

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Issue 54 October 2009

ONLINE WORK/INTERACTION WITH US COMING SOON!

We are excited about the approaching launch of our new online project, which will feature courses with us (one of the first being on working with personal and collective fear), teleseminars/webseminars, plenty of live Q&A, weekly guided meditations, new writings (often including audio), new music, chapters from my upcoming book on spiritual bypassing, and much more.

Our intention for this is to generate an online community that is centered by a passion for a life grounded in intimacy, integrity, and fully embodied awakening, a life that honors the personal and interpersonal as much as the transpersonal. So we'll be creating — and maintaining — an online setting devoted to deep healing and awakening, a distance-transcending locale that is part crucible and part sanctuary.

It is time for us to make our work more available to a larger audience, and this project is absolutely central to that. We will continue to offer our usual groups and trainings (taking only 12 participants for each one, so that everyone gets plenty of high-quality attention), and at the same time will be strongly engaged in our online offerings. We especially look forward to the online seminars and the interactions that will unfold there!

What we'll be offering will allow participants to move more fully and fulfillingly into their own work, in the spirit of what takes place in the deepest parts of our groups and trainings. And those who decide to do in-person work with us (or one of our trainees) will find that such work is made even more productive from their online participation with us.

Watch for the announcement of our launch in the next month or so. We hope you'll join us!

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF OUR TEAM?

Since I was diagnosed with prostate cancer last Fall, Diane and I have been busy revisioning and restructuring our work. We realized we'd been doing too much of the administrative labor ourselves; so we got some help with office-related things. But we needed more. As I dealt with my cancer (with good results), I quickly found that I could no longer do nearly as much of my work as I had done before — I needed my full energy for my healing, and no longer could do individual work, no matter how well it went. But thankfully I could still do our trainings and some groups, since they, as before, still energized me.

At the same time, I found I needed more quiet time, more time away from the demands and intensity of how I'd lived for much of my adult life. So our lives changed radically. We slowed down, still putting energy into our trainings and some groups, but didn't have a clear sense of what else to do — that is, until we sat with the notion of making our work far more available, and began viewing it as something we didn't always have to do in person. It was time to reach more people, while continuing to care for my health and train practitioners in intuitive integral work.

And so the vision of having an online teaching/interactive presence was birthed (at which time all signs indicated a considerable diminishing of my cancer)). People showed up, seemingly out of the blue, to help us clarify this vision. Soon we knew that giving it practical form was our next step. And so we began doing so. We've always felt very at home with spontaneous, in-depth interaction within our groups and at our public talks, and are very much looking forward to doing much the same thing online.

We have excellent support with this, and could really use more. We need help with videography, graphic design, marketing, audio-visual matters, and website support/tech stuff. We are looking for people adept in these areas who would like to be part of our team, and who would be willing to volunteer — credit for our groups and trainings would be available.

If this appeals to you, and you feel a strong resonance with us (my writing, Diane's music, our psychospiritual work), please contact us. We'd love to hear from you!

DARKNESS SHINING WILD

My book *Darkness Shining Wild: An Odyssey to the Heart of Hell & Beyond* is now out of print, but will be available — with a brand-new Afterword — as a PDF for those who subscribe to our upcoming new online teaching site (as described on the first page). Following is the Prelude from *Darkness Shining Wild*, plus an excerpt from the Afterword.

Prelude: Unravelling by the Minotaur's Bleeding Howl of Recognition

It's perhaps midnight.

I am sitting up in bed, as I have for the past sixty nights, my heart hammering and my mind overrun with accelerating dread. Another night of hell.

As usual, I am struggling to remain present, struggling not to let the reality of the dread engulf me. A dimensionless black pit of primal panic pulls at me, pulls and pulls, eerily sentient and far too close, its jagged electricity worming through me. Variations on a single theme keep campaigning for what remains of my attention: No more terror. I cannot endure any more.

And yet here it is, apparently immune to meditative practice and cathartic discharge — breath awareness, awareness of body and mind, prayer and pranayama, Vipassana and Dzogchen, bodywork and yoga and running and relaxation practices, raw emotional release, psychospiritual insight, tears and tears and deeper tears, providing at best a sporadic, extremely fragile relief. Short-lived interruptions of terror.

