

# THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 07 November 2005

SPECIAL ISSUE

## *Freedom Through Intimacy*

Your face a landscape  
My eyes love to wander  
Your gaze an oasis  
For my gypsy ways  
I've done time in many places  
Running out of land  
With nowhere to stand  
Hold me soft, hold me deep  
Wrap your skin around me

Your face a landscape  
My hands know by heart  
Your sweetly electric flesh  
Richly entangled with mine  
Bursting with a light  
That's awareness and love  
Functioning as one

Your face a landscape  
I have memorized  
Your easy radiance  
All the welcome I need  
My solo travels are done  
Our shared heart my sun  
As we together die  
Into the undying One  
Without forgetting  
The broken many

## The Crucible of Awakening

Welcome to the November issue of my newsletter, the primary focus of which is intimate relationship, especially in its deeply committed, full-blooded form.

I have a special passion for such relationship, not only with regard to the ever-deepening intimacy that I share with my beloved and spiritual partner, Diane, but also with regard to the work that I do with couples, and am now doing with her (see the next page).

When people ask me how they can deepen their spiritual practice, I often suggest that they get into an intimate relationship, because it will, among other things, catalyze the surfacing of just about everything that they would rather avoid — which is precisely what they need to stop avoiding. In the crucible of truly intimate relationship, we learn to find freedom not from limitation but *through* limitation. In the sobering joy of this, suffering is but grace in drag...

Each parting cracks our heart  
But nothing gets broken  
Except the illusion that we're apart  
The cracks widen letting in  
A light too vast to be spoken  
Let the space between the cracks expand  
Until we embrace love's primal demand

Each parting brings a ripping aching  
But nothing is breaking  
Except our nostalgia for tomorrow  
This sweetly cutting heart-hurt  
Carries us to the core of sorrow  
Guiding us through the pain  
Until separation does not separate us

Each parting crucifies our attachment  
Our ribcage sudden sky  
It's not our heart that cracks  
But what we've built around it  
A guardian from a younger time  
Crumbling to less than dust  
As all constructions must

# FREEDOM THROUGH INTIMACY

**A Weekend Group For Couples in Seattle,**

**January 14th & 15th, 2006**

**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 an 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:** January 14th & 15th, 2006, 10am to 6pm. Limited to 5 couples.  
US\$1100 per couple. US\$300 deposit required.

**Robert** is a critically acclaimed author and highly experienced psychotherapist with a doctorate in Psychology, integrating mind, body, emotion, and spirituality in his work. See [www.robertmasters.com](http://www.robertmasters.com).

**Diane**, who is in a deeply committed relationship with Robert, 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 Sivani.

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## What's Right About What's Wrong In Relationships

We want so damn badly to get it right in our relationships, as evidenced by all the books and television shows on how to have better relationships, all the songs of heartache and break and mend, all the hunting and hoping and groping for that special somebody who'll do right by us, all the efforting, manipulation, self-marketing, and strategizing to get it right, to get it to last, to get it to satisfy — all sentenced to the labor of making us feel better or at least more secure, consuming more of our attention and energy than we'd bargained for, leaving us burdened and bewildered and close to not much more than depression and burnout, yet still hot-wired to enough paint-by-numbers advice to be marooned from the fact that real relationship, relationship rooted in love and a mutual commitment to waking up, is not only less nice and more challenging than we thought, but also more *messy* (like this sentence).

Sometimes intimate relationship can be such a drag, such a high maintenance hassle, such a drain, knocking us around until we swear we'll not reenter such a hazardous arena, regardless of its goodies. But it usually doesn't take much time for us to jump back in again, high on hope (as when we get a tidbit of unexpected openness from an emotionally stingy partner). Maybe we will do better this time; maybe we'll meet someone who won't screw us around; maybe we'll handle it better. Such melodrama, such endlessly rich material this is for stand-up comedy, soap operas, and everyday gossip. And for something deeper, too, as we shall see.

Sloppy dialogue, emotional illiteracy, go-nowhere arguments, little cruelties, everyday stupidities, mismatched desires, mechanical rituals, halfheartedness, putting off what needs to be done — these are some of the things that clutter relationships. They resist the vacuuming of good intentions. They resist both rational persuasion and emotional pleas. They go wherever we go, following us into and out of our dreams. At essence, they are just longtime habits tracking mud and worse into our shared space, while masquerading as us. It's so messy, no matter how well-scrubbed our place and face is.

