obsolete stands. Such a wild, wild storm it sometimes can be— such a dark yet luminous outpouring, such a radical ripping of the heart, such a deep dying into Life, birthing us and a truer us in its wake.

The full-blooded, openly vocal expression of other emotions often catalyzes an undamming of grief, of a feeling of loss sometimes so immense and deep that it can, eventually, embrace other losses — losses that belong to all of us — thereby making deeply significant links not only across space, but also through time. Thus do we move from the interiorized community of voices that make up “I” to the community at large, widening the circle of our reach, our love, our caring.

In such a panoramic intensity of heart-hurt, however agonizing it might be, there usually emerges some sense of a sobering ease, the ease of simply being — not being this, not being that, but simply Being. This is not the bliss of immunity-seeking, fear-fueled transcendence, nor that resulting from any other flight from painful feeling, but rather is the

The Crucible of Awakening

natural joy of simply existing, equally at home with the high and the low, unable to be other than compassionate toward all.

Such is the prevailing condition of the heart that — though already bruised — is nonetheless sufficiently open to have room for all that we are, however dark or lowly or frightened. In grief, the heart is broken in the same way that a stream rushing down through a mountainside forest is broken — it's still cohesive spiritually, still unified in essence, its elemental dying only strengthening and affirming its fundamental aliveness, its rough-and-tumble course only furthering its dynamic yet utterly vulnerable surrender.

Where reactive sorrow just contracts and isolates us, unimpeded grief expands and connects us, grounding us in natural openness.

Grief can be just as spacious as it is earthy, existing as a deeply personal yet also significantly transcendent sense of loss pervaded by a more-than-intellectual recognition of the inevitable passing of all that arises.

As such, grief provides not only a bridge between the personal and transpersonal (with neither having a “higher” status than the other), but also between pain and love. That bridge awaits our step, our crossing.

Every loss must be felt right to the core
Or else there's an even greater loss
Sadness must leave its mind to become grief
Or else it'll just settle for repressive relief
So let the pain sweep through
And the even truer ache
And especially the bare need
The love beyond love
The pure heartbreak

Now available for pre-order on Amazon!

**SPIRITUAL BYPASSING:
WHEN SPIRITUALITY DISCONNECTS US
FROM WHAT REALLY MATTERS**

This, my next (and now-being-edited) book, will be published by North Atlantic Books this Summer. Here is one of its endorsements:

“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*

Chapter Five follows.

Cutting Through Spiritual Bypassing

The first step in dealing with spiritual bypassing is to see it for what it is — employing spiritual beliefs/practices to avoid dealing in any significant depth with our pain and developmental needs — and *name* it, so that we might begin relating *to* it rather than from it. This is relatively easy when spiritual bypassing manifests in its grosser forms, but not so easy when it gets more subtle, especially when it coexists with truly beneficial spiritual undertakings.

Uncovering and openly acknowledging our tendencies to spiritually bypass may trigger some shame in us at being thus “caught,” but this

is a healthy, readily workable shame so long as we don't allow it to fuel our inner critic. It helps to remember that spiritual bypassing isn't just something others do, but that we all have done. The freedom found in admitting its presence is akin to the freedom felt when we admit without any defensiveness that we have been up until a moment ago defensive in a heated exchange with a significant other.

Spiritual bypassing can perhaps most commonly be seen in the minimizing or superficializing or outright negation of our shadow-side and so-called negativity. It can also be seen in the taking of global or impersonal stands on clearly personal concerns, as when we might talk about the “fact” that it is all perfect, all unfolding exactly as it must, when we are talking to another in a demeaning way. Or someone is really suffering and we say, “Only love is real” or “it's all an illusion, including your suffering” or “it's just your ego,” finding in our parroting of such statements a distance from their pain — and ours — delivering such one-liners with minimal feeling, much like newscasters reporting both the shallow and the deeply tragic in the very same, professionally modulated tone of voice.

Of course, not all spiritual bypassing is so emotionally disconnected, but the spiritually rationalized avoidance of feeling deeply, particularly with regard to our less pleasant emotions, is nonetheless a common indicator of it. Spiritual bypassing is especially common in spiritual paths that treat ego as something to eradicate, something that is in the way of spiritual realization, rather than an activity to illuminate and fittingly integrate with the rest of our being.

The greater the pain of our unresolved wounds, the greater are the odds that we — if we are invested in being “spiritual” or in being viewed as “spiritual” — will manifest some form of compensatory self-inflation (however humble its robes) and involve ourselves in spiritual bypassing in its grosser forms, wherein spiritual practice and attainment is used to avoid directly and unguardedly feeling the raw reality of suffering, keeping us dissociated or otherwise “safely” removed from our pain,

especially the pain stemming from the more troubling times of our past.

Many get stranded here, assuming that if they are not feeling better from their spiritual practices, then all they need to do is go more deeply into such practices. If this fails, their tendency then is to blame themselves even as they resolutely cling to the demands and expectations of their spiritual path. Unpleasant though their falling short spiritually may be, at least they don't have to directly face and deal with their core pain.

