

# THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

## Issue 53 September 2009

Welcome to my September 2009 Newsletter, which features an essay on death (*Avoiding Death Deadens Us*). It's a timely topic for me; my father's funeral was yesterday. We tend to think of death only as actual physical death, but there are so many small deaths for each us, so many turning points that signal the need for change, sometimes radical change. Letting go, loosening our hold, getting more intimate with the Unknown, dying into a deeper Life...

I think this is the first newsletter where I haven't advertised any groups (other than our Practicum training). We have none scheduled. Only a year ago we advertised and did many groups. I still love doing groups, but my passion for such work is shifting more and more to training others to work in the same context as I do: intuitively and integrally and deeply. Such work, of course, includes plenty of deep group work, but this coexists with my getting to teach it. We've just started a new Practicum (training a dozen participants), and I am, even more than before, really loving teaching and doing deep work at the same time. This is quite natural for me, as I teach in much the same way as I do healing/awakening work: intuitively and creatively. If you have any interest in doing some training with us, please let me know. (Our next Practicum is scheduled to begin by next Spring.)

And now on to Twitter: Following are some of my posts there:

"The deeper we dive, the less we mind upsetting waves."

"Recognizing our Oneness is not the goal of a truly human life, but the foundation."

"Disembodied rationality and emotional illiteracy go hand in hand."

"Being present decentralizes egoity."

"Stop expecting spirituality to make you feel better."

If you want to see what I have been posting on Twitter (and I do so daily), visit my Twitter homepage: <http://twitter.com/RobertMasters>. And if you want to receive my daily posts, join Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com>, and "follow" me at @RobertMasters.

## **AVOIDING DEATH DEADENS US**

We die as we lived  
Death invites every one of us  
Into the Heartland of the Supreme  
Beyond every possible dream

Like birth, Death is both departure and arrival.

At the end of exhaling, there usually is a pause, a gap, before inhalation begins. That gap may only last a second, but it is a second that contains Eternity. Death is much like that gap. On the surface, nothing seems to be happening; the breath is gone, the body motionless. But below the surface, there may be plenty happening: dynamic openness, primordial presence, unsuspected dimensions of Being, powered by the Breath behind the breath.

The secret of Death is no further away than your next breath. Freefall into the gap between outbreath's end and inbreath's very beginning, and you will be cradled and filled by boundless space, effortlessly sentient space. Pure openness. The arrival of the inhale may distract you from this openness, but give it some attention as you observe the beginning, middle, and end of inhalation and exhalation, and you'll notice that this openness is not other than always with you. Just like Death. As ordinary and mysterious as our breath.

*Possibilities:*

*Death is a built-in breakout carrying reservations for incarnation's transit lounges, ghostly stopovers haunted by craved possibilities — or launching pads into an awakening beyond imagination.*

*Death is a compulsory loss of face and place, packed with blueprints for another round, another resurfacing of the same old bind, yet still just a dream away from the Undying.*

*More possibilities:*

*Death is a mind-blowing tour of what we have made of ourselves, followed by reruns directed by and starring those habits of ours that possessed us until the body's end.*

*Death is a goodbye blooming with epiphanous hellos, but what's left of us may be tuned in elsewhere, wrapped up in familiar clothes, busy making binding connections with lesser greetings.*

Death is a pregnant pause. It's the bottom line of in-between-ness.

And Death is not really annihilation, but rather just a dissolution of form, seeded with blueprints for further appearances, on every possible scale. Reappearance, not necessarily of us, but of Life-as-form. Inhale.

Death terrifies ego-occupied us. No wonder we dress up corpses as if they were going to a party or a business meeting; no wonder spiritually ambitious "I" wants to be present at its own funeral; no wonder we go to absurd lengths to keep the almost-dead alive for as long as possible; no wonder so many of us believe in an afterlife that's an eternal holiday for "I." It's quite understandable, given how strong our aversion is to Death. But are we reacting to Death, or just to our *idea* of Death?

