

# THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 35 March 2008

## SPIRITUAL BYPASSING

Spiritual bypassing is the use of spiritual beliefs and/or practices to “rise above” or otherwise avoid dealing in any significant depth with our unresolved wounds and related emotional and behavioral problems. It perhaps most commonly can be seen in the minimizing or superficializing or outright negation of our shadow-side and “negativity,” and in the taking of impersonal or prematurely transpersonal stands on personal concerns.

Spiritual bypassing is a dehumanizing practice, however much it may talk about and believe in light and love and compassion. It holds a key position in the headquarters of the talking school of spirituality. As much as it goes on and on about transcending egoity, it is little more than spiritualized egoity, egoity occupying highrises of mind, referring to itself as “I” — and it’s no big surprise that spiritual bypassing is especially common in spiritual paths that treat ego as something to eradicate (rather than as something to illuminate and fittingly integrate).

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 seen as “spiritual” — will manifest some form of compensatory self-inflation (however humble its robes), whether it be metaphysical grandiosity (“You created your past, including all that childhood abuse, so just let go of it”) or self-proclaimed transcendence of personal issues, perhaps gazing with *conceptual* compassion upon those less evolved persons who insist on digging around in and trying to “work” with their pain (instead of simply going beyond it).

## The Crucible of Awakening

This is spiritual bypassing in its grosser form, wherein spiritual practice and attainment is used to avoid directly dealing with — and unguardedly *feeling* — the raw reality of suffering. Here, the apparent “shoulds” and apparent altitude of spirituality are employed to keep us dissociated or otherwise “safely” removed from our pain, especially the pain resulting from the more troubling times of our past.

Many, 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 deal with their core pain.

More unfortunate than these are those who do “succeed” at spiritual bypassing, not only consistently avoiding their core pain, but also finding a relatively steady comfort and pleasure in their spiritual practices. I say “unfortunate” because they, given their degree of satisfaction, are less likely than those who aren’t doing so well at spiritual bypassing to take the plunge into working directly and deeply with their wounds.

In spiritual bypassing, psychotherapy is generally relegated to something for the seriously neurotic, something that at best only strengthens the very egoity that spirituality is supposed to eradicate. Devotees of spiritual bypassing are blind to the spiritual dimensions of good psychotherapy, psychotherapy that is integrally-informed (and not just in theory). Spiritual teachers who don’t support their students in doing some psychotherapy — perhaps because they themselves are all but clueless about it and its benefits — are doing their students a disservice, overemphasizing the importance of doing spiritual practice.

Spiritual bypassing keeps us stuck at a “higher” level that is really only higher in a merely conceptual sense; it’s as if we’re taking up residence on Floor 5 without having passed through Floors 2, 3, or 4. We’ve crystallized at Floor 5 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 disintegration, do we start to realize that we're on very unstable ground, at which point we hopefully get off our bypass and get back on track, however painful or humiliating that may be.

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

And spiritual bypassing does not always look like spiritual bypassing. For example, if someone asks us — in our teacherly role or position — about a difficulty they are having bringing together their spiritual practice with the demands of their intimate relationship, and we only give them a “Big Picture” answer, waxing eloquently about the finite and the infinite, etcetera, then we are engaged in spiritual bypassing, no matter how articulate and precise our answer may be, for we are, however inadvertently, avoiding dealing directly and relevantly with their personal pain. Yes, our questioner may benefit somewhat from the overview we are presenting, but they are not getting anything suitably personal from us. (The point is not to not give a Big Picture answer, but if we are to give it, to do so in intimate conjunction with a psychologically attuned, personally relevant answer.)

In spiritual bypassing, conceptual spirituality often masquerades as real spirituality. And conceptual spirituality can be very comforting, very safe, very easy to trot out, very easy to use to rationalize our removal, especially emotionally, from the more difficult aspects of life. In spiritual bypassing, compassion typically takes form as a proclamation or statement of intention, rather than as a living act, delivered in much the same spirit as flat-voiced military personnel and newscasters talking with professional detachment and disembodied rationality about civilian casualties or how many “troops” were killed in the past month. Here we have numbness (and numbness to our numbness), dissociation, emotional disconnection and desiccation, normalized and made respectable by the authority typically given to such speakers.