But in the messiness of a conscious relationship, such habits become nakedly *obvious*, clashing and colluding with each other before a mutually knowing eye, clearly needing more than a laundry spin, more than a communications course, more than better table manners. Such habits have gotten away with referring

to themselves as us, but now cannot do so for long, as we, more and more, relate *to*, rather than *from*, them.

Intimate relationship not only includes the mingling and encounter of differences, but also, sooner or later, catalyzes a blatant *exaggeration* or flaring-up of differences, a vividly dramatized exposure — however unwittingly animated! — of various oppositions, difficult mixes, impasses, and *overdefended* positionings that would have otherwise more than likely remained more camouflaged or untouched.

As unpleasant as this might feel — and the worse it feels, the more valuable it probably is — it signals a great opportunity to know ourselves more fully, because so much of what needs to be worked through for our own maturation is right before us, literally upfront and in our face.

Relationship thus provides an environment, both outer and inner, wherein what we don't like or do not want to know — or don't know — about ourselves is given center stage, just like in a dream. And there we may stand or stumble, seemingly transfixed by the spotlight, held in place both by our attachment to the other and to our own ideologies, feeling the heat of our preferences starting to flame into reactivity.

This point, where we typically would trot out our usual roles — the misunderstood one, the victim, the reasonable one, etcetera — is precisely where even a trace of wakefulness is of immense use, to inwardly acknowledge not only our state, but also the degree of our *identification* with that state. When a *mutually* compassionate eye can be cast upon the highlighted reactivity of one or both partners, the relationship is on course.

The deeper we dive, the less we mind upsetting waves, finding in intimate relationship an increasingly compelling invitation to find freedom *through* our shared heart, our shared body, our shared limitations, our shared boundlessness, our shared being, our shared yes...

But as good as it gets, intimate relationship still can be a two-headed hell-raiser. There are times when the shared heart is split into two densely-walled camps; there are times when the shared body is a vacant lump; there are times when the shared limitations are just a royal pain in the shared ass; there are times when the shared boundlessness is just an idea; there are times when the shared being is crowded with loneliness; there are times when the shared yes is riddled

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with doubt. Such times are fierce teachers, testers and potential deepeners of our faith, inviting us to get back on track.

When we are intimate with an other, we can be very, very hurt. We can become crazily jealous, possessive, obsessed, angry in ways we never thought possible, our spiritual practices shredding into near nonexistence in the storms of our pain and reactivity. It might seem under such conditions that our capacity for awakening has been severely diminished, but that is from the viewpoint that sees only the turbulence, the chaos, the unpleasantness of what is happening. However, in such rough and wild waters swirls another possibility, one equipped with nothing but a lifeline to our heartland. If we take hold of it, we start to recognize what's right about what's wrong; we treat the shit as compost; we let the pain tear open our heart; we learn to love when we are not being loved or don't feel loved.

However, if we only try to *think* our way through our relationship hassles, we merely confine their turbulent forces in our minds, thereby intensifying our *confusion*, instead of letting such forces *fuel* our leap into a more fitting level of being, recognizing and treating relational intimacy not as an end, but rather as a *means*, an extremely potent crucible for Awakening's alchemy.

*When we stop caring about who's right  
We touch an aching with enough heart to see  
What's right about what's wrong  
Settling into the evernew familiarity  
Of both surface and depth  
Moving closer to perpetual perishing's bare beauty  
And the daily grind's tiny treasures  
Getting more comfortable with the uncomfortable  
Including the fear of being so close  
That even the smallest unkindness  
Stabs, smacks, cuts to the bone  
But do not our wounds  
When held with awakened care  
Plunge us naked into the Real?  
So let's include in our embrace  
All of it, every pain and joy, every up and down  
Every bit of sun and rain, every loss and gain  
So short this time to be together  
Yet time enough to reenter the timeless*

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*The day's tasks call and pull and drag  
Summer floats by the window like an escaped dream  
While we make shopping lists and forget to breathe  
Now everything's out on the dancefloor  
Wallflowers suddenly in bloom  
So much space here  
Where love outshines fear*

There's nothing like an intimate relationship to let us know that we're not as developed as we thought. We may, in meditative retreat or metaphysical flight, assume without much challenge that we are sitting with our less-than-admirable qualities, being mindful of them, etcetera, but real relationship does not waste much time in letting us know the difference between sitting *with* such qualities and sitting *on* them.