We tend to keep Death at mind's length, preferring a vicarious relationship with it, as exemplified by the fascinated attentiveness given to dangerous sports and so-called death-defying feats. Being so seemingly close to Death may give us a feeling of being immune to or cheating it. Others succumb to it, but not us: A cuddly comfort this is, much like sitting by the hearth's fire while a chill storm howls outside. But — exhale — the doors will soon swing open, and the night come rushing in. We are *always* close to Death, very, very close.

We hear about near-Death experiences, perhaps marveling at their mystical elements, forgetting that Life itself is a near-Death experience. Right now.

*Still more possibilities:*

*Death is crowded with apparitions as real as you and me, ghosts that refuse to give up the ghost, phantoms of possibility recruited from our dreams.*

*Death is an undoing of the mind-latticed personal knot, a brief outshining of ego, an unlacing, an unraveling, a mysterious yet enormously familiar traveling.*

## The Crucible of Awakening

*Death is the arrow's release, a solitary flight into welcoming Light, or so we, nostalgic for the future, would like to believe. Death gives all the same opportunity. Death leaves no one out.*

Avoiding Death deadens us. Getting intimate with Death enlivens us.

This requires cutting through the mindset that views Life and Death as opposites — which is also the mindset that overseparates experiencer and experience, observer and observed, inside and outside, good and bad, and so on. Exhale.

Such dense dualism has as its operational center *me-centered* personal identity, around which orbit seemingly self-existing, discrete objects, things to which permanence or *constancy* may be attributed, but that actually are no more real or any less contingent than the very egoity that grants them objective existence. Inhale.

When objects — external or internal — appear to be definitively separated from us, we are dreaming. Exhale. But objects do not so convincingly stay “over there” — like objects are supposed to — when we start rubbing the sleep out of our “I’s”. Inhale with your entire body.

The more attached we are to object-constancy and to the security and kind of reality that it provides, the more fearful we will be of it changing, or, worse, being revealed as less than real. This attachment cannot be avoided — for it's as natural as it is inevitable — but it loses its grip on us as its objects are recognized as *already* being in process, as *already* being less solid or fixed than they appear, as *already* being not so apart from us, as *already* dying, seeded with their own end or transmutation. Exhale.

Life beyond the body  
    frees us to embody the Beyond  
Life beyond the mind  
    frees us to know the Unknown  
Life beyond Death  
    frees us to die into the Undying  
Dying to live are we  
Reaching for What we never left

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

but only dreamt we did  
The dream dies  
leaving nothing in its wake  
but us

Death does not slay us; denying or fearing it does. If we're so attached to our life that Death appears to be a tragedy, a misfortune, a screwup in the System, then we need to bring more light to our attachment, so that its bittersweet nature amplifies, rather than sours, our appreciation of and gratitude for Life, as well as our compassion for all that must die.

(About attachment: It doesn't deserve the bad press it gets from the pulpits of spiritual correctness. Attachment comes with Life. The point is not to get rid of it or to escape it, but to keep it in healthy perspective. Attachment makes painfully obvious what we need to face and deal with — insecurity, fearfulness, manipulativeness, etcetera — and doesn't let us off the hook until we truly do so. Exhale. When we are deeply attached, our heart breaks more easily, but if we work intelligently with that breaking — which is actually more a raw openness than an actual shattering — we will find a greater intimacy with Life. And with Death.)

Without Death, there would be no growth. Yet we tend to fear Death; some even claim that the fear of Death is innate to us. But *which* us?

When we are *preoccupied* (literally so!) with being who we *think* we are (or who we think we should be), fear arises, especially the fear of whatever could threaten — or, in the case of Death, apparently even *erase* — that particular identity. Would we be afraid, or as afraid, of Death if we were to adopt a less antagonistic, less ego-governed stance toward change, a stance in which we practiced riding — and being openly present in the midst of — the waves of change, instead of barricading and consoling ourselves in sandcastles?