The emotional distance that spiritual bypassing provides makes it very attractive to those who crave or make a virtue out of such distance.

## The Crucible of Awakening

The unwillingness or inability to authentically connect with our childlike aspects (our innocence, vulnerability, prerational openness, etcetera), the unwillingness or inability to feel real compassion for the child in us, makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for us to truly touch and heartfully connect with the child in others, so that we tend to stay mired in superficial, far from vulnerable stances with others who are actively working with and through old childhood wounds, even when such work is clearly non-regressive and healing and potently integrative.

Most, if not almost all, meditative practices can be used for spiritual bypassing, their “shoulds” (real or not) infecting us level upon level. Of particular note are meditative practices that tranquilize, rather than illuminate, the mind. They can be very misleading, despite their undeniable calming and relaxing effects. Providing greater calm and relaxation is not necessarily always a good thing, however; some who find such effects through meditative tranquilizing may simply be rendered even more effective in their harmful behavior or work.

Tranquilizers, meditative and otherwise, simply numb us, and if we have any investment in being numb, we may be “drawn” to meditative practices that teach and 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 so long as we are consciously and skilfully turning toward our pain and difficulties (so that we’re close enough to them to effectively work with them), we will be less and less seducible by spiritual bypassing’s propaganda and strategies.

Spiritual bypassing is more common than we might think; in fact, most practitioners of spiritual disciplines have probably done some spiritual bypassing, especially when they were craving some distance from their everyday psychoemotional difficulties. So let us cast a keenly compassionate eye upon the us who bought into, and still may buy into, spiritual bypassing and the compensatory removal and metaphysical playpens which constitute it.

Moving toward our pain — at the right pace — may not feel good, but is necessary if we are to move *through* our pain, so that it serves rather

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

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## **Upcoming Groups with Robert & Diane**

### ***AN OVERVIEW***

#### **The Situation:**

You've done some work on yourself and have opened and benefited (and want to maintain that openness), but find certain issues surfacing again and again — relationship difficulties, insecurities, emotional inhibitions, and so on. Now, more than ever, these are in your face — perhaps because you're now ready to fully face them — asking for your undivided attention. And, quite possibly, also for a suitable setting, featuring both highly skilled, cutting-edge guidance and the company of others who are as committed as you to healing and awakening.

#### **The Context:**

You might think that these issues are blocking your path, but in reality they are *part* of your path, and need to be treated as such. All you have to do is stop turning away from them, stop trying to rise above them, and make the journey into them, with awareness, compassion, and curiosity. This is not necessarily easy — for if it was, you probably would have already done it — but it can be done, leaving you more whole, more alive and present, more functional in every aspect of your life, allowing you to live a life that is as practical as it is liberating.

#### **Who It's For:**

Our groups are for those who want to make wise use of their difficulties and who are ready to work through whatever is obstructing their well-

being. Such work is especially suited for those whose longing to be truly free is stronger — or allowed to be more central — than their longing to continue distracting themselves from their suffering.

### **About the Work:**

Our groups are small and intimate, being limited from 8 to 14 participants only (depending on the length of the group), so that there is enough time for everyone to receive in-depth high quality attention.

The groups involve psychotherapy (in their focus on personal history), and also involve much more than psychotherapy, given their integral nature. Deep catharsis, psychodrama, and spiritual breakthroughs flow in and out of each other during the groups, in spontaneously apt ways.

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

The atmosphere is one of deep trust. The groups are safe places to let go of playing it safe, providing a crucible not only for personal healing, but also for awakening from all of our entrapping dreams. Participants learn, at the optimal pace, to become more intimate with *all* that they are — dark and light, high and low, shallow and deep, neurotic and transcendent, dying and undying.

The structuring of the groups is not preset, but instead arises in fitting accord with both group and individual needs. Each participant has an opportunity to work, in relevant detail and in sufficient depth, with his or her particular concerns, and not necessarily just once in the group.