More unfortunate than these practitioners are those who do “succeed” at spiritual bypassing — not only consistently sidestepping or otherwise avoiding their core pain but also finding a relatively steady comfort in their spiritual practices. I say “unfortunate” because given their degree of satisfaction, they are less likely than those who aren't succeeding at spiritual bypassing to take the plunge into working directly and deeply with their wounds and shadow elements.

When we're in the grip of spiritual bypassing, we tend to view psychotherapy as less necessary than it is or as something only for the seriously neurotic, something that at best only strengthens the very egoity that spirituality is supposed to cut through or eradicate. It is so easy to couch our fear of psychotherapy in spiritual language! Spiritual teachers who don't support their students in doing in-depth psychotherapy, perhaps because they themselves are all but clueless about it and its benefits, are doing their students a huge disservice in overemphasizing the importance of doing spiritual practice, and spiritual practice only.

Spiritual bypassing keeps us stuck at a “higher” level that is really only higher in a merely conceptual sense; it's as if we are taking up residence on Floor 5 without having passed through Floors 2, 3, or 4. So we're occupying the fifth floor and have all the right furniture and accoutrements for that level, while the floors below us deteriorate due to the lack of our attention and presence. Only when Floors 2, 3, and 4 — unexplored and unoccupied — reach the point of undeniable,

The Crucible of Awakening

attention-grabbing disintegration do we start to realize our mistake and try to get back on track, however painful or humiliating that might be.

When transcendence of our personal history takes precedence over intimacy with our personal history, spiritual bypassing is inevitable.

To not be intimate with our past, to not be deeply and thoroughly acquainted with our conditioning and its originating factors, keeps it undigested and unintegrated and therefore very much present, regardless of our capacity to rise above it. Instead of trying to get beyond our personal history, we need to learn to relate to it with as much clarity and compassion as possible, so that it serves rather than obstructs our healing and awakening. This also means relating in similar fashion to our tendency to spiritually bypass, casting a lucidly caring eye upon the us who buys into it.

The tricky thing about spiritual bypassing is that it does not always look like spiritual bypassing. For example, if a spiritual teacher is asked by his students about difficulties they are having integrating their spiritual practice with the demands of intimate relationship and he only provides them with big-picture answers/truisms, waxing eloquently about the finite and the infinite, the nature of self, and so on, then he is engaged in spiritual bypassing, no matter how articulate and precise his answer may be, for he is, however inadvertently, avoiding dealing directly and relevantly with his students' personal and interpersonal pain.

Yes, his questioners may benefit somewhat from the overview he is presenting, but they are not getting anything suitably personal from him. The point here is not to avoid a big-picture answer but to provide it, freshly articulated, in intimate conjunction with a psychologically attuned, personally relevant answer.

In spiritual bypassing's realm, conceptual spirituality more often than not masquerades as real spirituality. Conceptual or emotionally disconnected spirituality can be very comforting and safe, very easy to trot out, very

easy to use to rationalize our removal, especially emotionally, from the more difficult aspects of life.

Cutting through spiritual bypassing means turning toward the painful, disfigured, ostracized, unwanted, or otherwise disowned aspects of ourselves, and cultivating as much intimacy as possible with them. In order to do this, we inevitably will have to deal with our numbness, approaching it with as much care as possible, ceasing to numb ourselves to our numbness. If doing so seems to break our heart, we are on the right path, even if we are on our hands and knees; when our heart thus breaks, it doesn't shatter, but breaks *open*, expanding to include more and more, with no dilution of depth and care. As we denumb, letting our heart remain raw, becoming more and more comfortable with our discomfort, we can see and feel what first drove us into spiritual bypassing. It would be an understatement to say that this is a challenging journey, for it asks of us a very deep vulnerability, a bareness of being to which we may not be at all accustomed.

Our unwillingness or inability to enter such vulnerability, to authentically connect with our childlike aspects (our innocence, wonder, prerational openness, et cetera), to feel genuine compassion for and connection with the child in us, especially when that child is hurt or traumatized, makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for us to truly touch and heartfully connect with the child in others, so we tend to keep our distance from those who are actively working with and through old childhood wounds, even when such work is clearly healing and potently integrative.

What spiritual bypassing would have us rise above is precisely what we need to enter, and enter deeply, with as little self-numbing as possible. To this end, it is crucial that we see through whatever practices we have, spiritual and otherwise, which tranquilize, rather than illuminate and awaken, us. Meditative practices that tranquilize the mind can be very misleading, especially through the "zoning out" that they help catalyze, despite their undeniable calming and relaxing effects. Providing greater calm and relaxation is not necessarily always a good thing, particularly

The Crucible of Awakening

when it doesn't coexist with discernment and insight; some who find increased calm and relaxation through such meditative sedating may simply be rendered even more effective in their harm-doing.