Being in such relationship is generally a rude awakening. It steps on the toes of our egoity, unimpressed by our credentials, drawing us into a dharma drama in which our neuroses initially get to star as us, and then are divested of such pretension, becoming but grist for the mill of Awakening. To the degree that we are attached to our egoity and neurotic rituals, a real relationship will, more often than not, seem like just one insult after another.

The sooner we ask what's right about what's wrong in our relationships, the sooner we'll discover the real value and purpose of them.

This may mean approaching our relationships in ways to which we are not accustomed. Sometimes being off our path *is* our path. Sometimes what works best is to spend some time in what doesn't work. Watching the worst of television, as an alternative to meditation and prayer, can be good medicine for spiritual constipation. We can get so busy trying to be good, trying to stay on the path, trying to be a successful somebody in a conscious relationship, that we stagnate, barely able to move beneath the sheer weight of all our documented failures. Making more room for our intimate relationship to sometimes be messy — which does not mean making a virtue out of laziness and inconsiderateness — helps keep it clean, undirtied by purity and the tyrannies of spiritual correctness.

This does not, however, necessarily mean clear sailing. Any relationship can trigger us. Good relationships trigger the hell out of us without trashing the relationship; great relationships trigger the hell out of us while deepening the

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relationship. And the best relationships use whatever happens, however hellish or disheartening, not only to deepen the relationship, but to also awaken us beyond it.

What doesn't work in a relationship is what can make it truly work — especially in the sense of giving us sufficient jolts to alert us to our trances, consensual and otherwise — but only if such difficulties are dealt with not as problems, but as opportunities. Not easy, not easy at all. After all, this asks that we venture from the shoreline into some really big waves.

We may like thinking about how great it is to be at our edge — which is where growth primarily occurs — but actually being there is not necessarily much of a picnic. In fact, it may be so damned unpleasant, so scary, so hard to stomach, that we find some convincing alibis to do otherwise — such as literally leaving the relationship, withdrawing from it while still in it, or keeping it relatively superficial.

(About leaving a relationship: First of all, there is no inherent virtue in staying. What matters is that we do not leave prematurely. Hanging in there when it is rough or unnourishing or pointless is just as important as leaving when it has been rough or unnourishing or pointless for too long. We have to ask ourselves — and *not* when we are busy being reactive or close-hearted! — if we are truly being served or furthered by the relationship: Are the difficulties therein challenging us in a way that we need to be challenged, or are they simply eroding us? If the answer to this varies according to our mood, it's not the answer.)

We cannot connect unless we are already separate; and we cannot separate unless we are already connected. Such is the apparent paradox of relationship. Real intimacy is the art of balancing togetherness and apartness, so that they are not so much polar opposites as they are dance partners. The relationship is the dancefloor; what we don't like about each other and ourselves the wallflowers; and the music and movement Life Itself, at once outlasting us and appearing as us.

In the liberating bondage of real intimacy, our separateness is not a problem, but rather a ticket Home, providing more than enough grist for the mill of Awakening.

Part of what makes a relationship truly rewarding is an ongoing mutual intimacy

with what doesn't work in the relationship.

The obstacles we encounter in relationship are not really obstacles, but catalysts in drag. Catalysts for what? For waking up. Be grateful to have someone so close to you who can so easily push your buttons — and maybe even install a few. It's not so easy to stay buttoned-up when we're in close to another. Healthy relationships don't let us remain intact, cool, immune. They kick our mutual butt so hard that we can't sit for long on our stuff. How infuriating, how inconvenient, what a pain in the ass! And what a gift.

And what a joy — to enter so deeply into shared living that *everything* is permitted to awaken us. And to be so close, so attached, that we cannot get away for very long from the inevitable challenges of such relationship. This is freedom, freedom through limitation, freedom through traveling together no matter what the weather.

Freedom through intimacy.