In every group (except for the Men's groups), my wife and spiritual partner, Diane, works alongside and in deep harmony with me; her presence, insight, and deep heart add immeasurably to each group.

“Robert is hands-down the best therapist I've ever worked with — in fact, I had given up on the “therapy game” until I read his fascinating book *Darkness*

*Shining Wild* and was inspired to go to him for a session. Since then I've done much work with him, as have an increasing number of my friends — all of whom also give him rave reviews. In a few sessions I'd already done more substantial work on myself than in all my previous therapy combined (this is a comment I've often heard from others as well).

“Robert meets people where they are, and with a compassionate and insightful gaze finds what they need to take the next step in their development. His work is deeply embodied and highly integral, working with all aspects of a client's being. While extremely practical and grounded in his approach, he is deeply aware of (and embodies) deeper spiritual aspects of life, and can guide people to those places in their own being if and when they are ready to do so.

“As effective and inspiring as he is in individual sessions, Robert truly shines in groupwork settings — reaching such deeply universal issues that the work of anyone in the group feels personally relevant to everyone present. The openness and love of a group of people who have just done a workshop with Robert is a joy to behold.”

— Arthur Gillard

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# Breakthrough

**A 3-DAY GROUP in SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA**

**March 14th-16th**

**Tuition:** CAD\$795. A nonrefundable deposit of \$400 is required. Full tuition due one month before group begins.

**Location:** Franciscan Renewal Center, located on 25 acres of secluded desert grounds in the heart of the Scottsdale/Paradise Valley resort district of Arizona. For more details, visit [www.thecasa.org](http://www.thecasa.org).

Maximum number of participants: **14**.

**NOTE:** There will be a free evening event with Robert & Diane March 13th, at Changing Hands Bookstore in Tempe, AZ, 7:00pm until approx. 9:30pm.

## The Crucible of Awakening

The key theme will be *Transformation Through Intimacy* — intimacy with others, and also with all that we are. The format will be mostly Q&A, with plenty of in-depth considerations, finishing with a musical presentation by Diane and a booksigning.

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# Breakthrough

## A THREE DAY RESIDENTIAL GROUP

in ENGLAND, April 4-6

**Tuition:** CAD\$775, which is approximately £395. A nonrefundable deposit of \$400 CAD is required.

**Food & Lodging:** \$295 CAD (or approx. £150).

**Location:** Bawdsey Manor, approximately an hour and a half from London. Built in the late 1890s, Bawdsey Manor is a large and beautiful house, set in 150 acres of historic parkland overlooking the Deben Estuary in Suffolk. The location is outstanding, close to the river and the sea, surrounded by classic Suffolk scenery — boats, birdlife, reedy marshes and tranquil pebble beaches. See [www.bawdseymanor.co.uk](http://www.bawdseymanor.co.uk).

Maximum number of participants: **14**.

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# Breakthrough

## A WEEKEND GROUP in MANCHESTER, UK

April 12-13

**Tuition:** £275. A nonrefundable deposit of £100 is required. Arrange payment through Jon Pearson ([member@pearson7640.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:member@pearson7640.fsnet.co.uk)).

**Location:** Manchester Institute of Psychotherapy, Manchester, UK

Maximum number of participants: **12**.

# Breakthrough

**A WEEKEND GROUP in BOULDER, COLORADO**

**April 26th-27th**

**Tuition:** A special reduced rate of CAD\$495. A nonrefundable deposit of \$250 is required. Full tuition due one month before group begins.

**Location:** The Solstice Center, 302 Pearl Street, Boulder, Colorado.

Maximum number of participants: **12**.

**NOTE:** There will be an evening event with Robert & Diane April 25th, location TBA, from 7:00pm until approx. 9:30pm. The key theme will be *Transformation Through Intimacy* — intimacy with others, and also with all that we are. The format will be mostly Q&A, with plenty of in-depth considerations, finishing with a musical presentation by Diane and a booksigning.