Tranquilizers, meditative or otherwise, simply numb us, and if we have any investment in being numb, we may be drawn to meditative practices that make a virtue out of sedating us. Other meditative practices may also, of course, be used to distract us from our pain and difficulties, but as long as we are consciously and skillfully turning toward our pain and difficulties so that we are close enough to them to effectively work with them, we will be less easily seduced by the desire to sedate ourselves.

Spiritual bypassing is more common than we might think; in fact, almost all of us who have engaged in spiritual disciplines have very likely done some time in spiritual bypassing's domain, especially when we were craving some distance from our everyday psychoemotional difficulties. Moving toward our pain may not feel good, but it is a necessary journey if we are to truly heal, through which our wounds and difficulties serve rather than hinder us.

Spiritual bypassing is not something to eradicate but something to outgrow. Let us treat it as such, recognizing that real spirituality is not an escape but rather an arrival.

BREAKTHROUGH

March 27th-28th in ASHLAND, OREGON

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: Ashland TBA. 10 to 6 both days.

TUITION: Sliding Scale: US\$400-\$550. Nonrefundable deposit of US\$200 is required. Full tuition due by March 1, 2010. Contact Diane at dianeardwell@gmail.com to arrange payment.

BREAKTHROUGH

April 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 (4 spaces left).

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

TUITION: US\$550. Nonrefundable deposit of US\$200 is required. Full tuition due by March 11, 2010.

BREAKTHROUGH IN MEXICO!

A 5-Day Group on the Mexican Coast

DEVOTED TO DEEP HEALING & AWAKENING

April 29th-May 3rd, 2010

Deeply effective, integrative work for those who want to make wise use of their difficulties and who are ready to work through whatever is obstructing their well-being, in a beautiful setting on the Pacific coast of Mexico.

This group will be both a catalyst and sanctuary for such transformative work, providing a safe place to let go of playing it safe. The work will be not be prestructured, but rather structured in fitting accord with group and individual needs and energies.

All kinds of issues and concerns — from the deepest trauma to the seemingly trivial — will be dealt with, through a dynamic, creative mix of psychotherapy, bodywork, spiritual disciplines, dreamwork, and group practices.

We'll have plenty of time — 5 days! — for very deep work, plus time for spiritual deepening practices (as well as time to enjoy the beaches).

And the group will be small, being limited to 16 participants only, so that there will be enough time for everyone to receive in-depth attention.

LOCATION: Mexico (Pacific coast, probably in the Huatulco area) TBA

TUITION: US\$975. A nonrefundable deposit of US\$350 is required.

FOOD & LODGING: Separate price TBA.

PAYMENT: Contact Cathy Calderon de la Barca (ccalderonterapia@hotmail.com) or Diane (dianebardwell@gmail.com) to arrange payment. Full payment is due April 1, 2010.

SUGGESTED READING: Robert's latest book, *MEETING THE DRAGON: ENDING OUR SUFFERING BY ENTERING OUR PAIN*.

NOTE: Spanish/English translators will be present.

For more information, contact info@RobertMasters.com. Since we're only taking 16 participants, early registration is recommended.

FREEDOM THROUGH INTIMACY

A Transformational Group For Couples

May 8th & 9th on the Mexican Coast!

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 — in an exceptionally beautiful seaside setting.

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.

LOCATION: TBA (Pacific coast, probably in the Huatulco area).

TUITION: \$975 per couple. A nonrefundable deposit of \$350 is required from each couple.

FOOD & LODGING: Separate price TBA.

PAYMENT: Contact Cathy Calderon de la Barca (ccalderonterapia@hotmail.com) or Diane (dianebardwell@gmail.com) to arrange payment. Full payment is due April 1, 2010.

SUGGESTED READING: Robert's book, *TRANSFORMATION THROUGH INTIMACY: THE JOURNEY TOWARD MATURE MONOGAMY*.

NOTE: Spanish/English translators will be present.

For more information, contact info@RobertMasters.com. We're only taking 16 participants, so early registration is recommended.

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. The location has not yet been set. 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).

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 to arrange payment.

SCHEDULE:

May 27-30, July 22-25 , September 9-12, November 11-14, January 6-9

For more information regarding groups and trainings with Robert and Diane, contact info@RobertMasters.com.

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

The Crucible of Awakening

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 and click on STORE.

For other payment arrangements, contact dianebardwell@gmail.com.

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

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

To get Robert's daily posts on Twitter, go to www.twitter.com and join, and then go to twitter.com/RobertMasters to "follow" Robert.

2010 Schedule

March 7: All-Day Group, Mexico City

March 27-28: Breakthrough, Ashland, OR

April 8-11: Practicum, Boulder, CO

April 17-18: Breakthrough, Boulder, CO

April 29-May 3: Breakthrough, Mexico coast TBA

May 8-9: Couples retreat, Mexico coast TBA

May 27-30: 2010-2011 Practicum, location TBA