*Your eyes bare and wide  
Undressing me from the inside  
Your touch awake and soft  
Easily swims to my core  
Inviting me to leave the shore  
In you I take root then fly  
In you I am stand and sky  
I reach to you across the sheets  
Crossing more than time*

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### I'LL MEET YOU THERE

There's a love beyond time  
A love too real to die  
A love that's both ground and sky  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

There's a bond that doesn't bind  
A bond too real to be designed  
A bond leaving no one behind  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

There's a knowing more thine than mine  
A knowing too real to come from mind  
A knowing that can't be found by trying  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

There's a wonder shaping our stride  
A wonder waking us from the inside  
A wonder that's both groom and bride  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

There's a place where everything's heartland  
A place where love must take a stand  
A place where beauty can only expand  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

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There's a time when every joy is ours to feel  
A time when every wound is ours to heal  
A time not to explain but to reveal  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

There's a pain that cracks the heart  
A pain that won't let us stay apart  
A pain leaving nothing but pure art  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

There's a place forever wild  
A place that cannot be defiled  
A place ever-ripe with child  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

There's a love in perpetual bloom  
A love at home in every room  
A love that is Eternity's womb  
I'll meet you there  
Beloved take my hand  
Let's enter a deeper land

## Keeping In Touch When We're Out of Touch

The closer we are, the more painful the absence of closeness between us.

A feeling of disconnection arises, the mind makes lists of reasons why, attention gauges the density and strength of the barrier between us. Something in me says “oh shit!” and something else in me says “this too” — voices of alarm and voices of acceptance simultaneously ricocheting through me. The witness is present, but love is having trouble taking root. Stormwinds make it difficult. What's left of me cannot see a way out — except maybe intellectually — but there's a knowing, without thinking, that the way out is in.

Being close to you, really close, feels so good, so heartwarming and nourishing, that it's easy to make a problem out of times when I don't feel close to you. What I tell myself at these times I have learned to not take very seriously, for it is mostly just the voice of self-importance or hurt in reactive headgear.

My challenge, my labor of love, is to be intimate with whatever is occurring, including my and your closed-off-ness. It is, of course, easier to spot yours, and to hold it accountable for mine. Why this is not funnier simply highlights my stuckness.

It's not so easy to be intimate with the difficult stuff within when we are actually in it up to our eyeballs. But after a certain point — the length of which is an accurate measure of our self-inflicted suffering — what else is there to do? How much longer do we want to grind away at this consistently unsatisfying waltz of avoidance? How much more can we milk it for it's-not-fair handouts?

Being intimate with the difficult stuff is not about feel-good payoffs, but about not losing touch with what really matters, however fragile or slippery our connection to that may be. Spending some conscious, present-moment time openly feeling — feeling into, feeling through, feeling for — my closed-off-ness to you opens me, if only by widening the cracks in whatever self-obsessed containers I am busy occupying. Not so easy this is, given that I am likely not feeling very much like taking a break from my funk or whatever else is so seemingly important that I've let it possess me.

But when I'm in the muck — caught up in feeling bad or negative about my relationship with you — I can at least acknowledge that that is where I am, however embarrassing it might be to me. This is where I can very

profitably drop all blame, and stop indulging in reactivity, and also in any self-condemnation for being reactive.

We might as well drop our romantic notions of what conscious relationship means — unpleasanties will continue to happen, reactivity will keep showing up, stupidities large and small will continue to cross our path, and thank God for this, for without it we would very likely stay asleep, too snuggled in to our waking slumber to rub the sleep out of our I's. Gratitude in the revelatory raw this is, gratitude for what we “normally” do not feel any gratitude.

And what gets us back on track? Sometimes making and taking enough time to let what's happened settle. Sometimes letting another's pain really touch us. Mostly, though, it is a matter of becoming more fully present. Even if we are in a seriously endarkened state, we can be present in it and to it, and we can also remember to love, regardless of how stony or numb we may feel.

This does not mean that our heart will necessarily open very easily, but it does mean that a seed of awakening is being nourished. What else can we do when we are off track, and recognize that this is so, other than locate and nourish our intention to get back on track? As we lift our heads from the mud, we are akin to the first creatures that left the sea and found themselves on land, wriggling free enough of their past to take in the sky.

So many clouds, shapeshifting in multiple speeds, coming and going, long-lasting and short-lived, silver and black and creamy and drenched in fiery splendor, cloud after cloud, all passing through an aching purity of sky. We are that sky, home to every one of our qualities, embracing both thunderbolt and ethereal wisp, already having room for all, already being both all and more than all, already beyond grasping and understanding and transcendence, yet always right here, exactly here, reminding us when we are clouded by difficulties that whatever is happening is only part of what is really happening.