In crashes the surf, effortlessly leveling our monuments, carrying the essence of its depths in every drop, every surge, every lacy trace of evaporating foam. The broken wave, freed of its perimetering, knows the ocean, and in knowing the ocean knows that it *is* the ocean. And we are *all* coming to shore. Inhale. Thai meditation master Achaan Chaa says that when we understand that something (that is, whatever we take to be real, including our self) is *already broken, already shattered*, then every moment with it can be precious. Exhale.

## The Crucible of Awakening

Walking under shimmering sheets of slumping sky  
Leaning into the windchilled thrill of daybreak  
Ocean thunder and a deeper thunder all around  
And I am ground, ground to sand  
Drowned, drowned in torrents of broken cloud  
Spilling shattered against another shore  
Letting the storm have my face  
Letting the waves take my place  
Letting depth unfold through tales that cannot be told  
Dropping every should and every executioner's hood  
And now my bodies are no longer just mine  
The dreambody, the dailygrind body, the body doing time  
The body shattered, the body reborn, the body Divine  
Flesh of gravity, flesh of ecstasy, flesh of mud and stars  
Body after body, body within body  
All speaking their mind  
This I walk, letting the day undress me  
Uprooted until I find a truer ground  
Learning to surrender without collapsing  
    to love without clinging  
        to be attached without shrinking  
        to know without thinking  
    to die into the Real  
        without forgetting the Undying One  
            or the broken Many

The less intimate with Death (or radical change) we are, the more shallow, stagnant, and unreal our life tends to be, and the more subservient we become to the very dualism that separates Life from Death.

But what actually exists *between* Life and Death? Space? Time? No, because Death, in the form of impermanence, is always with and within us, from breath to breath, ever *now*, already eating through whatever veils or gates we may have installed between Life and Death.

There is nothing more between Life and Death than the notion that there is something between them. Exhale.

THE CRUCIBLE OF AWAKENING

Life outlives us yet we are Life  
Do not simply chew on this as mere metaphor  
It is, and it's also something more  
About which I'd surely speak  
If my words were not already  
Sea-gossamer dying on the waiting shore  
And if I was not already consumed  
By What Cannot Be Said  
While I rock in the cradle  
of stories that cannot be told

Gradually, with great respect for our need to go at a pace that allows for sufficient integration, we shift from recognizing the raw Reality of what is to — however briefly or shallowly — actually recognizing ourselves *as* none other than That. Preparing for this includes getting intimate with what we most fear. Inhale. Entering the cave, feeling the breath of the dark. Exhaling right down to our toes.

Sooner or later, we let ourselves be unraveled by the Minotaur's bleeding howl of recognition. Its face, however bestial, deformed, or masked, is none other than ours. Inhale, exhale. Its dark dank labyrinth, reeking of corpses, is our birthing canal, the end of which we're dying to see. The end that is the beginning.

Here, where the nondual nature of the Real is unmistakably recognized, Death is not a blackout, nor the Great White Hope, nor a metaphysical fable. Here, Death is neither ascent nor descent, neither beginning nor ending, but rather a Mystery-affirming verb effortlessly erasing every metaphor that would try to explain or contain it, or reduce it to mythological fodder.

Here, the boundless vastitude and eloquent silence of pure awareness become more obvious. Things may still be buzzingly abloom, even heavily decibeled, but they're now playing out their scripts in a more peripheral fashion, no more disturbing "our" awareness than do clouds disturb the sky.

Be still, be quiet: This advice from the greatest of sages (like Ramana Maharshi) is not about repression or forced quiet, but rather about allowing *intrinsic* awareness to become more obvious, more central.

## The Crucible of Awakening

Yet even this is not immune to the self-aggrandizing tendency of egoity. We must, at the right time, be willing to let go of particular practices; spiritual strategies, however sublime, can only carry us so far. At some point, we simply have to throw in the towel, not in submission but in surrender. Death, and a deeper Death. Dying into the Deathless. Not to score brownie points with God, but simply because we are sufficiently ripe.