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## UPCOMING TRAININGS

### Integral Psychotherapy Practicum

**2008/2009 APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM**

**in the USA (LOCATION TBA)**

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

The purpose of this training is to deepen the capacity of participants to effectively counsel others through a dynamic, intuitively structured approach that integrates body, mind, emotion, and spirit.

## The Crucible of Awakening

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. Tuition TBA. A deposit of \$1000 is required. The training is limited to **10** participants. Previous work with Robert required.

**Note: The Practicum is not just for therapists who want to learn a more intuitive, integral, and bodywork-including approach to their practice, nor just for those who are wanting to work in the counselling/psychotherapy field, but also for those who want to participate with kindred spirits in a year of exceptionally deep personal 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 counsellor), 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 counsellor-to-be.

## Practicum Schedule

To be determined once 10 participants have registered.

“Over my 10 years as a counselor, I have consistently sought out additional training. Many times, I have felt information overload (the skills felt mechanical). My experience in Robert’s Practicum was different than that. The practicum was profoundly experiential and there was support to integrate the skills. I feel much more confident as a therapist, and overall in my ability to be in contact with others. It’s not just what Robert is teaching, but his strong presence that provides the opportunity for deep personal healing. Diane’s presence adds a sense of being sweetly held, and at the same time, she persistently nudges for more authenticity. It is through this experience that I have expanded my ability to provide a healing presence for others.”

— Deanne Cousins

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## ***O BREATHE US DEEP***

Composer and recording artist Diane Bardwell, along with Robert (her husband), has created *O BREATHE US DEEP*, featuring genre-transcending music that reveals, explores, and celebrates our deepest dimensions with passion and grace. Diane brings her remarkably rich voice to each song, singing with a full-blooded, heartfelt fluidity unburdened by sentimentality. Complementing her voice are the eloquent lyrics, based on poetry written by Robert. Some songs are devotional, some are raw; some soar, some sing and bleed; but all are presented in the spirit of awakening to who and what we truly are.

*O BREATHE US DEEP* is an eclectic mix of deeply spiritual (but not New Age nor conventionally religious) music that is as evocative as it is original. What connects its eight songs is not a particular style (a wide range of styles is used — from ballads to Celtic to Native American to hard-driving), but rather the poetically-articulated embracing and living of a deeper life, a life in which body, mind, emotions, and spirituality function as a natural integrated whole.

*“The music in each of these beautiful songs takes my breath away. The soul and emotional depth expressed through both the lyrics and Diane’s magical voice moves me to tears. I relate to every feeling in every song. Thank you for this amazing and heartfelt gift.”*

— Pamala Oslie, author of LOVE COLORS

(To hear sound clips, go to MUSIC at [www.RobertMasters.com](http://www.RobertMasters.com))

O Breathe Us Deep is for sale at [www.RobertMasters.com](http://www.RobertMasters.com), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), CD Baby, and iTunes.

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***For more information regarding groups and trainings, or to register for them, contact [info@RobertMasters.com](mailto:info@RobertMasters.com).***

***All cheques, deposit and otherwise, should be mailed to Robert Masters, 16133 9th Avenue, Surrey, BC V4A 1A5.***

***Payments for groups (and my books and Diane’s new CD) can also be made by credit card online at our new Store; simply go to [www.RobertMasters.com](http://www.RobertMasters.com) and click on STORE.***

***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.***

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## **2008 WORK SCHEDULE**

February 29	Evening event in Boston
March 1-2	Transformation Through Intimacy: Boston

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March 13	Evening event in Tempe, Arizona
March 14-16	Breakthrough: Scottsdale, Arizona
April 4-6	Breakthrough: England (near London)
April 8, 9, 10	Evening events in London
April 12-13	Breakthrough: Manchester, UK
April 25	Evening event in Boulder, Colorado
April 26-27	Breakthrough: Boulder, Colorado
May 2-4	Man Unbound: White Rock, BC
May 17-18	Woman Unbound: White Rock, BC
May 24-25	Couples Group: White Rock, BC
June 5	Evening event in Seattle
June 6-8	Breakthrough: Seattle
June 13-16	Bodywork/Energywork Practicum: White Rock