A deeper imperative than just being aware of whatever constitutes the dread seems to be addressing — or *calling* — me. It's as if the dread is pulling me to itself, sucking me into its dark enormity, its sickeningly bottomless vortex.

Already I am leaving the level, the steady, the familiar, yet somehow keeping some attention on my breath, my body, my shaking body. I cannot stop the vibrating and jerking. Admitting to myself just how scared I actually am only intensifies my terror. I cannot help noticing that the dread seems to possess an intrinsic depth that effortlessly magnetizes my attention.

I am closer than close to the horrifyingly unbearable — hypervividly experienced on previous nights — as I “descend,” sometimes step by vertiginous step,

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sometimes blindly spinning and falling, working very hard to not give free rein to my wildly panicking mind. A gigantic no-exit madness surrounds and threatens to completely fill me. A horizonless insanity.

The movement of my attention is far from straightforward — it is dizzyingly irregular, complexly angled and involuted, wide then narrow then wide again, as if passing through a maze rather than a chute or corridor. An oscillating maze at once claustrophobically contracted and freakily expansive, housing a boomeranging focus. The fear of insanity is overwhelming.

What I am entering is a topography that won't lodge in memory. All that connects me to the world I've left is an extremely thin strand of attention, an Ariadne's thread of remembrance. A spectral filament linking me to a glimmer of basic sanity.

A storm-crazed kite gone spelunking am I, tied ever so slightly to a fleeting semblance of solid ground. Like Theseus descending into the Cretan labyrinth, I too am on my way to face — or to more fully face — what I dread, already feeling the breath of the Minotaur. But, unlike Theseus, I am not doing so deliberately, and I am not armed.

The terror intensifies.

I have got to go back — but I cannot. Sometimes I forget the thread, yet I have not completely lost it. It is, regardless of its frailty, a lifeline — I must not let go of it, but if I hold it too tightly or desperately, it loses its life. And if I tug on it, as if to secure more of it, I find myself gripping nothing, except the memory of those few times when such a strategy has jerked me back up to the surface, “safe” but still stuck, like dreamers who, reentering the so-called waking state, have merely fled their nightmare and its dark treasures.

No heroes here.

My dread is now unmasked terror, staggeringly powerful. Nothing can stand in its way. My thread of remembrance? It's somewhere behind me, its crazily fraying ghost sinking in warped chasms that elude attention. Insanity. Explanations balloon into sight, then dissolve or mutate into something ungraspably *other*.

Escape is now terribly attractive, but I've no line on which to tug, no cord of connection into which to breathe life. There seems to be only this amorphous monstrosity all around me, ready to swallow and obliterate and possess me. No, not ready — it already has. Within and without.

Intimations of a horror beyond horror invade me from all directions. There is a tidal thunder in the distance, a strangely sibilant surf-like roar. It is, I have to keep reminding myself, the de-familiarized sound of my own breathing.

Reference points eddy and shatter before I can find any anchoring through them. I am anchored elsewhere, in what appears to be a no-exit realm. I am *very* lost. The life I had before all this started is less than a dream now, its fleeting shards of memory only reminding me of how very far away I am. My mind rides the slopes of my previous life like an escaped sled with an accelerating black avalanche a microsecond behind.

Suddenly, without premeditation, I go into the terror, no longer fighting or resisting it, no longer attempting to witness it. The Minotaur's face is only inches away. My mind splinters, unraveled by the Minotaur's bleeding howl of recognition...

"An absolutely extraordinary book...

I think you really have offered something to the spiritual literature, an insight into the difficulty of the extraordinary vistas of the path that has never been written before....You've done a hell of a job writing about the hell that is a foundation for heaven. I don't know how many people will be able to understand everything that you're saying, or even half of what you're saying, but for those that do it may be a Godsend.

I think you're going to have some extraordinary responses to this book, because in a sense you're letting the cat out of the bag. You've really underlined the necessity to know hell from the inside, in order to be able to sustain heaven.

I absolutely recommend DARKNESS SHINING WILD. It's a remarkable book long waited for."