This we cannot truly figure out or explain, but only embrace, letting it remind us of our original face, the one we had before time began. Thus do we expand our love. Thus do we touch what has always touched us. Thus do we go on, gradually lessening our demand that our path be straight, until we are not only walking Awakening's pathless path, but are that path. Thus do we become what we seek. This is not the end, but the beginning — and what joy to do this together, no matter what the weather.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

To go truly deep in an intimate relationship, we need to feel safe with the other. We need to know — and know with our whole being — that we can *trust* them, and not just when we're with them. This is a trust based not on thinking that we should trust them, but rather on feeling right to our core their trustworthiness — their integrity, their commitment to remaining present, their passion for accessing love, depth, and freedom with and through us.

If we cannot count on the other to consistently take good care of the container of our relationship — as when energy is leaked through cracks created by erotically wandering attention — then we will find there is only so deep we can go with them. If one partner is chronically calling the whole relationship into question every time there's a fight, then the other is probably going to become wary of opening fully. Less safety means more shallows.

Making the ground of a relationship unnecessarily unstable — as when certain boundaries are overridden or trivialized in the name of “freedom” — keeps the relationship from being as deep and fulfilling as it could be. The point isn't to create a bastion of security, but to be a safe place for one's partner to let go of playing it safe. Feeling safe is much more than just feeling secure.

Real safety creates an atmosphere in which we can give our all without giving ourselves away. Real safety makes room for a truly radical sharing of all that we are. Without it, we may seem to be free to go where we could not otherwise go, but such freedom — in its relative superficiality — is far more limiting than is the freedom that arises in the presence of genuine safety between intimates.

The safer I feel with you, the deeper I can go with you. The safer I feel with you, the deeper the *risks* I can take with you. The safer I feel with you, the deeper and more fulfilling the passions are between us; anger becomes a guardian of intimacy, lust a magnifier of intimacy, and ecstasy a celebration of intimacy.

Real safety in a relationship gives us room to show up in all our colors. It gives us permission to be in as much pain as we actually are, thereby making possible the healing we need in order to come fully alive, the healing through which we are awakened by all things. What joy, what benediction, what grace, to share this in the dynamic safety possible in an intimate relationship!

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LONG THE WAIT HAS BEEN

Long the wait has been  
Long the time in between  
Hold my all in yours  
As I hold yours in mine  
Can't count all the doors  
Can't remember all the dying  
But I remember you  
I love this deep aching  
And love that you love it too  
Into the naked Sacred  
We together reawaken  
Into the Holy Deep we go  
In this pulsing container for two  
Out pours succulent wild care  
Without cracking the vessel  
Energy on the loose  
Flowering everfresh  
Without us doing a thing  
Blossoms of the Real  
Bouquets of infinite artistry  
And on our shared palm  
Rest a few dying petals  
Looking a lot like you and me  
So purely themselves  
Revealing everything  
In their moment  
Giving us enough time  
To do what we must

## NEWS

### WORK

**Freedom Through Intimacy (couples groups):** The next one is scheduled for January 14th & 15th, 2006, in Seattle. See page 3 for details. More are planned for Seattle, Vancouver, and Ojai, California (near Los Angeles). Check my website (under Groupwork) in early December for more details.

**Radical Opening (two-day groups):** TBA in Vancouver and Alberta in February, 2006.

**Letting Go (one-day groups):** The next one is scheduled for December 3rd, 2005, in Ojai, California. Call Diane at 805-646-3020 for more details. There will also be one in White Rock, BC, tentatively scheduled for the last weekend in January, 2006

**Psychospiritual Counselling Training (one-year apprenticeship program):** The 2005/2006 one is underway, and the 2006/2007 one is scheduled to start in late Spring, 2006. Registration will begin December 1st, 2005.

### BOOKS

**The Anatomy & Evolution of Anger: A Psychospiritual Investigation** will hopefully be out by early January. A state-of-the-art exploration of anger and how to work with it.

**Freedom Doesn't Mind Its Chains: Revisioning Sex, Body, Emotion, & Spirituality** is now out in bookstores. It has as its core theme the cultivation of intimacy with all that we are. Its approach is passionate, integral, and deep-cutting. And its topics? Sex, body, emotion, spirituality, choice, freedom. Its chapters range from the nature of choice to the anatomy of guilt to the raw basics of awakened sex.

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