Death and Life together make and consume these lines, together giving shape and color and seasoning to Being.

All these paper-seeking words  
Hanging in space  
Skewered by gravity  
Pinned down  
By what they're trying to pin down

All these spilling words  
Leapfrogging over each other  
In an already-shattered dream

Is it any wonder  
The Beloved wears every face?  
Even that of the Lord of Death  
Eyes behind our eyes  
Ever gazing into the Forever Wild  
Seeing what cannot be seen

## **A DEEPER ADIOS** **(IN REMEMBRANCE OF MY FATHER)**

**H**orses, horses, horses  
Munching on just-mowed grass  
Pacing in steamy stables on rainy days  
Sprinting in a blur of thundering beauty  
Saddled with your dreams of glory  
Horses, horses, horses  
They were your first love  
You broke them, rode them, fed them  
Treating them like they were your children  
Birthing them and burying them  
Rising and falling with them  
One hand on the reins, the other on what could be  
The boy in you riding bareback  
Longing for a breakthrough at the racetrack  
The man got saddled down by other things  
Leaving the track for the classroom  
But still kept riding  
Even when all he could do was walk  
  
Horses, horses, horses  
On track and field  
On your walls and in your dreams  
Mine too when I was young  
Horses, horses, horses  
Straining to be unbridled  
To leap every fence  
Leaps that I, like you, wanted to take  
  
The last time I saw you  
Your mind had a mind of its own  
And your memory had lost its grip  
And you were doing time in a no-one's land  
Fiercely squeezing my hand  
We were saying our goodbyes  
And there was something wild in your eyes

## The Crucible of Awakening

Something unbroken, something galloping free  
Just for a moment  
A long unsaddled moment  
What was looking through your eyes at me  
Was looking back at you through mine  
Just for a moment  
A moment free of time  
A long unbroken moment  
In which our difficulties as father and son  
Receded before something vast  
Something too deep to name  
You and I were not close  
There'd never been much overlap between our worlds  
But the last time I saw you  
We did meet for a lucid sliver of a moment  
Me on my steed, you on yours  
Eye to eye, saying goodbye  
And now it's a deeper goodbye  
Horses, horses, horses  
I remember being with you at Exhibition Park  
Over fifty years ago  
All the horses and excitement  
The smell of stables and sweat  
The horses pacing with snorting intensity  
The promise of a big payoff staining the air  
At the end of each day of races  
The announcer would say "Adios"  
So now I say to you a deeper adios  
May you ride free  
Beyond all your personal history  
Right into the heartland of the Great Mystery  
May you ride free  
Until horse and rider are one  
Beneath an undying sun

*(I read this at my father's funeral August 29th)*

## **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 almost everyone. 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](mailto: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](mailto:info@robertmasters.com) to arrange payment.

**SCHEDULE:**

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

(It is possible that the Practicum could begin sooner if it fills by early November.)

## ONLINE COMMUNITY

**GAIA**, a social networking site (free to join), has a group for people who have worked with me and/or who are interested in my work/writings to connect and discuss my work/writing or anything related to it.

The online culture of my Gaia group is vital and inviting, and its powerful forum software is well suited for meeting, discussing, and sharing with others who are interested in authenticity, healing, transformation, and Awakening.

You don't need to be a member of Gaia to see the posts there — just go to **[http://pods.gaia.com/robert\\_augustus\\_masters](http://pods.gaia.com/robert_augustus_masters)**.

But if you'd like to participate in the discussions, you can join Gaia by going to **<http://www.gaia.com/apply>**, or by emailing Arthur Gillard ([thinkintuit@gmail.com](mailto:thinkintuit@gmail.com)), the cultivator of the site, who will then send you an invitation.

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**F**or more information regarding groups and trainings with Robert and Diane, contact [info@RobertMasters.com](mailto: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](http://www.RobertMasters.com) and click on STORE.

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