Stephen Levine, author of HEALING INTO LIFE & DEATH and A YEAR TO LIVE

Afterword: Bound Together Yet Free

A number of you — having read *Darkness Shining Wild* (DSW) — have expressed curiosity about what has happened for/to me since my DSW experience. What follows is a response to your curiosity, detailing some of the more significant territories — both outer and inner — that I've since then navigated, between 1999 (which is where the book ends) and now.

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My DSW time was, to put it mildly, one hell of a ride, during which I often could do little more than just scream (soundlessly and otherwise) as I went around the corners and down the tubes, simultaneously freefalling and insanely ricocheting, gripped by something far beyond even an extreme AFOG (the post-2000 acronym for *Another Frigging Opportunity for Growth*). I'd gone over the edge of the edge, and knew it, and also knew that the only alternative was to let go of having to have an alternative; I wasn't just there for a tour of hell, but to know it from the way-in-deep inside, no matter how much it terrified me, as its darkest manifestations played peekaboo with my shredded sanity. As the book makes clear, I simply had to do my time there, no matter how long it took.

And my post-DSW time? An equally rich and revelatory ride, with just enough hell to keep things interesting. As you can probably already tell, I don't categorically condemn hell. In fact, I recommend getting intimate with it, whatever form it may take.

And why? For starters, its very presence, particularly in its inherent painfulness and contractedness, can be a fantastic albeit rude awakener, a relentlessly fierce instructor in spiritual bootcamp. Learning to keep our heart open in hellish conditions is one hell of a tough practice, but an essential one, if we are to truly evolve.

Keeping our heart thus open — including to our close-heartedness! — turns our pain into a crucible of awakening, thereby deepening our intimacy with all that is, bringing us closer not only to the fire's heat, but also to its light. Thus does hell serve psychospiritual evolution's alchemy.

I look back at what I have written in DSW, and know that I could improve it; in fact, I could probably Whitmanesquely rewrite it for the rest of my life. But I won't. It has a life of its own, a life that I respect enough to leave alone. The wordsmith in me would love to rework much of DSW, but he knows that he doesn't have my permission.

So this afterword is fresh, but everything that precedes it is the original text, settling into a natural aging process, fermenting here and there, gathering more than bouquet, honoring the time of its arising. All I can do is let it breathe. I feel great compassion for the man who wrote it, and for the man who suffered it, and for the man/boy whose actions set it all in motion...

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

What happens after death is happening now. Right now.

But what is actually happening right now? Not what seems to be happening, but what, at this very moment, is *really* happening?

Death is now. Precisely now. Change — and death is but relatively radical change — is now. In the perpetual perishing that it signals, the Real blooms.

Before death, Life. During death, Life. After death, Life.

Life outlives us, until we fully and nonconceptually recognize that we are Life itself, and more. More than we can possibly imagine.

Death does not kill us, but avoiding death deadens us.

We may think that death is the opposite of Life, but the real opposite of death is birth. We are not just birthed into Life, but also die into Life.

It's a matter of directionality, depending on which way the door is swinging. It seems that we appear, and then, a lifetime later, disappear, but in reality we are only here, much like the space in a room in which objects arrive, are positioned, and depart.

Imagine a room with no walls or floor or ceiling, no boundaries at all — pure space. And then imagine that this space is sentient. Absolutely sentient and self-illuminating. And not only that, but also utterly nonseparate from whatever objects might appear to be appearing in it. It's completely beyond imagination. That's us.

Us? Yes, beyond all the fuss, and not really even an “us” in any conventionally recognizable way — just What-Really-Matters in the radical raw, simultaneously transparent and fittingly personalized.

When the deep lovers wrapped together in ecstatic surrender cry out as one, “Oh God God Oh God!” they are giving as accurate as possible voice to what is really going on. The sacred succulence, the unbearably sweet dynamite that is turning their flesh into naked energy radiantly and lucidly alive, is

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simply Divinity on the loose. In the enormous welcome of such love, such transcendent mutuality, God is emphatically plugged-in. A ravishing electricity coupled with boundless space. The presence of death makes this all the more sublime.

The more we open, the greater the gift we are given, so long as we don't take it personally. Life is a gift. So is death. There could just as easily be nothing at all. (Some sages have said that there is in fact nothing at all, but we would do well to hear such proclamations with more than our rational minds, for the "nothing" they speak of is not the "nothing" of everyday speech.)

If Life could be said to be the Poetry of Being, then we are the instruments through which that Poetry, that Divine Music, is communicated. Death not only provides the necessary stops, the pauses that refresh, but also permits the evolution of the instruments. Thus is the music enlivened and enriched.

We don't make the music, but without us it cannot be made.

And though this music is immortal, its beauty is forged and evolves through an ongoing intimacy with mortality.

Death is the ultimate blacksmith's furnace, dissolving all — *all* — forms. It is the darkest shade of black and yet is also ablaze with light. Darkness shining wild. Life already blooming with child. Bits of upstart green splitting fields of concrete.

What happens after Death is, as always, already happening now. Your body exhales, pauses, and — mundane magic — in comes another breath, already seeded with its death, yet also filled with undying Life.

Life is, among other things, a near-death experience.

There's so much we're dying to see, dying to be.

Dying to live, to really live.

FREEDOM THROUGH INTIMACY

A Transformational Intensive For Couples

OCTOBER 24th-25th in DENVER

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.

LOCATION: Denver TBA

TUITION & LOGISTICS: 10am to 6pm both days. Limited to **6** couples only. A special rate of US\$550 per person (or \$1100 per couple). A nonrefundable deposit of \$400 is required from each couple.

BREAKTHROUGH

DEEP HEALING & AWAKENING

OCTOBER 31st-NOVEMBER 1st in BOULDER

Deep, efficient, highly effective breakthrough work for those who want to make wise use of their difficulties, and who are ready to work through whatever is obstructing their liberation.

LOCATION: Boulder TBA

TUITION & LOGISTICS: US\$550. A nonrefundable deposit of \$250 required. Limited to **12 participants only**.

NOTE: Private sessions will be available October 27th-30th. Both Robert and Diane will be present at each session. To schedule sessions, contact info@robertmasters.com.

Private Intensives for Individuals and Couples

Highly focused, exceptionally efficient and deep healing/awakening work with both Robert and Diane present, utilizing a fitting blend of cutting-edge psychotherapy, bodywork, energetic attunement, and spiritual deepening practices.

Instead of going to a therapist for 20+ sessions, consider seeing us for a far shorter and very likely far more effective time.

We've found that three to six hours is plenty for most. In the first hour what needs to be worked on is clearly identified and worked with in considerable depth. The succeeding hours (usually spread over several days or several weeks) continue with this, allowing for proper digestion and integration. US\$550 for 3 hours. US\$200 for one-hour appointments.

Contact Diane at dianebardwell@gmail.com if you are interested.

MASTERS INTEGRAL PSYCHOTHERAPY PRACTICUM

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

2010 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, energetics, and spirit.

To this end, the training will blend exceptionally deep work on oneself and equally deep work with others, in personal, social, and spiritual contexts. Healing will be the primary intention and activity. Approaches that are taught and practised will be held, as much as possible, in a perspective that transcends them.

WE WILL ONLY BE TAKING TWELVE PARTICIPANTS.

NOTE: The Practicum is intended for those who want to learn and practice a deeply intuitive, integral, and bodywork-including approach to psychotherapy, and who at the same time also want to participate with kindred spirits in a year of exceptionally deep personal (and interpersonal and transpersonal) work, during which they will learn skills that will serve them in every area of their life.

Graduates of previous practicums have not only found themselves at home with new skills (sufficient enough to begin working as an integral counselor), but have also done work of such depth — and not just a few times, but *many* times — during the practicum that they invariably emerge more grounded, open, intuitive, and confident about both themselves and their ability to effectively guide others.

Much of the depth and quality of the work done has to do with being with a group of individuals who are all deeply committed to their own healing and awakening. In such a setting, there's not only more than enough safety and trust, but also a rare intimacy, generated by sharing such deep work both as a participant and as a counselor-to-be.

LOCATION & STRUCTURE:

The Practicum will take place over 5 four-day modules in Ashland, Oregon.

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:

March 4-7, May 6-9, July 8-11, September 9-12, November 11-14

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

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

Payments for 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.

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.

2009 Schedule

October 24-25: Couples Retreat in Denver

October 31-November 1: Breakthrough group in Boulder